

## "The best stories I know come from late night car rides or kitchen tables." - Brenda Draney and Tanya Lukin Linklater

by Laurie White

REVIEW 14 Aug 2022

Share



Tanya Lukin Linklater, [go / go], 2022, installation view from "The best stories I know come from late night car rides or kitchen tables," 2022, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: Rachel Topham Photography, courtesy of Catriona Jeffries.

“What are we tethered to when everything seems to collapse / shatter / erupt simultaneously?” This is the question posed by Tanya Lukin Linklater in the text accompanying a recent exhibition at Catriona Jeffries, which brings together Lukin Linklater’s multimedia installations with paintings by Brenda Draney. The exhibition is a multilayered response to this question, a meditation on storytelling as that which binds us to place, family, and memory, both cultural and personal.

Lukin Linklater’s two-channel video *...you are judged to be going against the flow because you are insistent., Parts 1 & 2* (2017) is presented across a corner of the gallery. As I allow my attention to swing between the videos, several young women perform sections of various dance routines, as if in rehearsal, while in voice-over they conversationally describe their experiences in the dance community. They discuss the difficulties and affordances encountered in their dance careers—such as the tension between technical virtuosity and individual creativity—and their descriptive, at times confessional, tone rhymes with their gestures as they embody their own words.

The expressivity of gesture is a theme that unites Lukin Linklater's works with Draney's paintings. As if suggesting only the contours of memories, the latter are at once vague—in their sparse economy of mark making—and poignantly specific. While looking at *Rest* (2021), I trace the outline of a saggy brown couch with my eyes, only registering the sleeping figure lying there after my partner quips, "That's me, becoming one with the couch." This process of slow reveal feels intentional in Draney's work: only just enough information is given for a story to begin to unfold. Large areas of the canvases are left empty, indicating that which is forgotten or, more likely, withheld. Like the title of one work, *Strange Invitation* (2020), I feel external to the scenes within, as if led just across the narrative threshold, but no further.

Hung along the gallery's east wall, five large paintings establish an uneven network of gender- and class-based power. In *Ribbon 1* (2020), the cocky, complacent stances of three middle-aged men in white shirts and grey slacks slice through the celebratory context of a ribbon-cutting ceremony; their penetrating gazes belie a smug sense of entitlement. In *Visit* (2021), two uniformed police officers judgementally observe a woman who sits crumpled on a couch smoking a cigarette. The work produces a moment of tension: the woman's fatigued yet defiant expression suggests that "visits" from the police are an all-too-frequent occurrence for her. The mottled textures and bright colours in *Strange Invitation* (2020), *Orange Tent* (2020), and *Site* (2020) evoke an encampment, resonating with the gallery's location in the Downtown Eastside, a Vancouver neighbourhood with disproportionately high levels of homelessness. From the periphery of *Strange Invitation*, a reclining blanketed figure raises their head to meet my gaze as if roused from sleep, engulfed by an area of unpainted canvas. This void, which also flows around the tent forms in the adjacent works, intensifies the sense of displacement and vulnerability associated with the makeshift shelters. Viewed as a whole, the five works on the east wall present a disquieting constellation: the sleeper and the smoker bookend a knot of power and privilege, their diminutive postures and peripheral locations an analogy for their marginalized status. Moreover, Draney's works implicate me as a voyeur, bringing awareness to my role as both viewer and viewed.

The sense of productive withholding carries over into Lukin Linklater's installation *go / go* (2022). Overlapping sheets of printed canvas drape from the wall down to the gallery floor and extend into the space. On the sheets, a concrete poem is partly obscured by the placement of colourful kohkom (the Cree word for grandmother) scarves and a chevron of American Spirit cigarette boxes. The text that the scarves partially cover combines personal memory with a sewing pattern for "mitts : astisak" made by "women : iskwewak" and hints at the labour involved in their making. Words for the gestures involved in this process—"clip, scrape, wring, stretch"—are arranged in a circle; through these gestures, iskwewak "clothe their fami[lies]." As if in conversation, the poem addresses Lukin Linklater's own kohkom, and even shares a (partially concealed) message from her grandmother back to her: "*like this, Tanya:*" These fragments allow me to think of the making of belongings like atsiak as a form of matriarchal inheritance, a process that connects women, and a way of spending time together.

Themes of inheritance and embodiment continue in Lukin Linklater's video installation *They fall the ground beneath you* (2018). Seated at a kitchen table, Lukin Linklater and several young women enact a series of gestures on its surface, evoking the shock waves of the 1964 Great Earthquake and Tsunami that destroyed the community of Afognak, an Alutiiq village in the Gulf of Alaska. Through subtitles, the work contrasts stories of the event from Indigenous and settler perspectives, including a description in an objective, scientific tone that lists the precise timing and seismic magnitude of the event. The juxtaposition illuminates the gap between scientific records, which depersonalize natural disasters, and the specific memories, passed down through story, of what the experience was like for the inhabitants of Afognak. I am still struck by one elder's account of how the ground became liquid and moved in waves. The expressive motions of the arms and bodies of the performers communicate these memories extra-verbally, to impress what cannot be communicated through language alone. The reclaimed marine lumber of the projection platform lends additional texture to the projected image and resonates with the tabletop that is the centre of the video. I start to see the kitchen table as itself a performance platform, a site where stories are enacted and rehearsed.

*They fall* associates natural disaster with colonization, framing colonization as an ongoing seismic event, a tsunami that, to quote Draney in the exhibition text, “washes away [...] tangible things.” Draney and Lukin Linklater’s exhibition proposes that intangible memories, made physical through the sharing of stories and strengthened through retelling, are the threads that tether, even when the ground beneath you falls away.

---

“The best stories I know come from late night car rides or kitchen tables” ran from 29 January to 5 March 2022 at Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.