

Gabriel Esteban Molina: Memory Palace Nomination, Foote Prize 2023

Exhibition at Latitude 53, October 21–December 17, 2022

Latitude 53 is proud to submit for consideration to the Foote Prize the 2022 exhibition by Gabriel Esteban Molina, *Memory Palace*. As a major solo exhibition by an amiskwaciwaskahican artist who in the past has worked on smaller projects with Latitude 53 as well as other organizations in the community, we are eager to celebrate the accomplishment of this singular work.

Artist Gabriel Esteban Molina has always been eager to experiment with new visual technologies. His lens-based works have often explored the limits of digital image-making, with particular attention to the raw materials: sub-pixel RGB colour palettes in flat-panel displays, compressed digital video with missing keyframes, and printed images overlaid with projections. In *Memory Palace*, the artist uses 360 degree video overlaid with vernacular phone recordings and social media filters, and ambitious experiments on the boundary between physical and digital spaces through photogrammetry and Augmented Reality. Alongside these multimedia feasts are printed works and installations that bring physical remnants of the family home, now demolished, into the gallery.

In his older works, he turns his camera back onto images it produced, on the screens on which he works and plays, the pixels becoming the works themselves. Over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Esteban Molina began increasingly to turn to the landscape, first in these painting-like images and video from his recent residency in Iceland, and then to break into new techniques. Taking delivery of a 360° video camera in early 2020 with a vague idea of making work for a VR experience, the artist began to experiment.

Like in his rephotographed pieces, idle technological experimentation and walks through the outdoors became the beginning of something new. Esteban Molina's solo exhibition at Latitude 53, *Memory Palace*, is the transformation of an unexpected moment—the isolation of the pandemic coupled with the sudden news that his mother was about to lose the home they had lived in for more than a decade—into the raw material of a cross-media project that redraws the outline of the gallery into that of the home.

In the classical formulation of the Method of Loci, the Memory Palace is a fictional space, where individual places become metaphorical homes to memories. With the personal digital documentation and 360° videos of his former home, Esteban Molina turns this idea inside out, by turning the gallery into a physical model of the home itself. Using the technique of photogrammetry, the artist created several 3D models of his home, marked by a painterly manner as the software, knitting together hundreds or thousands of sometimes poorly-matched photographs of the exterior of the house tripped over inconsistent lighting and the surrounding foliage and greenery. This rough, speckled representation of the house is the ghostly core of the exhibition, glimpsed through Augmented Reality on a phone screen as a co-occupant of the gallery space alongside the more traditional works.

Taking this virtual space as an organizing principle, Esteban Molina lays out the gallery as a compass rose, with the four corners corresponding to four spaces of the home: the artist's bedroom, his mother's bedroom, the shared living space, and the exterior. For each, the 360° video is distorted again through a mapped projection into the corner space of the gallery walls, with audience seating selected from objects from the site, suggesting the possibility of the viewer entering directly into the

video. Overlaid onto these are more moments from the past: playtime with the artists' late dog Layka, whose life almost perfectly overlapped the 16-year tenancy in the home, a house-fire next door glimpsed through a window, day-to-day activities in the kitchen.

When Gabriel speaks about this work, he is earnest—talking about the emotionality of editing the videos, reliving the last days with his dog and in the place where him and his mother felt truly at home after his youth of returning to different homes in Edmonton between periods with family in Chile. But he slips in moments of humour, triumphantly blowing a cloud of vape smoke at the camera during a gaming match in his room, or playing formally with the ways the spherical video mangles trees and power-lines as he walks around outside. And in the layering of surveillance-like home documentation, tech-boom hyped VR video and AR experiences, and snapchat and instagram clips of personal documentation, Esteban Molina has something to say about the ways that we identify what memories are in the present moment. In the exhibition's closing artist talk, he laughs, speaking to writer Liuba González de Armas, that his snapshots of his most recent visit to Chile are not polaroids but point-clouds of the beach.

The home itself is also in question here: as de Armas notes in her exhibition text, "Housing precarity... affects cultural workers and artists in particular. Molina's experience of displacement is all too common." This sense of uprootedness and the question of who gets the tools to describe it runs through Esteban Molina's use of digital tools, his wrestling with questions of how to present work in AR and VR in an accessible and equitable way through the gallery, and his relationship with the tech capital that produces them. These are reasons why Latitude 53 is proud to have been the site of such an experiment and to have given this artist the space and some of the resources to create this work.

Finally, Latitude 53 is itself moving. As we work to find and set up our forever home, *Memory Palace* was the last exhibition to have been mounted in our space at 10242 106 Street. A fitting farewell to our home of 10 years.

Adam Waldron-Blain
Program Manager
Latitude 53

19 January 2023

List of Works:

- "My Bedroom", 2021–22, 4k 360° video loop with projection mapping, bed, pillows, sheets, blankets.
- "Mom's bedroom", 2021–22, 4k 360° video with projection mapping, bed, pillows, sheets and blankets.
- "The Yard", 2021–22, 4k 360° video with projection mapping, two reclining lawn chairs.
- "Living Room", 2021–22, 4K 360° video with projectio mapping, blue IKEA couch, pillows, green blanket.
- "Shrine (Desk)", 2022, tempered glass and aluminum desk, computer and monitor, three smartphones, powerbar, artists' belongings including: techgnosis paperback book, ufos hardcover book, antique crystal ashtray, chewed wooden soundmaker, edmonton space and science centre pin, piece of orange spraypainted wood, bertaboys license plate certificate of authenticity, empty

tresiba insulin pen, various pen needles, test strips, one touch verio smart glucose meter, yellow glass insulator, backlit prints, empty beer cans.

- “Layka’s things”, 2022, yellow dog raincoat, pink dog hoodie, pink striped dog sweater, red dog harness.
- “Layka’s bench and bed”, 2021–22, wooden bench, HD video projection, dog bed, red dog boots, pink blanket, blue blanket, dog toys.
- Untitled video projection, HD video loop, 2022.
- “Layka in bed”, 2022, framed digital print, 8 × 12 inches.
- “Layka with the lillies”, 2022, framed digital print, 5 × 7 inches.
- “Sunlit Backyard”, 2011–22, digital print, dye sublimation on aluminum, 30 × 20 inches.
- ”Criologia VIII” and “Criologia XII”, 2022, dye sublimation on aluminum, 24 × 36 inches each.
- “Green Aberration”, 2022, dye sublimation on aluminum, 8 × 8 inches.
- “The Great Divide 2.0”, 2021, dye sublimation on brushed aluminum, 8 × 12 inches.
- “Droplets XX”, 2022, dye sublimation on aluminum, 8 × 8 inches.
- “Sprite”, 2019, digital print on phototex, 16 × 24 inches.
- “House in the summer”, 2022, digital print, acrylic face mount, 48 × 24 inches.
- ”House in the winter”, 2022, digital print, acrylic face mount, 48 × 36 inches.
- “Caragoners I–III”, 2022, digital prints, dye sublimation on aluminum, 16 × 24 inches each.
- “Rainbow Bridge (The Last Sundog)”, 2021–22, digital print, dye sublimation on aluminum, 24 × 36 inches.

About the artist:

Gabriel Esteban Molina is a lens-based visual artist from amiskwaciwaskahican (also known as Edmonton, AB). He has exhibited videos, prints and installations in galleries throughout Alberta, including Latitude 53, the Art Gallery of Alberta and the Southern Alberta Art Gallery as well as internationally in Iceland, Italy, and London, England. Gabriel uses photography, video, and print, as well as emerging lens-based technologies such as photogrammetry, 360 degree spherical video, and augmented reality. His work explores how technology affects our perception and the way we interact with the world around us.