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ABOUT THE
EXHIBITION

Absence Inhabited is an online exhibition curated by Ashley C. Slemming, and has been generously funded through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Emerging Curator Fellowship.

This exhibition supports the growth and professional development of an emerging curator, encourages more diverse audiences to engage with the AFA collection, and increases virtual access to holdings which may otherwise not be available for traditional exhibitions. The Fellowship for Emerging Curators is intended to bring a new perspective to the artworks and artists featured in the AFA collection.

We encourage you to share this exhibition through the AFA website as well as through the Google Cultural Institute

ab·sence

/absəns/

noun

an occasion or period of being away from a place or person.

the nonexistence or lack of.

in·hab·it

/in'habət/

verb

(of a person, animal, or group) live in or occupy (a place or environment).

ABSENCE INHABITED

Absence Inhabited

A CURATORIAL PROJECT BY ASHLEY C. SLEMMING

*"...because the primary function of furniture and objects here is to personify human relationships, to fill the space that they share between them, and to be inhabited by a soul."
— Jean Baudrillard*

Domestic objects are saturated with cultural meaning—whispering stories about our every-day rituals, our wants and desires, our relationships, as well as our shortcomings as human beings. This exhibition aims to invite curiosity into the ways we inhabit our homes by contemplating the objects that surround us. All the artworks selected were chosen in consideration of habitual and everyday objects, specifically those which cannot perform their primary function without the active participation of a person or sentient being.

The works featured in this exhibition all tell different stories. The represented objects all appear to hold a patina or residue of life, yet all the objects presented are inanimate lifeless forms. *Absence Inhabited* consequently serves as an examination of absence representing presence, and the inherent states of being that are reflected in these various artworks. The range of objects represented allows for consideration of the concept of home and being from a variety of viewpoints – and challenges us to think about how we live, communicate, and function on a day to day basis.

This exhibition represents 29 artworks by 27 Alberta artists :

Barbara Amos
Ray Arnatt
Martin Bennett
John Brocke
Janet E. Brown
Elizabeth Clark
April Dean
Diana Edwards
K. Gwen Frank
Evelyn Grant
John Hall
Douglas Jones
Lillian Klimek
William Laing
Glen Mackinnon
Darci Mallon
Walter May
Lesley Menzies
Pamela Norrish
Jim Picco
Susan Robbins
Mel Rosa
Kate Schutz
Marc Siegner
Bill Simpkins
Arlene Stamp
Terry Winter

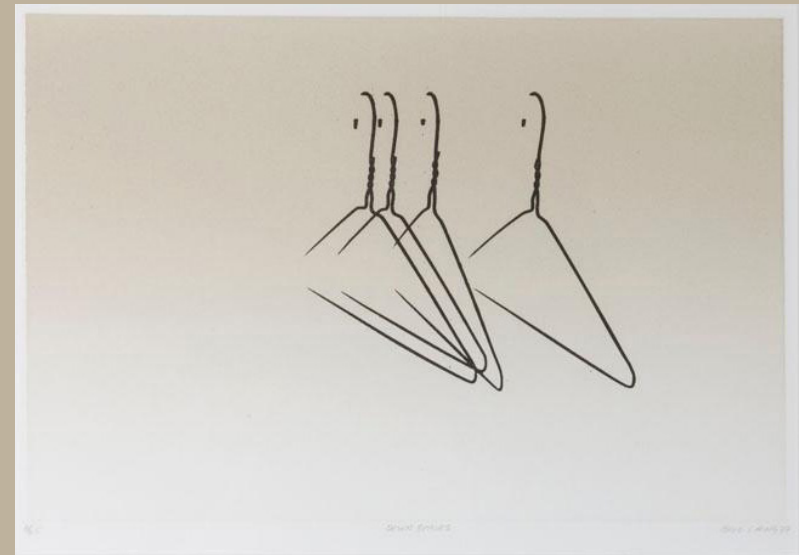
These artists all highlight unique perspectives on object-hood and have contributed to a rich survey of domestically-situated artworks. These works bring into focus notions of intimate home spaces within a continually growing and interconnected relational world.

Jim Picco & William Laing

JIM PICCO, *PLASTIC BAG*, 1996

Jim Picco stated that this particular piece is visceral and is about existence. According to Picco, existence is about the physiognomy of objects, their aura and their inherent symbolism. Content is the interpretation of these things and their relationship to each other in space.

The plastic bag is a shell, a skin, a holder of things. Empty, it serves no real function, but full, it's existence is legitimized. With the theme of absence in mind, this painting speaks of an uncertainty of feeling full or empty (we cannot know what is, or isn't, in the bag). Our culture has normalized filling feelings of emptiness with shopping and purchases of commodified items - Picco's Plastic Bag arguably hints at these themes with precision as well as subtlety.



WILLIAM LAING, *DOWNSTAIRS*, 1977

A 1998 retrospective of Laing's work described it as combining a highly innovative use of materials with an exploration of symbolic imagery. He works with photography, etching, silkscreen and assemblage – combining and re-ordering selected images from one medium to another. Longing, absence and the influence of memory play an important role in Laing's work as does a desire for reflection and contemplation.

With this work in particular, coat hangers mimic the shape of a human neck and shoulders in the most minimal way possible. With the absence of a coat or shirt to hang, the object becomes a reference to bare, vulnerable or naked bodies. The coat hangers hanging on an invisible rod allude to the things that could be there, but aren't.

Barbara Amos & Douglas Jones

BARBARA AMOS, *PAINT CAN, KETTLE AND VASES*, 1990

In one of Barbara Amos' early artist statements, she wrote about her interest in Still Life – stating her interest in the objects of her daily environment, the everyday things that we all take for granted. She explained that her initial attempts to portray these simple items were extremely humbling, and that these explorations prompted her study of Still Life.

Through these explorations, numerous questions arise. How does a society view its daily domestic objects? Are they cherished? How do they reflect our identities, individually and collectively? With these inquiries in mind, Barbara Amos at one point stated, "I fear that we have devalued our personal environment so much that it is not seen as worthy of statement. I draw in protest."



DOUGLAS JONES, *STILL LIFE, BOTTLE AND BOWL*, 1989

When contacted to comment on his painting *Still Life, Bottle and bowl*, Douglas B. Jones, now an established illustrator, talked about how this painting was made shortly after he had finished art school at the Alberta College of Art and Design. He was living in a rental suite, the top floor of an old house in SW Calgary – and he commented that he frequently used to set up objects to create Still Life paintings. Jones explained that the enamel bowl was from his grandmother's farm, and the fabric was chosen for its floral pattern which reminded him of John Singer Sargeant – a 19th Century Still Life painter whose work Jones admired and respected a lot at the time.

This particular still life features objects that seem to hold a residue of their past lives. Objects in themselves may not be sentient, but they do often reflect the culture in which they exist – becoming a mirror of our rituals, our day to day motions and our individual interests and values.

John Hall & Kate Schutz

JOHN HALL, *DISHES*, 1998

According to the artist, *Dishes* belongs to a group of twenty paintings completed in 1997 and 1998. Hall explained that ... “he presented the objects and situations with a certain formality to suggest that they have been deliberately chosen rather than accidentally stumbled upon or randomly selected.”

Hall also stated that “...the images make a case for finding worth and significance in the ordinary, the modest and the everyday.” At the same time, the extreme attention to detail and photo-realism in his paintings implies the value of precision, and underlines illusions of reality that come about when we think about how our environment and the objects around us define our life experiences - whether those experiences are perceived, or real.



KATE SCHUTZ, *KITCHEN SINK*, 2003

Kate Schutz's *Kitchen Sink* was part of a series painted from found or accidental photographs. Schutz described them as having “unexpected, informal compositions” which came from the instantaneous nature of snapshots.

The objects in *Kitchen Sink* were not staged, which translates to a very honest depiction of common human experience in domestic life. In Schutz's words, the painting... “reflects middle-class domesticity in an upfront manner which is disconcerting and mysterious.” This work evokes a curiosity towards the mundane, and calls into question the value and importance of these everyday experiences in our daily life.

Glen MacKinnon & Martin Bennett



GLEN MACKINNON, *TWO BOWLS*, 1998

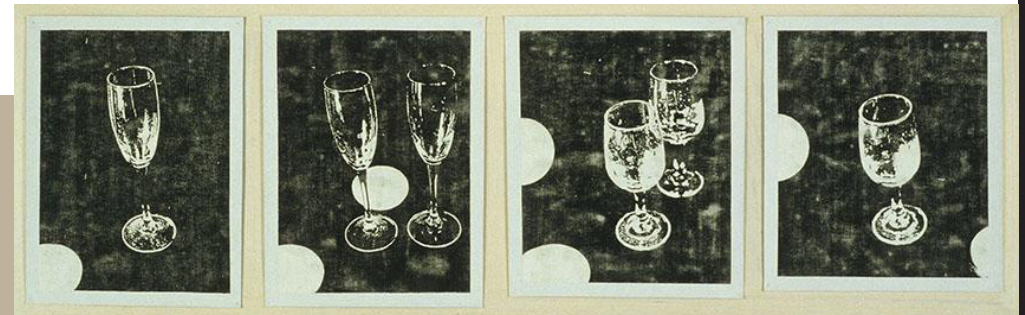
In MacKinnon's work *Two Bowls*, the imagery reminds us of how much our relationship to the world and others is mediated by touch and sensory experiences. MacKinnon explains that, "While conditioned to perceive the universe in two-dimensions, our very survival depends upon our understanding of tactile reality."

Woodcut printmaking as a medium itself holds a very tactile quality to it, and the imagery of steam rising from two bowls alludes to the sense of smell, touch, and the relational element of sharing a meal with someone. While minimal in representation, this piece speaks volumes about presence and finding grounding in tactile and mundane experiences.

MARTIN BENNETT, *WINE GLASSES AND YOGHURT CONTAINER LIDS*, 1998

This work by Martin Bennett involves computer-generated black-and-white photocopies that he projected onto canvas to then paint. The loss of small pieces of visual information that occurs through the process of photocopying creates imagery which in many ways parallels fragmented memory.

The painted black and white wine glasses and yoghurt lids create an illusory vision of a relational moment or memory, partially there, but partially forgotten. Presence, with a splash of absence.



Lesley Menzies & Lylian Klimek



LESLEY MENZIES, *HOUSEHOLD DRUDGERY - IRONING*, 1992

The title of this piece, *Household Drudgery – Ironing*, in itself references how simple household domestic tasks can hold a weight to them that affect our human experience. Menzies' piece invites dialogue around how certain domestic tasks and chore-related objects can be a reference to heavy topics or emotions. The materiality of the concrete and steel slab ironing board and the heavy-looking graphite sculptural objects made to reference an iron all speak to the weight of household chores and how they affect our everyday living.

Not many people claim to enjoy things like doing laundry or ironing their clothing, and Menzies effectively draws upon our common human experiences to evoke an almost visceral response towards drudgery and disliked tasks we become accustomed to doing repeatedly out of perceived necessity.

LYLIAN KLIMEK, *CLEAN UP*, 1992

Lylian Klimek's *Clean Up* is part of a series of installation and sculpture which she began in 1991. From an artist statement on this series, Klimek stated that, "All the works focus on domestic situations and objects involving cleaning and the never ending routine of scrubbing, washing, dusting." The use of bronze as a material in this series invites us to look at cultural attitudes towards traditional fine art materials, with the association to high art and long-lasting influence, as compared to our lesser appreciative attitudes towards essential domestic spaces and objects.

Klimek describes how this series led her to, "thoughts about all the other cleaning machines, tools, polishes, and potions ever made." She describes how she began contemplating the lives of other women who buy and use all these household cleaning tools and products. The work certainly draws attention to life and work in the domestic arena. In Klimek's words, these works consider, "the past, present, and future – [of] cleaning, cleaning, and more cleaning. No End in Sight."

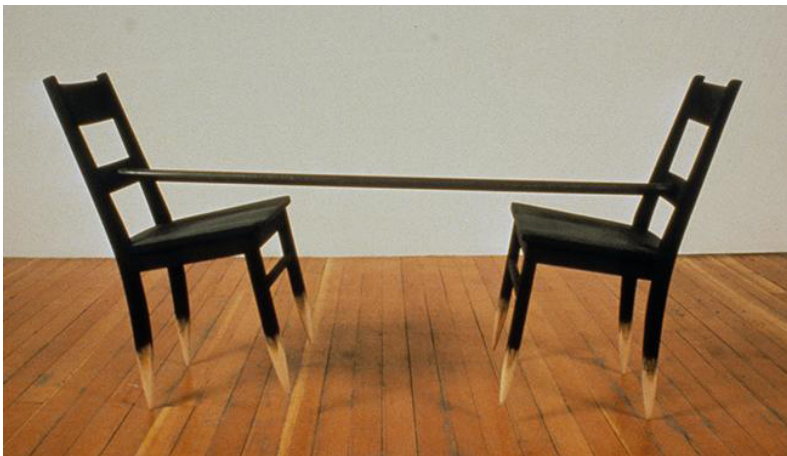


Darci Mallon & Walter May

DARCI MALLON, *TENDENCIES TO EXIST*, 1988

Darci Mallon's *Tendencies to Exist* was part of a series entitled *Quiet Acts* which included seven individual works plus a poem silk-screened onto the floor. Each piece in this series involved a pair of black chairs with tapered legs, between which an unattached steel element was keeping them together, and at the same time, apart. "The chairs tilted back in tension to a threshold point of collapse." Riding on a theme of fine balance, this piece speaks structurally about gravitational balance, but also implies, metaphorically, a balance between two people who have entered into some form of interpersonal relationship.

According to one of Mallon's artist statements from this time in her career, she was always interested in the construction of identity – what conditions contribute to how we define ourselves and who we think we are. This particular sculpture definitely seems to invite curiosity into the ways our environment and interpersonal relationships might shape us both individually and collectively.



WALTER MAY, *SCAVENGER AND FORAGER*, 2007

Walter May's working process during this time in his career was described as always beginning with a found material or object that he might have recognized as "mysterious, elegant or poetic". Collected items could originate in the city or the country, from industry, nature, or from the domestic. Whatever their history or origin, they passed through May's studio and eventually ended up as sculptures or installations with intentionality and resolve.

In this particular work, the two opposing chairs speak of duality, partnership, or difference. May's title also hints towards ways of living through scavenging and foraging for life's necessities, but also for commodified materials such as wood for commercially produced furniture. There seems an inherent theme of exploring the crossover of counterparts – such as those present in the distinctions between functional and non-functional, or industrial and natural.



Arlene Stamp & John Brocke

ARLENE STAMP, *CHESTERFIELD, UNCOVERED*, 1980

Arlene Stamp recalls her mother decorating their family home in detailed, unusual ways. In a statement made by the artist, she discusses how her mother would, “buy wallpaper, cut out the roses and stick them on the ceiling.” With these sorts of domestic memories holding importance and prominence for Stamp, her work often revolved around similar domestic themes. At this point in her career, Stamp most often painted interiors and their furnishings, rather than people. She sought to, “objectify the perceptual experience of her own home to recreate an experience for the viewer...” She would often flatten and compress the space of her images to represent physical attributes of materials in a simplified and palpable manner.

This piece *Chesterfield, Uncovered*, with an outreaching appendage of a palm leaf coming in from the side seems to speak towards a longing or a desire for comfort and presence within the space. An empty couch almost always beckons as a place of comfort, doesn't it?



JOHN BROCKE, *BASEMENT SUITE*, 1985

John Brocke is said to be one of the most accomplished practitioners of young, realist painters that evolved in the nineteen-eighties. Brock received much attention for his highly detailed domestic paintings before his life came to a tragic end due to a car accident at the age of 55. During his short career, he managed to complete a very small number of works because of the detailed and painstaking nature of his working method. A painting would generally take months to complete, and as a consequence his surviving paintings are appreciated for their rarity as well as for their realistic quality.

This extreme attention to detail in his paintings creates a liveliness even in a view of an uninhabited room. In this particular work, the left chair covering has a very ghost like quality to it, and the compositional framing of the painting places importance on the furniture - their positioning and their implied usage as objects for living and relating to one another.

Ray Arnatt & Evelyn Grant

RAY ARNATT, *UNTITLED*, 1983-84

Ray Arnatt often said, "What artists do is self-portraiture." This particular work is not a self-portrait in the direct sense of the definition, not a photographic representation or composition of a person, but it could be said to be a self-portrait in that furniture and the things that surround us in our dwelling spaces are reflections of our psyche, personality, and history.

Ray Arnatt was said to be a passionate, dedicated instructor and researcher, and was inspired in his own artistic practice by philosophy, quantum physics, and his own children's artwork. He continued teaching and creating art until his death in 2004.



EVELYN GRANT, *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, N.D.

Grant's work during this time in her career began to shift from functional wares to more detailed architectural forms. She began to introduce pieces that were more narrative rather than useable crafted dishware which she had previously been making.

In *A Room with a View*, the chair and the binoculars, while positioned as unmoving objects, still present a narrative of "neighbor spying". It invites discussion around the idea that the social construct of the home and of neighborhood is continuously influenced by interpersonal comparison, and voyeurism.



Diana Edwards & Janet E. Brown

DIANA EDWARDS, *THE BED*, 1977

With a background in anthropology, Diana Edwards viewed photography as a way of looking, and of relating to people and the land. She stated, "I don't take pictures of places and people I don't like.... One of the things photography does is to help you constantly increase your awareness. It's a great tool in living." With this kind of anthropological approach, it is not surprising that her photograph, *The Bed*, creates an almost fossilized impression of this dwelling space. The sheets left in a disturbed state from the sleeping body, now absent, create a kind of body-memory or presence through imprint.



JANET E. BROWN, *ROOM INTERIOR WITH BED*, 1978

Janet E. Brown was born in 1952 in Midnapore Alberta. She graduated from the Alberta College of Art in 1975, majoring in painting and photography. Brown was actively engaged in the arts community as a student and exhibited in various student shows and 3-man exhibitions in her 4th year of art college, moving on after graduation to being a photographer for Mount Royal College.

This particular photograph acquired by the AFA just three years after her graduation, features a room with an empty bed and sunlight shining in through the windows. These elements seem to generate a juxtaposition of bodily absence and an intruding ghostly presence of sunlight. In this photographic image of a perceivably empty room, one may be compelled to consider the experiential memories that are crystalized within spacial environments.

April Dean



APRIL DEAN, *ALMOST ALWAYS NEVER DREAMING*, 2013
WET T-SHIRT SERIES



APRIL DEAN, *ILL EQUIPPED & UNPREPARED*, 2013
WET T-SHIRT SERIES

In April Dean's *Wet T-Shirt Series*, she turned snippets of language into intimate slogans - inspired by poetry, tweets and text messages. With a very contemporary approach to inner dialogue, Dean silkscreens these slogans onto T-shirts, and then photographs them wet on a light table. The final works are digitally printed on transparent Pictorico Film and when exhibited, they are displayed off the wall by just a few inches.

The x-ray feel of these prints reference the body and the self in a very personal way. The subtleties in these pieces speak of an emotional presence through the use of text, using fashion and language to create a proclamation of identity and inner anxieties.

Susan Robbins & Terry Winter

SUSAN ROBBINS, *BOOTS*, 1974

Limited information is available on this piece by Susan Robbins, however this simple watercolor drawing can speak for itself in many ways.

Similar to the work of Terry Winter to the right, these unworn shoes appear molded to the experiences of the individual who walked in them - we can only imagine where these shoes have been - perhaps worn to work, or out in the snow, but any still life painted of a garment seems to have a strong connection to the figure and to personal identities and stories.



TERRY WINTER, *UNTITLED*, 1991

Terry Winter graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) in 1990 with a Fine Arts Diploma in drawing. Three of her works have been collected by the AFA, but not much is recorded about the works specifically.

This drawing acquired by AFA just one year after Winter's graduation from ACAD features an unworn garment, which almost always references back to absence of the body. Speaking of absence as well as a ghostly presence of the figure, we inhabit the clothing we wear and it arguably becomes a part of our identity. When unworn then, does the garment feel? Does it remember to whom it belongs?



Pamela Norrish

PAMELA NORRISH, *OUTFIT FOR THE AFTERLIFE*, 2010-2015

At first glance this sculpture made by then 32 year old artist Pamela Norrish appears to be a simple T-shirt and pair of jeans, but these garments are by no means ordinary. The T-shirt and jeans are made entirely from tiny glass beads. Each seed bead is 1.6 mm in size. According to the artist, she estimates that half a million beads were required to complete the "Outfit," which she worked on for five years.

Deciding to make this piece, Pamela Norrish wished to create an outfit which she would be comfortable to wear for eternity- she said that a simple t-shirt and jeans was her go - to clothing choice for comfortably working in her studio. Norrish explained that she beads representations of commonplace objects to "...suggest an alternate universe, an extraordinary beaded universe, where the everyday can transcend mediocrity."



Elizabeth Clark



ELIZABETH CLARK, *UNTITLED (PANTYHOSE)*, 1999

Born in Sherbrooke Quebec in 1947, Elizabeth Clark moved to Alberta to acquire a diploma in painting from the Alberta College of Art, Calgary in 1984, and went on to earn a Certificate in Museology (1992) along with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (1994) from Concordia University in Montreal. In her artistic practice, Elizabeth Clark began to explore different aspects of social identity by constructing and manipulating clothing.

ELIZABETH CLARK, *UNTITLED (SLEEPER)*, 1999

Clothing was for Clark, “a metaphor for the human body and a vehicle with which to explore human condition and interaction. They are illusion, masquerade, and idealized individualism of the human body. Clothing announces identity.”

These two works by Clark certainly seem to portray a ghost-like identity of their wearers. A metaphor of the body, and an expression of presence through absence. Elizabeth Clark passed away in 2008, but her works remind us of her contemplation and curiosity towards the many aspects of everyday life, and how materiality reflects our history, and identity.



Bill Simpkins & K. Gwen Frank

BILL SIMPKINS, *UNTITLED*, N.D

Bill Simpkins was educated at the Banff Centre and University of Calgary, and was an excellent example of the modern photojournalist. Starting out as a darkroom technician and moving on to become chief photographer for a few different major newspapers, Simpkins had a keen eye for story telling with photography. His philosophy on photography is that its strength is in realism, and that we should not be intimidated by the photograph as an art form.

In this particular photograph, the panty-hose lay limp, yet the way they are hung and positioned seems to reference three figures, standing in a row. The materiality of panty-hose is fragile and skin-like, and the image creates a haunting or ghost-like presence.



K. GWEN FRANK, *INNER WEATHER*, 1995

K. Gwen Frank, in her artist statement on this work, explained that she was “interested in the underlying energy beneath physicality and immediate perception.” Using etching as a medium - drawing with acid on copper, she described her exploration of “a certain darkness, a textural richness of experience” that she saw as part of the deep insights we all hold within us. For Frank, finding oddity within the mundane, and shifting attention to small often unnoticed events opened up a way to embrace mystery in the ordinary.

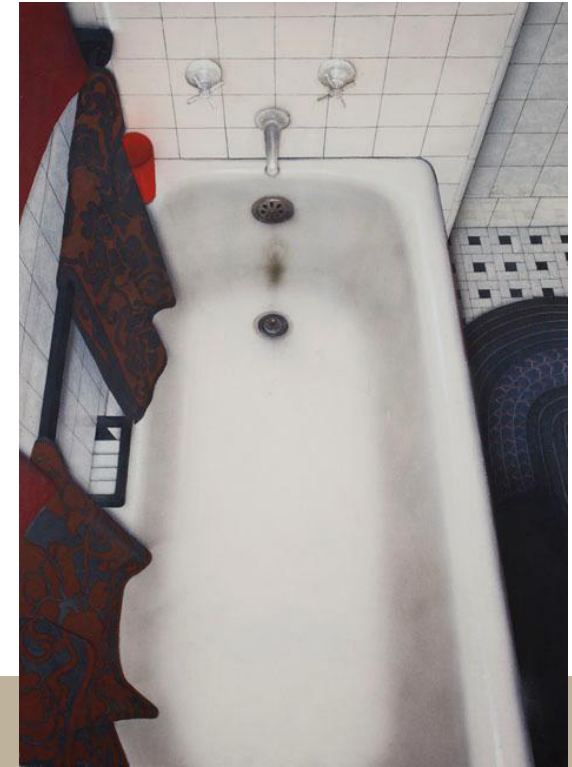
The title *Inner Weather* seems to allude to a metaphor of home as an outer shell of self, and weather as inner turbulence or anxiety. We all hold these internal dialogues, and Frank seems to be interested in bringing these dialogues to the forefront of conversations relating to domestic contexts and everyday experiences.

Marc Siegner & Mel Rosa

MARC SIEGNER, *BATHROBE*, 1993

This bathrobe by Marc Siegner was part of a series of clothing sculptures, where clothing serves as a metaphor for the binary sex and gender system. Clothing is in this context, a culturally invented self as well as a container meant to both conceal and reveal. With Siegner's sculptures, the physical body remains obscure, it's gender and identity both in question.

In this series, the skin-like sculptures directly reference the physical body and the self, as well as hint at encasement or shedding of skin.



MEL ROSA, *TUB*, 1975

This incredibly detailed painting of an empty bathtub by Mel Rosa, who is now primarily based in the States, doesn't necessarily seem empty at all. With so much visual information - the floral patterning on the towels, the stains on the tub, the woven bath mat, and the geometric tiling - this painting speaks volumes about modern culture and our private identities.

LIST OF ARTWORKS

1. Barbara Amos, *Paint Can, Kettle and Vases*, 1990, Pastel on paper
30 1/16" x 22 3/16"
2. Ray Arnatt, *Untitled*, 1983-84, Inlaid balsa wood and tinted gesso on board
12" x 12"
3. Martin Bennet, *Wine Glasses and Yoghurt Container Lids*, 1993, Oil on canvas
29 5/16" x 91 5/16"
4. John Brocke, *Basement Suite*, 1985, Oil on Linen
62 1/16" x 84 1/16"
5. Janet E. Brown, *Room Interior With Bed*, 1978, Silver gelatin on paper
6 3/8" x 9 1/2"
6. Elizabeth Clark, *Untitled (Pantyhose)*, 1999, Relief monoprint on paper
39 15/16" x 26 9/16"
7. Elizabeth Clark, *Untitled (Sleeper)*, 1999, Relief monoprint on paper
39 15/16" x 26 9/16"
8. April Dean, *Almost Always Never Dreaming*, 2013, Archival inkjet print on pictorio/clear film, 41 15/16" x 40 1/16"
9. April Dean, *Ill Equipped & Unprepared*, 2013, Archival inkjet print on pictorio/clear film, 41 15/16" x 39 15/16"
10. Diana Edwards, *The Bed*, 1977, Silver gelatin on paper
10 15/16" x 13 15/16"
11. K. Gwen Frank, *Inner Weather*, 1995, aquatint, etching, intaglio
14 15/16" x 15 1/16"
12. Evelyn Grant, *A Room With A View*, n.d., Porcelain and acrylic
9 7/16" x 9 5/8" x 9 5/8"
13. John Hall, *Dishes*, 1998, Acrylic on canvas
18" x 26 15/16"
14. Douglas Jones, *Still Life, Bottle and Bowl*, 1989, Oil on canvas
24" x 29 15/16"
15. Lylian Klimek, *Clean Up*, 1992, Directly cast bronze, string mop & cloth, found object - pail, 47 1/16" x 6 11/16" x 28 9/16"
16. William Laing, *Downstairs*, 1977, Etching, relief on paper
7 7/8" x 11 13/16"
17. Glen Mackinnon, *Two Bowls*, 1989, Woodblock on paper
35 7/8" x 71 5/8"
18. Darci Mallon, *Tendencies to Exist*, 1988, Wooden chairs, steel
35 1/16" x 71 5/8" x 16 15/16"
19. Walter May, *Scavenger and Forager*, 2007, Wood chairs and wood
34 1/2" x 76" x 18"
20. Lesley Menzies, *Household Drudgery – Ironing*, 1992, Concrete, steel, graphite, acrylic, wood, 29 1/8" x 61 7/16" x 19 11/16"
21. Pamela Norrish, *Outfit for the Afterlife*, 2010-2015, Glass beads and nylon thread, 67" x 30" x 3"
22. Jim Picco, *Plastic Bag*, 1996, Oil on canvas
24 15/16" x 29 15/16"
23. Susan Robbins, *Boots*, 1974, Watercolor on paper
8 1/2" x 9 1/2"
24. Mel Rosa, *Tub*, 1975, Acrylic on canvas
58 1/4" x 42 15/16"
25. Kate Schutz, *Kitchen Sink*, 2003, Oil on canvas
23 1/4" x 29 1/8"
26. Marc Siegner, *Bathrobe*, 1993, Naturine, metal, imitation gut
65 15/16" x 22 13/16"
27. Bill Simpkins, *Untitled*, n.d., Silver gelatin on paper
7" x 4 3/8"
28. Arlene Stamp, *Chesterfield, Uncovered*, 1980, Mixed media, oil, acrylic, latex, wax, gel medium on canvas, 66 1/8" x 92 1/8"
29. Terry Winter, *Untitled*, 1991, Charcoal on paper
20 13/16" x 15 5/16"

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CLOSING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks goes to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for the opportunity work with their extensive collection, and to learn more about each of the works included in this project. Research compiled and any quotes referenced came directly from AFA artist files found in the AFA Resource Centre. Special thanks to Gail Lint, Art Collections Consultant in Exhibitions, who provided the necessary research resources to make this online exhibition possible.

I would also like to thank all of the artists for the contributions of their works to the AFA collection, and subsequently for how each of those works adds to conversations around domesticity, material culture, and identity that this particular exhibition aims to explore.

