

**WARDEN
AND
MCNICOLL**

In 2015, the Vice-President and Principal, University of Toronto Scarborough made acquisition funds available for VPSC53H3 Curatorial Perspectives II—a course offered within the Department of Arts, Culture and Media.

Students enrolled in the course learned about U of T's Collections Policy and procedures, responded to assigned readings, conducted research and studio visits, and attended lectures by guest curators. A short list of artists who have significant roots, past or present, in the eastern GTA, or whose work reflects Scarborough's cultural landscape, was provided. The students presented their research in advance of the studio visits, and reconvened and reviewed the experience after each studio presentation.

As a result of their final summation, Simone Jones's *Warden and McNicoll* was selected for acquisition.

The students chose *Warden and McNicoll* for its explicit yet thoughtful consideration of this community, while also demonstrating a momentous artwork within the artist's practice. The acquisition of this work marks the legacy of the substantial participation of UTSC students toward the cultural heritage of the campus for many years to come. Other works in this tradition include Kim Adams's *Scarborough Lights* and Will Kwan's *This Archipelago*, acquired after the artists completed residencies while working closely with students. As part of the UTSC Permanent Art Collection, *Warden and McNicoll* will be available for exhibition, research and loan to other institutions.

Much gratitude is owed to each of the artists who hosted studio visits and generously shared their knowledge, experience and production with the students. These artists are: Michelle Bellemare, Shary Boyle, Simone Jones, Esmond Lee, Alex McLeod and Bojana Videkanic.

We are beholden to Andrew Hunter, who commissioned *Warden and McNicoll* as a contemporary response included in the *Alex Colville* exhibition (Art Gallery of Ontario, 2014; National Gallery of Canada, 2015). Here, Andrew has provided an insightful essay that offers several distinctive approaches toward understanding and appreciating the installation.

The support offered by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts added to the pleasure and excitement of seeing this acquisition through.

Finally, thank you to Simone Jones for the wealth of knowledge she shared wholeheartedly with the students, and for her creation of *Warden and McNicoll*, a work we are proud to steward and exhibit for the benefit of all.

Teaching VPSC53H3 has been an academic and professional highlight. Without exception, our encounters were spirited and exacting. The students who worked diligently to make the right choice for the UTSC Permanent Art Collection are: Sydney Cabioc, Pedro Chan, Shelley Gu, Celeste Hamilton, Zhaoyi Kang, Elyse LeDren and Kristina Zaja.

Ann MacDonald
Director/Curator
Doris McCarthy Gallery



**Intersections,
of Warden and McNicoll,
of Jones and Colville**

Andrew Hunter

We are flying. *We are flying*, soaring over the surface of the lake, rising up the face of the bluffs, now abruptly confronting the sprawl of the city's infrastructure. We progress north, as the crow flies, forward in time, from an older settlement near the shoreline of Lake Ontario, over major arterial roads, past highways, new suburbs and shopping malls. A wide expanse of green space, cropped close, paths, hydro towers, power lines, a lone jogger, and now we descend from our bird's-eye view to ground level, from macro to micro, from an aloof distant panoramic gaze to the intensity of an intimate stare, at isolated concentrated gestures, at bodies in motion, then at rest, *breathless*.

Such a bold beginning, echoing Stanley Kubrick's opening sequence in *The Shining*, with his slow, sweeping trace along a lonely highway into the mountains, stalking Danny in his parents' VW on their way to tragedy at the Overlook Hotel. Or perhaps David Lynch at the start of *Blue Velvet*, the camera leading us along a tranquil suburban drive, panning a cliché scene, only to descend into the dark, claustrophobic confines of a severed ear. Here, Simone Jones is leading us into the drama, a seemingly mundane, everyday encounter between two boys, heightened through cinematic gesture, composition and framing, a potent moment, a fleeting encounter, which only hints at past and future. As he was for Kubrick in *The Shining*, Alex Colville is the catalyst here. This sequence is *Colvillian*.

Like Colville, Simone Jones explores a single moment in time, hinting at a story but offering no beginning or ending. In her three-screen projection (originally commissioned for the 2014 AGO exhibition *Alex Colville*), she translates Colville's small-town and rural settings to a suburban hydro corridor, showing three distinct perspectives on a single charged event: a fight between two boys. That Jones shares with Colville an intense interest in the craft of image-making and a heightened sense of precision and control is obvious here.

“My favourite Colville paintings are the ones that are infused with a sense of danger and creepiness. He makes Canada seem slightly ominous and threatening—definitely not what I was used to seeing when I was growing up.”

—Simone Jones

Warden and McNicoll are these boys’ names. *Have you met young Warden and McNicoll?* The lads, school chums (to use archaic terms), buddies, pals, *my buddy ol’ pal*. They go everywhere together, to school, on teams (they’ll choose each other first when picking sides, goes without saying), *I’ve got your back, and you’ve got mine*, until... what? A lie, a secret revealed, a pact broken, perhaps a disagreement over a girl, or another boy, some new *friend*, an *other*. These intersecting lives, linked together, I imagine, since kindergarten, or maybe even before that. Perhaps they met through a back fence, dividing new lawns of fresh-laid grass, rolled out by their fathers on some early Saturday morning. New neighbours, tentative at first, best friends by lunchtime. Inseparable for years, but at this moment the bond has become strained and fragile. And so they’ve moved out onto the edge lands, into no man’s land, on the anonymous fringe of a web of meandering streets and cul-de-sacs, where deer graze, coyotes stalk, a red-tailed hawk circles overhead and the shadow of a distant plane races across dry ground, a subtle chance reminder of events and lives beyond this moment.

Did the boys come from nearby, from Sir Ernest McMillan Senior Public School (named for the Canadian organist and composer of choral music), or perhaps David Lewis Public School (key architect of the NDP, father of Stephen Lewis, grandfather of Avi Lewis), or St. Maximilian Kolbe Separate School (a Polish Franciscan friar who died at Auschwitz, having volunteered to take the place of another). More lives intersecting—the composer, the socialist and the martyr—weaving together threads of history. Do the boys know this? Are they conscious of these biographies carrying baggage into this place? Likely not.

Yet Warden and McNicoll may not be the names of boys (not these boys anyway, who may remain nameless)—they are roads, actually avenues. Warden and McNicoll mark an intersection north of Agincourt, south of Markham, in the heart of Scarborough (*Scarberia*, we once called it). The





intersection is on the northern edge of a wide swath of grass, running east to west, criss-crossed by paths and punctuated by clumps of hedges, the odd tree. This major hydro corridor cuts across Scarborough, clearly dividing its neighbourhoods but linking the residential, the industrial and the commercial areas, making it easy for a kid to quickly cross territories, to move into other worlds. For a kid, the distinctions between sites over short distances can be vast. This place can be anywhere—an imagined far-off place or a site of specific purpose. Is this a chance encounter or did the boys agree to meet on this common ground? Is this the prescribed turf for resolving conflicts, like the vacant lot next to the Texaco gas station just a block away from Mohawk Trail School, my school, in Hamilton, in the 1960s?

You're dead at four o'clock! That was the declaration uttered by Scott, the school bully who tormented me more than he tormented others (at least, I remember it that way). He'd announce the threat at first bell. Why? You never knew why. Some imagined or fabricated slight. At 4 p.m., we'd all march down the block to chants of *fight, fight, fight*, for a confrontation that only rarely led to physical violence, but always involved verbal abuse and humiliation, tears and cruel laughter. This oft-repeated ritual ended one day when someone (not me) actually punched Scott and bloodied his nose, which sounds contrived, but it's true. Back then it was an accepted part of growing up, no harm done—such things built *character*. Thankfully that sentiment is now lost, mostly. But those seemingly brief moments of conflict are not fleeting; they are buried deep in such marginal spaces that become charged ground, their ubiquity spreading anxiety exponentially. I am always crossing over, passing by, observing, these generic spaces on the margins, and so I relive past local traumas in far-off places, places made “interesting” through memory.

“I've never had the slightest interest in going to an ‘interesting’ place, because places are equally interesting to me. Wherever I am is reality, things are happening here, and this is ‘as good as it gets,’ as they say.”

—Alex Colville

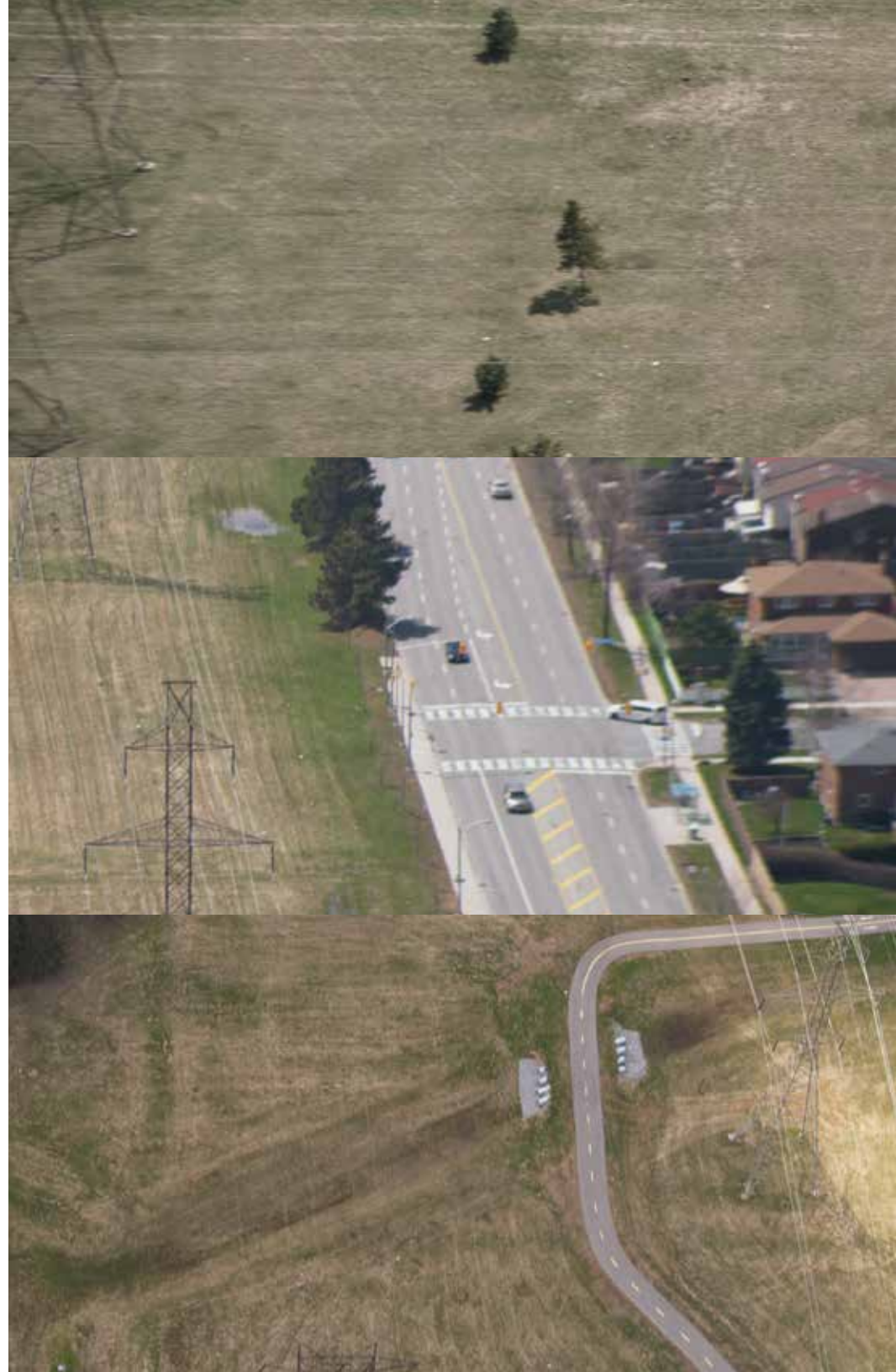


Alex Colville, *Horse and Girl*, 1984, acrylic polymer emulsion on hardboard, 45 × 60 cm. Private collection.

“I think any life can be interesting—I think any surrounds can be interesting. I don’t think I would’ve been nearly so bold as a writer if I had lived in a [bigger] town.”

—Alice Munro

Alex Colville often expressed this idea, in numerous ways, this firm belief that remarkable things happen in unremarkable places, that you don’t need to be in an exceptional place (Manhattan, London, Tokyo, Berlin...) for extraordinary things to occur. It is in these apparently nondescript marginal spaces that the most poignant moments can occur. This is particularly true for a child: the surroundings seem less critical than the presence of another, a friend, an enemy, a stranger. Intimacy is essential, the intensity of an engagement marking the spot, in time. Superficially extraordinary



surroundings become a distraction from the essential elements, and those elements make the unremarkable environment suddenly exceptional, a trigger for the most potent of memories. Jones's *Warden and McNicoll* reveals this, leaving behind the sublime cinematic gesture of the helicopter sweep over lake and city that sets up the core scene; we descend into the heart of the matter—two boys awkwardly squaring off, their physical grappling slowed down, their gestures becoming heightened, drawn out. They teeter between love and anger, friendship and aggression, caught in an embrace of ambiguous intimacy. Jones's audio tracks focus on the minimal and, matching the stripped-down encounter between the boys, offers only the persistence of fundamental sounds, of garments ripping, of the heavy weight of breathing, of sod being torn up, all slowed, exaggerated. As with Colville, no before and after, timelessness reinforced by the intermixing of shots, of detail and distance, constructing a disrupted chronology. Where will it end? Does it end?

She charges through the scene, thundering past the boys as they continue their endless struggle. The horse appears spooked, the rider perhaps losing control, barely holding on. Jones's video triptych has faded and will loop over again, *and again*, but the narrative projection she has established has stayed with me, and now I'm dreaming out of it, dreaming this horse and rider out of Colville, now racing across that expanse of dry grass lined with giant towers that walk over the landscape, linked by high-voltage wires gripped in their stunted limbs. Now I am at the intersection of Jones and Colville.

There is a subtle buzz of power surging along the wires. The woman on the horse heads north and west, crossing McNicoll and running up Innislawn Road to join Fundy Bay Boulevard. She heads west and then north, turns right, heading into Fundy Bay Park, and finally disappears in a sparse cluster of trees just past the ball diamond. It's now silent, except for the sound of thin rope brushing concrete as a young girl skips alone at the edge of the playground.



Alex Colville, *Child Skipping*, 1958, oil and synthetic redo on board, 60.96 × 45.72 cm. Private collection.



Alex Colville, *Seven Crows*, 1980, acrylic on masonite, 50 × 120cm.
Collection of the Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, gift of Ross B. Eddy, 1995.

“They drive past a park with swings, a slide, a merry-go-round and teeter-totters. Paved footpaths run between houses and open onto empty fields full of possibilities invisible to the adult eye...” The new school is “deserted, deep in its summer sleep. The flagpole stands empty. The swings hang motionless, the slides and teeter-totters static.

—Ann-Marie MacDonald, from *The Way the Crow Flies*

How strange that Jones staged *Warden and McNicoll* only blocks away from Fundy Bay Boulevard and Fundy Bay Park. The Bay of Fundy was Colville’s home, first at Amherst, Nova Scotia, then Sackville, New Brunswick, and finally Wolfville, Nova Scotia, where he died in 2013 not long after his wife, Rhoda. The girl in the painting is Colville’s daughter, Ann. Back then the school was new, still awaiting sod around the freshly cast concrete sidewalk. You can see the roof of the Colville house peaking just above the horizon, and the girl is caught in mid-air, trapped in time’s tension, caught forever in that moment, haunting the space. And the girl leads me back to Kubrick, to the Overlook Hotel and the ghosts of the twin girls enticing Danny, and us, *to come and play*. How many children still play on their own, unsupervised, not watched over by helicopter parents? How much trust among neighbours remains? Are we all now suspicious strangers? And so who is watching me, as the girl, Ann, hovers in mid-skip, neither rising nor falling?

"I think if anything I am perhaps more inclined than most people are to be polite and considerate because I am aware that human relationships are innately fragile and kind of dangerous."

—Alex Colville

Fight, fight, fight—a line of children emerges from the back of the school and I turn to follow, crossing the playground, down curving streets and back out onto the hydro corridor. I wait beneath one of the towers as the parade of youth carries on then stops, the chant fades, and the two boys emerge into the open, alone. They position themselves, facing each other, and begin circling slowly, like two grapplers, hands up for the inevitable lunge and grasp that begins all scripted wrestling matches (*men in tights*). The boys charge, embrace, struggle, then collapse to the ground, rolling, straining; they are holding each other, not striking, and so the crowd grows restless and moves off, and they are left, like the girl skipping, caught in the moment.

A lonely jogger drifts by on the path, a shadow races across the ground as another jet passes overhead, a solitary horse thunders past, then a murder of crows glide by, low to the ground. And the murder turns out to be the same crow, repeated seven times, at different moments in flight, time compressed into a single moment, like *Warden and McNicoll*, looping, a sticky thought.



Warden and McNicoll

2014

Edition: 5/5

11:22 (continuous loop)

Producer & Director

Simone Jones

Cinematographer

Ryan Randall

Sound Design

Tom Third

Editors

Simone Jones

Kyle Rogers

Fight Choreographer

Christopher Sawchyn

Production Manager

Hope Thompson

Crew

James Gordon

Peter Chan

Keith Cole

Layne Hinton

Aerial Photography

Four Season Aviation and Darby Film Services

Production Stills

Kelly Lamorie

Post Production

RedLab Digital

Actors

Leo Lamorie Fitzgerald

Theo Blackett

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Images courtesy of Simone Jones and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Simone Jones is a multidisciplinary artist who works with film, video, sculpture and electronics. Jones graduated from the Ontario College of Art (OCA) with a concentration in Experimental Art and received her MFA in Sculpture Installation from York University in Toronto. Jones was the Jill Kraus Visiting Assistant Professor of Art at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, with a joint appointment in the School of Art and Robotics from 2000–2003. Jones is currently an Associate Professor of Art at OCAD University, where she teaches in the Integrated Media Program. Jones has exhibited her work at national and international venues. She is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York.

Andrew Hunter is an accomplished curator, artist, writer, educator and community researcher. Since 2013, he has been the Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art, at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Hunter has held curatorial positions across Canada and, as an independent artist and curator, he has produced exhibitions and publications in Canada, the United States, England, China and Croatia. A graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Hunter is known for his innovative narrative-based museum interventions and his ongoing creative research performance Professor William Starling's Perambulations of Inquiry. With Lisa Hirmer, he founded the international creative research project DodoLab and has been Adjunct Faculty at the Ontario College of Art and Design University and at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture. Hunter's curatorial work emphasizes inter-disciplinarity, collaboration and narrative and he is committed the museum as a truly publically engaged institution of community learning and progressive thought.



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