



## Main Space

Xpace Cultural Centre  
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### ***Recess* curated by Jaycee Tu**

Rowena Katigbak, Eric Oh, Lina Wu, Yuma Yanagisawa, Cristine Yunyk.  
April 12 - May 11, 2019

*Recess* is an exhibition that prompts its visitors to play. The word recess comes from the Latin word *recessus*, meaning “a going back, retreat.”<sup>1</sup> What can recessing to a sense of playfulness teach us about community building and our approach to daily life? The exhibition aims to shift the gallery patron’s typical role in the art gallery as they are invited to play in tandem with the featured works and projects. During *Recess*, visitors are encouraged to become collaborators- invited to participate, improvise, deconstruct, reconstruct and, most importantly, play- in an exploration of how play has the potential to strengthen a community.

Eric Oh’s work titled *Comfortecture* encourages collaboration- requiring interaction from visitors in order to be activated. Interested in our relationships with domestic spaces and objects, *Comfortecture* explores Oh’s conceptual interests through fort-building by inviting visitors to build a fort with provided materials, many of which are familiar domestic objects such as blankets, pillows and furniture. Consecutive visitors may choose to simply occupy the existing structure or to demolish it and rebuild. The project aims to activate the participants’ imagination and ingenuity.

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1 “Recess” (n.). *Index*, [www.etymonline.com/word/recess](http://www.etymonline.com/word/recess).

Through this installation, Oh asks, “How might we bring this thinking of re-use and domestic playfulness into adulthood? What lessons can fort-building offer us in our approach to the fixity and static roles of domestic spaces and objects?”<sup>2</sup> A book lays by the fort as well: it prompts participants to choose either to follow diagrams left by others on how to build a fort or design their own. They may choose to either build on the existing fort before them or to tear it down and start over. They may also choose to add instructions and/or diagrams to the ongoing book for future participants. The book becomes a living collaborative document between the artist and gallery participants, reflecting on collaborative processes that open up ideas about how we can build new structures and spaces as a community.

*Recess* responds to Toronto’s landscape. It is a fast-moving and ever-changing cosmopolitan metropolis- a city that is constantly in development, bearing new structures and spaces whose purpose is more often commercial than not. In planning for cosmopolis, which involves a revival of inquiry about and appreciation for the existence of the city as sites for memory, desire and the spirit or sacred, Sandercock suggests the “need for diversity of spaces and places in the city: places loaded with visual stimulation, but also places of quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce where the [...] noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the ‘noise of the stars’ or the wind or water, and the voice(s) within ourselves.”<sup>3</sup> With Eric Oh’s *Comfortecture*, visitors are not only able to build new structures, but they are also able to take shelter within them and share that space with others. This opens up possibilities for chance encounters, conversation and contemplation.

Lina Wu’s *Treasure* also encourages playful interaction and reflection. Wu’s series of shrines comprises of their collection and informed by her obsession with trinkets that relate to her childhood, as well as to her family’s Chinese-Canadian

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<sup>2</sup> Artist Statement, Eric Oh (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century* (Continuum: London, New York, 2003) p.227.

immigration experiences. Playfully handmade interpretations of familiar objects and icons of Wu's younger self are included in the shrines, they represent the interpretations or misinterpretations caused intergenerationally in families living in the diaspora. Collaging various items such as Hello Kitty stickers, Chinese School exercise books, childhood journals, red pockets and more- the artist turns fleeting memories into a monumentalized shrine to recall her childhood self.<sup>4</sup> Visitors are invited to interact with the shrines- opening and peeking into doors, pockets and holes- leading them through a non-linear narrative about migration, intergenerational relationships and childhood development. *Treasure* unearths complexities about childhood memory, joy and the emotional worth of material possessions, through the acts of collection and memorialization. Visitors may also choose to participate in Wu's workshop, in which she invites the community to bring trinkets from their childhood to make shrines of their own. Through touch and interaction, *Treasure* invites the participants to recall and honour their inner child, generating a platform for social connections through childhood experiences.

Collaboration is the structural foundation of Yuma Yanagisawa's *Filter Collage*- a work that is interested in biotechnology, defined as a technological application that collaborates with biological systems. Requiring the interaction and collaboration of a given participant's figure with computer technology, the participant influences the visual outcome of the artwork.<sup>5</sup> A webcam captures the participants' likeness and projects it onto a monitor. The image is then abstracted and manipulated by the code that the artist has written- appearing as a collage of different image filters. The participant is encouraged to move their body in order to activate the work and manipulate its appearance. It is the participant in collaboration with the program that the artist has coded that decides the outcome of the image. The work operates on a harmonious collaboration between the artist, computer program and the participants, activating *Filter Collage* and rendering it alive. Like Eric Oh's *Comfortecture*, this installation

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4 Lina Wu, Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.

5 Yuma Yanagisawa Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.

generates a situation in which the creation of the work is passed on from the artists' hands to the participants.

It is through play that society collaboratively expresses its interpretation of life and the world.<sup>6</sup> While Lina Wu assembles old toys and remnants of the past into shrines, Rowena Katigbak takes old toys apart and pieces them back together in order to make something new. The artist aims to playfully subvert mainstream culture, employing rebellion, play and magic to conjure a work titled *Progress*- a series of kinetic sculptures comprised of found toys and images. Inspired by toy design, Katigbak unravels and reweaves narratives through the act of taking apart, redesigning and repurposing toys and other remnants of the past. The artist invites participants to activate the works through tactile touch. *High Flyer*, for example, is activated via a turning crank. By turning the crank, the viewer moves a witch on a broom who is flying over a stone monument of a male figure. The figures in the work are fragments of magazine images, pieced together to create the witch and male figures, which are prominent throughout the series. The male figure is representative of patriarchal systems and the witch is navigating these systems of power. The participant plays a significant role in the story as well, activating the movement of the kinetic sculptures and driving the story forward. Katigbak inserts her own likeness into each witch iteration, and through this act, seizes the narrative and centers herself in the story- hoping to inspire gallery visitors to do the same.<sup>7</sup> For by opening ourselves up to the potentials of play, we are making room for the possibility of stepping sideward into another reality. With *High Flyer*, the artist illustrates a reality which favours magic over patriarchal powers. The *Progress* series asks viewers to believe in magic- more specifically, their own magic- and to acknowledge the power one has to control their own narrative.

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<sup>6</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1955).

<sup>7</sup> Rowena Katigbak, Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.

Cristine Yunyk's series of paintings titled *Cartwheel Arms* is born out of childhood memories and feelings of playfulness. Like Rowena Katigbak's *Progress* series, Yunyk employs play to communicate her interpretation of the world. Yunyk recreates a childlike sense of play through painting by not prioritizing the end result of the image, but rather, by prioritizing the process and leisurely experience of painting itself.<sup>8</sup> The end result is an amalgamation of images that have the potential to spark our memories- memories of playing board games, hanging out in playgrounds and frolicking in grassy fields. The finished works are sprinkled high, low, and in-between other works throughout the gallery space- the reminiscent snapshots creating a sense of playfulness and movement, choreographing gallery visitors to improvise and move playfully through the gallery space as well. This series of paintings transport gallery visitors to the playscape of their memories, triggering recollections of our pasts and past selves.

As a child in school, a typical day often revolves around recess hour- a time for playing games, sports or make-believe with friends. From a young age, play teaches us the workings of language and of the social game, as well as relationships between players. *Recess* is centred on the notion that play brings individuals together to cooperate and have fun. Prompting playfulness, movement and interaction in the gallery space, this group exhibition highlights the importance of play and the potentialities that playfulness has to offer in our daily lives and interactions. While play is integral to social development and the strengthening of communities, it can also help us to cope with the stresses of daily life. Thus, play not only provides an outlet for entertainment- but also functions as a means of self-care, for creative expression. It can also be used as a tool to examine the world, working through social concerns, and as instruments for conceptual thinking. *Recess* aims to inspire visitors to play more often, and most importantly, to take that feeling of playfulness far outside of the confines of the exhibition.

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<sup>8</sup> Cristine Yunyk, Artist Statement, Proposal for Call for Submissions, 2018.

