



how the plants would react under the specific conditions of the gallery. The plants were completely sealed up a few days before being delivered to the AGA and once they were installed, they received no air or water and only minimal light from the two grow lamps. The goal was not that the plants die but that the limits of nature and our ability to preserve be tested.

Dean had several ideas for how the installation could change overtime and this flexibility speaks to her ingenuity and openness as an artist. Her plans ranged from swapping out dead plants with photographs of the living plants to replacing plants, to leaving the empty plastic forms in place. As the plastic encased the plant during the vacuum forming process, it made an imprint that showed in remarkable detail of the plant's leaves and structure. Plants are not motionless, however, and start to wriggle and move around in their plastic casings. As the plants moved, withered, shrank, wilted, and faded the ghostly imprints they left in the plastic become more and more apparent, revealing the plants' shadows of themselves. In the end, some of the plants did die back to almost nothing in their forms but Dean and exhibition visitors were then drawn to the ghostly outlines left in the plastic by the plants and the decision was made to leave them.

While Dean has long worked in printmaking, this ambitious installation allowed her to push the boundaries of her art practice and draw out material considerations that lay at the heart of her interest in her chosen medium. Dean is interested in the formal qualities of transparency and has played with screening her work from the viewer in various ways. She is deeply invested in the philosophies of printmaking and this work plays with notions of reproducibility and impressions in the broadest possible sense. Vacuum forming, like printmaking is a commercial process used for its reproducibility. Many sculptures as well as commercial 3D forms are created using vacuum forming which is designed to make plastic moulds that can be filled with plaster or other materials. The process creates a form that can be used multiple times. This interest in reproducibility also manifests in Dean's interest in plants and plant clippings. Plant clippings are also reproducible and beyond this project Dean has an interest in clipping and propagating plants. The actual plants in the installation are a mix of houseplants that Dean herself had propagated from clippings along with others that she bought specifically for the installation to represent both conspicuous consumption as well as the reproducibility of plants.

This installation deals with themes of mass consumerism and plastic waste and utilizes the aesthetic of mall retail to comment on mass consumerism. The plastic forms mimic a retail aesthetic. The plants' plastic packaging looks like packaging you would find in any store. The arrangement of the plants and the gradient backdrop is reminiscent of many lifestyle brands and would not look out of place in a retailer such as Anthropology or Urban Outfitters. This draws attention to our sanitized and often mediated relationship with nature, that problematizes to a popular contemporary "lifestyle" in which plants are highly commodified goods that are simultaneously in need of care and disposable. The lifestyle of "plant parent" often acted out on social media is marked by the aesthetic of rooms filled to almost overflowing with potted plants. This has become heightened during the pandemic as individuals look to both beautifying their homes and shopping for comfort. *I Inhale/You Exhale* calls into question

the imbalance of power enacted when we perceive nature as capital and each other as consumer.

Although this installation is rooted in its contemporary references and its observation of current lived reality, it also makes many historical allusions. While the current infatuation with houseplants has been amplified through social media, the desire to possess life and land goes hand in hand with histories of colonization. The plant life in Dean's installation are encapsulated like Victorian specimens, and speak to the broader history of botany and the collection of "exotic" plant and animal specimens from around the world. On the one hand, houseplants epitomize a contemporary relationship to nature by domesticating and infantilizing it. They depend on us to keep them alive, and so their liveliness is our achievement. On the other hand, tending to houseplants and sharing cuttings represents a longing to stay connected to nature in suburban and urban settings. This surrogate nature is cared for, yet they are trapped in plastic, uneasy and easily controlled.

COVID has added yet another layer of conceptual depth to *I Inhale/You Exhale*. Although Dean had no way of knowing the realities we would face in 2020, the work certainly seems to foreshadow or at least allude to our new world that is segmented and permeated by plastic and plexiglass. As the plastic elements were being created, so too were plexiglass dividers going up all over Edmonton. Even the title reads differently now, especially regarding the notions of shared breath that are conjured by the work.

*I Inhale/You Exhale* is a nuanced and clever work that continues to build in meaning. It is an exemplary work and Dean is an exemplary and important Edmonton artist deserving of this prize.

Regards,



Lindsey Sharman,  
Curator