

The Waste Land
ANDREA KASTNER







**Want. Don't Want.** An introduction to Andrea Kastner's exhibition *The Waste Land* by Angela Somerset, CVAG Curator

As I download the digital images of Andrea Kastner's new series of oil paintings *The Waste Land*, I feel as though I am looking at the content of a bizarre travel slide show that highlights the outtakes and behind-the-scenes places the artist has visited. Andrea describes *The Waste Land* as a "body of work that traces the haunting nature of our rejected possessions through a collaged, recycled and surreal world." In these carefully rendered oil paintings she accumulates imagery to create portraits of places. Although there are many signs of things that propose variations on a way of life, we do not encounter any living species in the series. The paintings are void of inhabitants, pets, and most local flora and fauna, and this intention heightens the edginess in the work.

The paintings depict barriers, fortresses and vacated premises, created through a combination of architectural configurations and the excess accumulation of stuff. Is the artist suggesting that we imagine what it might be like to visit these places, and to leave without the satisfaction of ever having a meaningful encounter with the inhabitants, as they are hidden away behind their discarded belongings?

This artist is curious about how we accumulate a sense of identity through the things that we collect and surround ourselves with. She is equally curious about how we go about trying to rid ourselves of these possessions, once they no longer serve our purposes. In *The Waste Land* "the imagery for this project was gathered by traveling to landfills, searching through archives, digging through bags of household garbage, and documenting the alleyways of the cities I've lived in," describes Andrea.

In looking at the body of paintings that comprise *The Waste Land* series I am reminded of the ambitious environments we built as children, making and unmaking the world around us with whatever we had on hand. Andrea's creative process is similar in that she approaches her investigations and meanderings through playful and focused encounters with a complex and changing world. She navigates this terrain as a means of drawing our attention to environmental issues and ways of being that signal crisis.

From the photographic imagery that she gathers of places she has visited and lived in, Andrea dismantles and reassembles her documentation using collage, an intermediary process that allows her to interpret new meaning from her research. "Collages based on this documentation are the inspiration for these paintings: the housing complexes that seem to grow out of mountainous landfills, the skeletal façades and the piles of forgotten things," Andrea explains.

## ...Travellers, The One That Got Away, Woodlands, Beautiful Losers, Small Disasters, The Inventory of Dreams, Good Neighbours, Keepsake, Leftovers IV, Float...

The titles of the works use naming conventions that evoke a mix of news bulletin, scrapbooking and poetic references, offering clues about the ways in which people inhabit these places, how they interact with their belongings and what they reveal and conceal about their lives. Andrea describes the recently completed work *Beautiful Losers* as being inspired by her encounter with an industrial area on the outskirts of Banff, Alberta. She recounts, "I went there and there is this field of discarded





objects that's sitting right beneath the beautiful mountains. I collaged that with some of my garbage excavation photos, a little bit of kitchen trash as well, sort of making it a little bit more surreal. The fact that a fence blocks it from you creates that strange tension and that distance."

These carefully rendered oil paintings, ranging in size from fifteen square inches to five by seven feet, are both intimate and monumental in scale and content. The scale shifts invite us to come close to examine the details of the paintings as well as to stand back to take in the overall picture. In this way we are invited to become aware of our perception of other people's things through our attraction and repulsion, moving in close to have a closer look and stepping back to distance ourselves from someone else's life.

The images depict excess and tell us something about the volume and speed of things made, shipped, gathered and discarded. As a whole the exhibition acts as series of visual pauses, challenging the viewer with unsettling scenic points of interest along the way. *The Waste Land* suggests the worst — in the end we simply drown under a sea of stuff. This proposition for a dreadful ending is also dreamy and seductive because of the shear beauty of the paintings.



Andrea's work offers insight into why we task ourselves with an ongoing project of sorting and resorting our belongings into want and don't want piles, and the consequences of never really letting go of anything. As Andrea says "At the heart of my work is the concept that our trash is akin to our unconscious mind. When we throw away our rubbish at the end of the week, we seal it into a black bag in an act of forgetting, wishing to never see it again. The very idea of someone else glimpsing the contents of our garbage seems incredibly intimate or invasive. My paintings are something of an act of acknowledgement toward this largely private and unexplored realm of our possessions. Even the landfills are teeming with our stuff, though we choose to disavow it. These mountains of things are a sort of accidental construction of our times, a shadow city built beside the one we live in. I wish to take a symbolic inventory of these things, to claim them as part of our lives."

**ANDREA KASTNER** is a Kamloops-based painter who makes work about the sacred nature of rejected things. Raised in Montreal, she completed her BFA at Mount Allison University and her MFA at the University of Alberta. Her work been exhibited across Canada and she was selected as a finalist in the 2012 RBC Canadian Painting Competition. **www.andreakastner.ca** 



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