



The Lists We Make

Elizabeth Downey-Sunnen

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Opening Reception: Thursday, February 28, 2019 at 7PM

Workshop: Wednesday, March 27, 6-8PM

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The Lists We Make: Elizabeth Downey-Sunnen

Lists—what beautiful things! You can write em', type em', and even stick em'. Lists are so versatile. They allow us to declutter our minds in this sometimes overwhelming age of technology. Ironically, while just about everything is now created to enhance convenience and save time, it often feels as if there is even less time to do the things that matter the most. Everything moves so fast; sometimes we need to slow down.

A recent trip to Paris, France, shifted Chatham-Kent artist Elizabeth Downey-Sunnen's regularly scheduled, list-filled routine into a wonderous, schedule-free trek through Europe. The inspiration for *The Lists We Make* stems from Downey-Sunnen's attempt to integrate back into her regularly scheduled programming, but with a twist. Through this exhibition, the artist asks us to look at our lives with a new perspective, to find joy in the mundane and discover humour in the chaos. She prompts us to take our thoughts and transfer them into the physical world in order to keep our sanity intact.

In terms of lists, one of the most popular modern-age lists is the grocery list. *Chicken, Parm & Beans* (2019) transforms the boring weekly grocery list by adorning it with dazzling gold glitter, bright pink hues, and plump blue colouring. The calculated placement of both colour and fabric carries the eye naturally, relieving any anxiety you may have possessed before entering the fresh produce aisle. Of course, no list would be complete without ice cream.

While you're waiting for that chicken parmesan to cook, why not take a look at the greatest Archie comic that was never written? *Double Digest* (2019) is all about fun. It will transport you back to the days of Bubblegum pop. Never have I wanted to open a painting so badly. The titillating piece *Things That Make Me Sweat* (2019) carries vibrant reds and blues woven throughout patterns of white, providing the viewer with an immense level of emotional depth, akin to a rollercoaster that loves calculus. A variety of fabrics are dispersed throughout

the piece, which brings this metaphorical ride to the next level; the longer the piece is taken in, the more there is to find concealed within.

Some of Downey-Sunnen's works have words strewn throughout. These words are covered, sometimes partially, other times wholly, revealing the artist's frantic attempt to grasp normalcy and order at the apex of a storm's reign—to be the bow and give structure when the waves of life are crashing all around. But, when the unexpected happens, finding stability can be difficult and overwhelming. In her work she embraces this vulnerability, showcasing it in a myriad of forms.

The covering of words within *Reasons We Make Lists* (2019) encourages a new, blazing path. In the letting go, we are able to embrace the present and look towards the future. One piece suggests the setting of new goals after the water has calmed. Another has "order" written all over it, but when life gives you lemons, you have to do jazz hands. It is the only logical response. The paintings poke at what we are all striving for in our lives: balance. Balance means having enough structure to be productive while also realizing unexpected events happen in life. We all crave the level of normalcy that lists give us, but this is all relative. Over 500 years ago, it was normal to throw buckets of waste out the window. Can you imagine? Okay, getting off topic. Facing the unknown would be so much easier if life consisted only of a batch of lists. Sometimes, the pain of our past hurts so deeply that we would rather know our future than live our lives. Why would we want to live like that?

Through these works Elizabeth tells a very personal story, each magnified piece exploring a different part of herself and her reality in the spectrum of her life. In *Burn To Create / Destroy / Create* (2019), the artist pulls away the magnifying glass to show us a broader picture. This painting serves as a reminder of the greater energies at work in the universe; unseen energies that form planets and stars—the same energy that flows through each of us. Explosions of light and colours intertwined, connected over immense distances. Each part of this

piece is unique to itself, yet it is not separate. One part cannot be without the other. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed; rather, it may be transformed or transferred from one form to another. This is the cyclical nature of life and our universe. When we take a step back from our daily lives to understand the immeasurable scale of the macrocosm we are part of, we can embrace our lives for what they truly are: a gift. Every day we are given a chance to add to the enormous tapestry of life, something Downey-Sunnen has bravely put forth in *The Lists We Make*. In doing so, the artist simply asks us to review the lists in our lives, observe what we need to paint over, discover where more joy is needed, and revel in the fact that life would be much less vibrant if it did not get a little nutty from time to time.

Michael Andrew Pickard is a Canadian artist and writer. Pickard is the co-owner of Philosia Pictures, a Chatham-Kent based video production company.

cover image: *Things That Make Me Sweat*, mixed media on canvas, 2019
middle image: *Burn To Create/Destroy/Create*, mixed media on canvas, 2019
right image: *Chicken Parm and Beans*, mixed media on canvas, 2019

