

SEARCH: Today's News Last 7 Days Web [Help](#)

Light rain
 **4°** Celsius

[Click for Forecast](#)

SpeedRead

[Contests](#) | [Lotteries](#) | [Horoscopes](#) | [Comics](#) | [Tides](#) | [Bookmark Us](#)

The ChronicleHerald
ELECTRONIC EDITION
 FREE SAMPLE

 PRINT

Small town, big world

Patterson's interactive sculptural installation celebrates, mourns small-town life

By ELISSA BARNARD Arts Reporter



Graeme Patterson models symbols of past prairie life in film and small sculptures like The Deer:/ Les Chevreuils. When a viewer approaches these small deer on a pedestal their heads turn and their eyes flash. (Contributed)

NEWS

- » Front page
- » Metro
- » Nova Scotia
- » Canada
- » World
- » Business
- » Sports
- » Entertainment
- » BMO Skating

GRAEME PATTERSON'S interactive prairie buildings are the kind of art a mechanic would love.

His faded white clapboard buildings, the size of giant doll houses, have motion sensors that turn on lights and sound, animate hand-made figurines and run comic films on tiny screens.

It's thrilling to peer through missing walls in these ghostly, derelict, small town buildings to discover the miniature world Patterson has created in rich, obsessive detail.

SUDOKU
CROSSWORD

"The exteriors represent the sadness of death but in the interiors a lot of playful things are happening," says Patterson, 26. "To have joy you have to sometimes feel sorrow."

OPINIONS

- » Editorials
- » Columnists
- » Letters/Feedback

His show, called Graeme Patterson: Woodrow and now at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia before a national tour, both mourns and celebrates the small southern Saskatchewan town of Woodrow.



The Grain-Elevator:/ Le silo, purchased by the National Gallery of Canada, towers above other quintessential small town buildings in Graeme Patterson's fictional, sculptural installation of a Prairie ghost town, based on the experience of his father's hometown of Woodrow, Sask. (Contributed)



Patterson's great-grandfather came from New Brunswick, bringing wood with him, to build a home on free land in Woodrow. His grandfather, Herbert George Patterson, to whom this show is dedicated, was born and raised there. His father was born in Woodrow but he raised his kids in Saskatoon.

BLOGS

- » Quinpool Kid
- » the indie scene
- » Urban Pedestrian
- » Sunday Dress
- » The Near North
- » Hockey Girl

Woodrow, about four hours south of Saskatoon, is "on the brink of being a ghost town," says Patterson, standing amidst his own haunted buildings. "This is an exaggeration of that. It's not a political statement, it's more of a romantic vision."

The nine sculptural works incorporating video, stop-motion animation and robotic figures are of non-specific sites that define any small town including a church, a grain elevator and a hockey rink and also of real buildings. The house, barn and work shed are all replicas of buildings on his grandfather's farm where Patterson now lives and works alone.

FREE Classifieds
 myConnect.ca

The junk pit at the end of a road is the junk pit at the homestead; however, Patterson makes it a metaphor for the passage of time, the collapse of civilization and small towns "at the end of the road" everywhere.

FEATURES

- » Living
- » Travel
- » At Home
- » Books
- » Religion
- » Science

He romanticizes this evocative image with a projection of a 16-hour time lapse of the horizon in Woodrow. It is projected against a star-spattered night sky painted on the gallery wall. The painting of the night sky above a band of hilly, golden earth goes right around the gallery.

While deer heads with suddenly flashing eyes and mice scurrying on floorboards are spooky, the artist has fun with three, silent movies about the antics of two brothers who live in grain bins and like to

» The NovaScotian play potato-canon hockey.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

» Births

» Cards of Thanks

» In Memoriam

» Milestones

» Obituaries

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"What's meant to be will always find a way."

Trisha Yearwood

As a kid growing up in Saskatoon, Patterson always built miniature worlds out of whatever was at hand but he didn't see the possibilities for multi-layered sculptural installation until he studied media arts at NSCAD with Rita McKeough. He also assisted her with her art. "She does video, installation, sculpture, music and sound, robotics, performance. Seeing her work with all these layers, it was a lot of fun."

"Before I didn't realize I could put in everything I knew how to do and make it a full-bodied, layered installation."

Working alone in his grandfather's work shed in Woodrow, he does it all, from every scrap of construction, sewing, model-building, wiring and painting to writing and recording his own music.

Patterson's approach is that of an innovative farmer making use of old tools and discarded junk at hand. He was inspired by his grandfather, whose machine shop with its contents is replicated in this exhibit next to a section of the shed displaying all of Patterson's buildings as mini-models.

Patterson made a film of his grandfather's lathe in motion, a film that is visible once the door lifts open on the shed. The lathe "was his baby, the one thing he used everyday so I animate it and that's the one thing that hits my family," says Patterson. "It's a very real connection."

As a kid Patterson spent summers, Christmases and Thanksgivings in Woodrow. He was inspired to build Woodrow when his grandfather died in 2004.

"When he realized he had cancer, he was worried the town was left in a state of dying. The town is basically 100 years old and he died at the age of 88 and as he died so did the town. There are only 10 people left."

His grandfather, to whom this show is dedicated, was "so devoted and so proud of the town, he would do anything for anybody in the community." When his workshop burned down in 1970, the people of Woodrow rebuilt it relying as they did on his services as a machinist, welder and handyman.

AGNS senior curator Ray Cronin, curator of this show, met Patterson when he was an art student at NSCAD and also working at the gallery installing shows. Cronin was impressed when he first saw Patterson's work in Halifax and asked him to run wild with his idea for Woodrow. "If you can put the weight of an institution behind an artist, it rewards ambition," he says.

While Patterson is looking at the physical effect of change in Woodrow, "this is about the way we all grow up and grow away from our homes, our stories and our myths," says Cronin.

"I see it as being about growing up and remembering all of your family, the security you get from your family — your grandparents would always be there, your mother would always be baking cookies," he said. "This is, in a way, a monument to the way we carry that home within us wherever we go."

Patterson is "one of the youngest artists ever" to have work acquired by the National Gallery of Canada, which bought the grain elevator. The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is buying the hockey rink, and the show is two thirds sold out.

"This is an artist whom I'm convinced will rise to the top of the Canadian and international art scene," says Cronin. "This is a show that will make his reputation and cement it."

Graeme Patterson: Woodrow, a co-production by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, is at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to April 9. Its next stop is the Montreal Biennial in the spring. A catalogue launch with Patterson and Cronin discussing the work will be held Thursday, Jan. 25, 7:30 p.m., at the Windsor Foundation Lecture Theatre, AGNS.

(ebarnard@herald.ca)

[Back](#)

[Back to top](#)

ABOUT US | CONTACT US | PRIVACY POLICY | CHARITIES | ADVERTISING | SUBSCRIBE | FAQ | COMICS | HIGHWAY CAMS
WORK @ THE CHRONICLE HERALD | WEATHER | TIDES | LOTTERIES | FEATURES | HOROSCOPE | CONTESTS | BOOKMARK US

© 2007 The Halifax Herald Limited