

Time-Lapse: *Posthumous Conversations* A Geoff McMurchy Retrospective

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



CURATED BY
Yuri Arajs
SD Holman
Persimmon Blackbridge

October 29 | 2020 – January 23 | 2021

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A Geoff McMurchy Retrospective

Geoff McMurchy

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Table of Contents

Preface by SD Holman, Artistic Director 1

Curatorial Statement3

Time-Lapse: Posthumous Conversations, Catalogue.....5

The Best Junk by Persimmon Blackbridge, Curator 26

Untitled (Essay) by Yuri Araj, Curator35

Heavenly Beauty: Geoff’s life in art by Paula Jardine38

Thank You Geoff by David Roche 41

Artist and Curator Biographies 42

Time-Lapse: Posthumous Conversations, Plate List..... 45

SUM gallery is located on the sovereign, unceded land of the **xwməθkwəy̓əm** (Musqueam), **Skwxwú7mesh** (Squamish) and **səlilwəta’7ɬ** (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. We ask you to join us in acknowledging the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh communities, their elders both past and present, as well as future generations. SUM also acknowledges that it was founded upon exclusions and erasures of many Indigenous peoples, including those on whose land we are located. We are committed to continued work dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. We ask that you join us in this commitment to action, and take that commitment with you beyond this time and space and into your daily lives.

Preface

BY SD Holman, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Geoff McMurchy was a disabled queer artist who changed the lives of many with his activism and mentorship.

As I write this foreword, I stumble upon my own disability—dyslexia. I harrowingly extract each word, no, each letter from my backwards brain. Society teaches me to hide this, as it teaches me to hide my queerness. But I think the world is more willing to speak of their unseen disabilities because of the work Geoff did.

We three curators are all disabled queer artists. We worked together with an ease of mutual understanding, not having to explain why we were amazingly talented at one thing, yet unable to do something else that to the *normal* person should be easy. We flowed with our own special super powers: vision, shape, precision. I would like to think it would have made Geoff happy that he helped create a space where people like us could thrive, then in turn bring his work to life in this show.

Geoff and I met way back in the 80’s when he was a meter maid and I was his Handydart driver. Then later we worked together as artists

and arts administrators. When Geoff was Artistic Director at Kickstart Disability Arts, I was curated into several shows. When Geoff left Kickstart to focus on art, I curated him into the 2015 Queer Arts Festival. He was, according to his artist statement, “working around concepts of lineage (comparing blood family heritage and legacies within chosen communities), storylines (exploring how our personal stories and myths—including lies—shape the people we become) and ‘lines in the sand’ (what conditions can compel one to take up, or resume, political action).”

Then Geoff went into hospital, leaving the work unfinished. Then, a few days before the show opened, he died. Where his work was to hang, I kept a bare white wall, with his artist statement in the middle of it and a bio, with a video of him dancing on a monitor beside it.

I didn’t know him well, but I feel a connection to Geoff. Our trajectories followed some of the same paths. Two queer artists with disabilities who, when we found there was not much of a place for us, built those places. Artists who became administrators so that other artists might not have to hit the same walls. Our

purpose was analogous: Geoff wanted to elevate disability art and artists as I want to do the same for queer art and artists. Similar disruptions from a different margin.

Queerness and disability intersect, and they intersect with all other kinds of identity: we are everywhere. But we most often don't have role models or people who share our experiences in our families of origin. To find others like us, to learn how to be in the world and how to deal with the bullshit the world slings at us, we have to find (or make) community/family.

I talk a lot here at SUM about how artists who speak our queerness constantly have to prove ourselves worthy. Geoff said piss on pity, he wanted his art, disability art, to be considered on the same level as all art. For both queers and disabled folks, the price of being considered *real* artists is often erasing our difference and staying silent about our lives. I don't want us to be erased and assumed out of existence. As composer Barry Truax wrote, "Art is said to mirror society, but if you look in the mirror and see no reflection, the implicit message is that you don't exist."¹

I have been thinking lately about reframing marginalization in terms of marginalia: speaking from the margins, embellishing the area outside

of what is considered the mainstream or normal, valorizing the edges as a vantage point for astute perspective and creative self-authorship, rather than merely a place of exclusion. And embellishments are so gay—in a good way of course, I don't have to explain that to you, do I, Dear Reader?

Geoff's work rejoices in the margins; his marginalia is rowdy and exuberant. And so from the margins, I encourage you to sit with this work. Read the perceptive, illuminating, multifaceted essays by Yuri Araj, Persimmon Blackbridge, Paula Jardine, David Roche, brilliant minds and artists who all knew and worked with Geoff in different ways. I hope the work and their words are as meaningful and transformative for you as they have been for me.

Special thanks to those who helped make the exhibition possible, including but not limited to: my Fabulous designer Odette Hidalgo, Israt Taslim and Ben Siegl for compiling this catalogue, Kait Blake, Linde Zingaro, Elizabeth Shefrin, Hieu Nguyen, Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture, Night for All Souls, The Lab, Capital Salvage, all of my wonderful staff at SUM gallery.

And, of course, Geoff, for your beautiful life and work, the *raison d'être* for the *Time-Lapse* exhibition and catalogue.

Time-Lapse: *Posthumous Conversations* A Geoff McMurchy Retrospective

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Artist/Visionary Geoff McMurchy (1955–2015) was a legend in the world of Canadian disability arts and culture. So many people knew him, so many people have life changing stories about him. He worked in visual art and dance, while living a life that connected him to people through collaboration, activism, advocacy and research.

This collection is primarily McMurchy's visual art and related ephemera. This was where he truly shone and we have some of his best work to share with you. These works give insight into the perspective of a fiercely independent artist living with a disability: his obsessions, desires and truths. This is a unique perspective, a queer perspective, one that isn't often given a platform.

¹ Barry Truax, *Homoeroticism and Electroacoustic Music: Absence and Personal Voice*, Journal of Organised Sound 8, no. 1, (April 2003): 117-124.

McMurchy's art is baroque, overflowing with repurposed junk: chaos bent to his formal pursuits. From sculptural assemblages to shadow boxes to his own living environment, he played with perception and assumption in ways that are quintessentially disability art. McMurchy's death was sudden and unexpected. Documenting where his sold works went was one of those things he might have gotten around to one day. His art is scattered, as is his memory. This exhibit includes many of his finest pieces and lacks others: another absence in a show full of absence.

This exhibit is built on absence, and on presence and the conversations between the two. The backbone of this show is McMurchy's existing art, found and unfound. Supporting that core are post-mortem conversations with disabled artists SD Holman and Persimmon Blackbridge. 20 days after McMurchy's death, Holman (still living with their wife's death) photographed the riotous installation that was his home. For 4 days they lived in his apartment (so full of him and so empty), listening to his life's aesthetic, and answering frame by frame. Blackbridge collaborated with McMurchy in life and continued in death, as she assembled unfinished pieces—working in the classic role of artist's assistant: his ideas, her hands. Seeking direction from his memory and from the work he left behind, she also combined items from his

iconic collections into the art that might have been, speaking always to his sly humour and reverent exuberance.

This exhibit remembers, honours and celebrates McMurchy at the same time as it reflects the emergence of a vibrant disability arts movement in BC, for which he was a primary architect.

Yuri Arajs
SD Holman
Persimmon Blackbridge
2020

Time-Lapse: *Posthumous Conversations* A Geoff McMurchy Retrospective

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Plate 1: Geoff McMurchy,
Hanging Up My Wings, circa
2015. Aluminum car grille,
feathers, 50" x 17" x 4"

Facing page

Plate 2: Geoff McMurchy,
Prayer Wheel, date unknown.
Assemblage sculpture;
repurposed metal,
bicycle wheels, lightbulbs,
66" x 23" x 23"



Plate 3: Geoff McMurchy,
My Service Griffon, 2013.
Assemblage sculpture;
repurposed wood, glass,
metal, 50" x 24" x 35"



Facing page

Plate 4: Geoff McMurchy,
Wind Machine, date unknown.
Assemblage sculpture; metal
crate, 31" x 21" x 10"

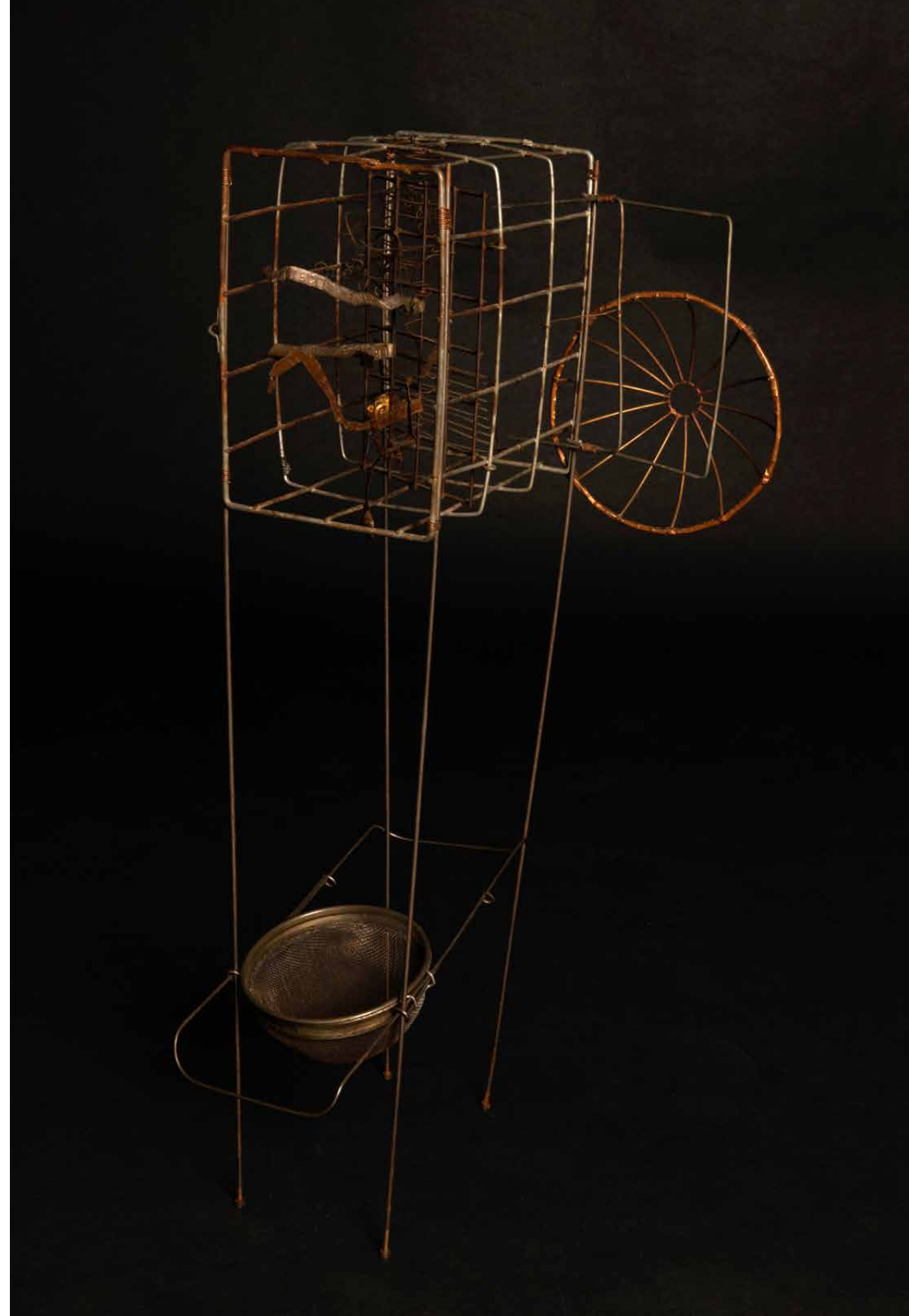


Plate 5: Geoff McMurchy, *Beaters*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; egg beaters, various sizes

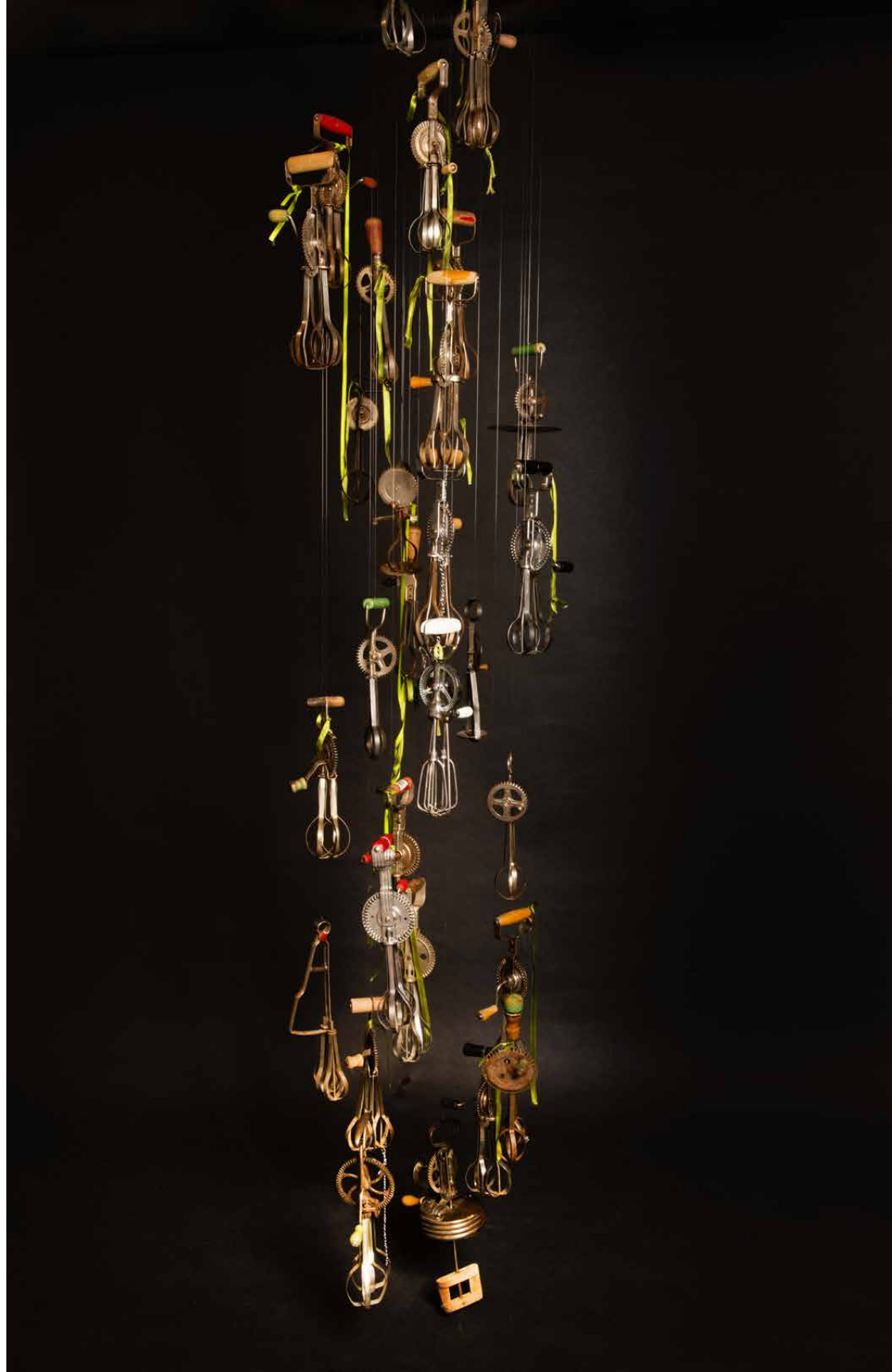


Plate 6: Geoff McMurchy, *Double Helix*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; copper pipe, industrial culinary mixers, 72" x 15" x 7"





Plate 7: Geoff McMurchy,
The Light Is Implied, date unknown.
Assemblage sculpture; wood,
lightbulb, metal, spring, 15" x 6" x 5"



Plate 8: Geoff McMurchy, *Digger 1*, date unknown.
Assemblage sculpture; metal springs, toy backhoe bucket,
14" x 5" x 7" Geoff McMurchy, *Digger 2*, date unknown.
Assemblage sculpture; metal springs, toy backhoe bucket,
14" x 5" x 6"



Plate 9: Left to right

Geoff McMurchy, *Vortex of Everything*, date unknown.

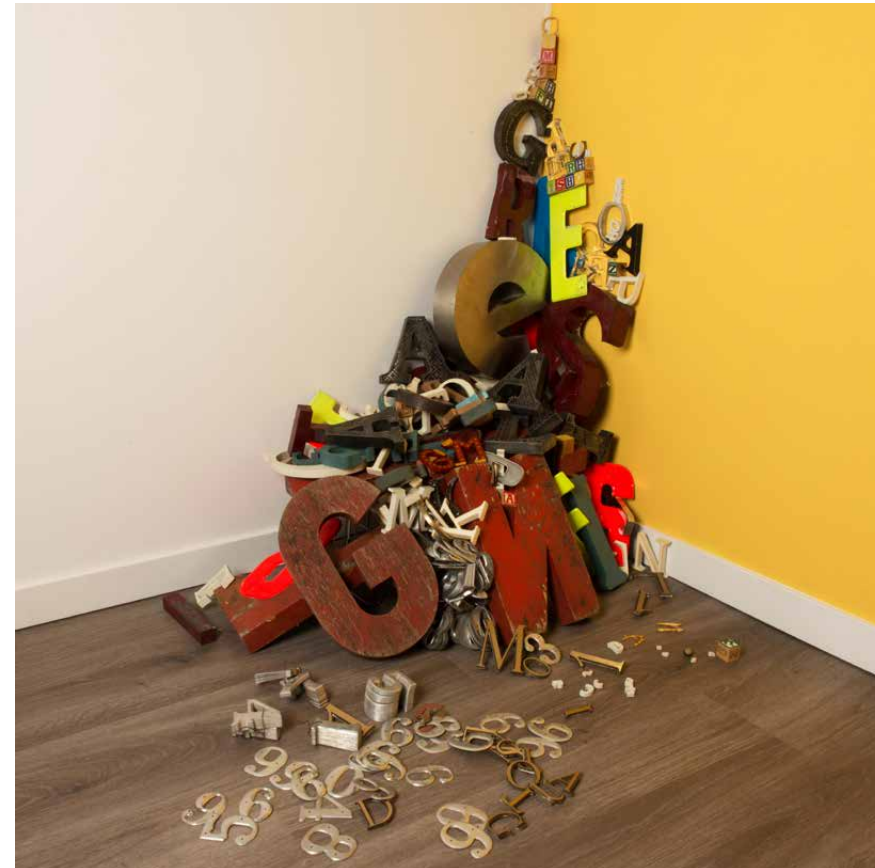
Assemblage sculpture; metal, feathers, wood,
24" x 7" x 7"

Geoff McMurchy, *Lightbulb Candle*, date unknown.

Assemblage sculpture; glass light bulb, wood, metal, fibres,
7" x 3" x 4"

Geoff McMurchy, *Crow Shaker*, date unknown. Assemblage
sculpture; feathers, metallic shaker, 15" x 12" x 6"

Geoff McMurchy, *Spring Salad*, date unknown. Assemblage
sculpture; metal colander, steel shavings, 13" x 8" x 8"



Left to right

Plate 10: Geoff McMurchy, *Letters*, 2020. Assemblage
sculpture; wooden and metal letters, various sizes

Plate 11: Geoff McMurchy, *Band From Hell*, 2013.

Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, fabric, clay,
23" x 15.5" x 20"



Page 16

Plate 12: Geoff McMurchy, *Sink Your Teeth*, 2020.
Assemblage sculpture; wooden box, metal, plastic, bone,
printed ephemera, 30" x 25" x 5"

Page 17

Plate 13: Geoff McMurchy, *So Many Recipes*, 2015.
Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, wire, printed and
written ephemera, 20" x 15" x 20"

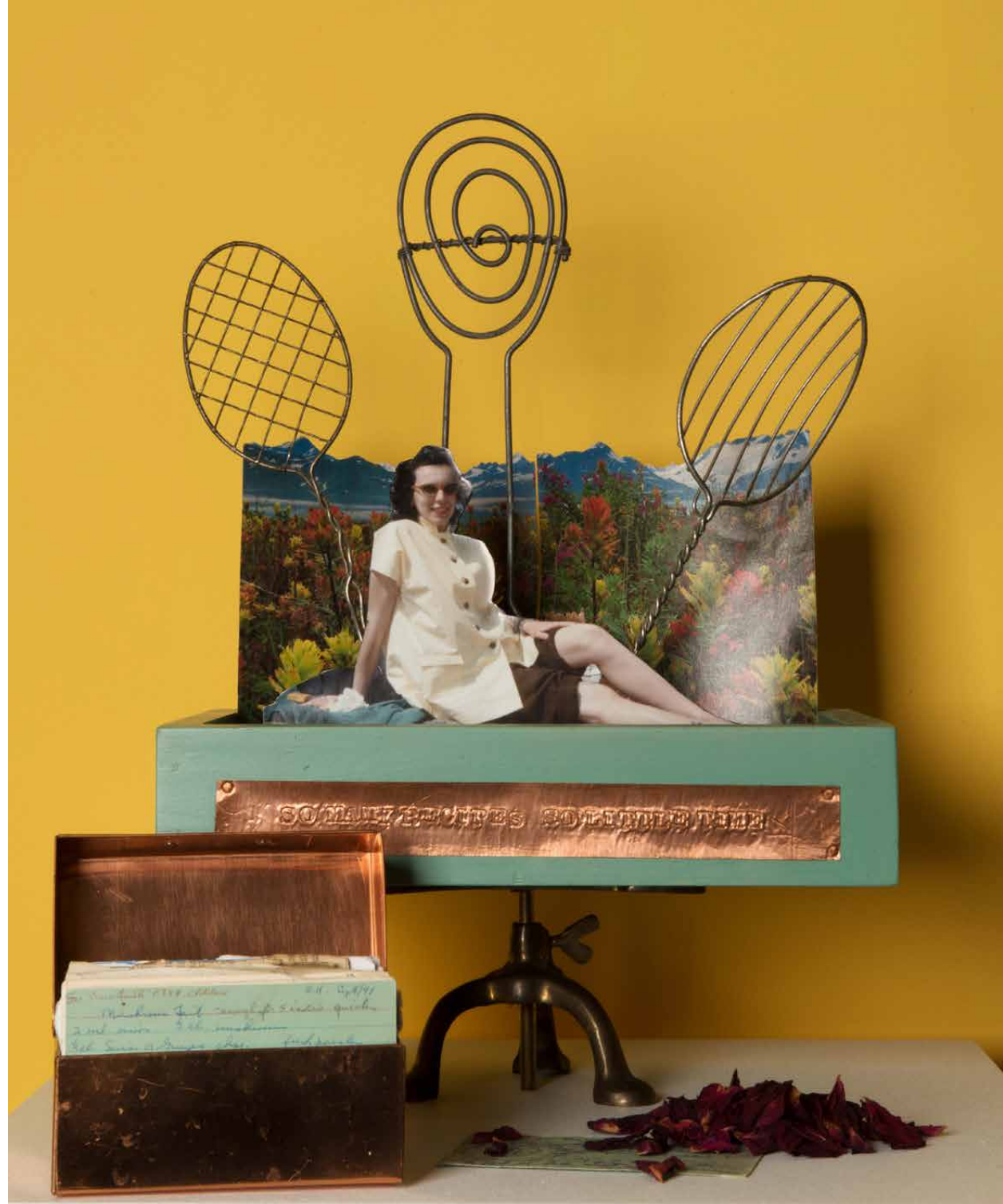




Plate 14: Geoff McMurphy, *Ancestors*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, ceramic, plastic, bone, paper, photos, 36" x 30" x 5"

Facing page

Plate 15: Geoff McMurphy, *Badlands* (unfinished), 2015. Assemblage sculpture; wooden box, vials, small metal objects, bone, egg shells, photographs, metal pins, 17" x 12" x 4", 15" x 15"





Plate 16: Geoff McMurchy, *Would You Like to See My Feather Box*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; cigar box, bones, wire, feathers, Polaroid photographs, sea glass, 12" x 9" x 7"



Top left

Plate 17: Geoff McMurchy, *Head Dress*, Garden Fairy / PRIDE outfit, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture (wearable); feathers and fibres

Bottom left

Plate 18: Geoff McMurchy, *Apron and Tutu*, Garden Fairy / PRIDE outfit, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture (wearable); astroturf skirt, tutu

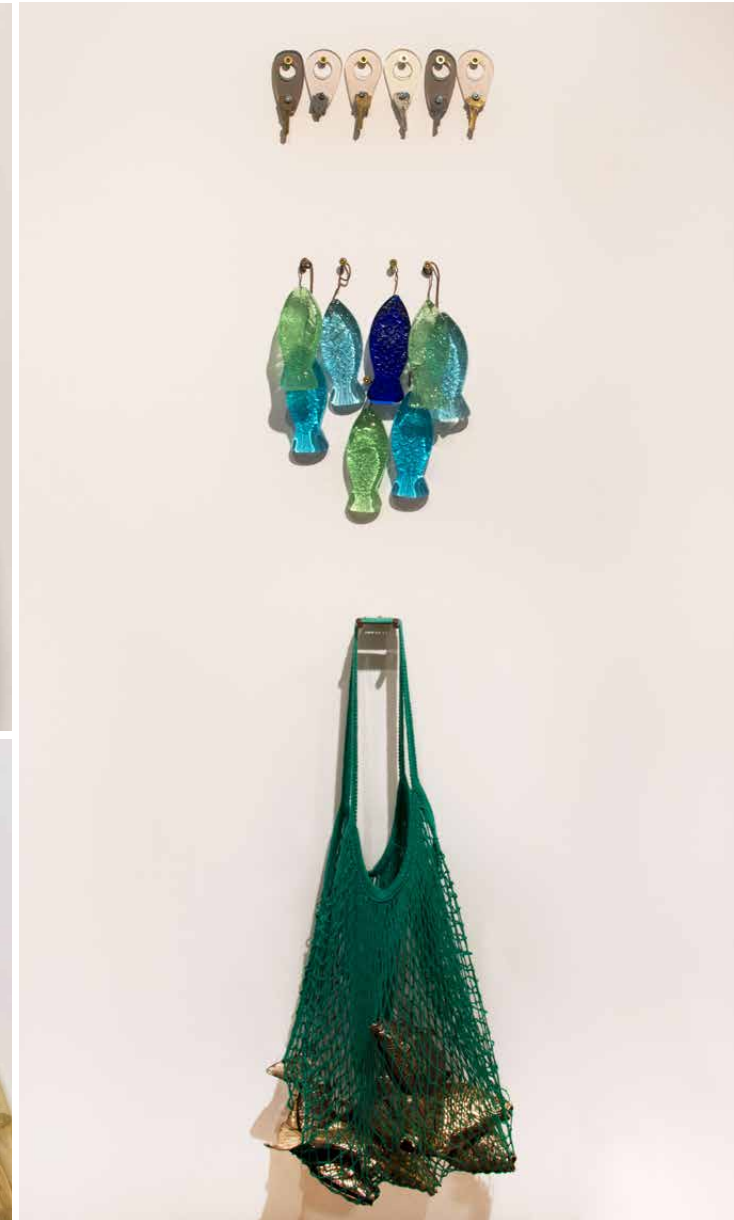


Plate 19 : Geoff McMurchy, *Fishes*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal, glass, plastic fabric, 59" x 13" x 9"

Plate 20: Geoff McMurchy, *Snakes*, 1980-2015.
Assemblage sculpture; wooden, plastic and ceramic snakes, various sizes

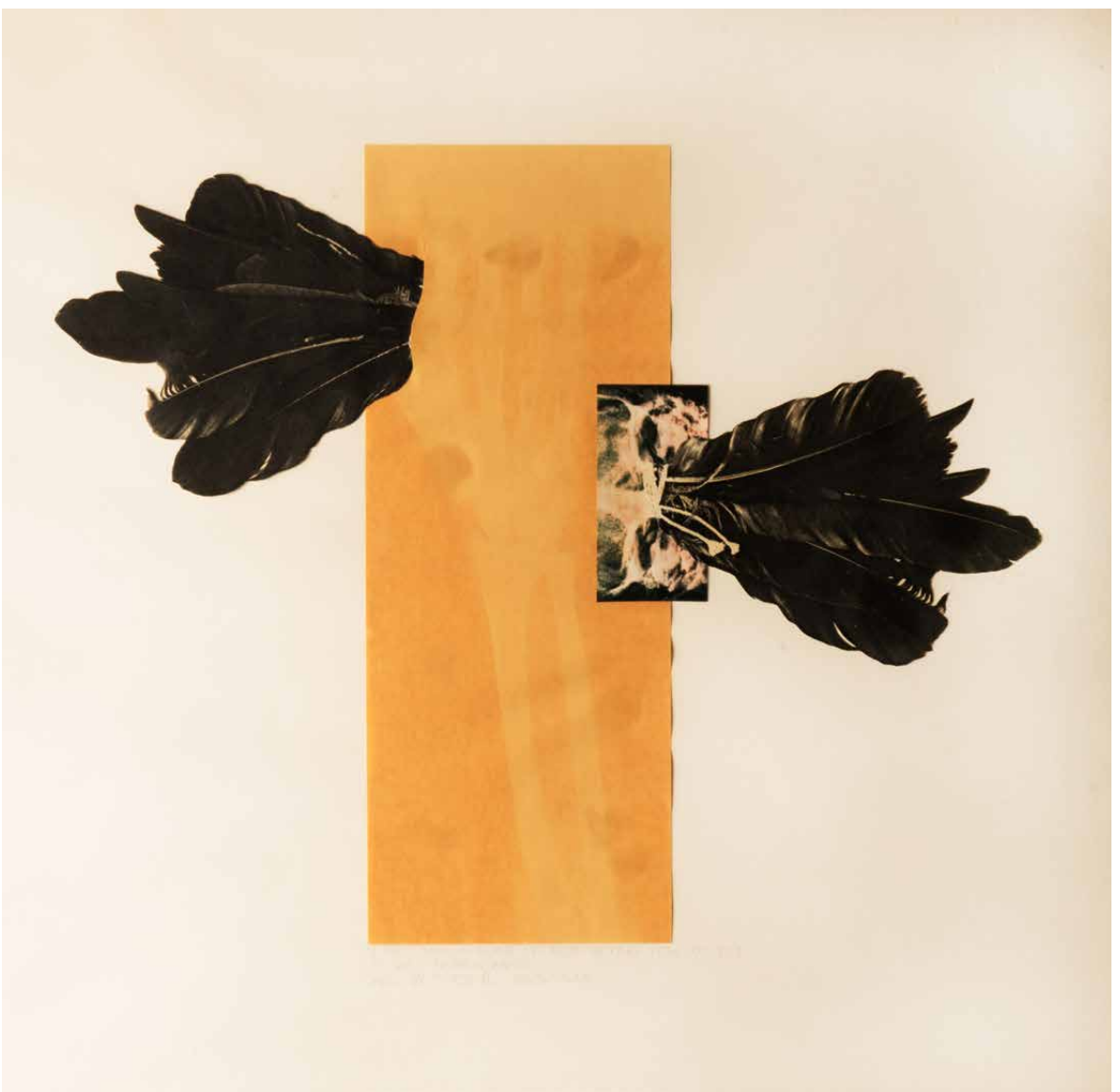


Plate 21: Geoff McMurchy, *Evidence of a Garden/Plant Tags*, 1980-2015.
Assemblage sculpture; wood, paint, plastic and paper plant tags, 35" x 36" x 12"

Plate 22:
Geoff McMurchy,
X-ray Vision,
circa 1980. Print,
12.5" x 15"



Top
Plate 23: Geoff McMurchy, *Pure*, 1979.
Photographic print, 13.875" x 9.5"



Bottom
Plate 24: Geoff McMurchy,
Not Fade Away, 1979. Assemblage;
print collage and pencil, 22.5" x 21.5"

The Best Junk

BY Persimmon Blackridge, CURATOR

Back in the day, Geoff and I talked art. We never asked, never told the who what if why of our love lives, our families, our pasts, our futures. We weren't that kind of friends. We talked pain, survival strategies, diagnoses, but that's disability talk, which is part of disability art talk, which is what we talked.

Sometimes we made art together. Sometimes it was both of us back and forth on one piece, sometimes his ideas and my hands. He did that often—guiding someone else to realize his visions. Geoff was always creating new forms, new ways of working. Life with a disability is constant creativity, twisting barriers into vehicles, flipping limitations into strengths. It can be exhausting; it can be the most fun you ever had. Crippling the arts, some people call it, when it happens in the art world.

Scholar Kelly Fritsch writes, "To crip is to open up with desire to the ways that disability disrupts."¹ Disability disrupted Geoff's life when he broke his neck on his way to the Nova Scotia College of Art. It created a new path

where he could become a disruptor, breaking art world norms and expectations together with other disabled artists across the country. This is not triumph over tragedy. It's not having a meaningful life despite disability. Disruption is the gift of disability, its superpower, and Geoff wielded it with clear-eyed intent. In both his activism and his art, he crippled Canada.

Disability scholar Eliza Chandler says crippling is the "desire to dwell with disability, a desire which is antagonistic to the normative desire to cure or kill disability."² Crippling the arts is intrinsic to the delicate filigree that activist/artist Avram Finkelstein draws with his post-stroke hands, opening new styles and meanings for him. Crippling is the writing style that my learning disability taught me. Or Geoff collecting driftwood and wondrous junk over months and then instructing his friends Calvin Cairns and Matt Hutton how to place each piece in *My Service Griffon*.

Calvin says Geoff was always picking up interesting bits of driftwood while he was wheeling along the beach. At some point the gathering of random cool stuff merged into the search for griffon parts. Assembling the piece was straightforward—Geoff had a clear spatial aesthetic and work went fast. "I wasn't a collaborator," Calvin says. "I was an assistant serving Geoff's vision on a practical level. I might have suggested what size of screw to use based on my carpentry experience, but that was all." ("I miss him," Calvin says. "I miss the gentle beauty he brought to my life. I still miss him.")

Junk. Geoff always had excellent junk. One time he sent me a box of his best old metal, which made me cry. I made 4 *Life of Geoff* portraits with it. We were both junkers, dedicated junkers, swooning over similar broken bits. Was there anyone else in the world who loved trash with the same reverent delight?

The junk aesthetic has a particular resonance in disability art: taking what is socially coded

as damaged and asserting its breathtaking, transformative beauty—what curator Sean Lee calls "the magnificence of our imperfections."³

That's part of what Geoff is expressing when he takes the crashed grille of a car and turns it into a ragged device of flight, in *Hanging Up My Wings*. That's what he's doing when he choreographs those wings into dance in *Wingspan*. Geoff was a dancer years before he became quadriplegic, and in his dance since then he takes movement that's culturally stigmatized as sad and confined, and revels in its gliding aesthetic. Similarly, in pieces like *Burnt Out Band*, *The Light is Implied*, *Prayer Wheel* and *Digger*, he deliberately combines items seen as defective and insists upon them as beautiful. (No. Not *insists*. Insisted. He insisted. He revealed. He expressed. Goddamn post mortem past tense.)

That's not the whole meaning of those pieces—it's a grounding on which other meanings are built. The invisible ground on which *Prayer Wheel* stands is that disabled lives are central to the human experience; it can also be

1. Kelly Fritsch, *Crip theory*, paper presented at the Society for Disability Studies Conference, Denver, CO, June 2012.

2. Eliza Chandler, *Crippling Community: New Meanings of Disability and Community*, 2012, *No More Potlucks*, <http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/cripping-community-new-meanings-of-disability-and-community> (accessed 18 November 2020).

3. Sean Lee, *Crip Horizons: Disability Art Futurism Akimbo*, <https://akimbo.ca/akimblog/crip-horizons-disability-art-futurism-by-sean-lee/> (accessed 18 November 2020).

read as a meditation on the *holiness of the mundane*, or the afterlife of bicycles, or the formal intertangling of arcs and lines. Similarly, *Hanging Up my Wings* can be read as a refusal of the SuperCrip stereotype, or, as I interpret it, a reflection of his decision to leave the work he did in so many organizations of social change, to focus on his own art.

(That's one of many the reasons his death fills me with anger: for most of his life, his art happened in the cracks between being an organizer, mentor, activist, administrator. In those roles he achieved so much, for all of us. But I was excited when he decided to prioritize his own art for the first time. That's a hard thing to do. So many artists live with constant inner voices telling them that making art is frivolous and inconsequential. But Geoff managed to push through those lies. And then he died.)

The *holiness of the mundane* thing: that was one of Geoff's things. Actually, I don't think he would have called it holiness, he was more understated than that. Or maybe he would; I should ask Paula Jardine, his friend and collaborator since high school. (Time passes.) Paula says: *Yes, I think he might use the word holy. He was pretty spiritual, though we rarely talked about it... Having his ashes in the garden, I feel like he's teaching me more about the sacred in the everyday.*

Taking common objects and revealing their loveliness, their humour, their aesthetic

complexity—and yes, their spiritual depth—that's something Geoff excelled at. Even his home reflected that. Especially his home. As someone whose mobility was limited by society's disability-challenged infrastructure, local domestic space was particularly important to Geoff.

But it was more than that. His apartment was like nothing else I've ever seen. It was curated. It was sculpted. It was a slowly evolving assemblage celebrating everyday objects. He didn't have a shelf of knickknacks. He had 20 shelves of strange, hilarious, revelatory groupings, like 3D sketches for his assemblages in situ. Rhymes and metaphors abounded. He would juxtapose items with similar shapes but completely different uses in ways that just made you laugh. He was a visual punster. A tin windmill sat beside an eggbeater. A globe sat by a skull. Or he would display items of similar use where the formal shapes both echoed and contradicted each other. Countless snakes of varying materials, including branches that only became snakes in context. A tornado of eggbeaters. Hundreds of plant tags from years of gardening, lovingly saved and boxed (and echoed in the riotous garden outside). Nothing was random. His place was a cacophony of clutter, composed into a symphony by his curatorial hand.

A few weeks after Geoff's death, SD Holman went to Victoria to photograph his home before the inevitable dismantling began. I knew SD from

way back. Knew their art had dipped into death in the past, knew how they photographed their wife Catherine's clothing after a plane crash took her five years before, knew that grieving was still hard within them, knew that wouldn't stop them.

SD knew Geoff from around. They were both queer disabled arts administrators, so of course. SD spent four days living in Geoff's apartment, sleeping in his bed, photographing his stuff. SD says we shed our DNA all over our stuff, so of course there's a presence. Catherine's presence (and absence) fills SD's house; talking with the dead is an everyday thing for them. And Geoff's home, so full and so empty, spoke as well.

That place, Geoff's place, was a dark basement suite with shafts of sun reflecting off the myriad shiny things crowding each window. SD's challenge was to capture both pervading darkness and glaring light, but even more: to make photographs that embodied Geoff's life instead of just documenting it.

SD used a technique called HDR (High Dynamic Range) to deal with the technical problem of a high contrast environment and at the same time to reflect on Geoff's own style. HDR means taking multiple photos of each object at different exposures, and then combining them during processing. That's what gives SD's work in this show its saturated lushness and high-wrought reality, kind of like a 17th century painting. Which

is utterly Geoff. The chiaroscuro of light and shadow, the overflowing ornamentation, the aura of reverence, the thick velvet draped across walls for no reason but drama: Geoff's aesthetic was like post modern baroque, like crippling Caravaggio. In these photographs, form and content merge in a way that's all SD and all Geoff.

This year, Paula Jardine brought me a truck full of Geoff's stuff to work on. Some were finished art pieces, like *So Many Recipes*, *So Little Time*, or *The Light Is Implied*, that just needed their parts glued and screwed. Some were like *For My Ancestors* and *Sink Your Teeth*, where Geoff had gathered the parts but not yet assembled them. These I put together as I thought Geoff might have, except for *Badlands*, which is left unassembled to mourn his absence. In pieces like *Spring Salad* and *Light Box*, I joined items from Geoff's domestic installation, in the style of his own combinations *Crow Shaker* and *Fishes*.

Working with Geoff's junk was giddy fun, like we had in the old days when he sent me that box, when we collaborated long distance, pictures and ideas emailed back and forth. *Make it more Geoff-ly* was my axiom in this new venture, and when I achieved true Geoff-liness, it was delirious delight. Cut through with sudden grief. Geoff's junk is the best junk. It's a privilege to be able to work with his collections. It's one last collaboration, his ideas, my hands.



Plate 25: Centaur, 2020
Plate 26: Beaters, 2020

Plate 27: Frogs, 2020
Plate 28: Griffon, 2020

SD Holman, Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16" each



Plate 29: Zeppelin, 2020
Plate 30: Skeletons, 2020

Plate 31: Dresser, 2020
Plate 32: X-ray, 2020

SD Holman, Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16" each



Plate 33: Altar, 2020
Plate 34: Table, 2020



Plate 35: Tutu, 2020
Plate 36: Windows, 2020
 SD Holman, Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16" each



Plate 37: Cupboard, 2020



Plate 38: Window, 2020
 SD Holman, Giclée Photographs, 16" x 20" each

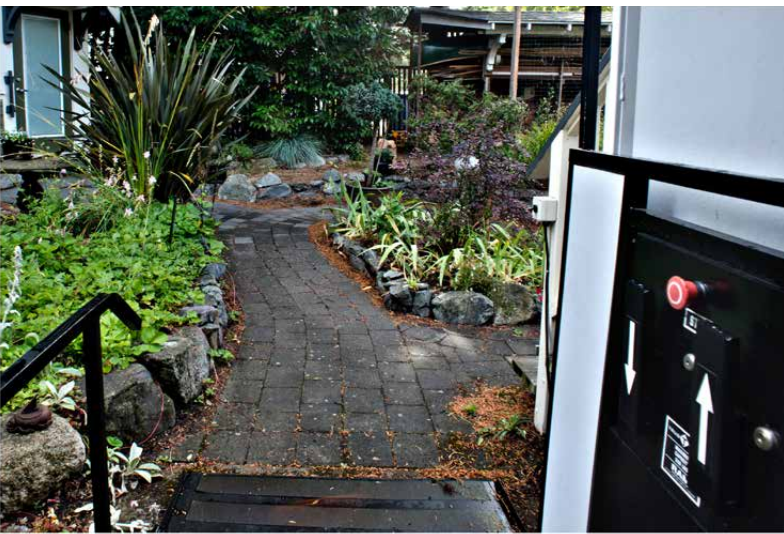


Plate 39: Lift, 2020

Plate 40: Spine, 2020

Plate 41: Empty Chair, 2020

SD Holman, Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16" each

Untitled (Essay)

BY Yuri Arajs, CURATOR

I first met Geoff in 2001 at Kickstart's first International Disability Arts Festival. This was the first festival of its kind in Canada, a week of disability focused arts and culture events, performances, lectures and exhibitions. Geoff was the creative force behind this ambitious project, which was a huge success. For the first time, people had the opportunity to be completely immersed in disability art and culture for five straight days.

My involvement at the festival was that of a presenter who gave a few talks on working with artists with disabilities, from a gallery and curatorial point of view. These talks were attended by a wide variety of folks, both non-disabled and with disabilities. Lots of artists looking to learn and find opportunities.

My initial interactions with Geoff were so brief because we met at the festival and he was trying to be everywhere to fix everything and meet everyone. I couldn't imagine how he kept it all together and how exhilarating the whole experience was.

One of the weirdest and most exciting things that ever happened to me was that I became Kickstart's Artistic Director in 2015. Never say never. This is where I really got to know Geoff. He was always available to talk Kickstart, to write a letter of support for a grant, or simply for advice. Kickstart ran through his blood.

After Geoff passed away, I knew that this exhibition would happen, but the big challenge was how. Geoff's body of work and his creative reach was vast. Visual artist, dancer, writer and a disability advocate like no other.

The process since then has had many ups and downs: funding to no funding, venue to no venue, and time just continued to pass. Elizabeth Shefrin and Linde Zingaro were vital in this early stage.

Then, a few years ago, SD Holman asked, "what ever happened to that Geoff McMurchy exhibition?" Persimmon Blackbridge stated the obvious and SD said, "Well we have a gallery so let's do this show." That was the real beginning of the exhibition you see before you today.

The process of creating the exhibition was a long and joyful one (and sometimes sad as well). Everyone involved in the process had a connection to Geoff in some way, which made it so much fun to discover and rediscover the work he created. Every piece brought a flood of memories and we traded Geoff stories, laughter and tears. Persimmon, SD and I worked closely together to select work and ephemera that we collectively felt we wanted to share in the context of this exhibition. Paula Jardine was a constant support and resource throughout this process.

Geoff's creative diversity was one of his many gifts. And creativity can be looked at in many ways. Geoff surrounded himself with stuff, lots of stuff, the seeds of much of his sculptural works. His attraction to vintage, nostalgia, and all things retro comes through in much of his work. Funky plastic toys, paper flowers, beach glass, plastic flower tags, *snakes*: all ready to be given a new life.

And at the same time, found alphabet letters of many sizes and shapes were saved for years with the anticipation of a creation that never saw its time.

Many of these objects and materials are pure metaphor for Geoff and his own life as an artist, and living with a disability. Pieces of machines that created movement or action appear in many works. Used, damaged, old, and discarded scraps are often refashioned to represent body parts. Scraps of rusted wire and metal are combined to create a machine that doesn't move in the wind called *Wind Machine* and a *Prayer Wheel* that does. This new life to these materials prove the will and desire this artist has to create and to give new meaning to fragmented objects.

Ultimately, this body of work represents an artist who was always thinking and working; had a respect for the materials they worked with; used disability as a tool and not a "dis"; and created work that spoke truth directly to the viewer without compromise. Geoff was not afraid to share who he was as an artist, as a queer artist or as an artist with a disability.

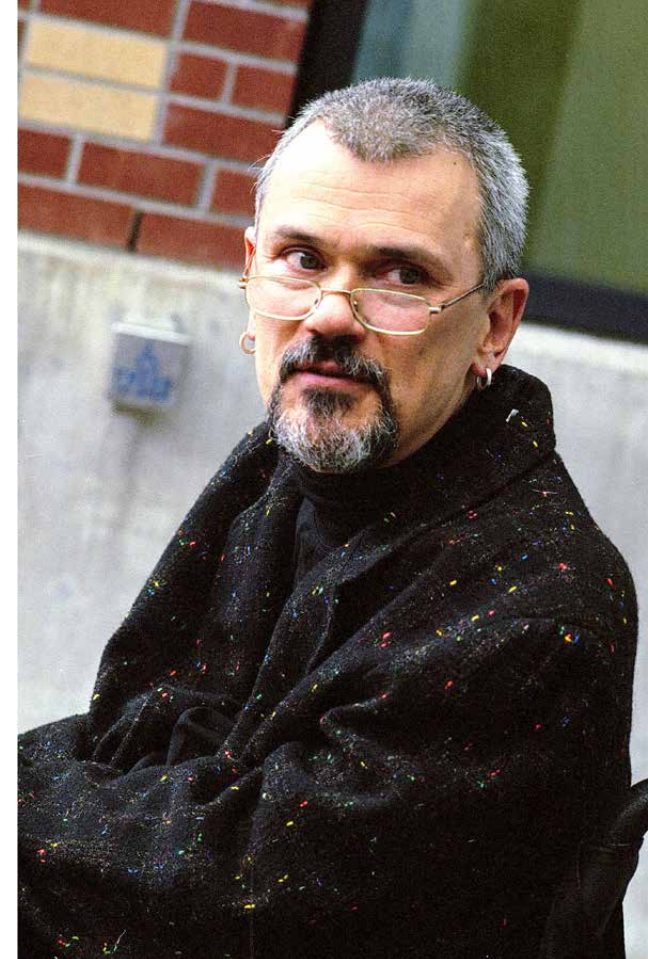


Plate 42: Geoff McMurchy, Photo Rosamond Norbury, 2006

Heavenly Beauty: Geoff's Life in Art

BY Paula Jardine

Springs and wings have always appeared in Geoff's art work. In high school art, he did a silk screen print of green springs on a bright yellow background. And an owl with extravagant wings twice its body size. Geoff was kind of the god of the art room—everything he did was so beautiful and original.

There was a little gang of us in high school. We made necklaces out of rose hips and wore blue jean overalls and construction boots. We did "experimental theatre" in the hallways. He was also a beautiful dancer. We were all in love with him—he had so many girl friends—and then he moved to Vancouver where it was raining men. None of us were surprised Geoff was gay, we just hadn't known it existed!

He was on his way to art school in Halifax in 1977 when he had his accident.

After the initial shock, his body became an art project: we quoted Blake and took photos of him as an angel with some swan's wings we had somehow acquired, while he lay immobilized with screws in his head attached to weights to keep his spine stretched out.

He had the presence of mind to ask for copies of his x-rays, and had life sized blueprints made of them. They became the central part of a show called *X-ray Vision* at Pumps and Power on Cordova, 1978 maybe.

It was such good and strong work. Some pieces were just small collages—I can only remember bits: an x-ray of his skull and neck, and his bony hand pointing at the 7th vertabrae where his spinal cord was severed; the dial pad of a push button phone (modern at the time); *Dear God: I need a new connection* (or something like that). There are a few faded pieces that survive.

Geoff had been working at MPA (Mental Patients Association) before he left for art school. An exceptional, patient-controlled resource, MPA actually owned their building, and they organized to have a suite converted to be wheelchair accessible when Geoff was finally released from hospital in the early spring of 1978.

Geoff's rehabilitation coincided with the advent of the Macintosh personal computer, and he

was quick to adopt the graphics programs and also teach us all how to use this technology. Geoff became graphic designer to quite a few nonprofits, creating posters and brochures, as well as some interpretive signs for the Fraser River Estuary in 1999.

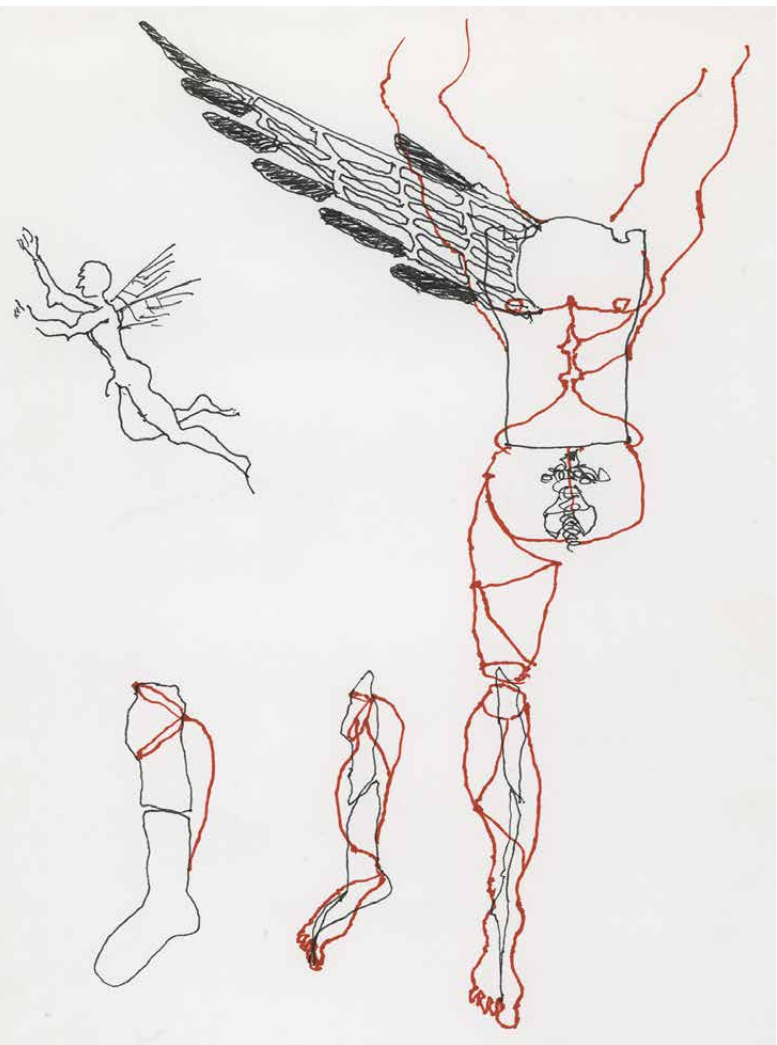
Becoming "a person with disabilities" also activated Geoff's righteous indignation at how inaccessible the city was for people in wheelchairs, and he turned a lot of his creative energies to those issues, working at the BC Coalition for People with Disabilities (now Disability Alliance BC). I remember in particular when they finally built Crab Park, giving water access to people in the Downtown Eastside, and the overpass was far too steep for a non-motorized wheelchair: Geoff called the press and invited them to watch him try. There's a tv clip somewhere. There's now a switchback ramp for wheelchairs on that overpass.

He was also a leader at Tidal Flats Housing Co-op, where he lived, and for a few gloriously convenient and exhausting years the Kickstart offices were right across the street. His home was a beautiful installation of springs and snakes and little lights; bones and feathers and rocks and fish and tiny figures. Some of the pieces in this show have followed him all the way from that time; materials

gathered on late night trips in George Landtrecht's van, down back alleys in Strathcona and Chinatown. Geoff could pick up something that hundreds of people had already walked by, not noticing, or dismissing as garbage, and by beaming his attention on it, or just by the way he held it, show us the beauty behind the broken.

Geoff moved to Victoria in 2006. He redesigned the "Garden Suite" in our James Bay home, and we had the ground level lowered to make it accessible. Geoff became the artistic director of the re-landscaped garden. I didn't know anything about gardening so I just did what I was told (he tolerated how often I said "oops"). Now he is fully integrated into the garden, as that's where he wanted his ashes to go. Gardening now is spending time with him in a different way.

Geoff embraced, celebrated and lived his gayness. In his final years however he was often sad, saying he felt invisible to his community. *The Digger* is a piece that kind of hurts my heart for its loneliness. But how thrilling that another digger was found (in a box destined for a thrift store), so he is a little less lonely. It was going to be a part of this piece that he sketched out:



So many pieces we won't get to see.

Looking at Persimmon's assemblages, many of the pieces seem so ordinary—like if you put my measuring cups on a plinth. They are things that were around Geoff in the everyday. They grew on their own, some of them, just from how Geoff collected and casually (in a controlled, Virgo-ish kind of casual) put things together in groups. The *Crow Shaker*. The *Fishes*. As his sister Shannon put it, "It was like he couldn't help but make everything beautiful around him... everything was organically yet intentionally lovely." Persimmon's interpretations of some of his collections make me cry—only because I wish Geoff could see them.

Plate 43: Geoff McMurchy, *Untitled sketch*, date unknown, ink on paper, 14" x17"

Thank You Geoff

BY David Roche

I am at the Mountain View Cemetery. I am going to be the master of ceremonies (is that the right phrase?) for Geoff McMurchy's celebration of life. I have arrived early to acclimate to the space, to prepare myself.

The place is already crowded an hour ahead of time. People are greeting and hugging and chatting. I join in for a while, then go in the main room to review my notes.

The room is beautifully decorated in the McMurchy style. People are flooding in; more chairs are needed. Some are somber but there is not really sadness. They wave and call across the room, rush to connect, crossing the room to embrace. It's like an Irish wake from my childhood.

So many familiar faces. The room is electric. It is SRO (Standing Room Only) and filled with the spirit of Geoff McMurchy. I crumple my notes into my pocket; they will be of no use.

What happens is that person after person comes forward to the microphone and speaks of what Geoff has done for them, what he meant in their lives. I stand in the middle of the people who form his true enduring legacy.

In 1999 Bonnie Klein persuaded me to perform at a fundraiser; it was successful; I met Geoff and

Joan Meister and all the pioneers who founded the iconic pioneer Canadian S4DAC (Society for Disability Arts and Culture). I was in. I spent years on the board of Kickstart, including several as president. I had found my people.

Geoff was a genius in many ways: look at this SUM exhibit for starters. But in the true spirit of disability culture, Geoff worked in and built community that nurtured so many: Victoria Maxwell's solo career, James Sanders' founding of RealWheels and the iconic play *Skydive*, more recently Dr. Leslie Roman's Wingspan project out of UBC, Dave Symington, Persimmon Blackbridge, organizations like Theatre Terrific, posAbilities and many more.

Because of Geoff McMurchy, I got to see and be part of the development of disability arts in Vancouver, in Canada, in the world. (Oh, and I have become a Canadian citizen.)

The story of his life is still being written, still being lived. In us. In you and me, in this SUM exhibit.

He gathered people, he saw that the heart of disability arts is a community in which creativity is born, nurtured and thrives, lifts the hearts of others. Thank you, Geoff McMurchy.

Artist and Curator Biographies

Geoff McMurchy, Artist

Geoff McMurchy (1955–2015) is recognized as a pioneer in the local and international disability arts community. Geoff was an accomplished visual artist, dancer and inspiring arts administrator. After an accident in 1977 left him paralyzed, he became dedicated to changing the lives of disabled artists and challenging attitudes toward disability art as the founding artistic director of Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture. McMurchy's dream was that disability art be considered on the same level as all art: *"My interest is that the art that is presented should not be through the filter of 'disability'; I would like it to be appreciated as art, and you don't have to like it."*

Yuri Arais, Curator

Yuri Arais is a working artist who has dedicated much of his practice to advocating for fellow artists, including artists who live with a disability. He has founded and run a number of arts organizations and art galleries in the US and in Canada over the last 20 years, including: former Gallery Director of Interact Center for the Visual and Performing Arts and Outsiders and Others in Minneapolis; former Artistic Director of Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture in Vancouver and Executive Director of newly launched Outsiders and Others in Vancouver, BC. His advocacy in the arts community focuses on working with, showing and facilitating public exposure and financial compensation for self-taught and non-traditional artists. Yuri has been recognized by the press and received numerous awards for his arts advocacy and promotion, as well as for his curatorial work as a gallerist, and was named most influential curator by the Minnesota Monthly in 2008. Yuri is also an accomplished artist, holding three degrees, including a Masters of Fine Art from Cranbrook Academy of Art. His work is in both private and public collections.

SD Holman, Artistic Director and Curator

SD Holman (born 1963, Hollywood, California) is a queer pagan Jew, an award-winning artist and curator whose work has toured internationally. An ECUAD graduate in 1990, Holman was picked up by the Vancouver Association for Non-commercial Culture (the NON) right out of art school. Holman was appointed Artistic Director of Pride in Art in 2008, and spearheaded the founding of the Queer Arts Festival, now recognized among the top 3 of its kind worldwide, and SUM, Canada's only queer-mandated transdisciplinary gallery and programmed artists notably including Kent Monkman, Cris Derksen, Jeremy Dutcher, Paul Wong, Angela Grossman and Dana Claxton. Curatorial highlights include *TRIGGER*, the 25th anniversary exhibition for Kiss & Tell's notorious *Drawing the Line* project, Adrian Stimson's *Naked Napi* solo show, and Paul Wong's monumental multi-curator *Through the Trapdoor* underground storage locker exhibition. Some of SD Holman's other experience running art spaces included founding and running Studio Q the notorious Art Salon in Vancouver's DTES Chinatown as noted in *Secrets of the City* 1st edition.

A laureate of the YWCA Women of Distinction Award one of Canada's most prestigious awards, Holman is known for engagement with themes of sex, death and identity. Holman's work has exhibited at Wellesley College, the Advocate Gallery (Los Angeles), the Soady-Campbell Gallery (New York), the San Francisco Public Library, On Main Gallery, The Helen Pitt International Gallery, Charles H. Scott, Exposure, Gallery Gachet, the Roundhouse, Vancouver East Cultural Centre, Artropolis, and Fotobase Galleries (Vancouver). Holman's portrait project *BUTCH: Not like the other girls* toured North America and is now in its second edition, distributed by Caitlin Press Dagger Editions.

Persimmon Blackbridge, Curator

For the past 45 years, Persimmon Blackbridge has worked as a sculptor, writer, curator and performer, as well as being a fiction editor, cleaning lady and very bad waitress. Blackbridge's pioneering contribution to queer art in Canada began with *Still Sane*, Blackbridge's 1984 Vancouver collaboration with Sheila Gilhooly, inspired by the latter's three-year psychiatric incarceration for being a lesbian. In the 1990s, Blackbridge was a member of the lesbian sex/art collective Kiss & Tell. Their touring erotic arts exhibition *Drawing the Line* helped turn the tide in the feminist sex wars—pro artistic sexual expression, anti-censorship. Kiss & Tell's groundbreaking exhibition *True Inversions*, presented at the Banff Centre in 1992, sparked a political confrontation in Alberta around arts funding and freedom of expression. Kiss & Tell's book, *Her Tongue on My Theory*, was the first Canadian book to win the Lambda Literary Award (based in Washington DC).

Blackbridge has also been a seminal figure in the disability arts movement from the seventies until the present. *Sunnybrook: a True Story with Lies* is an visual art show (later made into a book) about abuse in BC's Woodlands Institution, winning the 1997 Ferro-Grumley Prize (based in New York). In 1998, Blackbridge was invited to collaborate with 28 former inmates with intellectual disabilities on *From the Inside/Out*, an art exhibit chronicling their lives in three of BC's big institutions, and their current lives in the community. This exhibit traveled widely and was one of the factors gaining reparations for former residents of Woodlands. Blackbridge's most recent show, *Constructed Identities*, uses mixed media wood carving with found objects to question how disability is framed as a fracturing of ordinary life rather than a central, expected part of it. Her exploration of the figure begins in disability, but necessarily complicates itself as our embodied identities intersect and overlap.

Paula Jardine

Paula Jardine is an artist who grew up in Edmonton and went to high school with Geoff. The focus of her work has been to revive and redefine community arts and the artist’s role in the community, exploring and cultivating cultural forms that celebrate and connect us to each other, the land, and natural cycles.

Since 2005, Paula has been Artist in Residence at Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver, creating the annual All Souls event with long time collaborator Marina Szijarto.

David Roche

David Roche is an inspirational humorist, keynote speaker and performer who has transformed the challenges and gifts of living with a facial difference into a compelling message that uplifts and delights audiences around the world. With the publication of his first book, *The Church of 80% Sincerity*, he is also an author. He has performed this signature one-man show across the U.S. and in Canada, England, New Zealand, Australia and Russia. David has appeared at the Clinton White House and headlined at Olympics Arts Festivals in Sydney, Australia and Vancouver. He and his wife Marlena Blavin present Love At Second Sight, a program for adolescents about appearance, acceptance and diversity. David has been featured in four films, including *Shameless*, a feature-length documentary by Bonnie Sherr Klein from the National Film Board of Canada, and *The Second Glance*, a short film by Nic Askew. He has also been interviewed on the 7th Avenue Project on KUSP (NPR). Anne Lamott’s bestseller, *Plan B*, includes a chapter about David. Paula Zahn profiled David on her show as a result of viewer response to an earlier interview on CNN.

Time-Lapse: Posthumous Conversations Plate List

Geoff McMurchy, *Hanging Up My Wings*, circa 2015.
Aluminum car grille, feathers, 50” x 17” x 4”

Geoff McMurchy, *Prayer Wheel*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; repurposed metal, bicycle wheels, lighbulbs, 66” x 23” x 23”

Geoff McMurchy, *My Service Griffon*, 2013. Assemblage sculpture; repurposed wood, glass, 50” x 24” x 35”

Geoff McMurchy, *Wind Machine*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal wire, metal, 31” x 21” x 10”

Geoff McMurchy, *Beaters*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; egg beaters, various sizes

Geoff McMurchy, *Double Helix*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; copper pipe, industrial culinary mixers, 72” x 15” x 7”

Geoff McMurchy, *The Light Is Implied*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; wood, lightbulb, metal, spring, 15” x 6” x 5”

Geoff McMurchy, *Digger 1*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal springs, toy backhoe bucket, 14” x 5” x 7”

Geoff McMurchy, *Digger 2*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal springs, toy backhoe bucket, 14” x 5” x 6”

Geoff McMurchy, *Vortex of Everything*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal, feathers, wood, 24” x 7” x 7”

Geoff McMurchy, *Lightbulb Candle*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; glass light bulb, wood, metal, fibres, 7” x 3” x 4”

Geoff McMurchy, *Crow Shaker*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; feathers, metallic shaker, 15” x 12” x 6”

Geoff McMurchy, *Spring Salad*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal colander, steel shavings, 13” x 8” x 8”

Geoff McMurchy, *Letters*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; wooden and metal letters, various sizes

Geoff McMurchy, *Band From Hell*, 2013. Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, fabric, clay, 23” x 15.5” x 20”

Geoff McMurchy, *Sink Your Teeth*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; wooden box, metal, plastic, bone, printed ephemera, 30” x 25” x 5”

Geoff McMurchy, *So Many Recipes*, 2015. Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, wire, printed and written ephemera, 20” x 15” x 20”

Geoff McMurchy, *Ancestors*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; wood, metal, ceramic, plastic, bone, paper, photos, 36” x 30” x 5”

Geoff McMurchy, *Badlands* (unfinished), 2015. Assemblage sculpture; wooden box, vials, small metal objects, bone, egg shells, photographs, metal pins, 17” x 12” x 4”, 15” x 15”

“Date unknown” means the work was made during McMurchy’s creative period: between 1980-2015.

Geoff McMurchy, *Would You Like to See My Feather Box*, 2020. Assemblage sculpture; cigar box, bones, wire, feathers, Polaroid photographs, sea glass, 12" x 9" x 7"

Geoff McMurchy, *Head Dress*, Garden Fairy / PRIDE outfit, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture (wearable); feathers and fibres

Geoff McMurchy, *Apron and Tutu*, Garden Fairy / PRIDE outfit, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture (wearable); astroturf skirt, tutu

Geoff McMurchy, *Fishes*, date unknown. Assemblage sculpture; metal, glass, plastic fabric, 59" x 13" x 9"

Geoff McMurchy, *Snakes*, 1980-2015. Assemblage sculpture; wooden, plastic and ceramic snakes, various sizes

Geoff McMurchy, *Evidence of a Garden/Plant Tags*, 1980-2015. Assemblage sculpture; wood, paint, plastic and paper plant tags, 35" x 36" x 12"

Geoff McMurchy, *X-ray Vision*, circa 1980. Print, 12.5" x 15"

Geoff McMurchy, *Pure*, 1979. Photographic print, 13.875" x 9.5"

Geoff McMurchy, *Not Fade Away*, 1979. Assemblage sculpture; print collage and pencil, 22.5" x 21.5"

SD Holman, *Centaur*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Beaters*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Frogs*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Griffon*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Zeppelin*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Skeletons*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Dresser*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *X-ray*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Altar*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Table*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Tutu*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Windows*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Cupboard*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 16" x 20"

SD Holman, *Window*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 16" x 20"

SD Holman, *Lift*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Spine*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

SD Holman, *Empty Chair*, 2020. Giclée Photographs, 20" x 16"

Geoff McMurchy, *Photo Rosamond Norbury*, 2006

Geoff McMurchy, *Untitled sketch*, date unknown, ink on paper, 14" x 17"



SUM gallery is located on the sovereign, unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, also known as Vancouver, BC. We began as Pride in Art, founded by Two-Spirit artist and activist Robbie Hong and Black artist Jeffery Austin Gibson. For ten years, PiA operated as a volunteer-run artist collective, mounting an annual visual art exhibition at the Roundhouse Arts Centre.

In 2008 Pride in Art mounted the first transdisciplinary Queer Arts Festival. In 2018, we opened SUM gallery as the year-round programming arm of the Queer Arts Festival in an unused raw space in Vancouver’s historic Chinatown.

The SUM gallery name honours our location with multi-layered meaning:

- Originally envisioned as a Dim Sum (點心) restaurant, our space features the traditional round window, now a striking feature of our office
- The name pays tribute to the Pearl River Delta immigrants who settled our neighbourhood 150 years ago: Sum (𠵼) means heart in their Cantonese dialect
- Words for queer people in Chinese include the Sum 𠵼 character
- SUM = summation (Σ), the sum of its parts, the sum total, 2LGBTQIA+
- SUM art

The Pride in Art Society (PiA) produces, presents and exhibits with a curatorial vision favouring challenging, thought-provoking contemporary art that pushes boundaries and initiates dialogue, including through the Queer Arts Festival (QAF), an annual artist-run, transdisciplinary festival, and SUM Gallery, one of the only permanent spaces dedicated to the presentation of queer art worldwide. PiA brings diverse communities together to support artistic risk-taking, incite creative collaboration and experimentation and celebrate the rich heritage of queer artists and art. We harness the visceral power of the art to inspire recognition, respect and visibility of people who transgress gender and sexual norms.



ALL SOULS
AT MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY

Kickstart Disability
Arts & Culture



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



Canadian
Heritage

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An agency of the Province of British Columbia

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QUEER ARTS FESTIVAL



PRIDE IN ART SOCIETY
celebrating queer art and artists

