Tracy Peters: Littoral Landscape
Print on demand publication of the exhibition Tracy Peters: Littoral Landscape
presented at Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg
from March 1 – April 7, 2018

Curated by Jennifer Gibson

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Gallery 1C03
1st floor of Centennial Hall
The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9
CANADA
Phone: 204-786-9253
www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery

Essay: Willow Rector
Introduction: Jennifer Gibson
Graphic design: Susan Chafe
Photography: Ernest Mayer and Tracy Peters
Installation technician: Glen Johnson

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Tracy Peters, essayist Willow Rector, graphic designer Susan Chafe, photographers Ernest Mayer and
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and to all of the aforementioned for their dedication and expertise. Special thanks to Willow Rector for her
comprehensive and illuminating response to this exhibition.

Cover image: Shoreline
Back cover: CHOKE (above) Shallow Deep (below)

Introduction

Gallery 1C03 is pleased to present this publication to document Littoral Landscape, a solo exhibition of new mixed-
media installations by Winnipeg artist Tracy Peters that investigates ever-shifting shorelines of Lake Winnipeg.

Originally a photographer working in traditional darkroom methods, Peters has gained recognition for her immersive
studio practice in which she carries out multi-sensory experiments in constantly changing environments. These
result in site-responsive exhibition installations. Over the last three years, Peters has become particularly interested
in time-based exchanges between natural and human occurrences and their effect on littoral landscapes. In 2015
she undertook a residency at Derry, Northern Ireland where she explored the north Atlantic seacoast. For a second
residency Peters studied Miami’s oceanfront. The past two years have seen her focus closer to home. Between April
and August of 2016, she made several trips to a remote shoreline site north of Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park in
Manitoba. While there, she used audio, video and light sensitive photographic paper to record changes at a limestone
beach beginning with spring thaw and continuing as weather conditions evolved over the course of the following
five months. Last summer, Peters shifted her concentration further south on Lake Winnipeg’s western edge to the
area of Dunnottar and the seasonal pole piers that cottagers and the municipality insert along the shore.

Littoral Landscape offered gallery visitors an immersive experience with four sculptural and videos installations that
use photographic processes as their starting point. Peters’ colleague, writer and artist Willow Rector, herself having
created photographic works that focus on Lake Winnipeg, is well-positioned to write a response to this exhibition.
Rector has crafted a thorough and sensitive interpretation of Littoral Landscape, revealing many layers of meaning
behind Peters’ works.

From the silent sentinels that make up Pier, to the intimate viewing experience that characterizes Shallow Deep
and CHOKE, to the sweeping and mesmerizing panoramic Shoreline installation that fills the gallery’s back wall,
Peters weaves a common thread throughout her practice. Her curiosity compels her to study the behavior and
emotive power of eroding landscapes, whether they exist at the periphery where urban and rural environments
meet or at the boundary of bodies of water and landforms as in Littoral Landscape. Her poetic works respond to
the poignancy of these environments and urge us to consider our responsibility to protect them.

Jennifer Gibson
Director/Curator, Gallery 1C03
A Land to Light On:  
The Littoral Landscapes of Tracy Peters

Nature is not something that can be seen by the eye alone – it lies also within the soul, its pictures seen in the inner eye.  
Edvard Munch

The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously.  

Have you ever wanted to alter time? Do you long to change an event in the past, or simply experience it once again? Have you ever been impatient with life in the present, wishing you could bound ahead and revel in the fulfilled promises of the future? Indeed, much of our daily lives are lived balancing on the thin edge between past and future, the present an ephemeral moment, constantly fleeting, running like water through one’s fingers. These moments of transition are not limited to human experience, but also exist in the landscape. Littoral zones, “areas on the edges of a water body where the terrestrial environment transitions to the aquatic environment,” embody both confluence and conflict. While they are regions productive of heightened biodiversity, this affluence also draws human interest, resulting in conflict between incursive human behaviors and natural ecosystems. In Littoral Landscape, Tracy Peters deftly walks the thin line between natural and incursive ecosystems by exploring the littorality of the shores of Lake Winnipeg. The result of a two-year study that incorporates equal portions of art, science, and photography, the exhibition is an eloquent meditation on the multifaceted relationship between humans and the Lake in the early twenty-first century.

This meditation begins with a journey iterative of Peters’ numerous trips to a stone beach on Lake Winnipeg. Upon entering the Gallery, the viewer is immediately aware of Shoreline, a mixed media video installation depicting waves crashing upon a sculptural stone shoreline which spans the rear wall of the gallery.
The effect is arresting, hypnotic, and one’s immediate desire is to reach that shore. Pier, a rectangular grouping of twelve, eight foot tall cylinders of fibre-based photographic paper located immediately by the doorway, offers a quiet counterpoint. The installation echoes the myriad of traditional wooden pole piers that have dotted the southern shores of Lake Winnipeg since the early twentieth century. Peters is intrigued by the ways these piers re-shape the natural littoral zones of the lake, subverting the organic terrain which has adapted to repel incursive species by introducing a human-made littoral zone. How do these two littoral zones coexist?

For an installation of its size, Pier is remarkably fragile. Although each pole bears the mark of a tideline acquired when Peters dipped it into the Lake, these records—the memories of wind and wave—are as ephemeral as the forces that engraved them. After obtaining these images, Peters abstained from ‘fixing’ the paper to permanently preserve them. Thus, the ambient light of the gallery will continue to alter the paper, metaphorically ‘linking the photographic materials and their watermarks to the forever changing conditions of the Lake itself.’

The gradual evaporation of the tidelines alerts one to another significant absence: function. Rather than rooting a strong and vibrant structure, these poles are made of paper and suspended in air. The solid wood of the original pier has been pulverized and pressed, leaving the empty ‘skins’ of the trees behind. The stones beneath their footings have shifted, the Lake has receded, leaving them sighing in the breeze, longing for the caress of water. Literally, this Pier cannot bear weight, cannot cross the expanse of space to reach the Shoreline opposite. It reaches out, seeking to penetrate the water once more, and fails.

Other forms of incursion are more intimately explored in CHOKE and Shallow Deep, which act as a littoral zone, spanning the gap between Pier and Shoreline. These two videos explore the porous relationship between human and geological bodies by documenting disruptions in the very intimate act of breathing. The aesthetic and installation choices informing these works create an oasis of privacy where it is possible to hear yourself breathe, just as your eyes and ears are also registering the “breathing” of ice and stone.

CHOKE is a poetic documentation of the Lake’s suffocation, caused by an infection of its ‘skin.’ Throughout her artistic career, Peters has been continuously fascinated by the porosity of “architectural skins” such as walls. CHOKE builds upon the metaphor of wall/ boundary as skin by exploring it in the context of the littoral zone that envelopes the Lake in winter: ice. As the skin of ice ominously cracks and groans, beautiful, but deadly, algae blooms reach up from the deep, literally choking the ice, robbing it of all available oxygen, causing it to dehydrate, crumble and decay. The equilibrium of the Lake has been disturbed, its skin of ice gashed and gasping, exposing the invasive ecosystem rolling beneath. The video ends with a snap of black screen. The ice has broken; we are drowning in the fathomless deep.
On a conceptual level, Shoreline is an elegant culmination of many of the core interests that animate Peters’ art: sand, stone, and surf, rhythmically integrating viewer and art. The fight and might, the innate sublimity, of Lake Winnipeg is the backbone of Shoreline, a work of such power and strength that literally propels itself off of the wall. Yet, its power is not comprised of anger or violence, it is the meditative power of a vast, ancient body breathing. As one initially sits in front of the installation, the video and audio components of the work capture most of your attention. As the video loop advances, the waves become more turbulent, crashing through the wall, over the sculptural stone beach, and into the gallery itself. The subject/object division that traditionally characterizes the relationship between viewers and art is dashed upon the stones. The vast ridges of the stone beach carved by the Lake have invaded the gallery floor. The dynamic interaction between the two-dimensional cinematic waves and the sculptural stone ridges pushes and pulls the eye through creation and erosion, Peters finds the poetry in the landscape and in art.

Standing at the Shoreline, an elusive band of light appears where wave embraces shore; land washes into body, body becomes land.

Willow Rector

1 Nora Casson. “Opening Remarks,” Opening of Littoral Landscape by Tracy Peters, Gallery 1C01, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, 01 March 2018.
2 The original piers were designed at a height of approximately 15 feet, tall enough to accommodate the fluctuating tides of the lake while safely ferrying swimmers and boaters across the rocky beaches and into deeper water.
3 For Peters, “architecture embodies both a structure and a living system.” She contends that “human built structures...like the pier...are always changing and breaking down in a process that corresponds with an eroding landscape or fragile ecosystem.” (Tracy Peters, email to the author, 19 February 2018.)
4 Peters, email to the author, 19 February 2018.
5 These two continuous loop videos are shown on 10” tablets recessed into 36” tall plinths, accompanied by headphones. The plinths are centered on each of the side walls of the gallery, equidistant between Pier and Shoreline.
6 This installation is a fictional depiction of algae blooms that occur when the winter ice melts and floods the dormant algae trapped below the surface with fresh oxygen and sunlight. It is the product of the merger of two videos. The first captured the sound of the ice cracking and the movement of the meltwater on the ice. Then Peters placed photographic paper on the ice and filmed it while the sunlight and meltwater made images upon it. The green tones of the film were added during the editing process. No actual algae was present. (Tracy Peters, interview with Willow Rector, Winnipeg, 06 March 2018.)
7 Peters’ interest in “architectural skin” links much of her earlier work to Littoral Landscape. Arguably, this interest first became apparent in 2009 in her work entitled Artifact: Aftermath in which she explored the ways that burned camera film acted as a metaphor for human skin. She continued to deepen her exploration through Existence (2011), SHED (2012), SHED: Implant (2013), SHED: Unusual Migration (2014), and Tide Land (2015). For Peters, the concept of ‘architectural skin’ highlights the links between “the body, buildings, and the natural environment” as all of these architectural systems have outer layers of material that serve to both encase and protect inner space. As she discovered in her research for this exhibition, these skins also act as littoral zones, powerful sites of exchange, erosion, and growth.
8 Peters describes Shoreline as “a mixed media installation comprised of video, audio, and photo-based sculpture.” The sculpture consists of a series of sandbags, filled with glacial sand, that are stacked in a “disorderly manner” along the entire 18’ width of the gallery’s rear wall. The bags themselves are printed with “digital images of stones photographed on an ancient stone beach.” The overall effect invokes the stone ridges formed by the Lake at the water’s edge. The top half of the rear wall of the gallery is black, “suggesting infinite space.” A “looping video of turbulent waves” recorded by Peters “projects onto the lower half of the back wall, as well as the sandbags, to create a three-dimensional video installation.” (Tracy Peters, email to the author, 22 February 2018.)
9 Peters is very interested by metaphorical richness of the concepts of biological and geological porosity. In short, she describes porosity in regard to “every living entity that breathes,” as the natural process wherein “everything that goes in, comes out” whether that is in its original form, or some other metabolized form. (Tracy Peters, interview with Willow Rector, Winnipeg, 06 March 2018.)
10 A palimpsest is a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for other writing, but of which traces remain. An excellent study of the influence of this concept on Peters’ SHED installation has been written by Mary Reid.
11 A haptic landscape is one in which the experience of geological features occurs through touch and bodily sensations.
12 Tracy Peters, email to the author, 19 February 2018.
13 Lochman 29.
Bibliography


"A Developing Situation". Winnipeg Free Press. 19 September 2013:7.


Peters, Tracy. Personal Interview. 06 March 2018.

"Re: Things to Chew On." Email to the author. 19 February 2018.

"Re: Exhibition Details." Email to the author. 22 February 2018.


List of Works
Measurements are height x length x width.

CHORE, 2018
HD video (1:44 looped) in pedestal
36” x 15” x 15”

Shallow Deep, 2016
HD video (0:53 looped) in pedestal
36” x 15” x 15”

Pier, 2018
12 pier poles made of fibre-based photographic paper, polyethylene foam each measuring 96” x 3.5” x 3.5”

Shoreline, 2018
digital photographs printed on bags of recycled polyester, sand, cable ties, video projection approximately 48” x 224” x 12”

About the Artist
Tracy Peters is a Winnipeg-based multidisciplinary artist who examines the interactions between organic and human-built environments. In her site-responsive studio practice, she engages with time, space, light and weather to record changes in eroding landscapes. Many years of darkroom practice initiated her research into fragile materials and the emotive power of surfaces, resulting in immersive installations and videos that are largely based in the photographic process. Peters has been awarded grants from the Manitoba Arts Council and the Winnipeg Arts Council, as well as residencies that include a partnership between Void Gallery and the Social Studios and Gallery in Derry, Northern Ireland, the Deep Bay Residency program in Riding Mountain National Park, Canada, and the ArtCenter/South Florida-MAWA artist exchange program in Miami Beach, FL. Her work has exhibited across Canada and in Europe. Her website is https://www.tracypeters.ca/.

About the Essayist
Willow Rector is a Winnipeg-based visual artist, writer, and former university educator, who graduated with degrees in English Literature from the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. Her visual arts practice encompasses the seemingly disparate mediums of hand embroidery, photography, and installation. Her collection of hand-embroidered animal pelts, TRAPPED, has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Yukon Arts Centre (2017) and Gallery 1C03 (2014), and has also been featured in various group exhibitions across Canada. She has previously written on fine art for MAWA and aceart’s Paperwait. Her website is https://www.willowrector.com/.