

Portraits in Light

*Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program*



Cover artwork:
Anne-Laure (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

Portraits in Light

Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Interpretive Catalogue and Educators Guide: AFA Travelling Exhibition Program (Trex)

Curated by Xanthe Isbister, Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre



Naomi (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

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ABOUT THE ESPLANADE

The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre is where the stories of our great collective culture are told through music and dance, painting and sculpture, plays and concerts, exhibitions and installations, artifacts and art, education programs and private events. Featuring a 700- seat main stage balcony theatre which boasts superior technology and striking design, the Esplanade is where Medicine Hat celebrates arts and heritage.

A marvel of contemporary Canadian architecture on traditional Blackfoot territory just steps from the South Saskatchewan River, the Esplanade occupies an eminent position on downtown's historic First Street Southeast. From its rooftop terrace, you can see Saamis, the dramatic shoreline escarpment which is the setting for the story of how Medicine Hat got its name.

Inside, visitors discover the vibrant Esplanade Art Gallery, the prized Esplanade Museum, the Esplanade Studio Theatre across the lobby from the Esplanade Main Stage Theatre, the expansive Esplanade Archives and Reading Room, an art education space called the Discovery Centre and the catering-friendly Cutbanks Room.

In the northeast corner of the Esplanade grounds stands the oldest remaining brick home in Alberta, the Ewart-Duggan House. With its gingerbread trim and quaint heritage gardens, it now serves as a charming venue for select cultural events and a home away from home for artists in residence.

The Esplanade opened in celebration of Alberta's centennial in 2005 and ever since, Medicine Hat has welcomed a steady procession of artists and audiences, storytellers and story-lovers from around the region and around the globe. The celebration continues today.

ABOUT THE AFA TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program since 1981. The mandate of the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community. Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

Northwest Region: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

Northeast and North Central Region: The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

Southwest Region: The Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

Southeast Region: The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat

Each year, more than 300,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program also offers educational support material to help educators integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the TREX program are curated from a variety of sources, including private and public collections. A major part of the program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 8,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 2000 artists. As the only provincial art collection in Alberta, the AFA collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.



Myles (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

CURITORIAL STATEMENT

Whether it is a landscape, portrait, documentary, or simply art as photography, every photograph has a story behind it. This is exemplified in Petra Malá Miller's ongoing project *Portraits in Light*. Each of the 150 participants embodies a story. Placed in a three-quarter pose, they gaze into the distance with an unassuming softness that provides room for the viewer to contemplate each subject's life: Where have they lived? What makes them happy? Are they loved and do they love? What are their sorrows? What are their passions?

I first came across Malá Miller's works in the Alberta Foundation for the Arts' permanent collection. The two portraits that caught my attention were from the series *The Voice Reached Us Through the Floor, but the Words Themselves Were Lost*. I had never seen images so captivating: an adolescent boy and an adolescent girl, each in a three-quarter pose, staring into the distance. Other images within the series had the subjects structured within a context, but these were different; the lone figures in low, cold light

conveyed psychological isolation. The photographs had conceptual weight. Malá Miller also has an incredible facility not only with a camera and lens, but equally with light. This ability is highlighted in the *Portraits in Light* series.

Portraits in Light is an elemental body of work that is conceptually accessible and relatable to people from all walks of life. It is a massive project, currently consisting of 150 photographs, a book of photographs, and two side-by-side projections. For this presentation, a selection of images and the book will tour the province of Alberta for two and a half years. This exhibition is unlike any others that have toured with TREX. It raises questions surrounding representation, cultural identity, family, and community. Malá Miller explains, "Each person's appearance is clearly articulated, but his or her social status is cast in doubt, placed on the same symbolic level. Each person is depicted as if without clothing." As the viewer spends time with these photographs, the strength of each persona begins to emerge; each subject is exposed

but projects an apathetic confidence. We don't want to look away. Originally from the Czech Republic and now based in Lethbridge, Malá Miller began the *Portraits in Light* series to become more acquainted with her new home in southeast Alberta. Her portraits represent the individuals she met throughout her community. They are portraits of friends, schoolmates, colleagues, students, and friends of friends. The artist's portrait sessions were an extension of the relationships between her and her subjects. She says, "My portraits grow from an exchange between my subjects and myself and are made in a classical portrait style using a soft light, while I emphasize my subject's gaze in a three-quarter pose. My subjects are at once vulnerable and yielding." These works are quiet and powerful, and capture humanity's vulnerability and strength. They express how we are simultaneously similar but unique.

This exhibition is curated by Xanthe Isbister, Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre



Cindy (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"




Petra Malá Miller

BIOGRAPHY

Petra Malá Miller was born in the Czech Republic and grew up in Blatnice, a village in southern Moravia. Her photographic work explores the poetics of childhood, of innocence, ageing, memory and loss and raises questions surrounding representation, cultural identity, the individual, the family and the community.

Petra Malá Miller earned her MFA from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (2008). In 2009, she received the ESSL Museum Award for Contemporary Art, Klosterneuburg, Vienna. She received Canada Council for the Arts and Alberta Foundation for the Arts awards for her photography and is represented in the AFA's Art Collection. Her work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions in Europe, the United States and in Canada including: *Portraits in Light*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge (2015), *The Intimate Circle in Contemporary Czech Photography*, Landskrona Museum, Sweden (2015) and at the City Gallery of Prague (2013); *The Voice Reached Us Through the Floor, but the Words Themselves Were Lost*, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto (2013), Trianon Gallery, Lethbridge (2012) and Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague (2011); *On the Threshold*, Jiri Svestka Gallery, Berlin (2011); *Inter-view*, Nitra Gallery, Nitra (2010); *Czech It*, an exhibition of modern and contemporary Czech photography presented at Space Gallery, Pittsburgh (2009). The artist is currently preparing *Living in the Zone*, a multi-year project that explores the afterlife of Chernobyl and its effects on the children of Belarus.



Emeline (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

ARTIST STATEMENT

Portraits in Light is an artwork comprised of 150 portrait photographs. As an immigrant to Alberta my portraits attempt to represent the individuals I met in Lethbridge, to chart the network of my growing social relations and the complex interconnectedness between these people. My project explores and celebrates community; my works conceptual relevance, however, extends to other social groups and to other communities.

My portraits grow from an exchange between my subjects and myself and are made in a classical portrait style using a soft light while I emphasize my subject's gaze in a three-quarter pose. My subjects are at once vulnerable and yielding. Each person's appearance is clearly articulated but his or her social status is cast in doubt, placed on the same symbolic level. Each person is depicted as if without clothing.

The process of making these photographs is very important to me. I photographed people that I met in Lethbridge; these people are my friends, my school and work colleagues, my students, and friends of friends. I enjoyed the portrait session as an extension of our relationship; these moments are like the unspoken experience of being; this is valuable to me and to my artistic practice.

The wall-mounted prints reveal the totality of the portrait archive all at once, in a single view. The two side-by-side projections show the photographs as temporal proximities. The subjects' relations to each other are seen to change as well. One projected image touches the other. This movement, nearness and durational quality of the projections engage the physical presence, the live space of the viewer. The book of portraits invites the reader to touch and to linger over each portrait, to contemplate a materially bound artefact and, importantly, to consider each subject uniquely.

LIST OF WORKS



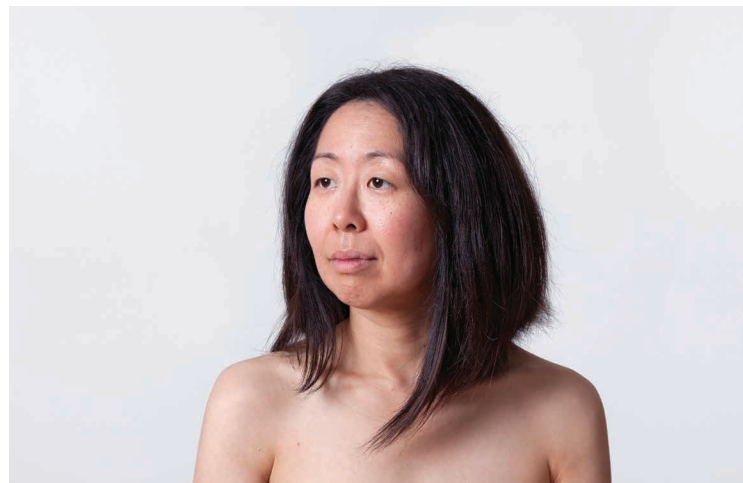
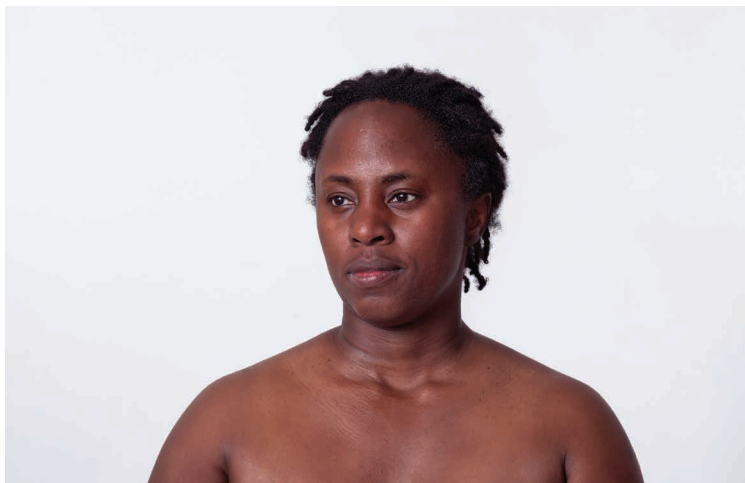
Left to Right/Top to Bottom

Karen (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Ike (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Skye (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Arianna (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist



Left to Right/Top to Bottom

Rodney (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Lorina (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Dana (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Naomi (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist



Left to Right/Top to Bottom

Sterling (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Mary (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Emeline (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

John (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist



Left to Right/Top to Bottom

Roy (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Tanya (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Cindy (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Myles (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist



Left to Right/Top to Bottom

Brent (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Michelle (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Anne-Laure (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist

Charly (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"
Collection of the artist



Photo-book
Archival Inkjet prints on rice paper
2015
13"x19"x1"
Collection of the artist



Ike (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATOR'S GUIDE AND LESSON PLANS

The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program Southeast created this educators' guide based on the exhibition's themes and concepts. It is composed of lesson plans and informative material. We strive to create projects that will inspire individuals to experience our exhibitions beyond the decorative and to explore their own creativity. Educators, writers, curators and artists have all contributed content; we hope you create something amazing from it.



Lesson 1

SUMI INK PORTRAIT

GRADES K–6

Overview

Petra Mala Miller’s portraits express how individuals are simultaneously similar and unique. By asking ourselves, “How am I like others?” and “How am I different?” we have an opportunity to explore our identities and also to discover how other people view themselves in the world. This project invites participants to create a self-portrait—to become their own subject and ask themselves, “How does it feel to be me?”

Objectives

Students will:

- Explore ways to connect with and express their inner selves
- Develop observational drawing skills

Materials

Sumi ink

Watercolour or textured Bristol paper (11 x 15 or larger)

Bamboo/sumi brush

Hand mirrors

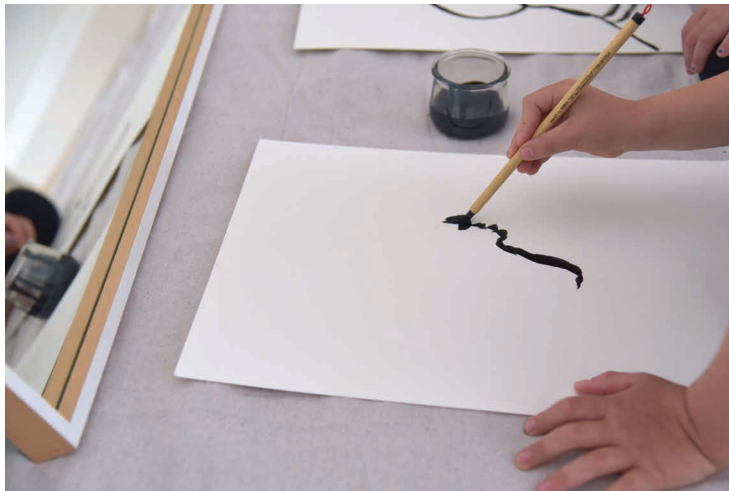


Instructions

Step One

Spend time looking in the mirror and studying your face. What shapes do you see? After a few minutes of reflection, think about how you'll draw yourself today. How does the way you feel about yourself come through in your facial expressions and your mark-making? Encourage feelings and ideas to emerge.

Step Two



If you've never used ink before, get a feel for the brush and ink on a piece of scrap paper.



Then, working intuitively and loosely, draw your self-portrait on the watercolour/Bristol paper using a bamboo brush dipped in ink.

Note: Sumi ink can stain, so wear old clothing or an apron.

Variations

You may choose to keep your image as a high-contrast ink portrait or try a variation by adding colour. Ink must be completely dry before you add colour. Chalk pastels work nicely, as they have a softness that contrasts the rich, dark surface of the ink.

Try working on larger paper (e.g., 18 x 24). The portrait will be more expressive as the brushstrokes will tend to be looser to fill the paper.





Lesson 2

SMALL PORTRAIT STUDIES

GRADES 1–12

Overview

Portrait photography attempts to capture the subject's personality and can be approached in many ways. In her portraits, Malá Miller creates a raw and vulnerable view of the subject by stripping away distractions. This allows us, the viewers, to connect with her subjects in a powerful way. As well, she has an existing relationship with each of her subjects, so the portraits sessions are an extension of this connection. Malá Miller's connection with her subjects is an integral aspect of her portraits.

In this project, participants will engage in their own portrait sessions to gain an understanding of the connection between artist and subject and further develop their drawing skills through observation.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn how to engage with a subject and tell their story through visual interpretation
- Develop representational drawing abilities through observation and develop skills through repetition
- Apply the fundamental principles of portraiture, such as proportions

Materials

Paper (8.5 x 11)

Drawing materials (pencil, pencil crayons, sketch pens, etc.)

Stapler

Scissors



Instructions

Step One

To create your mini sketchbook, you'll divide a single piece of paper into four sections: Fold the paper in half, open and cut on fold line. Layer the two pieces of paper on top of each other, fold in half, open and cut on fold line. Layer the four pieces of paper on top of each other, fold horizontally, open and staple along fold line. Your mini sketchbook should have fourteen pages.

Step Two



Carry your mini sketchbook with you throughout the week, to allow for spontaneous drawing sessions. Using your preferred drawing material, draw in the classroom, at home, on the bus etc



Choose your subjects out of personal interest. You might want to draw people you know well, like a family member, or you might want to draw a someone less familiar, like a fellow student from a different class. Observe your subject carefully and then, based on this observation, draw them on one page in your book.

Step Three

Once the sketchbook is complete, look through it and reflect on your sessions. Did you capture the personality of each subject in the way you were hoping to? Exchange books with other participants and interpret each other's work. Discuss and make observations about the different portraits. What do you know about each individual through the eyes of the artist? What do their expressions, gestures and other details say about them?





Lesson 3

CAMERA OBSCURA

GRADES 3–9

Overview

The camera obscura is an old device. It was used long before the camera was invented and became a popular aid to assist with tracing. It soon became the basis of early photographic cameras. The device is also referred to as a pinhole camera, as it uses a small hole to let reflected light in, ultimately creating a natural optical phenomenon. The image or scene outside the pinhole box is projected through the tiny hole and appears inside the box reversed and inverted. In a modern camera, a lens and a mirror are used to reflect the image back upright.

To replicate this original way of capturing an image, participants will create their own pinhole camera and explore framing subjects and compositions.



Objectives

Students will:

- Learn how a camera works
- Explore the phenomenon of the pinhole camera and how to frame a subject
- Develop fine motor skills and craftsmanship by building their own pinhole camera

Materials

Cardboard tube (recycled oatmeal tube or empty paper towel roll)

Aluminum foil

Wax paper

Rubber bands

Black construction paper

Black electrical tape

Straight pin

Ruler

Marker

Utility knife

Paint or drawing materials for decorating

Sunny day

Instructions

Step One

With your ruler, measure two inches up from the bottom of the cardboard tube. Turning the tube, mark at a two-inch height several more times around its circumference and then connect the marks so you have a continuous line. Using the utility knife, follow the marked line and cut through the tube. Your tube will now be in two pieces, one shorter and one longer.

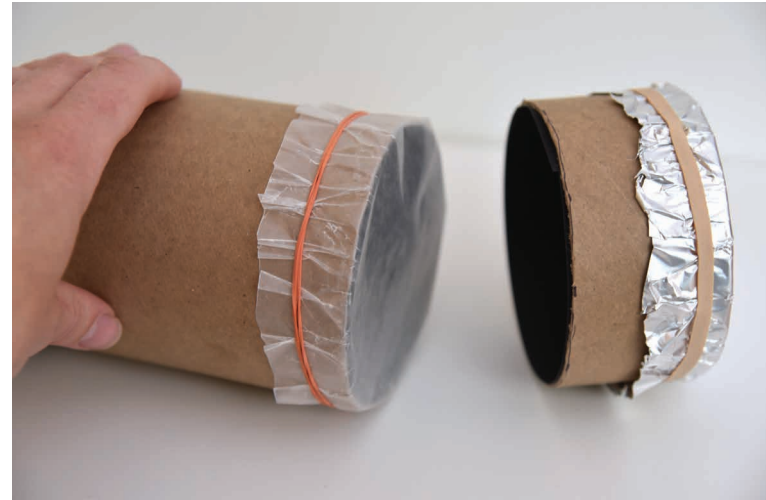


Step Two

Roll a piece of black construction paper inside each piece of tube and trim to fit. No need to tape secure, as it will stay in place on its own. Lining the tubes with black paper stops any refractory light from bouncing around inside the viewer and will create a clearer image.

Step Three

Take the longer length of tube and affix a piece of wax paper to one end using a rubber band or black electrical tape. The wax paper will act as your viewing screen—the surface that your image ends up being reflected onto. Next, take the shorter length of tube and attach a smooth piece of aluminum foil to one end.



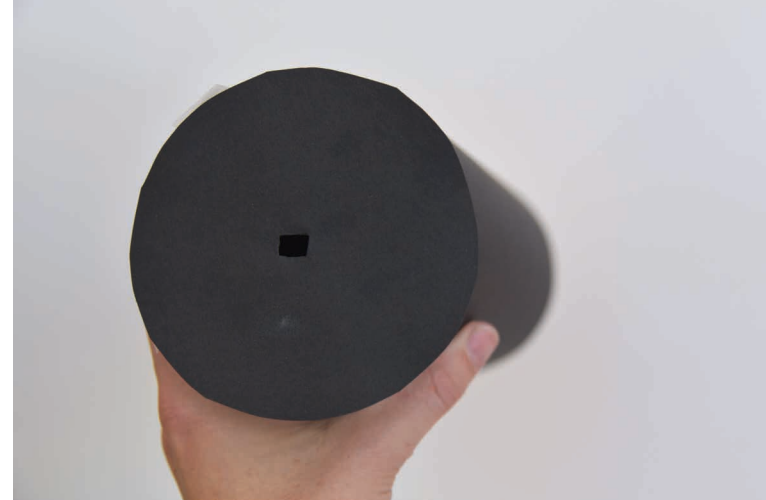
Step Four

Tape the two pieces of tube back together. Make sure the wax paper is in the middle section of the tube and the aluminum foil is on the bottom end.



Step Five

Carefully poke a pinhole in the centre of the aluminum foil with the pin. Work patiently, as you want the hole to be as tiny and smooth as possible.



Step Six


It's important to ensure that the inside of your tube is light-tight. Wrap the entire exterior of the tube with black construction paper.

To create a light-tight viewfinder, trace the open end of the tube on black paper and cut out the circle. Cut outside your line to make sure you have enough black paper to tape over the edges. Then cut a small rectangle out of the middle of the paper and secure to the open end of the tube. You may then choose to decorate and personalize the exterior of your camera.



Step Seven

Head outside on a sunny day to test your camera. Aim the camera obscura at a bright object or scene and look into the viewfinder. Hold your eye tight to the viewfinder, so excess light doesn't get in. Look carefully and you should be able to see an upside-down mirror image of the object or scene you're looking at.



John (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
2015
13"x19"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was produced in conjunction with the TREX exhibition *Portraits in Light* by the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program (Trex) Southeast Region 4, at TREX Space, City of Medicine Hat. *Portraits in Light* will tour throughout Alberta to non-traditional gallery spaces August 2019-February 2023. Visit www.trexprogramsoutheast.ca to find out more about the program and locations of each exhibition.

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ESPLANADE
Arts & Heritage Centre

 **Medicine Hat**
The Gas City

 **TREX**

 **Alberta**
Foundation
for the Arts



Rodney (Portraits in Light)
Archival inkjet print
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ESPLANADE

Arts & Heritage Centre

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