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UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

University of Waterloo Art Gallery  
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Tuesday to Saturday 12–5 PM

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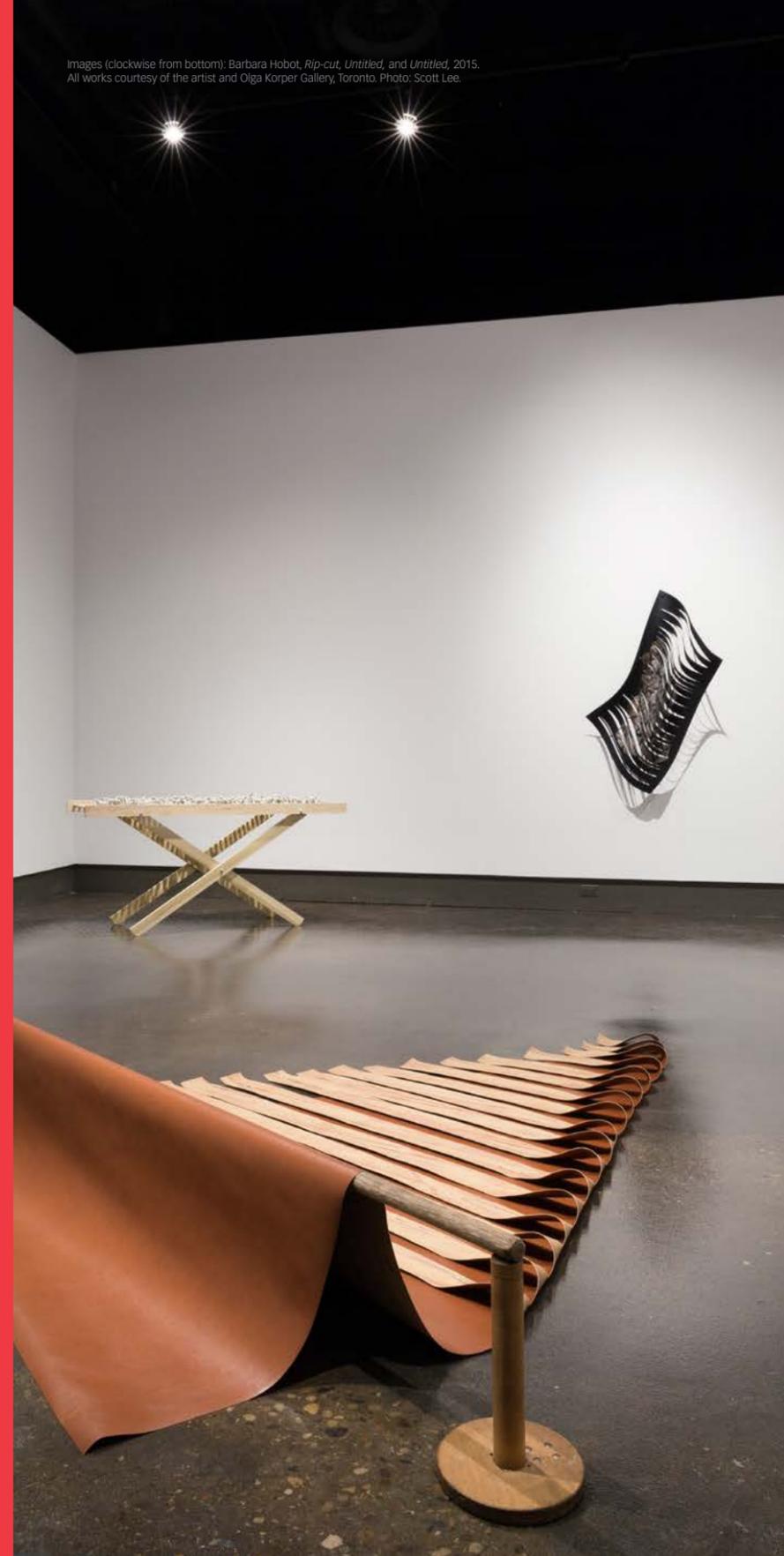
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Images (clockwise from bottom): Barbara Hobot, *Rip-cut*, *Untitled*, and *Untitled*, 2015. All works courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. Photo: Scott Lee.



## Strong Bonds

Barbara Hobot's multidisciplinary subjects are found, traced, manipulated, and translated from one medium to another. A drawing might be the basis for a digital collage that becomes a sculpture. By taking spatial and material cues from one work and introducing them to another form or material, her process seeks underlying unity. Each gesture is determined as much by chance as it is by the artist's speculation about the desires of the inanimate objects she works with. Hobot's aim is to create a circumstance in which her artworks appear self-generating.

*Gaps Full of Potential #3* and *#5* are part of an ongoing series that ably illustrates this process. Combining hand-cut tarpaulin, felt, rubber screen, and clay respectively, shapes and materials are overlaid and suspended from the wall. The "gaps full of potential" referred to in the title are the empty or negative spaces between things. Hobot is particularly inspired by chain link fencing and netting, commonly mass-produced materials that are typically used as a means of restraint but allow for the passage of light and air, as well as particulate matter and fluids. Exploring the improvisational possibilities of these gaps or spaces in between holds deep appeal for Hobot.

Although conceived in the studio, the artist's hand is never obvious in the making of forms such as *Blue Double Buck*, a relief of limply hanging leather trunks, or a pair of *Untitled* works featuring unfired white clay on a custom drying rack, and a digital print on vinyl with louvers slit through its surface. Each is determined, or rather intuited, by a process of accumulation and reduction. Hobot's process discretely echoes Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself* (1967–68), and makes use of many of the same actions: to bend, crumple, bundle, arrange, weave, crease, cut, mix, droop, fold, twist, rotate, gather, dapple, knot, curve, bind, laminate.<sup>1</sup> As a collective entity, her compositions share an anxious, precarious quality.

Strong bonds evoke intimacy, family and fraternity, but in chemistry the term refers to a covalent or ionic bond. A covalent bond involves the sharing of electron pairs in a stable balance of attractive and repulsive forces between atoms.<sup>2</sup> Hobot's formative process seeks a similar outcome: an elemental union between disparate materials.

— Ivan Jurakic

1. [http://www.ubu.com/concept/serra\\_verb.html](http://www.ubu.com/concept/serra_verb.html).

2. <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/chemical/bond.html>.

### List of Work

*Blue Double Buck*, 2015  
Acrylic on sliced faux leather vinyl  
185 x 40 x 33 cm

*Gaps Full of Potential #3*, 2015  
Air-dry clay, found metal  
63 x 25 x 19 cm

*Gaps Full of Potential #5*, 2015  
Hand-cut tarp, felt, rubber screen, found metal  
188 x 165 x 28 cm

*Rip-cut*, 2015  
Acrylic on sliced faux leather vinyl, twine spools, found wooden dowel  
266 x 260 x 34 cm

*Untitled*, 2015  
Unfired white clay, custom drying rack  
157 x 74 x 50 cm

*Untitled*, 2015  
Digital print on vinyl collage  
132 x 86 x 30 cm

### Artist Biography

Barbara Hobot holds an MFA from Western University and a BA in Fine Arts from the University of Waterloo. She has exhibited her work internationally and participated in artist residencies in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Upcoming projects include group exhibitions at Idea Exchange, Cambridge, the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, and a solo exhibition at Olga Korper Gallery in December of 2016. She is the recipient of several grants from the Ontario Arts Council. The artist lives and works in Kitchener. Barbara Hobot is represented by Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. [www.barbarahobot.com](http://www.barbarahobot.com)

January 14–March 5, 2016

**Elinor Whidden**  
Rearview

**Barbara Hobot**  
Strong Bonds





## Rearview

*Rearview* collects several thematically linked projects produced by Elinor Whidden between 2007-2014. This exhibition marks the first time that many of these projects have been shown together as a cohesive body of work. The artist uses an accumulation of photo-documents to personify the explorer as a heroic yet troubled cipher, and ersatz artifacts as a means of deconstructing the automobile as a metaphoric beacon of environmental distress.

Over the last decade, Whidden has travelled across Canada and the United States staging performative actions that investigate both contemporary and historical aspects of landscape. Combining performance and photography, with sculptural installations constructed almost entirely out of scavenged and repurposed automobile parts; the artist situates herself as an explorer.

Prior projects such as *Dronomania* (2005)—titled after the compulsive desire to walk—and *Portage FORD Taurus* (2006), involved long distance walks exploring the urban peripheries of Amherst and Niagara Falls, NY, respectively. Using scavenged auto parts assembled into utilitarian objects such as a backpack or canoe, these early projects hit upon several principals at the core of Whidden’s work: walking as a means of learning and exploration, and the repurposing of found materials. These elements were further refined during her participation in the *Walking and Art* residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

This residency inspired the *Mountain Man series*. While exploring the breathtaking wilderness of the Canadian Rockies, the artist coupled her walking to the resonant history of the region. This exploration of the frontier became a central theme that would inform her work moving forward. A benign definition of exploration is: the action of traveling through unfamiliar areas in order to learn more about them. Exploration is at the heart of the foundational narratives of both Canada and the

United States. Scratch the surface however, and one quickly uncovers a turbulent history of colonial expansion.

Frontiersmen, whether coureurs des bois or cowboys, play an almost mythic role in this historical narrative, as depicted in paintings, early photography and film. Whidden casts herself in this archetypal role to investigate the legacy of exploration and western expansion in Canada during the 19th century. Armed with a pair of snowshoes constructed out of scavenged radial tires and a modified walking stick capped by a rearview mirror, Whidden faces the majestic Rocky Mountains, marking the first steps of her new persona.

The *Mountain Man series* also marks the first use of the rearview mirror as an emblem. Rear- and side view mirrors are standard features on automobiles allowing drivers to safely check adjacent lanes for traffic. They function as a precautionary device used to help avoid collisions. By arming her frontiersman with a *Rearview Walking Stick*, Whidden insures that her explorer has the perceptual benefit of observing the landscape while moving forwards and looking back simultaneously.

Whidden builds on this theme in the *Ford EXPLORER series*. Armed with a *Side Mirror Musket*, she sets camp along the picturesque shores of Georgian Bay and Algonquin Park. Whidden’s imagery purposefully recalls aspects of the romantic sublime central to the Hudson Valley School who painted in the New York State area throughout the mid-late 19th century. Her choice of locations also echoes trips undertaken to the same area by Canada’s own iconoclastic group of landscape painters, the Group of Seven in the early 20th century. Both the *Mountain Man* and *Ford EXPLORER series* purposefully depict archetypal vistas and landscapes that in the context of Whidden’s counterfeit frontiersman underlines our tendency to idealize “wilderness”. Furthermore, by appropriating the name of a popular SUV as her title, she appropriates a naming strategy similar to that used by automobile manufacturers

to market their vehicles. Take for example the Ford Explorer, Escape, or Expedition. Each name represents an ideal of the outdoors that has been readily exploited or supplanted. Whidden’s work cleverly underscores this deception.

*Images of the Old West: Roadkill Redux*, features Whidden posing for souvenir cabinet cards wearing western regalia while brandishing the same ersatz musket; a symbolic trophy kill represented by steel buffalo skulls. In homage to anonymous period photographs these sepia-toned images are paired with reproductions from the Glenbow Archive that depict massed piles of buffalo skulls photographed in the late 19th century. Western expansion at the time was defined by a belief in Manifest Destiny—that Americans in particular had the right to dominion over the land from coast-to-coast—and was further enabled by the expansion of the railways. The massed piles of buffalo skulls depicted in the archival images—an animal sacred to the Siksika or “Blackfoot” tribes of the western prairies—evoke the nearly apocalyptic scale of this slaughter.

*Head-Smashed-In-Engine-Block-Buffalo-Jump* further reiterates this. Featuring a collision of dozens of welded steel buffalo skulls piled atop a rusting heap of scavenged mufflers, the installation starkly illustrates the wanton slaughter in the wake of western expansionism. Considered in context with the *Roadkill Redux series*, viewers are given a palpable sense of the industrialized scale of this catastrophe. Evoking a post-apocalyptic landfill, *Head-Smashed-In-Engine-Block-Buffalo-Jump* would also fit almost seamlessly into the gasoline-starved near future depicted in *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Whidden’s anonymous frontiersman is a Cassandra-like figure, wandering the land prophesying environmental collapse. Following the same early trade routes used by voyageurs that over time became our current system of highways, freeways and overpasses, Whidden pointedly explores these routes as a way of reconciling the

## List of Works

### Mountain Man series, 2007

3 of 8 photographs, snowshoes and walking stick. Photos taken near Banff, Alberta. Photos: Margaret Whidden, Jen Rae, Sylvia Jordi and Sarah Fuller

a. *Explore New Horizons–Ford Explorer*, digital print, 76 x 102 cm

b. *Steel Belted Snowshoes*, shredded tires scavenged from highway, steel, snowshoe harnesses, 152 x 46 x 8 cm

c. *Shift Adventure–Nissan Pathfinder*, digital print, 76 x 102 cm

d. *This is Our Country–Chevrolet Silverado*, digital print, 76 x 102 cm

e. *Rearview Walking Stick*, modified walking stick with automobile mirror, 183 x 2.5 x 5 cm

### Ford EXPLORER series, 2009

4 of 6 photographs, tent and musket. Photos taken near Georgian Bay and Algonquin Park. Photos: Jessica Abraham, Greg Manuel, Tanja Tiziana and the artist.

a. *Windshield Wiper Tent*, scavenged windshield wipers, cable ties, steel, 183 x 122 x 107 cm

b. *Ford EXPLORER*, digital print. 71 x 107 cm

c. *Side Mirror Musket*, automobile mirror and door handle, wood, steel tubing, 135 x 26 x 8 cm

d. *Smoke Lake*, digital print, 71 x 107 cm

e. *Sunny Lake Ridge*, digital print, 71 x 107 cm

f. *Georgian Bay*, digital print, 71 x 107 cm

### Head-Smashed-In-Engine-Block-Buffalo-Jump, 2010–2013

Scavenged automobile mufflers, exhaust pipes, steel, 338 x 341 x 183 cm

### Images of the Old West: Roadkill Redux, 2013

Photos: Tanja Tiziana; with a selection of historical images from the Glenbow Archives.

a. *Anonymous Plainsman*, digital image on found cabinet card, 22 x 14.5 cm

b. *Anonymous Bison Hunter*, digital image on found cabinet card, 17 x 12.5 cm

c. *Anonymous Cavalier*, digital image on found cabinet card, 17 x 14 cm

d. *Anonymous Frontiersman*, digital image on found cabinet card, 16.5 x 10.5 cm

e. *Anonymous Cowboy*, digital image on found cabinet card, 19 x 14 cm

f. *A & L Auto Recyclers*, Windsor, Ontario, digital image circa 2010

g. *Glenbow Archives NA-2242-2*, Detroit, Michigan, circa 1890

h. *Glenbow Archives NA-4967-10*, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, circa 1887–1889

i. *Glenbow Archives NA-354-30*, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1890

j. *Glenbow Archives NA-5457-3*, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1891

## Artist Biography

Elinor Whidden received her MFA from SUNY Buffalo, BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and BA in Canadian/Environmental Studies from Trent University. She has exhibited throughout North America and her work has been included in several biennials, including the 2010 Beyond/In Western New York biennial. In 2007, she attended the Walking and Art residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. She is the recipient of grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and an Arts Engagement grant from the Toronto Arts Council. She is also part of the arts collective Department Of Public Memory. Elinor Whidden lives and works in Toronto.

[www.elinorwhidden.com](http://www.elinorwhidden.com) / [www.departmentofpublicmemory.com](http://www.departmentofpublicmemory.com)

Images (cover): *Georgian Bay* (detail) from the *Ford EXPLORER series*, 2009, Photo: Jessica Abraham. (interior from left to right) *Explorer* from the *Ford EXPLORER series*, 2009, Photo: Jessica Abraham. *Head-Smashed-In-Engine-Block-Buffalo-Jump*, 2010–2013, Photo: Scott Lee. *Anonymous Cowboy* from *Images of the Old West: Roadkill Redux*, 2013, Photo: Tanja Tiziana.

history of the land, the catastrophe that occurred, and the pending threat of another on the horizon.<sup>2</sup>

Considered as a whole, *Rearview* holds a dystopian mirror up to the last 200 years of progress, a tumultuous period encompassing the subjugation of First Nations peoples, species near extinction, the extraction of natural resources, clear-cutting, pollution, landfill, urban sprawl and spiraling carbon emissions.

The frontiersman faces this uncertain future. Her warning is precise and prescient: Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear.

— Ivan Jurakic

1. Information found on the artist’s website: <http://www.elinorwhidden.com>.  
2. Correspondence with the artist: December 9, 2016.