

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Openings – an art exhibition

By Lisa Wood, MFA, BFA



Why this research is important

This exhibition provided an opportunity to study a single art community within the context of the larger Canadian art world, to reflect upon and highlight its similarities and differences with other art communities across the country. It looked at the performed behaviours and rituals common to art opening celebrations inquisitively and with criticality. Rituals around food and drink, in particular, were a focus, as they are key to social inclusion and belonging, and are integral to marking celebrations. Surveillance photography is commonly used in society to monitor people in public spaces, and for this exhibition, time-lapse photography was used to surveil people in order to track behaviours. Analyzing this documentation through the process of painting leads to understanding how community cohesion and belonging are established and maintained through rituals. It also provides an opportunity

What you need to know

Openings—an exhibition by Lisa Wood—explored ritual, transience, food, and community by looking at an art gallery opening and the food and drink served as a site of social interaction. The source material for the body of work, which included paintings, drawings, and a video piece, was compiled by documenting an opening reception of an art exhibition using time-lapse surveillance-like photography. The resulting artworks were exhibited at Neutral Ground Artist Run Centre in Regina, Saskatchewan (2018) and the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba in Brandon (2019).

to reflect on if these rituals are inclusive—expanding contemporary culture—or if they are exclusionary.

How the research was conducted

One year prior to the exhibition date for *Openings*, an art exhibition opening reception at Neutral Ground Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, was documented. Unobtrusive wall-mounted surveillance-like cameras were used to capture time-lapse images of the gallery-goers at the snack table and cash bar. The thousands of resulting photographs were combed through to find patterns in the patron's behaviour, looking at the different ways in which people take up space, interact with each other and use food and drink to make their social interactions easier.

What the researcher found

Through this process, four interesting behaviours were identified: (1) consuming food, (2) buying drinks, (3) hugging and gossiping, and (4) following the crowd. Images of attendees displaying each of the thematic behaviours were flagged, and artworks that illuminated these behaviours were created by superimposing figures together in paintings and drawings.

In *Slip Inside*, three suspended panels create a floating wall depicting a dense crowd of folks mid-bite, mouths open, self-absorbed. In *Embrace, Gossip*, two suspended panels create a small hallway for a viewer to step inside. On either side, friends come together to hug and greet each other, offering each other comfort while exchanging sideways glances and whispers about those around them. In *Know Your Bartender*, ten framed paintings show patrons at the bar interacting with the bartender who is seen only by her hands, reducing the bartender to a mere vehicle to acquire wants. Finally, in *Follow the Crowd*, a time-lapse video projected over a suspended drawing shows patrons listening to artists talks, moving en masse from one side of the gallery to the other as if unconsciously guided by an unseen force.

How this research can be used

The resulting artwork from this project prompts audiences to reflect on why these normalized rituals and performed behaviours perpetuate the culture of art openings. The works are helpful for creating self-awareness, compelling the community to ask if these behaviours are welcoming or exclusive. The artwork highlights the importance of community and celebration in advancing art and acts to visually archive the community members from one particular opening. This archiving aspect can be used to reflect on who is included in this community and who is not. Ultimately, the aim is that through these reflections,

the art opening experience can be altered to be more inclusive, advancing contemporary Canadian culture.

About the researcher

Lisa Wood is a visual artist and Assistant Professor at Brandon University's Department of Visual and Aboriginal Art. With an MFA from Yale University and a BFA from the University of Manitoba, her art practice focuses on contemporary figurative painting and drawing using time-lapse surveillance photography as source material.

Lisa has been the recipient of many awards and scholarships and exhibits her artwork nationally and internationally. Recent exhibitions include *Openings*, shown at Neutral Ground (Regina, 2018), and the AGSM (Brandon, 2019); *Consumed*, shown at the Estevan Art Gallery and Museum (Estevan, 2019); and *We and the Others*, shown at Warte für Kunst (Kassel, Germany, 2017).

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