

Kristi Malakoff: *The Golden Bell*

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FOREWORD

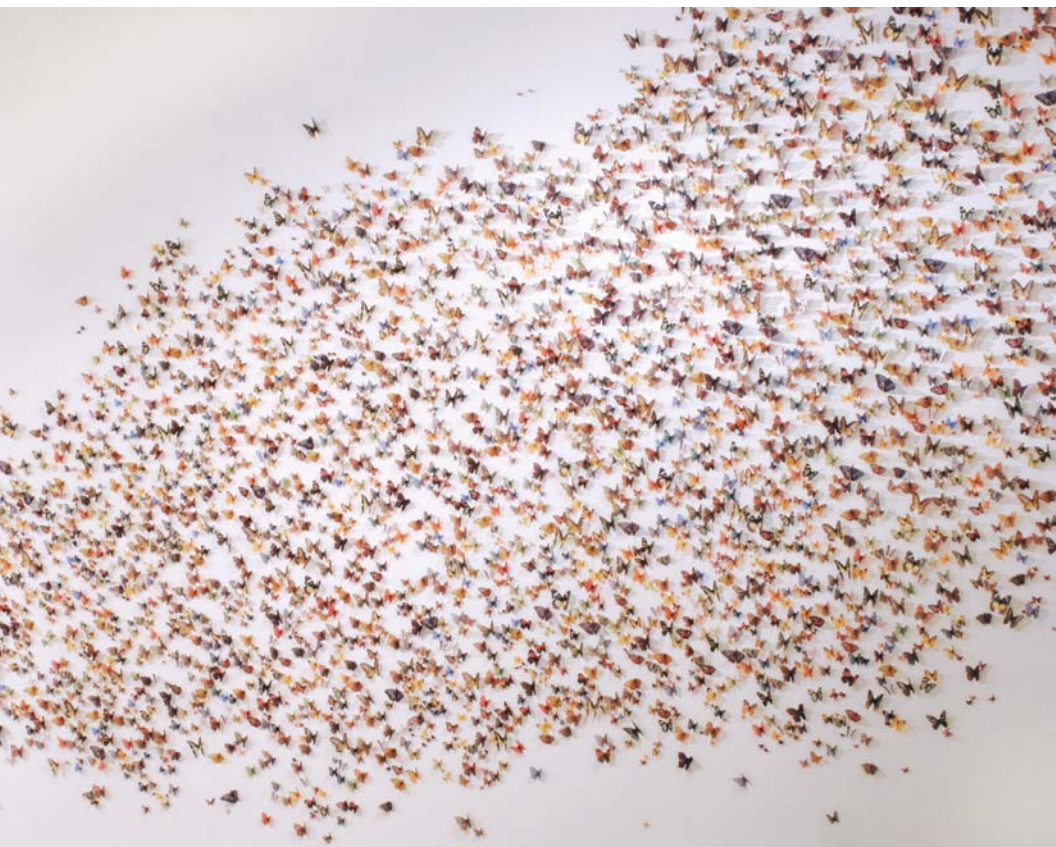
Shortly into my job as a curator at Touchstones Nelson, I came across an exhibition proposal submitted by Kristi Malakoff outlining her ideas for a show in the gallery. I had been aware of Kristi's work for several years via reviews of past shows in art periodicals. Her brilliant and often uncanny merging of materials and content had a lasting effect on my memory. As I opened the envelope, a small plastic butterfly fell on to my desk. a delicate and playful symbol of transformation. I was immediately excited about the prospect of showing her work here, and investigated her work further through her web site and various articles written about her. I was also surprised to find her return address was in Nelson, B.C. Did she still live here? Was she still interested in showing here? She did and she was, and thus a year and a half later Touchstones Nelson is pleased to present *Kristi Malakoff: The Golden Bell*.

Kristi Malakoff grew up in Naramata, B.C. As a child she made things from whatever resources were around the house. Common everyday castaways, particularly of the paper sort, were cut, glued and adhered into objects of art. From 2001-2005, Kristi formalized her making of things as a student at the Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver. Since graduating she has created a substantial and engaging body of work. *The Golden Bell* exhibition is a quasi-retrospective of Kristi's work up to this point in her artistic career – work both fully realized and meticulously executed.

It is with great enthusiasm and a desire to recognize the work of this emerging artist that Touchstones Nelson presents *Kristi Malakoff: The Golden Bell*. The opportunity to exhibit the work of such an important artist is critical to the organization's overall goal of contributing to the cultural growth and vibrancy of the region. We sincerely appreciate the support of the Canada Council for the Arts in publishing this catalogue. We also wish to thank art critic and writer Robin Laurence for her visit to Nelson to see the exhibition and meet with Kristi, and also Shaun Carrigg for her clever catalogue design. And lastly, I wish to thank Kristi Malakoff for her dedication to her art practice that inspired the whole exhibition.

Deb Thompson







ARTIST STATEMENT

As a child who grew up on Disney movies and books by Roald Dahl and C.S. Lewis, I have always been intrigued by notions of fantasy and the possibilities for escape into new, marvelous worlds via mundane objects such as a wardrobe (C.S. Lewis), a peach or an elevator (Roald Dahl). Parallel to this fascination was the delight I took, and continue to take, in the possibility of inanimate objects coming to life. As a serious child who was engaged from a young age in heavy discipline and competition, fantasy was my escape from the rigors of daily life.

It is this notion of fantasy that is the umbrella over much of my practice and has expanded to include man-made sites of culture and celebration – manufactured escapism – Disneyland and Las Vegas come to mind. In particular, I am intrigued by those sites in which dreams, desires and destruction collide. As such, my practice is about dichotomies. I often look for and create unexpected relationships between concepts, ideas and materials. In my personal life, I frequently bounce between living in major urban centers and extreme rural communities – my practice is frequently exploring the contrasts and connections between these two ways of being. The urban manipulation of nature is a theme in my work. The notion of “spectacle “ features prominently – both in the common and Debordian senses of the term.

Inspired early on by Walter Benjamin’s essay “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, I strive to take a contrarian approach to this idea – taking 2-dimensional mass-produced materials, I transform them back into unique objects, back to their pre-representational, 3-D state. By removing these materials from their intended context and placing them in new situations, I aim to both surprise the viewer and create a new, multi-layered conversation. To this end, I work with photographic images, cereal boxes, stamps, paper currency and wallpaper.

Through my installation work, I am interested in creating immersive, transformative environments. I have long been fascinated with ideas of swarm intelligence and the behavior of self-regulating communities. These works are often trompe l’oeil. As I am intrigued by the idea of the stage set and “movie magic”, much of my work is consciously one-sided – perfect vs. not perfect, real vs. not real. I am intrigued with concepts of illusion.

Kristi Malakoff is a Canadian visual artist who has returned to Canada after time spent living abroad, most recently in Moscow, Russia, where she participated in a 2-month residency at Proekt Fabrika in the spring of 2010, and previously in Berlin, Germany, Reykjavik, Iceland and London, England where she attended the Chelsea College of Art and Design. Malakoff is a 2005 BEA graduate of the Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver, Canada where she was the recipient of many awards and scholarships, among them the Alvin Balkind Memorial Scholarship, the Helen Pitt Award and the Governor General's silver medal for the top Emily Carr Institute graduating student of 2005. Since graduating, she has also participated in artist residency programs at the Banff Centre, the Stride Gallery, Calgary, and SIM, Reykjavik, Iceland. She has exhibited in an exhaustive schedule in both group and solo shows throughout Canada and the US and in England, Germany, Mexico and Russia.







ESSAY

Every time Kristi Malakoff undertakes an exhibition, she is reconstructing her art and, in a sense, reinvestigating the complexly imaginative aspect of herself from which her ideas emerge. She is re-experiencing the rigours of production, too. Most of her larger-scale installations are composed of multiple, often tiny, components. Each component, intricately and flawlessly fashioned by hand, is individually mounted in a way that is both true to the original concept for the piece and responsive to its temporary architectural site. This process of adhering individual elements may be repeated thousands of times to produce an illusionistic and often immersive presence in the gallery. Malakoff's ambitious work makes it clear that she is compelled to push not only herself but also her materials to creative extremes, either "through repetition and accumulation" in her more expansive installations or through intricate and exacting craftsmanship in her miniature sculptures. There's a poetic and meditative aspect to her art, too: like the repetitive chanting of a mantra or the cumulative production of a complexly patterned mandala, her way of working is transformative, even transcendent, shifting the artist and then the viewer into a deeper level of consciousness and an altered understanding of material reality.

Swarm, an installation comprising 6000 butterflies photocopied onto acetate, hand cut, then scattered in a gorgeous wave of colour and pattern across a high, windowless wall, and *Resting Swarm*, 21,000 photocopied paper bees also cut by hand and massed in an interior corner near the gallery's entrance, reveal Malakoff's characteristic working methods as well as a particular interest in "swarm theory" and the nature-culture interface. She presents us with art that first dazzles us, then asks us to think about the collective intelligence and self-organizing behaviours of insect colonies – and about human interactions with such life forms and systems, too. Swarm intelligence, which is also manifest in schools of fish and flocks of birds, has become a model for scientists working in the field of artificial intelligence. As well, philosophers such as Rudolph Steiner have seen a model for human behaviour in the "unconscious wisdom" of the beehive. Still, Malakoff's swarm works are not without their dark side. Implicit here are suggestions of the dangerous and destructive powers of massed insects – plagues of locusts, attacks of killer bees, ravaging armies of ants. Even her beautiful and delicate butterflies are unsettling in their sheer numbers.

Malakoff has worked in an array of unexpected materials, from postage stamps and paper money to actor's marking tape and crepe paper, all of which she deploys in ways that defy conventional expectations of their use. An example of this impulse is her *Fruit Loop Tower*, an eight-foot-high, freestanding, hollow structure composed entirely of little rounds of candy-coloured breakfast cereal. Here, Malakoff paradoxically melds a banal artifact of childhood nostalgia and Western consumer culture with the profound impulses of Middle Eastern mosaic traditions and religious architecture. She challenges her unlikely medium's structural integrity by using each little loop as a building block as well as a decorative component, risking the possibilities of both fading and crumbling. The paradoxical juxtaposition of the labour-intensiveness of her process with the instability of her materials is reminiscent, again, of the intricately detailed sand mandalas made – and then destroyed -- by Tibetan monks. Malakoff's installations are not about ephemerality, per se, but neither are they about permanence. They seem to register a problem-setting-and-solving impulse (her art often answers self-assigned philosophical, mathematical or structural questions) – together with a state of creative flux.

Fruit Loop Tower is one of a number of artworks in the show, including *Maibaum*, *Hole Punch Tower*, and *The Golden Bell*, that speak to a presiding theme of “ascension”. Here, ascension is not intended in a specific religious context but as a more generalized image of the human condition. In these pieces, towers, maypole, and church spire all contribute to a metaphor of conflicted aspiration -- what Malakoff calls, in talking about *The Golden Bell*, “a search for ecstasy and a search for grounding.” These vertical forms also function within the ancient and universal symbolism of the axis mundi, which, like the archetypal world tree, conjoins heaven and earth. In *Maibaum*, whose silhouetted figures of dancing children and fluttering birds are cut out of heavy black paper, the maypole can be seen also as the vestige of an ancient phallic symbol. A central element of pagan fertility rituals in parts of northern and central Europe, the wooden maypole was absorbed, centuries ago, into Christian spring and midsummer festival traditions and, more recently, especially in England, adapted as a beribboned pole around which school children innocently dance. As the show's curator, Deb Thompson, observes, “This image suggests a coming to terms with a loss of innocence that accompanies a child in her passage to adulthood.” The shadowy figures, whose clothing is intricately





incised with decorative elements such as hearts and flowers, are inflected with an ominous unreality. They also communicate the artist's complementary interests in enduring rituals, temporary stage sets and "movie magic". Close examination of *Maibaum* reveals that Malakoff chooses to expose the ways in which her art is fabricated using glue, pins, tape, fishing line and weights. She is quite willing to undermine the illusions she creates, challenging the notions of perfection that her art seems to embrace.

The energy that Malakoff invests and reinvests in her work bestows it with an extraordinary presence – an aura. Our awareness of that aura, the manifestation of her "imaginative fervour, physical dexterity and saintly patience", compels us to look more closely at her art and to consider its deeper meaning. Aura is a significant word in Malakoff's creative and critical vocabulary. Riffing on Walter Benjamin's influential 1936 essay, "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*", she seeks to reverse the direction of his theory, which posits the loss of the unique work of art's traditional or ritual meaning and aesthetic "aura" that occurs when it is easily and widely reproduced. Malakoff takes two-dimensional, mass-produced images and returns them to a unique, immediate, three-dimensional condition, thus restoring or reinventing their aura. This process may be seen in both her *Stamp* and *Polyhedra* series.

While living and working in Berlin in 2008, Malakoff began to investigate the kinds of cultural and propagandistic images that characterized German postage stamps before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the country. She then composed tiny tableaux by painstakingly cutting out the stamps' two-dimensional images and mounting them upright in three dimensions. These works read like miniature stage sets or dioramas, composed of cheerily dancing couples in folk costume, bustling town and transportation scenes and, most magical, a Fairy Ring of teensy mushrooms. In her *Polyhedra* series, Malakoff cut and folded selections from various world currencies, including obsolete Iraqi paper money, into complex, multi-faceted miniature forms. Some are geometric solids based on mathematical formulae and others are organic floral forms based on traditional Japanese origami. Again, these exquisite works compel our rapt attention, focusing our thinking about how value is assigned – whether to a work of art or to a piece of paper designated as currency. The arbitrariness of such attribution underlies, again, the ways both art and money function within international systems of exchange.

About *The Golden Bell*, whose title is borrowed from a Grateful Dead song, Malakoff says, "I'm interested in sites where dreams, desires and destruction collide." She also explains that, with this work, she was meditating on the relationship between wealth, power and the Christian church. A miniature

diorama of a church and churchyard delicately fashioned from a \$100 Canadian bill, the work again takes on the question of monetary value -- what it signifies and how it is assigned. Through the tiny bell, hanging in the bell tower, this piece also evokes the age-old lust for gold that has fuelled the rapacious claims of empire and the extermination of entire peoples and cultures -- witness the tiny grave markers on one side of the little church.

One of the paradoxes here is that the miniature scene Malakoff has created in *The Golden Bell* is, on first reading, exquisitely pretty and peaceful. On closer consideration, however, it reverberates with dark histories of greed and destruction. In fact, her entire show is informed by dichotomies, dualities and paradoxes. The nature of Malakoff's process is itself paradoxical: meditative in her quiet accrual of multiple components and repetitive actions, stressful in the necessity of realizing her installations in material form, under tight deadlines and difficult working conditions. There is, too, the paradox of her strategies of rigorous problem solving versus her impulse to immerse herself and her viewers in an escapist fantasy. And prevailing overall is her creation of something magical out of something commonplace, her investing ordinary images and materials with extraordinary -- and enduring -- value.

Robin Laurence







List of Works in Exhibition

Swarm

2005

6,000 color copies of butterflies on transparency material

Dimensions variable

Resting Swarm

2008

21,000 photographs of bees, pins, Styrofoam

Dimensions variable

The Golden Bell

2010

One \$100 Canadian bill

2.0" x 2.0" x 2.0"

Star IV

2010

Actor's marking tape

Dimensions variable

Maibaum

2009

Black paper, black foam core, hardware

Life-size (pole is 18 feet tall)

Dimensions variable (approx. 20.0' x 20.0' x 20.0')

Untitled (Fruit Loop Tower)

2009

Fruit Loops, glue

96.0" x 9.0" x 9.0"

Deutsche Trachten (Dancers)

2008

16 German stamps from GDR regime and Bundesrepublik (1961 - 93)

5.0" x 1.5" x 4.0"

Speisepilze/Giftpilze (Fairy Ring)

2008

32 German stamps from GDR regime (1974 - 80)

5.0" x 5.0" x 2.0"

City

2008

81 German stamps from GDR regime and Bundesrepublik (1967 - 97)

12.0" x 10.2" x 5.1"

Radrennfahrer (Bike Rider)

2008

2 German stamps from GDR regime (1960)

1.0" x 0.75" x 0.75"

*Polyhedra Series –
Canadian Star Ball*
2008

2 Canadian \$5 bills
2.0" x 2.0" x 2.0"

Intersecting Star
2008

4 bills of foreign currency (Brazil, Zambia,
Egypt, Bolivia)
2.5" x 2.5" x 2.5"

Iraqi Bloom
2008

3 Iraqi dinar bills
2.3" x 2.3" x 2.3"

Honeysuckle
2008

8 bills of foreign currency (Cambodia, China,
Costa Rica,
Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Russia, Brazil, Peru)
2.3" x 2.3" x 2.3"

Snappy
2008

3 bills of foreign currency (Zambia, Brazil,
Peru)
2.0" x 2.0" x 2.0"

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION:

Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (GPA: 4.13) – Vancouver, BC, Canada , 2001 – 2005
Chelsea College of Art and Design – London, England, 2004

RESIDENCIES:

Artist in Residence – Proekt Fabrika, Moscow, Russia, 2010
Artist in Residence – SIM-House, Reykjavik, Iceland, 2006 - 2007
Artist in Residence – Stride Gallery, Calgary, AB, Canada, 2006
Artist in Residence – Banff Centre, AB, Canada, 2005

AWARDS AND GRANTS:

Canada Council Project Grant for Visual Artists – Research/Creation, 2010
Canada Council Project Grant for Visual Artists – Research/Creation, 2008
Governor General's Award– Silver Medal (top Emily Carr graduate 2005), 2005
Helen Pitt Award, 2004
Emily Carr Achievement Scholarship, 2004
Datatel Scholars Foundation Scholarship, 2004
Alvin Balkind Memorial Scholarship, 2003
Emily Carr Achievement Scholarship, 2003

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

TBA – Truck Gallery, Calgary, AB, Canada, 2011
TBA – Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, SK, Canada, 2011
TBA – Hamilton Artists Inc., Hamilton, ON, Canada, 2011
TBA – Solo project for Nuit Blanche, Toronto, ON, Canada, 2010
TBA – Latitude 53, Edmonton, AB, Canada, 2010
The Golden Bell – Touchstones Nelson, Nelson, BC, Canada, 2010
Untitled (Agresive) – Proekt Fabrika, Moscow, Russia, 2010
The Circus and the Wishing Well – Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB, Canada, 2009
Bounty – Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, ON, Canada, 2008
hello honey – superbien! Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 2007
Headquarters – With Berlin-based collective Adapter, Kunstfabrik, Berlin, Germany, 2007
Great Day For Up – Museo Regional de Querétaro, Querétaro, Mexico, 2007

Minutiae – le gallery, Toronto, ON, Canada, 2006
Meadowsweet – Stride Gallery, Calgary, AB, Canada, 2006
The Glade – Alternator Gallery, Kelowna, BC, Canada, 2006
Flourish – Art Gallery of the South Okanagan, Penticton, BC, Canada, 2005

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

TBA – SFU Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada – 2-person show, 2011
Kelowna Collects – Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC, Canada, 2010
Sights/Sites of Spectacle – UBC Graduate Symposium, UBC, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2010
Aqua Art Miami – myartspace.com booth, Miami, Florida, USA, 2009
inVision – Queen Elizabeth Theatre Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2009
PAPERcuts – Peel Gallery, Houston, Texas, USA, 2009
Young Canada Presents: Barometric Reading Series 1 – le gallery, Toronto, ON, Canada, 2009
How Soon is Now – Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2009
Guise – Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, BC, Canada – 2-person show, 2009
What It Really Is – Red Bull 381 Projects, Toronto, ON, Canada – 5-person show, 2009
Making It – gallery rfd, Swainsboro, Georgia, USA, 2008
Wilde Tiere – Wilde Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 2008
Rapt – CAG Auction, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2007
Drawing Expo '07 – Gaff Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2007
Pink – 4-person show, Art Gallery of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada, 2007
Heyday – 3-person show, Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2006
2005 Annual – Juried exhibition, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA, USA, 2005
Proximities – Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, BC, Canada, 2005
Debt – The Other Gallery, Banff, AB, Canada, 2005
Where I Lay My Heart – The Other Gallery, Banff, AB, Canada, 2005
Enchanted Forest – 2-person show, Butchershop Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2005
Picture This – Juried exhibition (parallel Grad Show), Gastown, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2005
Project – 2-person collaboration and design of room at Dominion Hotel, Van., BC, Canada, 2005
ACT 02 – 291 Gallery, London, England, 2004
It's My First Time – Concrete Basement Gallery, London, England, 2004

Selected Bibliography

Belanger, Erin. "The Circus and the Wishing Well." *Shotgun-Review* 28 Sept 2009 - 8 Nov. 2009. <www.shotgun-review.ca/2009/09/the_circus_and_the_wishing_wel.html>.

Landry, Mike. "The Circus and the Wishing Well." *Things of Desire* 25 June 2009. 2 Sept. 2009. <www.thingsofdesire.ca/2009/06>.

Turner, Leah. "What It Really Is." *C Magazine* Summer 2009: 51.

Milroy, Sarah. "Pictures Are Out – Experience Is In." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 14 Feb. 2009: R1.

Laurence, Robin. "Thrilling Mix Spans Manga Ceramics, Tattooed Pigs." *The Georgia Straight* [Vancouver] 12-19 Feb. 2009: 47.

"Sprawling Exhibition Showcases the Work of More Than 30 of the Province's Most Compelling Artists." *Akimblog* 16 Feb. 2009 - 27 June 2009. <www.akimbo.biz/exhibitions/?id=14149>.

Mitges, Lynn. "Art Without Bounds." *The Province* [Vancouver] 5 Feb. 2009: C9.

Sandals, Leah. "West Coast Represent." *The National Post* [Toronto] 19 Feb. 2009: AL6+.

Griffin, Kevin. "Emerging B.C. Artists Take the Spotlight in Major Group Show at the VAG." *The Vancouver Sun* 14 Feb. 2009: D1+.

McElroy, Gil. "Peterborough." *Akimblog* 19 June 2008. 15 August 2008. <www.akimbo.biz/akimblog/?id=206>.

McLaughlin, Bryne. "Kristi Malakoff: Swarm Theory." *Canadian Art* 12 June 2008. 15 August 2008. <www.canadianart.ca/online/sec-it/2008/06/12/kristi-malakoff/>.

Pearson, Gary. "The Undigested World Itself." *Lake: A Journal of Arts and Environment* [Kelowna] 2007: 16 – 26.

Tousley, Nancy. "Exhibit's in the Pink: No Fluff to be Found in Women's Work." *Calgary Herald* 10 June 2007: E1+.

Sandals, Leah. "Feminine Mystique." *National Post* [Toronto] 4 June 2007: B16.

Pearson, Gary. "Kristi Malakoff." *Canadian Art Magazine* Spring 2007: 103.

Rogers, Scott. "Across the Medium Universe: AGC's Pink is Risky, Thought-Provoking, Sensuous and Stimulating." *Fast Forward Weekly* [Calgary] 26 April 2007.

Adams, Sarah. "Calgary." *Akimblog* 27 Sept. 2006. 15 August 2008.
<www.akimbo.biz/akimblog/?id=66>.

Dault, Gary Michael. "A Gorgeous Moment of Collective Pause." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 23 Sept. 2006: R8.

Graham, Hugh. "Monsters and Flowers: Scot Bullick's Creepy Creations and Kristi Malakoff's Meadowsweet." *Fast Forward Weekly* [Calgary] 21-27 Sept. 2006: 64.

Laurence, Robin. "Artists Embrace, Deconstruct Capitalism." *Georgia Straight* [Vancouver] 13-20 April 2006: 60.

Priegert, Portia. "Artistic Displays Transport Their Viewers." *eVent* [Kelowna] 26 Oct. 2005: B2.

Priegert, Portia. "Flourish, by Kristi Malakoff." *GalleriesWest* 6 Oct. 2005. 10 Aug. 2007.
<www.gallerieswest.ca/Departments/ExhibitionReviews//6-106662.html>.

Pearson, Gary. "Razor Sharp: Kristi Malakoff's Work Flourishes." *Off-Centre Magazine* [Vernon] Oct. 2005: 12.

Zacharias, Yvonne. "Enchanted Forest." *The Vancouver Sun* 25 June 2005: F3.

Laurence, Robin. "Show Cooks up Raw Talent." *Georgia Straight* [Vancouver] 19-26 May 2005: 55.

ARTWORK FEATURED IN SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

Room: A Space of Your Own. 32.2 (2009): 40.

m. One Shot: A Visual Codec Project (100 West Coast Artists). Seattle, WA: Visual Codec, 2007.

Sunday Magazine [Vancouver] June/July 2005: 28.

“Relationality.” Front Magazine [Vancouver] March/April 2005: 10, 35.

COLLECTIONS:

Private collections: across Canada and the United States

Corporate collections: Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt, Montreal, Canada

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