

## Bridget Moser

Six months into the coronavirus pandemic, this portrayal of contemporary apathy and anxiety seems even more relevant.

by Michael Peterson

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Bridget Moser, "My Crops Are Dying But My Body Persists," 2020 (courtesy the artist and Remail Modern, Saskatoon)

I first saw Bridget Moser's exhibition *My Crops Are Dying But My Body Persists* as it was being installed at the Remail Modern just as Saskatoon was starting to shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Returning half a year later, it feels even more relevant, as if her portrayal of societal tensions was foreshadowing the challenges and unrest to come.

The exhibition's main feature is a 22-minute video projected onto a large screen at the end of a carpeted viewing platform. On the floor near the entrance is an anatomically muscled body suit, stuffed with packing peanuts that spill from every opening, an apt welcome to the anxiety

the exhibition both presents and produces.



Bridget Moser, "My Crops Are Dying But My Body Persists," 2020, installation view at Remai Modern, Saskatoon (photo by Blaine Campbell)

From an aesthetic point of view, the video would be at home on an influencer's Instagram feed with its appealing palette of pinks, mauves and golds. But what it portrays, alternating between weird YouTube-esque food scenes – hotdogs with fingernails, a bowl of coins covered with milk being eaten as if it were cereal – and Moser's character grappling with unease in her



body, is much less palatable. Her voiceover makes clear the anxiety is current, built from Internet and consumer culture, and centred around worry for the health of the planet.



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"I had been crying at the computer for years until finally we moved into a different home somewhere else," she says. And then later: "We're living on this meaningless island, and I think it's getting sick. Maybe it's already very unwell. How do you know if your body is toxic?" This last question is one so many of us have been asking on repeat for the last six months.

However, as much as this exhibition now may seem like foreshadowing, Moser makes clear her character's main worry is not what we may lose as we – and our planet – become sick, but rather how to endure present, day-to-day life. "It's one thing to panic about uncertain futures," she says, "but I'm totally immobilized by my boring, self-obsessed guilt."

Guilt. And, to be specific, white guilt. For Moser exists in a white body, and she makes clear that this work is about whiteness. That influencer palette? It's the colours of her body. Then there's the scene where she wakes up on her couch with pillows that look like white bread, and another, where she bandages the crust of a real slice of white bread. Her voiceover: "This is where I come from, or anyways I think you can see the resemblance. We're all a bit soft and we're always digestible. We're just used to certain comforts."



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Moser presents her character as apologetic and apathetic, making this a damning critique of white responsibility for current societal and environmental crises, as well as the white response. Near the end of the video, a robotic Siri-like voice suggests, "The antidote to guilt is action." To which Moser's voiceover responds, "My muscles are weak from lack of action." Sadly, I can't think of a better summary for so much of the white response to recent Black Lives Matter protests.

The Siri voice tries one more time: "So what will you do with this?"

Moser: "I will accept what I have done."

The video ends with Moser removing her white clothing to reveal not her body, but the anatomical body suit now on the gallery floor. Underneath the superficial, there's no deeper meaning, just more artifice.



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At one point, Moser says: "Give me this day my daily bread and do not impede my consumption. And when there is nothing left, give me all that I'll have. The wasteland." In a few sentences, she moves from the common Christian prayer to T.S. Eliot's poem on disillusionment following the First World War.

In the final scene, American pop band fun.'s *We Are Young* plays at half speed. The chorus – "Tonight, we are young/So let's set the world on fire/We can burn brighter than the sun" – repeats while Moser dances in her body suit. This is a portrayal of a fall, but one that she, as a white person, has brought on herself. She is aware of this, but does nothing to stop. Her privilege means she does not need to. ■

***Bridget Moser: My Crops Are Dying But My Body Persists*** at the Remail Modern in Saskatoon from March 17 to Oct. 12, 2020. The video can be viewed [here](#).

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Michael Peterson has a Master's degree from Emily Carr University and runs VOID, a non-profit screen print and risograph studio in Saskatoon. He also coordinates a digital technology project for the University of Saskatchewan Art Galleries.

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