

two eyes gleaming *pictures of windows* ESSAY: LISA BENSCHOP

As humans, we all wish to connect with others, to be known and to share our experience, and yet we know that truly *sharing* an experience with another is often fraught with missed connections and misunderstandings, and that we often simply fail. For Steven Cochrane and The Walled Garden, this critical failure is at the crux of his whole endeavour. Recognizing the tenuous objective, Cochrane's installation offers a speculative conversation about both his own memory and also the relative impossibility of recreating for your conversant the intricacies and subtleties of a memory, a dream, something that you experienced or a feeling you once had. *Describing the scene only goes so far.*

Cochrane layers and repeats drawings, prints, photographs, and familiar-but-unsettled objects alongside signs bearing fragments of text, intentional lighting, and larger installation elements in a multivalent but non-verbal description of something elusive and yet very concrete. *The memory is real.* This immersive exhibition tells the parts of a story that words can't convey and casts the viewer as interlocutor, puzzler, witness.

Untitled (Screen wall) (2011) is made up of a series of unique rubbings, each repeating graphic components within a gridded frame to create irregular patterns. They are regimented enough to make a person think there's a formula here (on this wall, and also in this room) but further investigation seems to suggest otherwise. *Can you crack the code?* This careful looking, eyes darting over the grid to compare this here to that there, is similar to the mind's project of persistently revisiting different aspects of the memory/ies of a traumatic moment in an effort to make sense of it/them. The mind continues puzzling, despite the possible endlessness of this pursuit.

Plants drawn from memory with invisible ink (2012) is a series of blind contour drawings Cochrane made by relying on his own memories of botanical illustrations of plants that grew around his childhood homes,^ and they're drawn with a medium that disappears as you work and then reappears when it's dried. He explained, "you can see sometimes that I'd accidentally draw...over and over again in the same spot...I was trying to build the struggle to remember into the making of the work"^—again, a metaphor for the mind's project of working it out, whatever 'it' may be. *Explaining, repeating, defining, exaggerating, leaving things out, forgetting, but you get the gist.*

Two jewels gleam on the wall, yellow-green and blue-red eyes surveying the space. Together they are After Evening Thunderstorms, June 2002 and June 2007 (2013), a pair photographs from Cochrane's personal collection, each mounted behind an acrylic prism—a *paperweight? an award? a crystal ball?* These two snapshots were taken in the same room, five years apart, each an attempt to capture and reproduce "that quality of light—a very particular kind of hyper-saturated yellow-green."^

Windows in particular have a specific job: letting the light in, framing the view. Windows are contemplative by their very nature, conjuring ideas about reflection, longing, escape... Cochrane's *pictures of windows* here, now viewed from a distance in time through a bevelled crystalline filter, put us in that room looking out those windows. Viewing the rest of the exhibition from this position, we might feel that we're looking through Cochrane's own lens. *Is this the key?*

Cochrane's visual and sensorial narrative seems to reveal intimate details about a moment in his life, if obliquely, and at the same time The Walled Garden presents a perfect illustration of the frustration inherent in such an undertaking. Communicating a subjective experience, whether profound or traumatic or both, can be tremendously difficult. The artist is sharing something with us here, and whether we scrutinize the clues or simply absorb the impressions, *or/and* walk away feeling stumped/*bemused, curious, betrayed, or touched*, we are participating in a conversation.

Lisa Benschop
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^ refers to details shared by the artist in email correspondence, April 23, 2015.

About The Writer:

Lisa Benschop is a visual artist, a sometimes writer, a toddler's mother, a great cook, and a fledgeling gardener. She holds a BA with Honours in English from the University of Alberta and a BFA in Sculpture from the Alberta College of Art & Design. She is currently living in semi-rural paradise as a new urban homesteader. Her work focuses on the myriad functions and expressions of imagination and nostalgia in the human experience.

About the Artist :

Steven Leyden Cochrane is a multidisciplinary visual artist, writer, and educator based in Winnipeg. While committed to conceptual and process-based methodologies, Cochrane works across a broad range of media to produce works that critically investigate issues of subjective experience, memory, identity, and place. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and a Masters of Fine Arts in studio art from the University of Windsor.