

REFLECTIONS ON *ROUNDING*

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Rounding, University of Saskatchewan College Art Galleries, installation view, 2024.
Photograph by Carey Shaw.

In the days before installing *Rounding*, an unorthodox decision was made concerning the wall vinyl from the gallery's previous exhibition. As anyone familiar with the ins-and-outs of exhibition change would know, it is standard to remove all exhibition vinyl from the gallery walls, sand down the area, and repaint to the original gallery white, or whatever colour the next exhibition requires. I chose to proceed with the first of these steps; however, once the removal was complete, I would go no further with steps to return the wall to its original state.

Instead, I left behind the traces of Leah Taylor's curatorial text for *Jeff Thomas: I Refuse To Be Invisible* in the form of razor blade scrapes and thin layers of adhesive backing. At the proper angle, with just the right amount of lighting, one could make out a word here or there from the previous text. For the most part, the decision was only perceptible as a faint haze of grey marks, easily missed if one was not looking for it.

During a discussion with an Exhibition Practices course at the University of Saskatchewan, one of the students asked me how people would know how to look for this subtle intervention on the gallery wall.

Of course, this was a very valid query. Without a label or textual indication, the markings would most likely go unnoticed by most visitors. In response, I pointed to the poetic nature of such a decision, noting how when we resist the urge to over-explain such situations, we allow for a multitude of possible interpretations and alterations to the framework of normal gallery viewing.

Is there anything more boring than an explanation?

On the other hand, the traces of previous vinyl indicated a very present material reality of gallery space. Because, in fact, whenever we look at a freshly painted gallery wall, behind the veil of newness is an endless layer of past scrape marks, patched holes, drywall mud and hardware from previous exhibitions that come to comprise the gallery wall itself. Here, we were only making visible what is always present from the start.

Although each visitor certainly had different takeaways from *Rounding*, for me, the emphasis lied in the project's ability to make public those operations of gallery programming that are often rendered invisible while at the same time distributing those operations amongst a multitude of authors from outside of the institution proper.

As a space of unlearning, teaching, activation, and processual exhibition, in dialogue with our current exhibition and collection practices, the project was comprised of collectively curated selections from the University of Saskatchewan's permanent collection alongside a small library, open access media setup, and flexible group seating. The space was available for use by campus and community groups for focused engagement as well as hosting several programmed public events. It considered the institution's existing practices and relations to community while opening the University's holdings to multiple forms of authorship.

It was exciting to see the buy-in from campus groups and communities as they took up the prompts and used the space. Both Audie Murray and Tarralik Duffy made curatorial selections from the permanent collection and produced responsive texts to Allen Sapp's *Softening a Moosehide* (1972) and Myra Kukiiyaut's *Evil Spirits* (1971), respectively. Gallery director and Art & Art History faculty member Jake Moore hosted her undergraduate Exhibition Practices course in the *Rounding* space, using the available media technology and gallery features as pedagogical prompts for her students. Courses from the Department requested viewings of artworks from the permanent collection, which staff installed on the walls for viewing and teaching possibilities.

Next page top: *Rounding*, University of Saskatchewan College Art Galleries, installation view with library and Myra Kukiiyaut's *Evil Spirits* (1971); **Next page bottom (and back cover):** installation view with Felix Kopak's *Sedna With Two Whales* (20th century) in the foreground. Photographs by Carey Shaw.





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Audie Murray conducted an artist talk in the space, and faculty and staff members from the new School for the Arts gathered for an afterwork social. High school classes worked on assignments, and Muveddet Al-Katib gave a presentation on her community-based art practice to graduate students. The variety of engagement with *Rounding* was encouraging, and this list only accounts for events of which the Gallery staff were wholly aware of.

In the examples listed above, an organizer from the respective groups would usually stop by the office or reach out via email to book the space or discuss how we could make the available resources work for their visit. The discussions and engagement that came out of these moments were invaluable and validated the Galleries' intuition that such a space would be needed on a long-term basis moving forward. As such, future iterations of *Rounding* are already planned beginning in January 2025. Moving forward, it is my hope that groups and individuals take up the space on their own without our knowing, using the available resources and taking ownership over how they want to use *Rounding* without intervention from gallery staff. This would mark a true ceding of expertise and ownership, opening *Rounding* to the greatest range of possibility. Like subtle scrape marks on the wall, these generative events might occur without us ever being prompted to their happening.



Rounding, University of Saskatchewan College Art Galleries, installation view with Felix Kopak's *Sedna With Two Whales* (20th century) in the foreground. Photograph by Carey Shaw.
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