

Audio tour transcript

Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to experience the exhibition *Semiotics of Leisure*, which runs from May 24 to July 27, 2024. Artists in this exhibition use "leisure" as the subject and method for creating their artworks.

Before entering the gallery, you may wish to use the coat rack in our welcome area or set large bags inside the gallery doors.

We understand that you may be curious about how artworks are made and what they are made from, but we urge you not to investigate by touching fragile artworks. We especially caution you not to touch Terri Fidelak's sculpture.

While you should not touch the artworks in this exhibition, Shinobu Akimoto invites you to take a copy of the booklet she has printed about her project *Meaning of Making: Natusu-Mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* and use the computer station in the gallery to learn about her other projects.

Don't miss Akimoto's original editioned jars of marmalade, located on the shelves to the left of the gallery door before you enter. Akimoto asked for her artwork to be placed outside of the gallery, inviting humorous speculation on whether *Meaning of Making: Natusu-Mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* is art or simply fruit preserves.

Please help yourself to sensory tools for use in the gallery from the baskets under the table at our entrance wall. 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 on your way out.

[Start outside the gallery doors]

I'm Sandee Moore, curator of the exhibition *Semiotics of Leisure*. I'm delighted to guide you through this exhibition of artworks that promote the subversive qualities of pleasurable non-work by Saskatchewan artists Terri Fidelak, Simon Fuh and Gerald Jessop, alongside Japanese artist Shinobu Akimoto.

Many people consider art a leisure activity, whether making it or looking at it, but for professional artists, art is work. When an artist does a jigsaw puzzle, cans homemade marmalade, seeks out an after-hours night club or basks on the beach, do these leisure activities become work?

The seemingly frivolous subject of leisure makes us question the concepts that structure our world. What does leisure mean? Do we only understand leisure in contrast to work? Is leisure then dependent upon work for its existence as a concept? If there were no work, would there be leisure?

Artists Shinobu Akimoto (Japan), Terri Fidelak (SK), Simon Fuh (SK/ON) and Gerald Jessop (SK) ruin our easy acceptance of leisure as "anti-work" by taking activities that signify "free time" as the subjects and methods of their art practices.

Likely, the first thing you'll see upon entering the gallery is a wall with a table that holds helpful items and gallery information, including self-guided tour pamphlets and the exhibition didactic panel. On the didactic panel, you'll see the exhibition title (*Semiotics of Leisure*), the artists' names (Shinobu Akimoto, Terri Fidelak, Simon Fuh & Gerald Jessop), exhibition dates and a short introduction I wrote for this show.

You probably know what "leisure" is, or you might think you do. The other part of the exhibition title, "Semiotics," might be a little hard to understand. Semiotics is the study of how meaning is created.

The exhibition title, then, tells us that this exhibition will reveal how words, sounds, images, activities, and other social constructs, like work and commodities, shape our ideas and understandings of leisure.

Photos are permitted. If you post pictures from our exhibition, tag the Art Gallery of Regina and the artists. Each artist's name is underneath the artwork titles on the labels near their works.

If we begin our tour by going to the left, you'll notice several 22 by 28-inch framed paintings on canvas. In the first painting, *Sunning*, we see two figures sitting in lawn chairs, partially submerged in the water. The turquoise background and figures are overlaid with a thick impasto of sherbet yellow paint, suggesting the dazzling sunlight glancing off the lake. A dark blue oblong seems to be a leg glimpsed through the thick lens of the water.

If you look closely at the figure on the left, the bill of their ball cap has migrated to their lower face like a duck's bill. This is typical of Jessop's work: people, items, landscapes, and architectural figures are overlaid, merged, and become chimeras (imaginary monsters composed of incongruous parts).

Gerald Jessop has been painting the beach for fifty years, and we see this dedication to both his painting practice and his subject. His favoured subject - beach frolickers and their recreational accoutrements - represent avenues of escape from the predictable rhythms of Capitalism.

Next to *Sunning is Sand Tents*. Thick lines incised into the goopy swirls of paint that represent the beach delineate the outlines of tents and umbrellas, which are otherwise subsumed into a uniformly blobby expanse of beach. The outlines of beach furnishings are like mirages rising from the hot sand.

The next painting, *Beach Frolickers*, shows a densely crowded beach. People, speed boats and inflatable rafts jostle for space on the narrow strip of sand hemmed in a flat line of water and a small line of hills. Jessop crams his canvases with all the goods we understand symbolize a relaxing day at the beach: the striped towel, the gaudily patterned board shorts, the unnaturally-coloured plastic of loungers and flotation rings.

Now, we come to four paintings hung in a grid fashion. The top left is *Fish Hat*, a jumble of elements: in the middle distance, people on a boat or a pier fishing and close-ups of elaborately covered heads, shielding themselves from sun,

sand and gazes. Like a hallucination brought on by the hot sun of the beach, this painting reveals the beach as a heterotopia. A heterotopia is a place that is a part of our everyday lives but where the normal rules of society don't apply. The beach is a special place dedicated to rest, unconstrained thoughts, and soaking in the sunlight and water in equal doses.

This atmosphere is also crucial to Jessop's process of accessing the unconscious in his paintings. He begins with careful observation of the shoreline crowded with sunbathers, picnickers, swimmers, pets, toys and leisure structures of the affluent, then uses the technique of "automatic drawing" to "get the feeling of it [the bustling beach]." He doesn't start with an endpoint in mind but journeys into the unconscious instead, taking us along on his dreamy voyage.

The top right of this grouping, with its eye-searing candy colours and unconstrained glee, is called *Giant Unicorn*. The artist has made an inflatable unicorn the focal point of the canvas. A smaller inflatable at its side recasts these brash toys as mother and child and recasts this scene as a holy icon of Madonna and child. Somehow, we begin to relate to and empathize with these plastic objects.

The artist himself has mentioned that the inflatable unicorn has become a personal symbol: a figure constantly observing the goings on at the beach. In the background, we can see a couple: a man sprawled out with his legs in front of him resting on his arms and a woman hunched toward him, perhaps applying sunscreen or squeezing his back zits. It's a strangely amusing moment of intimacy that drives home the

notion of the beach as neither public nor private, but somewhere in between. In the background, the smoky lavender structure of the beach club seems less real than the breath-swelled unicorns.

The bottom right of this grouping is a painting titled *Unexpected Guest*. The figure rendered most clearly in this canvas is a purple inflatable ring from which projects a llama's head. This ersatz beast crowds the beach blanket of a woman and child in the shade of their green umbrella. Faint immaterial outlines of more umbrellas stretch towards a nearly identical saw-toothed line of hills in the distance. The scrabbled lines of sand dappled with shadows imply a beach crowded with many more people.

Jessop describes his paintings as anachronistic; they could be from any time in the past or the future. However, when he thinks of the future, he also thinks of these toys manufactured from non-biodegradable plastic as the ultimate inheritors of our beaches.

Next to *Giant Unicorn* is *Hot Sky*. With its unadorned stretch of blue sky, it's a reprieve from the crammed and saturated canvases seen up until now. An expanse of the pale turquoise sky lightly touched with yellow is interrupted only by silver contrails. Below is another bustling beach scene centred on a gate with a pair of crossed paddles. There are sailboats, silhouettes of lawn chairs, figures huddled under towels, and the scumbled surface of the water.

Showing the world as it is rather than romanticizing is something to admire in any artist's practice. The next painting by Gerald Jessop, *Lifejacket Loaner Station*, is

vigorously mundane. A blue rectangle carves out its own space within the larger 22 x 28 canvas. A cartoon family and the words "life jacket loaner station" are emblazoned upon it. The purple shadow of a diver with flippers angled across the sign suggests that all may not be as ordinary as it seems. Is this sign (a row of lifejackets hanging from the bottom edge) underwater? The sky splashed with watery drips of cobalt enhances the sense that the lifejacket loaner station has sunk to the bottom of the lake, a relic of our current crassly commercial lifestyle.

The last painting on this wall is called *High Security*. An inflatable pink flamingo, perhaps an inflatable swan, and other plastic playthings are incarcerated behind the diamond-shaped grid of a wire fence. The impression is of an absurd zoo or a penitentiary for things that ultimately destroy the beauty of the beaches whose pleasures they are meant to enhance.

If we round the corner and go past the emergency exit door, we come to another painting by Gerald Jessop called *Beach Toys*. This maximalist canvas is crammed with google-eyed visages of inflatable unicorns and ducks alongside insubstantial-looking summer people. A towable tube's bulbous, rounded shape, looking for the world like a gigantic hot dog, dwarfs these many tiny figures.

Although we think of the beach as a relaxing place, it is so laden with activities and recreational accoutrements that there is almost no room left for the main attraction: the water. In *Beach Toys*, the blue-glazed surface of the water is pushed to the very edges of the canvas by a flood of goofy toys.

I chose to put the next two canvases by Jessop in conversation with Simon Fuh's installation on the other side of this moveable wall.

The first painting, called *Sunscreen*, is a kind of inverted or X-ray view, where we can see through the bulky shape of a tent to the brightly outlined figure inside and on the beach beyond.

Night Dance is a confusing ecstasy of dancers lined up along the shore, giving the sense that after dark, the beach moves from a hallucinatory daydream to a frenzied social space. The colour palette of *Sunscreen* and the painting next to it, *Night Dance*, are markedly different from the saturated sunshine yellow, aquamarine, and flamingo pink that characterizes Jessop's other paintings. These paintings show a world of deep indigo dusk lit up with glowingly colourful details, the way a black light picks out white teeth and pieces of apparel in a darkened nightclub.

Rounding the movable wall, you'll notice an octagonal speaker decorated with outlines of clouds and painted in Miami Vice pastels hanging from the ceiling; this is a part of Simon Fuh's installation called *Memory Theatre*. Though the beachy theme of the speaker resonates with many of Jessop's paintings, the transition of the beach-turned-dance club in Jessop's paintings to Fuh's sound installation is a coordinated shift from one type of aspirational non-work to another. Fuh's installation, crafted from light, sound and faint pencil marks, is a longing for the after-hours club as an escape from the predictable rhythms and dictates of productivity that define capitalist culture.

Passing under the octagonal speaker, you'll hear the sound of steady drizzling rain, traffic passing on a busy street, and distant rumbles of thunder. It's oppressive, dreary, and evocative of the daily grind in an urban centre.

Fuh's work is as immaterial as a spectre; he haunts the gallery with subtle nods to the now-defunct after-hours club *Checkmate*. He has lightly pencilled the word "Checkmate" high up on the wall and lit a corner of the space with purple lights, restaging the festive, mysterious quality of nightclub lighting.

If you make your way toward the corner, you'll hear the rumbling quake of dance beats from inside the wall and an overheard phone conversation. The caller is lost and seeking directions to *Checkmate*. The directions, hilarious and divergent, spool from the phone almost interminably, continually deferring pleasure for the would-be nightclub-goers.

Fuh often restages or recreates what no longer exists in incorporeal materials (sound, light, shadow and easily erased pencil drawings). Sometimes, he corrects the public record, as in *Two Nemeses Pass in the Day* from 2022; other times, he invites us to engage with events from an unconsidered point of view, such as that of the tenant in the basement of a house damaged by teen squatters (*Greenlight: Carlaw*, 2022).

It is perhaps no accident that many artists in this exhibition created their artworks in response to the 2020 lockdowns to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

They found solace in elevating everyday activities—putting together puzzles, visiting the beach, making preserves from fruit trees, and imaginatively travelling to an almost mythically epic after-hours nightclub.

Fuh's *Memory Theatre* emerged from the isolation and longing experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the artist's relocation from Regina to Toronto.

"I reached out to my friends and colleagues with questions about parties and then about memory," Fuh explains. "A party, I thought, is much like a memory: evasive and ungraspable unless experienced directly." *Memory Theatre*, crafted from sound, light and a pencil drawing, is, like a happy memory, transitory and immaterial.

Fuh's installation places viewers in the nonplace of an Uber's backseat, waiting for the leisure to begin. The unending journey to the clandestine club, with its surfeit of phone calls seeking its location, is neither free time nor labour.

If we move back toward the middle of the gallery, we'll see a cube-like pedestal, a stack of completed picture puzzles on top of it. This is an untitled work in progress by Terri Fidelak. These puzzles are not glued together, so it's important not to touch them, as the pieces can easily separate.

Fidelak's sculpture records endless hours of time-filling by the artist putting together banal images. Fidelak's artwork drains her process of creativity, which we usually require from artists. She lavishes hours on creating pictures but merely assembles pieces from a box.

The tedious labour of the artist is translated into an activity everyone has experience with.

Fidelak may gleefully purchase puzzles for their sappy or mundane photo covers but denies viewers the dubious pleasure of these images. She stacks the puzzles one on top of the other, obscuring all but one of the pictures. The differing puzzle dimensions create a random remix and assemblage of the pictures, reminiscent of Jessop's paintings that juxtapose many views and elements in a single plane. The sharply painted geometric lines that delineate playing boundaries of a sports surface appear to merge into jagged rock formations of the puzzle stacked on top of it; another accidental composition of picture puzzles sees flowers emerge from the robe worn by a religious figure.

When viewed from the side, the stack of puzzles tells of the many hours the artist has spent on this project. The layers of one completed puzzle laid upon another are like geological eras laid down in sedimentary rock. Just as Fidelak's artwork challenges notions of art and work, it also subverts the notion of a monument as a remembrance of a significant event. This tower of puzzles, created over many years, is a monument to "passing time"—unnoticeable hours that have slipped away.

"The hand of the artist" is the idea that an artist's unique flair leaves a signature trace of their authorship in the finished artwork. Though Fidelak assembles her artworks from found objects rather than wielding a paintbrush or chisel, she also imbues them with the artist's hand.

She notes that she chooses her materials by how they move and respond to the hand. She touched each puzzle piece in *Semiotics of Leisure* and, by doing so, asked us to question what the artist's work consists of. Is it making a product, or is it something else?

The seemingly simple pleasures of leisure quickly unravel when we question what work is for artists or audiences. Does leisure only exist in relation to work?

Towards the gallery's back wall, you'll see two grids of photos printed on vinyl. These are part of a project called *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu-mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* by Japanese artist Shinobu Akimoto, who is well known for projects that critique the "work" portion of "artwork."

Each jar in the photographs contains marmalade handmade by the artist from her family's orange tree. She photographed the jars in various places around the house she inherited in 2019 when the artist's mother unexpectedly passed away, underscoring the intimate nature of her project and its connections to family and grief.

The photographs are printed larger than life-size, allowing us to investigate the wide shreds of rind, bubbles suspended in thick syrup, and the dots that make up the lettering on each label affixed to the jars.

You may notice that each jar has a number; for instance, six out of 22 VE or seven out of 22VE. The artist comes from a printmaking background and has followed printmaking conventions to label her marmalade.

The first vinyl square contains a varied edition (VE) of 22 jars of marmalade; the neighbouring square of adhesive vinyl has photographs of all 23 jars of marmalade in this edition.

Akimoto's artworks typically wrestle with problems of labour and value. Since 2013, she has been co-director of *Residency for Artists On Hiatus*, which values downtime as an essential aspect of making. For her other projects, she labouriously learns various handicrafts to replicate factory-produced home goods from retailers like Ikea or Muji.

We invite you to learn more about the *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu-mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* or explore Akimoto's many other projects using the computer station next to the gallery. You can browse Akimoto's website and help yourself to a booklet she created that explains many of the profound reasons that motivated her to make the *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu-mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019*.

While reproductions of her *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu-mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* are in the gallery, the artist asked for the actual artwork to be placed outside the gallery. We know that putting things inside an art gallery conveys the status of "art" upon those things. Akimoto's limited edition multiple of handmade marmalade resists easy categorization as artwork.

Her project combines the trendy, twee nostalgia for preserving food with mourning the loss of a parent, a long familial connection to a fruit tree and the artist's ongoing project to create a

satisfying lifestyle through the means of art-making. Look for the *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu-mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019*, which is just outside the gallery doors.

Akimoto's work raises the question: "If everything an artist does is art (and work), what about grieving?"

Akimoto subtly shifts the ground on which our precarious system of beliefs about work commodities and that which should be pure of commercialization by selling her jars of marmalade, priced as original artworks rather than mass-produced grocery store staples. Though the artist doesn't advertise the fact, appealing instead to sugar-free locavore appetites, each jar of Natsu-Mikan Marmalade is a sarcophagus for memories of harvesting oranges from this tree with her parents and grandparents.

Akimoto writes of this project, "In the backyard of my family home, an old natsu-mikan (summer orange) tree has once again produced hundreds of fruit, just like many others that grow wild in the area which no one, except for squirrels and some birds, really cares about. One third of our oranges fall on the ground before the summer even arrives contrary to the name. Some years, they had to be thrown away, but we have always tried to consume as many of them as we could for as long as I can remember.

The spring of 2019 has been no exception despite the heartrending circumstance. I was determined not to waste a single fruit and decided to make our usual marmalade even more rigorously and professionally, perhaps as a therapy. As always, it is 100% organic with zero

pesticides or additives (not even pectin), sweetened with half the amount of non-white sugar (naturally)."

To purchase a jar of Natsu-Mikan Marmalade, please ask the Art Gallery of Regina staff to assist you in completing your purchase through Akimoto's website. Each limited edition jar of marmalade comes with an archivally framed portrait of your jar of marmalade.

Finally, if you continue circling to your right through the gallery, we will come to more paintings by Gerald Jessop - this time, unframed paintings on paper.

The group of two - *Beach Tent* and *Texting by the Shelter* - are formally connected by the tent structure pivotal to both compositions. *Beach Tent* (on top) transports us from the gallery to lounging in the shade on the hot sand. The vista, framed by two outstretched feet and the tent's angular fabric walls, contrasts the cool comfort of the shelter's interior with the relentlessly blazing sun outside. Jessop renders the shadowed interior of the tent in rich colour and detail while the dazzling sunlight obscures the sketchily outlined figures glimpsed through the door and walls.

In the bottom painting, *Texting by the Shelter*, two covered-up figures seem oblivious to the enchanting surroundings of the beach. Instead, one focuses on the tiny world on her phone screen. While the shelter in *Beach Tent* seemed like a portal to a dreamworld, in *Texting by the Shelter*, it is a hulking, bulky presence crowding the beach, lake, trees and the two women to one side of the canvas.

In the middle of this wall is a grouping of paintings: *Duck and Cat*, *Angle View*, *Men Lounging*, *Floating*, *Pink Flamingos*, and *Recreation on the Beach*. In *Duck and Cat* and *Men Lounging*, we are once again confronted with the google-eyed gazes of inflatable characters. Ones that seem to ask of us, "What's going on here?"

One answer to "What's going on?" or possibly more accurately, "What does it mean," lies in the impressionistic brush strokes that tumble across the canvas like a hot summer wind in *Angle View*. The frenzied painting style underscores the fleeting nature of pleasure arrested in an instant in this canvas.

Pink Flamingos incorporates an eye-searing yellow frame painted on the paper as part of the composition – a surprising new element in Jessop's oeuvre of beach paintings. A frame, similar to a gallery, tells us that what we see inside of it is art. We see figures in swimsuits doubled on the rippling water, slack limbs supported by pneumatic lounge chairs, and the distance, the absurd, delicate arching of the necks of two inflatable pink flamingos. By painting a frame around this trivial and ridiculous scene, Jessop asserts that these things and situations are worth our attention and recording.

There's amusing confusion about the way Jessop puts together a scene. A tediously bland recreational device becomes a glacier or an iceberg, a landscape in itself. Disposable trash becomes heroic.

Jessop's final paintings on this wall are *Slide* and *Watching the Floaties*. Wood and metal recreational structures, long ago demolished in favour of safer and

less romantic alternatives, haunt these paintings. An acid-green floating inflatable playground (free of hard surfaces, sharp edges or splinters) sprawls across the bottom of the composition under a smokey lavender sky and the silhouettes of people meandering across a rickety bridge. In *Slide*, a wooden trestle tower supporting the slide seems to float and be carried away on hot pink legs.

These remembrances of the ruined structures of joy relate to Simon Fuh's installation *Memory Theatre*. Fuh's work, too, reflects upon the loss of a structure that served as a site for pleasure. The word "checkmate" that Fuh pencilled high on the wall, is the name of the nightclub that is the subject of his work. The building the Checkmate after-hours club was housed in and the mural on the building that advertised its presence has since been demolished. The faintness of Fuh's tribute to the Checkmate mural underscores its quality as an insubstantial yet cherished memory.

While it's important not to convert leisure to labour, it's essential to acknowledge the critical role leisure plays in our lives. Every day, we are battered by bad news followed by worse news; we experience the pain of war, genocide, climate change and personal loss. Leisure can help us heal by allowing us space to be unproductive and aimless.

Shinobu Akimoto's *Meaning of Making Series: Natsu Mikan (summer orange) Marmalade 2019* didn't begin as an art project but simply as a way for the artist to busy her hands while processing her mother's death that prompted her return to Japan in 2019, after 30 years in Canada.

While Terri Fidelak's project connects to the kind of soothingly aimless activities that many people turned to in 2020.

Thank you for taking the time to visit Semiotics of Leisure.

Thank you to the City of Regina's Accessibility grants program for enabling us to provide inclusive ways to process the concepts in our exhibitions.

I wish 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 Semiotics of Leisure.

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