

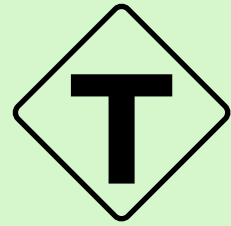


Home (In)Security

Sylvia Ziemann

April 29 to May 26, 2011

Opening Reception: Friday, April 29th @ 8:00PM



When we think of home, probably the first thing that comes to mind is the physical structure we inhabit — be it a house, condo or apartment. When we travel, though, our concept of home expands to include the city, province and country we're from. Endlessly fluid and adaptable, "home" is nonetheless deeply rooted in our psyche. The compulsion to acquire and defend territory. It's how we (and other plants and animals on Earth) secure the resources necessary to survive and propagate.

Economics is a powerful motivator, but humans also invest emotionally in the communities and countries we live in. To the extent it promotes communal bonding and well-being, that's good. But if people invest too earnestly they become vulnerable to manipulation. By calling its 2002 bill restricting civil liberties in the wake of 9/11 The Homeland Security Act the Bush administration deftly insulated itself from criticism. If you spoke out against the Act you were labeled anti-patriotic, even un-American. Playing on people's fears about the safety of their homes and neighbourhoods is a good way to advance a "Tough on Crime" agenda too.

Most of the installations in this exhibition by Regina artist Sylvia Ziemann are mini-houses. So the domestic sense of home is definitely there. But Home (In)security encompasses much more than that. That's obvious from the first piece Ziemann made for the show. "Bomber Woman" consists of a Barbie-type doll dressed up as a suicide bomber with a photo of Ziemann's face attached. It was inspired by a PBS documentary she saw on suicide bombers. With two young children herself, she was surprised some of the bombers were mothers like her.

One segment concerned a 2002 hostage-taking where over 170 people died in a Moscow theatre. "A Russian women who survived described how she'd spoken with one of the Chechen women who had bombs strapped to her," recalls Ziemann. "She asked how she became a suicide bomber and the woman said the Russian government had killed all her family. She was lost until she joined this group, then she had a cause. I thought to myself, 'What would happen if the Canadian government killed my family?'"

The likelihood of that happening isn't very high. Still, Canadians can be harmed by injudicious government action. When we are, though, we have recourse to legal and political processes that, while not perfect, at least offer an avenue to seek justice. In many places that isn't the case.

Media references abound in Home (In)security As part of her faithful recreation of domestic interiors, Ziemann has installed mini-TVs and radios in her dwellings. Playing on most are short video and audio excerpts from actual broadcasts. In "Terrorist Cell", if you peer in the window, you'll see a clip of George W. Bush saying to robust applause "Send more troops". You'll also see a table with guns and bomb-making equipment. Instantly, the mental picture forms of terrorists watching news coverage of American military aggression while planning their next strike.

In some instances, the video or audio segment represents an actual person or occurrence inside the house. When you approach Home Invasion, for instance, you realize the front door's been kicked in. Inside, you can see a phone laying on the floor, and a masked intruder (on video) ransacking the house.

By now it should be obvious that Ziemann's work rewards careful viewing. Engage, and you'll uncover all sorts of dark and twisted takes on home and security. Like the one experienced by Ziemann's mother when she was a Hamburg teenager during WWII and slept with a suitcase by her bed in case she had to flee an Allied bombing raid. Ziemann made Fear of the Past: Portrait of My Mother in 2003 when her mom began having nightmares while watching news reports on the Iraq War.

The meta-thought I take away from Home (In)security is that walls are dangerous. Yes, they offer a measure of privacy. But it's a delicate balance. When they become too numerous and impenetrable, they hinder our ability to communicate and understand each other. Over the last 60 years there's been a steady drift toward the privileging of private space over public in our society. Homes are an obvious example. When cities across North America were being formed, people lived clustered in apartments and tenements. With rise in automobile ownership (another privileging of private over public space ie mass transit) people fled crowded inner cities for single-family homes in the suburbs.

The irony, as Ziemann makes clear, is that the more we retreat into private enclaves, the more we exacerbate societal ills like crime, terrorism and pretty much everything else we fear in daily life.

Essay by Gregory Beatty



TRUCK gratefully acknowledges the support of our members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and the Calgary Arts Development Authority

The Grain Exchange (lower level)
815 First Street SW, Calgary, Alberta T2P 1N3
T 403.261.7702 F 403.264.7737 E info@truck.ca



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



Alberta
Foundation
for the Arts



www.truck.ca