

# Can we ever trust memory?

And if we can't recall what happens to us, how true is history?

## Gwen MacGregor, Video Installation

Curated by Marnie Fleming  
**Where:** Oakville Galleries, Gairloch Gardens, 1306 Lakeshore Rd. E.  
**Telephone:** 905-844-4402  
**When:** to June 2.

By ELAINE HUJER

Special to The Hamilton Spectator

Eyewitnesses of the same event often tell different stories. And our memories often lead us to construct stories about ourselves that serve to bolster our own self-image.

The role of memory and the construction of 'truth' is the subject of a video installation by artist Gwen MacGregor, currently on view at Oakville Galleries' Gairloch Gardens.

MacGregor's installation combines audio, video and text to replicate the experience of remembering and forgetting.

But MacGregor goes beyond the intimate and personal, leading us to understand how entire nations construct their own "memories" — stories and chronicles which then become known as "history."

MacGregor is a Toronto-based artist, a graduate of York University.

Her earlier work includes photography and video installations, pieces that often explore perceptions of time and difficulties associated with recalling the routine, as opposed to the significant.

She has shown her work internationally, in London and in Mexico City where she received a grant for an artist's residency.

But she has also created a site-specific work for a Hamilton parking lot, a work she describes as an attempt "to put a hiccup in each commuter's morning routine."

MacGregor says the site-specific piece commissioned for Gairloch pulls together all her interests over the last four years.

The installation has been designed to fit into three of the domestic spaces of the gallery.

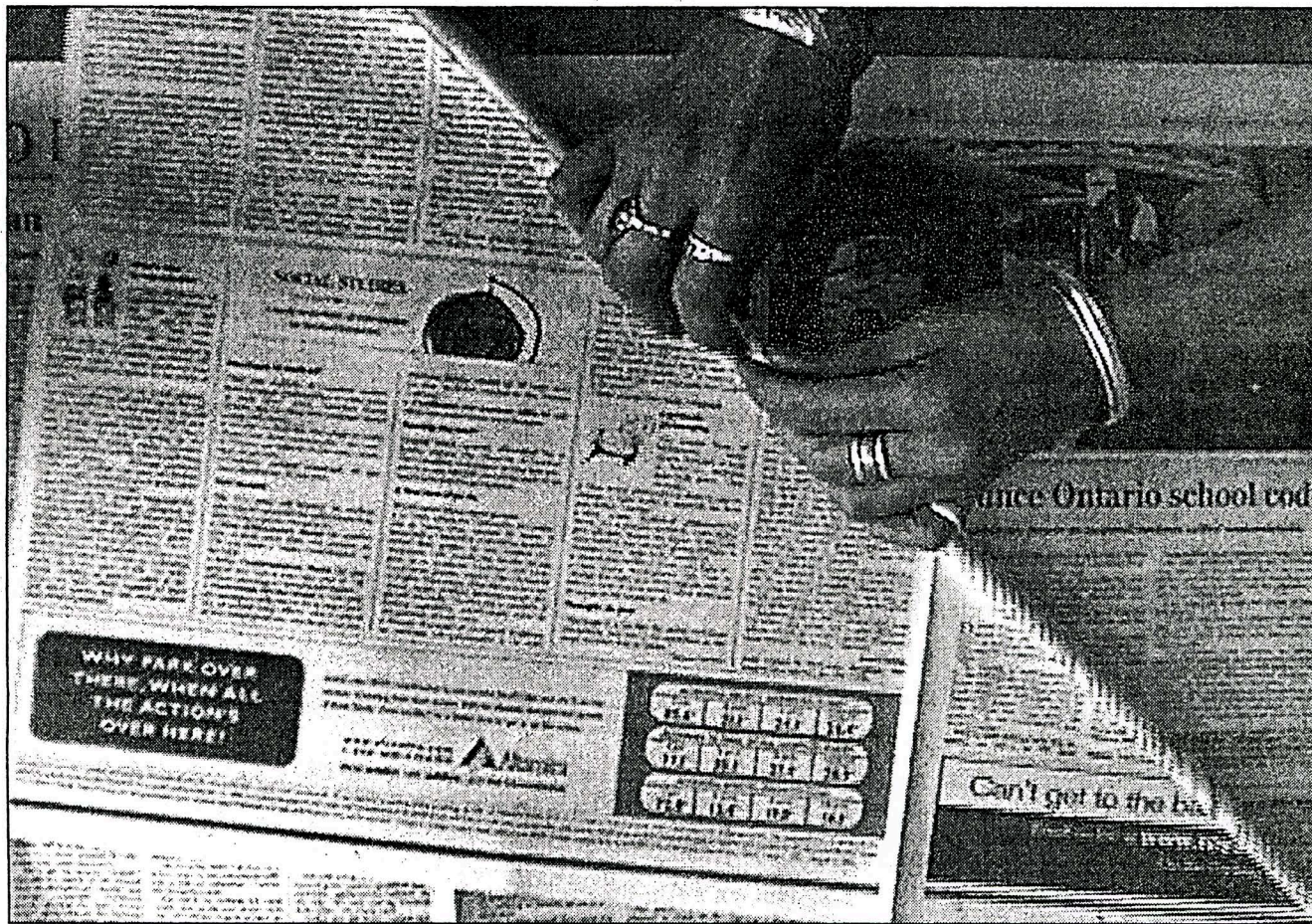
The viewer enters into a completely darkened room and instinctively stops, waiting for the eyes to adjust to the blackness.

Then, while trying to get his bearings, he is struck by a bright, blinding light flashed on for a few seconds. When the darkness returns, phrases written on the walls in glow-in-the-dark paint can be discerned.

The text comes from MacGregor's own "diary of forgetting," a journal she has kept over the year that includes elements as insignificant as the address of the passport office, a film star's name, what the artist forgot at the grocery store and suggestions for Christmas presents.

The difficulty for the viewer is that the glowing paint fades very quickly, making it impossible to read or remember more than a few bits and pieces of the phrases before the blackness returns.

One becomes engaged in frantic and futile attempts at remembering and



SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Artist Gwen MacGregor ties newspapers into knots, poking fun at any notion that one absolute truth is possible.

the experience is as maddening and fascinating as trying to fill in a crossword puzzle with a word that's on the tip of your tongue but resolutely remains right there.

This entrance room acts as a transit zone to introduce the viewer to the theme of remembering and forgetting.

*MacGregor seems to be asking us to critically re-examine our most cherished myths and chronicles.*

Moving on through a curtained opening to the left into the space of the former dining room, MacGregor investigates the role of time and its effect on memory.

Twin videos simultaneously project 60-second sequences of a variety of commonplace actions.

The activity to the left has been speeded up, to the right slowed down, and viewers are challenged to find links between the images.

Rowing, for example, is opposed to knitting. A speeded-up sunset is juxtaposed to the slowed-down blink of an eye. Water boils quickly and languorously forms a drop.

It makes us reflect how time seems

to fly when we're having a good time.

And how reliable are our personal histories, which are most often constructed from a few memorable moments, with our faulty memories obliterating the long spaces in between?

On the other side of the transit room, in the gallery's former living

been piled on the hearth in a sardonic suggestion of the worth of the recorded events.

The video is accompanied by the amplified sound of a crackling fire.

MacGregor's installation provokes many questions about both the complexity of memory and the telling of history:

Who decides what is important enough to be remembered?

How does time affect memory?

Do recording devices such as print, photography and video actually help or hinder us in remembering the truth?

Are all narrators essentially unreliable?

Is one absolute, objective truth possible?

History is a type of narrative, a story that is constructed to give meaning to random events.

MacGregor seems to be asking us to critically re-examine our most cherished myths and chronicles and to ponder the enigmas of other peoples' 'truths.'

room, MacGregor moves from the personal to the political.

With the fireplace as the central focus, a video is projected above the mantel.

The film illustrates the front pages of several Canadian newspapers, one front page for each week of the year in the year 2000.

In the video, the artist's hands can be seen obsessively rolling up each front page and then tying granny knots with the long tubes of paper.

The completed granny knots have