



VIRTUAL GALLERY

37907 Second Avenue, Squamish, BC
<https://squamishlibrary.ca/foyer-gallery/>



June 29 – August 10

THOMASINA PIDGEON

*‘Changing Squamish
Part 1: For Sale’*

photography



THOMASINA PIDGEON



Title: Last Standing

Description: Feature photograph

Price: not for sale!

Q & A with THOMASINA PIDGEON, 'Changing Squamish, Part One: For Sale' -- photography

Q: Describe this exhibit? What was your creative stimulation for this particular series?

A: This exhibit "For Sale," is part of a larger project titled "Changing Squamish" which is an ongoing photography documentation of the gentrification and related changes that Skwxwú7mesh has and is undergoing. I moved to Squamish in 2000 and like many at the time, I did not anticipate the sheer size of what lay ahead of us. At a rate faster than anyone expected, Squamish morphed from a quiet, affordable town, to one of the most expensive places in Canada and a paradise for developers and investors. The capital forces plummeting through resulted in complex social, political, economic and environmental side effects that were felt throughout the community and the land. While I originally set out to document the uniqueness of Squamish which attracted so many in the first place, such as the unmanicured sense of adventure coupled with affordability, I realized that that essence was quickly being replaced with what political scientist, James Scott, describes as "high modernist ideology," the homogeneous monoculture which is replicating itself across North America. Increasingly, the mentality "out with the old, in with the new " have become common among politicians, developers, and some community members who saw development as an opportunity for individual wealth and profit. I realized time was not on my side and the pull to pick up my camera intensified as I saw the landscape and views subject to commodification and homogeneous sterilization all in the name of real estate and profit.

Q: What is most important to you in your art?

A: Art is a powerful tool to share the beauty and fragility of the world in which we live and to bring awareness to the difficult political, economic, social and environmental issues of our time. It is important to me that I stay true to myself, whether it is photographing complex issues, like this current project, or the simplicity and beauty that I appreciate in life. A diverse and unfiltered world has character, culture and soul which provides meaning and connection. Too often we lose sight of what is important in life and what exactly "The Good Life" is. Values can get pushed to the side out of pressure or perhaps for more lucrative adventures. In the process of gentrification, community is displaced and paradise is paved. Photography is simply another way to try and get people to pay attention to the forces working in and around us. In this particular project, I aim to shine a light on how these development changes seriously impact the land and the people living in and around Squamish. For alternative ways, I consider questions like, what could happen if we move from the current profit-driven,

growth-dependent economy to giving up some so the future can have more? What happens when sacred views are protected rather than commodified? How do ideas such as a Just Transition, reconciliation and revitalization fully and honestly fit into this equation?

Q: What does your work aim to say? Does your work comment on current social or political issues?

A: As a student of political science, I am deeply interested in the social, political and economic world so it is difficult for me to not see politics and economics in virtually everything, including with the camera. This series hopes to inspire questions about the gentrification process and challenge the definition of "progress" and sustainability. For example, what are the short and long-term implications for both people and the environment when a town changes so quickly and significantly? What happens when green spaces and picturesque views are commodified and environmental capacities are continually pushed at the hands of developers whilst we are in a climate emergency? What are the implications of consumption-orientated environments and lifestyles which are marketed by many developers? Critically engaging the viewers by thinking about who is gaining from this development and who is absent or lost. What essence of Squamish is fundamentally being shifted by this development and what might be gained? By looking past the economic benefits of so-called growth, I hope to challenge our own understanding of progress, so-called sustainability and inspire a more just path forward for both people and the environment, local and global. This is possible but the people need to act and the government must be willing to change.

Q: Who are you hoping to engage with your art?

A: I am hoping to engage everyone - citizens of Squamish young and old; politicians, developers, business owners, visitors and passer byers. We all play a crucial part in shaping our world, including influencing government decisions. Complacency and silence is consent. Benjamin Constant, a political thinker who founded the principles of a liberal democracy said: "a society must always remain vigilant to the political forces around it. The moment it stops paying attention, the power shifts from the people to the few elites." Those who we give our power have shaped society and the economic system in such a way that many people feel stuck, powerless, and/or don't have time to be involved because they are working so hard to put food on the table while paying exorbitant rent or mortgage prices. This is a serious problem that needs real sustainable solutions. Expansion does not fix this. In fact, we are continually expanding, yet prices keep going up. In the process, the collective limits of the environment are pushed further. The motto "system change not climate change" acknowledges the fact that the same system that got us here will not save us. We must question the idea that unconscious growth is the solution. This means acknowledging that the government is too reliant on market-rate housing developers to grow their tax base and that so-called "green technologies" and technological advancements are mere reproductions of the same broken system and do not address the root cause of the problems we face. This means reorganizing economic activity from extraction and domination toward cooperation, caring, equity and community. This is being done elsewhere through people-led movements. We are not stuck. At the very least, we must reevaluate our needs and consider this finite and fragile planet on which we live.

Q: Who are your biggest influences?

A: I admire the work of Dorothea Lange, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Burtynsky, Banksy, the written word of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Fyodor Dostoevsky. These artists have a way of stirring up complicated emotions which many turn a blind eye to. Shining a light on difficult situations is a way of opening up dialogue and can

lead to an exploration into better ways. They inspire people to really think critically and question the world around them, to think outside the box. For example, some of my photos in this series "For Sale," document the discourse used by developers whose marketing aims to target a very specific audience and create a very specific environment. How does the fish-bait discourse lure in support of "sustainability," "mutually beneficial" and "contemporary" shape, not only support for such projects, but also human behavior? What role does power, race, gender and representation have in these spaces? In the end, who will be excluded and displaced from said environments? What inequalities will be reinforced? How does it change our connection to place?

For more information contact:

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<https://thomasinapidgeon.com/category/changing-squamish/>