

Claire Kujundzic

CARIBOO

Two Rivers Art Gallery

May 21 - August 9, 2009



installation view — west wall

list of works & statements





Deferred area
mixed media on canvas 24" x 28"



Interior conditions
mixed media on canvas 35.5" x 46"



When the beetles fly #1 
mixed media on canvas 36" x 46"



When the beetles fly #2 
mixed media on canvas 35.5" x 54"
(original sold)



Buffer zone 
mixed media on canvas 35.5" x 48"



in Wells; not part of Two Rivers exhibition

Northern light 
mixed media on canvas 36" x 45.5"



Critical winter range 
mixed media on canvas 24" x 56"



Landscape pattern *(cropped)*
mixed media on canvas 35.5" x 42"



Heartwood
mixed media on canvas 69" x 69" 
(original sold)



Slash
mixed media on canvas 70" x 70" 

in Wells; not part of Two Rivers exhibition



Disturbance
mixed media on canvas 52" x 57" 



Landscape interrupted
mixed media on canvas 42" x 82" 
(original sold)



Mixed stand
mixed media on canvas 54" x 69" 

in Wells; not part of Two Rivers exhibition



Fire wall
mixed media on canvas 38" x 45" 
(original sold)



Road to the Cariboo
mixed media on canvas 35.5" x 47.5" 
(original sold)



Cariboo trails
mixed media on canvas 36" x 48" 
(original sold)



Provenance (*rear painting*)
mixed media on canvas 48" x 120"
shown with one "Veteran" tree in front



Residue
mixed media on canvas 48" x 120"

canvas trees - all mixed media on canvas 120" tall



Veterans



Dead standing



Veteran stand



Message from the beetle #1 through 5
mixed media on canvas with beetle wood frames
approx 15" x 15" each



Forest Light

mixed media on canvas

(original sold in Wells; not part of Two Rivers exhibition)



Community Forest

mixed media on canvas *(original sold in Wells; not part of Two Rivers exhibition)*





installation views





installation views





installation views



Claire Kujundzic

CARIBOO

RICHLY TEXTURED, RAW AND TOOTHY, the work in this exhibition represents a rekindling of a thirty-year old fascination with pre-historic cave paintings for Wells, BC artist Claire Kujundzic. Using unprepared canvas evocative of hide, iron from the water she drinks, soot and charcoal from the fire that keeps her warm, these paintings evoke the stained and patinaed surfaces of the caves that captured her interest decades ago. Kujundzic utilises a broad repertoire of techniques including collage, frottage, printmaking and drawing, abandoning concerns for style and convention in favour of pouring herself into her work. Visceral and reductive, *Cariboo* gives shape to the artist's environmental concerns.

Cariboo grew out of a long period of experimentation during which time painters Norman Yates and Tony Urquhart were both tremendously influential. Breaking away from the “Flying Women” styled series familiar to those who know Kujundzic's work, she produced *Fire Wall* in 2003. The outline of a human form with arms out-stretched is drawn loose and free, against an ochre backdrop that appears fractured or fissured like a rock wall. Though still figurative it is a significant departure from her earlier figurative work and a pre-cursor to *Message from the Beetle: Road to the Cariboo* painted four years later.

In 2007, Kujundzic participated in the *Red and Blue Beetle Art* exhibition that toured communities in central BC, asserting her interest in the pine beetle. She was represented by a photograph of beetle trails framed with wood bearing the same marks and a second work, appearing two years later in this current exhibition with its title truncated to *Road to the Cariboo*. Incorporating rubbings (frottage) of the trails onto unstretched canvas, alongside animal forms and marks from maps that denote rivers, waterways and roads, Kujundzic shows us how similar are the traces of human habitation to those of the beetle. Introducing many of the elements used in successive works, this is the decisive launching point for this body of work.

Kujundzic's beetle marks simultaneously signal the beetle infestation and the human activity which exacerbated the problem by contributing to global warming. But here too, she has given form to a host of other transgressions. Having lived in BC's Interior she has seen the lasting impact of a goldrush now a century-and-a-half old, which centred around Barkerville, and the tearing of the earth in search of gold. She has lived in and around buildings that were built with lumber from the forests around her and she has seen those same forests thinned. She has driven the roads built to ferry people, equipment and the natural resources they harvest. And like the beetle trails on the wood she uses to heat her home these traces are evidence of patterns of consumption.

While in work like *Landscape Pattern* and *Cariboo Trails* she extracts this evidence from maps, in work like *Deferred Area* and *Heart Wood* she transfers the grain from the lumber we have milled directly on to canvas. Taking this further in *Deferred Area* she seems to use it to suggest a human torso while in work like *When the Beetles Fly* and *Landscape Interrupted* she uses the imprint of old timber from around buildings in Wells to actually define trees. Doing so she both renders them as the potential resource they represent and implies our connection to the environment.

In *Critical Winter Range*, three trees inhabit a barren landscape. It is a vision of unchecked consumption that may just as easily reflect an environment devastated by human beings, the pine beetle or forest fire. Here, the background suggests the inhospitable surfaces of the rock faces belonging to the cave paintings that inspired her. But invoking her deep love & wonder for the world she inhabits, Kujundzic has the capacity to transform the stark into something rich. Here as with the other work in this exhibition, she does so in the hope that we will consider how far we will go in risking a world as barren as the one in which these trees sit.

—George Harris, Curator



Artist's Statement

CARIBOO

WHEN WE FIRST MOVED FROM VANCOUVER TO WELLS in 1995, the Cariboo was deep green with thick forested hills all around us. In the past 14 years, many of the hills have turned to rust, then grey-black, as the pine beetle epidemic has spread. Or they have become barren, if they have been clearcut. Global warming has played a part in this, as have decades of logging practices. The Cree quote *"Only when the last fish has died, the last river been poisoned, and the last tree been cut down will we realize we cannot eat money"* rings in my ears.

The exhibition "CARIBOO" has been prompted by this changing landscape, as I try to come to terms with it personally. It also marks a return to work I did 30 years ago after first seeing images from the cave walls in Lascaux. What people of that time found important to record moves me to make my own marks.



marks left on pine by beetles

For years we have been burning the beetle-etched wood in our stove to heat our home. At first I was repulsed by it, with its sawdust trails and decomposing bark. But over time I grew fascinated by the beetle marks that look like drawings, hieroglyphics or paintings on rock surfaces from another era.

I started a series called "Message from the beetle", the first of which was "Road to the Cariboo". I tore a three by four foot canvas and laid it unprimed and unstretched over the beetle wood. I rubbed it with a variety of art materials: wax, conté, and even charcoal made from burned firewood. Over time, I

worked the surface of the canvas, staining it with thin layers of paint, watching for the opportunities that occurred from the partially accidental ways I applied the paint.

It was an improvisational, jazz-like way of working: finding the story rather than telling it — a departure from the graphic, storytelling imagery of my last few decades. Thus the "road" in the middle of "Road to the Cariboo" appeared: a red, vein-like line humans have made on the surface of the land. Tree skeletons appeared, a partial image of wildlife, the green of the undergrowth, blue of the sky, and finally, white bone-like marks that were drawn from looking at the beetles' paths in the bark.

When I began the body of work for Two Rivers Gallery, I struggled with the form it should take, first using stretched, primed canvases of various sizes. I made roads and rough figures by painting my own body and applying it to the canvas in an attempt to put humans in the picture. By January of this year, I abandoned them, using instead only loose pieces of canvas to rub over the wood and letting the paintings appear by serendipity (letting go of all preconceived imagery). That's how I came to "Buffer zone", those few trees that are left in front of a clearcut, and "When the beetles fly", which shows the beetles' flight. Trees became layers over landscape backgrounds, and some of



Road to the Cariboo

the wood became frames for enlarged drawings of the beetles' marks. All came about organically, using a process of discernment instead of linear thinking. As well as disintegration, I find life and hope in them.

I felt a need to work on a larger scale than my own, and began making ten foot high "trees". The canvases they are painted on have been torn and fringed at the edges, and made ragged to represent what they have endured. Some have rubbings from milled wood to show how they have been used by industry; others have been rubbed over beetle-etched wood and have blue staining on them — the colour the wood turns as it dies from the epidemic. Many of the trees are called "Veterans", one of many forestry terms used in titling the show, for their power and stamina.

The work has all been hung the way I made it: fragile, loose, tapestry or hide-like, to show the painting process, and echo the fragility and resilience of our environment.



—Claire Kujundzic

Claire painting canvas "trees" in the studio
winter, 2009

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... and many others in my community who helped in a variety of ways.

—*Claire Kujundzic*



Annerose Georgeson photo

Another possible painting appears behind the “trees”.
winter, 2009