

# In Dreams Awake

Between 1480 and 1505 the Flemish artist Hieronymus Bosch created one of the masterpieces of European art history. Entitled *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, this imaginative tour de force portrays Bosch's vision of the Garden of Eden, the earthly realm and the afterlife. The actual meaning of Bosch's painting has confounded viewers and art historians throughout the ages with art historians and critics generally interpreting the painting as a didactic warning on the perils of life's temptations. The intricacy of its symbolism, however, has led to a wide range of scholarly interpretations over the centuries. In recent decades scholars have come to believe this work reflects the orthodox religious belief systems of Bosch's age and was meant to teach specific moral and spiritual truths in the manner of other Northern Renaissance artists.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) Travelling Exhibition *In Dreams Awake* is inspired by this treasure of the early Renaissance. Referencing themes and elements discerned in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, the art works in this exhibition, like Bosch's painting, explore life – both the natural world and human relationships and interactions – in all its complexity.

Subjects such as fruit, water, fish and plant life and themes of religion, desire, simple pleasures and 'horror' are expressed in Bosch's master work and art works from the AFA's collection which echo these concerns were chosen for this exhibition. While Bosch's painting is the muse for this exhibition, however, each work in the exhibition is its own entity and in reality is unrelated to the other works featured. Like the fragmented images seen in dreams the exhibition *In Dreams Awake* unites these works to provide visions, similar to the disjointed and bizarre scenes in Bosch's triptych, of life in the 20th and 21st centuries. The exhibition *In Dreams Awake* thus becomes, in essence, a modern recitation of Bosch's narrative.

The exhibition *In Dreams Awake*, featuring art works drawn from the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, is inspired by the triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* created by the early Renaissance artist Hieronymus Bosch. Exploring elements, themes, and artistic styles which are expressed within or can be linked to this gem of Madrid's Prado Museum, this eclectic exhibition examines the 'earthly garden' as investigated by Alberta's artists and explores the influence of the past on contemporary artistic expression.

*The exhibition In Dreams Awake 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.*

FRONT COVER IMAGES:  
Top image: Robert Chelmick, *The Dalai Zonia*, 1990, Cibachrome photograph on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts  
Bottom image: Holly Newman, *Backyard Beauties*, 1989, Mixed media, silver gelatin, pencil crayon, oil on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts



## 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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## The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

# In Dreams Awake

*Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake.*  
Henry David Thoreau

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Brianna Palmer  
*Syphen and Squeal*, 2004  
 Etching on paper  
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation  
 for the Arts

The panels of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* are filled with strange plant forms and other organic elements such as rock formations and even a mollusk shell. This fantastical rendering of the natural world is also expressed in the work of Alberta artist **Brianna Palmer** as seen in her etching *Syphen and Squeal* included in the exhibition *In Dreams Awake*.

Palmer received a BFA in Printmaking from the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary in 2000 and an MFA in Printmaking from the University of Alberta in 2003. Palmer's concern with the environment and her 'surreal' treatment of it is clearly expressed by the artist in her artist statement:

*As we rely on modern advances to become our mediators between the environment and our existence, our bond with the natural environment diminishes. While the world of technology demystifies the power of nature, we are removed from the pure act of its experience. My work embodies a contrast between technology and nature; the artificial and the real.*

*In my art production I use an amalgamation of various materials and methods of working. I have an affinity for gathering discarded fragments of natural and man-made objects that fill my studio, and are displayed like rare treasures. This small ritual of gathering and displaying objects has become a vehicle for exploration. I begin by manipulating the objects, transforming them, and often redefining the nature of their materials. This intimate ritual of object making, reconnects me to the physical process of gathering in nature. The objects that are recreated are hybrids of organic and man-made; they contain an element of uncertainty about them: what has been created and what grew from nature? These transformations continue, as the objects are displayed, photographed, and re-contextualized through various print processes. Through these transformations, the identity of the objects is obscured, suspended between fact and fiction. The materials are familiar and reminiscent of experience, but the object itself is lucid, positioned between memory and imaginations. It is the recreation and contextualization of the artifact, and its ambiguity, that parallels the mystery and wonderment of nature.*



Hieronymus Bosch  
*The Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail)  
 1490-1510  
 Collection of the Prado Museum, Madrid,  
 Spain

The AFA Travelling Exhibition *In Dreams Awake* is inspired by the painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, painted by the early Renaissance artist **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450-1516) between 1490 and 1510. Bosch's works are known for their fantastic imagery, detailed landscapes, and illustrations of religious concepts and narratives. During his lifetime Bosch produced at least sixteen triptychs, eight of which are fully intact. His most famous triptych is *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a work chronicling the creation of the world and the creation and fall of man and this work serves as the inspiration for. The inner panels of Bosch's painting are intended to be read chronologically from left to right. In the left hand panel God presents Eve to Adam; in the center is a broad panorama teeming with socially engaged figures seemingly engaged in innocent, self-absorbed joy, as well as fantastical animals, oversized fruit and strange stone formations. The right panel presents a hellscape where tortured human are reaping eternal damnation.

The actual meaning of Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* has confounded viewers and art historians throughout the ages. Art historians and critics often interpret the painting as a didactic warning on the perils of life's temptations. The intricacy of its symbolism, however, has led to a wide range of scholarly interpretations over the centuries. Some have linked Bosch's art to heretical points of view and attacks on the Roman church of the time. Others have believed that his work was created merely to titillate and amuse. In recent decades scholars have come to believe his art reflects the orthodox religious belief systems of his age and was meant to teach specific moral and spiritual truths in the manner of other Northern Renaissance figures.

Because Bosch was such a unique artist his influence has not spread as widely as that of other painters of this time. He did influence a few artists during the 1500s and 1600s but was then largely forgotten. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, with the advent of the art movements of Symbolism and Surrealism, Bosch's work enjoyed a popular resurrection. The early surrealists' fascination with dreamscapes, the autonomy of the imagination, and a free-flowing connection to the unconscious brought about a renewed interest in his work.



Dale Beaven  
*Mall Rats: Malls Their Cathedrals, Shopping  
 Their Religion*, 1989  
 Intaglio etching, watercolour on paper  
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation  
 for the Arts

The middle panel of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* teams with a host of naked human figures engaged in a multitude of activities and joyously fulfilling all their desires. Frolicking with each other and with a variety of animals and birds in a landscape filled with water, trees, hills and strange formations, some of the figures have their heads shrouded by fruits or flowers while others have been transformed into strange animal/human hybrids.

**Dale Beaven's** mixed media work *Mall Rats: Malls Their Cathedrals, Shopping Their Religion* is similar to Bosch's painting in two main ways. First, Beaven's work is also concerned with the theme of human desire. Rather than cavorting in nature and focused on physical desire, however, Beaven's image shows a multitude of people rushing to fulfill the contemporary fixation with shopping. The theme of transformation also links Beaven's print work to Bosch's painting. While scholars have been unable to adequately decipher the meaning behind the human/animal/plant transformations expressed in Bosch's work, however, Beaven's meaning seems rather clear: in their thirst for a shopping bargain, humans become like rats in a maze, furiously scurrying to get to the goods before anyone else.

Dale Beaven resides in Medicine Hat, Alberta, and has participated in many exhibitions since 1996. As expressed by the artist in his artist statement:

*Manipulating imagery appeals to me more than reproducing what is already evident; putting the ordinary into an unconventional setting or conversely the surreal into reality. My subject matter flashes into my mind visually complete, usually triggered by casual phrases or events around me.*

*I hold a B.A. in Administration from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, but no formal education in art. Although I began primarily as a printmaker (intaglio) I am now working with larger images as a painter. Much of my work involves social commentary, the rest is often figurative. I find people more interesting than their surroundings.*