

PART 1

History creeps: the grunt kitchen and Julia Feyrer

[grunt had]... an embryonic beginning that was a toss-up. It could have ended several times, but the people who believed in it stuck around. There was always a coffee pot going (and a kettle for tea) to converse over, whether supportive or argumentative. The people were a diverse lot with a multitude of practices. There were musicians (jazz to folk to Cage), writers (Haikus to great epics), visual artists (from drawing and painting etc., to performance art, video and theatre); it wasn't New York or Paris but just grunt. In its own way, for the community, more important. A safe place that accepted and cross-pollinated a great diversity of creative thought and people.

- Merle Addison, grunt founding member¹

The show that you're standing in is part of a larger conversation. At the time of writing I can see a white fridge, a non-working stove, a set of second-hand Ikea cabinets, a pile of 2x4s, an old coffee maker, an arborite table, a chop saw. It is as yet unresolved—and will continue to evolve throughout the run of the exhibition, building in dimension and playing host to events, discussions and small gatherings.

The artist – Julia Feyrer – has been working in the archive for months now, pulling images and ideas out of binders and cupboards, watching videos and running slides. Central to her research has been images of the grunt kitchen, often mined from the background of documentation of openings, fundraisers and board meetings of years past. Faces, overexposed from a 90s-era flashbulb, laughing/ smiling/ smoking/ drinking in the grunt kitchen. Like so many archival investigations, this one is about filling in blanks—pulling information from the literal backgrounds of the collection.

Feyrer's practice is well situated to work within these gaps. Much of her work deals with a re-interpretation of archival documents. *The Poodle Dog Ornamental Bar* (2010) began as the artist's recreation of an archival photograph of a Vancouver bar from the 1890s. A film set built in Feyrer's backyard methodically reproduced the image in three dimensions, and over the course of a summer Feyrer invited artists and musicians to perform and inhabit the space. From these events came the material for a film. Seemingly improvisational and highly textured, the 16mm work charts a movement through the spaces of the film set, and also includes other, fleeting glimpses of a social dimension barely captured by the camera's lens. From the archival source comes a delicately textured view, and the artwork proposes various views of time, embodiment and perception. Feyrer encourages experiences that form, cloud-like (hazy, expansive, unpredictable), from our documented past.

And so the kitchen emerges from a fog. Grunt, like so many artist-run centres, had a social value in the community before it had an institutional one. The kitchen table, communal centerpiece that it was, hosted countless conversations and arguments about art and life, and the networks of relations that were built there supported the grunt community more steadily than could funders, at least in the early days:

One time, grunt was totally broke, the next grant not due for a month or two. So Glenn [Alteen, founding director], Pat [Beaton, founding member], and I were talking about the situation there in the original kitchen around the table. The only asset of value we could part with was a 26'er of gin. What to do in a crisis? Got lemons, make lemonade; got gin, make dry martinis of course. Except the gin was locked in our liquor cabinet. Glenn and I were trying to pick the lock without damaging it or the doors (remember we were broke) and were not having much success. Pat, who doesn't drink much, was kind of snickering at our attempts at being B and E artists. Finally, feeling kind of sorry for us and being the pragmatic person she is, [she] said, "why don't you just pull the pins from the hinges?" We did and drank what we thought was the last asset of the grunt. The next day the word had got 'round and one of the great unsung heroes of grunt loaned us enough to get by until the next grant cheque.

- Merle Addison²

You may now be standing in a re-built version of the grunt kitchen. Maybe it looks just like it did, but probably it diverges. Feyrer's practice worries the edge of those original moments and archival documents suggesting new incarnations. Her interpretations are not quite ghostly, but certainly creeping: in this new environment, memory and archive find new sculptural and experiential form.

- Vanessa Kwan, November 1st, 2014

This is the first of three texts, to be released over the course of the exhibition.

Julia Feyrer: Kitchen

November 1 – December 19, 2014

For events information and updates, please visit grunt.ca

¹ Merle Addison, e-mail interview, October 24th, 2014.

² Ibid.