

GALLERY GUIDE | 14 OCTOBER 2023 – 13 JANUARY 2024

SAAG SOUTHERN ALBERTA ART GALLERY
MAANSIKSIKAITSIPIITSINIKSSIN

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GABI DAO

What breaks on the horizon?

14 OCTOBER 2023 – 13 JANUARY 2024 | LOWER GALLERY

How to echolocate in a green screen

In her essay for the 2021 Sobey Art Award exhibition, Joni Low described Gabi Dao's work as "video poems." In a similar vein, rhyme is the best word I possess to characterize the formal core of Dao's two-channel video *Lucifer Falls from Heaven at Dawn*. I don't mean rhyme in a sonic sense—or maybe, in keeping with the work's theme of bats, I mean it in the sense of something that we can't necessarily hear. I imagine this as a kind of compositional device, a way of solving the problem of how to get from A to B—how to get the audience from A to B.

Lucifer Falls is a monologue by a bat who invites us to call them Lucifer. Like their biblical namesake, Lucifer has fallen to earth. They were felled flying into a wind turbine, a fate that has befallen the migratory bats of North America in general and resulted in a significant depletion of the continent's bat population. In turn, this depletion has had major consequences to the ecosystem, and that in turn has had large economic effects. Wind turbines kill over a million bats annually in North America, which disturbs the ecological balance achieved by bats and their insect prey's coevolution. One study estimates that bats provide an annual value of \$22.9 billion to the U.S. economy; a subsequent study pegged the death toll's cost to the agro-industrial complex at \$3 billion annually before accounting for the downwind costs of additional pollution caused by the introduction of new or extra pesticides. At several points, Lucifer asks, "Am I worthy of your protection?" What they are really



Gabi Dao, *Lucifer falls from Heaven at Dawn*, digital film still, 21:00, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Unit 17.

asking is, on what basis—ecological, economic, or something else—is the protection of bats a case worthy of our concern?

Lucifer Falls begins with a pun: "This is the wing that broke the horizon." The wing they refer to belongs to a wind turbine. Our first glimpse of Lucifer, depicted by a marionette in a green screen environment having its strings pulled in continuous motion, rhymes with the next shot: a bat's POV looking up at a wind turbine, itself rotating continuously. This linguistic pun compounded by a visual rhyme sets into motion the string of associations that sustains *Lucifer Falls*: the work of etymology retroactively compares the animal wing to the ruthless efficiency of the mechanical one named after it, the productivity of the turbine that Lucifer's anthropomorphized "productive" activity (think: Jazzercise) is supposed to keep up with.

As we have been reminded by figures such as singer Bryan Adams and former premier Jason Kenney, in the 2020s bats are unavoidably associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. This line of association invariably leads us to a discussion in which Asian immigration, and Asian people's mobility in general, becomes a question of biosecurity. This rhymes the economic utility of bats—commonly thought to be pestilent carriers of disease but, as insectivores, also the bringers of prosperity according to a different set of calculations—with a phenomenon that scholar lyko Day calls “alien capital”: the importing of migrant labour forces to generate economic effects greater than what the naturalized labour force can produce. When no longer needed, these “aliens” become scapegoats of one kind or another and, lacking the same rights (legal or symbolic) as white settlers, are made to feel the precarity of their position in their landed home. The dynamic catalyzing of dispossessed Indigenous land by alien labour, Day argues, is the lifeblood of settler-colonial capitalist society. This phenomenon is most clearly visible in the politics of the United States' southern border, where “illegal” workers sustain agricultural industries without the protections of labour laws, minimum wage, or insulation from detention and deportation. But this phenomenon is also genetic to Canadian immigration law—not only to the Chinese Immigration Acts of 1885 and 1923 (the “exclusion acts”), but also to the 1960s reforms that led ultimately to the Immigration Act of 1976. As geographer David Ley explains, post-1967 immigrants “were admitted based on their human capital, not their ethnicity or country of origin.” This is to say, the rationale for ending the explicitly racist immigration policy and the “multiculturalism” that followed was an economic one.

The question of how to make the case for bats, then, might be one of acoustics. Namely, what registers are we able to hear? In *Lucifer Falls*, acoustics becomes a question of ethics, and

ethics a question of acoustics. When Lucifer speaks about being trustworthy, do we hear the double-entendre? Or which one do we hear?

Lucifer Falls might also be about what we are not hearing. Bats navigate space by echolocating at a register beyond the human auditory register. When we see Lucifer at work, we don't hear them working. In her book on bats, cultural critic Tessa Laird writes: “Calls are usually synched to wingbeats, increasing in speed as bats home in on prey, with different sizes of insects requiring different frequencies. Some bats even use harmonics, like Tibetan throat singers, creating sympathetic vibrations that increase the complexity of information the bat receives, turning hunting into a high art form.” Moreover, as I learned from a wildlife control company's website, “The complex communication structures of bats mean that it is unlikely for any bats to get left behind.”

I'm left with the sinking feeling that not only are we misrecognizing Lucifer's search for their brethren for productivity, but that given the scale of their depletion they might never ultimately find their people. We see a sequence of visual rhymes: a table fan; an upturned metal tube chair shot from an oblique angle to match the state Lucifer found themselves in after their fall; a partially assembled puzzle resembling a colony of bats in flight—“false friends.” How can one echolocate in the void of the green screen? Can we still hear the music of the colony if there is no economic justification for their continued existence? Or are we just chasing shadows?

One last visual rhyme—between the wind turbines of Alberta, where most of *Lucifer Falls* was shot, and the windmills that are iconic to Dao's current location, the Netherlands. Lucifer's fate calls to mind the work of Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader,

which in the words of critic Jan Verwoert dramatizes in slapstick fashion “the inevitability, fatefulness, and seductive pull of falling, or of submitting yourself to failure.” There is also a sense of inescapable doom in Lucifer’s story: even the supposedly “clean,” alternative energy of wind, which might eventually allow us to divest from carbon capitalism, results in the ecologically disruptive mass murder of animal species.¹ But underlying this is also a question of how a person lands in a place and how one makes a place there. Often, the interaction between the two channels of Lucifer Falls behaves like a kaleidoscope, obliquely scissoring images and landscapes like—as Lucifer points out—the wings of a wind turbine. But in two brief shots the two channels cohere as one continuous screen: a colony of bats flying together through the Alberta “big sky” and a pan across the Albertan prairie in its voluptuous endlessness. These are not un-Dutch images. Diegetically, they are nostalgic, almost dreamlike, asides within a narrative of inevitable defeat. But they also point to the possibility of a miraculous outcome.

Text by Godfre Leung

*Curated by Adam Whitford, Associate Curator
& Exhibitions Manager*

1. Accompanying a friend on her incognito research trip, I learned that the steel used to build ‘green’ windmills in the region of the Gushul Studios, where I did a month-long residency towards producing this exhibition, is fabricated with coal mined from local mountains. In fact, I learned that it takes 175 tons of steel making coal to produce 1 wind turbine. I couldn’t stop feeling especially haunted by the remnant limestone boulders that surrounded me at my residency. These boulders, parted by Highway 3 and the train tracks of the Canadian Pacific Railway, are remnants of the collapsed face of the Turtle Mountain. Heavily mined for coal, it became so unstable that it crumbled, burying the town of Frank in the nation’s deadliest landslide in 1903.

– Gabi Dao

Gabi Dao (Canadian, b. 1991) is an artist and organizer currently based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Dao’s research-based practice culminates in collage, sculpture, sound and moving image installations. They also generate olfactory experiences in both their installations and their small-batch perfume business, PPL’S PERFUME. Through non-linear conceptions of memory, time and truth, Dao confronts Western ocularcentrism and the rigid binarism of capitalism. Dao also engages with writing and community building in their work.

Dao graduated Summa Cum Laude with an MFA from the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam and received the Master Fine Art Research Award (2023). They also hold a BFA from Emily Carr University. Dao was shortlisted for the Sobey Art Award (2021) and received the Portfolio Prize Award for Emerging Artists (2016). They have exhibited in galleries and artist-run spaces across Canada, Asia and Europe, including solo exhibitions at grunt gallery and Spare Room, Vancouver; as well as group exhibitions at A Tale of a Tub, Rotterdam; the Vincom Centre for Contemporary Art, Hà Nội, Vietnam; Centre Clark, Montreal; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Kamias Triennale, Quezon City, Philippines; Nanaimo Art Gallery; Libby Leshgold Gallery at Emily Carr University, Vancouver; Burnaby Art Gallery; Vancouver Art Gallery; Audain Gallery at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver; Western Front, Vancouver; Artspeak, Vancouver; 221a, Vancouver.

Dao was the Southern Alberta Art Gallery Maansiksikaitsitapiitsinikssin’s Gushul Studio Artist in Residence for 2022. The Gushul Residency is a long-standing program that invites artists from around the world to visit the mountain town of Blairmore, Alberta in preparation for an exhibition at the Gallery.

Godfre Leung is a critic and the curator at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. His writing has recently appeared in *ArtAsiaPacific*, *ASAP/Journal*, and *C Magazine*, with an essay upcoming in a monograph by Pao Houa Her, forthcoming from Aperture. Recent exhibitions include *Offsite: Christopher K. Ho* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2022), *TJ Shin: The Vegetarian* (The Bows, 2022), *Diinsi Abuur. Kaamil A. Haider, Khadijah Muse, Mohamud Mumin* (The Bows, 2023), *Sonja Ahlers: Classification Crisis* (Richmond Art Gallery, 2023), and exhibitions by Dionne Lee, Sesemiya, and Trinh T. Minh-ha at CAG.

The artist would like to thank: the Alberta Community Bat Program, especially Susan Holroyd and Cory Olson. Calgary Wildlife and Melanie Whalen. The researchers at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park Field Research Station: Luisa Weigand, Alex O'Callaghan, Hannah Wilson, Emma Blanken, Josh Christiansen. The biologists at Ecoresult and South Holland bat count volunteers: Anton Van Meurs, Marlon de Haan, Mark Bouwmeester, Rudy Vanderkuil, and Karin Gossin. As well as: Lan Tieu, Kim Dao, Bernadette Dao, Terrance Houle, Alysha Seriani, Lou Lou Sainsbury, Steffanie Ling, Natasha Chaykowski, and Ioana Lupascu.

ELISA HARKINS

Teach Me a Song

14 OCTOBER 2023 – 13 JANUARY 2024 | UPPER GALLERY

Titled after Elisa Harkins' artwork of the same name, *Teach Me a Song* is an ongoing song preservation project where the artist asks Indigenous friends to teach her one song. Each song is performed for video and the resulting audio is transcribed into sheet music, preserving the songs for possible future performances. Since 2021, Harkins has recorded nine songs with singers and musicians from Osage, Cree, Seminole, Cherokee, Kiowa, and Blackfoot traditions. Part performance and part song preservation, *Teach Me a Song* is based on an exchange between artist and performers, of sharing and vulnerability in the common pursuit of playing and listening to contemporary Indigenous music.

The iteration of *Teach Me a Song* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery Maansiksikaitapiitsinikssin features videos of five songs, two of which were recorded specifically for Harkins' exhibition at the Gallery. Earlier this year, Harkins travelled to Sikoohkotoki/Lethbridge to record "The Grandmother's Song" by the White Buffalo Singers (Blackfoot), a drum group composed of: Jerome Blood, Keira Fox, and Brooke Provost as well as "Hold Her Pillow Tight" an original song by Marilyn Contois (Saulteaux from Cowessess First Nation). The exhibition also features recordings of performances by Louis Gray (Osage), Eli Hirtle (Cree), and Cheyenne Rain LeGrande ᑭᑭᑭᑭ (Bigstone Cree Nation).

After each song, Harkins captures a portrait of the singer at the time of its recording and begins the process of



Elisa Harkins, *Teach Me a Song* – Louis Gray (Osage), photograph, 2023. Courtesy of the artist.

transcribing each song into sheet music. The transcription becomes a kind of portrait of the song that allows it to be disseminated and subsequently reperformed. In addition to the portraits and sheet music, Harkins creates a custom shawl dedicated to each singer or group. Fancy Shawls are worn by women over their shoulders at powwows and in shawl dances from the Cherokee Nation and across the plains to our place on Blackfoot territory. As a continuing project of musical performance and transcription, *Teach Me a Song* ensures that musical practices that may otherwise go unheard or exist on the periphery, are appreciated for years to come.

*Curated by Adam Whitford, Associate Curator
& Exhibitions Manager*

Framing generously supported by L.A. Gallery 2.0.

Elisa Harkins is a Native American (Cherokee/Muscogee) artist and composer based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her work is concerned with translation, language preservation, and Indigenous musicology. Harkins uses the Cherokee and Mvskoke languages, electronic music, sculpture, and the body as her tools. She is the first person to sing in the Cherokee language in a contemporary song. Harkins received a BA from Columbia College, Chicago and an MFA from CALARTS. She has since continued her education at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She has exhibited her work at Crystal Bridges, documenta 14, The Hammer Museum, The Heard Museum, and Vancouver Art Gallery. She created an online Indigenous concert series called *6 Moons*, and published a CD of Creek/Seminole Hymns. She is also the DJ of Mvhayv Radio, an Indigenous radio show on 91.1FM in Tulsa, OK and 99.1FM in Indianapolis, IN.

MEGAN FENIAK

In honoured dust

14 OCTOBER 2023 – 13 JANUARY 2024 | LIBRARY GALLERY

In honoured dust assembles Megan Feniak's recent sculptures of caterpillars, Glacier Lillies, and Cyclocosmia that consider a shared connection between consciousness and the earth. Through the approach of a craftsman, Feniak depicts these caterpillars, lilies, and trapdoor spiders in laboriously hand-rendered materials of carved wood, cast aluminum, and bronze. Feniak's detailed depictions of these creatures of the earth both disgust and attract. The negative subconscious stimulation from insects and other ground-dwellers is thought to come from their association with filth, decomposition, and mortality. Considering Feniak's sculptures, this physic impulse is a bridge to remembering our connection with the ground and the transformations possible within it.

Feniak describes a time while camping when, lying on the ground, she was at the mercy of a swarm of hundreds of Spongy Moth caterpillars. Subsumed in a flood of the insects, it was as if they thought her to be no different than the rest of the landscape, seemingly unaware of her presence. Based on this experience, Feniak has cast an organically shaped swarm of Spongy Moth caterpillars that envelop an unseen organic shape. Alongside the caterpillars are aluminum casts of the delicate Glacier Lily of the Rocky Mountains. The wildflowers gaze back towards the harsh ground they sprung from, spectral in their brief time on the landscape.



Megan Feniak, *terrestrial creeper* (detail), bronze, 2023. Image courtesy of Chelsea Yang-Smith.

On the wall of the library hangs a ribbed, hand-carved disc with ridges that make it appear as a vague face or a mask. The shape of the carving is derived from the abdomen of the Cyclocosmia, a type of trapdoor spider that uses its uniquely disc-shaped abdomen to plug the opening of its burrow. Its body simultaneously becomes a barrier between above and below and to its unsuspecting prey, just another surface of the earth. Feniak intricately carves the abdomen's muscles, spines, and grooves with each mark of the chisel. The wood is then dyed with milk paint and earth pigments, an ancient method of using soil to colour the work. *In honoured dust* is an opportunity to re-attune to the sensations and transformations possible in the subterranean.

*Curated by Adam Whitford, Associate Curator
& Exhibitions Manager*

Megan Feniak (b. 1990) is a sculpture-based artist and craftsperson living and working in Alberta. Her sculptures explore themes of transformation, longing, mortality and religious ecstasy. The works draw from a range of references including Christian mysticism, science fiction, the American Shakers, and Slavic paganism. Mutating and drifting in and out of figuration, her sculptures often feature human and non-human bodies and their negative impressions. Approaching the deep wells of the heart with lyricism, her sculptures intimate the power of affects, gestures, and the positioning of the body in ritual and belief. Feniak received her BFA from the Alberta University of the Arts in 2018, and her MFA from the University of Guelph in 2021.

SAAG Library Gallery: The Gallery presents exhibitions as in-situ interventions within our Library. The Library Gallery features a diverse selection of artworks and mediums from regional contemporary artists. Artists are invited to think of the library as a unique exhibition context by investigating the Gallery's programming around readership, publications, and its place within Lethbridge's historic Carnegie library which opened in 1922. Artists are encouraged to consider the physical architecture of the library and its material holdings, responding to a broader and generative idea of what a library might be, as they change and adapt to new forms of knowledge production.

INDIG BUSY-NESS

Feature Artist

14 OCTOBER 2023 – 13 JANUARY 2024 | SHOP AT SAAG

Indig Busy-ness is an arts practice and passion project of Naatoyiki aka Cheyenne McGinnis, a non-binary Niitsitapi individual who grew up for the majority of her life in Kainaiwa, the Blood Tribe. Their work features prints created at CASA around the theme of Blackfoot cultural retention and Indigenous futurisms as well as apparel and jewelry created with other Indigenous Artists.



Cheyenne (NAATOIYIKI) McGinnis, *Flip the Script*, digital print on fine art paper, 2021.
Courtesy of the artist.

Naatoiyiki has been practicing various forms of art for over 15 years and calls themselves a multi-media contemporary conceptual artist. They are inspired by the work of their peers, the Indian 7, Carl Beam, and other artists who tend to push boundaries in their work. They own a small consulting and arts business called Indig Busy-ness which has been in operation since 2016. They have curated in Vancouver in their career, been a part of shows in three cities including Calgary, Vancouver, and Lethbridge, and currently have three public art installations in and around the Blood Tribe. Her work was purchased by Alberta Health Services when they were selected to complete the illustrations for the Blood Tribe Addictions Framework in 2019, they have a permanent display in the new Red Crow College, selected for two "OKI" artwork signs in the city of Lethbridge, and is still featured on the Telus Building in downtown Lethbridge. Naatoiyiki is interested in the intersections between arts and business, and also works as an arts Consultant, offering sliding-scale consultations to artists of all types. They also offer an annual bursary to artists of all types through Indig Busy-ness each Fall.

The Shop at SAAG carries unique items by top Canadian designers and artisans, including past feature artists Cindy Baker, Tanya Doody, Darby Havrelock, Mao Projects, Arianna Richardson, Nicole Riedmueller, and more. From one-of-a-kind jewelry pieces to textiles to ceramics and more, you'll find something special here. The Shop also carries exhibition catalogues, books and other publications, including those from our Tiny Press studio.

EVENTS + PROGRAMS

- Oct. 14** | Articulations with Gabi Dao | 2 – 3 PM
- Oct 14** | Opening Reception | 7 – 9 PM
- Oct 17** | Experimental Film Development Workshop
with Gabi Dao and Terrance Houle | 5 – 9 PM
- Oct 18** | SAAG Annual General Meeting | 6 – 7 PM
- Oct 26** | Bletcher Hour Reading Group
with the Waking Death Collective | 6 – 7 PM
- Oct 28** | Batstravaganza with Helen Schuler Nature Centre
and the Alberta Community Bat Program | noon – 5 PM
- Nov 2** | SAAG Social 2023 | 7 – 10 PM
- Nov 9** | Bletcher Hour Reading Group | 6 – 7 PM
- Nov 11** | Gallery Closed for Remembrance Day
- Nov 17** | SAAG 2023 Holiday Market | 5 – 9 PM
- Nov 18** | SAAG 2023 Holiday Market | 10 AM – 5 PM
- Nov 25** | Crafternoon | 1 – 4 PM
- Nov 30** | Curator's Tour | 6 – 7 PM
- Dec 1** | Free First Friday with Trap\door
- Dec 14** | Bletcher Hour Reading Group Year-End Celebration | 6 – 7 PM
- Dec 16** | Crafternoon | 1 – 4 PM
- Jan 10** | Bletcher Hour Reading Group | 6 – 7 PM
- Jan 13** | SAAG Birthday Celebration | noon – 5 PM

For details and more information, visit saag.ca/events or contact Heather Kehoe, Program & Event Coordinator at hkehoe@saag.ca.

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up to our e newsletter to stay in the loop about everything going on at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery Maansiksikaitsitapiitsinikssin from current exhibitions to guest speakers and special events.

Visit www.saag.ca to subscribe.



JOIN

Become a Gallery member and enjoy free admission to the Gallery, discounts on all classes, programs, and workshops, 10% off select merchandise in the Shop at SAAG and special discounts at our partners and supporters.

Individual | \$25

Student | \$15

Senior | \$20 (65+)

Family | \$50*

*includes 2 Individual Memberships and memberships for any number of children under 18.

To join, visit www.saag.ca/membership.

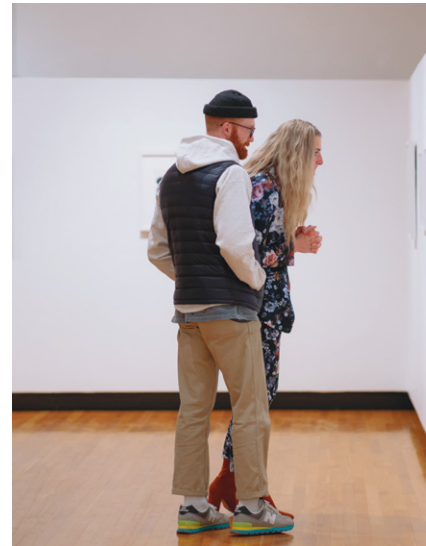


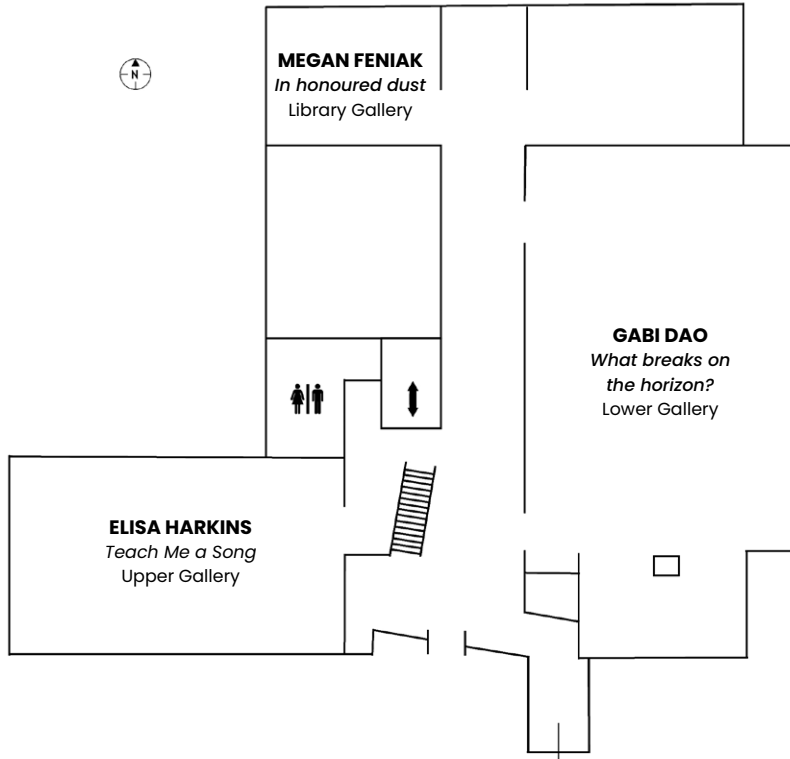
DONATE

Donating to the Gallery is an investment in the creative capacities of Lethbridge and southern Alberta. We share a vision of arts embedded within the core of our communities because, like you, we recognize the value of culture in shaping meaningful lives.

Join our *Centennial Club* monthly giving program today and be part of the vibrant future of our institution and the arts in southern Alberta.

Visit www.saag.ca/donate for more information.





INDIG BUSY-NESS
Shop at SAAG Feature Artist

GALLERY HOURS

Wednesday | 12 - 5 Pm
Thursday | 12 - 8 Pm
Friday | 12 - 8 Pm
Saturday | 12 - 5 Pm
Sun - Tues | Closed

DAILY ADMISSION

Adult | \$10
Senior (65+) | \$7
Youth (7-17) | \$5
Child (0-6) | FREE

The Southern Alberta Art Gallery Maansiksikaitapitsinikssin honours and acknowledges the Siksikaitapipi peoples that have resided and cared for these lands since time immemorial. We recognize that these lands are home to many Indigenous peoples, including the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

We acknowledge the support of the City of Lethbridge, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and the Rozsa Foundation.



SAAG SOUTHERN ALBERTA ART GALLERY
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