

Crows wield a certain 'brilliance'

BY MARK WEBER
Red Deer Express

Aiming to challenge common notions of crows, a Calgary artist has unveiled a brilliant new exhibit at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre.

Ordinary Days: Crows, Recent Works by Shantael Sleight is on display in the Marjorie Wood Gallery through to Jan. 20.

Sleight's intention is to entertain a new perspective, invite curiosity and reveal the simple and complex beauty of the crow.

"Through this exploration I seek to ignite a sense of wonder and toy with our perceptions of beauty," says her artist's statement.

"I invite a second look, a moment to reconsider, and suggest a refreshing familiarity that connects us to a common experience."

Her work offers attractive, striking portraits of crows in a variety of settings.

Through acrylic on wood, colour and black and white photos and mixed media on wood, she effectively captures the mood and mysteries of the bird - which often gets a bad rap in society.

"They've always been associated with death," she explains. Why that is less

certain, but some folk tales describe crows as carrying spirits to the underworld.

They also tend to be scavengers, and can be aggressive - traits that don't exactly brighten their image.

Indeed. Flocks of crows are known as 'murders' of crows.

"My intention with the Crow series is to challenge unconsidered notions, general indifference or impetuous negativity toward the common crow and consider how this inability to truly see our surroundings parallels human interaction."

But they're not the sinister bunch we assume them to be after all. Crows raise their young communally, protect each other while foraging for food, communicate through about 100 different calls, mate for life or construct and use tools. They can use sticks to help gather food for instance.

They will also take a nut and fly high above a road, waiting for a vehicle to crush it. They also seem quite loyal to each other. Sleight also said she's seen several crows gather around a dead one for several moments, then fly away.

Her avid interest in crows was sparked back when Sleight was a student at Alberta College of Art and Design.

One day, she went on a hike and a crow



CLASSIC CROW - Calgary artist Shantael Sleight captures vivid images of crows in *Ordinary Days: Crows, Recent Works by Shantael Sleight* now showing at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre.

Chad Hipolito/Red Deer Express

started following her.

Sleight stopped and the crow perched on a rock. They studied each other for more than one hour.

Six years of both studying and painting crows followed that pivotal moment.

As for her art, Sleight hopes people come away with a fresh appreciation for the

beauty and intelligence of crows.

"It also goes beyond the crows - it's about thinking differently in how we observe things as well."

Besides her beautiful artistry, Sleight also works as community coordinator for the City of Calgary.

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