



**Patricia Deadman**

***Permanent Collection Spotlight***

December 2, 2011 – February 26, 2012

**Foyer**

**Patricia Deadman | *Between a Word and an Image***

December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 - February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012

In a 1996 interview with Larry Abbott, Patricia Deadman discussed her new ***Serve Series***:

The land is a very personal experience and one that's closest to my heart, something that I can identify with. There is respect and a concern for how we treat the land. I look closely at how people misuse or appropriate the land, and the issues of ownership and power and control.<sup>1</sup>

Photo-based artist Patricia Deadman's *Serve Series* – a part of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery's Permanent Collection - explores the interpretive space between words and their commonly understood meanings, and the photographic image, with its specific visual reference to the ways people interact with the natural landscape and animal life.

Each piece is printed on a clear plastic material, called Duratran, which Deadman then displays between two sheets of Plexiglas. Because the back sheet of Plexiglas is largely transparent light is able to travel through the photograph, illuminating the work from behind.

To print the words onto each piece Deadman used created a small piece of plastic with text printed on it which she then exposed together with the negative onto the Duratran.<sup>2</sup> As a result, there are instances where the words - reserve, self-serve, deserve, preserve, and conserve - sit pronounced atop of the photographs and there are other cases where the exposure of light has wrapped around the lettering and dissolved its edges into the photograph.

There is tension in the layers of meaning where text and image intersect. In ***conserve***, tall majestic conifers tower over the large picture plane, receding into a luscious and full background of foliage. The work serves as a reminder to protect the land that we so easily take for granted. Likewise, the implied message of ***preserve*** is to question our relationship with nature through the depiction of animals in a taxidermy wildlife display. Deadman's use of the word "preserve" operates as a double entendre: on the one hand the message relays the imperative to preserve and care for animals in their natural habitat while the term "preserve" also points to the fact that these animals are, in reality, preserved through taxidermy processes illustrating the sometimes artificial ways we have come to understand nature.

These types of layered meanings continue through the works *reserve* and *self-serve*. The two teepees depicted in *reserve* operate as signifiers of Aboriginal traditions taking place on a First Nations Reservation. However, the meaning of the word “reserve” is also layered: to reserve is to designate some place for specific use – as in a tract of land - or, it can mean the action of keeping something aside for future use. Likewise, the pairing of photograph and text in *self-serve* connotes at least two related and yet separate meanings. This photograph depicts Deadman pumping gas at a self-serve station coupled with the text “self-serve” – a familiar commercial transaction that takes place in stores of all kinds. In this image featuring the ubiquitous, and yet increasingly precious and environmentally detrimental commodity of gasoline, other questions persist: who is being served at this gas station, and who or what is being paid a dis-service by that very same action? In a social and environmental climate where our lives have become so reliant upon the consumption of refined oil, Deadman alludes to the often self-serving and destructive nature of our actions. This message is underscored by the repetition of the text within the photograph itself.

Deadman’s vested interests in issues of land conservation and preservation, issues of ownership and land title through reservation territories, and her questioning of self-serving attitudes in the control of natural land and resources blend moralistic interpretations through her photographic method and display. The space of meaning takes place between Deadman’s choice of text and her image, the results of which provide strong examples from which to begin questioning our responsibility for the ways we shape our environments. *deserve*, questions this relationship albeit in arguably more subtle ways. In this photograph the shadows of two figures with hands joined stretch out along a non descript rock face. Though these shadows suggest the presence of two individuals within the photograph, their actual likenesses are largely absent from the landscape, except where an arm and a leg of one figure enter into the frame slightly. They could be anyone. Regardless of their identity, this is a place they deserve – and not unlike any other rock face or open prairie field - it is the land for which we are all responsible.

**Suzanne Morrissette**, Curatorial Resident, 2011

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Deadman, in interview with Larry Abbott (1996), *A Time of Visions: Interviews by Larry Abbott*, [http://www.britesites.com/native\\_artist\\_interviews/pdeadman.htm](http://www.britesites.com/native_artist_interviews/pdeadman.htm) (accessed October 14, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, np.

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