

Meet Pixie Cram, the 2017 Diefenbunker Museum artist-in-residence

By [Danuta Sierhuis](#) on February 22, 2017



If you have ever been to the [Diefenbunker Museum](#) in Carp, Ontario, a National Historic Site and Canada's museum dedicated to the Cold War, you know that it is a unique and special space – a space that also has endless possibilities for artistic exploration and interpretation.



Photo by Pixie Cram. Courtesy of the Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum.

Since 2014, alongside their regular museum programming, the Diefenbunker has offered local artists the opportunity to conduct a site-specific project through their [Artist-in-Residence](#) program. The Diefenbunker's Curatorial Manager, Megan Lafrenière, explained that the idea for the program began with an invitation to artist [Gail Bourgeois](#) to expand on her work exploring Cold War themes through a residency opportunity, which culminated in an exhibition, *To warn other Canadians* (April 26 to September 28, 2014).

"The Diefenbunker is a very visual and experiential place, and having artists develop site-specific works related to the museum is so special and exciting for us and our visitors," says Lafrenière.

This year, the selected Artist-in-Residence is Hull-based filmmaker, [Pixie Cram](#), whose experimental films and videos have dealt with themes such as the relationship between nature and technology, the aesthetics of urban architecture, and dystopian fictions.

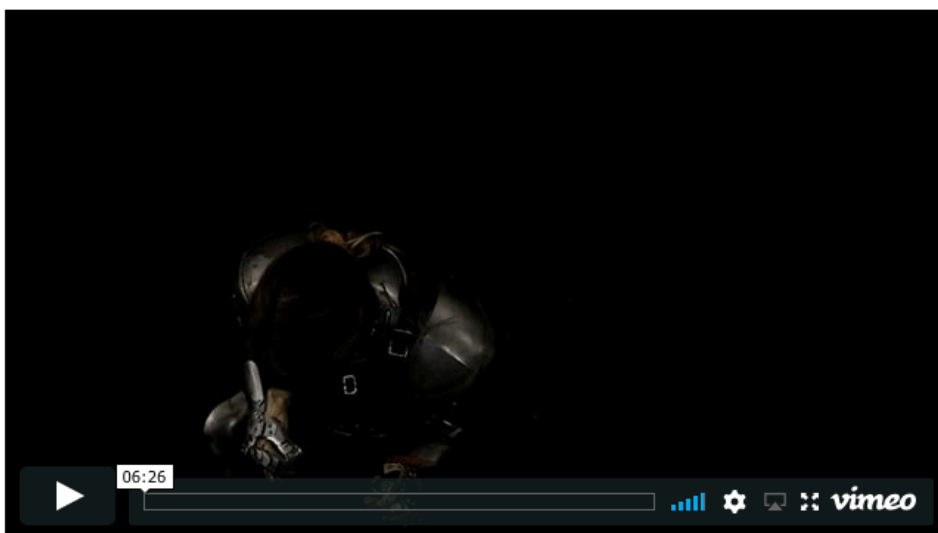


Pixie Cram at the Diefenbunker Museum. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Cram's project at the museum, a stop motion animation film, will explore the objects, furniture, and spaces found in the museum. Although the project is still in the early stages with Cram currently conducting extensive research into the museum's archives, it sounds like it will be an eerie investigation of the threat/possibility of nuclear attack. Especially given that there will be no visible human presence within the film.

“ *I have a very deep concern regarding nuclear war.* ”

Cram's other projects and past works, including *Pragmatopia* (currently in post-production), *The Factory of Light* (30 min., 2007) and *Joan* (6.5 min, 2014) have featured themes tied to war. According to Lafrenière, Cram's film *Joan*, a short film about Joan of Arc, solidified the selection committee's decision to offer her the residency, "the way she presented this particular story made it made it clear what she could do here."



[Joan / Jeanne from Pixie Cram on Vimeo.](#)

Lafrenière says, “Pixie captured a certain tone in her proposal. She had such a clear idea of not having a human presence in her project, presenting the Diefenbunker as an eerie kind of place – some people already find the space a bit unsettling since it was built to house a select group in the event of a nuclear attack on Canada.”

“I have a very deep concern regarding nuclear war. I saw a film made by the National Film Board of Canada called, *If you love this planet* (1982), it was a lecture by Dr. Helen Caldicott explaining the impact of nuclear war in Japan... I was maybe 10 or 11 years old when I saw it, and it had a deep impact on me,” Cram says. “The whole period of the Cold War was under threat of nuclear attack, and everyone was rushing to develop these safety strategies, like building bunkers – but actually, if there was an attack, there would be no time to get to safety.”

With this in mind, Cram’s plan for her residency project takes on an even more eerie, haunting, and an even ominous tone. The idea that her film will solely be oriented towards the spaces and object found within the Diefenbunker already has me wondering: Where are the people? And what happened to them?

I am excited to see it when it will be screened at the museum in June 2017.

To stay up-to-date with Pixie Cram’s project and associated events at The Diefenbunker (there was mention of an artist talk and a workshop on stop motion animation) please see the museum’s website: www.diefenbunker.ca.

Ottawa artist captures eerie Cold War mood with stop-motion film

As the Diefenbunker's artist in residence, Pixie Cram had the run of the underground museum

By CBC's All in a Day, CBC News | Posted: Jul 23, 2017 8:00 AM ET | Last Updated: Jul 23, 2017 3:29 PM ET



Pixie Cram's stop-motion film, *Emergency Broadcast*, uses vintage items from the Diefenbunker to create an eerie picture of Cold War-era life. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

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Seven minutes, 5,000 frames and a lot of imagination.

That's what it took for Ottawa filmmaker Pixie Cram to transform the Diefunbunker Museum into a whimsical representation of life in Cold War-era Canada in her new short film, *Emergency Broadcast*.

As the museum's artist in residence, Cram was given free rein of the bunker, which was built as an escape for government and military leaders in the event that Canada came under nuclear attack.

"I thought I was going to make a film that was about the Diefenbunker and, really, the bureaucracy going on," Cram told Alan Neal on CBC's *All in a Day*.

"It became about more than just the bunker."

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Film required 'obsessive perfectionist'

The stop-motion film has an eerie quality to it, with each frame meticulously staged to reveal objects including a typewriter, a uniform and other vintage equipment moving fluidly about the room.

The filmmaking process, says Cram, was challenging and required "an obsessive perfectionist element."

"Sometimes things will move," she described. "We'll accidentally move the object or the camera will get jostled and we'd have to kind of reset everything to not give away the illusion."



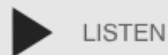
The film features a real emergency broadcast recorded — but never used — by the CBC. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

Wedded with archival audio from the 1972 Emergency Radio Broadcast recorded — but never used — by CBC, the resulting film will take viewers back in time, says Thomas Littlewood, the Diefenbunker's curator of learning.

"We're really pleased with the result," he said. "I think it really brings it to life. I think it allows, literally, the bunker to move the way it might have moved in an emergency."

The film premiered last week and is now available for viewing at the Diefenbunker Museum in Carp.

All in a Day
Pixie Cram is the artist in residence at the
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Resident artist creates animated film on Diefenbunker

NEWS Jul 18, 2017 by [Jake Davies](#) ✓ West Carleton Review



*Canadian Filmmaker Pixie Cram poses beside one of the starring 'characters' in her film *Emergency Broadcast* debuting at the Diefenbunker Thursday, July 20. - Jake Davies/Metroland*

On Thursday, July 20, the Diefenbunker will unveil a film about the Diefenbunker, in the Diefenbunker.

Canadian Filmmaker Pixie Cram is the Diefenbunker Museum Artist in Residence for 2017. Her work, *Emergency Broadcast*, is a seven-minute, stop-motion production filmed entirely within the Diefenbunker.

"I really wanted to explore the idea of what would happen in a fallout scenario," Cram told the West Carleton Review. "This project is a continuation of some of the themes I've worked on before. I wanted to do it with just the objects in the bunker. There's something eerie about objects moving on their own."

Cram's residency started in January with her pre-work which included research, selecting props and other pre-production work. She started filming in April with some assistance from fellow animator Tina Le Moine. In June, Cram began working on sound editing with the help of audio engineer Kevin Komaranski.

"I took audio clips from the U.S. Civil Defense and CBC Emergency Broadcast archives," Cram said. "In the event of the war, this is the actual audio that would have been used. Seventy per cent of the sound effects were created here with actual objects."

Cram, who lives in Centretown in Ottawa, was born near the end of the cold war era in the mid 1970s. Her work includes fiction, animation, documentary films and art installations.

"Grew up in Ottawa and had always been fascinated with this place," Cram said. "Being a filmmaker and visitor to the place, I saw the potential here. I always wanted to do a project here."

In fact, Cram had done some filming in the Diefenbunker before.

"I wanted to use the blast tunnel entrance for a fictional film I was working on," she said. "That scene was cut but I still wanted to work here and the residency was my entrance to it."

Cram says the museum staff made it easy for her to complete her task.

Cram says the museum staff made it easy for her to complete her task.



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“It was a delight to work here,” she said. “I can’t think of any other museum that would allow me to move objects around. Sometimes tours would come through and we would invite them in because we weren’t recording sound. It was fun.”

That’s not to say there weren’t challenges. There was no budget and obtaining rights to the CBC’s sound archives was difficult.

But Cram finished the project, is happy with the outcome and is set to debut the film tonight at Diefenbunker. The event starts at 7 p.m. where Cram will talk about her film and her career so far, accompanied with clips of some of her other work. Following the première of her film *Emergency Broadcast*, those in attendance will be able to ask Cram questions. Following première night, Cram’s film will be on display in The Allard Gallery at the Diefenbunker for the next three months.

by [Jake Davies](#)

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