

March 31, 2017

Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize
Visual Arts Alberta Association
3rd Floor, 10215 112 St. NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 1M7

Dear Eldon + Anne Foote Foundation,

This year, the Art Gallery of Alberta and dc3 Art Projects are excited to co-nominate Sean Caulfield's *The Flood* for the 2017 Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Art Prize.

On view from February 6 – August 14 in the Art Gallery of Alberta's ground floor atrium, *The Flood* was the feature, site-specific installation of 2016. Taking the form of a large-scale mural, the work was made of enormous hand-carved woodblock panels, which covered the entire back wall of Manning Hall. Flipping the printmaking process and its conventional outcome of printed images, Caulfield presented the relief work of the woodblock panels (typically unseen to viewers) as an artwork in itself. By doing so, this work revealed to viewers the tactile and material qualities of this traditional technique.

The imagery presented in *The Flood* follows Caulfield's ongoing explorations into the impact of technological advancements on our environment. Caulfield suggests that the imagery is meant to look to both the past and future, through the depiction of a cautionary future setting in a landscape both familiar yet strange, reminding viewers that the present is destined to become past. Questioning and envisioning the how the viewer acts as a player in creating a sustainable future, his composition ultimately presented a world that must adapt to the challenges of industrialization. The work sought to merge hope with anxiety, and call into question our own role in shaping a future narrative for our shared ecosystem.

This work has been selected for nomination for several reasons: its location and scale, topical subject matter, and the innovative approach to materials. Over the course of the presentation of *The Flood*, over 22,100 people took in the work. This was made possible by the fact that it is prominently located in the AGA's Manning Hall, a space that is clearly and directly visible upon entry to the Gallery, and that it is a free space which people can access both during and outside of regular visiting hours. The projects commissioned for Manning Hall are meant to allow artists to stretch their skill set and explore new approaches to ideas by giving them the opportunity to play on a scale that is normally out of reach. For a work such as *The Flood*, this overwhelming scale combined with the graphic quality of the work made it near impossible not to notice and contributed to the impact of the subject.

The subject of *The Flood* engaged the community in topical discussions about the relationship between natural resources and our impact as humans on the natural world from all sides of the political spectrum. There were lively debates online about Alberta's Oil Sands, which require large amounts of water to operate and that have undeniable impacts on the waterways in and around development sites, with

perspectives from people from both sides. While Caulfield's work took on a darker tone, it inspired a cautious optimism about the future and the possibility of new or alternative paths forward. That this conversation was mixed is significant. *The Flood* manifested active engagement and conversation on topics that are often uncomfortable and without singular solution.

Finally, Caulfield's innovative and unexpected approach to presenting printmaking further increases the merit of *The Flood* as the 2017 recipient of the Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Art Prize. In this work, the material support or matrix upon which prints are conventionally pulled is framed as the artwork itself, thereby revealing the work and process that typically goes unseen. By presenting his hand-carved in this way, Caulfield's invites viewers to reconceptualise their understanding of printmaking, and of woodblock printing in particular - a practice commonly understood as an archaic practice - thereby highlighting its place in contemporary practice. The effect of this presentation is outstanding.

This prize celebrates merit, relevance to artistic traditions, and exemplary work in the field. We at the Art Gallery of Alberta and dc3 Art Projects believe Sean Caulfield's *The Flood* is an exceptional project and highly deserving of this award.

Warmly,

Megan Bertagnolli
Head, Sponsor and Donor Engagement
Art Gallery of Alberta