

# Lynda Gammon and the Archive of the Inbetween

by Christine A. Walde

*Representation is never the goal. Why would it be? The job of the artist, and the pursuit of the meditation, is not to capture anything the eye can already see or what the mind might remember but rather offer a glimpse at the spaces inbetween each.*

Kegan McFadden from Lynda Gammon's *Studio Practice Meditation Practice*

Archive fever, the archival impulse, the archival turn. These are theoretical terms confluent in contemporary art that resonate with our current understanding of the archive and how it has been utilized in theory and practice. As we purvey our analogue past and look to our post human future, the archive has acted as a site of invention and interrogation and continues to be an important locus of history, information, ideas, and in the work of artist Lynda Gammon, a critical place of repose and intervention.

Through the act of meditation, Gammon's repeated captures of herself in the archives and collections vaults of the University of Victoria Libraries' Mearns Centre-McPherson Library and the University Art Collections echo the same multilayered composition that comprises a series or subseries of records. Just as an archival fonds has the potential to 'capture' a subject through its accumulations of accessions and accruals, so too is Gammon 'captured' in a composition of layers of time and space that transforms our understanding of her presence in the archive.

Through her 4 x 5 camera, Gammon is not only seen to be meditating, but by extension, inserting herself into the body of the archive, confronting the complex contradictions of collections — the problems with arrangement, cataloguing, and description, but also the histories of women artists and how they have been collected — or not. While Gammon's aunt Sylvia Sutton may have been the catalyst to her initial vigil, it is also a Guerilla Girl tactic against collecting practices that have controlled institutions' collection development policies for decades, favouring male artists over women artists and other historically marginalized creators.

Gammon's silence reflects the absence of those collections. But it is her observance of what she is looking at and what we are looking at in looking at her that is most interesting. As Gammon's "gaze" is directed at the artwork that holds her attention, so too are we transfixed by the space in the archive where we observe her, and she directs us where to look or not to look, what to see or not to see. We are implicated through our participation, in the very act of looking. We, too, are inbetween.

Orderly rows of archival boxes stacked on metal shelves. Artworks wrapped and filed into painting racks. The innocuous aura of order, the hierarchy of information. Left alone in the vault, under the canopy of fluorescent lighting and in the temperature-and-humidity-controlled airlessness that characterizes such spaces, it seems there is a strange stasis in Gammon's silhouette, but as one looks more closely at her profile one can see she is not static at all, but is in fact, as she herself describes it, "actively resting". Poised on the edge of her chair, she seems able to stand up or leap or just choose to lean back and grow comfortable in the stillness.

This modality is reflected in the curator's choice of the word 'latent' for the title of the exhibition, implying a power or quality that has not come forth but that may emerge and 'develop'. In libraries and archives, and in collections of all kinds, it is the same. A book may spend years on a shelf — decades, even — waiting for its reader. And just because it has not been accessed does not mean that it has lost this emergent power. It is a latent subject whose meaning has yet to be determined, its potential existing beyond what we think we know and have yet to learn.

In this knowledge transfer in which information is imprinted and exchanged, Gammon directly references the process of photography. It too, has a latent quality and power in directing the eye to show what has always been there, to reveal what already exists. As such, Gammon's presence in the physical archive is an account of record-keeping, self-archiving, and documentation. Like the collections she is meditating on, Gammon documents her latent photographic image, literally what will 'develop'. Exposed to the same processes of storage and inventory, preservation and access, Gammon's meditation is also one of mediation with the camera, informing our understanding of the archive through the long exposure and the open capture of time.

Through her use of black and white photography, our eyes are slowed, calming our minds from the technicolour image-saturated world from which algorithms control our attentions. In our digital age, photos are nothing but just one digital file among thousands of other digital files in our bulging photo libraries on our iPhones. Are there even pictures, anymore? What is our relationship to the image now, and in time? Our current moment offers an unprecedented acceleration of digital tools through the promise of AI. But how can we trust what we see, and that what we see is "real"? From this perspective, the analogue technologies of Lynda Gammon's slow photography point to our documentary past while being both a reflection and affirmation of the origins of the art form. It's an important exchange worth capturing, in the present, for the future.

Having read a little bit about quantum mechanics and superposition, I like to think that Gammon's photographs help to explain the double-slit experiment. Entangled in the embodiment of the archive, as both the observer and observed, her image acts in the same way as the waves that interfere with each other, creating a pattern of light and dark bands on a screen. The frame from which she sits across appears as a grey rectangular pool to another dimension, bent with the refracted light of the reflection of the other frames behind her. It is a confluence of lines, just one moment in time, a figure sitting poised in a chair. You can see it in the photographs, enmeshed in the blur that embodies her between states of past and present, its' impossible phenomenon. After all, what is photography but a composition of light?

Such a state of dynamic interpolation also exists in archives and collections' vaults. One loses track of time being in the present looking at the past, amidst a negotiation of futures, different paths. As places they are ephemeral and impermanent, never fixed. It is also a continuing theme that underlies and resonates throughout Gammon's art — as well as being central to Buddhist meditation and her meditation practice. Thoughts, like moments in the archive, come and go. We must not be attached to them and instead, focus on our breath. Lynda Gammon's presence in the stacks may seem ghostly, impermanent. But she is human, and fallible. Through her long exposures, beyond subject and object, she is quietly, steadily breathing inbetween the spaces of the archive: in and out, in and out.