



equinox  
vigil

2017



I float, the sun pushes me up, shining, warming face, hair. The blazing star goes down tonight like it does each day, dying again and again. A submergence that makes way for rest. Seasons, flowers, leaves all do the same, turning over, coming in. Laughter and touch too, even taste wanes in order for you to taste again with renewed vibrancy. Like these, death can bring freedom, refreshment. Carried in the palms of autumnal figures that glide through the trees, glowing lights flit by. Harmonies float over the invariable stillness, swathing bodies huddled above and below, a celebration of those individuals who made it onto the earth by some cosmic curiosity. We pen the names of those who have died, and the mutual understanding feels like an embrace.

With open eyes, we look upon legacies, hierarchies of the dead as well as the living. Light in hand, I see the cemetery, the advent of colonial burial practices in the West, a museum for a questionable history, monument to those with the power to attribute or deny respect to individuals even in death. Union Cemetery was established in 1890, 13 years after Treaty 7 was signed by the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee), a miscommunicated agreement that mislead the First Nations into legally surrendering their land. Racism, class division, and cultural ignorance have all contributed to Calgary's immediate history as a city, exemplified by those unrightfully excluded from the Field of Honour or buried in Section X (The Pauper's Grave). Observing this history, walking through it, a communal awareness is brought to what opportunities we the living have now to arise, to turn over, to be renewed with our loved ones in mind, to bloom.



**K**ris Demeanor, former poet laureate and musical co-director for the Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society, gently welcomed us to the entrance of the Equinox Vigil at Calgary's Union Cemetery. A ceremonial ribbon stretched behind him, Demeanor sang and read poems percolating loss, life, and history before founder and curator Sharon Stevens (above) opened the evening. As one body, we walk.

Photo Miriam Johnston



We walk down a tree-lined lane, to the Vigil, past the overlapping harmonies of the Renaissance Singers, bundled in coats. Perhaps the dead sing along, incanting, walking us along through the decades toward now.

Photo Miriam Johnston



Using paper lanterns as conduits for celebrating the spirits of loved ones no longer with us, we write messages on them, and hoist them lit into the sky. Chinese paper lanterns—in the mid-Autumn festival celebrated in China and Vietnam—represent sun, light, warmth, and a prayer for the sun to come back after winter. As the sun rises again tomorrow, may we carry our loved ones with us into the warmth of the day.



Lisa Hodgkinson's shrine to lost pets, *Noble Beasts*, is a balancing-act of sweet animals meticulously twisted out of metal. Participants sit in a circle, chat, and write the names of past pets on rocks before placing them at the base of the sculpture in an act of remembrance. Ferd, Nips, Tramp, Wooz II—all get a place at the base, gathering their furry bodies in a reunion of sorts.



Patches, Rollie, Muffin: pets from my own past come to mind, little fuzzballs that have spent considerable time on my neck, lap, under my covers, their little paws on my face. They comforted me when I was sick or alone—without judgement—favours that I will never forget. They didn't see my lumpy sweater, the asteroid ring of used Kleenex around me. They just saw *me*.



Michelina Bramford's collectively loving gesture, *Treasured*, starts with the glint of knick-knacks and objects heaped on a table—jewels, shells, beads, flowers, plastic mermaids. If an object on the table (or in your pocket) speaks to you, evokes a memory of a loved one, you are welcomed to adhere it to the urn, or write a note to be placed inside this growing communal funerary object.

Photo Miriam Johnston





An intricate collection of neon and glow-in-the-dark objects are arranged into a peaked heart. Skulls, glowing crucifixes, dinosaurs, creepy-crawlies and religious characters mingle side-by-side with the final overarching purpose of creating a heart. Keith Murray's *The Neon God We Made* intermingles the spirits and religions of many countries and cultures, underlining the cross-cultural universality of loss.

Photo Miriam Johnston



Sentinels wander the site, peaceful ghostly creatures of fall that inhabit the space between living and non-living. They animate the spaces in-between, embodying a spiritual questioning, a pondering of the otherworld. Here, they kneel before the monument for Calgary artist Jasmine Valentina Herron, a powerful voice in the queer community that died too young, but continues to be celebrated.

Photo Miriam Johnston



**R**osanna Terracciano uses peinetas, large white decorative combs, to punctuate her chilling and beautiful flamenco performance *We All Need to Say Goodbye/Adios*. Singing in Spanish throughout, she allows the skull-like combs to fall from her hair, eventually leaving them behind as she walks away among the gravestones in a black dress.

Photo Brian Jensen



Like the Chinese custom of burning paper luxuries, Joss paper, or spirit money, cards are written and hung on a line for passed loved ones to be later burned. This ritualistic gesture, also an act of release and kinship, transforms the message from its physical form into an invisible form, a gift to the dead.



**H**istorian Harry Sanders shares his research on the beginnings of Union Cemetery, and burial practices in the Calgary-area since the 19th Century. He outlines Catholic and Protestant burial practices of the past, points out which of Calgary's first funeral homes are now A&Ws, and discusses discrepancies between those allotted to the Field of Honour, and those buried in the The Potter's Grave.

Photo Brian Jensen

heaven, where we'll sing together some day again.

Mom, Dad, Dylan  
Wishing you light and stars!  
Love Patrick

Hey Mumsie, It's almost your birthday.  
Let's blow out a candle together.

To Loretta  
I still miss you so so much  
<3 Pam

Miss you Joe, more than you'll know,  
and always at gold. What do you usually  
hit from here?  
Love, Margot

Hey Pops,  
Miss you so much! Granmo, Uncle Ken,  
Grandad, Gramie - all of you.

As we make our way around the Vigil loop, Sharon Stevens's *Digital Shrine* allows us to write a note for passed loved ones to be compiled and projected. Our notes, having been turned simply into light, roll up the screen like credits, a kind of contemporary paper-burning ceremony.



Individuals sign up with *The Bridge to Peace Threshold Choir* to be song-bathed. The participant is wrapped in blankets and reclines in a chair, surrounded by warm bodies singing, washing over them, incanting with harmonies. You are enveloped in a cocoon of sound, peace, and warmth in the face of loss.

SHE TOLD ME THAT LIFE IS LIKE  
A TRAIN-EVERYONE STARTS AND STOPS  
AT THE SAME STATIONS

Jeff Chan's *Life is Like a Train* surprises in the top corner of the walk as the sun goes down. It is a meditation on the nature of living and dying as an everyday phenomena—as common as the train. Perhaps in thinking of death in quotidian terms, stigma around it has the opportunity to be released.

Photo Miriam Johnston





Some of us with bells, some of us talking quietly, we hoist the names of our loved ones up high, flags symbolizing their victory in life. Lead by horn-players Andre Wickenheiser and Carsten Rubeling, we serenade their memories, and those dead who have no one left on this earth to celebrate them.

Photo Miriam Johnston



Caged videos hang from a cemetery tree, a tree that has seen mourners pass by for over a century; its roots extended through graves, through coffins, through memory itself. Maybe Gillian McKercher's *Impressions*, made in collaboration with Nancy Jo Cullen and Sharon Stevens, reflects on grieving traditions, memories, and dreams, as the tree does: all it sees.

Photo Sharon Stevens



Each strand is woven over and under, a network of connections made only to then deteriorate—over days, months, years. Jessie Fraser’s work, *Ultimately*, we lose each other to something, lays her own weavings to rest inside wooden boxes, burying their memory. She lifts a handful of dirt over the weavings as an act of burial, and invites passers-by to do the same in memory of pathways, networks, and textures put to rest.



Harry Sanders with Sharon Stevens

equinox  
vigil

Photo Brigitte von Rothemburg

## THANK YOU

Equinox Vigil is indebted to the talented and thoughtful members of Calgary's professional arts community who join with us in creating this cherished annual event.

Whether through delighting us with music, creating participatory art installations, or inspiring us through poetry and stories, they provide a beautiful sanctuary for remembrance and reflection.

We gratefully acknowledge each of the visual artists, musicians, performers, dancers, poets and installation artists who have contributed their time and talents to Equinox Vigil.

Thanks also to the production team and the many volunteers whose dedicated efforts in the days, weeks and months leading up to the Equinox Vigil made this beautiful event possible.

### **Sharon Stevens**

*Founder,*

*Equinox Vigil in Calgary's historic Union Cemetery*



Photo Peter Moller



## PRODUCTION

Jodie Stevens • Lizzie McGovern • Stewart Stevens  
 Talia Potter • Victoria Sanchez • Katie Kimber  
 Meagan Boisvert • Amy Ferris • Yvonne Kustec  
 Colwyn Paddon • Krista Marsden • Marcie Brown  
 Peggy Gallagher • Susan Thorpe

## ARTISTS & PERFORMERS

Michelena Bamford • Nancy Jo Cullen • Jeff Chan  
 Jessie Fraser • Lisa Hodgkinson • Keith Murray  
 Harry Sanders • Shannon MacKinnon • Kris Demeanor  
 Rosanna Terracciano • Kyrsten Blair

## CHOIRS & MUSCIANS

Chris Neville – *Music Director* • Mark Limacher  
 Carsten Rubelin • Andre Wickenheiser  
 Bridge to Peace Threshold Choir  
 Calgary Renaissance Singers & Players

## LIGHTING & TECH

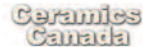
Kathryn Smith • Alexandria Inkster • Joe Kelly  
 Julian Zwack • Jessica Anger

## MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

Johanna Schwartz • Vicki Chau • Kelsey Fraser  
 Sandra Vida • Nicola Waugh

## PHOTOGRAPHY & DOCUMENTATION

Brian Jensen • Miriam Johnston • Aran Wilkinson-Blanc  
 Audrey Burch • Peter Moller • Lindsay Sorell



**WRITER:** Lindsay Sorell is an artist and writer in Calgary. She is the Calgary correspondent for *Akimbo* and the editor of *Luma Quarterly*. [lindsaysorell.com](http://lindsaysorell.com)



equinox  
vigil

Photo Sharon Stevens