

Re-Imaging Normal

What does it mean to describe something or someone as 'normal'? What is 'normal' and who gets to decide what is 'normal' or not?

As defined by curator Michelle Lavoie, the term 'normal' refers to accepted ways of being: culturally constructed ideas around gender, sexuality and expected and accepted behaviour. Since time immemorial all societies have set norms of behaviour. As stated by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535-475 B.C.), however, *the only thing that is constant is change* and as expressed by Michelle Lavoie, while society creates limits on behaviour, these norms are always shifting.

Society evolves and progress marches on. One component of Canadian culture affected by changes in norms has been views towards, and thus the rights of, Canada's LGBTQ+ 'community'. Prior to the late 1960s homosexuality was considered a criminal offense. In 1969, however, homosexuality was decriminalized and the following decades have witnessed a steady, albeit arduous, progression concerning the legal rights of LGBTQ+ citizens in Canada.

While Canadian society has made significant progress concerning the rights not only of LGBTQ+ identifying citizens but for all Canadians, however, there are those who resist these transformations. Whether speaking of LGBTQ+ recognition and rights or the rights and values of other minority groups, there are those who promote an *us vs. them* mentality and strive to impose a narrow definition of 'normal' on society.

The TREX exhibition **Re-Imaging Normal** questions such aims. Combining archival materials from The Queer History Project, developed by The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, with art works created by LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+-allied artists, this exhibition challenges expectations and allows people's own stories to be told. In the process this exhibition creates a space for dialogue between different communities so that the boundaries of what is considered 'normal' are questioned and possibly expanded. It is believed that through this 're-imagining' everyone, not just the queer community, benefits and individual lives and society as a whole will become broader, richer and more inclusive.

*The exhibition **Re-Imaging Normal** was curated by Michelle Lavoie from the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, University of Alberta, and 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 financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

FRONT COVER IMAGES:
Top: Murray Billet quote, Collection of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, University of Alberta
Bottom Left: Adebayo Katiiti, *Untitled #1 (Detail)*, 2016, Woodblock print, Collection of the artist
Bottom Center: Max Quilliam, *Untitled #1*, 2016, Acrylic on paper, Collection of the artist
Bottom Right: Espen Wade, *Moth (Detail)*, 2016, Silkscreen on paper, 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
Michelle Lavoie - co-curator
The Institute of Sexual Minority Studies and Services, University of Alberta
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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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**“This is not about kids' rights
or parents' rights.
This is about discrimination.”**

**— Murray Billett,
gay rights activist**



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

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Daniel Beaudin
The Last Kiss, 2017
 Digital illustration
 Collection of Daniel Beaudin

Daniel Beaudin was born and raised on a farm in Sherrington, Quebec. At the time, being queer in a small and conservative rural town meant being an outcast. Moving to Montreal to attend college was an opportunity for him to discover a much more accepting and promising world.

Beaudin relates that he was an artist before college. A fine art illustrator at heart, he saw in graphic design a set of skills that could make him a more 'complete' artist. As he expresses it, Graphic Design was

...a way to learn about the tricks and techniques to master visual communication as a whole.

For Beaudin, his studies in Graphic Design taught him to put himself in the shoes of a diverse array of viewers in order to get his ideas across, complementing his artistic reflection with the tools to translate raw concepts into an accessible visual language. This creative mindset is now at the core of his process to create a connection between the public and his artwork.

Daniel Beaudin's artistic interests could be considered rather eclectic, ranging from cartoon illustrations to realism and surrealism. In his work he seeks to create a balance between cartooning, with its use of outlines and exaggeration, and realism with its careful modelling of light, textures and volumes. Beaudin relates that he strives to find the 'sweet spot' between the two styles combined with an ambient sense of surrealism to explore things just outside this world.

In speaking of the exhibition **Re-Imaging Normal** Beaudin indicates that the goal of helping viewers to learn is a strong intent behind his works. Beaudin wants his artwork to be 'ambassadorial'; a way for him to reach out to people who may be taking their first steps in discovering new aspects of human diversity. Challenging expectations, he seeks to build a bridge with other communities and so contribute to viewers' journeys towards a concept of 'normal' which encompasses the richness of human experience. In this journey Beaudin believes that everyone benefits and society will become broader, richer and more inclusive.



Frater Tham
When We Play We Grow Wiser..., 2016
 Faux vintage photo
 Collection of the artist

Lethbridge artist and curator **Frater Tham (Darcy Logan)** has been a professional artist since 1998. After studying at Grande Prairie College for two years he transferred to the University of Lethbridge where he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 2002.

Logan's art practice is fairly broad in nature and he has both a personal practice and a collaborative performance practice. His personal practice is multi-disciplinary, involving sculpture, painting, print-making and photography. In his two-dimensional work he concentrates on mythological themes which serve as allegories to investigate his place in the world.

Logan's 'place' in the world began in the lumber town of Prince George, B.C. As expressed by the artist, LGBTQ issues were not addressed in the town and, if they were, it was in a negative manner. This proved difficult for Logan as, while he identifies as a 'straight' male, as a child he engaged in activities which were not seen as 'normal' and caused Logan to later feel ashamed.

As expressed by Darcy Logan, however, change comes with time, education and being open. Over time Logan has come to believe that to say something is 'normal' is a very narrow definition of how cultures expect people should look, act or behave. According to the artist most people, at least privately, fall far outside societal bounds. For Darcy Logan, 'normal' is a point on a spectrum and most interesting things fall outside of that point.

The fairy 'photographs' created by Darcy Logan illustrate this. While these works explore his own sense of being, they also challenge a larger audience. As expressed by the artist:

I make them in my community where a lot of people know me. By being a man who identifies as 'straight' but has no problem being fluid and playing in this way, it challenges perceptions and asks viewers to consider why it should matter who someone loves and why should people take exception to LGBT culture and pride? Maybe, for those who are adversarial, these works will give them pause to re-consider their stance.



Trudi Sissons
No Trump 3, 2017
 Digital collage on paper
 Private collection - Trudi Sissons

For **Trudi Sissons**, becoming an artist was 'not a choice'. Rather, raised in a home where art was valued and where her own early attempts at making art were encouraged, it was only natural for her to pursue studies in art at school and later at University.

For Sissons' art is often a way to cope with, or to back away from, 'real' life. A lot of her work is highly personal but the personal narrative is not readily visible. Rather, the deeper meanings of her works are shrouded in imagery which aims to give people a taste of stuff that isn't the 'norm'.

Trudi Sissons identifies as 'straight' but over the past few years has participated in a number of queer-themed art exhibitions in Lethbridge. Her involvement in these exhibitions, as well as the TREX exhibition **Re-Imaging Normal**, stems from her personal story. Sissons' daughter identified as lesbian and while she felt comfortable 'coming out' to Sissons at age sixteen, struggled with 'coming out' to the rest of the world and finding a welcoming space.

Through her art work Sissons' seeks to honour her daughter, to understand her struggles, and to fight for other LGBTQ+ individuals. For the exhibition **Re-Imaging Normal** Sissons has created three works collectively titled 'What's the deal?' Envisaged as 'playing cards', these works present 'mirrored' figures which address the conflict many LGBTQ+ individuals face by pretending to be straight when they're not; by trying to fit into the majority when they're in the minority. In Sissons' experience, this struggle gives birth to duplicitousness where a person ends up living a lie. Sissons' works address the turmoil and pain that results. Her overall aim with these works is to invite the viewer to enter the work and try to understand the struggle of the subjects portrayed. In so doing she hopes viewers can be more compassionate and understanding.

Trudi Sissons does not think 'normal' exists. For her, people are all unique and in her mind, to be described as 'normal' would be an insult. As she states:

That term (normal) puts a label on something that doesn't exist. It creates an expectation to conform when we're all so unique. I've always liked that I'm not 'normal'. My world is so much richer because of it.