

Along The River Road

We are so blessed, we are so enabled to be almost anything we want, that we take it for granted, too seldom remembering that it's all been passed on to us because of what those who went before us achieved, what they suffered, what they endured.

David McCullough, author

Rivers have been of central importance to humankind throughout history. Access to and use of these life-giving waterways has unlocked the secrets of continents and determined both the rise and fall of civilizations.

The history of Canada, like that of many other nations, is largely bound up with the story of its waterways. In the Canadian west the rivers and streams which flow across the prairies and through the forests of the Canadian Shield provided water for the flora and fauna upon which First Nations peoples depended and functioned as borders between tribal territories. For Europeans and Euro-Canadians, the rivers of the west were the primary highways from the settlements of Eastern Canada across the continent to the Rocky Mountains and down to the Pacific Ocean. Along these highways came the explorers, fur traders, and eventually the settlers.

The most important river system in western Canada is the Saskatchewan, made up of the North Saskatchewan, South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers. The Cree called the North Saskatchewan River *kisisaskatchewan*, meaning 'swift flowing river' and, just like the river's current, time has passed very quickly and brought tremendous changes in the west. Just over one-hundred years ago central Alberta was populated by nomadic First Nations groups and roaming herds of buffalo. Today the region is home to millions of people and the open prairie has been replaced by asphalt highways, industrial developments, and huge metropolitan centres.

Along The River Road explores the swift flow of time along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. Featuring historically-based paintings by Fort Saskatchewan artist Katherine Braid juxtaposed with photographs by Edmonton artist Mark Freeman, the art works in the exhibition reveal the past and present contemporary views of central Alberta. Through their works the artists introduce viewers to some of the people, places and events which have informed the history and development of the province of Alberta over the last 150 years.

Along The River Road was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA Travelling Exhibition program is supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Travelling Exhibition 2010-2012 Season

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition for the 2010-2012 season. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves up to 50 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide for the show. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The Artists

Katherine Braid
Mark Freeman

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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Front Cover Images:

Top: Katherine Braid, *York Boats on the North Saskatchewan River*, 2007, Acrylic on masonite, Courtesy of the artist

Left: Katherine Braid, *Edmonton Trading Post*, 2009, Acrylic wash, crayon on masonite, Courtesy of the artist

Right: Mark Freeman, *Some People Will Believe Just About Anything*, 2009, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Along The River Road

*History ought to be part of everyone's education.
It is essential to understanding who we are, how we got to be
where we are, and why we are the way we are.*

David McCullough, author





Katherine Braid
Palliser Expedition Arriving at Fort Edmonton, 2007
Pen, ink and acrylic wash
Courtesy of the artist

Artist Katherine Braid grew up in a log house not far from the site of Victoria Settlement, near present-day Fort Saskatchewan. Her parents were pioneers from Europe and as a child she listened to their stories, growing up with a sense of history and the desire to share the history of the local region with others. Braid has said that the aim of her art is to inform people of the hardships early settlers lived through and the debt we owe to early pioneers in what is now Alberta.

Katherine Braid's paintings in [Along the River Road](#) fall into the genre of History Paintings. From the late 1600s to the 1800s history paintings were at the top of the hierarchy of artistic subjects for artists to explore, concerned with scenes with narrative content from classical history, Christian history and mythology, and historical events of the near past. One of the events recorded by Braid is the Palliser Expedition of 1857 to 1860. This expedition, which explored and surveyed the prairies and wilderness of western Canada, provided the first comprehensive account of the region and helped open the door to Euro-Canadian settlement in the future province of Alberta. Braid acknowledges the importance of this survey in Alberta's history by choosing it as a subject and capturing the moment when John Palliser and his comrades first caught sight of Fort Edmonton in the winter of 1857.

In her painting of this event Braid adopts a mixed-media style of presentation. Combining acrylic washes and pen and ink, the work has an illustrative or sketch-like quality. This technique creates a sense of immediacy in the painting and gives the impression that the artist was 'right on the scene', recording events in the Palliser expedition as they happened.



Mark Freeman
Residential Parking, 2008
Photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Mark Freeman is an Edmonton photographic artist interested in street photography and people in their environments. Freeman's artistic aim is to look for juxtapositions in elements to provide for a deeper meaning or reading of his photographs. He wishes the viewer to think about something else beyond the 'pretty' picture. Freeman is often concerned with scenes that trigger an immediate emotional response, especially those that display elements of humour or show a fascination with ambiguous or unusual happenings.

Freeman's photograph *Residential Parking* addresses these aspects of street photography. In a large urban centre like Edmonton the sight of bedding against a building, hidden in a bush, or secreted in a business doorway, is an all-too frequent occurrence. In a city-sponsored survey from 2006, it was found that there were over 2,600 homeless people in Edmonton. Freeman's work is a powerful statement about the harsh conditions that thousands of people endure in the heart of oil-rich Alberta.

Irony is also a key ingredient in Freeman's work. The bedding in the photograph, for example, references the famous Hudson's Bay point blankets. These were a type of wool blanket traded by the Hudson's Bay Company during the 18th and 19th centuries to First Nations hunters and trappers in exchange for furs. While these blankets were available in many designs, the classic pattern, known as 'chief's blankets', featured a white background with stripes of green, red and yellow. These blankets symbolized the important role First Nations peoples played in the fur trade and in the exploration and eventual settlement by Euro-Canadians of Western Canada. That it now serves as the bedding for a homeless person makes a very telling comment on this history and the issues faced by First Nations peoples today.

The irony of this situation is emphasised by the location of the bedding below a reserved parking sign, which suggests the reserves established for First Nations bands beginning in the 1870s, and by the title given to the work itself. The term 'residential' not only refers to the actual location, but may make reference to the residential school system which has proved to be another black mark in the Canadian government's relationship with First Nations peoples.



Katherine Braid
York Boats on the North Saskatchewan River, 2006
Pen, Ink and Acrylic Wash
Courtesy of the artist

In her pursuit of Alberta's history and the creation of the paintings in the exhibition [Along The River Road](#), Katherine Braid undertook extensive archival research. Her paintings are based on early illustrations and historic photographs of the people, places, events and activities which were involved in the transformation of central Alberta. An example of this is seen in the painting *York Boats on the North Saskatchewan River*. This painting was inspired by a photograph taken by Ernest Brown, an important Edmonton businessman who photographed the West during and after the 'boom' period of the early 1900s.

Like other works by Braid, this painting is also a history painting. In the mid 19th century the grande style of history painting was blended with 'genre' painting and artists began to depict more personal incidents in the lives of the great, or depicted everyday life in historical settings. This development is seen in Braid's painting *York Boats on the North Saskatchewan River*. Rather than portraying an important historical event, like the Palliser Expedition, in this work the artist focuses on more mundane, everyday subjects, portraying here the famous Hudson Bay Company York Boat which was used to carry furs and trade goods along inland waterways in Rupertsland and the Columbia District.

While the actual subject of this work is not grand, however, Braid's romantic treatment elevates its importance. Romanticism in art is linked to naturalistic painting but is a mode of the ideal and involves the 'stepping up' of the usual. The result of a wistfulness for what was past, or for what was considered distant and exotic, it embraces concepts of nobility and grandeur. The 'grandness' of the York Boat in Braid's work is primarily created through the setting of this scene. By placing the boat and its crew on a calm river at sunset Braid creates a quiet, nostalgic feeling in the work. Here the tranquil passage of the boat along the river at dusk seems to foreshadow its eventual demise as, with the advent of the steamboat at the beginning of the 19th century, the use of York boats ended.