



Detail of "Active Patience" 2017

Fiercely Open / John Graham

Exhibition:

October 19 - November 30, 2018

Opening Reception and Artist Talk:

October 27, 7:00PM - 9:00PM



Alberta Printmakers Main Space Gallery
4025 4 Street SE, Calgary AB

Fiercely Open

John Graham

Essay by Shaun Crawford

The first word that comes to mind upon viewing John Graham's series, *Fiercely Open* is "vulnerability." His pieces contain such a potent vulnerability that simply viewing them is a vulnerable experience for the audience. A closer look at the pieces reveals a common theme - the occurrence of relationships in the content and the collages. A character with a tree. A pair of pagan-like figures engaging one another. And in these relationships, and in these prints, there is a longing for something. Connection. Discovery. Truth. Sometimes sought after playfully, and sometimes just yearned for in something like silence. And the fulfillment of that longing is available through the act of openness. And the opening of one's self is a sensation that lives at the very core of vulnerability. Where most things worth having are found. And that is when it becomes clear that John Graham's work is indeed printmaking poetry. And that his show could bare no fitter title than *Fiercely Open*.

John Graham describes himself as an "ever-diversifying" artist, and rightly so. His practise ranges from printmaking and painting to installation work and experimental independent films. Graham began his professional career in the world of architecture before transitioning into creating visual art. He matched his Bachelor of Environmental Studies and Master of Architecture from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Fine Art from Concordia University and a Master of Fine Art from the University of Oregon. And since that shift into visual art, Graham has compiled a body of work that includes 7 short experimental films screened at over 120 international film festivals and group, duo, and solo shows exhibited around the world and too abundant to list. His work can be found in several public and private collections across Canada and the U.S. and he currently teaches Printmaking & Digital Media at the University of Saskatchewan.

Look too quickly at the pieces contained in *Fiercely Open* and it may merely recall imagery from the first season of *True Detective*, or serve as a reminder that humans are actually just a different species of animal.

But as much as it seems like the human figures are wearing masks - this is actually humanity with the masks removed. Symbolic characters pulled from dreamscapes and mythology. For even upon a short viewing it is clear that John Graham's work is not of this world. It is conjured by the imagination or rescued from the recesses of the subconscious, a realm so deep and convoluted that Jungians have been the only group brave enough to explore there since early humankind first pressed their palms to stone. Such bravery is required in the viewer. To accept the call. To open themselves to the underbelly of the psyche, a place that cannot help but be ruled by truth. And once that threshold is crossed, perhaps there is nothing to fear at all. Some of these figures almost look inviting, like a couple of people that would be a pleasure to spend time with - regardless of their animal heads. Because despite superficial first impressions, and the hidden depths from which they come, this is a body of work that is so innately human.

In his Artist Statement, Graham shares his hope, "that visitors will not try to deconstruct these visions with dismissive rationalizations." I sincerely hope that this essay has not crossed that line. Not undermined the invitation to imagine. He explains that, "The experience of this work is not intended to appease the conscious mind but to challenge it." And there is certainly no solace here. At least none that is easily found. It is an open offer to willingly explore a different world. Not a new world, but a hidden one. The one we carry deep within, and within, and within. A realm where humankind once wandered more freely, where interpretations were attempted to account for features of this world such as the existence of the wolf or the creation of the sun, and where we can still contemplate if we choose. In the end, Graham's work is a challenge to make one of the most valuable discoveries that our experiences have to offer. What Graham very aptly identifies as, "the authentic self."

Writer Biography

Shaun Crawford is an award winning writer and filmmaker based out of Calgary, Alberta. He studied screenwriting at the Vancouver Film School and holds a Bachelors of Education from the University of Alberta. His work has aired on CBC, HBO, The Movie Network, has been distributed worldwide by Sony, and has screened at festivals in Canada and the US. Shaun has most recently worked as an augmented reality and virtual reality content creator. He is a passionate supporter of dreamchasers and believes in the capacity of the arts to explore the human experience.

Artist Biography

John Graham is a multidisciplinary artist based in Saskatoon, Canada where he teaches Printmaking & Digital Media at the University of Saskatchewan. John started his professional creative life by studying architecture and working as an architect. He later shifted his artistic focus to study and create visual art in multiple media. His ever-diversifying art practice includes print media, artist's books, drawing, painting, installations, and independent filmmaking. His visual art has been widely exhibited in North America, Asia and Europe. His 7 short experimental films have been screened at over 120 international film festivals, gallery venues and awards ceremonies in 26 countries. John has participated in artist residencies worldwide and has been the recipient of multiple awards, grants, fellowships and prizes in both visual art and film. His artwork has been acquired by numerable public and private art collections. This includes the art collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada Council Art Bank, Loto-Quebec Corporation, National Bank of Canada, National Library of Canada, National Library of Quebec,

Alberta Printmakers (A/P) is a non-profit, artist-run centre founded in 1989 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The organization's goals are to increase public awareness of print media, to engage a diverse audience, to provide resources for the artistic community and production facilities for printmaking.

A/P has an open membership, and is governed by a board of directors. Management and administration of A/P's activities are the responsibilities of its Directors, who reach out to volunteers in accomplishing A/P's goals. A/P also hosts residency and summer student programs.

A/P thanks our funders:



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