

Scroll stories of Sean Karemaker a feast for the senses

Seymour Art Gallery hosting graphic novel exhibit

[Ben Bengtson](#) / North Shore News

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Sean Karemaker will give a talk on his new exhibit at the Seymour Art Gallery on Saturday, Feb. 2 at 2 p.m. He will also host a workshop on Feb. 16 at 2 p.m.

Photo MIKE WAKEFIELD, NORTH SHORE NEWS

Candy Bar, Electric Lights: The Scroll Stories of Sean Karemaker, Seymour Art Gallery, until Feb. 23. [Artist Talk, Saturday, Feb. 2, 2 p.m. Interactive Virtual Reality Workshop, Saturday Feb. 16, 2 p.m.](#)

It can be difficult to believe, but our parents lived lives long before us.

Writer and artist Sean Karemaker has always been aware of this, when as a kid the stories his mother would tell him about her time spent in an orphanage while growing up in Denmark left a unique impression.

“My mom’s childhood seemed like a whole world away from my own experiences,” Karemaker, who grew up in Crofton, B.C., and now lives in Vancouver, tells the North Shore News. “She didn’t talk about it all that much, and I knew about it but I didn’t have a lot of detail or a clear picture about what her childhood was like, and I just feel like these types of stories are things that get lost pretty quickly unless they’re recorded.”

Karemaker’s latest graphic novel, *Feast of Fields*, attempts to chronicle those stories using bold black and white colours, boxes of text that appear like memories cast upon a surface, and an open, flowing narrative.

The graphic novel oscillates between the story of Karemaker’s mother, Hanne Nim Karemaker, and her time spent at an orphanage in Denmark, along with her brothers, while her own mother was sick in hospital, and more autobiographical sections that involve Sean reckoning with his past growing up in Crofton while maintaining an interest in his mother’s childhood.

“I wanted to talk with her about experiences and make some representation of those experiences that would celebrate her memories and help her process that information in the same way that I wanted to understand and process where she comes from,” says Karemaker.

Feast of Fields examines the experience of living at an orphanage, but it’s by no means a macabre tale involving sinister headmasters or ghoulish Victorian architecture. Like most real life experiences, Karemaker’s narrative depicts his mother’s time there as “a mixed bag,” where there were moments of pain brought on by being separated from family and entering a new strange place, and there were moments of fondness shared among new friends, caring nuns and the general wonderment of childhood.

“One thing I was trying to do with the book is make it so that it’s not so one dimensional, that it shows that there were people who cared, she met friends there, and that it was a positive thing in some ways,” he says

More than five years into a full-time artistic career, Karemaker has entered a stride that's transcending a single dimension as well. Until Feb. 23, visitors to Seymour Art Gallery can take in Candy Bar, Electric Lights: The Scroll Stories of Sean Karemaker, a multi-faceted exhibition featuring a set of original drawings from Feast of Fields presented over 14 six-foot black-and-white canvasses encircling the gallery.

"These drawings have a different kind of value when you see them in person at the original scale. They have a whole different kind of read," says Karemaker.

Taking things a step further, there's also a virtual reality headset on location for guests to step into as a way to immerse themselves in a 360-degree environment and explore the scenery of the world Karemaker has created in a deeper manner.

"Working in this format kind of led me fairly easily towards starting to think about how this type of storytelling could apply to virtual reality," he says.

On the exhibition itself, Karemaker notes it's "definitely different than anything else that I've seen around," before adding his hope that some visitors might be encouraged to delve deeper into the world of graphic novels after experiencing his work.

"The types of comics that I'm drawing weren't really on my radar when I was a kid. There weren't any comic book stores that featured the kind of work that I do where I lived," he says, noting he has attracted to the rich visual storytelling of comics when he was kid, but it wasn't until he was older when he realized the medium could be used to express other more personal ideas as well.

After a decade spent in the video game design industry in Vancouver, Karemaker dove into an art career. His mother's story kept calling to him. After putting out Feast of Fields, CBC Books listed it among its top 16 Canadian comics for 2018.

"If I didn't decide to do it now than it's quite possible that I would never do it," he says. "I figured if I use these books as a way for me to learn how to write and work graphic novels, then at the very least they'll be almost like a photo album for me and my family and the people I care about."

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