

ART

Land|Slide Possible Futures Explores a Suburb in Flux

An ambitious art exhibition at the Markham Museum reimagines the past and the potential of suburban landscapes.

BY ELENI DEACON



Duke and Battersby's Always Popular; Never Cool.

Markham Museum (9350 Markham Road)
Saturday, September 21–Monday, October 14

FREE

If you look out the window while riding the bus from downtown to Markham, you'll notice the urban landscape gradually unfolding into the suburban: tight-knit city streets loosen into faster multi-lane roads, box stores assemble in beige-brick clusters, and everywhere new structures are being outstripped by even newer buildings at various stages of completion.

Markham just upgraded itself from town to city in July 2012, and is one of the fastest-growing and most diverse municipalities in the country. And while the place may not inspire many enthusiastic road-trips from downtowners, **Land|Slide Possible Futures**, a new, large-scale public-art exhibition, invites visitors to explore Markham's history, its quickly changing present, and its potential evolution—while also challenging glib notions surrounding the suburbs themselves.

Land|Slide Possible Futures, which opened on September 20, engaged over thirty artists to create site-specific installations at the [Markham Museum](#), a twenty-five-acre pioneer village housing thirty centuries-old structures. The project is led and curated by York University professor Janine Marchessault, who previously co-curated *The Leona Drive Project*, as well as *Museum for the End of the World* at last year's Nuit Blanche. For this latest exhibition, artists explore issues of sustainability and community using everything from sculpture and gardens to film projections and iPad apps. The result is a thought-provoking and immersive collaboration that can be viewed in the day or night.



Sean Martindale, Lisa Myers, and Yvan MacKinnon's *All Purpose*.

The exhibit's most powerful installations play off the historic space to offer insight into our lives today. Among the most disturbing is [Duke and Battersby](#)'s *Always Popular; Never Cool*, a life-sized diorama that

stages a present-day teenage sexual assault in a nineteenth-century log cabin. Mannequins dressed in both contemporary and old-fashioned clothing are frozen mid-party. While a flip cup game is paused in the wooden kitchen, over on the bed a young girl lies face down while a peer takes her photo on his phone. Within the pre-industrial surroundings, the scene offers an unsettling reminder of the timelessness of certain aspects of rape culture.

Another clever redecoration is Sean Martindale, Lisa Myers, and Yvan MacKinnon's *All Purpose*, which transforms the inside of an old carriage house into a gleaming white gallery space that doubles as a "concept café," serving only white foods. The artists say that the blank walls are meant to "meet the generic expectations for mass 'high art' consumption," but they also challenge anyone who might scoff at the suburbs—the predictable frosty decor emphasizes that there are things about the creative industries that are just as cookie-cutter as a row of townhouses. Meanwhile, just down the road, artist Jennie Suddick has redecorated a pioneer bedroom to look identical to her own teenage bedroom in Markham, suggesting that a new—and no less valid—history is being made in the suburbs today.

The outdoor space is also filled with ambitious installations: [IAIN BAXTER&](#) has created a walkable grass maze, Glynis Logue grew a river of sunflowers that winds through the whole village, and Dutch artist [Frank Havermans](#) transformed an old barn with an expansive sculpture made from pulleys and wheels. While the site makes for a pleasant daytime visit, the show is likely best viewed at night, when the outdoor video projections are running and the buildings can be experienced to maximum eerie effect.

Land|Slide Possible Futures continues until October 14, with artist talks, panels, tours, and film screenings throughout the next few weeks. The museum can quite easily be accessed by GO Transit, but for the bike-everywheres who break into a sweat at the thought of clinking a token in the jar, there are free buses leaving from (and returning to) the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, near Queen Street West and Shaw Street, every Saturday afternoon and evening. While a visit requires some commitment and pre-planning, the exhibit would make a worthy Nuit Blanche alternative for those who enjoy the installations but hate elbowing through the crowds. This is the suburbs, after all; there's lots of space.

Photos courtesy of Land|Slide Possible Futures.