Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to experience the exhibition *III*, which runs from January 23 to March 29, 2025. Before entering the gallery, please use the coat rack in our welcome area or place large bags on the floor inside the gallery doors. This exhibition features more artworks than usual, particularly fragile pieces displayed on pedestals. As you move through the gallery, please do so with care, recognizing that these artworks are unique creations by skilled artists.

Photos *are* permitted. If you post pictures from our exhibition, tag the Art Gallery of Regina and the artists.

Please visit our welcome table inside the gallery doors for helpful items and gallery information, including self-guided tour pamphlets written in plain English.

SENSORY TOOLS

Help yourself to sensory tools for use in the gallery from the baskets under the white table. There are earmuffs for those sensitive to sound, dark glasses for people with light sensitivity and fidget toys for those who wish to keep their hands busy. Please return these items at the end of your visit.

GENERAL GALLERY LAYOUT

We have divided our gallery space with three movable walls on wheels. Please don't lean against gallery walls, as they mark easily, and we want to protect artworks from damage by being brushed against. We have a soft upholstered bench in the gallery where visitors can rest.

We display artwork on walls and pedestals. Please ask the gallery staff if you would like assistance navigating our gallery, which changes with each exhibition.

Start outside the gallery doors:

I'm Sandee Moore, curator of the exhibition *III*.I'm delighted to guide you through this exhibition of artworks by Deborah Potter, Leesa Streifler, and Sheila Nourse in the media that each of them prefers.

If you look at the wall to the left of the entrance doors, you'll see the exhibition's didactic panel inside the gallery. Didactic means intended to teach; an exhibition didactic panel includes information that helps visitors understand and learn about an exhibition. This didactic panel consists of the artists' names, the exhibition dates and title, *III,* and a short introduction I wrote for this show.

TITLE

Titles of artworks and exhibitions are intended to direct viewers' thoughts to understand an artist's or curator's message.

I titled the exhibition three with Roman numerals I, I, and I to underscore how each artist's work is rooted in their individual subjectivity.

I won’t talk about every artwork in this exhibition, but I recognize that the audio tour is still quite long. I’ve noted some time stamps here, so that you can scrub through the audio to particular sections of interest. Sheila Nourse’s artworks are discussed from 4 minutes 34 seconds to 12 minutes, Leesa Streifler’s from 12 minutes 50 seconds to 29 minutes 20 seconds and Deb Potter’s from 29 minutes 30 seconds to 43 minutes 20 seconds.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

This exhibition audio tour will take you through the gallery, starting to the left of the entrance wall and going left through the doors to the gallery. You'll see a narrow plinth with three ceramic sculptures by Deborah Potter, Hope, Acrobat, and No Recourse. I will skip over these for now and return to them later. Further along this wall, we will see a grouping of artworks by Sheila Nourse.

SHEILA NOURSE

Sometimes, when I'm writing about artwork or thinking about how to address topics in an exhibition, I like to start with "the elements of art." These are fundamental qualities of artworks, like scale, colour, texture, medium, materials, subject matter and so on.

Scale is critical to most of the artworks in *III*. If we consider the size of these artworks in relation to our own body, we can see that the artists in the exhibition work in very different scales and how these scales, in turn, add meaning to their artworks.

Leesa Streifler's drawings and paintings of older or elderly women are life-sized or larger. They tower over us and make us feel small and powerless in comparison. This is an inversion of the dynamic in which older people not only physically shrink but diminish in importance and the power that they can wield in our culture.

Deborah Potter's sculptures, on the other hand, are very small, even miniature. The scale underscores the fragility of the elderly and the preciousness of one's remaining years. These tiny bodies arouse our empathy and a desire to protect the sanctity of their miniature worlds.

It's hard to describe the scale of Sheila Nourse's artworks because they use real items, so their scale seems normal. A spool of thread, plate or a mirror is the size in relation to our bodies as we expect one would be.

This scale underscores the ordinariness and the usefulness of the materials from which she has built her artworks and similarly presents her subjects as real and relatable.

Sheila chose to hang her artwork together in this kind of grouping so that they are like a community of women who are stronger together. This method of hanging artworks - hung one above another, densely packed - is called a salon hanging. It comes from European art traditions where paintings would be hung from the floor to the ceiling and one side to the other of a wall, and every available space was taken up.

This is one of the reasons that Sheila titled her assemblages as a group the Golden Salon Series. The salon is a way of hanging artwork and a social scene. An artist salon would be where artists meet to talk and share ideas; this vibrant group of women all sharing space and conversation is also part of Sheila's vision for her work.

The other part of the title, "golden," refers to the "golden years" of a person's life, usually accepted to age 65 and older. Sheila is showing us fifteen portraits she has made of women who, in her words, "changed the world or changed her life." Her ultimate goal for the Golden Salon Series is to create fifty portraits of women over 50.

Sheila's portraits may be different from your expectations of a portraiture. Instead of depicting what people look like, she creates portraits of people that show how identities are crafted from hobbies and work - the activities that give life meaning. Sheila has assembled her portraits from items that provide insights into each subject. We can learn about these women by looking at the many items Sheila has brought together to tell us how they think and feel.

Sheila's medium is called "assemblage." Assemblage is similar to a type of artwork you may be more familiar with, a practice called collage. Collage comes from the French word collé, which means glue, which refers to flat items glued together to create one image. Assemblage is putting three-dimensional items together to make one artwork. Another artistic discipline related to collage and assemblage is "montage"; montage is the piecing together film or video clips.

Look at *Nurturing (Diane)* - a long, narrow wooden box stamped with the words "smoked cod fillets." The artist has filled it with dirt, which she has studded with forks and glass vegetables and a collector plate with a farming image and a photograph of the subject, Dianne, glued to it. We can understand many things about this woman. We can tell that farming and raising vegetables are important in her life. The broken plate suggests she has a fractured relationship with an agrarian past or a farm upbringing. We can also see how tending to food with her hands and consuming things from the soil matter to Diane.

Moving towards the middle of this group of artworks is a large oval mirror called *The Promise (Rae)*. Sheila has placed photographs of Rae's face here and there on the mirror. Some pictures face outward towards us; others are turned toward the mirror; we can only see the face through the mirror reflection. Rae is a theatre and performance artist, and this artwork may be telling us about an artist's public face versus their private face. Or, maybe *The Promise* depicts the face we present to the world versus the face that is for ourselves only - the vulnerable face. Glued to the very centre of the mirror is a tiny photograph of a girl riding a horse inside an itty-bitty frame. I wonder if this represents Rae's self-image, the idea of herself around which she has built her personality. Tiny bottles, known as potion bottles, frame the mirror and also support the photographs. The bottles are filled with things like plant seeds, ribbons, beads, a miniature playing card, and shreds of paper that look like money. These potions point to the magic of nature (seeds and flowers) and items through which we can control the world (money to buy things or beads and ribbons to embellish and create beauty).

I love listening to Sheila discuss how she has chosen to work with some of her materials. *Sprightly (Louise)* is a silver tray with a grapevine to which Sheila has affixed bits of broken shale, fragments of wood and dried flowers. The little wood rounds are made from a twig collected from the subject's garden. Instead of throwing it on the compost heap, Sheila sliced it up, she says, like a cucumber.

I've been inside her studio, and I can describe how every wall is filled from floor to ceiling with bins where she collects the items she uses to make her artwork. Materials, especially those that Sheila collects from thrift stores and garage sales, carry meaning. One thing that strikes me about the materials that Sheila has chosen to use to create these portraits of women is that so many of them are related to the domestic, the home and the traditional workplace of women. We see plates and serving platters, a cupboard door, and a glass candy dish. On the furthest right corner of the wall is a small, square assemblage called *Sheltered Gem (Shannon)*. Many of Sheila's assemblages don't have a frame, but a heavy square frame encloses *Sheltered Gem*.

Frames are not art, but we often understand that they are like signs telling us that what's inside the frame is art. What is inside this frame is a patchwork of fabrics like a quilt. In the not-too-distant past, many things were not allowed in art galleries, including things considered craft, meaning things that have "use-value" and were strongly associated with "women's work." Functional ceramics and textiles exemplify media that were excluded from galleries until recently. Sheila did something very funny with Sheltered Gem. First, she outlined the frame in soft yarn, like a slipcover or blanket, then stuck a pair of knitting needles through the rigid wood, puncturing the frame. Sheila has skewered the orthodoxy of the art world. Her piercing of the frame's authority is even funnier because she used knitting needles, the very symbol not just of women's work and craft but also of the hallmark of old ladies. Sheltered Gem not only reveals the feminist battle to have crafts included in galleries but also reveals the tandem use of sexism and agism to exclude people and their artwork from social spheres. Sheltered Gem pleasurably asserts that ageing and older women have value.

LEESA STREIFLER

If we continue to circle through the gallery clockwise, we come to almost a little room created by our T-shaped moveable walls. In this space are two pedestals with small ceramic sculptures created by Deb Potter and three artworks by Lisa Streifler hung on the walls.

One of my pleasures and privileges as a curator is to place artworks in conversation with each other. Deb Potter's sculpture *Choices*, protected by a plexiglass vitrine top, shows a woman perched on a stool and holding her smartphone as if taking a selfie. She wears a T-shirt printed with the words "Get busy living." As we circle from the left to the right side of the sculpture, the other side of her face, stripped of flesh and hair, is revealed. The skull lets us know that this sculpture is in the *memento mori* tradition - images that seek to remind us of the fleeting nature of life and not to waste our lives on frivolities.

On the wall behind the sculpture is a digital print on aluminum by Leesa Streifler, elucidating another perspective on *memento mori*, called *Transformation*.

*Transformation* is also a bisected woman's face, in this case, the artist's own. The artist has altered the photograph by writing and drawing over it. The writing at the top of the picture reads "34 then" on the left side and "67 now" on the right side. Unlike Deb's sculpture, which peels back the surface to reveal death on one side, Leesa edits her face to create a youthfully slimmed appearance on the left while drawing a drooping eyebrow, heavy eyelid and pendulous jowls on the other. Leesa's paint and ink intervention is also a memento mori that reveals what comes before death: laxity, wrinkles and other reminders of mortality.

In the middle of the wall is a large painting. While all of Leesa's works have texture, scale, and presence, *Leg* is notable for its solidity, squarely projecting from the wall on a stretched canvas. The richly applied, luxuriously swirled pigment, the colour of cooked ham, describes an emaciated thigh and plump ball of the abdomen. The artist has partially dissolved the paint, creating rivulets and voids in the fleshiness of the form, mimicking the way age carves away at the body. There's a mysterious beauty to how Leesa has painted the distribution of fat on the older body: thin and withered thigh, the knee, swollen with arthritis, and the stomach and buttocks, prominent and solid.

To the right is another aluminum digital print titled *Stand Out*. It depicts the kind of nightmarish exposure we might all feel about our bodies: a woman in a red dress is the focus of a large audience of people. Her dress is transparent, exposing her three legs and four breasts. These superfluous appendages suggest another relatable experience: the artist's experience of her own female body distorted by pervasive narratives of monstrousness and rejection.

On the other side of this moveable wall are two large drawings on paper by Leesa. The one on the left, titled *With her Husband*, is one of the few images of a male person in the exhibition. Rendered in magenta on shocking pink, it is as if we can see blood just below the surface animating these bodies. The artist's spare lines describing the couple illustrate bodies slightly stooped and collapsed in on themselves. A quiet tenderness in their clasped hands speaks of their interdependence and reliance on each other as they resolutely journey together into an unknown future. Although this drawing's title suggests that the man is secondary, a mere appendage of the woman, they are a pair.

A composite image, titled *Over Time,* occupies the same stretch of wall. It shows, as would be anticipated from the title, an entire life collapsed into one monstrous body: a child's body in a girlish dress joined down the middle with a woman's ripe figure in a red dress. This amalgamated torso is supported on another body, contorted with the weight of years and identity, bent over backwards.

Known as a feminist artist, Leesa has long represented bodies that defy social conventions, behavioural norms, and traditional gender roles in work defined by her sharp wit and equally sharp social commentary. She often portrays her experiences and uses her own image to depict the pain and humour of falling short of our culture's idealized notions of what a woman should be: young, beautiful, cheerful, fertile, able-bodied and slim. *Over Time* compresses all of life's expectations onto a single page.

Rounding the corner to another nook created by the movable walls, we see more images by Leesa, including some unexpectedly small drawings. A drawing on paper pinned to the wall with ordinary sewing pins is as thin and fragile as aged skin. It shows a woman with thick glasses bent double to pick up something black near her foot—billowing blobs of fuchsia and gold rest on her back, like heavy weights bowing her figure.

Next, a shelf supports two small drawings on board. *Stop* shows a woman in an elegant strapless gown and long gloves. Despite her dignified appearance, she is vulnerably transparent; we can see right through her skin to a strange organ lodged in her throat. The dark brown background and gloved hands are mirrored in the gloves, limply hanging off the edge of the shelf, in the same shade of soft leather as the painting.

The dangling fingers of the gloves, each painted with a nude female form, powerfully suggest the body and the absence of a body. The protective second skin of the glove reminds us how we want to cover and keep bodies, especially undesirable ones, hidden.

The other painting on the shelf is titled *Her Body*. The figure with a big blue head is almost obscured by the copious annotations telling us how to think of this figure, how those in her life think of her and how she thinks of herself. Positive statements and self-critical worries crowd together: "Not Beautiful, but he does not care," "big ears, starting to appear like dad" alongside "getting stronger," "mediatrix," "mother," and "Amazon," which is struck out, then "stinks, does yours?" "stiffness," and "pain." Leesa's decision to headline this painting with a declaration of unconditional love and acceptance doesn't dispel physical flaws and aches of ageing that change one's place in the world but suggests reasons to value women beyond appearance, health, and usefulness.

Another enlarged image printed on aluminum, amusingly titled *Old Friends*, hangs on the wall beside these tiny paintings. Indeed, these friends are old.

While Leesa declares that she never works for models, only her imagination, we can see that her drawings are based in observation, perhaps of her own body. That we would typically reject and recoil from in horror - the extra breast, glimpsing of the internal organs through clothing and skin, bulging and sagging forms are always permitted and, in fact, glorified. Never have wrinkles, varicose veins, and rolls of flab seems so sensuous, so luscious, so delicate and so precious. She applies colour to craft delicate wrinkles, bronchi, and feathery eyelashes. The incredible thing about Leesa's drawings is that she allows us to appreciate the beauty in what is not typically believed to be beautiful.

You might like to take a seat on the bench in this area of the gallery and look at the large drawing titled *Her Dream*. Dreams are typically a jumble of things that our brains randomly combine to give us new perspectives on events we've experienced.

In *Her Dream*, the reclined nude form of an old lady is the most prominent. A muscular arm wraps around her, and the handsome head of a young man hovers above hers. He presses his lips to hers, their eyes closed in mutual ecstasy. A small figure, possibly that of a child or another version of the self, snuggles into the old woman's ample breast. A shyly coloured image of a nursing woman cradling a plump infant in the top corner, like a fading memory, reinforces the reading of this figure as a child. The lover and child seem to sprout from the woman's body; these experiences are part of her and shape her, as does her nearly forgotten sexuality. One blue foot reaches straight out, and the other dangles down onto another piece of paper. Encased in a dagger-heeled platform-soled shoe, the dangling foot and its siren-red high heel is a defiant assertion of the old woman's sensuality and desirability.

*Her Dream* is the biggest drawing in this exhibition. Scale is a critical component of meaning in Leesa's work; often life-sized or larger, her drawings take up space, steeping viewers in the physical realities of aging and conveying her subjects' agency. Further, Leesa refuses to confine her figures to the narrow rectangle of a page. Instead, she adds more paper as necessary, letting these women expand. We've heard of "man-spreading;" Leesa shows how women, too, can be confident of their right to occupy space.

If we continue around, we come to a pedestal with three sculptures by Deb Potter. Once again, I will return to Deb's work later in the audio tour, but it is worth noting how Deb's sculptures and Leesa's drawings speak to each other.

The joyful pink and turquoise colour palette of Deb's *Healing Waters* and the bright floral dressing gown of *Invisibility* resonate with the equally vivid pastels of Leesa's drawings *Fern Woman*, *Solace*, and *Protection* on the gallery's North wall. Deb's sculpture of a woman looking in the mirror on the highest riser, *Definitely Not Me,* shares a conceptual connection with Leesa's work. The column of the woman's body is cracked and fissured. The mirror she looks into contains the words "Not you," where a reflection of her face should be. While this is a common experience for many of us as we get older, the face we see in the mirror does not accurately reflect our self-image; it also hints at a key concept from theorist Julia Kristeva.

Leesa has been guided by Kristeva's writing on "The Abject," which means the part of ourselves that becomes horrific and that we reject. An example of the abject could be when something is no longer part of our body, such as hair that has fallen out. The abject is, in short, garbage, what we discard to maintain a coherent self-image. A self-image that is socially-acceptable and not grotesque. By creating composite unreal creatures like the part-plant *Fern Woman,* *Over Time*, or *Her Dream*, Leesa creates space for us to accept and not reject the shameful parts of the self.

Beside *Fern Woman* is *Targeted*, a face is presented in profile like a mug shot. Dotted lines and T-shapes crisscross the visage, suggesting the desperate cosmetic alterations, taken to ensure the self we see in the mirror reflects who we believe we are, before age makes us unrecognizable to ourselves.

Another large-scale drawing on pieces of mylar, a kind of paper made from smooth plastic, stapled directly to the wall, comes next. It's extraordinary to be able to read the story of an artwork's creation when we see the finished work in a gallery: *Waiting* shows us how Streifler works in her studio. When she needs more paper, she simply cuts more and staples it up. Although the old lady in *Waiting* is a large and looming presence, her figure is rendered in brushy gray strokes, as insubstantial as smoke. The focus is on her accessories: the brilliant red armour of lipstick, gloves, kerchief, boots and purse. She carries her purse like a battering ram, ready to fight her way through life.

Many of us can relate to this drawing. We know people who would never go out without lipstick or matching shoes and handbags. We understand how important creating a façade is to maintain a solid sense of self-worth, especially for older people who struggle with (fears of) being forgotten, useless and discarded.

Next, *Girl, Woman, Crone* is a fever-dream image of the cycle of life. Disembodied heads describe the arc from babyhood to girlhood, womanhood, and death. Lying pale and flat at the bottom of the paper, the final head invites us to gaze upon the horrifying spectre of mortality and the promise of rebirth.

Another trio of drawings on aluminum on this wall. Their luscious ice cream-y colour palette and almost obscenely honest, intimate glimpses of older women's bodies contrasted by the strength and delicacy of youth. These drawings, with their matter-of-fact acceptance of the absurdity of aging, provoke a smile more than pity.

Finally, if we circle to the gallery's east wall, there are two 64 x 48 prints on aluminum by Leesa, *Revelation* and *History*. These are the exhibition's largest digital prints but started as drawings in the artist's sketchbook. By enlarging her drawings, Leesa invites viewers to revel in the rich textures and varied markmaking of her drawings.

The woman's posture in *Revelation* directly references the Christian iconography of Christ being crucified - her legs crossed and arms awkwardly lifted. She serenely turns her face away from us, allowing us to gaze at the gleaming wonder of her flaccid body. The milky pink background of this drawing, scattered with touches of gold, is a happy accident. Leesa applied the paint on a clear mylar sheet; the places where the paint didn't adhere were left transparent. When the artist scanned this drawing to have it enlarged, the scanner lid showed through the voids in the paint, creating the gilded effect.

Similarly, we can appreciate the layered quality of *History*. The mottled green and coral of the bony, disembodied hands and feet conjure comparisons to the decaying body parts from which Dr. Frankenstein sought to create a whole being. Vibrant and smooth, the limbs stand out against the *trompe l'eoil* background of thickly textured black paint. I've seen the original from which this image was printed; Streifler painted the limbs on slick plastic and layered over the background. It's impressive how the vinyl conveys and magnifies the sumptuous textural qualities of Leesa's original drawings.

Moving toward the gallery's centre, I invite you to pause and consider two more digital prints on aluminum, the rich coral hue of diluted blood, on the back of the moveable wall near the entrance. These are the most recent of Leesa's drawings and represent her most pressing interest - the dehumanization of older women as flawed, failing and needing improvement through cosmetic procedures. *Improvement* on the left shows a woman's face bristling with hypodermic needles, arrows pointing to where the skin will be lifted and rows of stitches. Around her, like a cloud of flies, are the tools of beautification and self-improvement: dentures, a laser to remove dark spots and a new lens for corneal implantation.

On the right is a figure whose body is secondary to the ailments and treatments. Less a person than a collection of procedures, flaws with incongruously glamorous eyes and inflated lips, the figure bombarded with words like "collagen," "turmeric," "osteoarthritis," "lacy bones," "new lens," "hearing aid," "UTI prevention," "hip replacement," and "knee replacement." The trivial and the painful accorded equal urgency; Leesa's images of the lurid fantasies and concerns of senior citizen women are as gorgeous, funny and enjoyable as they are dreadful.

I mentioned earlier how placing artworks in conversation is one of my goals in curating an exhibition. *III* buzzes with sympathetic conversations between artworks. *Improvement* and *Common Concerns*, for example, share their colour palette with Deb Potter's nearby sculpture *Life Is a Balloon*, inside a glass case.

DEB POTTER

Ceramic figurines commonly depict sentimental and idealized subjects; Deb's small-scale figural clay sculptures cast a jaundiced eye upon society's devaluing older women, despite their accomplishments or when their youth fades. Her works are minutely detailed with humour based in observation.

*Life is a Balloon* is notable for recasting a famous image of a little girl reaching for a red heart-shaped balloon floating out of her reach by the artist Banksy. Banksy is a street artist known for a lot of politically engaged art in public places and graffiti art. You might be familiar with the image Deb references, stenciled on walls around London in about 2002.

You might also remember one reason Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* is so well-known: an official print on paper was recently sold at auction for a record-setting amount. Something happened after the successful bid was made, and the artwork was sold. A paper shredder turned on, and the print was shredded to ribbons, the remains hanging from the bottom of the frame. Banksy has always made artwork that critiques societal flaws; shredding *Girl with Balloon* is partly the artist's commentary on removing something from public, free for everyone to view and hiding it away in a private collection. In Banksy's eyes, *Girl with Balloon*, was doubtless already destroyed before it went through the shredder.

In Deb's version, an elderly woman perched on a brick wall holds onto a balloon string. You can't help but notice the contrast between her body - heavy, sagging, deflated - and the red balloon - plump and buoyant. Although her posture is slumped, she's not ready to loosen her grip on the balloon and let it drift away.

The structure she's sitting on isn't an ordinary brick wall. Colourful graffiti writing spells out, "life is a balloon," then the words, "holding on and letting go," wrap around the side and back. A small word comes at the end, like the graffiti artist's signature or punctuation. This tiny writing is a name: "Banksy," and "Life is a balloon: holding on and letting go" is a quote from Banksy.

The shape of the wall the figure is seated on is meaningful. It has narrow, jagged peaks. It doesn't look like any wall or structure I can imagine. For instance, a skateboard ramp might have a series of sloping faces, but these angles are too sharp for skateboarding. A skateboarder would get their board wedged. So, I have to conclude that these sharp points are symbolic. This shape makes me think of a few things, like the graph line that describes annual profits and losses or the spiky line of a heart rate monitor. If the latter were the case, it's a little concerning because she's on the flatline.

Older folks merging with their belongings, especially becoming inseparable from their easy chairs, is something many of us have observed. *Set Back*, in the next glass-covered pedestal, depicts an old lady straining to escape her plush pink chair, embossed with a doily pattern.

You'll notice that many of Deb's sculptures feature padded armchairs. A lot of us may instantly recognize a well-loved piece of furniture as being "grandma's chair;" these armchairs also pay homage to one of Regina's best-known and well-loved ceramic artists, Victor Cicansky, who often sculpted garden produce seated on his easy chairs.

Deb's sculpture *Set Back* shows us an ambivalent situation of reliance, comfort and a desire to stand on our "own two feet." The chair has grown a set of hands that have grasped the woman by her waist. This could be a comforting embrace, but the title suggests that it is a restraining grip.

While the armchair is associated with the aged, knitting is particularly emblematic of old ladies. Deb lavishes intricate details on her sculptures, making them seem real. The woman wears a pair of ornate Fair Isle-patterned socks, which reproduce a pair of socks Deb's friend Sharon knitted for her.

We can move on to the lower pedestal with a cluster of three sculptures on it: *Bird Brain*, *Small Pleasures/Pressures* and *In Her Bubble*. Deb describes *Bird Brain* as an illustration of how older folks notice their minds changing; thoughts, words, and memories flit around just beyond reach or recall, like the tiny birds circling the sculpture's head. She says, "It creeps up on you; you don't even know what's happening. All the things don't come anymore. Sometimes, it takes like 15 minutes for them to finally surface."

Sharing the same pedestal is *Small Pleasures/Pressures*, a sculpture of a shrunken female figure perched on a pillow-y chair surrounded by dolls. By shrinking a person, Deb shows us how old folk's power and independence shrink. Many of her sculptures reference the idea of "second childhood" that affects seniors; they may take pleasure in childish things and need help with basic tasks such as getting dressed. All the dolls and the old woman are sucking on soothers or pacifiers. "When you are a child," explains Deb, "you're given a soother to calm you and shut you up." The voices of all the female-identified figures in the sculpture have been silenced.

Also sharing this pedestal is *In Her Bubble*. A tiny bed is encased in a glass bubble, resembling a snow globe. Two small figures, who could be elderly folks, children, or dolls, share the narrow bed. The inspiration for *In Her Bubble* came from a visit Deb made to a personal care home for seniors. She looked into a room and noticed a doll positioned on the bed, a touching example of a comfort object and the loss of agency experienced by the elderly. Many of us can identify with Deb's sentiments, "As we get older, we become more dependent; we become smaller. It makes me wonder, how many years will I remain independent?"

Moving to the next tall, narrow pedestal is a sculpture that tells us what happens to nursery rhyme characters when they get old. Weathered boards were roughly nailed together to create this now dilapidated boot-shaped house. This way of constructing the home to look like barn board is a tribute to Deb's deceased friend Evan Quick, who often made similar ceramic structures. This is clearly the home of the Old Woman Who Lived in A Shoe, but the house, its door hanging open, appears abandoned. Inside, an empty kitchen chair and a pair of high-heeled shoes underscore the absence of the old woman. There are more clues as to where the old woman has gone: a puff of smoke rises like a departing spirit from the chimney, and the painting on the shack's wall is the back of someone's head as if they are walking away. The old woman is dead, and her children are all gone.

If we move to the west or to the left side, we will find more armchair sculptures. One that I particularly like is titled *Hope Against Hope*. It depicts a woman waiting for the phone to ring. Her posture - turned sideways, with her legs dangling over the armrest - is girlish. Wearing casual jeans and sporting grey hair pulled back into a youthful ponytail, she evokes the image of a teenager eagerly awaiting a call from a date on a Friday night. Now, many years later, this woman, once a teenager, finds herself waiting in vain for her children to call.

There is a trio of sculptures on the pedestal in front of Leesa's drawings *Waiting* and *Girl, Woman, Crone,* whose colours harmonize perfectly with these drawings. *Refuse* is comedic at first glance. Deb has once again cast an elderly woman as a child, dressed in a puffy pumpkin Hallowe'en costume and surrounded by junk food wrappers and fallen leaves. However, there is more than mere childlike pleasure in gorging on candy here. The costume looks collapsed, like a rotten pumpkin that has sat on the front steps for a month after Halloween or a plastic trash bag printed like a jack-o'-lantern, turning garbage into a festive decoration. Reminders of autumnal decay, emptiness and end-of-life are everywhere.

Facing the other way on this pedestal is *Wisdam*', wisdom or wise dame. An elephant perches in a crimson armchair, her legs bending with surprising suppleness and her expression, beneath the deeply wrinkled skin, is stoic. "I wanted to do something about wisdom and empathy that comes with age; the elephant seems to embody nurturing into old age. Someone told me they thought this was about a female doctor in our community who has dedicated her career, even long past retirement age, to women's bodies and reproductive health issues."

Sometimes, people ask me whether I assign tasks to these artists or if they collaborate together. While that is not the case, seeing how their thoughts and creations converge is fascinating. Deb's sculpture, *Big Girl Panties*, depicts a grey-haired woman wearing high-waisted panties, which I used to refer to as "mumderwear." She gazes across a short distance at Leesa's drawing of a woman with pink panties pulled up over her slightly jutting abdomen. The figure in *Big Girl Panties* smiles proudly, perhaps pleased that she doesn't yet need to wear adult diapers. Instead of Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, emerging from a shell, this woman emerges from a rose that could resemble a fancy soap—everything about her is coded with bathroom themes.

On a lower pedestal sits an armchair constructed from wooden slats haphazardly nailed together, which pays homage to Deb's friend Evan's clay work. Perched on this rickety seat is a rock. We often refer to reliable, supportive, and steadfast individuals in our lives as our "rocks." Even after the aging matriarch, the bedrock of the family is gone; her presence and her chair will remain. Her influence is as permanent as the force of geology.

A trio of Deb's sculptures are grouped on a large pedestal in the corner. Just as Deb has reimagined *Girl With Balloon* and *The Birth of Venus* to reflect the experiences of older women, the central figure on this pedestal, Invisible, reinterprets the famous Hellenistic marble sculpture Venus de Milo. Deb's version of Venus de Milo reveals her gorgeous (and famously armless) body as pitted and worm-eaten, not just ravaged by age but by maggots. Rather than sculpted features, her face collapses into hollow space, allowing us to envision how 2000 years could transform flesh in ways to which marble is impervious.

*Downhill/Sisu* is on a plinth toward the gallery entrance. An old lady, coloured in flat, dark grey, makes her way down a sloping path. Her accessories are familiar and evocative of elderly women: an enormous floral handbag laden with shopping hangs from one skinny arm while the other grips a cane with a large foot for stability. The term "Sisu" is Norwegian and translates loosely to perseverance; this is how Deb thinks of her mother: "I remember my mother was simply determined to endure all the challenges that were happening to her body." In front of the woman on the path lies a white feather—an omen of change.

In Deb's work, feathers and birds are almost as prevalent as elderly women are. Women are often referred to in terms that diminish their humanity, such as silly geese, chicks, or birds. Another notable bird sculpture is Deb's *Old Bird*, which is actually an urn—a cheeky final resting place for a tough old bird!

At the literal and metaphorical heart of the exhibition is *Rise Above*. Unlike nearly all of Deb's other sculptures featured here, *Rise Above* was created several years ago, not in 2024. This sculpture depicts a woman raised on a pedestal that, upon closer inspection, turns out to be a garbage can—a striking commentary on how women who are perceived as being past their physical prime are often devalued and treated as disposable.

I first encountered this sculpture in our Members' Show & Sale three or four years ago, and it has lingered in my thoughts ever since. It strikes a balance between sadness and humour, and its relevance has only grown more critical in recent times.

When I first saw *Rise Above*, it made me think of Hillary Clinton. At the time, the media criticized her for being dowdy, overlooking her intelligence and accomplishments in favour of criticizing her unappealing pantsuits. Recently, misogyny in American politics has intensified, with Donald Trump derogatorily labelling Kamala Harris as "trash." This kind of language is one way to diminish powerful, intelligent women whose lives and contributions extend far beyond reproduction and sexual appeal.

Deb's work, whimsical yet tragic, invites viewers to engage with the complex and often hidden realities of aging.

CONCLUSION

All the artists in III — Deborah Potter, Leesa Streifler, and Sheila Nourse — challenge perceptions and propose joy, humour and worth for those least valued by our society.

As curator of this exhibition, it sometimes hit home more than expected. I've observed that nearly every conversation I have with my cis-women friends revolves around topics like menopause and the challenges of caring for aging parents. While each of us has unique experiences with aging, it is a universal journey that affects us all. Aging is a topic our society often recoils from. *III* invites viewers to appreciate hidden experiences and complexities of aging and female identity. Perhaps you will see yourself as another "I" joining the female figures in the exhibition *III*.

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to visit *III*. As Director/Curator at the AGR, it is rewarding for me to support local artists and strengthen our connections to the community through exhibitions that speak to our collective concerns and experiences*.*

Thank you to the City of Regina's Accessibility grants program, which enables us to provide inclusive ways to process the concepts in our exhibitions. We are also grateful to the Canada Council for the Arts for funding our Accessible Gallery Tours project, offered and developed in consultation with Listen to Dis', a disability arts organization based in Regina.

I would like to thank our core funders, SK-Arts and the City of Regina, through their Community Partner Grant program.

And I am delighted to recognize SaskTel for making this audio tour possible with their sponsorship, which connects people to experiences of art through communications technology.

I especially thank YOU for taking the time to listen to this audio tour and attend this exhibition. You can support the Art Gallery of Regina by becoming a member, donating, or both. Visit our website, www.artgalleryofregina.ca, for details on becoming part of our gallery's community and more about *III.*