

knock knock... is an exhibition of recent work by Jeremy Pavka and Sean Procyk in which they explore states of fear, ambivalence, and apathy as they are enacted and represented in relation to the land. The cornerstone of this exhibition, *Big Whoop*, depicts man and myth outdoing one another in an – albeit sluggish – round of tag. Their prosaic one-upmanship evokes the slow play of a long con. Trading blow for blow with hunter-orange spray paint, they mark trees, a barn, pizza boxes, and one another. In the growing suspense and escalating mischief, it seems the colour orange may be the only winner. In their game, orange signals what is to be extracted or demolished; orange is a warning sign and a target. The sound of distant automatic gunfire overlays the metallic drone of one totally badass power chord – but is it a gun? Is it a drum? Could it be knocking? To knock on wood is to enact a superstitious ritual of warding off the evil eye, but is also said to be the preferred method of communicating with Bigfoot.

For Pavka and Procyk, the attitudes, folklore, and demographics that surround Bigfoot mythology are useful tools for understanding the motives and emotions driving settler-colonial discourse, and processes that unsettle it. The majority of contemporary encounters with Bigfoot are reported by hunters or people working in extractive industries. In other words: those who take directly from the land. In most cases, such individuals had an uncanny experience in nature and the resultant effect was fear— fear of the unknown, of vulnerability, or of their presence on the land being illegitimate. More recently, historians have argued that fear was the underlying emotion driving colonial expansion in North America¹, and it is clear that fear continues to influence current sociopolitical developments on the continent. Fake news, witch hunts, and sensational rumors are tactics for coping with fear, as they establish scapegoats, diverting attention from other more contentious issues. It's classic misdirection. When used by those in power it maintains status quo; when used on stage it's a way of sneaking something past the audience. For Pavka and Procyk, the use of humor, farce, and absurdity allow them to speak to sensitive issues regarding land and settler-colonialism, while also acknowledging their own fallible positions as artists.

Big Whoop presents two naïve and clumsy white dudes navigating land, leisure, and destruction through their lackadaisical relationship with Bigfoot. The doltish, yet likably earnest characters are hyperbolic versions of the artists themselves, making their way through physical and aesthetic interventions in the environment. With self-effacing humour, Pavka and Procyk navigate their role as artists who are deeply invested in the land. Their willingness to self-deprecate and make themselves vulnerable, is their way of sincerely owning the privilege they possess as a result of exploitative, and devastating histories of colonial expansion in Canada. This heightened ambivalence is echoed throughout *Big Whoop*, in their use of juxtaposition, musical dissonance, and the adversarial relationships between characters on screen.

In *Big Whoop*, Pavka and Procyk subtly point to artifice, with visible microphones, a manicured lawn, and brief appearances from the artists themselves. These formal gestures speak to the relationship between filmmaking and veracity, a subject of constant debate within the realm of Bigfoot footage. On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the infamous Patterson-Gimlin film, Pavka and Procyk seize a timely moment to investigate the role of footage as a tool of verification, debunking, or conviction.²

In the recounting of close encounters with Bigfoot, there are hundreds of stories with striking similarities – belief is tempting. After all, consistent testimonies in a court of law would be taken as credible evidence of an event. Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on who is testifying, who is on trial, and what structure, hierarchies, or interests are at stake. It depends on whose fear is portrayed, and whose power. How does the land speak for itself? What constitutes proof or believability? How does one deal with questions that don't have answers? Who cares? What's the big whoop? Throughout their work Jeremy Pavka and Sean Procyk probe difficult questions about the state of the land and their relationship to it – they trudge through the wearisome ambivalence that often leads to paralyzing apathy. Their intension is to engage with serious issues, while never taking themselves too seriously.

¹ Lauric Henneton and L. H. Roper, ed., *Fear and the Shaping of Early American Societies* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016)

² The Patterson-Gimlin film, shot in Northern California in 1967, depicts an unidentified bipedal subject who strolls through the frame and casually looks toward the camera. Many have alleged that this figure is a female Bigfoot, informally known as Patty.