

# PHOTO, MEDIA AND DIGITAL ART

Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art  
Suite 124, Box 124  
401 Richmond Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 3A8  
T 416.591.0357 F 416.591.0358  
info@prefix.ca www.prefix.ca  
Photo Magazine. Visual, Audio and Surround Art Galleries.  
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## PREFIX.

For Immediate Release (March 24, 2014)

### STEVE PAYNE'S NEW EXHIBITION CAPTURES A VANISHING ARCHITECTURAL FORM

(Toronto) – To mark the tenth anniversary of the grand opening of **Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art's** current facility, we are pleased to present a solo exhibition by photographer **Steve Payne**, the first living artist to have been exhibited at Prefix. Curated by Scott McLeod and entitled *False Fronts*, the exhibition features a new series of photographs that documents the western-style façades of mercantile buildings throughout Newfoundland. The exhibition is accompanied by an essay by curator and novelist **Bruce Johnson**, published in *Prefix Photo 29*, and is presented as a primary exhibition of the **Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival**.

An **opening reception**, in conjunction with the release party for *Prefix Photo 29*, will be held on **Thursday, May 8 from 7 to 10 PM** at **Prefix**, located at 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 124, Toronto. The artist and curator will be present. Prefix is open from Wednesday to Saturday, 12 to 5 PM, and admission is free. The gallery will also be open on **Sunday, May 25 from 12 to 5 PM** for **Doors Open Toronto**. The artist will be present. The exhibition continues until **July 26, 2014**.

Steve Payne consistently engages with the idiosyncrasies of vernacular architecture, particularly that of his native Newfoundland. He is keenly aware that often, with the evolution of a people and a culture, comes significant change and that, with this change, architectural forms that were previously valued fall into danger of disappearing. His notable earlier works include *Last Stands*, completed in 1988, which documents the small, independent taxi stands that once littered downtown St. John's and were ultimately supplanted by larger corporations, and *Motels*, completed in 2006, which documents the fading motor inns of Toronto's suburban lakeshore that were subsequently demolished to make way for high-rise condominium developments.

*False Fronts* is Payne's most ambitious work to date, a series that took several years and countless treks across Newfoundland to complete. As written by Bruce Johnson: "Historically, in Western Canada and the United States, wooden false fronts were ornamental structures erected as a building's public face in order to make hastily built boom towns appear more impressive. They created the illusion of greater size, and therefore importance, mimicking buildings of stone or brick common in more established cities. Symbolizing pioneering frontier towns, the false front is synonymous with the artificial display of wealth and the rapid expansion of early mining, railroad and forestry communities. It is unclear how this architectural affectation found its way to Newfoundland, where it was adopted by commercial enterprises ranging from garages and warehouses to small dry-goods stores. It is plausible that the association of early pioneer architecture from the West with stability, prosperity and permanence simply migrated east and took root in a place with a distinctly different history and culture. Or perhaps it is a reflection of the pop-culture form of western movies, introduced by the American military presence on the island in the 1940s and 1950s. Divorced from their earlier function of illusion, these eastern facades nonetheless served as a type of visual shorthand that branded the buildings to which they were attached as places of commerce."

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Certainly, the translation from one cultural context to another has yielded buildings of a distinctly different character, in a place better known for its rural saltboxes and fishing sheds. The hand-painted signage, the vivid colours, and the mish-mash of symmetry and asymmetry – all attest to the idiosyncrasies of the artisans who designed and constructed these buildings. That their facades often abut the edge of the road while their rears, typically obscured from view, often teeter over the water could be interpreted as a manifestation of the identity of a people who must put a brave face on a hard and precarious existence. Payne has sought out, catalogued and presented this widespread cultural phenomenon with exceptional artistry. As with his prior works, he has done so with acute historical sensitivity, just on the eve of this phenomenon's disappearance.

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### **About the Artist**

**Steve Payne** was born in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, in 1953. He studied at Memorial University in St. John's and Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson University) in Toronto. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries, including Victoria Manor Gallery (Harbour Grace, NL), Christina Parker Gallery (St. John's), Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art (Toronto), York Quay Gallery (Toronto), and, most recently, the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery (St. John's). In 2008, he had a solo exhibition at the Fringe Gallery in Hong Kong. His work is held in numerous private and public collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank, the City of Toronto Archives and the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery. He currently divides his time between Toronto and Harbour Grace, Newfoundland.

### **About the Curator**

**Scott McLeod** is a writer, curator and arts administrator. His work focuses on contemporary practices, with a specialization in photographic, media and digital art. Since 2000, he has been the director and curator of Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, where he also serves as the editor and publisher of *Prefix Photo* magazine.

### **About Prefix**

**Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art** is a public art gallery and arts publishing house based in Toronto. A registered charitable organization, Prefix fosters the appreciation and understanding of contemporary photographic, media and digital arts through exhibitions, publications, public programmes and related activities.

### **Acknowledgements**

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For more information, print-ready images or to schedule an interview with the artist or curator, please contact:

Alysha Rajkumar  
Operations Manager  
T 416-591-0357  
F 416-591-0358  
E info@prefix.ca  
www.prefix.ca

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