

The General Store opens at the Kelowna Art Gallery

The General Store: Ben Evely and Nahanni McKay
January 13 to April 14, 2024

January 10, 2024 – Kelowna, BC: Visitors to a new exhibition at the Kelowna Art Gallery could be forgiven for feeling they had mistakenly wandered into a gift shop.

The General Store, by artists Nahanni McKay and Ben Evely, features an assortment of souvenir-type items that the pair have constructed, including postcards, pennants, magnets, mugs, and other objects that all reference Canada’s wilderness areas.

“This work is a parody of souvenir merchandise, incorporating the puns and low-brow humour that can so often be found in them,” says artist **Ben Evely**. “The souvenirs on display in *The General Store* reference the way places can be misrepresented—how the commercial viability of a souvenir will often take precedence over whether it is genuine or accurate. Whatever sells best gets reproduced.”

Both artists hail from Banff, Alberta situated on Treaty 7 Territory, in the heart of Canada’s most visited park, so they were steeped in a world of outdoor tourism growing up. Over 4 million visitors from around the world flock to the National Park each year, marketed to tourists idyllically with its soaring peaks, sparkling alpine lakes, and natural beauty.

Through the objects, McKay and Evely critically examine the way Canada’s parks and wild spaces are presented, and call attention to the commodification of the natural world.

“Beautiful places in Canada attract a colonial desire to commercialize and conquer this sacred place. This is my way of decolonizing the land,” says artist **Nahanni McKay**.

Gallery visitors will encounter playful (and perhaps slightly frightening) reproductions of tourist kitsch and pieces of Canadiana in the installation. *Gopher in a Can* (2023) is a perfect example. Rather than the typical plush and cuddly “canned critters” tourists commonly find like a beaver, moose, or bear, the artists have created an unsettling taxidermy version featuring a stiff and haggard looking gopher in a can. In *Moraine Lake Ashtray* (2023), users literally put out their cigarette on an image of the pristine Moraine Lake, darkly hinting at the fraught relationship between humans and nature.

Through their work, the duo seeks to deconstruct cultural trends inspired by nature, examining wilderness aesthetics, and encouraging dialogue within outdoor communities and tourism economies.

Nahanni McKay is a Metis-Cree artist and photographer based in Treaty 7 Territory. Born and raised in the Banff, AB, her creative practice has focused on National Parks in Canada and the human impact on natural environments as well as the decolonization of land.

Ben Evely is a visual artist from Banff, AB, on Treaty 7 Territory. He primarily works with painting, collage, and drawing. He appreciates the transformations and distortions that happen while merging traditional and digital art mediums. Evely currently lives and works in Vancouver, BC.



The General Store runs from January 13 to April 14, 2024.

The Kelowna Art Gallery is located at 1315 Water Street, in downtown Kelowna, B.C.

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