

# NEW BRUNSWICK *studio conversations*

Notes from the Sheila Hugh Mackay  
Foundation Art Critic Residency

by Stephanie Buhmann

**W**hen I first decided to assemble a book of interviews with female New York-based artists of various generations and working in all media, published in April 2016, I could not have imagined that the Beaverbrook Art Gallery would invite me to extend this theme in New Brunswick, Canada. But invited I was and, as my 2016 Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation Art Critic Residency drew near, I wondered whether I would find that the selected artists share similar concerns, adhere to a predominant style or aesthetic, and cross-reference other artists of the region.

Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Abstracted and non-narrative, many of Bourque's films consider notions of home, family, and personal memories. She inherited a family archive of home movies her father filmed of family moments. These have been incorporated as part of several of her own films, in which they address complicated, and often contradictory, interpretations of family and home.

We talked at length about one of her earlier films, *The People in the House*, completed while she attended the School of Art Institute of Chicago. The film was staged with every detail designed especially for the set. Beautifully lit in high-contrast and fauve-like colours, and with an overall foreboding mood, the film is perhaps Bourque's most formally representational work.

Painstakingly cast and rehearsed, *The People in the House* contains often pantomime-like acting that is "strictly choreographed

Saint John

DEANNA MUSGRAVE

Painter Deanna Musgrave explores the exchange between microscopic and macroscopic perspectives. "I'm very much interested in the changeover from representation to abstraction," she says about her compositions which, from afar, appear as symphonic conglomerates of fine details. This is true for both her medium-scale paintings and her epic mural *Cloud*, which is permanently installed at the Hans W. Klohn Commons in the University of New Brunswick, Saint John.

Measuring 10 x 56 feet, *Cloud* contains a wealth of information, gathered from pop culture, science, art history, and personal notations, all embedded in a biomorphic shape that seems to



Deanna Musgrave, *Cloud*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 304.8 cm high by 1706.88 cm wide. Collection of the University of New Brunswick, Saint John, located at the Hans W. Klohn Commons, University of New Brunswick, Saint John. Photo: Drew Gilbert.

morph and expand constantly. Movement is a key component in Musgrave's work, made manifest through shifting colour nuances and an overall sense of fluidity.

"My work is very much about water and there is this theory that water has memory, that it retains information," she says. "There's always been information transmitted through the sky, starting with carrier pigeons and ending with electronic waves and radio frequencies." *Cloud* was inspired by the concept of information travelling through the air, "spiritual, intellectual, and random".

Often working on the studio floor, using liquid paints to surround, unify, and pool around areas of information, Musgrave succeeds in defying a traditional concept of perspective. Her compositions unfold almost three-dimensionally, enveloping the viewer with information from above, straight on, and below. "I try to pull from different traditions and styles, including Dutch still life, graffiti, visual music, abstract expressionism and op art. I'm especially interested in different ideas about colour and perspective, depth, mass, and light. I like Asian landscape painting, where plain white can evoke incredible depth."

Musgrave clearly feels a deep connection to nature and expresses a feeling of awe reminiscent of Romantic painting. She practises dowsing, a 15th century technique involving pendulums to locate underground water systems, and is currently studying to become a hypnotherapist, feeling that both "are very much part of my art practice".

Through its ambition, brilliant execution, and staggering detail, *Cloud* serves as Musgrave's masterpiece and proof of her ability. Perhaps it is in the large scale that her many interests, knowledge, and eclectic observations come together most readily, demanding space and breathing room.

"You don't think of the Internet as taking up more space," she says. "Its devices are getting thinner and are being named 'Air', while storage is being referred to as the 'Cloud'. In my work, I want to be able to bring up everything that comes into my mind. I don't want to be limited by labels, such as having to be an 'abstract painter' or a 'representational painter'. I want to create a painting style, where anything goes."