

Deanna Bowen

Proof of Presence

September 10 – October 8, 2022

Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

0. Exhibition View
1. *Proof of Presence (Red Chest)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
2. *Proof of Presence (Red Chest)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
3. *Proof of Presence (Lazy Dazy, solo)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
4. *Proof of Presence (Lazy Dazy, solo)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
5. Exhibition View
6. *Proof of Presence (Typewriter Bag)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 36 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
7. *Proof of Presence (Cassette Case)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 34 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
8. Exhibition View
9. *Proof of Presence (Pin Cushion and Cufflinks)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 36 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
10. *Proof of Presence (Calendars)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 34 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
11. Exhibition View
12. *Proof of Presence (Cords and Batteries)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 36 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
13. Exhibition View
14. *Proof of Presence (Shoes)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP
15. Exhibition View
16. *Proof of Presence (Wigs)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP

17. Exhibition View

18. *Proof of Presence (Lazy Dazy)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP

19. Exhibition View

20. *Proof of Presence (Brushes and Bowl)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 30 x 45 in, Edition of 3 +IAP

21. *Proof of Presence (Slacks)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 36 in, Edition of 3 +IAP

22. Exhibition View

23. *Proof of Presence (Broken, Before)*, 2022, Archival inkjet on photo paper, 24 x 34 in, Edition of 3 +IAP

24. Exhibition View

25. Exhibition View

26. *Mama's Spoons*, 2022, Lightbox, 15 x 2 feet

27. *Mama's Spoons*, 2022, Lightbox, 15 x 2 feet

28. *Mama's Spoons*, 2022, Lightbox, 15 x 2 feet

Exhibition Text:

However seemingly kitschy, the series of images in Proof of Presence continue to do the work of documenting and tracing my family's lineage in ways similar to A Harlem Nocturne (2019), Black Drones in the Hive (currently on view at the Image Centre at TMU) and my Spring 2023 commissioned work for the National Gallery's Leading With Women series, but in a much more intimate way.

My mother Leora is the second eldest of twelve children borne to Rev. Albert Sterling and Jean (Bowen) Risby in Amber Valley, AB. The family moved from the farm to Vancouver in 1953; and in this transition Leora was tasked with the role of surrogate matriarch/memory keeper of her siblings when my grandparents traveled to preach. As her only daughter/eldest granddaughter, I grew up knowing that I was expected to assume the role of surrogate matriarch at some time. Every work I have created since 1994 has been about my efforts to dodge or accept this burden.

My mother Leora was diagnosed with dementia at the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020; and since moving my mother to Montreal in December 2021, one of my spatially necessary and emotionally daunting tasks as her caregiver has been sorting through her personal belongings to determine what should be kept and what to give away. Not quite a hoarder; my mother's belongings are a mélange of 'what could be salvaged' items from various stages of her life as a single mother and career secretary, as well as the trinkets and bobbles of relatives whose stories are too painful to remember. A stack of "slacks;" a collection of shoes; a pile of brushes and combs; wigs; a hair dryer; empty wallets and agendas; cassette tapes; a cracked photo; a pile of singed power cords; and a deteriorating pin cushion all form a material portrait of, and tribute to, an extraordinary woman who has lived a hard and frugal life.

Here, my mother's character and life 'worth' are not determined by the monetary value of the things we selected and photographed. These photos (and subsequent editions) reflect my efforts as my mother's surrogate, to remind her of the family she cannot recall, and these seemingly insignificant objects help spark recollection and long-hoped for present-day connection between a daughter who never felt seen and a mother who was never encouraged to see herself.

Deanna Bowen is a descendant of two Alabama and Kentucky born Black Prairie pioneer families from Amber Valley and Campsie, Alberta. Bowen's family history has been the central pivot of her auto-ethnographic interdisciplinary works since the early 1990s. She makes use of a repertoire of artistic gestures in order to define the Black body and trace its presence and movement in place and time. She is a recipient of numerous grants and award including the Concordia University's 2022 Provost's Circle of Distinction Award, 2021 Scotiabank Photography Award, 2020 Governors General Award, 2016 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and the 2014 William H. Johnson Prize. Her writing, interviews and art works have been published in Canadian Art, The Capilano Review, The Black Prairie Archives, and Transition Magazine. Bowen is editor of the 2019 publication Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada. Later this month, German publisher Steidl is releasing a monograph on Bowen's work that includes essays by Crystal Mowry, director of programs at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan and Kimberly Phillips, director of the Simon Fraser University Galleries in Vancouver and Burnaby, British Columbia.

Deanna lives and works in Montreal, QC where she is an Assistant Professor of Intersectional Feminist and Decolonial 2D-4D Image Making and Co-Director of the Post Image Cluster at Concordia University Her work is in the collections of the Canada Council Art Bank, Remail Modern, Saskatoon, The Art Museum at the University of Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, TD Bank, RBC, Scotiabank, Hydro Quebec and the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco among many others.