

“Over and over again the mark gathers itself as a kind of membrane over absence. Movements of the body, the only movements there are, mark this membrane. Again and again the approach to touch its surface, to press, to rub, to mark. What are inscribed there are the signs of passing. These things fall away into fragments, runes that stand in for the body that moved... Memory is delay. Memory is fragment. Memory is of the body that passed. Memory is the trace of a wave goodbye made with a slightly clenched fist.”

—Robert Morris, 1994ⁱ

Two Legacies is a two-person exhibition bringing together recent works on paper by regional artists Tanya Cunnington and Jill Price. Although formally and conceptually divergent in their approaches to their projects, both artists are engaged in an exploration of what poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) describes as the two legacies of love: the joy of attachment and the pain of separation. Both bodies of work share an immediacy and presence, their marks an index of compensatory gestures intended to preserve a trace of the past against some unknown future. Oscillating between eternity and time, fragments of lives lived are captured for posterity in disparate but rich ways.

Tanya Cunnington’s *Cal.endar* (2013-2018) responds to the artist’s experience of becoming a mother and returning to the Orillia area. A series of eleven multimedia drawings on paper, the works function somewhat like a medieval Labours of the Month. Each drawing corresponds to a moment in time or an ongoing issue Cunnington faces as she works through the challenges of making: *Moving Day. February 2017* (2018) is given a specific time and place, locating the work in a single day of activity; *I Wish my Parents Lived Closer. Ongoing* (2014) is untethered, allowing that desire to continuously live in the present tense. A radical departure from Cunnington’s earlier work—she largely worked as an abstract painter prior to her move back to the region—this work demonstrates some of the grit and tenacity that Cunnington possesses in her practice. Like many woman artists, Cunnington has an ambivalent relationship with self-identifying as a mother in a professional context: “I want you to be proud of me and what I can accomplish,” Cunnington writes to her son, Cal, in one of her didactics for the exhibition: “but I know this won’t happen if I give my entire self to you.”ⁱⁱ

Cunnington’s work reflects on what we inherit, what we leave behind and what we create in the interstices between. The earliest three works, dating from 2013, capture the family home and walks Cunnington took with her infant son. *138 Tecumseth Street, Sept 2012-December 2013* (2013) depicts a little brick house, on a corner lot, blank with no windows. Rather than evoking a sense of claustrophobia, the home feels protected, enclosed: “Here you took your first steps and spoke your first words,”ⁱⁱⁱ Cunnington notes. In her direct address and her generous representational style, the work feels like an offering to her son, remembering for him what he was too young to retain. Since 2017, Cunnington has been working in her late father-in-law’s studio, completing this series that began soon after her son’s birth. Fittingly, the last work in the series is *I am an Artist. Ongoing* (2018), centering herself as an artist, a maker of legacies. That this work was made in her father-in-law’s studio emphasizes that this is not necessarily a gendered impulse, or one derived entirely from motherhood: Cunnington, like all artists, is creating for an unknown future, carving from time a work for eternity.

Jill Price’s *Lineage* (2018) is a series of work that derives from gifts this Barrie-based artist received from her late grandmother. Describing these offerings as legacies, Price notes that she received three hand knitted blankets over the course of her adult life: the first blanket, in blue, was gifted to her as a single woman living on her own at university in London; the second, while she was married and living in a new home with her husband; and the third, never gifted, but discovered in a box alongside presents Price had given her grandmother, found only after her grandmother had passed. Numbered sequentially, *Lineage #1* through *Lineage #3*, were made using these blankets as drawing devices, each whorl traced in pencil on a paper below the draped textile. Deeply meditative, this process introduced a powerful somatic conversation between these two women makers, one alive and the other deceased: as Price carefully traced each stitch, she recognized those moments in which a stitch was dropped or a row was repeated, gestures that were never available to her when she used the blankets for warmth or cover. Complementing these large works are more intimately scaled drawings, developed from handwritten letters the artist received from her grandmother. Price begins by carefully tracing over her grandmother’s cursive strip, accreting words on the page until the text descends into near inscrutability. Taken together, the drawn stitches and hand-traced letters take on the character of asemic writing: evocative glyphs that appear, at a glance, legible, but defy our ability to understand them on closer inspection. In this sense, the drawings are like memory: they resist the scrutiny of our attention, refusing to release all the meaning they contain.

Prior to this body of work, Price’s most recent project examined the Anthropocene through a New Materialism lens.^{iv} Utilizing textiles as a method of understanding the global systems of capitalist exchange that further deplete natural resources and threaten ecosystems, Price’s project takes art historian Petra Lange-Berndt’s call to action to heart: “What does it mean to give agency to the material, to follow the material and to *act with* the material?”^v Her practice-based research culminated in an exhibition at YYZ in Toronto, featuring sculptures, textile works, projections and drawings in an examination of excess, unequal power relations and decay. While *Lineage* follows similar material-led methodologies, the subject is far more intimate: “What

started out as environmental research quietly turned into a sentimental inquiry after the passing of my paternal grandmother,”^{vi} Price notes. What is remarkable about Price’s artistic process is its sensitivity to both global shifts in the environment as well as the smallest registers of domestic activities. What she captures are the subtle, unremarked-upon inscriptions of people on things, traces that outlive their creators and collectively make up the material world.

Emily Dickinson, in the final stanza of her poem, “Two Legacies,” writes: “You left me Boundaries of Pain – / Capricious as the Sea – / Between Eternity and Time – / Your Consciousness – and me –”^{vii} Here eternity is captured in its 19th century incarnation, a place outside of time where those who inhabit it are exempt from time’s exigencies. A god could be said to exist in eternity, a passed loved one, or a true work of art. If eternity exists outside of time, time for us is the ticking clock that hurries us along in our creative pursuits. Jill Price and Tanya Cunnington, in disparate ways, have assembled marks that now gather themselves as correctives against absence, decay and loss. A transmutation is at play here: both artists give tangible form to passing moments, gestures and memories, offering to posterity their evocative trace.

—Emily McKibbon

Jill Price achieved a BFA at the University of Western Ontario and a MFA in Interdisciplinary Art Media and Design from OCADU. She is a recipient of numerous awards, including a 2016 SSHRC research grant and a 2017 Michael Smith Foreign Study Bursary. Price has shown her work throughout Canada, and previously worked as a Curator at Quest Art Gallery in Midland and as a professional arts educator teaching at Georgian College, OCADU and Queens University. She is currently a PhD candidate at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario.

Tanya Cunnington has an Associates Degree from OCAD in 2001, where she was the recipient of the Eric Freifeld Award for Excellence in Figurative Art. She has exhibited her work throughout Canada, working independently or as one half of the Birdbath Collaboration with her partner, Bewabon Shilling. She is the recipient of the 2015 John Hartman Award through the MacLaren Art Centre and the Cleeve Horne Purchase Award from the Orillia Museum of Art and History in 2018. She is currently based in the Orillia area, where she is Owner/Director of Lee Contemporary Art.

ⁱ WJT Mitchell, “Golden Memories—Interview with Sculptor Robert Morris,” originally published in *Artforum*, April 1994. Available online: https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/wjtmitchell/files/2014/11/Golden_Memories.pdf, p. 4. Accessed November 26, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Tanya Cunnington, *Cal.endar* didactics. August 16, 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} New Materialism is a posthumanist interdisciplinary field of study that recognizes and engages with matter and material in ways that emphasize its agency and generative qualities. Emerging from feminism, philosophy, science studies, cultural theory, gender and sexuality studies and queer theory, it invokes knowledge generated from both human and natural sciences.

^v Petra Lange-Berndt, “How to Be Complicit with Materials,” in *Materiality* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015): 13.

^{vi} Jill Price, email correspondence with the author, August 6, 2018.

^{vii} Emily Dickinson, “Two Legacies,” from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998, 1999). Available online: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52201/you-left-me-sire-two-legacies-713>. Accessed November 27, 2018.

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