

Amy Fung, *They Made a Day Be a Day Here*, Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Mendel Art Gallery, University of Manitoba, 2013

Brenda Draney

I woke up underneath a small window and sloped roof in a house on Old Road in Huntly, Scotland. I had been gone from Edmonton for two months, immersing myself into this daily reality of bird songs instead of car alarms. It was not yet summer in Edmonton, but the north of Scotland was experiencing a balmy heat wave. Memories of summer live beneath your skin, and mine were coming alive again—and not due simply to atypical Scottish weather. My skin shivered as news broke out all over my online feeds that the town of Slave Lake was burning down.

To explain to an outsider that Slave Lake was on fire conjured up certain contradictions, if not biblical implications. Slave Lake remained a mystery to me as a first generation Canadian growing up in Edmonton. My family did not own any cabins, nor did we ever go to one, but for many, Slave Lake was where their families disappeared to every other weekend in the summer.

There was always someone with a house on a lake, be it Greater or Lesser Slave Lake. There were those who spent their childhood summers there, and who returned as adults to realize they'd had happy childhoods after all.

The translation of information and language was rarely kind in my youth, and the lake's etymology would be no different. I recalled lunchroom conversations where, as a child, it was explained that the lakes were named after Slavic explorers. I have come to learn in more recent years that "slavey" was a derogatory Cree term the Dené people, who are Indigenous to the region.

Brenda Draney was the only person I knew who was actually from Slave Lake, though she now lived in Edmonton. After the fire, Brenda started making a series of paintings about the town and the provisions we take to go on.

Tents became a theme in her paintings which felt like sketches. Watercolours of torsos in the distance, a background evaporated by light and by our own abilities to remember the details flashing by. What do you salvage from a fire? I have asked myself this question during and after fire drills. I woke up one winter night in Edmonton to see my neighbour's house blazing in the night. Someone was furiously pounding on my front door and I saw the fire trucks before I heard them. I didn't grab anything. I looked at my cat, who was annoyed for being stirred. I threw on some clothes and talked to one of the firemen. My neighbours were hysterical, but no one was hurt.

This time.

The devastating impact of natural disasters on the Slave Lake community has multiple perspectives. The result of Brenda's many conversations on this topic is a salon-style perspective of people and events from across the town. Like her previous body of work which focused on the erasure of memories—painting fragments that appeared unable to grasp the entirety of the situation beyond singular moments—Brenda began collecting stories from what was left of her hometown. In a fire, nothing is urgent because everything is precious. What we have forgotten is all that is left behind.



Brenda Draney, *Provisions*, 2013, oil on canvas, watercolour on paper, gouache on paper, and oil on wood. Varying dimensions.

Tent, 2013, oil on canvas, 36h x 48w inches

Dream, 2013, oil on canvas, 24h x 30w inches

Tent II, 2013, oil on canvas, 36h x 48w inches

Evacuation, 2013, oil on canvas, 3h x 4w inches

7th Street Southeast, 2012, oil on canvas, 8h x 10w inches

Chair, 2012, watercolour on paper, 13h x 12w inches

Camper, 2012, watercolour on paper, 13h x 12w inches

Suspense, 2012, watercolour on paper, 9h x 11w inches

Hockey Boys, 2013, watercolour on paper, 22h x 30w inches

Shan, 2013, oil on wood, 4h x 6w inches

The Righteous, 2012, oil on canvas, 18h x 24w inches

Untitled, 2012, oil on canvas, 18h x 24w inches

Church, 2012, oil on canvas, 18h x 24w inches

Red Tent, 2012, oil on canvas, 23h x 30w inches



Brenda Draney, *The Righteous*, 2012, oil on canvas, 18h x 24w inches
Photo credit by Sarah Fuller
Image courtesy of the artist

They Made a Day Be a Day Here
Curated by Amy Fung

Featuring

Amalie Atkins

Heather Benning

Jennifer Bowes

Tammi Campbell

Brenda Draney

Wednesday Lupypciw

Sarah Anne Johnson

Maria Madacky

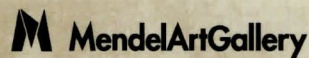
Mary-Anne McTrowe


Divya Mehra

Jennifer Stillwell

Leesa Streifler

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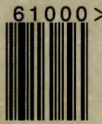
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