

tenderness

Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery

tenderness ogies





catalogue
32 pages / 102g

Artist Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the British Columbia Arts Board, the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan for generous support of this project. Technical assistance in making a number of the pieces was provided by Altech Anodizing, Delta, B.C. and Pacific Watercutting, Coquitlam, B.C. Many thanks to each of these institutions and businesses.

For lessons in tenderness, I thank my son, Leif Warland Shantz, born February, 1998.



Exhibition List*

light force, P-004-5

mdf, acrylic paint, 38 x 45 x 2 cm, 1999

virtual angel, P-007

glass, mirror, metal paper, 14.5 x 8.2 x 2 cm, 1998

sorrows/joy, P-007

carbon transfer, pins, 55 x 13 x 2.5 cm, 2003

crib i – vi, P-008-9

anodized aluminium, 6 panels, each 128 x 65 x 18 cm, 1999

untitled (light box and photo), P-010

aluminium, contact x-ray, x-ray, plexiglass, glass, metal, light, wood, $29 \times 23 \times 9.5$ cm, light box, installation dimensions vary, 2003

spin, P-012

(collaboration with K. Sellars), glass, found objects, paper, 122 x 245 x 18 cm, 2000

intensive care, P-023

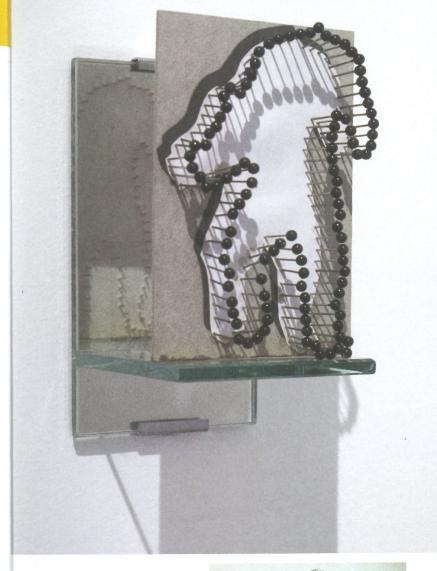
mdf, acrylic paint, installation dimensions 198 x 212 x 5 cm, 1999

acute::care, P-024-25

contact x-ray, glass paint, plexiglass, 92 x 362 x 3 cm, 2002

listen!, P-026-27

vinyl transfer, installation dimensions vary, 2003





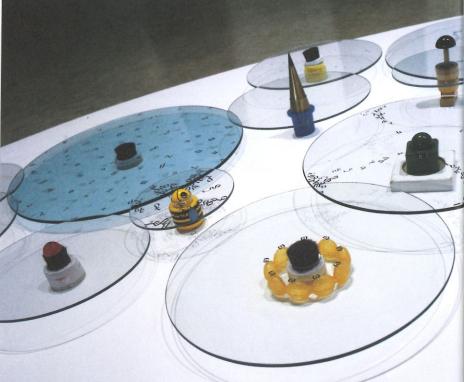




Introduction

Susan Shantz has consistently located her sculptural and installation-based practice within the realms of corporality and transformation; this most recent body of work is the result of an investigation into, as Shantz comments, "sentimentality in art and the possibility of expressing emotion without falling into cliché." / In technologies of tenderness, Susan Shantz has created works which incorporate both an awkward, soft-bodied vulnerability and the smooth-surfaced geometry of systems and machines designed to support - if not nurture - those bodies. Specifically, Shantz was inspired by the birth of her son, a birth which necessitated a high degree of medical intervention. Pieces such as crib i-vi, with their tiny, abstracted body shapes cut out of large sheets of anodized aluminum, or acute::care, a connected series of images of a small form comprised of and mediated by x-rays, pins and glass, conjure dual perceptions of risk and fostering, emotion and analysis, sentiment and objectification. / Wall works such as listen! or sorrows/joys imbue the modernist architecture of the gallery with achingly delicate gestures: sound silently emits from the flesh-pink vinyl, sign language primer diagrams which skin the wall of listen!; and touch is empathetically evoked in hundreds of tiny pinpricks which pierce the wall's skin, writing upon it sorrows/joys. The work in this exhibition has evolved over the six years since the birth of Shantz' son; various pieces in the exhibition documented in this publication have previously been shown at Ace Art in Winnipeg, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Natalie and James Thompson Gallery in San Jose, California. However, technologies of tenderness marks the first time the entire body of work has been seen in a solo exhibition context, along with new work specifically created for this exhibition. / I would like to thank Sigrid Dahle for her engaging and perceptive discussion of the issues underlying Susan Shantz's work, Rory Mahony for his sensitive photographic documentation and Fishten for their innovative and sympathetic approach to the publication's design. This project would not have been possible without the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, The Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the City of Medicine Hat. Special thanks are extended to the University of Saskatchewan for publication assistance. / Finally, it was a pleasure to work with Susan Shantz on the exhibition and publication, and a privilege to present her work in Medicine Hat. / Joanne Marion, Curator





06:38

A Long Day's Journey

acute vulnerability

I'm on my way to Medicine Hat, Alberta to immerse myself in technologies of tenderness, an exhibition of work by Susan Shantz. Methodically gathering up enough paper, pens, undergarments, books and toothpaste to last me 36 hours, I begin speculating on the exhibition I'm about to see. / The title, technologies of tenderness, tickles and teases my fancy as mental pictures of Susan's earlier bodies of work - hibernaculum, satiate, engorge - alternately appear and dissolve on my mind's screen. The words "abundance," "accumulation," "order," "containment," "labour" and "elegance" spill over one another as I squeeze a pair of socks, panties and black cotton T-shirt into the buttery black compartments of my heavy leather backpack. / I think to myself: the senses of touch, taste and smell are as implicated as vision in Susan's work - maybe even more so. What the logocentricism, material austerity and categorical purity of modernism and its predecessor, the Enlightenment, suppressed, stages a delicious comeback in her work, but with a reliance on serialization and repetition that hearkens back to the rhetoric of minimalism. In other words, Susan plays in a dialect informed by post-minimalism, an art movement that overlapped with the second wave of feminism which unceremoniously doused the Canadian art world in the 1970s; a historical juncture that spawned work by artists like Aganetha Dyck, Gathie Falk, Colette Whiten, Lisa Steele and Irene Whittome here in Canada¹, and in Britain, work such as Mary Kelly's legendary Post-Partum Document (1973-79), / [a] six-part work that documents the relationship between Kelly and her son over a period of six years. Drawing on contemporary feminist thought, and in particular on psychoanalysis, it explores the contradictions for a woman artist between her creative and procreative roles. The work, says Kelly, traces the differences between "my lived experience as a mother and my analysis of that experience.2

¹ Bruce Grenville, Corpus (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1995), 8.

² from a display caption exhibited with Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document. Analyzed Markings And Diary Perspective Schema (Experimentum Mentis III: Weaning from the Dyad) 1975, November 2000. © copyright 2003 Tate, all rights reserved; http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=7900&searchid=9843



Check list: blue ball-point pen, Trident cherry chewing gum, Nokia cell phone, Kleenex, Tylenol, notepad - and a sumptuously framed, palm-sized photograph of Emma, my daughter. I carefully insert everything into the appropriate slots and pouches; "Emma" is snuggled into the breast pocket of my vest. Whereupon I remember Zdena, a character in John Berger's To the Wedding, preparing for a reunion with her daughter who is dying of AIDS: / ...Zdena wants everything to be tidily arranged and cared for. The contents of her handbag are the last touch. Like this she hopes that everything about herself will have a clear, crisp outline, which, when she meets her daughter, will offer and express confidence. In her own way, Zdena arranges for the same reasons as Baldassare Longhena and Palladio [who each constructed an imposing architectural monument, the Santa Maria della Salute, begun 1631, and the Church of the Redeemer, begun 1577, respectively, to fulfill vows made by Venetian leaders in the hopes of delivering their citizens from the plaguel.3 / I wonder if Sigmund Freud, like John Berger after him, would have labelled Zdena's, Longhena's and Palladio's arranging - and my own methodical packing, too - as a reaction formation. Would he interpret the precision and clarity of our public or private acts, whether monumental or everydayordinary, as symptoms of the intense emotional states, anxieties and ambivalences we long to deny? Do all cultural structures - whether they be architectonic or time-based, whether they involve precisely choreographed ritual acts or fluid ongoing processes - actually serve as indexes of our awesome vulnerability and helplessness; as implicit reminders of what could potentially befall us in the absence of a reliable or "good enough" holding environment? / (Holding environment, handling and "good enough [mother]" are terms given to us by D. W. Winnicott, the British object relations psychoanalyst and pediatrician who eloquently paid homage to the inherent vulnerability, ruthlessness and sociability of babies, mothers and artists alike. Holding environment refers to how a parent or caregiver nurtures their neonate into a fully socialized human being, while handling connotes the manner in which a caregiver relates to their young child. I like to extend or reinterpret Winnicott's terms to include society's holding and handling of its citizens.)

/AM





So what exactly IS the fear that snaps at the heels of my tender winter-boot protected feet as I ready myself to meet technologies of tenderness? I zip-shut tight the layers of dedicated compartments (checking for my airline ticket for the umpteenth time) and two niggling phrases from the text that accompanies Susan's exhibition leap to mind: / "...sentimentality in art and the possibility of expressing emotion without falling into cliché..." / "...Shantz was inspired by the recent birth of her son, a birth which necessitated a high degree of medical intervention." / No small order, the task Susan has set for herself, given that advertising engineers and media moguls strategically and relentlessly knead our hearts, anesthetize our minds and suture our imaginations with all manner of cute, quaint, hungry and romantic images. 4 Fuzz-ball kittens, glassy-eyed victims from away (always from as far away as possible), cottage cute domiciles, pathetic poster children, flamingo sunsets and cherub-faced white-skinned babies: I am confident that you will recognize the category of images I am referring to because we've all seen them before. / And yet - are we to cruelly toss the baby (our babies) out with the bath water just because Ivory Snow and Pampers have plastered an idealized rendition of his or her precious little visage on every soap box and billboard between Babine and Badger? Are care and holding - that which binds us to our babies and that which painstakingly transforms our neonates into citizens - to be abandoned altogether? Are sentiment and tenderness to be confined to the stifling great rooms of the bourgeoisie or to a consumerfrantic public sphere ruled by marketeers - simply because they (the middle classes) successfully colonized the territory even while bohemians and their politically active comrades were busy arming the barricades on behalf of the suppressed, repressed and oppressed?



What other alternatives are on offer? Are we to mine the history of culture for effective "distancing devices" with which to induce so-called higher, more critically astute states of consciousness in you, our readers? What about the strategies favoured by minimalist artists who relied on irrefutable geometries and the un-inscribability (or should I say, inscrutability) of shiny, machined surfaces? Are these the only means of forestalling unselfconscious expressionism, depoliticized notions of subjectivity and self-satisfied middle-class narcissism — or might there be some other way(s) to proceed less circumscribed by the guide book of modernism? Perhaps we should simply insert a requisite quotient of violence into our pretty perfect pictures as an antidote to saccharine overdoses of sentiment. But come to think of it, didn't Disney Corporation stake out this territory when it gave us an orphan named Bambi? These are the questions I anxiously ask myself as I embark on my journey to Medicine Hat.

5 Judith Mastai, *Women and Paint* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1995), 10: "The German playwright, Bertold Brecht, hoping to incite political consciousness in his audiences at the time of the emergence of fascism in his country, devised techniques to undermine the seductiveness of the narrative in his plays. One of these techniques was to provide short texts at the beginning of each scene of the play. He hoped, by informing the audience in advance about the content and outcome of each scene, that he could free them from purely empathetic identification and induce the possibility of the spectators distancing themselves sufficiently to be analytical about the way in which the plot unfolded: that is, to position themselves critically in relation to the narrative."

/AM



The heart of winter darkness – an inferno of exhaust fumes punctuated by strings of smoldering red headlights – envelops the cozy confines of the taxicab. I nestle into the car's cushion-deep back seat luxuriating in the knowledge that I'm not the one negotiating rush hour traffic and icy roads all the way to the airport.



I emerge from my contented stupor just long enough to notice a silver oval medallion dangling from the rear view mirror. Imprinted on its surface is an image of St. Fiacre depicted as a medieval peasant holding a garden spade, looking as though he's just escaped from an illuminated manuscript. Unpredictable historical forces have conspired to make this misogynist, 7th century Irish monk the patron saint of taxi drivers as well as gardeners. Coincidentally, in the 17th century, a Parisian hotel named for the saint - Hotel St. Fiacre - was the first establishment on record to make horse-drawn carriages available for hire. $^{6}\,$ / As the taxicab slips and slides towards the airport, I say a little prayer in St. Fiacre's name and fix my gaze on his image; I imagine myself caressing the contradictory folds of his garment and pressing the tiny icon into the palm of my anxious hand. I take comfort in the generations of committed (and promiscuous) believers who have literally (and imaginatively) done likewise. / It is said (I take it on faith) that the human heart and fist are roughly the same size. No wonder, then, that to hold something in one's heart - to render it precious - it must be small enough to rest securely in one's hand yet durable enough to survive the punishment of fiercely clenched fingers and grasping palms. / (With the concept of "transitional phenomenon" D. W. Winnicott generously embraced all manner of symbolic gestures, objects and ideas for their life-enhancing ability to simultaneously represent and bring into existence a transit zone between the desire-suffused, idiosyncratic and imaginative psychic life of a subject - that would be you and me - and the so-called objective world of consensual reality in which we collectively live. For Winnicott, transitional phenomena potentially include everything from fetishes to cell phones, a toddler's teddy bear to the Mona Lisa, sandbox play to board room brainstorming, scientific theories to science fiction, handbags to cathedrals, technologies to tenderness. For Winnicott, it is in the space between inner and outer world, which is also the space between people - the transitional space, that intimate relationships and creativity occur.)7

/AM



As I make my way to the Air Canada counter I notice the gigantic relief mural by Saskatoon artist Eli Bornstein, a symphony of cubes, rectangles, planks and planes in primary colors, produced specifically for this airport in 1964. Mondrian in three-dimensions. / In the cultist space of modern art, the grid serves not only as emblem but also as myth. For like all myths, it deals with paradox or contradiction not by dissolving the paradox or resolving the contradiction, but by covering them over so that they seem (but only seem) to go away. The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction). A / For a moment, I picture the mythic space theorized by Rosalind Krauss as disrupted by materialism of a radically "other" kind: the floppy, helpless, needful, messy bag of instincts and desire called a human neonate.

12:50

When we finally bounce into the Calgary airport, it's too late for me to make my connecting flight to Medicine Hat. I drift aimlessly back and forth past the standard cornucopia of airport attractions - booze bar, book bar, sushi bar, donut bar, candy bar, magazine bar. I pause momentarily at a chain-link variety bookstore to peruse a book cover portrait of Andy Warhol posing with Ultra Violet, a member of his infamous entourage. Between the covers, Ultra Violet reflects on sixties underground culture, a scene in which Andy and the rest of the Factory gang held centre court. / Now, years later, looking back with an altogether different consciousness on the ugliness and brutality, I wonder what the satisfaction is meant to be. Everything is destructive. I let my mind dwell on the depravity, searching for meaning, to understand how people can do such revolting things to each other. And why: surely not for any kind of pleasure I can comprehend. / Then gradually I begin to grasp what Andy was trying to say with all his babble about machines and sex. Where sex has turned repulsive and inhuman, machine sex beckons alluringly. Only in telephone sex, robot sex, computer sex, is there escape from ugliness and cruelty. Machine sex is the only kind left that is uncontaminated, antiseptic, clean, even a little mysterious. Let's not think about affection and tenderness – they are entirely beyond expectation.⁹ / A century earlier, capitalist factories enacted brutalities of an altogether different kind (a horrific legacy that lives on in 21st century third-world sweatshops); / Conditions in the factories were appalling...the hours of labour were five in the morning until eight at night with one thirty minute break at noon, and this not only for adults but for children of seven...In some mills children of five were employed, under conditions of harsh discipline, being mercilessly 'straffed' if they spoke to one another or fell asleep at the machine. 10 / Though radically distant from one another in time, place and politic, what both (dropping) environments have in common is their awe-inspiring ability "to produce the goods" brilliant art and consumer abundance, respectively. They also have in common a profound inability to accommodate everyday-ordinary vulnerability; the kind that haunts us from cradle to grave even as it poignantly fuels social bonding. Let's not even think about their potential to support acute vulnerability - that is entirely beyond expectation.

/PM



At last I'm trudging down a stark, ground-level, pre-fab metal hallway that will take me to the tarmac that holds the airplane which will fly me to Medicine Hat. It turns out to be a 19-seat Beechcraft 1900D boarded via a rickety ladder-like staircase. No door separates passengers from flight crew, one of whom also serves as a flight attendant. I have a sneaking suspicion that this is the co-pilot's maiden voyage, a theory supported by the aching awkwardness of his downy, bird-boned adolescent forearms and the photos he inexplicably snaps as we taxi down the runway (I wonder if St. Fiacre covers airborne vehicles). / The aircraft groans and roars, shakes and rattles as it gathers enough momentum to lift itself into the air. (Now I picture the pilot as a barefoot Fred Flintstone pedaling the ground with all his might.) It is brutally evident that this Beechcraft is made of metal - heavy metal - which surely renders it vulnerable to abrupt descents. When, against all odds, the shuddering plane finally reaches a modest cruising altitude, I feel as though I'm dangling in midair, about to be dropped. I desperately try to recall everything I learned in grade four science class about lift and thrust and airborne machines, reminding myself that despite my visceral response, a clumsy old Beechcraft is actually far safer for human flight than lcarus's feather-light wax wings. The chasm between "what I know to be true" (thanks to my Enlightenment-inspired, formal education) and "what I actually sense with my eyes, skin and body," gapes wide. / How many other, parallel disjunctures I could name: medical treatments that are painful and humiliating even though "I know" they will extend my life; the coziness of riding in a comfortable, oversized car though "I know" the vehicle is contributing to environmental degradation; the knowledge that my baby's fragrant, freshly washed skin hosts a thousand and one creepy microorganisms invisible to my unaided eye. / How to live and play in the gap between what "I know" and what "I perceive or intuit" without deifying authority? While Rosalind Krauss interpreted symbolization as a means of camouflaging painful contradictions, for Winnicott gaps like these serve as fertile, creationproducing playgrounds for artists, mothers and infants alike. For me, they also offer an ideological breathing space teeming with political potential.

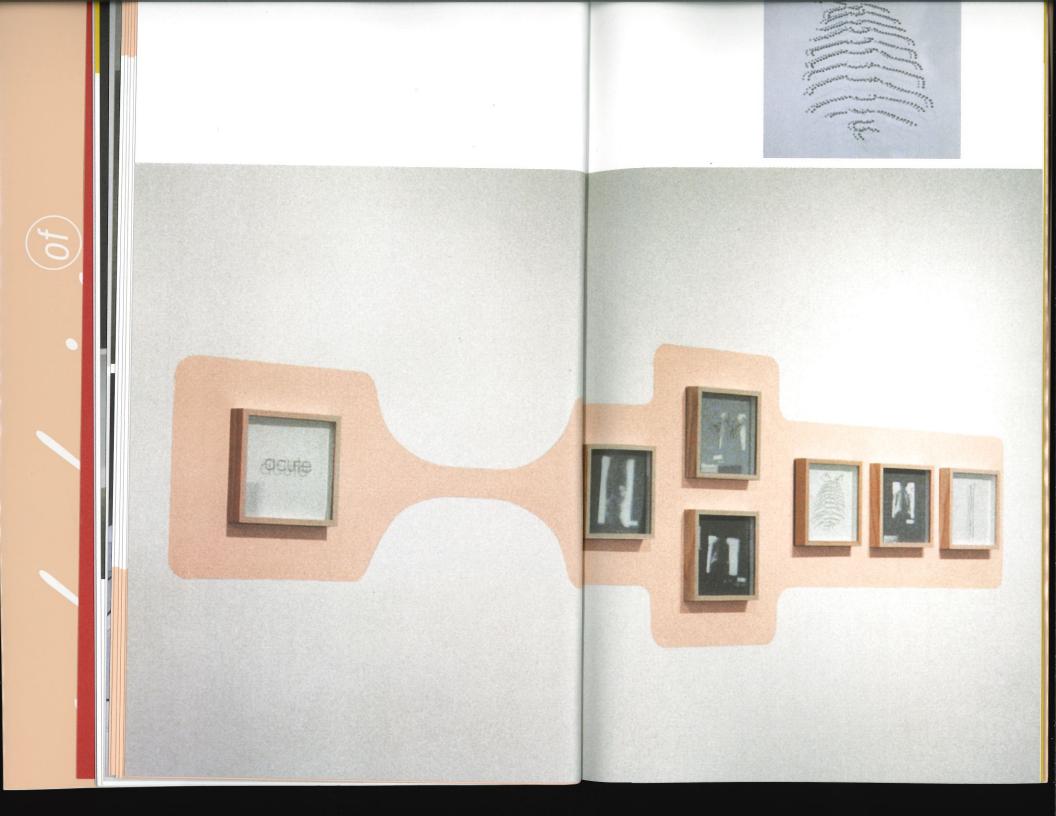


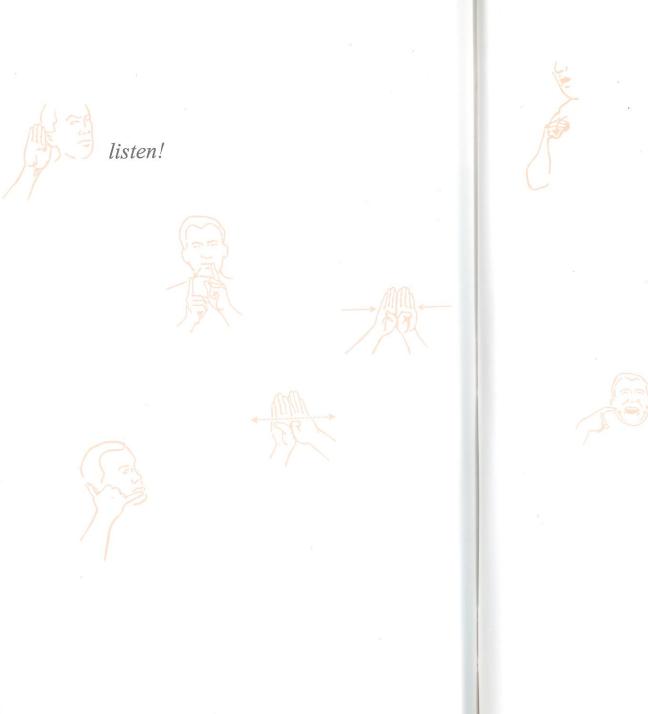


After my long day's journey, I'm ever so relieved to be delivered to the Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery by yet another of St. Fiacre's supplicants. Joanne and the rest of the staff greet me with welcoming handshakes and warm smiles. Following a quick tour of the facility, Joanne escorts me to the gallery space. I pause at the threshold, riveted: I am transformed into a question mark, a hungering wide-mouthed infant, a waiting baby bird with beak gaping wide. / How to imagine a society capable of embracing the ruthlessness that feeds culture of the most progressive and inspiring kind while, at the same time, supporting the awesome helplessness of an acutely vulnerable human infant? I enter the exhibition with baited breath, ready to receive symbolizations that will create a space for this, my utopian desire. / Sigrid Dahle*



















Biography shantz

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2003	EXPRESSION, Centre d'exposition de Sainte-Hyacinthe, Sainte Hyacinthe, QC
2001	Natalie and James Thompson Gallery, School of Art and Design, San Jose, CA
1999	Art Gallery of Algoma, Sault Ste. Marie, ON
1998	MacKenzie Gallery, Regina, SK
	Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB
1997	Glendon Gallery, York University, Toronto, ON
1995	Articule, Montreal, QC
1994	Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
1993	UNB Arts Centre, Fredericton, NB
	Muttart Gallery, Calgary, AB
1992	AKA Artist-Run Centre, Saskatoon, SK
	Eastern Edge, St. John's, NF
1991	Definitely Superior, Thunder Bay, ON
	Ace Art, Winnipeg, MB
1989	Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City
	I.D.A. Gallery, York University, Toronto, ON
1987	Rodman Hall Arts Centre, St. Catherines, ON
1986-88	Nancy Poole Studio, Toronto, ON

Selected Group Exhibitions		
2002	Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK	
	Charles H. Scott Gallery, ECIAD, Vancouver, BC	
2000	Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby, BC	
	Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC	
	Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, SK	
1999	Ace Art, Winnipeg, MB	
1998	MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK	
1997	Manoa Art Gallery, University of Hawaii, USA	
	Snelgrove Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, SK	
1997	Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB	
1996	AKA Artist-Run Centre, Saskatoon, SK	
	Kenderdine Gallery, Saskatoon, SK	
1995	Mercer Union, Toronto, ON	
1993	Snelgrove Gallery, University of Saskachewan, SK	
	Kenderdine Gallery, Saskatoon, SK	
1991	Cambridge Art Gallery, Cambridge, ON	
1990	Main/Access Gallery, Winnipeg, MB	
	Burlington Cultural Centre, Burlington, ON	
1989	Cycle Gallery, University of Waterloo, ON	
1988	MacIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, ON	
	Windsor Art Gallery, Windsor, ON	
1987	Cambridge Art Gallery, Cambridge, ON	
1986	Harbourfront Art Gallery, Toronto, ON	
1985	London Regional Art Gallery, London, ON	
1982	Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, ON	

Associate Professor, M.F.A.- Interdisciplinary Arts, Goddard College, Vermont, USA 2000-02 1989 M.F.A. Sculpture and Interdisciplinary, York University, Toronto, ON 1985 M.A. Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON Dept. of Visual Art, University of Waterloo, ON 1980-82 1980 B.A. English, Goshen College, IN Selected Catalogues and Reviews Yvonne Owens. ;rapt: an installation by Kathleen Sellars and Susan Shantz. In Artichoke. 2001 2000 Diane Dickers. Mail-Order Art. In Victoria Times Colonist Lisa Baldissera. ;rapt. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Michael Scott. Choice and Surprise. In Vancouver Sun 1999 Borsa, Joan. Performing Interconnectedness. In n.paradoxa Baert, Renee. Salvages. In Satiate. Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB 1998 Lippard, Lucy. Insight at Hand. In Satiate. Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB Long, Timothy. Satiate. Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK Dawn, Leslie. Susan Shantz: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, in C., May-August

1990-present Associate Professor, Sculpture and Multi-media, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK

Fisher, Barbara. in her nature. Glendon Gallery, York University, Toronto, ON Garneau, David & Nancy Tousley. Nature Redux. Southern Alberta Art Gallery, AB
 Nowlin, Tim. Imagining Eden. Kenderdine Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
 Christie, Clare & Sandra Gregson. Natured. Mercer Union, Toronto, ON Newdigate, Ann. Susan Shantz: hibernaculum, in Canadian Art, Spring
 Borsa, Joan. hibernaculum. Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
 Heisler, Franklin. Myths of Art and Science. Muttart Art Gallery, Calgary, AB

Anderson, Jack. Susan Shantz: Satiate, The Regina Leader-Post

Beatty, Greg. Satiate: Susan Shantz, in Espace, Fall

Awards

2003	Art Residency, Boreal Art/Nature, Quebec
2001	B.C. Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant
1999	Canada Council, Creative B Grant
1998	Saskatchewan Arts Board, Creative B Grant
1997	Art Residency, Villa Montalvo, Saratoga, CA
1996	Art Residency, Ucross Foundation, Ucross, WY
	Canada Council, Creative B Grant
1995	Saskatchewan Arts Board, Creative B Grant
	Canada Council, Travel Grant
1994	Saskatchewan Arts Board, Travel Grant
	External Affairs Canada, Travel Grant
1993	Saskatchewan Arts Board, Creative B Grant
1987	Ontario Arts Council, Materials Assistance Grant
1986	Canada Council, Projects Grant
1984	Ontario Arts Council, Materials Assistance Grant

Collections

Canada Council Art Bank, Saskatchewan Arts Board, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Mendel Art Gallery, London Free Press, Burlington Cultural Centre, University of New Brunswick, Wilfrid Laurier University, University of Saskatchewan, Private Collections

technologies of tenderness

December 6, 2003 - January 18, 2004 / Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery 1302 Bomford Cres. SW / Medicine Hat, AB / T1A 5E6 / (403) 502-8580 Curator: Joanne Marion / Writer: Sigrid Dahle / Design: Fishten, Calgary, fishes@fishten.net Photography: Rory Mahony / Printer: Sundog Printing

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Canada Council Conseil des Arts







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du Canada











or lessons in tenderness, I thank my son, Leit Warland Shantz, born February, 19

