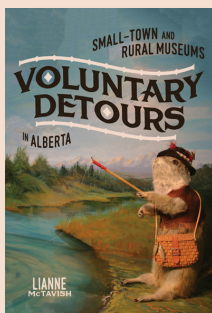


collection since the institution's founding in 1880. The shift in perspectives toward contemporary Indigenous art signaled by this purchase have only expanded under the curatorial direction of Kanien'kehá:ka artist Greg A. Hill. Appointed in 2007 as the inaugural Audain Curator of Indigenous Art, Hill is currently the Senior Audain Curator and head of the Department of Indigenous Art. Hill has significantly increased the number of Indigenous artworks in the collection (2200-plus and counting) as well as organized or hosted many solo exhibitions for senior Indigenous artists, beginning with Anishinaabe painter Norval Morrisseau in 2006. The development of *Sakahān, Àbadakone*, and future cinquennials of international Indigenous art have also happened under his leadership. Institutionally, the National Gallery of Art, in conversation with Indigenous knowledge keepers, rebranded itself in 2021 with the Algonquin term Ankosé, meaning "everything is connected." Sasha Suda, the NGA's Director and CEO appointed in 2019, notes that this conceptualization is central to the strategic plan, which consists of deep re-visioning to create connections with diverse audiences and tell more complex stories. Decades of persistence and hard-fought battles by Indigenous artists, curators, community members, and their allies have shifted the dialogue from inclusion and representation within national narratives to important considerations of how Indigenous art practices and world views can transform settler-colonial places into sovereign spaces.

These ongoing discussions around displacing or replacing "Western art" as the controlling narrative of art history in major art institutions" (114) comprise the final major essay in the catalogue. The essay arose from "Worlding the Global: The Arts in the Age of Decolonization," a conference held in conjunction with the exhibition, which included fifty academics from

four continents. The very nature of the essay is reflective of the exhibition, the catalogue, and the current state of the discipline. Multi-authored, multi-layered, presenting



multiple perspectives, it compels the reader to slow down, to think, to consider the complex concepts presented. As the five authors—Brigit Hopfener, Heather Igloliorte, Ruth Phillips, Carmen Robertson, and Ming Tiampo—note: "The form, process and content of this piece embody our hopes for reimagining a world that both respects local, specific knowledges, temporalities and ways of being, and also appreciates the necessity and complexity of attending to global perspectives" (122).

Though not a substitute for the physical experience of moving through the exhibition spaces of *Àbadakone*, the thoughtful essays and compelling color photographs frame and contextualize the ambitious curatorial vision and provide a glimpse of the global diversity of the artists and their works. The strength of the diversity is perhaps not as well expressed in the catalogue's authorship, as most of the essayists are based in Canada. An understandably imperfect fragment of a powerful exhibition, the catalogue (and virtual elements available online) nonetheless provide an accessible and valuable introduction to the rich array of contemporary Indigenous art practices and their global futures for generalists and specialists alike. ¶

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1. See <https://www.gallery.ca/virtual-ngc/abadakone>.

Lianne McTavish
Voluntary Detours: Small-town and Rural Museums in Alberta
 Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021

360 pp. 52 photos, 1 table, colour insert
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Devon Smither

The first book to closely examine small-town and rural museums across Alberta, *Voluntary Detours* is an important contribution to critical museum studies. Indebted to the work of Fiona Candlin on micromuseums in the UK, the book addresses a selection of institutions that have been underexamined in Alberta, an oversight which has contributed to the sense that large urban museums are supposedly superior. Lianne McTavish, Professor of the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture at the University of Alberta, sets out to challenge this hierarchy by giving serious attention to difficult to reach, quirky, and unexpected sites where she sees ideas of museology being challenged and reshaped as she "aspire[s] to understand the small-town and rural museums in Alberta on their own terms by highlighting their distinctive qualities and recognizing their regional and cultural specificity" (4). McTavish began research in 2012 into small-town and rural museums as lead researcher for the grant-funded Alberta Museums Project, the findings of which are synthesized on an educational and bibliographic website, which hosts an interactive map and a list of more than three hundred museums in operation in Alberta.¹ *Voluntary Detours* is the second phase of the

author's research, building on the Alberta Museums Project, and the book delves deeper, offering more in-depth critical case studies from specific museums in the province.

McTavish intends for the book to be used as an "alternative textbook," although likely it is the individual chapters that will be of particular interest to undergraduate students in museum studies. One of the strengths of the book lies in its use of theories from sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and tourism studies to analyze "the interdisciplinary nature of museums, including concepts related to automobilites, hauntology, critical heritage studies, petrocultures, and Indigenous knowledge" (37). The book is an insightful and absorbing text that explores how small-town and rural museums might contest historical understandings of museums, how visitors and "insiders" understand them, and—perhaps most importantly—how the institutions under discussion connect to histories of colonialism in the province. Calls to decolonize the museum in the past few years have spurred a noticeable increase in critiques of the naturalized authority of museums, including their role as agents of the nation-state and producers of grand narratives. Through the example of the Gopher Hole Museum in particular, McTavish argues that this museum diverges from "authorized heritage discourse" and can be seen as exemplary of the ways small-town museums can subvert "messages about museums, heritage, and rural life" (117) in its direct challenge to hierarchies of taste, class and authority.

Including an introduction offering an overview of small-town museums in Alberta and introducing McTavish's methods and case studies, the book is organized into five chapters. Chapter one addresses three museums: the Torrington Gopher Hole Museum, which features taxidermy gophers posed in

a series of forty-seven anthropomorphic scenes; the Wadey Centre in Blackfalds, a historic T. Eaton house; and the Fort Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum, an exact replica of an 1870s Hudson's Bay store with historical artifacts. The first part of the chapter focuses on the often-lengthy journey trip required to reach each museum, which, according to McTavish, is a critical part of the visitor's experience and works to "create place" at small museums such as these. The author argues that visiting "urban museums usually involves shorter trips through city traffic, whether on public transportation systems or on foot, differing from the more lengthy excursions on back roads or through the countryside to reach small-town and rural museums" (39). This is true, although many visitors to large institutions like the National Gallery of Canada, the Louvre, or the Metropolitan Museum travel hundreds, if not thousands of kilometres from their home. What is important for the understanding of small-town museums in Alberta, McTavish notes, is that they are often not the intended destination, but are a side trip or detour. Building on John Urry's theory of automobility, she argues that driving and museums are mutually constituted, and that the detour is a key facet of visiting sites like the Gopher Hole Museum (44). Certainly, as the author suggests, the trek to this museum can be seen as a kind of Situationist *dérive*; but on occasion, for some visitors (and certainly in other case studies in the book), the journey may also be a kind of pilgrimage like those undertaken by visitors to the Guggenheim in Bilbao or Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in Utah. While pilgrimage studies in anthropology typically refers to religious travel and tourism, as Valene Smith² has noted, most scholars agree with Edith and Victor Turner "that a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist."³ Given the centrality of the trek to the museums discussed

in *Voluntary Detours*, pilgrimage studies, and the inclusion of a few larger urban museums as points of comparison, might have helped underscore how the theory of automobility makes small-town museums unique case studies.

The Gopher Hole Museum was clearly a major catalyst for this project and one of the first rural museums McTavish visited. It surprised her, challenging her assumptions about the superiority of large urban museums. The Gopher Hole Museum is read as an "open text," whose curators and creators are active agents in making meaning through the forty-seven dioramas representing Torrington's history and more contemporary events. Situated in a genealogy of natural history museums, the author acknowledges that the museum is humorous but glosses over the ways in which humour and camp are part of the allure of the museum. Acknowledging her own delighted surprise upon her first visit (and those of other visitors writing in the guest book or in online reviews), McTavish doesn't fully address what the appeal of the museum is to those taking the long detour to arrive in Torrington. In Susan Sontag's essay "Notes on Camp," she writes that, "In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve," can be seen as Camp.⁴ While local "insiders" celebrate the Gopher Hole Museum for its role in displaying history and culture, outsiders' responses that the museum is quirky, weird, hilarious, adorable, bizarre, and unique, are indicative of the museum's campy sensibility. Addressing this aspect as one of the appeals of the gopher dioramas need not detract from a serious examination of its challenge to traditional museology.

In chapter two, the reader is taken on a delightful voyage to the

Museum of Fear and Wonder in Bergen. Housed in a renovated army barracks and run by brothers Brendan and Jude Griebel, the museum is only available by appointment. Harkening back to cabinets of curiosities, the museum contains a collection of strange and bizarre objects and artifacts including creepy dolls, ventriloquist dummies, a chess set made by a death row prisoner in the period before his execution, dollhouses, anatomical models, and many other objects that have had emotional relationships with their owners or makers. McTavish draws on theories of haunting to argue that the museum alludes to past museum practices, playing on the tradition of the rural museum and the history of cabinets of curiosity to reveal their enduring allure for visitors. One of the strengths here and throughout the book is McTavish's ability to situate the museum under investigation within a larger genealogy of museums (in this case, that of the cabinet of curiosity and natural history museum). The Viktor Wynd Museum, a modern-day cabinet of curiosities housed in the basement of a cocktail bar in East London, is very similar to the Museum of Fear and Wonder. McTavish references the Wynd as well as the Museum of Jurassic Technology, which is located in a storefront in Culver City, California, and requires visitors to be buzzed in to view the exhibitions, which are a mix of fact and fantasy; however, a deeper comparison would help highlight the specificities of the Griebel brothers' museum and its unique hauntology.

The Oil Sands Discovery Centre in Fort McMurray is discussed in chapter four. The Discovery Centre opened in 1985 and expanded in 2002. It offers exhibitions, demonstrations, equipment displays used in bitumen mining operations, educational programs, and a children's activity area. The analysis of the Discovery Centre draws on scholarly accounts of petrocultures to examine the reasons it has

resisted critical analysis and, more importantly, how it sanitizes the representation of oil extraction, its environmental effects, and its often-devastating effects on Indigenous peoples and lands. McTavish compares the Oil Sands Discovery Centre to the Brooks Aqueduct National and Provincial Historic Site, which she describes as an industrial ruin that offers a multilayered experience of the unpredictable outcomes of industrialization—while, however, reinforcing longstanding settler narratives. McTavish contrasts the complexity of the Brooks Aqueduct with the corporate-sponsored, heavily prescribed experience at the Oil Sands Discovery Centre. The latter has all the trappings of a science centre, but sponsorship from corporations such as Shell, Finning, Suncor, and Syncrude ensures that the centre tells a triumphant story of economic opportunity and environmental protection. Science centres are undertheorized institutions in museum studies, and this chapter points to directions for future research in this area. Bringing in other science centres as points of comparison would have pushed McTavish's argument about how these institutions, and the corporate sponsored Discovery Centre, neutralize difficult knowledge. Meanwhile, the Brooks Aqueduct is the only heritage site discussed at length in the book, making it feel like an outlier.

The final chapter examines the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, a Siksika cultural centre. Here, McTavish argues for the ways that the park relates to and subverts museum conventions. Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is located on the site of the signing of Treaty 7 and is a designated National Historic Site. Located just south of Calgary, Blackfoot Crossing is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Siksika Nation's language, culture, and traditions through interactive exhibitions, an on-site restaurant, and programming throughout the year.

Visitors can take part in a self-guided tour of historic sites along a marked trail, book an overnight stay in a tipi, or book an advance tour of the centre by a local Siksika interpreter. The latter section of this chapter considers pioneer museums, the most common kind of museum in Alberta, which for the most part “commemorate the predominantly European immigrants who settled the West... with standard pioneer narratives that legitimate the white possession of the land” (178). McTavish attends to the ways such museums reinforce or contest representations of Indigenous peoples and colonial history.

McTavish undertook extensive research for this project, and it is a welcome addition to the scholarship on museum studies. It makes use of novel and important methods for analyzing the chosen sites. It is, however, unfortunate that the book does not include a bibliography of sources. If the book is intended as a resource for students and researchers in the field who may want to pursue further study in a specific area, a list of references would be valuable. While the author does briefly mention the existence of a bibliography on her Alberta Museums Project website in the introduction, a further reminder in the conclusion would help reinforce this resource as a starting point for readings in museum studies. Nonetheless, McTavish's main argument that small-town and rural museums can alter conceptions of curation, display, the public, and the production of knowledge is an important one. ¶

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1. See <http://albertamuseumsproject.com/>.
2. Valene L. Smith, “The quest in the guest,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, no. 1 (1992): 1–17.
3. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 20.
4. Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (1964): 522.