

Jeff Wielki

The Reckoning

Marion Nicoll Gallery, Calgary AB



The Marion Nicoll Gallery is located in the main lobby of Alberta University of the Arts. The gallery is rectangular, with one wall made entirely of windows that face into the main atrium of the university. Jeff Wielki has *The Reckoning* inside the gallery, an exhibition of nine sculptural works that serve to reimagine Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1834 poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

The gallery entrance is a glass door as part of the windowed wall. On the wall to the left, vinyl cut lettering of six stanzas from Coleridge's poem. On the wall to the right, a metallic blue sculptural piece hangs symmetrical to the poem. The back wall is painted a rusty orange color. The sculptures on the floor are positioned slightly crowded to the center of the room yet with space left for the viewer to walk among them. They're organized so that the tallest sculptures are at the back of the room, and the sculptures closest to the ground are at the front. This orientation

creates a theatrical effect, and though the sculptures are non-representational, seems to suggest a front and back side to each piece as they face towards the windowed gallery wall.

The sculptural works consist of industrial materials and found objects. Concrete, rubber, and metal in various forms: aluminum, sheet metal, rebar, mild steel. The found objects are familiar: car tires, barrels, concrete; removed of their functions by Wielki's influence through rusting, bending, ripping, or otherwise deforming. There are no titles or materials list provided, which removes each sculpture of its individuality and works to place each piece in collective service of a broader message, that as figures in Coleridge's poem.

As stated in the show didactic, the section of Coleridge's poem included in the exhibition describes a moment "when deathly supernatural figures arrive to decide the fate of the Mariner and the ship's crew after the Mariner kills one of God's creatures." The poem provides a framework for the exhibition and asks the viewer to consider the sculptural works as representations of aspects of the poem, which encourages the theatrical nature of this exhibition. The gallery is set like a stage; the poem is a script, the painted orange wall is a backdrop, and the sculptures are actors.

Wielki has created a fiction to question reality. The familiarity of the materials in each sculpture combined with the artist's influence to remove the items of their function brings forth the feeling of wandering a junk yard. The painted wall in the background, a hazy orange reminiscent of smog or air thick with smoke, adds a post-apocalyptic feeling to the room. It is a dystopian scene and one that feels like a warning. The Mariner must find out his fate after killing a sea bird, and perhaps the viewer might also have to contend with their own effect on the natural world. In the theatre Wielki has created, is the viewer audience or actor? *The Reckoning* asks the viewer to consider their role.

- *Chelsea Cairns*