
SERIES

Amalie Atkins, "Requiem for Wind and Water" (film still), 2018 (courtesy of the artist)

Year-End Views: Saskatchewan

A sigh of relief ripples through the province's art communities.

by Michael Peterson

December 19, 2019 9:15 PM

The past year has been a tumultuous one for the Saskatchewan arts community, but largely positive. So let's all breathe together as we enter 2020.

Exhale.

The heaviest weight on Saskatchewan's arts community – the tenure of Gregory Burke as director of the Remai Modern – was lifted in early 2019 with his **resignation** amidst an investigation by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission for alleged workplace harassment. His tenure was a time of strained relationships, both externally and internally – 15 of the 37 full-time employees listed in the Remai's 2017 annual report have since parted ways with the gallery.

Over the last six months, the Remai has started to feel welcoming to the local community in a way it hasn't since back in the Mendel days. (As one colleague exclaimed: "I can finally buy a Remai membership!")

There had been such a focus on the international, but never an understanding that the gallery's role is to connect the international to Saskatoon – to present conceptually difficult exhibitions in a manner accessible to the general public and to build bridges for local artists taking the next steps in their careers.



Lynn McMaster, interim director of the Remai Modern

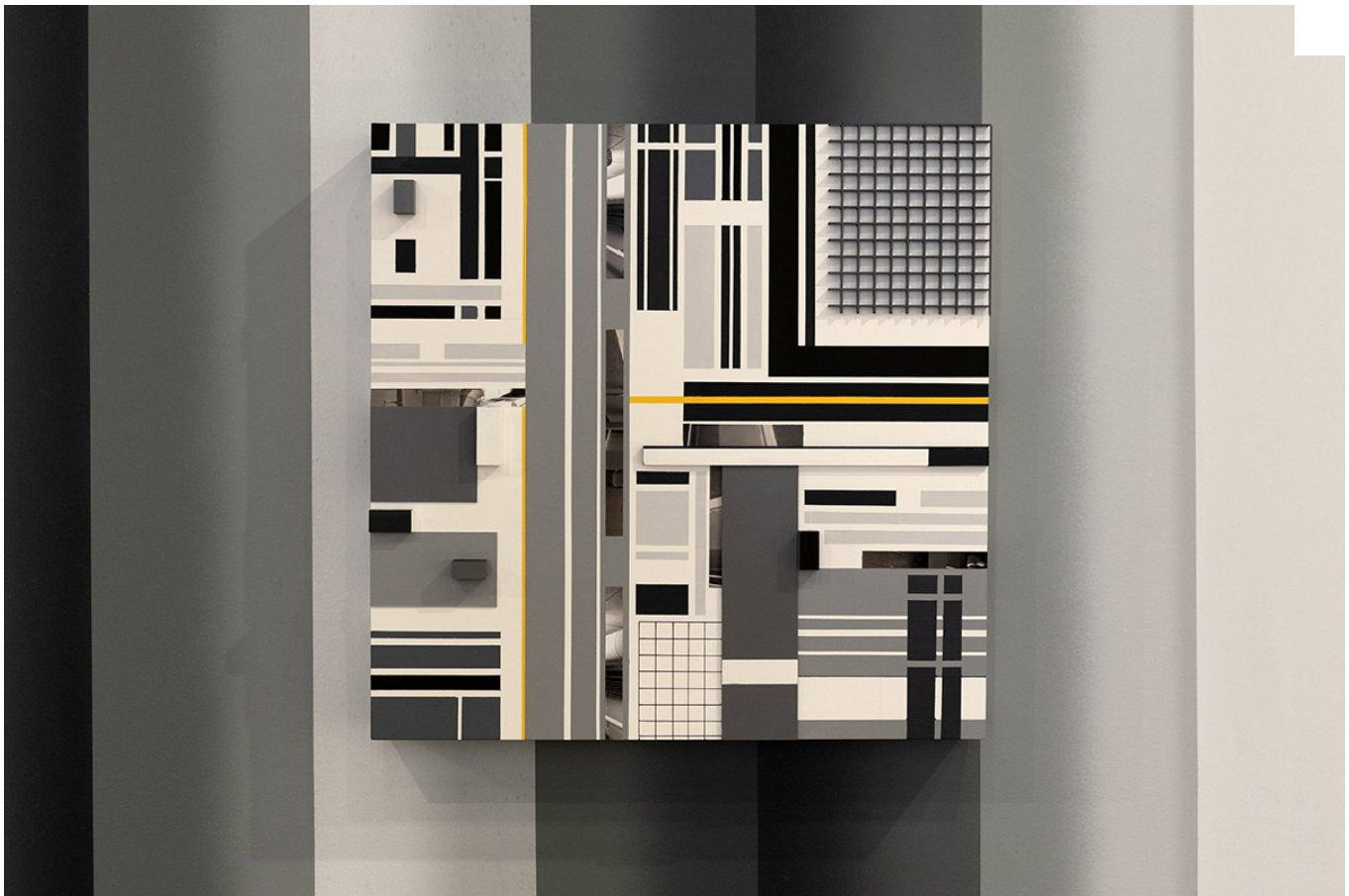
At the Remai's April opening of *Amalie Atkins and the Diamond Eye Assembly*, curated by Sandra Fraser, members of the arts community who had gathered to celebrate were surprised by Ukrainian dancers and gold-coated chocolates lowered from the balconies. This type of sweet display didn't feel possible before. But now, under the leadership of interim director Lynn McMaster, it is. There's no word yet on the timeline for filling the top position permanently.



Ukrainian dancers open a bundle of custom-made diamond-shaped chocolates that were distributed to guests at the opening of Amalie Atkin's "The Diamond Eye Assembly" at the Remai Modern in Saskatoon earlier this year.

Inhale.

The Remai is not the only Saskatchewan arts organization that has had leadership challenges in recent years. Regina's Neutral Ground went through a tumultuous transition a while back, but the good work of rebuilding community is well underway, thanks to the guidance of programming director Amber Phelps Bondaroff.

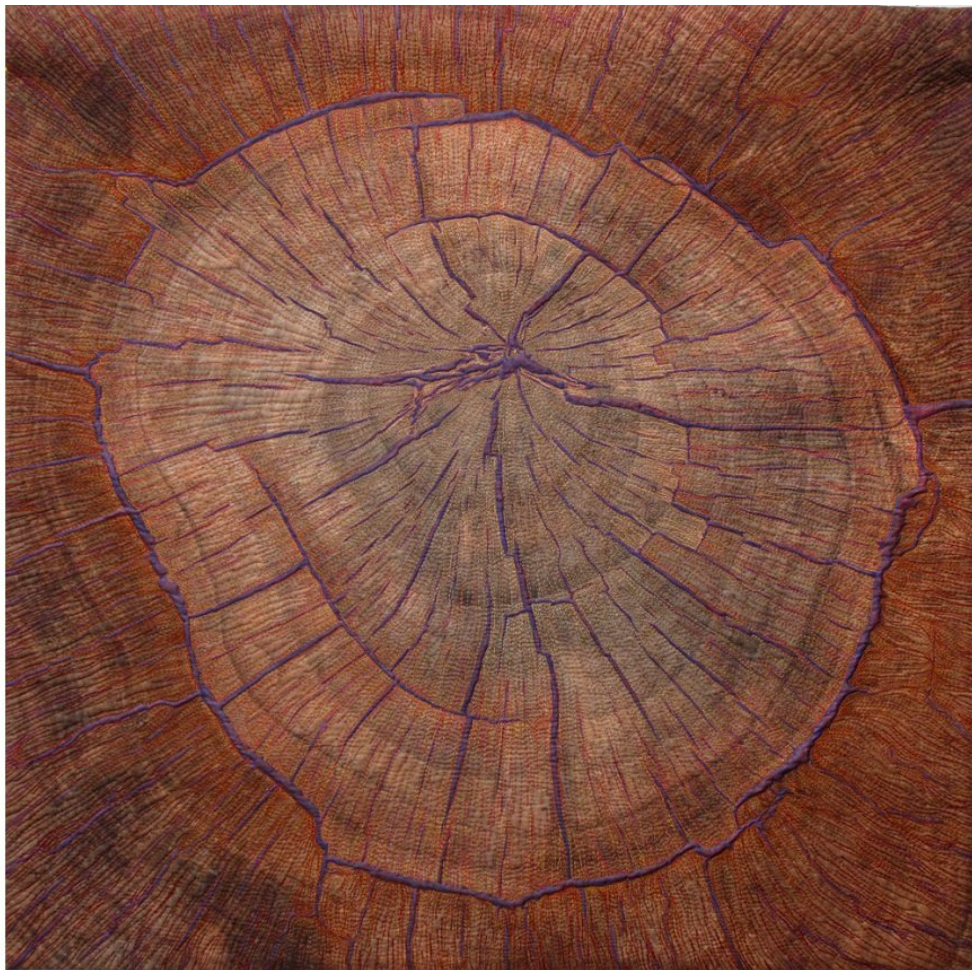


Laura Payne, Derek Sandbeck and Cam McKay, "Structurally Sound," 2019, installation detail (photo by Nic Wilson)

It's exciting to see this being done with an emphasis on the local, including the current exhibition, *Structurally Sound*, which features Saskatoon-based artists Cameron McKay, Laura Payne and Derek Sandbeck.

Sandbeck and the show's curator, Dave Stonhouse, are founding members of Saskatoon's Bridges Art Movement, a collective that this year started providing emerging artist residencies. These residencies are especially significant given the closure for redevelopment of the Tees and Persse building, which had housed the main hub of art studios in Saskatoon.

Rather than only a rebuilding of individual studios, we are starting to see a move to collective spaces – from ceramic centres like Regina's Silt Studio and Saskatoon Clayworks to Saskatoon Makerspace, which provides access to laser cutters, CNC routers and other high-tech equipment. Meanwhile, Regina's MacKenzie Art Gallery is launching a **digital studio** that, under the leadership of coordinators Cat Bluemke and Jonathan Carroll, will provide digital arts training and equipment.



Martha Cole, "Tree Ring Mandala," 2019, digital image on brushed silk, fabric paints and thread, 38" x 38" (courtesy Assiniboia Gallery, Regina)

We've also seen a renewed appreciation for craft practices. At the Saskatchewan Arts Awards last month, fibre artist Martha Cole received the Lieutenant Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award and jewelry artist Mary Lynn Podiluk was chosen as the RBC Emerging Artist.

As well, Amanda Nogier was selected as Fashion Designer of the Year by *Western Living Magazine*. With the Canadian Craft Federation's national conference, Ten Digit Technology, set for Saskatoon in March, appreciation for craft can only grow.

Breathe.

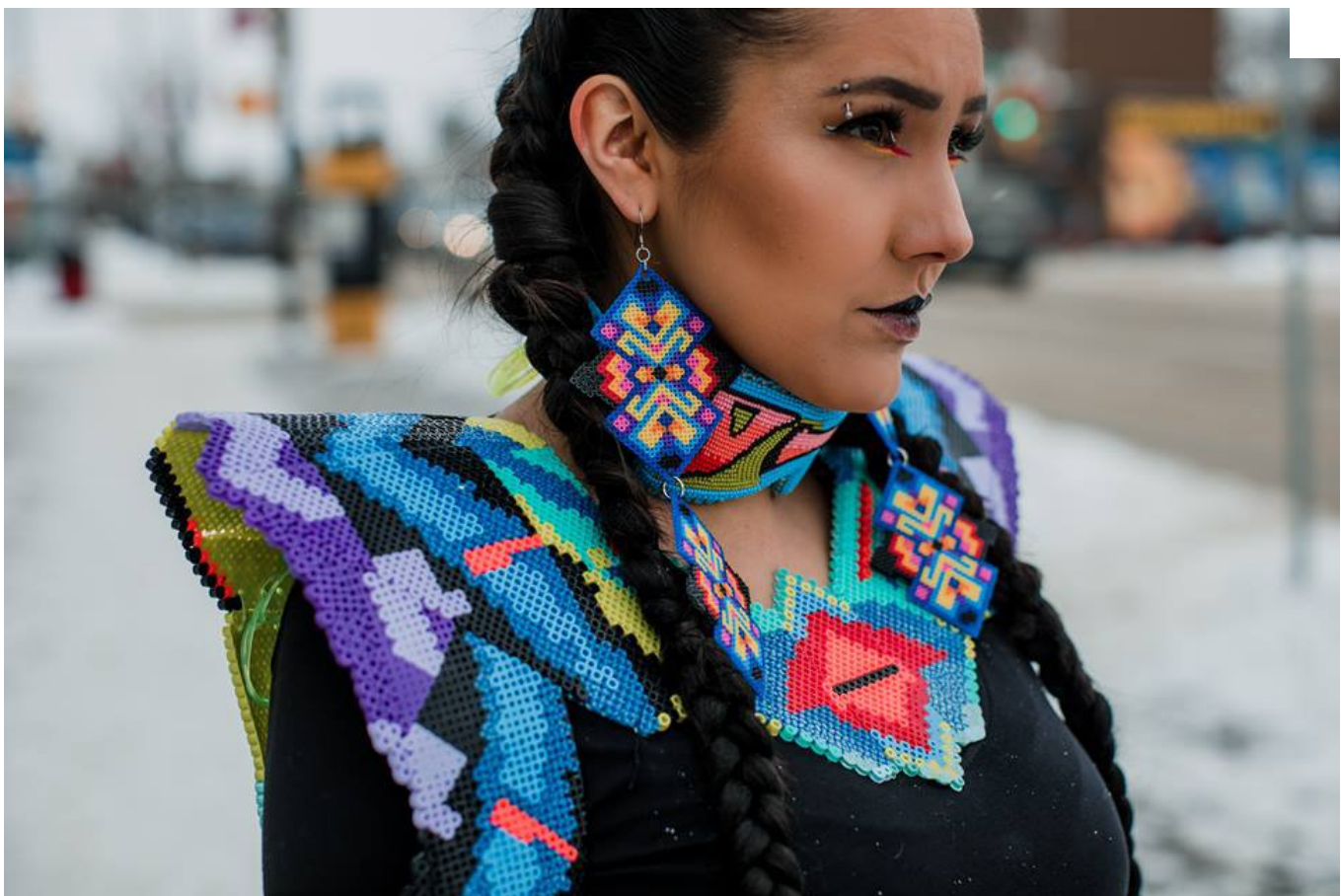
It was sad to see **Felicia Gay** leave her position in January as curator at Wanuskewin Galleries in Saskatoon. Her last exhibition there, *Power Lines: The Work of Norval Morrisseau*, and its attendant symposium, brought together leading Indigenous artists and thinkers from across Canada.

But while Saskatoon loses Gay, who is of Swampy Cree and Scottish (Gordon Clan) heritage, it's good to see she isn't going far – she has been hired as a curatorial fellow at the MacKenzie, a cross-appointment with the University of Regina that will run until 2021.

She will contribute to a joint conference and gathering of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures in June that will be hosted by the MacKenzie and the Sâkêwêwak First Nations Artists' Collective. It will surely be a highlight of the coming year.



Felicia Gay



Catherine Blackburn, "The Waterhen Weaver," 2018 (photo by Tenille Campbell, Sweetmoon Photography)

One artist having a big impact on both a provincial and national level is Catherine Blackburn, an artist with Dene and European roots. Her exhibition, *New Age Warriors*, curated by Jesse Campbell and originally presented at the Mann Art Gallery in Prince Albert, in partnership with the Indigenous Peoples Artist Collective, is touring the province.

With stops this year at Neutral Ground, the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery, and North Battleford's Chapel Gallery and next year at the Art Gallery of Swift Current, the work is fuelling

conversations about Indigenous innovation and ways to live on the land in the 21st century.



Catherine Blackburn, "But There's No Scar?" 2016, beads, deer hide and wood, 47" x 47" (courtesy of the artist)

Blackburn's *But There's No Scar?*, a beaded bruise on stretched deer hide, was purchased this year by the National Gallery of Canada and is on display in Ottawa as part of *Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuuel*. Blackburn has a month-long residency leading to her next exhibition, *with these hands, from this land*, curated by Leah Taylor, at the Kenderdine Art Gallery in Saskatoon. I look forward to seeing what direction she will take next. ■

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Laura Payne	Amanda Nogier	Mann Art Gallery	Silt Studio	Jesse Campbell	Amber Phelps Bondaroff
Wanuskewin Heritage Park Gallery	Martha Cole	Felicia Gay	Sandra Fraser	Cat Bluemke	
Lynn McMaster	Jonathan Carroll	Saskatoon Makerspace	MacKenzie Art Gallery	31 December 2019 issue	
David Stonhouse	Neutral Ground	Mary Lynn Podiluk	Leah Taylor	Catherine Blackburn	
Kenderdine Art Gallery	Remai Modern Art Gallery of Saskatchewan	Derek Sandbeck	Cameron McKay		
Saskatoon Clayworks	Amalie Atkins				

Michael Peterson

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



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