

## Amorphous Anthologies

Robin Smith-Peck's collages offer new and mysterious visions.

by Agnieszka Matejko

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Robin Smith-Peck, "Hiram's Gift 376," 2018, ink, acrylic, wax and resin on panel, 30" x 60" x 1"

Seemingly insignificant things in our homes can trigger powerful memories, whether it's a lamp we read by on long winter evenings or the checkered cloth on a table where we share conversations with an old friend.

Robin Smith-Peck's Edmonton studio is filled with shards that evoke such memories. Piles of paper surround her, even spilling onto the floor as she assembles her mixed-media prints. Scanned foliage from a garden she once grew, bits of her own drawings and all manner of other intimate imagery have found their way into the collages featured in *Anthologies: a collection of chance encounters*, on view at the Peter Robertson Gallery in Edmonton from March 14 to April 6.

But once a work is completed, few of the original images are readily recognizable. Smith-Peck cuts and compiles bits of paper into new images that are as mysterious and evocative as the memories they comprise. For example, *Bluing*, similar in scale to a Japanese landscape scroll, is filled with small objects that read as geese, crouching figures or clouds floating in an indigo sky.



Robin Smith-Peck, "Bluing," 2018, ink, acrylic, paper, wax and resin on panel, 24" x 60" x 1"

Such dreamlike ambiguity is important to Smith-Peck. She is inspired by Indonesian story cloths, which portray daily activities and are passed on from generation to generation, but her works don't follow a defined narrative. They are like the mutable storylines of a Rorschach test or maps through imaginary landscapes.

Viewers can meander through these works as if walking out in nature amid teeming plant life, an activity Smith-Peck knows well. Excursions into the Northern Canadian wilderness have been a part of her life since her childhood in Goose Bay, Labrador, and she has taught printmaking in remote communities, including Cape Dorset and Iqaluit.

Picking wild blueberries with her father was an annual ritual that invokes cherished memories. The keen eye needed to spy berries amidst the boreal forest was an asset for her most recent series of large prints.





Robin Smith-Peck, "PoEm 3," 2018, ink, acrylic, paper, wax and resin on panel, 16" x 16" x 2"

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Another body of work in the show consists of intimate, emotionally wrenching collages. The artist began these works decades ago after the death of her brother, but completed them only recently. For her, the loss remains ever present.

The third work in this *PoEm* series evokes both a lonesome view from a window and the symmetrical majesty of an altar. A tree-like offering is placed at the centre; it's a scan of a marigold root that Smith-Peck once picked in her Labrador garden. A mysterious moon-like crescent illuminates the scene. It's a photo-based print of a hand-held clay sculpture she made while contemplating loss.

Although such lovingly collected memories fill Smith-Peck's collages, there is no trace of nostalgia. The plant life that permeates her art seems enchanted. With each glance, the scene changes and new amorphous and enigmatic forms entice viewers to construct their own stories. ■

*Anthologies: a collection of chance encounters* is on view at the Peter Robertson Gallery from March 14 to April 6, 2019.

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Robin Smith-Peck



Agnieszka Matejko is an Edmonton community-based artist whose practice focuses on youth and children as well as engaging non-arts groups in public art projects. She has taught at MacEwan University and the University of Alberta.

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