

**Emily Neufeld**  
***Before Demolition***

Emily Neufeld pays tribute to the single detached dwelling and its shifting status in her exhibition *Before Demolition*. Her focus on the home draws from her experience growing up with a father who worked as a building contractor and is grounded in her awareness of Vancouver's housing crisis marking a divide between the haves and the have-nots. She explains:

Most people can no longer afford detached homes, and because of that many houses are being sold and demolished to make room for further densification. Rising housing costs are displacing people, and those who are able to stay suffer under large mortgages and crippling property taxes. [...] My goal is to bring a moment of pause and reflection to the rapidly-changing housing landscape around the lower mainland.

The result of three years of research, Neufeld's first solo exhibition in Vancouver is characterized by her hands-on, site-specific approach. Scouting houses set for demolition, Neufeld obtained permission to enter these sites during the brief window between the departure of the inhabitants and the arrival of the wrecking ball.

Once inside these domiciles slated to be torn down and rebuilt into townhouses, condos, or larger homes, Neufeld searched for the traces of humanity within these "empty" houses—all the subtle effects that touched her: ghostly imprints of pictures removed from the walls, worn-out areas on carpets, a view of the lawn from the window above a kitchen sink, a cranny of cobwebs. The details she found moving share parallels with Roland Barthes' notion of a photograph's potential "punctum," which he outlines in *Camera Lucida* as "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." These punctum-like elements "disrupting" the house's architecture led Neufeld to imagine those who had once lived there, and even to see the houses as people, each with their own special temperaments. And indeed, Neufeld describes her time spent in these houses as performing "funeral rites."

These rites included Neufeld cutting away carpet to reveal hardwood floors, slicing into walls in order to create new sightlines between rooms, moving sections of lawn indoors. Neufeld photographed these short-lived *in situ* interventions. Drenched in light streaming through uncovered windows, these brief transformations suggest a fleeting optimism before their inevitable destruction. A selection from this photographic series will be displayed life-size at BAF, intimately enveloping the viewer. Constructing an environment that requires gallery visitors to walk not only through but *on* the exhibition, Neufeld will cover BAF's floors with old wood and packed dirt.

For *Before Demolition*, Neufeld also created a set of sculptures from the devalued materials gleaned from these houses. A furnace duct, old curtains, discarded ferns, light fixtures, insulation, plywood, and concrete became the building blocks of free-standing structures—some awkward and fragile, while others are strong and squat—that roughly allude to the human body, evoking the equivalencies Neufeld makes between people and their homes. Mixing architecture and sculpture with an almost archeological sensibility, *Before Demolition* hints at the many narratives that can be found within domestic lodgings. As she writes, "Homes embody layers of history: memories, stories of lives lived in space, rooms full of light and sound, stratified like the soil they are embedded in."