

PROTECTION

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Tina Newlove



Tina Newlove graduated from McMaster University in the Honours Fine Arts program in 1996. She has an extensive list of solo exhibitions, group and juried shows in which she has participated and has received many awards. To be counter-productive Tina likes to drink tea in the garden, fume over politics, dance and think thoughts – occasionally jotting them down. For company, Tina loves her musical friends who provide her with endless delight and dancing opportunities and her neighbours for their witty banter. At home, Tina has a large collection of children's books she likes to read to the smallest person in the house (often herself) and a studio, in walking distance, where she often escapes to. As a constant Tina continues to explore means of portraying her secrets, protests and declarations as in 'Protection'.

PROTECTION

While working on 'Protection', Tina has been signing lots of petitions, enjoying the neighbours, sending a little boy onto to a school bus for the first time and writing her thoughts down on scraps of paper.



Womb, assemblage



Blanketed Crowd 30" x 40" oil on canvas

Blanketed Crowd

It was complicated
sorting out
The threads that tied us together
the towers
and wires
and wireless
webs woven around our heads,
stitched us together
tighter and tighter
until we all
saw the same thing,
ate the same food
and lost our singular
colour

newlove 2008



WINTER BURDEN

Winter woman

Backpack full

Family; memory

Misty breath

Streetlight glow

Snowflakes settling

Winter flowers

Work, home

Work, home

Back again

newlove 2008





I'm Going to
Get Me a Wife
8" x 4" oil on paper

**I Looked Inside:
The Spaces Between
(conscious)**

Apple Blushing
there were fruit flies
clustered on this juicy talk
apple parts with fleshy bits
pinks and lemon yellow
last sip of wine

skin, skinned
blushing all the while
Halved apple, apple halved
three parts in one

skin
seed
flesh

newlove 2008



Open Like This
18" x 12" oil on canvas

OPEN

i became transparent
as i walked
between

(the passage of time
the flow of the crowd)

my bones
creaked into motion

(and then)

i was sailing in full view
with my eyes squinting in the sun
with my heart wide open
with an open book
with my body

(walking on)

LIKE THIS

newlove 2008

Open Book

they were bound together,
loves little moments
on pages pressed together
a chapter book recording
the way they sailed through
the day
the sun and the moon
flowers from the market
life cycles,
death cycles
wash cycles
past-present-future

newlove 2008



I Looked Inside
(Conscious)
22" x 17"
oil on printed paper



Her Halo was Half the Size,
4.5" x 3", silver leaf on photo



Hope Burst
4" x 4" oil on canvas



My Thoughts Were Crowded 21" x 15.5" oil on canvas

'Protest' or 'She felt herself'

she felt herself protest
 anguished inside
 at the inability to speak
 at the appropriate times

she felt herself lovely
 and sad and blue
 she felt herself lonely
 one again
 instead of two

she felt herself vulnerable
 hand on cool wall
 no strength to fight
 no strength at all

she felt herself angry
 at all the mistakes
 everyone around her and herself
 would make

and she was tired of apathy
 and sick of her heart
 which beat out a rhythm
 in pale yellow light

and the glare of revolution
 was burning her face
 and at every siren sounding
 women and children embraced

newlove 2008



They Looked Past Her and Through Her 6' x 4' oil on canvas



She Checked Her Pieces
23" x 16" drawing on cut paper



She Held Her Bunny Tight
12" x 6" watercolour

he was walking into April
in a lucid daze
with his hands tied back
fully attached
to the misdeeds of the past
the cruelty
coming down the line
to him
today

and the streetlights
were staring
as he walked by

in the pitching night
and they murmured
and they muttered
as he looked down
the last words he heard

"thanks for wasting my time"

newlove 2008



Walking Into April
30" x 10" oil on board



Political Circus: This Clown was
Walking Around, 4.5" x 3", watercolour

Protest Girl

It was about
the lack of feeling
the lack of ability
To do something

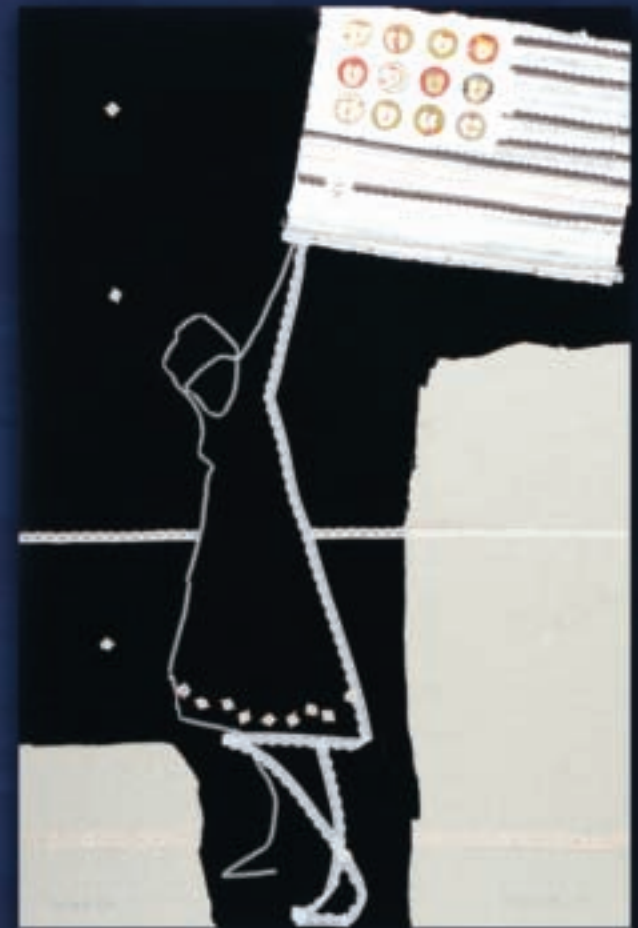
petitions
protest letters
Signing and signing and signing

I opened my heart

and out came a flag
to wave in the wind
to create a breeze
in the breathless air...

something to do
while everyone,
everywhere,
held their breath

newlove 2008



Protest Girl
60" x 40" oil on canvas



Target (triptych)
7" x 11" oil on paper

Tina Newlove: Protection

To be face to face with one of Tina Newlove's paintings is to be confronted with beauty, spirituality, sorrow and struggle. All of these elements are portrayed through complex colours and forms that are expressed through the artist's sensitive but sure touch. Newlove's images present intricate patterns of rich, often unusual colours that in many cases are adorned with gold leaf, embroidery or words, giving a richness and preciousness to the works. The movement on the surface is musical, bringing to life what often seem like abstract ideas. But within all of Newlove's work there is more beneath the surface. Hidden within the abstract patterns are figures; in drawers, artwork; and behind the paint, text. Although the artist is expressing herself through the movement and vibrancy of the media, there is also a subject there, one that she reveals even while she protects it. The subject is usually uncomfortable, one that addresses pain, abuse, despair. But the way Newlove treats the figures in these situations is to respect their vulnerability by cushioning them in elaborate colours and forms, and to imbue them with beauty, making them appealing to the viewer and in fact enticing the viewer to love them and protect them as she does.

Tina Newlove is a fun-loving, vibrant, exciting and perceptive young woman. Her joyful energy when you are around her is contagious as is her search for beauty and her constant questioning of the world. The intensity of all she feels and thinks is certainly echoed in her artwork. To look seriously at Newlove's work is to look for a long period time. Even the smallest paintings have minute details and subtle suggestions that leave the viewer looking harder and asking more questions.

Newlove's painting is a definite amalgamation of many historical styles and yet she brings them together in a way that is unique. In her paintings we see the chaos and anti-logic of the Dadaists, and the spontaneity and the creation from the subconscious of the abstract expressionists. There are clear references to individ-

ual painters like Klimt and Kandinsky. The highly decorative style of Newlove's paintings is immediately reminiscent of Klimt's figures as are her use of gold leaf, her focus on the female figure and the Egyptian-like patterns that appear in her work. And yet, her message is entirely different. Her colours, the importance of music and the expression of the spiritual are all similar to the approach of Kandinsky as is what he saw as the fairy-tale power of painting. And yet of course the time she's living in, her own experiences in the world and her very person are so prominent in Newlove's paintings that they reveal an individualism that takes these aspects of historical styles and fuses them with her own to create this aesthetic.

For Tina Newlove, the canvas is not merely something that one paints on. Every little piece of material she touches whether it be canvas, linen, paper or wood, becomes the work or maybe even is the work. In her series of dictionary pages, Newlove reproduces a page of a dictionary directly onto the canvas or paper and then begins to weave her image in and out and around the words and the meanings. The definitions inspire the images and the images add meanings to the words. In many cases the images are literal interpretations of the words like in *Milked* that is painted on the "cow" page of the dictionary and on which Newlove has painted the cow and bottles of milk. Even in this painting there is undoubtedly a more subtle message that the artist is conveying through the phrases she highlights, like "the mature female", "the domestic bovine" and the "silly cow" which together with other works in the exhibition reference issues around fertility, nursing, nurturing and the role of the feminine. Other dictionary pages are more poetic in their interpretations like the painting *My Thoughts* were crowded, circular and repeating on the page including the word "crowd". To interpret this word, Newlove chose a self-portrait in which she reveals an intimacy about her own inner thoughts. And *War Cloud* shows the most abstract interpretation and one in which the artist has let loose on the surface of the page to the extent that there is very little of the original left visible, with a myriad of circles and stars exploding about, creating a highly textured, visually busy image that is at once appealing and devastating. In her figurative paintings viewers may at first

not even recognize them as such. *Winter Burden*, *They Looked Past her* and *Through her* and *Blanketed Crowd* for instance initially look like plays of pattern, texture and colour. There are lines and shapes, areas of light and dark that have the eye swirling around the surface finding moments of panic and chaos balanced by spaces of calm and release. But slowly the eye adapts to the vibrations and energy and begins to identify a figure or figures. In *Winter Burden*, it is a faceless woman in a long coat, bent over due to the weight of her knapsack and what seems to be a windy winter storm. *They Looked Past Her* and *Through Her* shows a young girl, off to the side, turning her head severely away from the viewer trying to hide in the background of the painting, which indeed her body does. She seems afraid, doesn't want to be seen and yet she is there in a touching and vulnerable pose that makes the viewer simultaneously uncomfortable and sympathetic. *Blanketed Crowd* is the most abstract of the three but the many forms could be interpreted as figures all huddled together in a faceless crowd; a crowd where although everyone is together they are all alone.

In other works Newlove incorporates the actual surface as part of the work. *I Looked Inside* and *Hope burst*, for instance, show abstract patterns framed by the border of the page which the artist has cut out to create an intricate lace-like frame. The reference to doilies and other feminine lace traditions is clear and builds a bridge between her painting, which references such a male-dominated history, and this more traditionally female craft. A frame, a solid form used on paintings to protect them, here is as delicate as lace. Again there is a subtle suggestion that this protection is needed even to safeguard such strong images as those presented in these paintings.

In *She checked her pieces* and *Target* the cutouts become even more integrated into the work, actually becoming part of the subject rather than the frame. *She checked her pieces*, for example, once again shows this abstract doily shape as the head of the figure allowing the work to jump back and forth between figurative and abstract, realistic and imaginative, drawing and cut-out. This technique captures literally the idea expressed in the title of the work (*She checked her pieces* and wondered if

she was falling apart) as well as the emotional confusion and lack of control implied in it. As an artist, Newlove uses much more than the visual image to express herself. She is a writer; a poet, a performer. Her visual art is inextricably linked to music, words and sounds as well as things she sees in her everyday life. Newlove creates in a world where the sounds on the street influence and are influenced by the images in her head and the objects in her studio. She passes an old confessional in a store on the street and immediately her body of art takes on new focus. The notions of confession and religion in general echo some feelings of privacy versus public, and even the sacred versus the profane that Newlove is exploring in this body of work. On one side of the confessional Newlove paints a self-portrait making her vulnerable, an act of bravery and sharing. Similarly, she is camping in an Ontario park and the howl of a wolf reminds her of the power of nature, the cycle of the natural world and these ideas work themselves into her work. She finds an antique photo album on eBay and in it her ideas of memory, family, reality and imagination are clarified in concrete form. Her work then adopts the figures in the album. They become her characters and she becomes their listener.

Newlove explains the two photo albums in the exhibition: The antique photo albums, filled with paintings and poetry and musings, are like diaries where I can record feelings and memories – a daily meditation. The works wrestle with the need to express and explore my subconscious as well as the desire to hide those same things - to confess and clear the air or to lock them away. (Artist statement, 2008)

Memory Book is filled with 36 miniature paintings, some of trees, some abstract, some figurative. The titles of these paintings all flow together to create a poem, one that echoes the stream of consciousness in Newlove's mind. The other album *Portage... I looked backwards* as I walked includes both original paintings as well as some of the old photographs that came with the album. Including these photographs is a tool Newlove uses to help protect the memory of these people. Although their identity is lost and even their image given away, she reclaims their presence giving importance and meaning –

even if it is recreated meaning – to their lives. In both works the titles are part of the story giving viewers just a hint into the possibilities around the image, like “they watched him go from the steps” and “Her halo was half the size”. But the full story is one viewers have to write on their own, by once again spending time looking at the images and going beyond the surface to imagine the specifics of each of the characters.

Something is troubling about Newlove’s images. The overall theme of the exhibition – protection – itself makes us ask questions. Protection from what? What or whom do we need to protect? And why? Newlove’s technique is very effective. She draws us in with beautiful images that are so full of life that we inevitably spend time looking all over, enjoying the rhythms, the dancing colours, the spiraling lines. And in looking we see more and more. A little girl bashfully – maybe even fearfully - turned away from the viewer, faceless figures crowded together and yet not appearing to see each other, the idea that someone is present and yet not seen all convey the need for or desire for protection. There is nothing overt in these images, but there seems to be underlying themes that suggest abuse, depression, isolation and sadness. There is certainly fear, chaos, references to war and danger. Newlove elaborates: Ideas litter my mind like scraps of paper or buzzing flies. While I cherish the beautiful, the delicate, the detailed, the organic and the non-violent, I often paint my experience with violence, despair, the poor and war-torn.” (Artist statement, 2006)

The real question emerges: are these figures and objects hiding or are they revealing themselves? It is exactly this issue that the artist herself struggles with. Her endless fear of revealing too much, of maintaining her privacy and thus her safety is continually in conflict with her almost uncontrollable desire to share, speak, be seen.

Such an array of images, such range in material, and such a culmination of ideas might result in a muddled message that is all over the place with no clarity or focus. And yet, what is undeniable about Newlove’s work is the fact that all these paths cross at one point and that is in her head. They enter her thoughts, get filtered

through her sensitivity and creativity and leave through her works of art where they reveal a familiar yet dichotomous feeling: the need to protect versus the need to let go. She shelters her objects with beauty, she defends them through abstraction. She once described her images of female figures this way, “I have a lot of these sad young girls in my paintings right now...they do have some sad themes. That’s why I try to paint them so beautifully – so people can’t help but love them.”

Newlove’s approach to her message is steered by her endless searching, the intensity of her emotional response to what she sees in the world and her uncontrollable need to express her reactions and her struggles to find a path where she can find answers. Her desire for privacy is constantly shaken by her responsibility to speak out. In the end it is her struggle to grow, her need to be courageous and take risks that leads her to share her artwork with the public. The beauty she strives to share combined with the ugliness she has seen in the world results in art that is perhaps best described in its most basic way as terribly beautiful.

Maura Broadhurst
Curator
The Latcham Gallery



Bullet # 2
lost wax cast
bronze nail 6”

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war cloud, 20" x 16"
oil on printed paper