
Deborah Root



Deborah Root came of age during the Vietnam War, in a family deeply affected by World War II. As a child, she listened to her father's and grandfather's stories of the Pacific war, alongside the accounts of women who experienced life on the home front. "The war" was a constant presence in her family's life, with the once-assumed certainty of U.S. victory challenged during the Vietnam War.

Much of Root's recent work explores the impact of these wars within the family, incorporating seemingly dissonant images from art history, advertising illustration, and photography. Forms blur and bleed into one another, while elements are cut off—yet a narrative still emerges. Her fragmented compositions and bold colors heighten moments of disconnection in both social and familial contexts. Meanwhile, the relative flatness of the objects surrounding the central figures emphasizes the stagelike quality that defines many of the moments she portrays.

"My hope is that a particular image might link up to a vast constellation of associations, whose symbolic nuances have migrated and transformed over historical time and geographic space yet remain embedded in the image. These intuitive associations evoke personal, psychological truths, or broader cultural narratives." Deborah Root

Deborah Root's influences include Gothic art and early Spanish apocalypses, drawn to the contrast between the flatness of the images and the intricate arrangement of material on the page. She has also been influenced by pre-European Mexican conventions of representation, particularly the pictorial texts that function like storyboards.

Eric Fischl's depictions of suburban anxiety revealed to Root the narrative possibilities within such imagery, while the complex compositions of contemporary painter Kerry James Marshall—especially his integration of graphic design elements and bold color—have had a profound impact on her work. Currently, she is exploring the work of female Surrealists, with a particular focus on Leonora Carrington.

In addition to being a visual artist working primarily in painting, Deborah Root is a cultural critic and writer whose arts writing explores the relationship between visual art and cultural politics. Her catalog contributions include in-depth essays on Sarindar Dhaliwal, Laureana Toledo, Jorge Lozano, Ximena Cuevas, and Annie Pootoogook. Her work has appeared in *Art Papers*, *Prefix Photo*, *Public*, *C Magazine*, the *Contact Photography* and *Bienal de São Paulo* catalogs, as well as other Canadian and international journals. Most recently, her writing has been featured in *Rebecca Garrett: Search and Transmotion*. Root is also the author of *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* and has taught visual art and cultural politics at OCAD University, the University of Guelph, and Bilkent University in Turkey.

Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

- 2023 *Bringing the War Home*, Solo exhibition, Blizzmax Gallery, Prince Edward County, Canada, July 8–August 6
- 2021 *POV in PEC*, with Graham Metson, Hatch Gallery, Prince Edward County, Ontario, October 7–November 7
- 2017 *These Foolish Things Remind Me of You*, with Shani Mootoo, Maison Depoivre Art Gallery, Picton, Ontario, August 25–September 10

Group Exhibitions

- 2025 Nature's Wild, curated by Andil Gosine, Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, D.C., March 27–June 29 (CANCELLED)
- 2025 Self-Portrait, international group show, Cista Arts, London (UK), March 3–20
- 2023 METAMORPHOSIS 2023, Lacuna Festival (Lanzarote, Spain), July 1–30 (co-coordinator of Facets of Change roundtable)
- 2023 Anew, Maison Depoivre Gallery, Picton, Canada, April 29–June 11
- 2022 Memory and Identity, international group show, Cista Arts, London (UK), December
- 2022 As I See It, Blizzmax Gallery, group show, Prince Edward County (Canada), July 14–August 14
- 2022 When Did Fairytales Change?, curated by Kseniia Antipina, Liebig12 Art Centre, Berlin, July 15–20
- 2022 CLASH2022, Lacuna Festival (online and Lanzarote, Spain), July 2–31
- 2021 Virtual Realism, arthistorybabes.com (online exhibition, digital catalogue PDF, podcast)

Catalogues

- 2021 Order and Progress Redux, Orden y Progreso, Laureana Toledo, Oaxaca Art Gallery
- 2021 Isolation ABC, bh Yael: Family States, ConverSalon, Toronto
- 2020 What World Do You Live In?, Rebecca Garrett: Search, ConverSalon, Toronto
- 2018 The Sparrow's Secret Song: Sarindar Dhaliwal and the Space-Time Continuum, The Radcliffe Line and Other Geographies (Rodman Hall Art Centre, Reach Gallery, and Robert McLaughlan Gallery) Shortlisted for Ontario Association of Art Galleries Art Writing Award
- 2013 Jorge Lozano: Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space, V-Tape, Toronto
- 2012 The Truth-Telling of Ximena Cuevas, Half-Lies: The Videoworks of Ximena Cuevas, edited by Bina Manning, Video Data Bank, Chicago
- 2007 Annie Pootoogook: Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity, Annie Pootoogook, edited by Nancy Campbell (Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary, and Confederation Centre Art Gallery) Reprinted in *The Scholar and the Feminist* (Barnard College Center for Research on Women, Fall 2008). Reprinted in *Inuit Art Quarterly* 23:2, Summer 2008.

Articles (Selected)

- 2021 On Marlene MacCallum's Shadow, *IMPACT Printmaking Journal* #4, Centre for Fine Print Research, UWE Bristol, UK.
- 2016 Honoring the Disappeared in the Art of Lorena Wolffer, Rebecca Belmore, and the Walking With Our Sisters Project, *Transmotion* 1:2, pp. 43–51.
- 2014 Paranoia, *C Magazine* 120 (Winter), pp. 14–16.
- 2010 Erdag Aksel and the Phantoms of Memory, *ArtPapers*, May–June, pp. 21–27.

- 2010 On the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, *Public* 40, Spring
2007 *Stray Dogs and Urban Ghosts: Walking with Francis Alÿs*, Prefix Photo 16: *Walking and Consciousness*, Fall/Winter, pp. 52–65

Books

- 1996 *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, January 1996). Named Gustavus Myers 1996 Outstanding Book in Human Rights. Listed in *These 16 Books Explain White Supremacy in the US*, BuzzFeed News, 2017

Chapters in Books

- 2023 Orden y progreso abreviado o El Lamento del turista, in *La Tierra baldía*, edited by Laureana Toledo, Mexico City, Quarentena Ediciones, pp. 171–178
1999 Çölde Talihsiz Serüvenler: Sömürgeci Kabus Olarak Esirgeyen Gökyüzü, in *Oryantalizm, Hegomanya ve Kültürel Fark*, edited by Fuat Keyman, Mahmut Mutman, Meyda Yegenoglu (Istanbul, Iletisim Press), pp. 161–181
1996 White Indians: Appropriation and the Politics of Display, in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), pp. 225–233

Editorial

- 2020–Present Artistic Director, *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*
2008 Editor, *Public* 36: *Emergency* (with Kathryn Walter)

Curatorial

- 2013 Jorge Lozano: Splintering Time, Fragmenting Space, V-Tape, January 26–February 23

Boards and Juries

- 2020–Present Advisory Board, *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*
2002 Ontario Arts Council, Works In Progress Jury (Literature), July

Education

- Ph.D. Graduate Program in Social and Political Thought, York University
M.A. Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta
B.A. Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University

Teaching Experience

- 2003–2005 Assistant Professor, School of Fine Art and Music, University of Guelph
1991–2003 Lecturer, Department of Liberal Studies, Ontario College of Art and Design

Other

- 2021 Cover image, *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies* #1