

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Club life

Photographer explores 'All the Clubs from Holyrood to Brigus'

By JOAN SULLIVAN

SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

Photographer Scott Walden approaches his work with a camera eye and a philosophic mind. Academically trained, his accomplished pieces have been included in Prefix Photo and Maclean's magazines. Walden is also a writer, and often combines imagery and text. He spends about half his time in Newfoundland, where he is particularly engaged with post-Confederation industry and economics.

This exhibition is organized into series, the subjects geographically arranged and usually clearly identifiable.

"All The Clubs From Holyrood to Brigus" are of clubs — definitely clubs — not ersatz English pubs or fern bars but community-based communal gathering spots done up with a minimal but

characteristic decor. Outside, they are sheathed in white clapboard or vinyl siding. The windows are the small slider ones, or non-existent. Inside, handwritten notices are thumbtacked to bulletin boards, and Armistice poppies peg old black-and-white photos of veterans and warships to their cork sheets.

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Sometimes, the walls are wood panelled, and sometimes half-painted that institutional green that coloured every hallway of every Catholic school in Newfoundland during the 1970s, and half wainscoting.

These 24 pieces are all modern colour photographs, but they have a Polaroid sensibility in their frankness and familiarity, as if they are illuminated with a chrome fluorescent nostalgia. The subjects are shown as casual, unposed, and the scenes are sometimes unpeopled.

As informal and found as these photographs



are (or seem) they are also the symbols and signposts of a distinct place and culture. (There are even a couple of reoccurring characters.)

Most of the compositions could be called either tableaux or still lifes. In one scene, a group of smokers have gathered outside a club. It's a summer day and a couple of the men are carrying on, horseplaying. Another shows an empty dartboard and the small black chalkboard for keeping score, the most recent numbers erased. Another is of a wooden chair and small round table — the exact same wooden chair and small round table as seen in virtually every Newfoundland club. Another shows two young women at a pool table, the downcast light making them both indandescent and sculptural.

In one, a fridge door is decked with a marked-up \$5 bill, a series of grainy newspaper photographs, a Betty Boop cartoon figure sticker, and a "Drink Till She's Cute" magnet, all gathered in a

random, discrete, flotsam assemblage.

Others illustrate exterior walls and parking lots with lit signs adorned with black lettering, or interiors of a bar countertop with taped-up, pastel bristle-board rectangles advertising specials, and a plastic Maple Leaf flag overhanging the liquor bottles, or a payphone set beside one of those sheets with tear-away hand-printed phone numbers. Some are swirls of blurred motion, like a dart throw, or a group of dancers swinging their partner.

These photographs, compelling and skillfully balanced and rendered, are in essence fundamentally documents, witnesses to a particular kind of place and the time of that place with its esthetics, fashions, rituals, sunglasses, sneakers and the odd skeet.

"All The Clubs From Holyrood to Brigus" opened Thursday at the Christina Parker Gallery and continues until Aug. 18.



Three images from photographer Scott Walden's exhibition "All the Clubs from Holyrood to Brigus." — Submitted photos



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