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Withdrawn Sarah Davidson

Shary Boyle and Christine Fellows
'Spell to Bring Lost Creatures Home'

Western Front
303 East 8th Avenue
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Shary Boyle's *Spell to Bring Lost Creatures Home* suggested linear narrative, but never solidified. I was therefore made to float, unmoored, amongst dream-like fragments of experience.

The work was commissioned to be toured around schools in the Canadian North, and the artists had just returned from a tour by small plane. When I heard this context, along with the words "overhead projector", I imagined something crude, but the event unfolded like a well-directed stage play. Projection lent a transcendent, theatrical power to the imagery, which morphed and danced on cue to music performed live by Christine Fellows.

Spell to Bring Lost Creatures Home adds to the growing mythology of the artist and analogously echoes the history of the lighted spectacle. Boyle's own growing mythology consists of an ongoing investigation into the figure, strong feminist leanings, and recurring animist tendencies. In revisiting the moment when light show became animation and animation other forms of film, Boyle suggests counter-narrative footnotes for outdated spectacle-based storytelling. We forget, in the age of the lighted screen, that this form of display was once seen as a remarkable thing.

Sky Goodden panned Boyle's 2013 Venice Biennale presentation in *Blouin Artinfo*, and though I didn't see the exhibition myself, and can't speak to how the scale of her work functioned in the space, a certain anathema is attached to work that embraces the "cute" aesthetic. Another criticism of this nature could also be made based on the fact that Boyle gained fame for work that seemed to embrace "cuteness" only winkingly, wearing obvious grotesquery on its surface as well. Porcelain propelled Boyle into the limelight, but she's been neglected as an artist in drawing, projection, and other media for well over a decade.

Boyle wields the art of projector choreography like a beautifully crafted knife, for one thing. A seasoned performer, her theatricality shines when she reveals the ability to paint a child's face and make it age before our eyes, by swirl-

ing india ink and water together on glass. None of this feels winking. The sincerely handmade is made transcendent, a familiar form strange.

Boyle making her work so inclusive makes it all the more powerful; but surely, starting a dialogue about loneliness with youth, and attending the Venice Biennale, can't be part of one and the same practice. Would you believe me if I said hard-hearted art insiders wiped their tears as the lights went up?

As an artist who draws, I felt particularly invested in Shary Boyle's performance. I say this because I think it's important to note that I'm not a disinterested party and, even more so, because I think the wider reception of Boyle's oeuvre illustrates the problems presented by a certain aesthetic, namely that of the line-based and implicitly feminine. I can note, hopefully, that *Reading The Line* (currently on view at Western Front), brings another related set of concerns to the fore by examining textile art and other overlooked, often gendered genres of line-based image making.

I leave you with my lingering sentiment: if new and complicated forms of knowledge can be woven out of illustrative art in a high school auditorium, then perhaps they might also be fashioned within an art scene where they would be all the more unsettling for being so unexpected.

Sarah Davidson