

Sarah Fuller: *The Homecoming*
KIAC Artist in Residence
Program/ODD Gallery,
Dawson City
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 by Peta Rake

Twelve kilometers outside of Dawson City, Yukon, is Bear Creek, a township created to support the former Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation and its itinerant population, which up until the 1960s was a veritable *Pleasantville* situation. Oddly, the town of Bear Creek is one of the rare places in the Yukon that was not built on the permafrost. Its unique island ecology allowed most of its inhabitants to build homes with basements, an architectural armature unheard of anywhere above 60 degrees north. Due to the waning of gold, the mining corporation shut its doors and the town was practically abandoned by the early 1960s. Today, the location is maintained as a heritage property. Sitting as a ghost town for more than 60 years, Bear Creek has become a cloudy memory, existing largely in local tales and oral storytelling. History, however, has been frozen in the dwellings built by the miners, drunk with the chance to make a fortune. Many of these homes were moved from Bear Creek in the 1960s and relocated to Dawson City, where some are still inhabited today. Houses were lifted straight off their foundations, their removal dotting the Bear Creek site with uncovered basements similar to mine shafts, making for a treacherous walk through the abandoned town. Countless other houses are entirely overgrown, but some remain intact—sheltered by thick birch shrubbery. Others exist on the periphery as ghostly spectres: a red cottage is shrouded by the trees, past the “river of no return”—as locals call it—its door left unlocked, as if the owners went out for a walk 60 years earlier, only never to return.

The Homecoming, created by Banff-based artist Sarah Fuller while she was in residence at the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture (KIAC), addresses this strange occurrence of transitory living spaces in a remote part of the world. Taking two years to research, this project saw Fuller photographically “excavate” the homes from their second locations in Dawson City back to Bear Creek. Fuller photographed five of these houses and enlarged the prints to almost life scale, printing them on linen, stringing the images from the limbery birch trees in the forest of the ex-townsite.

Referencing Daguerre’s theatrical technique from the Paris Diorama in the mid-1850s, Fuller rendered the images so that, when lit from behind, the translucent windows glow, creating an inverted shadowbox. The midnight sun, which by August is beginning to wane, means that the golden moment for viewing the exhibition is thirty minutes before the sun goes down at 11:30 pm. At this time, the images no longer remain as such, and your eyes adjust to see small, warm homesteads shining through the forest at one another. As if lived in once again, these two-dimensional photographs become spaces, which have life. This is peculiarly comforting, if not slightly eerie. After much research by Fuller using old archival photographs and having conversations with the children who once lived there, the houses are situated in the very place they once stood and the path to view the exhibition is by way of the faint driveway that once looped around these cottages. *The Homecoming* ultimately leaves you with the residual effect of both a familial and familiar nostalgia. An addendum to the main installation of *The Homecoming* is five lenticular images of the homes mounted on signs that Fuller has placed in front of the buildings where they currently stand in Dawson City. Each has a short history of the residence and its connection to Bear Creek, in a style similar to the historical signage that dresses most of the buildings around town.

There is a way in which outdoor exhibitions signify a type of practice that had its grounding in the 1970s in less impressive



Sarah Fuller, *Dubois Residence*, 2013.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CHRISTINE KLASSEN GALLERY

gestures of land art. An outdoor installation project that concerns itself with actual exhibition experimentation is *Intérieur/Extérieur (Interior/Exterior)* (1970) by French artist collective Supports-Surfaces. This group sought to create aleatory arrangements and sites considered “neutral”, that is, spaces beyond the control of cultural institutions and critical mediation.¹ The installation *Intérieur/Extérieur*, staged on the French Mediterranean coast, comprised tests of how art can “interact with natural or social sites, and how these environments condition the works and the viewer’s experience.” This series of exhibitions was initiated as a way to transgress painting and create new sets of relations outside of the institution. While contextually more concerned with social sites, the collective did aim to produce sites of artistic and social exchange that would engage deeply with temporality and history. Similarly, Fuller’s effort — while not a return to nature per se — achieves the mutability of the Supports-Surfaces works from the 1970s, and also manages to open up a broad space — both physically and ephemerally — of interpretation around these images. The provisional nature of both these projects and their transient mise-en-scènes eventuated in plein-air exhibitions that allowed a space of autonomy for each work.

Furthermore, *The Homecoming* engages with history in a flexible way, highlighting the domestic within the cultural detritus of a city whose only story is that of the gold rush. Fuller’s experiment in photographic installation through an alternative instance of site-specificity is separate from anything resembling the white cube. What is successful is her showmanship and nuanced attempt to make an exhibition exist, in all actuality, for a very short and considered time span when the limits of your vision become highly apparent. Nowadays, the artifice of exhibition-making — lights, graphics, temperature, or moreover the extreme control of environment — often leaves little room for happenstance of natural elements. While there are ways many curators and artists circumvent this highly prescribed lineage of working, the outdoors is much more unforgiving to exhibiting anything, even less so for photographs. There are no tricks here: the flat-image plane at sundown quickly transforms into a study in depth, physicality and awareness of one’s own corporeal limits concerning vision.

The site-particularity of *The Homecoming*, the laborious nature of creating these images, as well as the remote location and thus limited audiences for viewing it, is an unavoidable obstacle. As an exhibition, its remarkable negotiation of history, environment and place is highly affecting and theatrical, and certainly an important cursor in exhibiting work *en plein-air*. ×

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Bernice Vincent: *Time and Travels* Museum London, London, Ontario Jul. 6–Sept. 29, 2013 by Bill Clarke

If you were an artist living in Canada in the late-1960s, London, ON was the place to be — at least according to *Art in America*. Published in that magazine’s September/October 1969 issue, art historian Barry Lord’s article, “What London, Ontario Has that Everywhere Else Needs,” describes the city as “younger” and “livelier” than Montreal and Toronto, respectively, and on a par with Vancouver in the range, quality and quantity of work produced by its novelists and poets, filmmakers, visual artists and musicians. Throughout the mid-’60s and early-’70s, the movement known as London Regionalism was defined by artists’ commitment to using their own lives and locales as raw material for artworks, and their belief that culture could thrive outside of major urban centres. Greg Curnoe is the artist most identified with London Regionalism although the movement had several other adherents, including Jack Chambers and Murray Favro in the ’60s and, in the ’70s, Robert Fones, Jamelie Hassan, and painter and sculptor Bernice Vincent.

The retrospective *Time and Travels* brought together works by the Woodstock, ON-born Vincent from the early ’70s to the present. Vincent, who moved to London in the early ’50s for art school, became a key figure in the city’s cultural life in the ’60s; for example, along with Curnoe and Chambers, Vincent helped establish the short-lived Region Gallery, one of the city’s earliest artist-run centres, in 1962. Her first significant solo exhibitions occurred at the Forest City Gallery between 1975 and 1979. A large work from this period, *In July the Sun Sets Thirty-One Times* (1978), encompasses several of the themes, formal arrangements and motifs that appear throughout her *oeuvre* over the next 35 years. Laid out in the format of a monthly calendar are 31 circular renditions of the sky at dusk, in acrylic washes of deep blues and fiery oranges, accompanied by handwritten notes in graphite about the temperature and other atmospheric conditions. In this painting, Vincent picks up on the tropes of international Conceptual Art, such as the use of grid-like organizing structures, serial imagery and the incorporation of text.



Bernice Vincent, *Changing City Series #3, Summer 2007*, sitting on lawn at Museum London near Rhino, London, ON, 2007. Acrylic and graphite on panel, 50.9 x 35.7 cm. IMAGE COURTESY OF MUSEUM LONDON

1 Rosemary O’Neill, “Été 70: The Plein-Air Exhibitions of Supports-Surfaces,” in *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 1:(3) [2012], 349–368.