

*The Tin Man Was a Dreamer: Allegories, Poetics and Performances of Power* had its origins in an idea Assistant Curator Mandy Ginson proposed in the summer of 2019 for an exhibition of work from the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection that would respond subtly to the American presidential election campaign, which will take place during the run of the exhibition. Early on in the planning process it was determined that the exhibition would provide the most engaging experience for the viewer and best represent the scope of the collection if it included work in a variety of media—painting, drawing, photography, video and sculpture—and covered a broad span of time. After considering hundreds of artworks, it also became clear that an exhibition structured thematically, rather than chronologically, would allow for a deeper consideration of the ways in which different modes of power are constructed, practiced and represented. The majority of the eighty-seven works by forty-three artists selected for the exhibition are from the Gallery's permanent collection; these have been supplemented with loans of work by Diyan Achjadi, Ho Tam, Althea Thauberger, Vincent Trasov and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun.

The title of the exhibition refers to the tin woodsman, a figure that first appeared in European folk tales centuries ago and was regularly featured in American political cartoons and newspaper ads during the late nineteenth century. The tin woodsman was the basis for the character of the Tin Man in L. Frank Baum's *Land of Oz* novels and the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, in which the Tin Man earnestly sets out in search of a heart only to discover he already possesses the power of empathy. The Tin Man is a contradictory motif. While the axe-wielding lumberjack is a clichéd embodiment of the self-sufficient male who exercises dominion over nature, he becomes helplessly immobile when his joints rust and seize up after getting wet in the rain and he is forced to rely on the assistance of others to continue on his journey. Similarly, a dreamer can be someone who either imagines a brighter future or is hopelessly out of touch with the circumstances they inhabit. This multi-faceted character situated the Tin Man as an evocative emblem for the exhibition.

– Grant Arnold, March 2020