

MODERNFUEL

SASKATCHEWAN MARITIME MUSEUM

TODD GRONSDAHL

WINTER EXHIBITIONS 2022



Photo by Chris Miner.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Todd Gronsdahl's interdisciplinary practice challenges truth, fiction and the construction of historical narratives. The exhibition is an immersive installation of fictional museum exhibits, employing irony to highlight the randomness of museum and archive logic. By playing, tampering and reconfiguring archival documentation, Gronsdahl intentionally legitimizes mythologies, loosely retracing residual marks of past events.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Todd Gronsdahl is an artist from Saskatchewan working primarily in sculpture and drawing. Through the use of humour and narrative, Gronsdahl's work complicates official histories and legitimizing mythologies.



Informed by folk art and self-taught practitioners, Gronsdaahl treats his subject matter with a rural sensibility. Through a practical repurposing of vernacular forms and found materials, coupled with an intuitive approach to building, his work often has an unrefined or pragmatic aesthetic.

Gronsdaahl's sculptures and drawings are charged with narrative potential. Each project emerges from invented stories and colorful characters that speak to his experience. His artwork is an enactment of these elaborate fictions with his sculptures, in particular, functioning not unlike museum replicas or artifacts.

RESPONSE BY KELSEY NEWMAN REED

Saskatchewan Maritime Museum challenges truth, nation-building, and history-making. With confidence, Todd Gronsdaahl invents a new history for Saskatchewan. One that involves an inventor, explorers sailing in the Prairie waterways, and military fending off foreign invaders who attack from the river's depths. The exhibition space reads like a museum, sharing these stories and found artifacts to back them up.

When you first enter the "museum", you're first greeted by a large sculptural work, titled "Devil's Dip Ski Launch, A Ballistic Missile Defence System." In Gronsdaahl's world, the Devil's Dip Ski Launch played an indispensable role in defending the Saskatchewan River system from aquatic attack during WW2. In the winter, he notes, it was used as a jump ski for the locals.

Throughout the space, the wall labels retell the story of the Ski Launch, and Charles Gaspar, the prototypical architect, engineer and entrepreneur. Gronsdaahl shares in a CBC Radio interview, that Gaspar resembles an Elon Musk type character of our day, "using fortune and influence to sort of try to improve humanity". Gronsdaahl plays with recollections of past historical figures in his retelling of who Charles Gaspar was, putting him on a pedestal like so many past figures were.

In the next room, we get to see one of Gaspar's creations, the Gasparfon, "a pedal powered reconnaissance surface sub". One can imagine Gaspar sailing through the Saskatchewan waters collecting samples to be used in his future medicines. The Gasparfon is surrounded by nautical flags that could be used when out at sea to warn others of what's ahead.

Surrounding the Ski Launch, found artifacts from Frankwin's Expedition sit in the space. Frankwin set out to make a name for himself, planning to "employ a seafaring whaling vessel to navigate the rivers, streams, and sloughs of Saskatchewan, naming and charting them as a legacy project. He also saw it as a favour to local inhabitants of the land." The mission, ultimately, wasn't successful and all that remains are these everyday items, like his hairbrush.

Another two sculptural pieces stand in the main exhibition space, the GASPAR 3, a diving helmet, and a media interface, all created by Gronsdaahl. With little descriptions, these pieces aid in the satirizing of history-making. From a distance these pieces look concise and well-made but upon closer inspection you can see



just how precarious the GASPAR sits on the base, and how each sculpture is held together by tiny wooden pieces, almost about to collapse. Perhaps this is what Gronsdaahl was hinting at all along – that history-making is always a little uneasy and so often retold from one person’s perspective. It makes you question: how will history of today be retold? What will be left out or emphasized? In its retelling will it be light and airy with precarious and dark hidden details like *Saskatchewan Maritime Museum*? Only time will tell.

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Sources:

<https://www.toddgronsdaahl.com/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-monday-edition-1.5397734/why-is-there-a-maritime-museum-in-landlocked-saskatchewan-1.5397743>