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Coming of age [Exhibition catalogue]

Kainer, Mary and Luminaire, Ramune and Mason, Judith A. and Patterson, Pam


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Mary Kainer
Ramune Luminaire
Judith A. Mason

COMING OF AGE

 The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

THE ATTIC Collaborative installation by Ramune Luminaire, Judith A. Mason and Mary Kainer.

Mary Kainer
Ramune Luminaire
Judith A. Mason

Coming of Age

Essay by
Pam Patterson

Coming of Age

Pam Patterson

*Old woman, why are you crying, it is not allowed here.
No one must make any noise...
A. A. Aidoo*

The figure of the older woman... is treated with loud derision. She is usually shown in a coven with other witches, gabbling and cackling incomprehensibly...

If we are to be well, we must care for ourselves. We must not cast the old woman out, but become her more abundantly. If we embrace the idea of witch-hood, and turn it into a positive, aggressive, self-defining self-concept we can exploit the proliferation of aversion imagery to our own advantage...

*The old woman who muttered the magic words or collected the moon-drenched herbs was not a cynical manipulator of the credulity of others...
[these were] women who strove for power over the imagination.
Germaine Greer*

French feminist Luce Irigaray notes that if women are to have their own identity, they must subvert the traditional male symbolic. While speaking primarily to reading and writing, she notes women “writers” must favour the images and metaphors of fluidity, dynamism, polysemy, and plurality. “She associates the metaphor of the specular mirror with this feminine representation. The curved surface of the speculum produces a deformed image which reverses the reflections of masculine discourse. Irigaray writes: ... [on] ‘the specular surface [will be] found not the void of nothingness but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillating and incandescent concavity” (Mambrol, 2016).

Coming of Age, as exhibition, acts as a specular as well as speculative (as in notional and unpredictable) concave surface which reflects the work of three accomplished female multi-media artists, Mary Kainer, Ramune Luminaire, and Judith A. Mason. Here they take up the deeply ambivalent social and personal perceptions of aging. Are the senior years a time of completion, reflection, and serenity, or of impoverishment, loss, and sorrow? Whether glorifying or disparaging, ideas around aging mirror, and are framed by, many preconceptions. Hovering around their 60th years, these artists brew a scrappy and complex concoction, as they consider age as not only a biological fact, but a cultural – and gendered – one.

Nobody wants to be old.

Germaine Greer

Their work in drawing, painting, sculpture, video, fiber, installation, and performance defies many of the traditional modes of art making. The choice of subject matter is unusual, the style is not easily defined, and the formal use of media is unconventional.

If the world has dubbed you crone, you might as well be one.

Germaine Greer

They rebel as active agents against standardization and as artists, against the predictable, and in so doing create a generative (com)motion as they tackle contemporary societal postmodern ambivalence and ennui. In postmodernity, writes Harold Pearce (1992), “What is reflected is not the outer world of nature or the inner world of subjectivity, but a complex maze of associated meanings – the mirror’s reflection of itself into infinity. The artist... become[s] a fun-house mirror anonymously parodying, simulating, or reproducing images” (p. 249).

These artists embrace and yet challenge definitions of the postmodern. While Luminaire satirizes, as might a postmodern parodist, the massive modernist military sculptural icon by transforming it into a robust dancing woman, the figure takes

on a life of its own. It engages and then transcends, as does much of the work by Kainer and Mason, contemporary discussions around postmodern ambiguity (as an intellectual activity that attempts to subvert outdated binaries) and ambivalence (potentially more complex, but ultimately a dissatisfying emotional response). Is Luminaire's figure at "the dangerous age" – a term used at the turn of the last century to refer to the menopause (Greer, 1991, p. 81)? As the hag-worn trio who await Macbeth on the heath, these contemporary art witches threaten societal structures, tossing starkness, storms, and sensuality into the mix.

We might also mention the Gnaeae, horrible old women who had only one eye and one tooth between the three of them and who passed them from hand to hand.

Simone de Beauvoir

Here we move to exhibition-as-babble and reclaim women's talk from its derogatory connotations. No longer the stereotypically-(mis)named quilting bee buzz, the conversations occurring among these works are dialogic, emotional, intellectual, political, personal, and evocative. They are engaged by and through difference.

A weight fell away from her; she flew up to a higher perch and cackled a little.

Isak Dinesen

These artists embody difference in location, histories, and experiences. They are travelers who live their lives, as Ruth Falk notes, "with roots in themselves" (in Debrida, 1982, p. 142). But they are not the displaced nomads referred to in the altermodern of Nicolas Bourriaud (in Ryan, 2009) but rather are, as in transmodernism, transborder thinkers. The transmodern is understood to be outside of, and at times divisive to, the ongoing discourse (and privilege) of modernism. In transmodernism, individuals understood to be marginalized, writes Enrique Dussel (2006), engage in transversal dialogue. It is an authentic pluralistic dialogue among those on the periphery, not originating from, nor determined by, mainstream experts.

When you are young everything is about you. As you grow older, and are pushed to the margins, you begin to realize that everything is not about you, and that is the beginning of freedom.

Germaine Greer

The artists, self-identifying as marginalized by a youth-dominated culture, speak as cackling older women, from the margins. But it is at the margins where danger and opportunities lurk. These women are adventurers, risk-takers. Such travelers, as Julia Kristeva (1991) notes, are those who are willing to be changed by such activity - to not rest content, but rather engage in a practice that willingly makes the familiar strange.

The Kikuyu have a saying, "An old goat does not spit without a reason."

Simone de Beauvoir

Mary Kainer's banner-like whimsical mixed-media drawings combine data, collage, biomorphic forms, and text. She uses statistics as "objective" markers of aging and subverts objectivity by exploiting imagery in which the body is seen to fragment, twist, bend, morph, ache, and cry. The banners address a range of health issues for the elderly: dementia, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, and vision loss. In them, she confronts the related over-medication for geriatric, oft ill-defined illnesses, and draws attention to individual experiences of pain and deprivation that challenge the formation of existing societal myths around graceful aging.

Alien and troubling organic forms confront the viewer – as do the tri-figured dendrites in "Dementia" that point to multi-staged mental decay, and to fear. Her accompanying figurative sculptures, placed on formal white gallery plinths, elucidate both pain and prolapse. They twist and reach, achingly passionate in their struggle.

Her installation is entitled "Body/Burden" and while it may indicate the many challenges one might stoically bear in the senior years, it also refers to the insidiousness of accumulation – the load of chemical and environmental toxins and

the slow accretion of bodily decay. Notes Simone de Beauvoir (1970/1996), "It is not the organs that abruptly lose their powers in the case of illness, stress, bereavement or serious misfortune: it is the build-up which hid their deficiencies that falls to pieces" (p. 31).

Kainer's video-looped projection "Exposed" speaks not to to burden but rather to exposure. When women managed their own bodies, the difficulties they encountered were dealt with within the female community. "Women were shy of sharing such matters with strange young men" (Greer, 1992, p. 75). Such shyness colludes with a societal lack of interest in older women. In this video, the women self-identify as artists. They curiously palm their faces and then suddenly, in a fleeting moment of revelation, expose rare and dissimilar expressions. Perhaps, after centuries of witnessing how the female is conditioned into a girlishness called femininity, we can now apprehend mature femaleness.

An old lady can accept the fact that she may occasionally belch or fart.

Germaine Greer

"Old age is not merely a statistical fact; it is the prolongation and the last stage of a... process" (de Beauvoir, 1970/1996, p. 11). Writes de Beauvoir, "[T]he individual's psychic or spiritual life can only

be understood in the light of his [or her] existential situation: this situation... also affects... [the] physical organism. And the converse applies, for [s/]he experiences his [or her] relationship with time differently according to whether his [or her] body is more or less impaired.... (p. 9)."

It is this relationship to time that is compellingly mapped out on the numbered squares from age 60 to 100 found on Ramune Luminaire's floor-to-ceiling full-wall wooden game board. Replicating "Snakes and Ladders," it plays out in surreal drawings an enticing, chaotic game for the over-60s: fall in love, long hospital stay, travel to see Taj Mahal, Alzheimer's! Titled "Virtues & Vicissitudes", it alludes not only to the ups and downs of life, which at an advanced age can be devastating, but to the often-outdated assumption that women who suffer at the menopause and beyond are bad people while those with "virtue" intact will flourish (Greer, 1991, p. 105). Her snakes, as familiars, are omniscient but not always benign. One scrutinizes a suffering woman, while another studies the viewer out of the corner of its eye; inviting or implicating us?

In counterpoint, Luminaire's larger-than-life-sized acetate-wrapped female form entitled "About Time" pirouettes and arches her naked body with abandonment. She defies the disparaging descriptive words on the pedestal beneath used to describe the aging woman: hag, senile, bitter, useless,

lonely, deranged, wizened, babbling, arthritic, incontinent, invisible... As with this sculpture, there is often a fleshiness to Luminaire's figurative work, as if life itself is pressing against the restraints of skin and surface. This dancing form dares to confront the seemingly fate-directed game not with sexual rapaciousness but with passion and joy – a deep unnamable energy that subverts. "[I]f a woman never lets herself go, how will she ever know how far she has got" (Greer, 1991, p. 14)?

The old woman whose very shadow can blight anything it falls upon need no longer play the meek, obliterated wife-mother.

Germaine Greer

Judith A. Mason's evocative, vividly rich abstract paintings and mythological drawings combine in relationship to each other to tell of the not-easily-articulated interior life of the older woman. These works and the accompanying group of felted marionette-like figures entitled "The Family Drama in Eleven Parts" restage her original ground – the psychic, physical, and material space/places from which her feelings, sensations, and sense of self emerged. All point to the fact that, as Germaine Greer (1991) notes, "Men have friends, women have relations" (p. 249). And these relations are problematic; daughters, for example, often feel resentment toward their mothers. Among all this vibrancy in paint, drawing and fiber though, there is a whiff of

sadness, a disconsolate "what is the point?". Women can bear the unbearable only so long and our culture has little tolerance for grief.

In her paintings, she reawakens abstract form in an expressive use of colour and imagery. Her evolving experiences of her familial intimate relationships as content are exposed as she navigates through these works revealing collapse, emptiness, starkness, storms, pleasure, pressure, and release. Mason, in paintings such as "Separation" or "Making Peace with the Darkness", engages in an emotive remembering, a kind of intense recollecting where one senses the future shortening and the past growing heavier. Wrote Gauguin (in Greer, 1991) in his 67th year, "I believe that when one is young, it is the object... that fills one with enthusiasm. Later it comes from the inside..." (p. 406).

An elemental passion is even more evident in her drawings. "The Scream" with its raw wounded mouth gives sentiment an excruciating form. These chalk pastels touch on how the loneliness and vulnerability of older women have been exploited throughout Western mythology. In "Ariadne and the Minotaur" a golden-hued maze is gathered up and protected by large and powerful hands; in "Demeter and her Daughter" a fragile figure hangs in the balance between a face-to-face confrontation; Demeter battles for her daughter.

To disbelieve in witches is the greatest of heresies.

Malleus Maleficarum

The three, as generative makers, combine efforts in an attic installation where the detritus of their creative lives is reformed into seductive heaps of objects and materials exposed or partially hidden as memory boxes or illusive reminiscences. Childhood and future hopes are captured in a children's doll house or redrawn on panels that capture the bodies and presence of aged women. Sound echoes, memories are weighted; the installation is enticing.

The exhibition is mature; it expands and subverts the postmodern oeuvre by being inclusive, incisive, and powerful. The artists draw from a dialogic "babble" and take ageing on as a rite of passage as they conceive a new art legacy.

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Biographies



Mary Kainer, Ramune Luminaire, Judith A. Mason

Mary Kainer

Mary Kainer's artistic practice addresses the political, the personal and the purely visual through drawing, painting, sculpture, photography and installation. Conceptually her work travels through representation, illustration, process, obsessive construction, colour and form.

Kainer's work tackles difficult topics – environmental devastation, global corporate domination, fracking, mining, deforestation, and most recently aging and infirmity. Her images draw on biomorphic forms vacillating between the real and surreal. Data and information and simultaneously presented as text and schematized images are imbued with collage elements that contain informational fragments. The mutant images and incendiary information are meant to disturb and challenge the viewer.

Born in Saskatchewan, Kainer has lived, worked, volunteered and raised three children in Toronto, working as planner, administrator and community activist. Her artistic practice is informed by these experiences. She pursued her art studies at the Toronto School of Art including a final year in the Independent Studio Program and she has served as a director on the boards of Toronto School of Art and ASpace Gallery.

In 2015, her *Fracking* series drew first prize in the John B. Aird's Contemporary Drawing Exhibition. In 2017 Kainer was awarded Ontario Arts Council's mid-career artists grant. Exhibitions of her work have been shown at the Art Gallery of Peterborough, Regina's Dunlop Art Gallery, A Space Gallery, Propellor Gallery and the Rebecca Gallery. Her works have also been shown in No Man's Land/Erring on the Mount, *Triple X*, Contact, and in studio tours.

Ramune Luminaire

Ramune Luminaire attended both Central St Martins and Camberwell College of Art in London, England and has a joint honors visual arts degree in sculpture and ceramics from the University of the Arts, London. Luminaire's subject matter often revolves around finding a place for female sexuality. While her current media are drawing, sculpture, installation and writing, she is also engaged in projects exploring the nature of creativity and creative dialogue.

Her drawing installation *A Wisdom of Crones*, shown at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse in Montreal in 2008, examined the inner lives of older women. Her collaborative mural at the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto in 2009 and *Drawing>Sculpture> Drawing* was at the Campus Gallery in Barrie in 2010 explored transformative aspects of being through narrative and organic form. She was one of four artists commissioned by the City of Toronto to produce *Outsiders 2012* and in 2014 participated in *No Man's Land* at the Mount St Joseph's Convent in Peterborough. *Conversation Pieces*, an ongoing collaboration with Judith Mason, has taken different forms – at Artspace Peterborough, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa and across continents in Egypt and England. Luminaire has also exhibited at the Bezpala Brown Gallery and the Japanese Paper Place in Toronto, the Canada Summit Centre in Huntsville, Studio 22 in Kingston, the Glynhurst Gallery in Brant, The Varley Gallery in Markham, The Toronto Exhibition Centre and the Etobicoke Civic Art Gallery as well as public galleries and museums in England and Norway.

Luminaire teaches and facilitates courses and workshops in many aspects of creative process, drawing, developing ideas and sketchbook journaling.

Judith A. Mason

Judith A. Mason has a long history with the Visual Arts Centre beginning with her involvement as both a teacher and a board member and culminating with it as the subject of her MA thesis. She is also a graduate of the VAC's Curatorial Mentoring Program. Mason's home is now Peterborough, ON; she is currently teaching visual arts and drama in Cairo, Egypt. She graduated from Trent University with a MA in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies at the same time studied photography, weaving, pottery, performance, drawing, sculpture and print-making at NSCAD and OCAD. Her current work includes drawing, painting, installation and performance as she continues to explore the psychic terrain of her life.

She is a long standing member of the women's art collective *Iris Group* that recently celebrated its 20th birthday with *Iris at Twenty* at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa and for WIA at OISE.

Mason participated in *Filmic* at Whitby Station Gallery, performed *The Perfect Spy* for Public Energy's *Emergency #20* in Peterborough, ON, featured work in *Whiteout*, Toronto Arts Council Gallery, *Outsiders 2012* commissioned by the City of Toronto, *Conversation Pieces Café* at Artspace, Peterborough, *Missing Man Series* at the Art Gallery of Peterborough.

Mason's curatorial projects include *No Man's Land* and *Furniture, Fissures and Fancies*, both shown in Peterborough, ON and *Tending: cultivating patterns of thought, words and kindness*, at the VAC. Her most recent publications include *Menacing Attraction* for *At the Root*, Red Head Gallery, Toronto and 'Vision and Blindness' for *WhiteOut*, Toronto Arts Council Gallery.

Pam Patterson

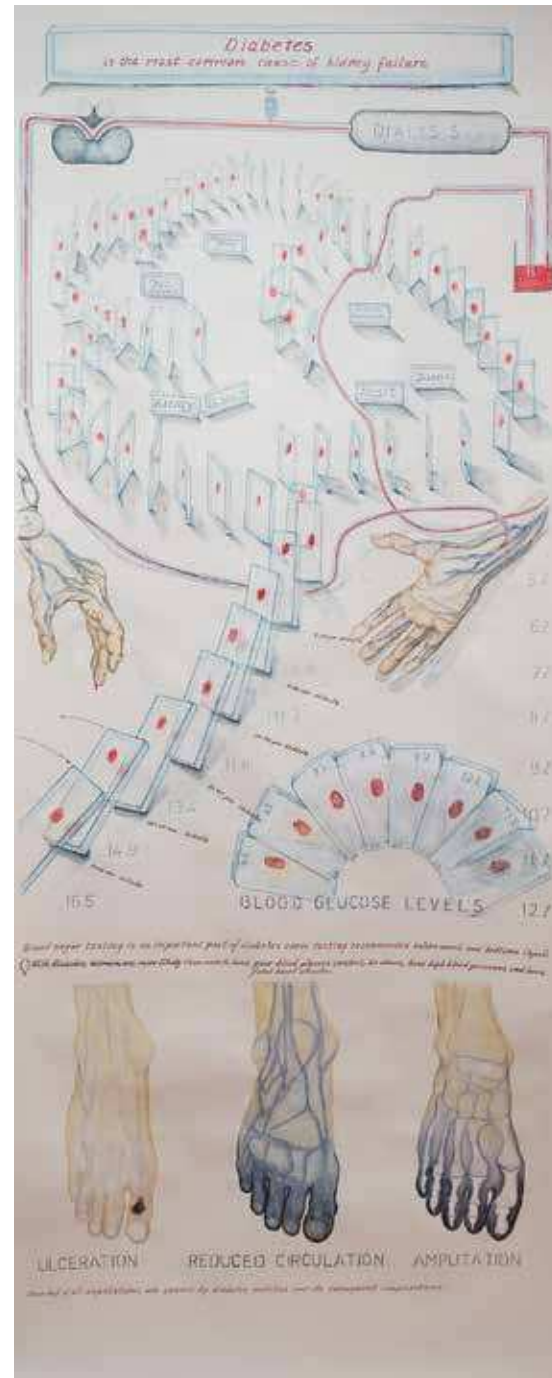
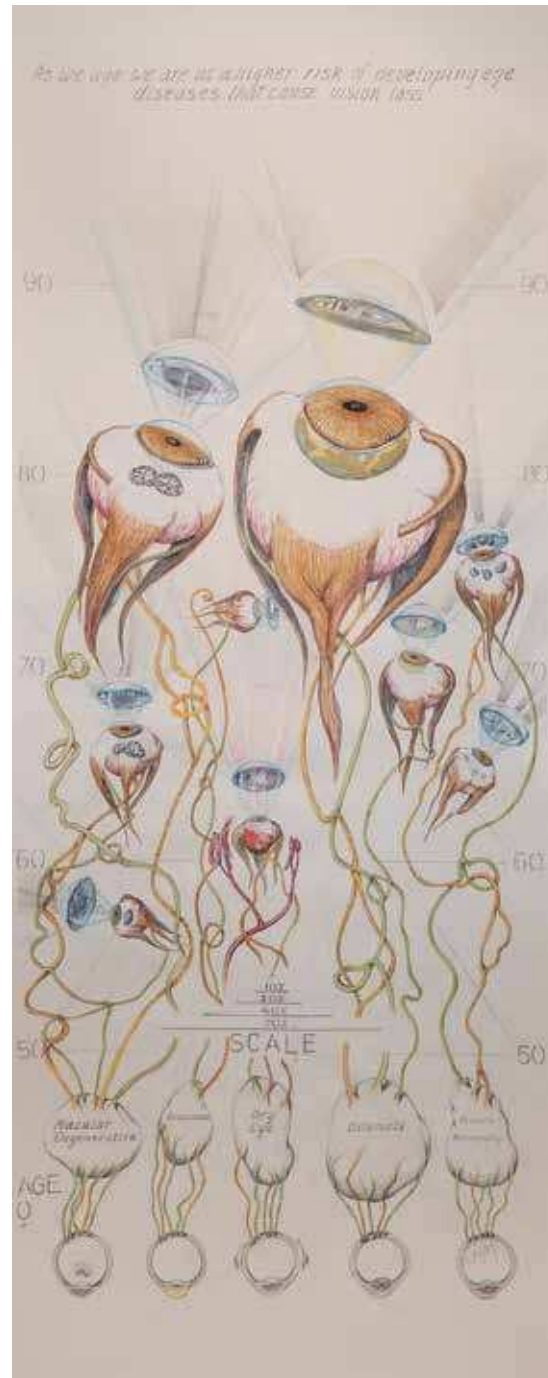
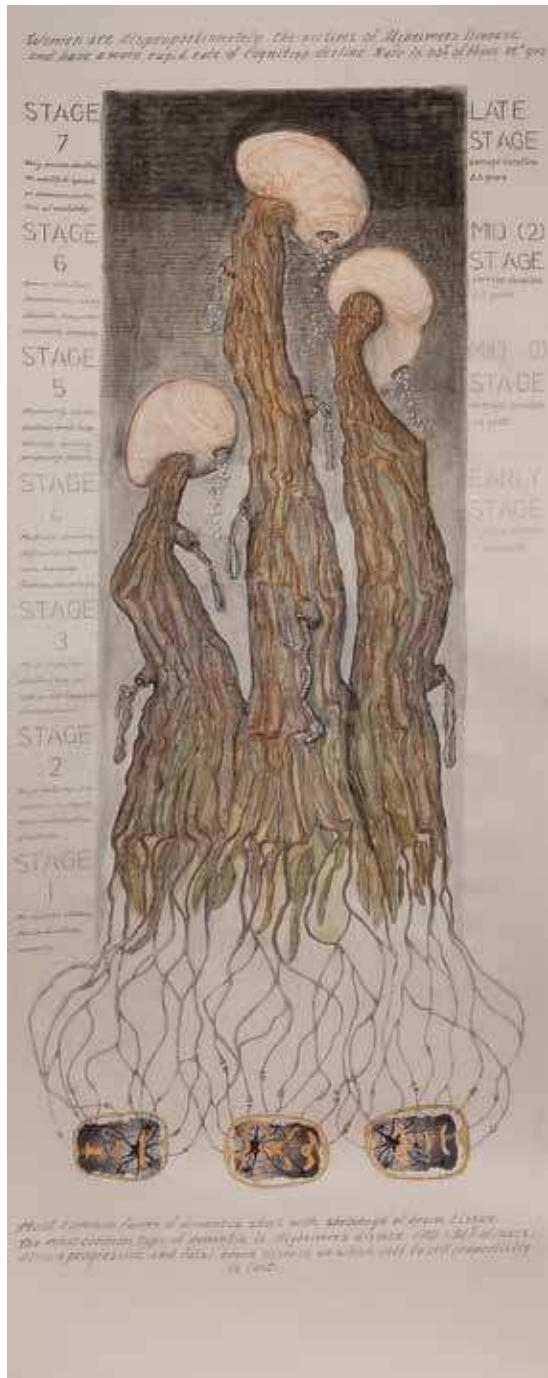
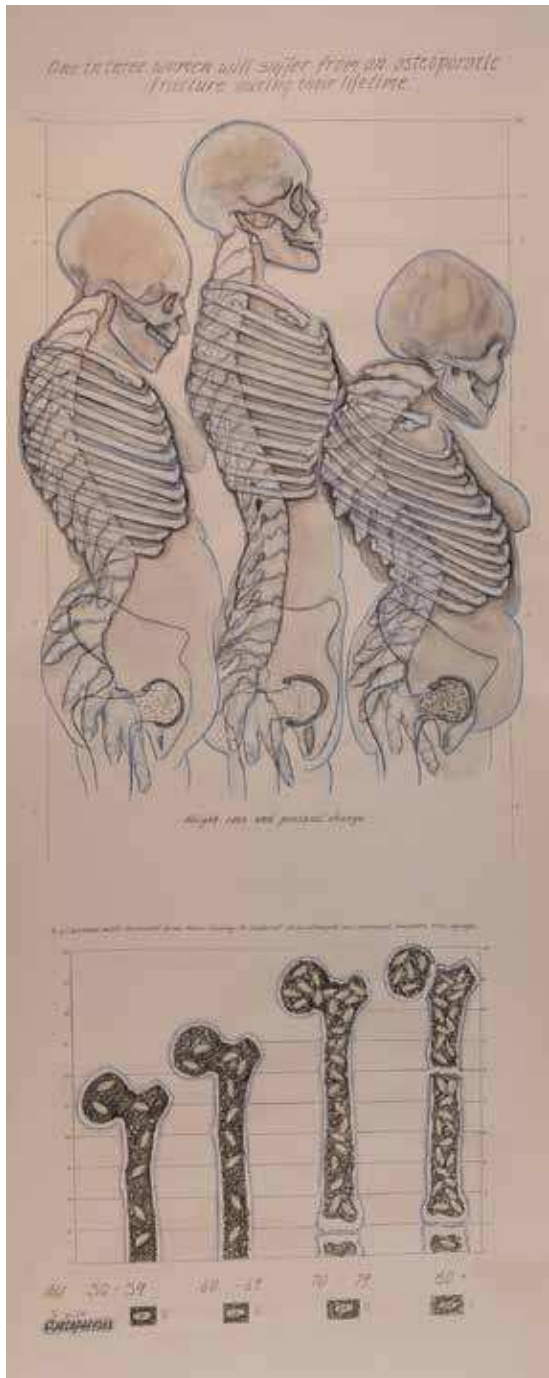
Pam Patterson (PhD) has been active for 30 years in the art, performance and women's communities. Her research, performance, writing, curating and teaching have focussed on embodiment in art practice, disability arts and feminist art education. Her articles, reviews and research have appeared in numerous journals, magazines, books, and exhibition catalogues. Her book, *Enacting Learning: An Arts-Informed Inquiry with the Bay Area Artists for Women's Art (BAAWA)*, was published by Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, Germany. She has been Director of Research for the Canadian Society for Education through Art (CSEA) and was the OCADU and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE UT) ambassador for the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education (CASWE)

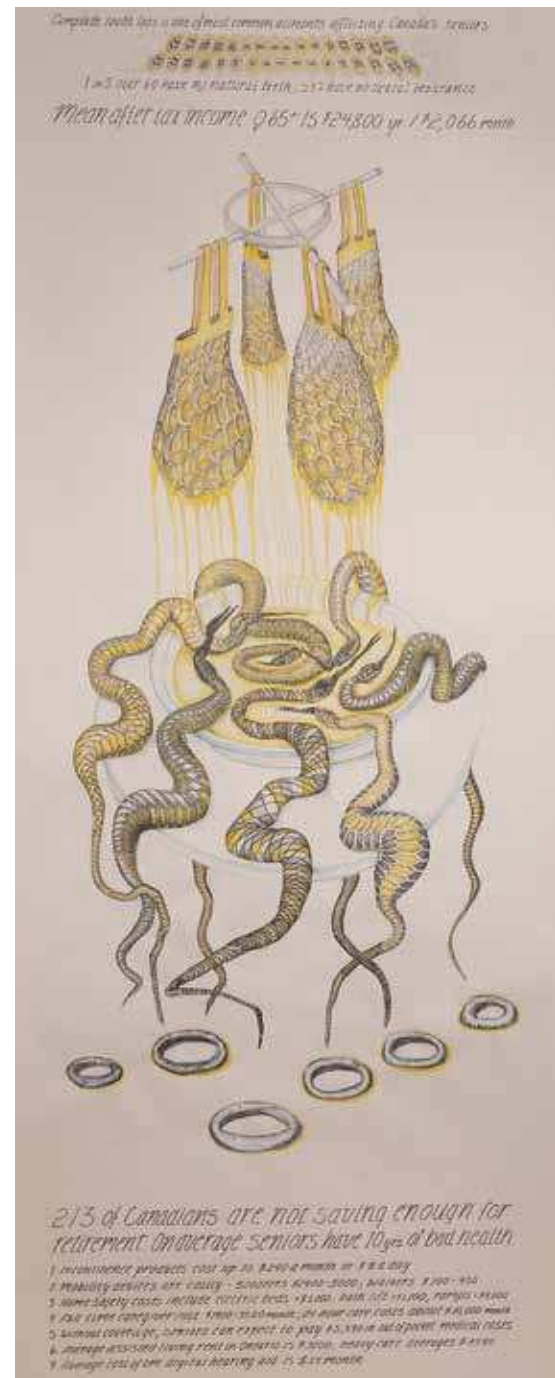
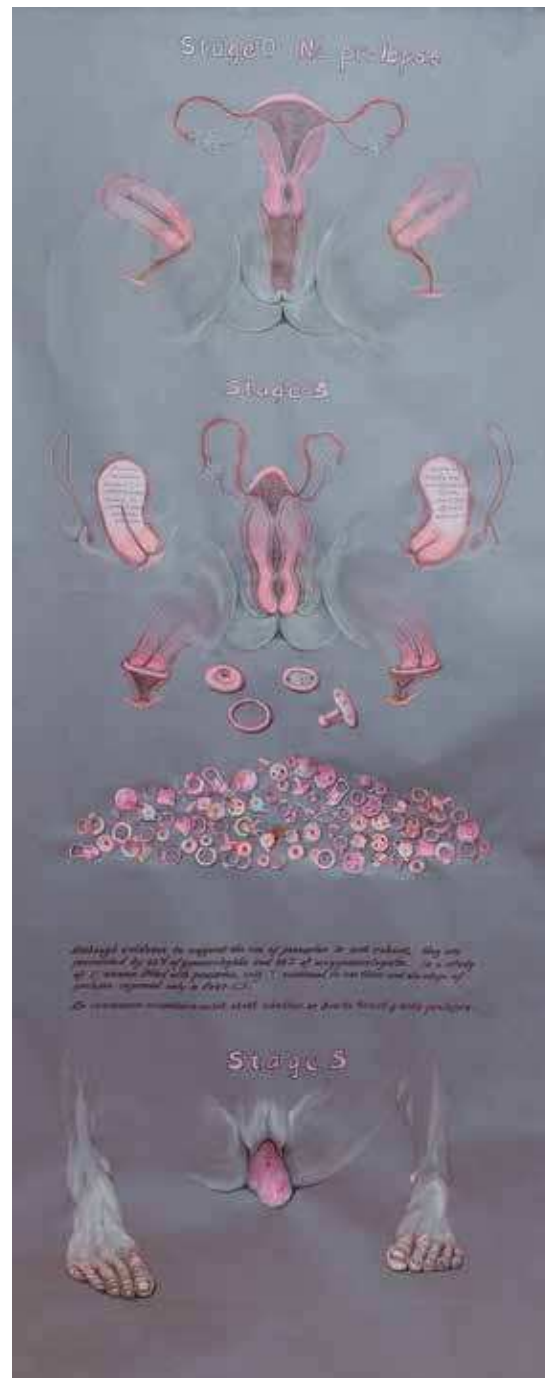
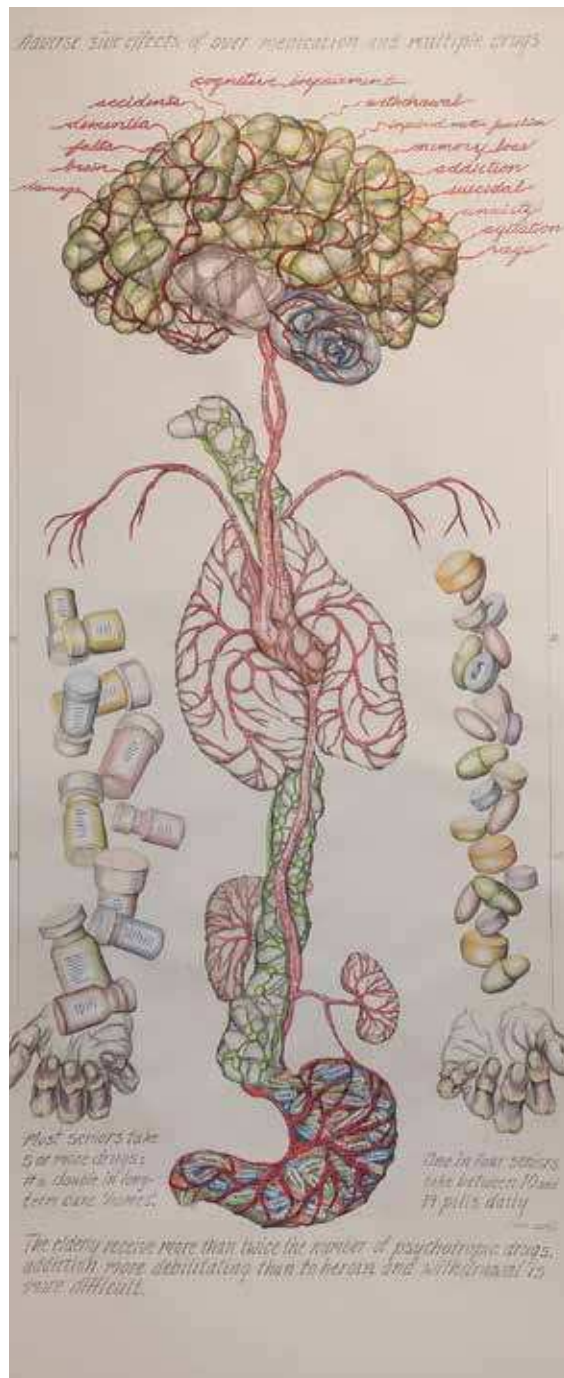
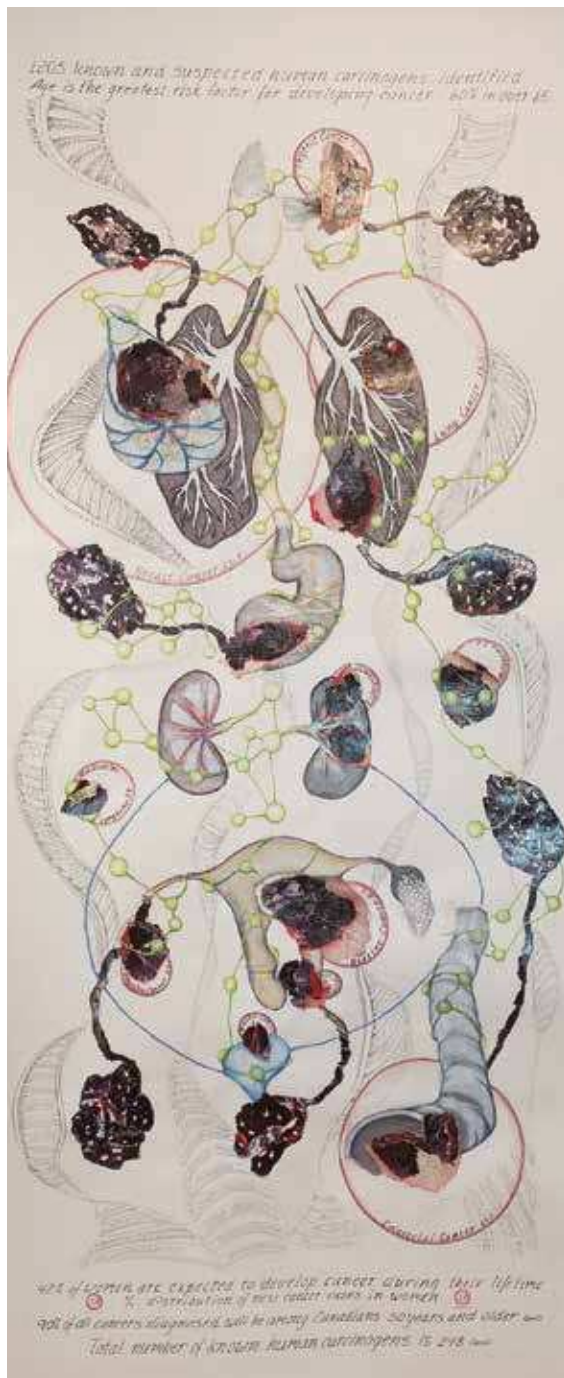
Patterson has directed graduate and undergraduate courses and programs for various Canadian institutions in positions such as Head, Fibre, and Curator for Art in Public Spaces, The Banff Centre. Since 2004, she has been Associate Scholar for the Centre for Women's Studies in Education OISE UT where she directs *WIAprojects*, a feminist interdisciplinary program in community-based, arts-informed, feminist-inspired research. For *WIAprojects*, she mentors emerging trans and women artists and curators, and curates exhibitions, performances and events. *WIAprojects* also publishes various documents and monographs. She is also a faculty member at OCAD University.

As a performance and visual artist, she has exhibited and performed across Canada and internationally. She is represented by Sybil Frank Gallery.

Mary Kainer







Ramune Luminaire

About Time, acetate, wood, aluminum, 2.5 m x 1.78m x 1.14 m, 2017; with thanks to Kelly O'Neill





Judith A. Mason



"Please let Nanny know that my favorite colour is pink."
Each: Oil on board, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2016 – 2017

Splat

Making peace with the darkness



Letting Go
Each: Oil on board, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2016 – 2017

Separation

Here we are again

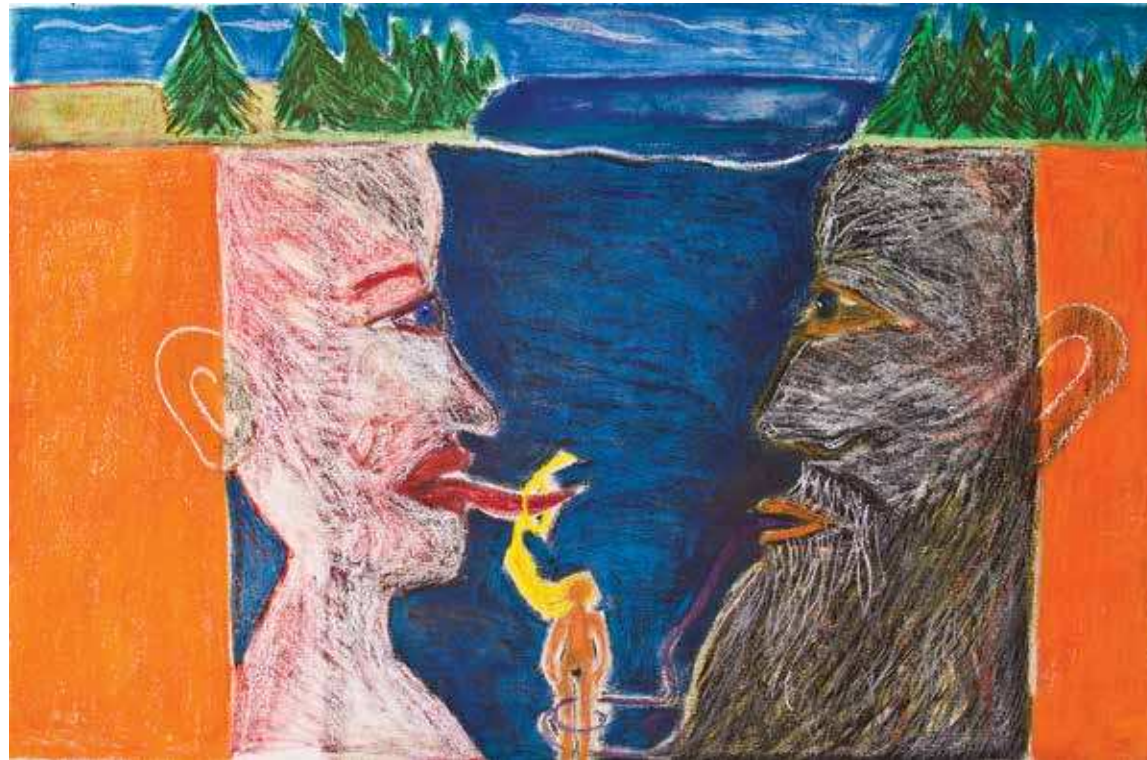
The Gift
Each: Oil on board, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2016 – 2017

The Promise of Tomorrow

"My hands are too big. I'll kill the baby."



Ariadne and the Minotaur
Chalk pastel on paper, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2017



Demeter and her Daughter
Chalk pastel on paper, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2017



The Scream
Chalk pastel on paper, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2017



THE ATTIC

Collaborative installation by Ramune Luminaire, Judith A. Mason and Mary Kainer.

A past that is not coming back, an accumulation no longer required, a keeping place before letting go, an honouring of the departed, traces of where we have been, hints at where we're going...

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Leslie Menagh

Lino Hilsdon

Michael Kainer

Michele Karch Ackerman

Rowena Dykins

Susan Low-Ber

and the women artists who generously donated their time to pose for the video piece *Exposed*

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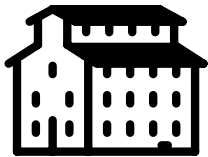
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