

# THE FRONT

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KARL MATTSON

*Life Pod 001 (with horses)*, 2010. 2.75 metres x 3 metres x 3 metres.  
Salvaged materials from farmyards and industry scrapyards. The main chamber is made from an abandoned fuel tank. Collection of the artist, photo by Karl Mattson.

**F**OR OVER A DECADE, my creative pieces have gravitated towards my concerns with the relentless push of the oil and gas industry in northeastern British Columbia. Along with the angst of bearing witness to environmental degradation and risk to human health, I have always contended with a baseline struggle with my own existence.

During the process of dealing with certain aspects of the negative effects of industry activity unfolding around my family farm, I decided to take action through art. As a result, over the years, I have been creating a body of work to address these concerns. My first project on this subject was LIFE POD: “Life Pods; beautifully awkward objects made from found industrial and farm materials that are also survival chambers, equipped with oxygen tanks and communication devices” (*Border Crossings Magazine*, 2016).

Since 2010, several Life Pods have been created and exhibited nationwide. These sculptures are my creative response to the lack of proper emergency response planning, in the case of a disaster, as well as to certain aspects of the oil and gas in my area, specifically lethal sour gas leaks. “Shelter in Place” is part of the emergency plan farmers are provided in the case of an event. We are told to tape windows and doors if there is a poison gas leak or pipeline rupture. We are not provided the tape, we are not told how evacuation would occur, and we are refused basic first-responder equipment and monitoring supplies. These measures leave residents with a level of uncertainty about our safety, while

bearing witness to the overwhelming development around our farms and community.

The Life Pod series are prototypes of self-contained breathing apparatus designed to hold and supply air for a number of hours, if a sour gas leak or pipeline ruptures were to occur. Since the creation of the “family size” model, I have gone on to create a “bachelor” life pod, and “Vessel,” an air-supplied iron casket with inside controls and an external siren. These sculptures are interactive and people are invited to go inside and touch the controls and look out the porthole windows. These pieces can be displayed both indoors and outdoors.

Along with these sculptures, I have also created a body of work in mixed media photography/sculpture on the same subject. I have incorporated ink, video, and small sculpture into photographs on canvas or wood.