

Fern Helfand: Timber, Lumber, Wood, Home

GALLERY 2 – GRAND FORKS ART GALLERY, Grand Forks BC - To Aug 7



Fern Helfand, *Timber, Lumber, Wood, Home #1*, 2020,
inkjet print on archival Epson cold-press fibre exhibition paper

by Michael Turner

Fern Helfand is an under-recognized artist whose photographs display technical mastery and compositional artistry. Recently retired from UBC Okanagan's Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies after a decades-long teaching career, Helfand has resumed a full-time studio practice. Her work includes darkroom experiments in abstraction in addition to the large-scale pictures she is known for. The best of these remind us of our contradictory relationship with the natural environment and a resource economy that allows us the means to enjoy it.

For *Timber, Lumber, Wood, Home*, Helfand projects onto the opposing wall of the Reid Gallery entrance a video of a skyscape shot in the Boundary region, east of the lower Okanagan Valley. This sped-up image of clouds quickly forming and dissipating above a familiar mountain range acts as a clock, if not a calendar, that allows for the registration of time amidst space. The exhibition's second cardinal axis features a massive 3-D panorama of a log pile readied for transport opposite a picture series of both the local Interfor sawmill and the Son Ranch.

As the exhibition title suggests, viewers can expect to see Wood (the material basis of a tree) pass through its various stages of refinement – to Lumber (processed wood) from Timber (unprocessed wood) – before leaving the area in which it is sourced (Home). That these stages are not presented in a linear or reverse-linear fashion, but one that begins in the middle and works outwards to its beginning (Timber) and end (Home), is an artful gesture; the exhibition layout situates the viewer in the midst of a commercial production cycle with, presiding over it all, Nature herself.

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