



"The Valise"

## Director Statement – Tammy Salzl

I was walking down Toronto's Queen Street West on a slushy spring day and happened to wander into a little antique thrift store. Sitting in a corner, amidst an array of old photos and flowered pottery, sat a small, boxy vanity case - the kind women used in the 60's to store make up and perfume. It called to me.

There is memory and history and stories in objects. I wondered about this little valise, about its travels and all the different kinds of personal treasures it once held. I took it home with no real purpose in mind, trusting in the connection I felt to it. In the following weeks I began preparing for an international artist residency in Norway, and all the while the little case sat quietly in the corner of my room, almost forgotten. One day before departure I tripped over it, knocking it askew, and when I set it upright again it told me a beautiful tale of love and loss, emergence and decay. I became determined to tell its tale, and so the little valise accompanied me to the magical mountains and fjords of Norway.

'The Valise' is inspired by my fascination with folklore and myth. It is a tale of magic and loss in an endless cycle every living creature belongs to. The soundtrack by Greg Mulyk references ancient Nordic folk music, its rhythm in step with the otherworldly northern scenery.

How do you give voice to the beauty and folly of being human?

## Biographies

### Tammy Salzl

Tammy Salzl is a multimedia artist who has presented her work across Canada and internationally. Salzl is a 2019 Salt Spring Prize Finalist, a 2018 OALA/Ground Award recipient, an Honourable Award Winner in The Kingston Prize, and a Concordia University Tedeschi Scholarship recipient. She has received grants and residencies from: the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Edmonton Arts Council, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Vermont Studio Center, US; I-Park International Artist in Residence Program, US; KHMessen Art House, Norway; The Banff Centre; the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture Centre, Yukon. Recent exhibitions include: White Water Gallery, ON; Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, AB; Art Souterrain 2019, Montreal; Ottawa School of Art, ON; Two Rivers Gallery, BC; Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, AB. Salzl has upcoming exhibitions at Harcourt House Artist Centre in Edmonton, and La Central Galerie Powerhouse in Montreal.

### Greg Mulyk

Greg Mulyk is a Canadian Composer and Sound Designer specializing in music for visual media. He has composed music and sound design for short and feature length films, including stop-motion animation, and video games. Greg has also written a variety of standalone works ranging from small chamber ensemble to full orchestra.

### Anne Pratt

Anne Pratt is a writer and communicator in Edmonton, Alberta. Anne first started writing reviews and commentary for broadcast and publication in the 1980s; after a lengthy hiatus, she recently returned to art writing. Inspired by the contemporary artists working in Edmonton, Anne has written pieces for Canadian Art, Galleries West, Magenta and Galerie Sturm.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional lands of Treaty 6 nations, including the Blackfoot, Cree, Dene [De-nee], Gros Ventres [Grow-Vaughn-tra], Metis, Nakota Sioux [nah-kota sue] and Saulteaux [saul-toe]. Indigenous people were joined by settlers and pioneers who together built this great community of Strathcona County.

Photo credit – Tammy Salzl



# Tales From the In Between

July 8 - August 21, 2021



"Believers"

# TAMMY SALZL

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Sherwood Park, AB T8A 4X3  
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## TAMMY SALZL

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# Tales From the In Between

## Prologue

Painting, sculpture, installation, sound, film - these are all languages Tammy Salzl uses to tell tales of a modern age, one where humankind has detached itself from nature, where conflict and division are the zeitgeist, and where escape to other worlds is a survival tactic. The bodies of work presented in this exhibition tell a myriad of tales - some brand new and others revisited and retold through contemporary eyes - reflecting the thoughts and worries of a life.

In her earliest paintings Salzl used historical allegory to tell stories of family life and then began creating her own narratives, reflecting the world she and her children were living in, through large operatic oils on canvas and diminutive paintings on paper. Salzl increasingly looked to immerse her viewers within her stories and began creating spaces and sculptures that engulfed the viewer and engaged multiple senses. Folding moving image with still, sound with light, and invoking the element of time, Salzl wants to transport the viewer into her realm.

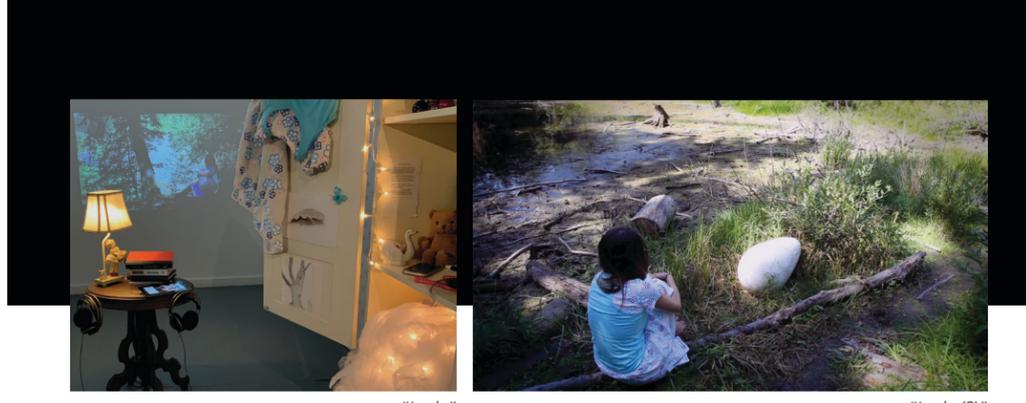
Tales from the In Between speaks of the liminal position of Salzl and her work - striding the line between traditional and new media, between high and "low brow" art forms, between the excited inexperience of youth and the tired cynicism of the times. Through her research into the history of storytelling she examines the way fables and myths shape the everyday stories we tell each other, especially those surrounding femininity and nature within the white European/North American context. She is fascinated with circumstances where humanity and the natural world are both at odds and intricately entwined. What is the psychology that brings such strange realities? Rooted in investigations of ecology and historical tales, Salzl draws on cultural contexts ranging from Greek mythology to pop culture.<sup>1</sup>



"Little Things"

## Chapter 1 – A world of Sounds

Filling the gallery, a multichannel ambient soundtrack is an evolving and ever changing composition punctuated by separate sound elements from individual sculptures. Sound artist Greg Mulyk responds to Salzl's visuals with an immersive forest soundscape, a sonic transport carrying you from your world into hers.



"Leda"

"Leda (2)"

## Chapter 2 – Broken Walls

Enter the gallery and step through the doorway into Broken Walls, an ancient tale retold through a young protagonist - Leda.

### Broken Walls – An Essay by ANNE PRATT

Who is Leda? Is she a tremulous, dewy naif ravaged by a lustful god? A cheating wife falling into the arms of a powerful man? A sorceress luring a hapless cob to her nest? The story of Leda's coupling with Zeus has fuelled the creative imaginations of male artists since antiquity. The scene lends itself to a gentile if nonetheless pornographic tale of bestiality, a pre-Christian version of a god begetting a child on a human woman. Various versions of the myth identify one of the resultant offspring as Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, destined to 'launch a thousand ships' and bear the blame for the 10-year Trojan war. In William Butler Yeats poem, *Leda and the Swan*, the poet imagines the fall of Troy in the swan's all too human orgasm:

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower 10  
And Agamemnon dead.<sup>1</sup>

But really - who cares? Who is Agamemnon anyway? Let's go back to the beginning and ask again. Who is Leda? What is she up to? What are the consequences of her actions?

Tammy Salzl approaches these questions in *Broken Walls*, not to dictate a new myth, but to re-imagine the story with different assumptions. Throughout the installation is a richly imagined framework of symbolism, studded with allusions and defined by ambiguity. As in much of Salzl's work, there is tension between decay and emergence; she asks us to teeter on the edge with her, right where the delicate forest flower digs its roots into the rot for sustenance. Or - is it the other way around? Is the rich humus the actor - not a passive 'plowed field' after all.

The entry to *Broken Walls* is through the bedroom of a young woman who is herself in transit between the conflicting messages of childhood and the dizzying power of her sexuality. Carefully chosen artefacts guide the story: a lamp with a Shirley Temple style figurine and a white rabbit; copies of *The Ugly Duckling*, Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, a cell phone and cannabis grinder, a hair brush tangled with long black hair. A copy of Yeats' poem tacked to the inside wall of an armoire. Through a peep hole lies the secret garden of desire and consequence that Leda protects in her private world.

A doll house sits in the inner room. Through its windows we see a couple, presumably parents, sitting in front of a screen. Their heads missing, they are hapless consumers of dangerous myths represented by the infamous academy award winning Disney film, *White Wilderness*, a "True Life Adventure." Unable to find lemmings actually throwing themselves off a cliff (because lemmings don't actually do that) the film's producers staged the scene, pushing the animals to a

staged mass 'suicide'. How far will we go to defend the myths that we have absorbed into our culture? When a myth is so deeply engrained that we cannot accept the possibility that it is based on a lie, how much damage results?

The myth of Leda teaches us about power and submission, the causes of war, the culpability of the female in the emergence of western culture, and the terrible indifference of the gods.

In Salzl's video *Leda*, 2019 she gives us a protagonist who, while burdened, has agency. The swan appears in black and white, his muscular performance silenced. He is the other - an interlude in the larger sweep of Leda's narrative. The birth of their offspring is similarly rendered in silence, devoid of romanticism or myth. What will become of this creature now? That decision lies with Leda and her female world. Flowers hover over and are mirrored in a black pool. Which is the real world? Is something about to live, or die? There is no predestiny here; power has been removed from the callous hands of gods and taken by different hands. In them lie a different way to imagine the world. Agamemnon dead.

## Chapter 3 – Beauty and Folly

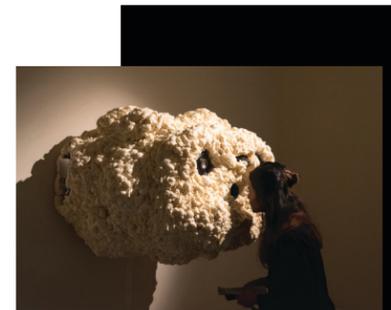
As you leave Leda's realm, you enter a second space filled with paintings and multi media installation works. These creations are all individual stories that stem from Salzl's interest in the complex psychological relationship between humanity and the natural world. Salzl sees stories within the objects that humans build, consume, collect and discard: they are markers of our desires and value systems. How is it that our want for 'things' takes precedence over the urgent need to protect the planet? The objects she transforms often harbour two tales entwined: the external and the internal. Salzl engages the viewer with surprise, interactivity, humour and sound, prompting new ways of seeing and understanding.

## Chapter 4 – A Northern Tale

In a land of rugged beauty, a flower lures the innocent into a world of magic and loss. An enchanted character places pieces of herself into a shifting world she cannot control, in a cycle of creation and destruction that will continue long after she is gone.

Pass through the final archway and place the headphones over your ears. You are once again ferried out of your world into Salzl's; welcome to *The Valise*.

1. William Yeats, *Leda and Swan*, <https://poets.org/poem/leda-and-swan>



"Self"



"Threnodies"



"Making Ready"