



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

ResearchLIFE

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CHURCHILL MARINE OBSERVATORY

Marine science in
Canada's third ocean

GROUNDING PERSPECTIVE

Artworks connect to the natural world

MEASURING RECONCILIATION

Canadian reconciliation barometer

SAVING LIVES WITH DATA

Long-term partners get quick results

TRANSFORMING AGRICULTURE

Leveraging technology

Message

FROM THE VICE-PRESIDENT
(RESEARCH AND INTERNATIONAL)



THIS ISSUE MARKS MY LAST IN MY role as vice-president (*research and international*) at UM. The magazine has afforded me the opportunity to share the incredible research, scholarly works and creative activities undertaken by the exemplary group of university faculty members, post-doctoral fellows and students at UM.

It has been my privilege to oversee the research enterprise at UM for the past thirteen years. I sat down with this magazine's editor to chat about my time in my administrative role. You can read an excerpt from that conversation in the Insights section (*page 18*).

In this issue you will read about some of the things I think of as having had a hand in making come to fruition, like the opening of the Churchill Marine Observatory, slated to open in 2022. During my term there were many such infrastructure projects that resulted in new facilities that support research, teaching and learning at UM. They include the Taché Arts Complex, the Manitoba Institute for Materials, the Stanley Pauley Engineering building, Smartpark Innovation Hub, the Richardson Centre for Functional Food and Nutraceuticals, the Canadian Wheat Board Centre for Grain Storage Research and the Sea-ice Environmental Research Facility.

I am especially proud of the growth in undergraduate research experiences and support. When launched in 2012, we were the first university in Canada to offer the Undergraduate Research Awards in all disciplines open competitively to all students. You can read more about undergraduate research and sparking the interest of the next generation in the Spotlight on Students section (*page 36*).

I look forward to seeing the further growth of the research enterprise at UM for years to come. I close with my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to you, our readers, our supporters and our partners.

—Digvir S. Jayas, OC, PhD, DSc, PEng, PAg, FRSC



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BY SHARON CHISVIN

Sarah Ciurysek did not spend her childhood dreaming of becoming an artist. But as an artist she has come to realize, and appreciate, just how much that childhood, largely spent roaming the great outdoors at her family’s northern Alberta farm, has impacted her artwork.

Ciurysek is a land-based photographer and multi-media artist who is constantly exploring the existential and emotional relationship between humankind and the land. Many of her images reflect barren branches, uprooted trees, graves, voids and other replications of death and decay, but much of her work also draws attention to the life-affirming properties of the land.

ARTWORKS
CONNECT TO THE
NATURAL WORLD

GROUNDED PER SPECTIVE

“A LOT OF MY WORKS ARE MOST OBVIOUSLY ABOUT DEATH,” Ciurysek explains, “and that is a subject matter that comes to the fore quite quickly. But at the same time, I’m usually aiming to encourage for the viewer a sense of returning to their body and, in spending time with the artworks, to just feel grounded themselves and present and alive.”

Her works, she adds, may be physically dark, but not necessarily heavy or sad.

“They feel inextricably tied in with the experience of living, of being human.”

Ciurysek was drawn to art, and photography in particular, through political activism, and has remained committed to photography because of what she perceives as the medium’s democratic nature.

While studying political science with a focus on Indigenous self-determination at the University of Alberta, Ciurysek worked for the student newspaper as a photographer. That combination of work and study led, after graduation, to a job with the Metis Settlements General Council in Alberta, where she edited a community magazine.

HER WORKS, SHE ADDS, MAY BE PHYSICALLY DARK, BUT NOT NECESSARILY HEAVY OR SAD. “THEY FEEL INEXTRICABLY TIED IN WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING, OF BEING HUMAN.”

“From this, I realized my deeper interest in visual art and my hopes for how art can contribute to social change,” Ciurysek says.

Ciurysek enrolled in the photography program at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design—receiving rigorous technical and conceptual training—and then went on to Concordia for a MFA. She joined the University of Manitoba as an associate professor at the School of Art in 2013.

“When I was in grad school in Montreal,” Ciurysek says, “I began to see that my experience with land was rather unusual. I felt a familiarity and comfort with the ground that I started to understand not everyone had, and I wanted to share that proximity to the ground that I felt with others.”



That desire, she adds, coincided with a determination to celebrate rural perspectives, which she found to be missing from contemporary art at that time.

“Channeling the pleasures and powers of the ground through my photographic installations seemed right to me,” the artist asserts.

Those pleasures and power are evident in both Ciurysek’s early and current work, including the 2016 photographic series, *Fell*, which depicts the dark root balls at the base of trees that have fallen over, and the photographic mural of intertwining tree branches that she is currently working on during a six-month research leave.

Ciurysek works primarily with physical photographs that have a material existence, and her images are often site specific, representing the ground as it really appears. Her 2011 photographic mural, *Landscape*, is an anomaly, made up, as it is, of soil images re-configured and recomposited from old excavation negatives. Ciurysek’s sonic photographic piece, *Dear Mary*, is an even greater departure from her usual practice. *Dear Mary*, part of a commissioned exhibit at Loughborough University in England, pays tribute to an older



Sarah Ciurysek,
Associate Professor,
School of Art

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Fell 2. Silver gelatin
photograph,
40”x50”, 2016

TOP:
Landscape. Toner
photographs printed on
Tyvek, total size 9’x8’
(separated in 3 panels),
2011 Photo: Blaine
Campbell

LEFT:
Collage-in-progress, 2022

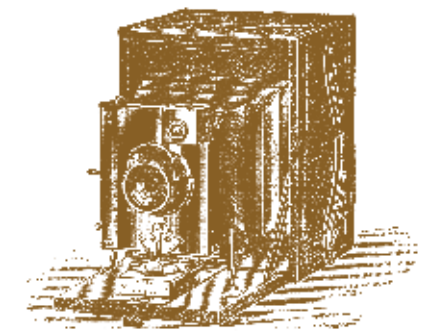
woman’s life as a farmer, while evincing Ciurysek’s feminist perspective and determination to represent unknown or undervalued women’s experiences.

Many of Ciurysek’s installations—which have been exhibited across Canada and in the UK, Austria and South Africa—are intentionally designed to require an unusual viewing experience, such as leaning over the artwork.

“I AM ALSO HOPEFUL THAT MY ARTWORKS ENCOURAGE THE VIEWER TO CONSIDER THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GROUND AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE NATURAL WORLD.”

“I believe that triggering the viewer’s senses and body heightens the emotional impact of the stories that are embedded in the works,” she explains. “I am also hopeful that my artworks encourage the viewer to consider their relationship to the ground and their relationship to the natural world.”

Ciurysek encourages that same consideration in her students, whether she is introducing them to non-traditional research methods at an outdoor class at FortWhyte Alive or teaching them darkroom secrets in the School of Art’s analogue photography facilities. Those facilities, she says, are “amazing,” and are just one representation of the many ways in which the U of M so generously supports her research, her art making, and her determination to connect others with the land. **IN**



TOWARDS DECOLONIZATION

SARAH CIURYSEK’S RESEARCH AND resulting artwork have consistently reflected her ties to and passion for the land. But her approach to that research and artwork, she admits, has been as a “settler artist,” an artist who benefits from accepted art practices, even though they may be rooted in colonial power imbalances.

Ciurysek is now intent on changing that trajectory and focusing more of her practice on decolonization.

“I have been very committed to intercultural work and decolonization in my work as a teacher, and as a person,” she says, “but I haven’t explicitly worked on decolonization in my own creative research yet.”

Ciurysek’s commitment to exploring decolonization will involve creating future photographic based artwork that clearly engages with the topic. But the commitment will also involve a lot of looking back.

“Some of my work ahead is to go back and reexamine my past artworks to see if those artworks have been complicit in conventional colonial landscape art practices,” she explains.

The first step in reexamining that past will mean thoroughly researching the history of colonization in northern Alberta’s Peace River region in Treaty 8 territory. That is where Ciurysek grew up and where she first connected to, and was inspired by, the land.

“I’ve always known the general history of the area, but now I’m really turning to learning in a deeper fashion,” she says. “Not enough landscape art acknowledges the history or is working productively towards decolonization. It is time that I do that learning and address that topic.”