

The Mitchell Art Gallery (MAG) is nominating Leanne Olson for her solo exhibition, *With All Things Considered*, for The 2020 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize. The work featured in *With All Things Considered* was created during Olson's Artist in Residence position at the Edmonton Waste Management Centre (EWMC), which was supported by the Edmonton Arts Council. *With All Things Considered* was chosen for nomination for its artistic elucidation of critical, timely ideas for our planet with local context, and the artist's remarkable welcoming of community into the creation, exhibition, and animation of this body of work.

In the deluge of images that represent the scale of overconsumption that defines late capitalism, the photo, video, and found object works in *With All Things Considered* refuses a totalizing view. We are denied the monumental, awe-filled, nihilistic feeling that comes from viewing an elegant aestheticizing of what we have disposed. Instead we are set amongst the ruins to contend with our impulse to reinscribe meaning onto the decaying objects otherwise rendered unintelligible, ejected from all our systems of value.

In works such as *Dream Life*, viewers are absorbed within the 12 paneled, photo printed vinyl installation, seeking and finding objects of their own consumption. As local artist Zachary Ayotte noted in his review of the exhibition for *Canadian Art*, this artwork "offers Olson's most explicit critique of capitalist consumption: rows of branded garbage are flattened and drained of their (unfulfilled) packaging promises. We're left to look at the remains of unneeded items, things that we might have purchased unthinkingly, like the add-ons that granted us free shipping."

Waste gets removed from most systems of value when it disappears from our lives each garbage day, and yet it still exists, outside of meaning as well as beyond our vision, sometimes in perpetuity. As we grapple with our inability to relate to the massive scale of contemporary consumption, Olson's work calls us to look closely and tenderly as we reinscribe our abject discards with meaning.

This idea of tenderness is critical to the exhibition: the process the artist used to build knowledge was grounded in the relationships with workers of all kinds at the EWMC, and the over-500 visitors she welcomed through her studio during her residency. From artists to motorcycle enthusiasts to industrial workers who visited her, Olson's exhibition is rooted in an empathic approach to the ways in which we are all embedded within systems predicated on late capitalism overconsumption.

This is clear in the exhibition through *Ode to the Pit Crew*, a 90-minute-long video whose grainy quality gives the appearance of a closed-circuit live feed. In poetry, an ode is a lyrical work to address a specific subject, and in this video, Olson pays tribute to the invisible labour of the people who do the physically-demanding work of operating heavy machinery during long shifts in the initial processing of our waste. These workers care for the materials we have already removed from any system of value. As Ayotte notes, “The work here is quiet. It empathizes with viewer and subject, faulting a system rather than the people in it.”

It is important to note that Olson’s empathy extends beyond human subjectivity into reframing our understanding of materials and other species. The artist titled an assemblage of items taken from the various landfill sites that she visited as *Collection of Bruised Metals*. Referencing minimalist sculpture, elevating these pieces of garbage one foot off the floor — elevating them back into meaning — is a powerful reminder of the enduring nature of our waste, the latent value that languishes and rusts in ever-growing landfills. The artist’s encouragement of viewers to think on the relationship between value and discarding is further emphasized by *Shoe Knew*, a multi-paneled photograph on paper that appears to be either slipping off the wall, or crawling up the wall — either slipping outside of intelligibility, or trying to hold onto the wall, a space of recognition, before it finds itself back on the ground, the place where meaning is lost for many objects who find themselves abandoned there. *Coworker*, a stark view of a Canada goose claiming its space and right to exist at the EWMC, reminds us of the ecological systems in which our waste exists, and the ways in which other species prosper in spite of inhospitable, human-made condition.

Leanne Olson’s art practice provokes existential dilemmas that seek to surpass dualities of hope and fear, love and pain, death and life. She works with disassembling coping mechanisms to get to the epistemological root of surviving, living and thriving.

To survive through love and pain, to exist beyond hope and fear, leads to a way of knowing, a value system that can be extended to climate catastrophe, rehabilitation post trauma, and an array of additional scenarios that occur at the brink of survival. Olson, however, seeks to transcend her photo practice beyond scenarios, didactics and documentation. Olson’s practice, and *With All Things Considered* in particular, brings the pressing, existential questions for our species away from fearful or moralizing messages into an arena of care, comfort with impermanence, and co-existence against despite the odds.

Olson's work was selected for nomination because of its artistic excellence in engaging with one of the most pressing global issues of our time, while grounded in a local context. Further, the artist underwent exceptional community engagement in the process of creating this body of work, in the time and thoughtfulness she dedicated to creating a meaningful experience for visitors. As noted above, Olson welcomed hundreds to her studio while developing this body of work, in addition to presenting at waste industry conferences, art-related conferences, and many other contexts.

Olson curated a series of public programming to enrich engagement with exhibition materials. Her work brought people interested in waste, art, and science together to discuss the critical ideas in *With All Things Considered* through: a river valley walk at a former landfill site (where photograph #yegbrick was taken) with ecologist Dr. David Locky and photographer Dwayne Martineau; a workshop with artist Christina Battle and land reclamation researcher Nicholas Brown; a talk with art-science collective Synthetic Collective and waste geographer Josh Lepawsky; a visit to the waste site with the artist and two MacEwan fine art classes; and an artist talk. This programming enriched the public's understanding of the systemic issues of overconsumption and brought together diverse audiences to discuss these ideas together through a body of artwork. All of the programming was very well attended and consistently brought people otherwise never in the same room, together.

Through her process of research creation and community engagement, Olson creates an ecosystem within her art practice that embodies interconnectedness, an epistemological state that is so often lost and forgotten in categorical capitalist avoidance. The relationality integrated into the process of creating, producing, exhibiting, and animating this exhibition make Leanne Olson and *With All Things Considered* exceptional, both artistically and in their impact on the interconnectedness of our community.