



Fencelines

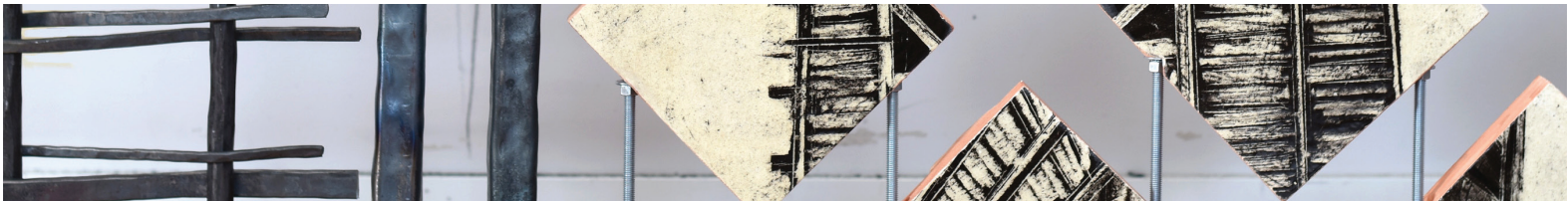
Ruben Irons,
Fenn Martin &
Raina McDonald

March 24 - May 14, 2017
Opening Reception: March 23, 6pm

Mary E. Black Gallery

Fences parcel and weave together rural lives and landscapes. They keep livestock and crops apart and safe, and neighbours neighbourly. Expressing ownership and control, they partition inside from outside, yours from mine, permissible from forbidden. Gates are a necessary feature of fence lines, maintaining borders, yet tempting transgression. Given the current global climate of fear and separation, this fence and gate with imagery reflecting on rural outmigration and the collapse of small farms, is an elegy and challenge to re-imagine rural life in Nova Scotia. Fencelines also invites the audience to cross the threshold of ones own intimate boundaries.

In *Fencelines*, we propose the common cow as our mythological gatekeeper. This gentle giant, once prominent in farmyards, is becoming invisible due to industrial factory farming and international trade agreements. We see her more in nostalgic popular culture, such as children’s books, than as part of a local ecology and economy. As three collaborating artists, we each explore these themes in our own practice.



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All images courtesy of the artists Ruben Irons, Fenn Martin, and Raine MacDonald: *The Gateway* (details), Steel, Ceramic, wood, Paper, Charcoal, 22" long variable height, 2017.



Ruben Irons

Since our origins, humans have directly imparted skills from one generation to the next. In todays context, I am interested in how generational and virtual learning weave together. I built a gate as a metaphor to represent the choices we all must make individually and collectively. Which traditions from the past still serve us and which are better left behind?

I wanted my forging process to incorporate elements of traditional joinery as well as the modern conveniences of welding and grinding. Forging a cow skeleton allowed a deeper appreciation for an animal that has provided me with so much sustenance. The bees provided a perfect wax formula to protect the steel.

My life as a blacksmith is quite solitary. This brings a certain level of comfort and predictability. Joining this collaboration violates both of these, for which I am thankful.

rubenirons.com



Fenn Martin

I see the ceramic role to create relief tiles exploring the narrative and the decorative. So, I created two-sided ceramic tiles for a fence that connects and corrals space. On one side, a fragmented collection of cow bones muses in decorative tessellation but instead unravels into disjointed glazed surfaces of foliage encircling bones. The reverse side depicts ruined architectural spaces from Nova Scotia's fading 19th century landmark wooden barns.

This conceptual journey began with a walk in the woods looking for bones. A farmer led me to the place where a humongous carcass had been unceremoniously dumped from a truck. Scavengers had consumed the flesh and scattered the bones. The bones were testimony to an animal that had served our human need while suffering from bone cancer around the eye, and eventually had been euthanized with a bullet through its skull.

Working from site photos, I reimagined this story in ceramic. When rotated and reassembled into the fence the visual and narrative orders are unsettled into new readings.

fennmartin.com



Raina McDonald

Animal bones discovered in cathartic moments in the woods are sacred reminders to me of primal, intuitive life. So it was fitting when Fenn arrived at my studio with a collection of large vertebrae to kickstart what has become *Fencelines*.

My contribution to *Fencelines* explores the fertile edge where one thing ends and another begins. On the gallery walls, I have created a space where both sides of various divides touch: rural and urban, wild and domestic, our inner and outer worlds. What seemed rooted in separation suddenly knows no boundaries.

Through elements of printmaking, drawing and steel, I am exploring a realm of planned/spontaneous, complete undone, repetition/variation. Responding to the gallery space and gate, imagery flows onto the wall to create relationships, sense and nonsense. I use charcoal, homemade from fence line willows: mark-making and erasing on the wall activate movement and embodied connection to the whole.

rainamedonald.com