



Feature – Life Informs Art



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Fraserwood Ave., Apt #2, Factory Roof

The Intersection of Public and Private

By Henny Buffinga

Cheryl Pagurek has always been interested in the ways we experience the world around us, and the line that is drawn between public and private life. An Ottawa artist specializing in visual art, her work over the years has explored that dichotomy, including a series called Open House for which she built installations of domestic rooms and installed them in public sites.

“That idea of how the public and domestic realms intersect has been present throughout my career,” says Pagurek. “The way that I work changed as I had children. I had this idea that the baby would stay in the playpen as I worked, and that’s not what happened at all. What I realized when I moved back to Ottawa was that I would need a studio space in my home, because I needed to be able to work with whatever time was available, whether that was in the middle of the night or in the middle of the day.”

Ottawa has been good to Pagurek, she says, as she has received a number of grants over the years for her work. “When my kids were young, I used a lot of my grant money for childcare and babysitting so that I had time to work, so that was really key to me being able to practice,” she explains.

With beginnings in sculpture, it was photographing her Open House concepts that set her on the path of photo and video installations. Her Connect exhibit, appearing at the Ottawa Art Gallery this spring, explores how technology frames our interaction with the



world around us. The imagery in the installation comes from news footage about real-world events, so you experience these images through the lens of your own body as you move inside the installation, viewing the images through your own shadow. The sound in the installation increases in volume the closer you are to the screen, creating a sense of urgency, and each experience is unique depending on if you enter the installation alone or in a group, as well as how you choose to interact with it.

Cheryl Pagurek Photo and Video Artist. City Hall Art Gallery, Longevity

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"I was hoping people would share in my explorations of how we interact with the world, and one of the things with the ways we are communicating right now is that they are not transparent—technology frames everything we do," she explains. "For example, if you are a Twitter user, your statements are limited to a certain number of characters, or if you're on Facebook, you have a certain number of emotions to choose to react to something... If you're reading news online or on TV, it's framed by the presentation. One of the things I'm more aware of now—and I hope other people are becoming more aware of—is the way we use technology frames the way we view the world around us. With this installation, it's your own body that frames the way you interact, and that's a more active experience while usually we are more passive users of technology."

As an Ottawa artist, Pagurek says the community here is very supportive, and opportunities for women are abundant. "In terms of public art, there have been more and more female artists that have won those commissions, so you see a lot more public art that's being done by women," she says. "There are many people who don't necessarily go into galleries, so the way they experience art is in the public realm."

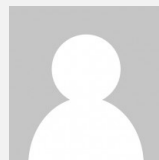
When asked about how being a woman and a mother has influenced her art, she says: "It's hard to know what affects what in one's life—does the art affect my life, or does my life affect my art? I think it's a flow back and forth."

Exhibit

Cheryl Pagurek: Connect

April 12 – August 11, 2019, at the Ottawa Art Gallery

cherylpagurek.com



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