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Artist spotlight: Shary Boyle

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Studio portrait of Shary Boyle, 2017, by Marc DeGuerre . Courtesy of artist.

Scarborough-born artist and AGO Trustee Shary Boyle is well-known throughout Canada – and after representing the country at the 2013 Venice Biennale, internationally as well. But however common her name might be throughout the art world, the best way to get to know her is through her art itself.

As *The Walrus* wrote about Boyle's work, "Her focus is deeply personal. While many artists follow theoretical, conceptually obtuse practices, she makes art that is highly literal and figurative... Although her work resonates with Canadians, it is not rooted in Canadian themes. From the outset, her drawing, painting, sculpture, and performance have mined universal realities, such as death, aging, sexuality, pain, injustice, and grief, creating defiant narratives about marginalization and otherness."

And once you know Shary's work, you don't easily forget it – or her. AGO visitors might remember Boyle from her exhibition *Shary Boyle: Flesh & Blood* in 2010 (after winning the 2009 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO). The exhibition presented 28 works, including four large-scale installations, sculptures, paintings and drawings.

We caught up with Shary after a very busy spring to see what she's up to now.

AGO: You've recently been shown in Calgary (the Esker Foundation), Amsterdam (Suzanne Biederberg Gallery), and South Korea (Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale). Busy spring! What was it like seeing your work in those three very different areas at the same time?

Shary: The relative newness of a contemporary art audience and history in Calgary is a sharp contrast to the ancient relationships between artists and audiences in the Netherlands and Korea. The Esker audience was thrilled to discover new connections between northern and southern art practises, the Amsterdam contemporary art scene was interested in deviations from their ceramic and painting history, and in South Korea, museum people were keen to share traditions. The response to any given artwork can change dramatically depending on the context and perspective of the culture it is viewed within.

AGO: You're constantly working with other artists, and across fields (like your live performance work with Christine Fellows). What do you get out of collaborative projects with other artists? Conversely, what do you love about working solo?

Shary: The heart of my practise is introspective and solitary – collaborations bring me out of the studio into exciting, challenging exchanges with completely different creative ways of thinking. My approach to performance connects with audiences in a very social and shared way. And after the public immediacy of a tour, it feels wonderful to retreat to quiet and personal reflection.

AGO: What do you have coming up next? What themes or materials are you interested in exploring?

Shary: I'm working on a series of sculptures and drawings inspired by traditions of theatre, dance and clowning. In our media and government climate of artifice, used to bend truth and manipulate the public, I've become very interested in examining the ways artists have used artifice to tell the truth about human nature. The work will be presented at Gallery 3 in Québec City this November.

AGO: Which artists have inspired you lately?

Shary: Luke Parnell's carvings, Amber Wellman's paintings, Vanessa Brown's metal sculptures, Jérôme Havre's marionettes, Lindsay Montgomery's ceramics, John Kurok's masks, Jim Holyoak's massive ink drawings, everything Shuvinai Ashoona touches, the artist-activist duo Embassy of Imagination... I can go on. All from or working in so-called Canada.

Learn more about Shary Boyle [here](#).

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