

## ALEX TURGEON | *WASTE LAND*

A poem, like a city, communicates in concrete and empty space. Mexican conceptual artist and writer Ulises Carrión in his 1975 essay "The New Art of Making Books" writes that books are sequences of spaces and moments, not just containers of words. Artist Alex Turgeon extends this thinking to the spaces of the city, locating a queer subjectivity between the poetic realms of architecture and the built space of language. In Turgeon's first solo exhibition at a public gallery in Canada, he employs concrete poetry, drawing, sculpture, and assemblage in examining the gentrification, division, and promised utopic unity of urban revitalization.

A focal point of *Waste Land* is Turgeon's extended concrete poem presented as a mural across the walls of the gallery. The poem appears as a lattice fence, typical of those in suburban neighborhoods that divide property and act as a screen that partially obscures vision. The lattice is composed of a repeating text that reads, "a ugly condo for ugly peeps", a graffiti tag encountered by the artist written across a sign for a new proposed condo development in Toronto. Similar fencing around urban construction sites disrupts access to public spaces and obscures vision into the construction site beyond. Turgeon's lattice fence motif also separates viewers from an unknown, infinite space beyond the gallery walls. The tension between the solid wall and the trompe l'oeil fence nods towards the divisionary architecture that is physically and ideologically built into our institutions.

Having previously resided in Berlin and now based in Toronto, Turgeon continues to contrast the iconic architectures of both cities, especially through the architectural type of the lookout tower. Scale models of the slender, pointed forms of the CN Tower, Berlin's Fernsehturm, and the Calgary Tower, amongst others, are denied to viewers, encased within a birdcage. Each of these buildings have become iconic symbols for their respective cities, representing growth, commerce, and success. For those that venture to the top, the tower also confers god-like command over the city. Each tower's declaration of prosperity is entwined in a phallic statement of patriarchal domination that is written in urban centres across the globe.

Turgeon's *Waste Land* proposes that citizens should read between the lines that the city writes in. Like a book, the city too has margins, gutters, and borders that exist on the periphery of the main text. As Carrión writes, "The space is the music of the unsung poetry." It is these supposedly empty margins of the city such as its grassy downtown lots or marked suburban developments where the cities of tomorrow are contested. The wasteland as an unproductive, public, and shared space is a prerequisite for the body of the city to communicate.

Curated by Adam Whitford, Associate Curator & Exhibitions Manager.

**Alex Turgeon** (b. Kijipuktuk/Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada) is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice investigates formal relationships between poetry and architecture. His overall work focuses on how the structures of language and architecture inform the queer subject as built environment. Turgeon's practice finds interdisciplinary form through concrete poetry, sculpture, drawing, video, and performance, embodying a radical ethos rooted in the methodologies of printed matter—framed as a distributive tool and political method for making and occupying space. He received his BFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design and an MFA from Rutgers University. His work has been presented in part at the Tate (Liverpool); Akademie der Künste and KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin); Kunsthalle Zürich; Contemporary Art Centre (Vilnius); and as part of "Poetry as Practice," an online exhibition hosted by Rhizome and the New Museum (New York). In 2022-2023 Turgeon received a Junge Akademie Fellowship from the Akademie der Künste, Berlin and has participated as an artist-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts, (2011), Rupert (2015), Fondazione Antonio Ratti (2017), Autodesk Technology Center (2019) and is a forthcoming resident at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2024-2025). His exhibition *Waste Land* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery marks the artist's first institutional exhibition in Canada.

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