

Beyond 'the patch'

Stories from Wood Buffalo

Until May 3, 2016, the urban area of Fort McMurray and the Regional District of Wood Buffalo, nestled in the boreal forest of north-eastern Alberta, were basically known to outsiders for one thing - the oil patch. Described as the economic engine of Canada the story of Fort McMurray - a narrative of migrant workers; enormous wages; and high costs - was either praised or reviled by the rest of Alberta's population, across the nation and internationally. On May 3, 2016, a new chapter was added to this story: the devastating Fort McMurray wildfire. Forcing the evacuation of 88,000 people and eventually destroying 15% of the city 'the beast', as it became known, gave birth to new perceptions of the region.

The story of Fort McMurray and the regional district of Wood Buffalo of which it is a part, however, is about much more than oil or devastation. As tragic as the fire of 2016 was and while the oil industry continues to drive the economy of the region, these are only two aspects of life in the north-eastern part of Alberta. As articulated by artist Erin Stinson:

Wood Buffalo most certainly has life and soul in and 'beyond the patch'. The media focus on the oil sands development in our region has painted an inaccurate picture of our lives here. There is a serious gap in knowledge, leaving many to judge us by those things deemed most unattractive. It neglects to tell the whole, balanced story of beauty and stillness - hope and opportunity - vibrancy and diversity. My Wood Buffalo exudes all of those characteristics.

The Travelling Exhibition (Trex) **Beyond 'the patch'** Stories from Wood Buffalo examines this little known region, investigating what it has to offer and what it is like to call this area home as these themes are rendered in the work of artists from the Wood Buffalo region. Through their drawings, paintings and photographs artists David Ball, Lucie Bause, Shauna Kelly, Kritsana Naowakhun and Erin Stinson share what they see and experience, inviting viewers to go beyond stereotypes and as expressed by Kritsana Naowakhun

...focus on the positive and beauty of Wood Buffalo, a new life and the hope of community.

The exhibition **Beyond 'the patch'** Stories from Wood Buffalo takes viewers on a journey into Alberta's boreal forest and the fifth largest urban settlement in the province. Providing an experience that is more nuanced than the conventional chronicles of 'rig pigs' and pipelines, the works in this exhibition challenge popular views of the region and offer opportunities for the creation of new and more profound narratives.

*The exhibition **Beyond 'the patch'** Stories from Wood Buffalo was curated by Shane Golby and Ana Maria Mendez-Barks (Manager, Arts & Culture, Regional Recreation Corporation of Wood Buffalo) and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

FRONT COVER IMAGES:

Top: Erin Stinson, *Resilience: Morning on the Athabasca River* (Detail), Photograph, 2016, Collection of the artist
Bottom: Kritsana Naowakhun, *One night behind my house* (Detail), 2016, Acrylic on canvas, Collection of the artist



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 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. 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

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

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

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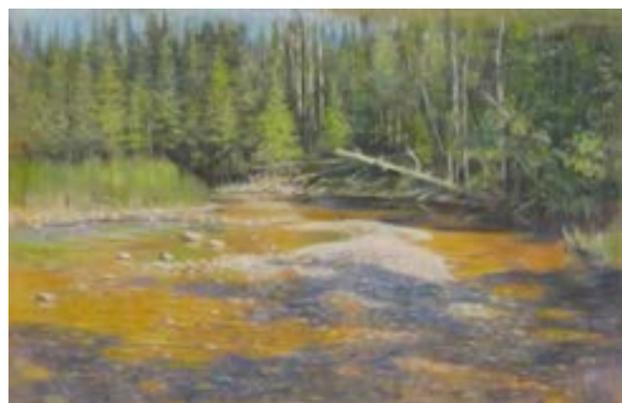
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David Ball
Hangstone River, 2016
Pastel on paper
Collection of the artist

David Ball was born in Coventry, England and studied at the Coventry College of Art in 1960/1961 where he trained as a graphic/technical illustrator. In 1978 he immigrated to Canada, spending the next three years in Montreal. In 1981 he moved to Alberta and after a few contract placements, he received a full-time position with Syncrude Canada Ltd. and moved to Fort McMurray on a permanent basis

David Ball's art practice had its beginnings while he was living in Britain and producing local landscapes through the use of pastels. His artistic style, which he defines as 'realistic', is a result of being trained to show every detail as a technical illustrator.

Since moving to Alberta Ball has come to know the landscapes of his new home through his outdoor activities - hiking, cycling, skiing, climbing, and kayaking. Through his art he strives to incorporate his love of the outdoors with his skills as an artist to portray the landscape.

Ball admits, however, that it took him some time to get a grasp of the Wood Buffalo area, stating that the region at first appears an endless sea of trees and all looks the same. As he described it, there are millions of trees that are so 'tight' and the undergrowth is limited. Because of these realities, the beauty and wonder of the region is not obvious to the casual viewer. When Ball started using the rivers and lakes in his drawings, however, the area became more interesting and after over thirty years in the region he has come to appreciate the landscape and the place. As Ball states, Fort McMurray has everything a city needs and yet is so close to the forest which, for him as an outdoor person, is really intriguing.

Through his works in the exhibition **Beyond 'the patch' Stories from Wood Buffalo** Ball hopes to share the beauty of this region with those who have not visited the area.



Shauna Kelly
Thickwood Boulevard, 2016
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist

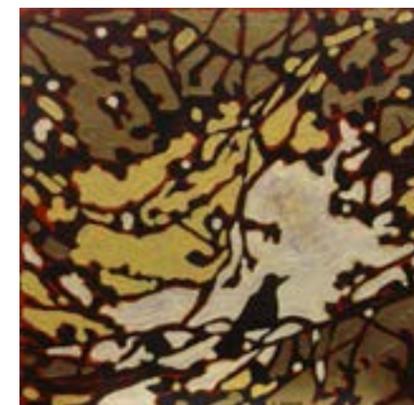
Shauna Kelly moved to Fort McMurray five years ago both for work reasons and to follow her husband who had received a position with Suncor. Kelly has taught with the Fort McMurray Catholic School District since her move north.

For Kelly, Fort McMurray is *a town like no other*. As stated by the artist:

...People come from all over the world to work here. There is so much opportunity. Nowhere else would I get to teach High School Art for my very first teaching job straight out of university. No where else would I have made so many friends, other teachers from around the country, who are also new to the community. It's a really great environment to learn and grow in. Everyone I know, including myself, wanted to move here to gain experience, then ended up staying because they loved their jobs and the people and town.

Kelly's interest in art began at a very young age as her father is an artist and taught her a lot. While she sold her first piece of art in junior high, however, she feels she really developed in High School and University during her Fine Art degree. Kelly has been fortunate to do a lot of travelling and takes pictures everywhere she goes, many of which serve as the foundation for future paintings. While she enjoys landscapes, she finds that street scenes and buildings always yield the most interesting end results. Although she has recently taken up watercolour painting, her preferred medium is acrylics and she has developed a technique where she starts with raw canvas and adds super heavy gesso in choice sections. This immediately adds a lot of texture and interest to the work. While Kelly uses photographs as the source of much of her work, her aim is not to recreate a photo but rather enhance the scene with complex colour, added texture and expressive brush strokes.

Kelly paints because she enjoys the excitement of the process, the impact a painting has and the control she can have with colour and light. For her work in the exhibition she chose to focus most of her attention on Hi-Way 63, both because of the composition and the shapes created by the curving lines and also because of the importance of the Hi-Way to the community. Hi-Way 63 serves as a life-line to the outside world and, for Kelly, to her family and home in Edmonton. For Kelly each painting is associated with a different emotion or a special place on the Hi-Way.



Lucie Bause
Bird on branch, 2016
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist

Lucie Bause moved to Fort McMurray in 2011 and lived in the city until 2016 when, due to the Fort McMurray wildfire, she was forced to evacuate. Though it has been a difficult decision, she has decided not to return.

Bause has been a practicing Visual Artist since 2002. Primarily a landscape artist, she explores nature-based themes and it is important for her to have a personal relationship with nature which includes observing and honoring its power and intelligence through her artwork. Having lived in Canmore for over twenty years, Bause states that living in the Fort McMurray region and the Boreal Forest offered her a lot of growth and opportunity as an artist. It was also, however, a big adaptation going from the mountains to a place of 'trees'. As stated by the artist:

My art was dependent on this imagery (the mountains) that was around me. (In the forest I) found I had to work harder and look deeper into myself and my subject and I had to be more 'sensitive'. I had to work differently and look at things in a different way.

Being able to get out on the trails and connect to the forest was very important for Bause, enabling her to *regenerate my soul*, and in her painting she began to strive to capture the energy and feeling she got from being in the forest. In comparing her work in the mountains to her work in the forest she states:

When painting the mountains I was using my eyes (as well as capturing an emotion). In the forest I had to look deeper into my own self and my work became more of a personal experience and more sublime and spiritual.

Describing her art style as 'stylized landscape', Bause depends on her observational skills to really absorb and be attentive to what is around her. While it is important for her to give a sense of what a region looks like, she is really after a deeper emotional sense of the region rather than actual representation. She interprets her experiences by simplifying, stylizing and coloring to express her emotional connection to a place.