

x p a c e

VOLUME IS XPACE CULTURAL CENTRE'S ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY OF EXHIBITIONS, ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS. THESE ESSAYS DEMONSTRATE THE BREADTH OF EXHIBITIONS, ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO XSPACE'S PLACE AS A VIBRANT PART OF TORONTO AND OCAD UNIVERSITY'S ARTS COMMUNITY. THIS PUBLICATION INCLUDES PROGRAMMING ACROSS ALL FOUR OF OUR EXHIBITION SPACES FROM SEPTEMBER 2016 TO JUNE 2017.

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w i n d o w

1

THE INTERNET AND HOW I GOOGLED MYSELF INTO
INNER HEAVEN STACIE ANT

PLYGUY LUKE SIEMENS

IN MY BEDROOM NOON IS THE DARKEST TIME OF DAY
MONICA MORARU

I HOPE THIS IS FUN TO LOOK AT HALLOWAY JONES

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO, I CAN DO BETTER
MELANIE BILLARK

ST. MICHAEL AND THE DEMON PHILIP OCAMPO

BEARING THE WEIGHT NESS LEE

m a i n

2

WHAT WOULD THE COMMUNITY THINK? @GOTHSHAKIRA,
BONERKILL, KIERA BOULT, SOFY MESA
CURATED BY EMILY GOVE

GHOST STORY ANNA EYLER, LAURA FINDLAY, MICKEY MACKENNA, SARAH
SANDS PHILLIPS, ANGIE QUICK, STANZIE TOOTH
CURATED BY BLAIR SWANN

WHERE IS HOME JESSICA GABA, KARINA ISKANDARSJAH, ZANA KOZOMOVA,
RAJ ANNIE PATIÑO-MARIN, MAXIM VLASSENKO
CURATED BY ZVIKO MHAKAYAKORA

BLOOD TIES OMAR BADRIN, SHAHIR OMAR-QRISHNASWAMY, ADITI OHRI,
FALLON SIMARD, EVE TAGNY
CURATED BY EVE TAGNY & GENEVIÈVE WALLEN

VPN TO IRL RONNIE CLARKE, MARLON KROLL, SOPHIA OPPEL, TOMMY
TRUONG CURATED BY TAK PHAM

recurrence KIM NINKURU, FALLON SIMARD, KAMIKA PETERS,
ADRIENNE CROSSMAN, ALLI LOGOUT
CURATED BY MAANDEEQ MOHAMED

p r o j e c t

3

OUT OF PLACE DANA PRIETO

THE SIDE PROFILE SERIES SHANTELL MILLER

BODIES OF WATER CALDER HARBEN

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN KENDRA YEE AND
TOVA BENJAMIN

MAPPING TIME: HARMONIC STUDIES FOR VERA RUBIN
MEHRNAZ ROHBAKSH

FREEDOM TUBE: LOST IN X SPACE JES SACHSE

e x t e r n a l

4

THE JOY OF ATLEIGH: REVIEW OF GOUACHE
ATLEIGH HOMMA

SHIFTING GESTURES (FATHER / DAUGHTER)
ZANA KOZOMORA

1973-1979 LUCILLE KIM

AFTER DARKNESS MANUELA MORALES

SEASCAPE KELLY ZANTINGH

IT CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING
JESSIE SHENG & CHANTELLE HARTLE

SOLE PURPOSE RONNIE CLARKE

w i n d o w

1

THE INTERNET AND HOW I GOOGLED MYSELF INTO INNER HEAVEN

STACIE ANT

Long ambients!: calm. sleep.: Moby and the Virtually Sacred

Multi-media artist Stacie Ant's window installation *The Internet and how I Googled myself into inner heaven* references both homemade website aesthetics and commercial window displays. For passersby unaware of Xpace's exhibition structure, the window display might allude to a gimmicky pop-up shop or better yet, an "as-seen-on-TV" store, moving "life hack" products from screen to IRL to nullify online buyers' apprehensions. The exhibition features a hand-painted backdrop of small, puffy clouds against aqua blue skies—a typical web layout option, I'm told. The pattern moves into the foreground, repeating on the front faces of three plinths. Their remaining sides, covered with a vector-printed wallpaper, explode the sky into geometric pieces—perhaps a reference to the backend of a website. Several portable DVD players, a picture frame, propped book, and various votive candles fill the floor space. Two hologram posters of Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ hang from the ceiling like discount sales signs. Together, the imagery appears to market a religious enterprise that follows some elements of Christianity. However, the face behind the business is not Jesus but Moby, the American singer-songwriter, musician, and DJ known for his trance-inducing electronic music. Moby's floating face fills the picture frame and book cover, both framed by the title *The Internet and how I Googled myself to inner heaven*. Here's the lynchpin of the work: the amalgamation of Google and Heaven as places of, or means to, transcendence, with Richard Melville Hall as our guide.¹

Ant's installation converges the spiritual realms of digital and material space through aesthetic play and social critique. Fusing online celebrity worship with cyber religious practices, the installation plays with image consumption and idolization, turning celebrities following into its own branch of religion. The artist's conceptual intentions to merge

SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 21, 2016

screen space and the physical environment are strengthened by the architecture of the window installation, which performs its own qualities of virtuality vis-à-vis the window (reflection, approximation of the real, and transparency being material properties related to virtual effects). The mix of objects and digital references incorporate various religious icons that reflect a culture of user-generated and user-curated content. Applying digital tactics, the artist explores faith-building in the twenty-first century not just as a personal path along a given belief system but as a grassroots initiative which enables users to create their own "cyber church" by incorporating elements of various religions into the web's infrastructure. Using the dispersed nature of the web as both content and architecture for spiritual design better reflects the ways we receive and gather information today. *The Internet and how I Googled myself into inner heaven* playfully and satirically references the possibilities of the web as both a site for religious bricolage and as a spiritual media itself.

Has Google replaced god? A report in MIT Technology Review suggests a correlation between increased Internet use and a decline in religious affiliation.² The study's results, and Stacie Ant's installation, raise questions not just about the cost of digital life on religion but the shared expectations associated with online activity and religious engagements. Although "ask and you shall receive"—a colloquial adaptation from Book of Matthew (7:7 KJV)—describes communication with God for Christian-believers, it is also an apt description of our relationship with the Google search engine, exchanging the virtues of patience and slow listening for online immediacy and directness. A sense of community and belonging may be better delivered through an online setting with the convenience of at home immediacy and 24-hour presence, participation, and the promise to connect to someone at any given time. The Internet offers the opportunity for information sharing, community building, as well as knowledge



exchange and production, eliminating the barriers of physically dependent communities. Thus, online engagement enables agency to self-produce what a physical space such as a church does not allow.

As religious affiliations promise the opportunity to transcend the material world, digital platforms provide this heavenly sphere by enabling user-generated frameworks to operate outside of, or against, normative and privileged structures. The ability to act beyond the limits of the flesh (in the digital world) does not mean transcending our earthly setting but existing without imposed external limitations fixed by ideas of normality, perpetuated in the physical environment.³ To (digitally) explore other ways of being is indeed a spiritual quest. In this sense, Googling oneself to Heaven is not far off.

Is Moby the spokesperson for such ventures? Celebrity status certainly hinges on the supernatural but his most recent album, which explores meditation and altered states, may make him a better candidate. long ambientsI: calm. sleep. uses the virtues of the digital to create and disseminate a fully accessible, free, and unprotected track list of ambient music inspired by his own personal listening interests: music for yoga, sleep, meditation, or panicking (as stated by the artist). Drawing parallels between celebrity worship and spiritual worship, Moby serves as the spokesperson, product, and spiritual guide in Ant's installation.

While the Internet performs and enables spiritual qualities like transcendence, know edge-seeking, and even a sort of online

afterlife (posthumous online activity, such as the Facebook profile of a deceased friend or loved one), religious communities are too taking to the Internet to establish new points of connection and even user-generated religions, referred to as "cyber cathedrals" by the artist. Cyber churches and virtual temples extend the physical architecture of worship spaces to an online setting as a means of creating an increased sense of collectivity and connectivity.

The Internet and how I Googled myself to inner heaven pays homage to these translations between physical and online infrastructures and not unlike the impetus for *ambientsI: calm. Sleep.* aims to create a spiritual space accessible for all.

-Sara Nicole England

This exhibition and essay were created during Xpace's 2016 residency for OCAD U graduates. Moby's given name

Christine Rosen, "Is Google Replacing God?" *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2016, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/christine-rosen-is-google-replacing-god-1402614743>.

³For more on power dynamics and social exclusion at work in face-to-face interaction see Jenny Davis, "Face to Interface," *Real Life Mag*, August 10, 2016, accessed on August 28, 2016, <http://real-lifemag.com/face-to-interface/>. Davis provides many examples of users that socially benefit from digital communication such as Alzheimer patients, writing that a greater sense of self and increased social connections are gained online. More examples to add to Davis' overview include the production safe spaces for LGBTQ+ and the development and strengthening of Crip communities through online networks, to name only a few.

PLYGUY

LUKE SIEMENS

On The Sublime Pleasure Of Owning A Home Of One's Own

The paragraphs of this essay are presented in random sequence. You will have to arrange its components in the correct order on your own.

PlyGuy

explores the implications of contemporary real estate ambition, and implicit within this work are the repercussions for those who have bought in—quite literally. PlyGuy, before attaining his current state, began as a 3D rendering, his individually configured parts telling a comprehensive tale of the condo experience. One arm weighted down, another offers a hook for your jacket and hat, on his lap sits a plant-lush, verdant, expectant. His facial expression reads surprise, pain, or neither. His torso is a series of laddered slats for additional storage, for shade, for ascent.

There are 2.5 million people living in Toronto. This is a fact. The median annual household income is \$75,240.² The poverty line in Toronto is \$18,759. Almost 604,000 are living in poverty. These are facts. Toronto's newcomer population fares the worst, with 46 per cent living in poverty. One in three children under age 15 is living in poverty and 31 per cent of youths, ages 15 to 24. Housing is what drives the disparity: "with 47 per cent of all tenants paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. Another 23 per cent pay an astonishing 50 per cent or more on rent."³ These are all facts. The average price for a home in Toronto is expected to be as high as \$3.582 million by 2026, while the average condo price may rise to \$628,000 within the same time.⁴ Certainly neither of these options is particularly viable for someone, say, who makes a living as a freelance writer of exhibition essays, but for some, especially those who are bound to the notion of "real estate equals eternal wealth," a condominium is the only rational option.

This begs the question, do we, as Torontonians, as renters, as aspirational home and condo owners, have a tangible language to describe the ex-

OCTOBER 28 – DECEMBER 9, 2016

perience of living in a condominium? When we remove the veneer of cupidity generated by real estate investors, along with the unforgivable displacement of lower income individuals and families from newly desirable neighbourhoods, what are we left with? Does our contempt and comiseration for the cause and effect of the condo market overshadow our ability to sympathize with those who have bought into this iterative dream of home ownership?

While theorists like Mark Kingwell are preoccupied with the impending beauty of the Toronto skyline by the year 2020, PlyGuy patiently, painfully, expressionlessly awaits his fate to be built, installed, wrecked and cast away in turns, as he "[adapts] to the stresses of your modern living." Your condo companion, indeed.

These are 'young professionals,' or, better yet, recent graduates, who have shed the burden of overpriced and out-dated basement apartments, these are widows who can no longer rationalize their four bedroom-three and a half bathroom-detached homes, and these are first generation Canadians who have bought into the ancient precept propagated by Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, Franklin D. Roosevelt,⁵ and even the superlative bigoted millionaire Donald Trump, that real estate is an imperishable asset, one which will effortlessly transform its holder into a person of boundless opulence.

If John Paulson's quote reminds you of the recent housing crisis in the United States, then you will not be surprised to learn that Paulson, hedge fund manager and billionaire, made a \$4 billion fortune by purchasing subprime mortgages before the market ultimately crashed in 2007.⁶ It is obvious that the same species of capitalist greed currently fuels Toronto's condominium market. Those very same 'young professionals' and recent graduates who gave up their dank subterranean apartments are salient prey to "investors [who] are betting on big returns from young renters who can't afford to buy in the red-hot real estate market and don't mind living in a unit, about 500 square feet, where their dining table might



have to fold down into a bed.”⁷ Luke Siemens’ *PlyGuy*, is a tenable critique of the condominium culture sweeping downtown Toronto, as well as other cities across the globe. There are those, such as author and academic Mark Kingwell, who see the landscape’s morphosis as aesthetically pleasing, and as a signifier of financial optimism for Toronto’s newcomer population.⁸ There are also those, such as Toronto’s artist and lower-income community, who view the city’s gentrification and condo development programs in a much more threatening light.⁹ And yet, there is a third lot that we rarely discuss: those who have made the choice to purchase and live in these condos.

“If you don’t own a home, buy one. If you own a home, buy another one. If you own two homes, buy a third. And, lend your relatives the money to buy a home.”¹⁰ —John Paulson

And, like *PlyGuy*, these sprouting condos are crude creations, fragmentary attempts to reproduce an ideal 3D rendering. “Fears that shoddy Toronto condos could become future slums” is a real, albeit absurd, headline that CBC News published online in 2014.¹¹ Surely the Shangri La Hotel will not become a “slum,” even though that choice of vocabulary is telling in various respects, of the market and public perception of the condominium purchasing demographic. Read: those of you who could not afford to purchase a house, also known as the “red-hot real estate market,” and instead purchased what was marketed to you as a more affordable option, i.e., a condominium, you, poor soul, have been duped.

-Letticia Cosbert

⁷ Helmin, Josin. 2010. “Urgent Advice From Billionaire John Paulson: Buy A House And Gold; Plus, Rupert Murdoch’s Pay Cut.” *Forbes*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshhelmin/2010/09/29/urgent-advice-from-billionaire-john-paulson-buy-a-house-and-gold-plus-rupert-murdochs-pay-cut/#241989fe7c5a>

⁸<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/famil07a-eng.htm>

⁹ James, Royson. 2012. “Nearly a quarter of Toronto residents live in poverty.” *The Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/06/11/nearly_a_quarter_of_toronto_residents_live_in_poverty_james.html

¹⁰ Ferreras, Jesse. 2016. “Canada’s House Prices Will Look Like This In 10 Years, If Trends Keep Up.” *Huffington Post*. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/04/16/canada-real-estate-projections_n_9648448.html

¹¹ Fourth century B.C.E. philosopher, political economist, and former U.S. president, respectively.

¹² Kolhatkar, Sheelagh. 2012. “John Paulson’s Very Bad Year.” *Bloomberg*. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-06-28/john-paulsons-very-bad-year>

¹³ Posadzki, Alexandra. 2015. “Micro condos set to face their first test.” *Macleans*.

<http://www.macleans.ca/economy/realestateconomy/putting-micro-condos-to-the-test-in-canada/>

¹⁴ Hyman, Gerry. 2016. “Toronto’s skyline is about to join the big-leagues: What the city could look like in 2020.” *The Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2016/10/01/to_rontos-skyline-is-entering-the-stratosphere.html

¹⁵ Whyte, Murray. 2016. “Skyrocketing commercial rents purge reluctant artists from Toronto’s west end.” *The Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2016/10/23/skyrocketing-commercial-rents-purge-reluctant-artists-from-the-west-end.html>

¹⁶ Helmin, Josin. 2010. “Urgent Advice From Billionaire John Paulson: Buy A House And Gold; Plus, Rupert Murdoch’s Pay Cut.” *Forbes*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshhelmin/2010/09/29/urgent-advice-from-billionaire-john-paulson-buy-a-house-and-gold-plus-rupert-murdochs-pay-cut/#241989fe7c5a>

¹⁷<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/fears-that-shoddy-toronto-condos-could-become-future-slums-1.2796979>

IN MY BEDROOM NOON IS THE DARKEST TIME OF DAY

MONICA MORARU

Praying at the Altar of the Screen: Notes on the Aura of the Technological Object

The light and dark blurry shapes that show up at noon are craggy, delineated by the different surfaces that reflect the light and the trees and fire-escapes that obstruct its circuitous path of travel. This light does not illuminate things to see per se. It is instead a kind of light that transmits — in its lack — the very shape of things. A light that shows by not shining; this is the light at noon.

The above epigraph, drawn from Paul Chan's enlightening and poetic text "On Light as Midnight and Noon" represents a fragment of his larger consideration of the omnipresent lu-minous screen through musings on windows, light and shadow. *In My Bedroom Noon is the Darkest Time of Day*, is a site-specific project for Xpace Cultural Centre's window space. Artist Monica Moraru's highly intertextual and interdisciplinary work was largely informed by Chan, drawing on an interest in sensory experience, and the potential failings of the illuminated object.

Moraru's work is structured around a tiered platform, at the base of which lies a small monitor, screening a looping video work. From the ceiling, a hemmed curtain hangs, failing to conceal a small pile of sand, which lies behind the wooden steps. The video work explores the formal properties of light and shadow, recording the subtle distortions provided by glasses, windows, mirrors, and fabric transparencies. Our viewing of these vignettes is mediated not only by the lens of the artist's camera, but by the various layers of reflection within each scene. The spaces we are introduced to are a mix of ambiguous commercial and domestic spaces. Moraru has included subtitles drawn from a personal response to Chan's writings, in which she details the passage of light across the space of her apartment.

Due to the screen's position on the bottom tier of the platform, facing skyward, the viewer's experience of Moraru's work will change based on the hour of viewing. As the afternoon sun creeps

JANUARY 6TH- FEBRUARY 10TH, 2017

across the sky towards the horizon, the westerly light will reflect off the window of the gallery. Potential glare obscuring the viewer's ability to see the screen properly. The video can be seen most clearly seen beginning after dusk, emanating a gentle glow and drawing in passersby. On the highest tier of the platform lies a defunct projector that similarly is best seen after dark, the bulb visible from the side facing the window, through the cracks in its construction. The technological object fails to perform, fails to project.

The window has been mobilized as a symbol within cultural production for centuries, and in sitting down to speak with Moraru in her subterranean studio, it came to light that for her, the window represents a portal between two spaces.¹ The window allows for the subject to traverse or transgress an assumed boundary between interior and exterior, public and private, self and other. Philosophical musings on the window are intimately tied to the history of painting, beginning in 1435 with Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura*, a relationship shifted with the twentieth century developments of photography and film. With the development of single-point perspective and illusory space, the frame of the painting presented a new way of seeing the world. The window is a portal of desire, with historical connotations linking it to the sublime — if you can, in your mind's eye, imagine the iconic default computer wallpaper of Microsoft Windows XP operating system, aptly named *Bliss*.

When the conversation returns to the subject of the artist's research for the project, Moraru hands me a brilliantly colored found postcard from a butterfly conservatory in Florida, featuring a giant swallowtail butterfly perched on a cluster of tangerines. Like Chan's text, this reproduction maintained a significant position in her artistic process, as she imagined the postcard to, like the window, act as a portal into an alternate space. This postcard is further representative of a thread which can be traced back to the video work — the scenes of commercial and domestic spaces are joined by footage shot at a local butterfly conservatory. This element can be traced by an ongoing



interest which influences Moraru's practice: kitsch as formal or commercial waste, and replicas of form, without function.

The shape of the platform mimics the form of an amphitheater, with the surrounding tiers positioning an imagined audience gazing down at the screen, the stage. Moraru likens the medium of installation to set making, a site for an immersive experience, and theatricality. The fragment of green fabric which hangs above the platform further contributes to the transformation of the window space into a non-functional set or redundant theatre stage — it reads as a constructed element, a play about to be set, waiting for performers who will never arrive. Beyond entertainment, the steps of the platform make reference to religious ascension, ritual and worship at the altar of commercial or corporate goods. An illuminated altar, which is self-reflexive, and further, subject to its own inevitable failure.

- Katie Lawson

In My Bedroom Noon is the Darkest Time of Day
is part of the Toronto Design Offsite Festival 2017



¹Chan, Paul."On Light as Midnight and Noon" Paul Chan: The 7 Lights. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhand-lung Walther König, 2007, 120.

²Monica Moraru (artist) in conversation with Katie Lawson (author), December 5th, 2016. Transcription of ideas have been revised and approved by the artist.



I HOPE THIS IS FUN TO LOOK AT

HALLOWAY JONES

Halloway Jones' *I Hope This Is Fun to Look at* embarks on a maximalist journey in search of connection. Filled with different materials, textures, themes and colours, the installation consists of a jungle motif with faux fur grass, a sparkly river and paper-mâché plants, all sitting beneath a large portrait of the musical group the Spice Girls. Situated in the gallery's front window space, this visual jungle's sensory and playful entanglements draw attention and act as a connective force between the work and the viewer.

Fun's overload of disparate references and surfaces is entertaining to look at, but it also addresses in many ways our attachments, habits and how we consume art. The work speaks to our current cultural climate wherein we are besieged with, and yet also choose to collect, unrelated stories and images. Our Internet browsers are filled with news articles, pictures and our social media, all which find connection through our personal use of them. We pull together these various cultural elements and make our own meaning out of them in order to suit our personal understandings and desires. In Jones' case, she has used the Spice Girls and a jungle landscape to create *I Hope This Is Fun to Look at*. Although disparate in their respective topic and materiality, they find rapport in their ability to elicit reaction while also offering to the viewer insights to Jones herself and her creative practice.

Jones enjoys working collaboratively, taking suggestions from friends, including conceptual advisement from Heather Rappard and studio assistance from Tom Hobson. This process has solidified her active approach to creating art that is bold and inventive. With faux fur, sparkles and celebrity on full display, *Fun* is eye-catching and fearless in its pursuit of a 'more is more' aesthetic. Taking such a maximalist approach can be a freeing way of expressing one's creativity. In this context, the limitations of genre and style are contested as perspective and personality are invited in. In *Fun's* case, its visceral and spirited nature makes the installa-

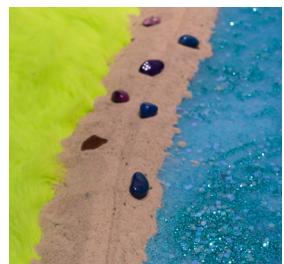
FEBRUARY 17TH - MARCH 24TH, 2017

tion amusing and approachable. Here, the Spice Girls are an emblem of celebrity, camaraderie and performativity, and it's their presence that contributes to the work's Maximalist entanglements and attachments.

Contrast this image with the stark grey landscape of Lansdowne Avenue and we further get a sense of the spectacle and lively nature of Jones' work. *Fun's* depiction of recognizable figures acts as a reference point for interaction while Jones' choice of colour and pattern draws in the passers-by. The window in this regard is a consciously accessible space where viewers from outside of the art world have an opportunity to connect with art. Everyday as people walk past or wait for the bus they are privy to the charismatic nature of Jones' installation. As such, *Fun* is an incitement; a call to have fun and to embrace the whimsical. So often we are consumed with the busy yet mundane pace of traversing the city. Behind glass and on full display, *Fun* is a prompt to self reflect on that routine and to let a little fun into your day.

Jones's intention here is clear; she hopes that her work is amusing. The title itself sets this intention. *I Hope This Is Fun to Look at* is meant to be a provocation, but of a different kind than that of popular art discourse. Often in academic and institutional spaces we are told that art is a medium at which we are meant to gaze at and of which we are to consume. This is a concept that is further established when we, as viewers, are advised to look at art and 'read' it in an attempt to find it moving and beautiful, or to observe the skill behind it or the mastery of its maker. Rarely does art discourse ask us to have fun while viewing art. Jones actively seeks out and encourages this type of contact, and wants ultimately to establish a connection between her work and the viewer. This relationship is supported by the work's vibrant foray into expression and playfulness, and finds resonance in its spirited nature and creative energy.

- Miranda Whist



ANYTHING YOU CAN DO, I CAN DO BETTER

MELANIE BILLARK

Between takeoff and landing, we are each in suspended animation, a pause between chapters of our lives. When we stare out the window into the sun's glare, the landscape is only a flat projection with mountain ranges reduced to wrinkles in the continental skin. Oblivious to our passage overhead, other stories are unfolding beneath us. Blackberries ripen in the August sun, a woman packs a suitcase and hesitates at her doorway, a letter is opened and the most surprising photograph slides from between the pages. But we are moving too fast and we are too far away; all the stories escape us, except our own. When I turn away from the window, the stories recede into the two-dimensional map of green and brown below. Like a trout disappearing into the shade of an overhanging bank, leaving you staring at the flat surface of the water and wondering if you saw it at all.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*

Melanie Billark's window installation, *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better*, features cascading plexiglass boxes filled with self-contained permaculture. Tiny moss habitats stack inside these cubes like vibrant, blooming, green nesting dolls surrounded by dark, rich soil. The installation reads like surreal, whimsical poetry, both enchanting and bemusing. The whiteness of the walls and floor position of the cubes leads into a fantasy that allows them to engage in the dreamy nuances of the work. Billark presents the audience with this work gently and subtly, leaving them free to interpret these objects liberally from their own perspective.

Deeper underlying themes sequester around the urban landscape and our relationship to it. City life and the culture we subsume prompts and beguiles us into believing we are not participants of a living, breathing, constantly evolving organism. Despite this illusion, we are, in fact, part of a transforming ecosystem immersed in commerce, commodity globalization, industry and the process of seeking individuation from the collective conscious. Urban de-

MARCH 31 - MAY 5, 2017

velopment takes pleasure in this form of deception—molding and stacking concrete slabs into customizable abodes, contemporary culture is complicit in bulldozing terrains and the histories contained within the land. Our participation in modeling capitalist culture fogs our memories of how nature provides what we need, how it sustains us, and teaches us the value of a reciprocal relationship. Billark's work provides a soft entry point into these thoughts and feelings.

Irish moss foraged from Toronto's back alleys makes up the core of *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better*. The appeal to cultivate these mosses comes from a deep sympathy for a species often ignored, resented and pulled from between the cracks of pavement, and is an attractive metaphor for subliminal, psychological, and physical manifestation of uprootedness. Being deracinated aptly describes Billark's move away from her rural upbringing in the Niagara-On-The-Lake region to pursue her art education. In these forgotten corners, she discovers a companion and friend that speaks to her.¹ In collecting mosses, she finds a beauty which otherwise feels lacking in the city. Weeds, unwanted in our gardens, are often native, as well as resilient plant medicines. This resiliency is the crux of urban survival. Therefore, in the corporeal act of foraging and rewilding indigenous plants, the viewer sits between two awkward points of being: Their contribution to and their deviation from nature and nurture. Here, we contemplate whether human nature is an invasive species to other life forms, or if we are a supportive member of the natural systems at play.

Regardless of where one self-identifies in this parable, they are navigating a hall of mirrors, or a looping paradigm, not knowing what is the former and what is the latter. The audience is invited to ask to themselves whether humans create beauty for their own consumption and pleasure, or for altruistic and benevolent purposes. The deeper one forays into this maze of questions, Billark's installation increasingly oscillates towards puzzling psychological territory, surrounding the observer and the observed, the



ethics of captivity, living art, and furthermore, who is caretaking to who?

The installation's title, *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better*, describes Billark's investigations while creating these self-sustaining moss gardens. The artist feels that the plants are stronger than she is, as they grow boundlessly under stressful conditions.² Within the contained structures, the recycled nutrients from the soil and moisture conditions within the cubes produce an environment where the mosses live in a constant germination phase. As a scientific experiment, she maternally watches over these habitats, affectionately monitoring changes through acts of observational research. In previous studies, she notes the success of the mosses, which occasionally flower depending on external environmental conditions. She understands the experiments are conditional and ephemeral, and that the growth is attributed to a constant state of stress within the created plexiglass container. This symbolism resounds to city life and the pressures to boom and bust, break through and thrive in created superficial environments.

The installation is anchored by the presence of a surveillance dome mirror. Passersby may be captivated by their reflection amongst the mystifying and abundant plexiglass cubes in the minimalist window space. The dome finds its viewers in a pleasing distortion of being contained within the fisheye lens. They may see themselves among the art, belonging to it, and it belonging to them. The glass window reflects back to us the city street and the traffic of the busy intersection, as well as multiplying the perceived plexi cubes. While creating an illusion of an infinite mirror in which the audience can envision themselves in these multiple facets of reality, it contains them within the art's metaphors. Reminiscent of Hans Haacke's 'Con-

densing Cube,'³ Billark's works absorb moisture and systematically condense in order to sustain its living ecosystem. During daytime, the condensation produces a haze over the cubes, blurring our view of its contents. We are at the mercy of nature's own timelines and removed from the commodity of these beautiful, curated moss parcels as the condensation intensifies from exposure to direct sunlight and the presence of body heat. It is perhaps under these compromised circumstances when viewers are most likely to observe the work, whereas at night, the containers cool and their content become visible once again. Amusingly, spectators may be least susceptible to view the installation after sunset when the containers are clearest to witness; those observant enough are drawn inward to appreciate the overlooked, the overstepped. As members of the audience, we are invited to be patient or to entirely miss the enticing spectacle of beauty found in alleyways and dark corners from whence the moss came. Thus the viewer returns to the source of its creation, the beauty found in forgotten spaces, where these nomadic, urban moss specimens were originally recovered.

- Amanda Robertson-Hebert

¹Melanie Billark. In conversation with artist by author Amanda Robertson-Hebert. Toronto, Ontario March 12, 2017

²Ibid

³Condensation Cube (1965) is one of Hans Haacke's earlier works. In 1962, Haacke began producing works that incorporated Plexiglass containers filled with water. Condensation Cube exemplifies his interest in such basic physical processes as the evaporation and condensation of water. The work consists of a transparent acrylic cube containing water. Because of the temperature differential between the inside and outside, water vapour condenses into droplets that run down the walls of the cube, taking on random forms. Retrieved from: <http://www.macba.cat/en/condensation-cube-1523> March 30, 2017

ST. MICHAEL AND THE DEMON

PHILIP OCAMPO

Philip Ocampo in Conversation with
Steven Beckly

Philip Ocampo's window installation *St. Michael and the Demon* appropriates the biblical battle between the archangel and the devil. Representing St. Michael's banishment of Lucifer from the heavens, the battle serves as a tale of morality that is foundational to Catholicism. Usually depicted as separate entities—light and dark, good and evil—they are counterparts in a narrative familiar to Ocampo and his religious upbringing.

Using art-making as a way of re-imagining Catholicism's strict traditions, Ocampo gives form to his internal struggles. In *St. Michael and the Demon*, there are traces of past violence. For example, a charred flag hangs above a framed portrait of a figure impaled by a glowing sword. Set against a dark, charcoal wall and dramatically lit from below, the scene evokes the aftermath of a battle devoid of a clear winner and loser. Its moral ambiguity is partly due to Ocampo's ability to merge seemingly dichotomous positions of power. He empathizes with Lucifer's fall from grace, and speaks openly about queerness being the cause of his own fall from his family and religious community. Pain and struggle are evident in Ocampo's installation, but on the face of his black-and-white portrait I also perceive a freedom that comes with surrendering. The figure is no longer fighting. Part of moving from a place of pain to a place of power involves an openness to loss. In *St. Michael and the Demon*, Ocampo is working through his own defeat, cultivating a new and empathetic self from his religious remains. The following conversation occurred by email in June of 2017.

Steven Beckly: How has your sensibility been shaped by your relationship with religion?
 Philip Ocampo: My life at home and school was very religious and conservative. Due to my queerness, I felt ostracized in these spaces from an early age. It was demoralizing to have a large part of my identity slandered on a daily

JUNE 16TH–JULY 15TH, 2017

basis. Eventually, I saw Western Catholicism as a tool for alienation and oppression. At first-hand, I knew what it felt like to be an outsider and decided that I never wanted to inflict that experience on anyone. Sensibility is rooted in empathy. It's interesting how much you can learn about others through your own pain. So, ultimately, I think my experience as an outsider shaped me positively.

SB: A defining quality of empathy is the ability to place oneself in another's position, in another frame of reference. In your window installation, a Baroque frame houses an image of an impaled figure that looks like you. Do you consider this work to be a self-portrait?

PO: Yes, although it's a self-portrait that combines both identities from the biblical story. St. Michael and Satan are often depicted as separate, opposing forces. In my portrait, one figure stands in for both angel and devil.

SB: They're not opposites, but two sides of one thing.

PO: People often forget that at one point Lucifer was an archangel. He was most glorious, until he challenged the authority of God. This duality is important. On one hand, he is the object to vanquish, and on the other, a fall from grace. There are parallels between our narratives. For example, our families and communities previously accepted us, but no longer do so. Our doubts are motivated by an interest in our identities and self-worth, with a charred white flag symbolizing our divergent paths. Lucifer becomes consumed by his narcissism and antagonizes the power hierarchy of his world, whereas I remain questioning Catholicism's constant condemnation of queerness. In historical depictions, Lucifer fights to the bitter end, whereas this installation illustrates a forfeit with a punishment regardless.

SB: The lighting of your installation is similar to the way objects are lit in religious places. Can you speak about this decision? How will the



different weather and lighting conditions affect the work?

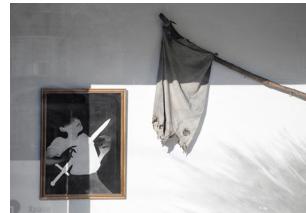
PO: Low lighting or lighting from below is usually used to make objects appear menacing or to accent their sacredness in religious spaces. I was envisioning an ominous shrine that doubled as a museum display. The changing weather will definitely alter the mood of the work. For example, a sunny day implies neutral viewing, the night evokes a quiet eeriness, and a storm would bring some chaos. In this way, I see the installation as both a still moment and a live performance.

SB: By placing highly personal work in a street-level window that gets seen by many people, you're exposing the taboo subject of religion not only to an art audience, but also to the general public. What does this work offer to viewers 'outside' of the art world?

PO: Although the installation has a strong religious tone, I wanted to avoid literal symbols in favour of a quieter, meditative encounter. For example, there are no crosses, angel wings, and horned demons. Without these visual prompts and the typical Baroque intensity, I think the scene becomes more intimate, which is fitting for a piece as personal as this.

Religion is such a charged topic! You're right to say that it's still taboo. People feel very strongly about it. Exhibiting this work in a window space allows for the private to become public. The installation's subtle religious symbolism is intended to encourage reflection without criticism, because I'm not interested in antagonizing anyone. For me, this work allowed an introspective conversation with myself. To those outside of the art community, I hope that it's just interesting enough to approach. Perhaps, in doing so, they can eavesdrop on and listen to a story that's probably quite different from their own.

- Steven Beckly

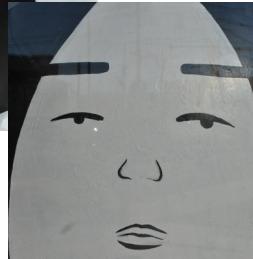


BEARING THE WAIT

NESS LEE

XPACE'S 2017 FUNDRAISER EXHIBITION.







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WHAT WOULD THE COMMUNITY THINK?

@GOTHSHAKIRA, BONERKILL,
KIERA BOULT, SOFY MESA
CURATED BY EMILY GOVE

SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 15, 2016

What would the community think? is introduced by a large-scale, printed meme by Montréal-based, “high priestess of dank feminist memory”² @gothshakira. Following a now-ubiquitous format, an appropriated image of distraught former Disney star turned pop singer Selena Gomez is headlined by black text on a white background:

“when u agonize over apartment listings bc u don’t want to be complicit in gentrification by inserting urself in a traditionally working-class neighbourhood but still salivate at the thought of inhabiting a tastefully-decorated one-bedroom mere steps away from both a very positively yelp-reviewed gastropub and a new minimalist concept café”

For too many young people living in the city, an ambivalent statement like @gothshakira’s meme is decisively relatable. According to the Toronto Real Estate Board, the current average rental price for a one-bedroom apartment in downtown Toronto is \$1,662 per month,³ while the median annual income of low-income earners is \$14,930,⁴ meaning very simply: there are a lot of people, majorly artists and students, who can’t afford to live here, but do anyway.

The uneasy relationship between artists, developers and residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods is being addressed not only in Toronto, since it is a widely spread phenomenon in North America. Recently in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network (BAN) demanded that the Brooklyn Museum cancel its hosting of the sixth annual Brooklyn Real Estate Summit. This event, reported by writer Alexis Clements for Hyperallergic, included a panel titled, “There goes the neighbourhood,” in which speakers would give advice on “discovering undervalued properties with a more valuable future use... to yield untold—and sometimes unexpected—riches;” in other words, how to remove rent-regulated tenants and flip a residential building for profit.⁵ In South Bronx, activists protested the 2016 iteration of No Commission, a contemporary art fair presented in partnership with developer Somerset Group that included no Latino artists (in a neighbourhood populated by the highest

percentage of Hispanic residents in New York State),⁶ and was described as “a sales tactic to provide street cred for rapacious developers.”⁷ For further information about both protests and subsequent events/actions, please see artists of color bloc (aocblk.org) and Arts & Labor (artsandlabor.org).

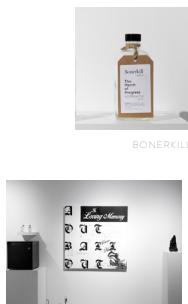
Back in Toronto, as the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto_Canada announces a partnership with developer Castlepoint Numa and a plan for a new location on the first floors of a new condominium development on Sterling Road, artists renting studios in the area received 55% rent hikes with their lease renewals; and thus are preparing to move out.⁸ While the condominium complex set to house MOCA is not the only such development in the area, it’s an immediate example of the cycle of ‘urban renewal,’ gentrification and displacement. Artists seeking low-cost housing and/or studio space move into neighbourhoods historically inhabited by racialized and/or low-income earning communities, and provide the required ‘cultural cachet’ to make the area desirable to populations with money to spend; no matter the form it ends up taking, gentrification “is fundamentally about the reconstruction of the city to serve middle- and upper-class interests.”⁹ In her 2004 book, research psychiatrist Dr. Mindy Fullilove adapts the gardening concept of “root shock,” or the “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem.”¹⁰ In the context of urban development, root shock disperses people and ruptures their community bonds. New condo developments facilitate “instant gentrification,”¹¹ by bulldozing existing structures and providing housing for sale to those who can afford it while displacing those who cannot.

In the widely-read 2004 book, *Cities and the Creative Class*, ‘urban theorist’ Richard Florida equates the ‘success’ of a city with the it’s ability to attract and retain members of the “creative class”— creative professionals who work in various economic sectors and industries. Florida theorizes that regions most attractive to his creative class possess what he calls the “3Ts” of economic development: Technology, Talent and

Tolerance. "Talent" is defined as those with a bachelor's degree or above, and "Tolerance" defined as "openness, inclusiveness, and diversity to all ethnicities, races and walks of life."¹² According to the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) of the United States, in 2009–10, 1,167,480 bachelor's degrees were conferred to students identifying as white, while 540,004 were granted to students identifying as black, Hispanic, Asian and/or indigenous; this more than 2:1 racial gap increases with Masters and Doctorate degrees.¹³ Though Florida does not specifically address race within his definition of "Talent," he also avoids mentioning systemic issues that prevent members of racialized communities from accessing higher education—such as high post-secondary tuition fees, or negative experiences with the public education system leading to lower secondary school graduation rates. Florida's 'talent' pool is thus composed of a primarily white middle- and upper-class population. Regarding Tolerance and diversity, Florida explains that "Talent" (i.e. a group of primarily white, middle- and upper-class 'creatives') is attracted to the same places as "artists, musicians [and] gay people,"¹⁴ a.k.a. the



KIERA BOULT



BONERKILL WITH YAN WEN CHANG

outsider groups most likely to take advantage of 'affordable' rents in pre-gentrified neighbourhoods. In *Homegrown: engaged cultural criticism*, critical theorist bell hooks likens this process to "colonization, post-colonial style": "...artists aren't the only marginalized folks controlling real estate. Think about the colonizing role that wealthy white gay men have played in communities of colour; they're often the first group to gentrify poor and working-class neighbourhoods... And it's a double-bind, because some of these people could be allies. Some gay white men are proactive about racism, even while being entrepreneurial. But in the end, they take spaces, redo them, sell them for a certain amount of money, while the people who have been there are displaced. And in some cases, the people of colour who are there are [perceived as enemies by white newcomers]."¹⁵

"Influenced by the sweet whispers of Richard

Florida and his Creative Class,"¹⁶ Kiera Boult's *Truthrz* project takes the form of both research and performance. Using Florida's concept of the Creative Class as a starting point, the project offers participants what Boult calls, "gentrification acceptance therapy" and "grief counseling for the myth of the Creative Class."¹⁷ Through performative, satirical "truth-telling" from a booth placed in sites undergoing the process of gentrification, Boult addresses the level of denial towards notions of gentrification in our own communities, and aims to "motivate artists and community members to work and live in collaboration with one another."¹⁸

While Florida argues that for a city to achieve economic growth, it must attract a population of the Creative Class, Boult contends that this notion implies the absence of homegrown creativity, which devalues the talents, knowledge and efforts of the original population; newcomers "who benefit from the work of the original members of the community raise property prices, [which leads to] financial strain on the community."¹⁹ Dominant ideologies of progress, exemplified by Florida, often take the form of heralding economic growth while suppressing or silencing the marginalized. In comparison, *Truthrz* encourages young artists to examine their own complicity in the process of gentrification, and aims to remind residents of the importance of a neighbourhood's shared consciousness.

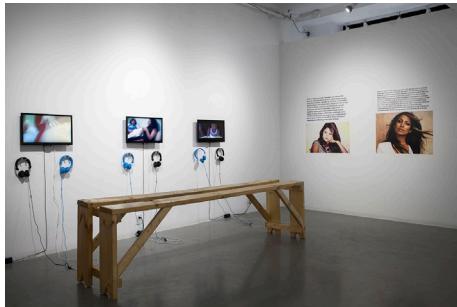
Continuing on these themes of complicity and mindfulness, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*²⁰ a collaborative installation by 10-member²¹ intergenerational and intersectional feminist-identified art collective Bonerkill, takes the form of a three-part critical thinking exercise. Visitors are first invited to choose and consume one of two "Bonerkill Cultures," bottles of flavoured kombucha brewed in collaboration with brewmaster/tea sommelier Carol Mark, the mother of collective member Ananda Gabo. In existence since the 1900s, the fizzy, fermented beverage made by fermenting tea with kombucha culture, has in recent years become associated with expensive juice bars and natural food stores owing to its oft-debated health benefits. To brew a batch of kombucha, one requires a rubbery, doughy mass called a 'scoby' (or Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast)²², which acts as the living home for the bacteria and yeast that ferment tea into a tangy, fizzy concoction. Though scobs can be grown, they are often sourced or traded from other home brewers – Bonerkill's scobs were donated by friends and fellow members of Toronto's arts community Myung-Sun Kim and Su-Ying Lee. During the brewing process, the scoby must be cared for and 'fed' with sugar; scobs are also often referred to as kombucha 'mothers' and will grow 'babies' with each batch. The care and feeding of scobs during the brewing process can be likened to the transfer of knowledge, as it is passed down through generations. While consuming one of two custom kombucha flavours (*The March of Progress* or *The Burden of Craft*), the consumer is encouraged to consid-

er their "complicit role in the current surge of the rapidly changing urban environ." How are we, as artists and cultural labourers, situated within the established communities in which we currently work? How is "regeneration" and "prosperity" distributed?²² How does the displacement of communities through gentrification disrupt the generational transfer of cultural knowledge?

While considering these questions, the viewer may move on to the installation's centerpiece, an abstracted interpretation of a City of Toronto development proposal, painted by artist Yan Wen Chang. In the piece, Chang has mimicked the 4' x 4' format and bolded headline of ubiquitous municipal informational posters, which, by law, must be posted publicly to inform communities that new development will be taking place. The text is appropriated from the actual development proposal for 99 Sudbury, a 'social club' and gym located in Toronto's Queen West neighbourhood. Formerly an industrial warehouse, the club is located at a central point between Toronto's highly gentrified Queen West and Liberty Village areas. The artist has changed the now-charged "Development Proposal" headline to, "In loving memory," shifting the proposal's intention from anticipation to memorial, calling upon the viewer to consider their own feelings regarding new constructions; are we optimistic or worried about the future of our city?

The installation is completed with a large black obsidian healing stone, purchased from the Drake General Store. The viewer is asked to spend time with this volcanic stone, known for its qualities of psychic protection and consider an affirmation or meditation to reaffirm their commitment to "1) get rich or die tryin'" (American rapper 50 cent) or 2) never selling out and staying real.²³ The stone was purchased at the Drake General Store, an adjunct to the Drake Hotel, a boutique-style hotel, incorporating community events, an expensive restaurant, café; all interwoven with contemporary art. The shop embodies the advent of the modern 'general store,' selling artisanal goods, fragrances, soaps and other sundries goes hand-in-hand with contemporary urban gentrification. The selection of products sold in this style of establishment recall the 'good old days' of hand-crafted, small-batch goods. The Drake's selective motifs of Canadians like mounties and maple syrup, along with ambiguously spiritual sprays and oils, and an occasional cardboard tee-pee-shaped cat playhouse, mirrors research done by Australian geographer Wendy Shaw, who locates gentrification as a "celebration of whiteness and in its selective appropriation of history, a form of neo-colonialism that excludes competing legitimate voices in the history of many neighbourhoods now experiencing sudden upward social trajectories."²⁴ Many of these products detach spiritual items from their cultures, or present colonial narratives nostalgically, making them palatable and desirable to a primarily white, middle and upper-class consumer base, and in the process

erasing indigenous and multicultural histories. In the same vein as Bonerkill's installation, Sofy Mesa brings forward systematic erasure in public arenas through the appropriation of present cultural trends. In Mesa's ongoing *Episode* series, the artist transcribes portions of episodes of the E! network reality show, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (KUWTK) and re-stages them with friends and family in domestic locations (*Episodes 1 & 2* in apartments in Toronto's Regent Park neighbourhood, where Mesa lives currently, and *Episode 3* in her home town of Palomino, Colombia). For the unfamiliar, KUWTK follows the lives of wealthy sisters Kim, Kourtney and Khloé Kardashian, their half-sisters Kendall and Kylie Jenner, and functions as "a perfect commercial for our products," according to the Kardashian sisters in their 2010 autobiographical book, *Kardashian Konfidential*.²⁵ Incredibly popular among a diverse range of viewers, the show provides audiences with what author Jo Piazza describes as "aspirational intimacy"²⁶: alongside 'relatable' affairs such as complicated family dynamics and body image issues, we see family members discuss international endorsement deals, and which multi-million dollar lighting is best suited for a multi-million dollar home. For each *Episode*, Mesa has chosen specific moments to be acted out by her peers. In *Episode 1*, two young women playing Khloé and Kim discuss Khloé's anxiety about wearing a two-piece swimsuit (Kim: "Your body in a two-piece would literally be a sensation"). In *Episode 2*, the sisters, played by a group of Mesa's friends in a Regent Park apartment, discuss plastic surgery ("Lips aren't permanent!"), debate Khloé's ideal body weight ("I was wearing black because I was depressed!"), and read gossip blogs on their iPhones. The setting of Regent Park in *Episodes 1 and 2* is especially relevant within the context gentrifying Toronto; since 2009, Toronto Community Housing has been 'revitalizing' the neighbourhood, replacing buildings containing affordable housing units with mixed-income, mixed-use condominium and rental buildings.²⁷ Longtime Regent Park resident and community worker Sandra Costain points out, "we must remember that at one time the same buildings being bulldozed and criticized now were once considered the answer to the community's problems. We can't place too much hope in these buildings."²⁸ In *Episode 3*, Kim and mother Kris, played by a real mother and daughter, tour Kim's new house, portrayed by an abandoned concrete residential structure ("Views everywhere!" exclaims 'Kris' as she passes through a shelter-less room taken over by wild tropical plants). Rather than mimicking the characters they are playing, the 'actors' are asked to bring their own personality and background to each scenario. With *Episodes*, Mesa questions the 'relatability' of KUWTK. How does meaning change when these moments are appropriated and placed in a new context? What is it that we are aspiring to? So, where do we go with this knowledge? The works in *What would the community think?* do



SOFY MESA (LEFT), @GOTHSHAKIRA (RIGHT)

not present concrete solutions, but rather ask questions about the ways in which those who have access to privilege might use it proactively and mindfully, to engage with issues of displacement and collaborate productively with communities and neighbourhoods. bell hooks writes, "Privilege is not in and of itself bad; what matters is what we do with privilege... Privilege does not have to be negative, but we have to share our resources and take direction about how to use our privilege in ways that empower those who lack it."²⁹ As artists and institutions, how can we do better?

-Emily Gove

¹A humorous image, video, piece of text, etc. that is copied (often with slight variations) and proliferates rapidly by internet user sharing.

²Gerges, Murray, "GothShakira: Montreal's High Priestess of Dark Feminist Memory." *Canadian Art* online, June 14, 2016: <https://canadianart.ca/features/gothshakira-intersectional-feminist-memes/>

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⁴Toronto's Vital Signs Report 2015: <http://torontosvitalsigns.ca/main-sections/gap-between-rich-and-poor/>

⁵Clements, Alexis, "In Brooklyn, a Forum Focuses the Fight Against Displacement," *Hyperallergic*, August 1, 2016: <http://hyperallergic.com/314973/in-brooklyn-a-forum-focuses-the-fight-against-displacement/>

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⁸Whye, Murray, "Soaring rent threatens Sterling Road's creative vibe," *Toronto Star*, January 31, 2016: <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2016/01/31/some-sterling-road-artists-facing-steep-rents-plan-to-move-on.html>

⁹Atkinson, Rowland, and Bridge, Gary, *Gentrification in a Global*



SOFY MESA

Context: *The new urban colonialism*. Routledge: London, 2005.

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¹¹Fullilove, Dr. Mindy, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*. New York: New Village Press, 2004, p 11.

¹²Slater, Tom, "Gentrification in Canada's Cities: From social mix to 'social tectonics,'" in *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 2005, p 55.

¹³Florida, Richard, *Cities and the Creative Class*. London: Routledge, 2005, p 10.

¹⁴National Centre for Education Statistics, "Fast Facts: Degrees conferred by Sex and Race" <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>

¹⁵Florida, p 10.

¹⁶hooks, bell and Mesa-Bains, Amalia, *homegrown: engaged cultural criticism*. Cambridge: South End Press, p 67.

¹⁷Boult, Kiera, Truth Booth pamphlet, performance ephemera, 2015

¹⁸Boult, Kiera, "Art is the New Steal: Appropriating the Hamilton Landscape," OCAD U thesis paper, 2016, p 2.

¹⁹Boult, p 2 & p 13.

²⁰Boult, p 3.

²¹The current members of Bonerkill are: Kiera Boult, Marilyn Fernandes, Ananda Gabo, Ana Guerra, Ashlee Harper, Shaita Latif, Sylvia Limbana, Pamila Matharu, Sofy Mesa and Annie Wong.

²²Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SCOPY>

²³Bonerkill, Should I Stay or Should I Go?, 2016.

²⁴Bonerkill 2016.

²⁵Atkinson and Bridge, p 12.

²⁶Kardashian, Kim, Kardashian, Khloé, and Kardashian, Kourtney, *Kardashian Konfidential*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010, p 214.

²⁷Piazza, Jo, *Celebrity Inc: How Famous People Make Money*. New York: Open Road, 2011, p 102.

²⁸Toronto Community Housing, Regent Park Revitalization Plan: <https://www.torontohousing.ca/regentpark>

²⁹Pitter, Jay in conversation with Costain, Sandra, "Reconsidering Revitalization: The Case of Regent Park," in *Subdivided: City Building in an Age of Hyper Diversity*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 2016, p 184.

³⁰hooks & Mesa-Bains, p 76

GHOST STORY

ANNA EYLER, LAURA FINDLAY, MICKEY MACKENNA, SARAH SANDS PHILLIPS, ANGIE QUICK, STANZIE TOOTH
CURATED BY BLAIR SWANN

Ghosts have always been a subject of storytelling. Appearing in folkloric traditions from around the world, in both written language, and visual communication, they have been called haunts, shades,² onryō³, bhut,⁴ draugr⁵ – as well as ghosts. The ghost story has evolved into a staple subject in literature, television series, movies, and art, both as simple entertainment as well as a complex metaphor to question ideas of truth and the unknown, the psyche and the scientific, the natural and the supernatural, life and death, and time and space. This exhibition, *Ghost Story*, examines how the selected artists engage with hauntings, spectres, and the ghost story – examining these themes within a range of media, both critically inquisitive and poetically personal. In this exhibition, they consider places that disrupt memory and history by looking at the ghost as a metaphor for things caught between presence and absence, real and unreal⁶ – representing a “crisis of space as well as time.”⁷

In her installation *Haint Blue* (2016), Sarah Sands Phillips invokes the ghost story in its “dependence on physical place”⁸ adopting the blue colour thought to have the ability to ward-off spirits or “haunts” in the southern United States. She has painted in the gallery one of these southern walls, weathered and abandoned by time, in a re-interpretation of the haunted house. To French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, the house is an “airy structure that moves about on the breath of time;” a place which is the “localization of our memories.”¹¹ Sands Phillips invokes hauntings as “what happens when a place is stained by time”¹² with an installation that explores the convergence of place and time in memory – and how it is the past that haunts the house. However, this is not the actual past, but a representation of it, mimetically built for us in the present. The walls drip with rot and age, the paint textured like wrinkles forgets lifetimes, with layers breaking open to expose distant voices, faded by calendars of morning light. But this is just a story told by Sands Phillips – a “past” rooted in the physicality of the house, where the artist stages

OCTOBER 28 – DECEMBER 3, 2016

an “encounter with broken time.”¹³

Angie Quick’s work also considers time, exploring how it is accessed through the mind, in memory and fantasy. In her painting, *How to Whistle Through a Blade of Grass* (2016), these fantasies and memories are stacked like worn lawn chairs, collected like discarded cans. They dissolve into a heaping shape of bodies without faces, without names. From her series *Interiors*, Quick’s work channels these intangible thoughts into ghostly beings – they fill space, furnish rooms, and inhabit disjointed sexual encounters. Is this a daydream? A distortion? A fleshly fantasy or “phantom happiness?”¹⁴ – fading in from some imagined memory. She gives these apparitions physical bodies with flesh both sharp and mutable, painting visions of ghostly movement, frozen on the canvas’ surface.

Mickey Mackenna poetizes the alteration of materials, in this case whittled wood and bent steel, with works that echo, her manipulation process, suspending this action in mid-alteration. To her, “a ghost is only perceivable through the material that it comes into contact with”¹⁵ – they make themselves known “like the wind,” in “the unprovoked movement of a beaded doorway.”¹⁶ Her wistful sculptures contemplate these points of contact. In *Chokehold* (2016), wood and steel lean back easily against each other, the whittled wood stick suspended in place by the steel wire, resisting gravity’s pull downward. Her sculptural works create moments of stillness that rest in their physical tension. Mackenna’s work depicts conflict, a ghostly intervention, whose motivation we are not made privy, but are left to imagine.

Storytelling is a framework that allows us to speak to unknown forces, to things beyond our physical reality. Laura Findlay’s paintings tell stories of ghosts as forces in the earth, as the movements in the sky. Findlay’s *Paper Moon* (2014) hangs high above the gallery, haunting the space just as the actual moon haunts the night – a ghost walking proud in the tall shadows it labours to paint. In *Chile* (2016), a moun-



SARAH SANDS PHILLIPS (BACKGROUND),
LAURA FINDLAY (LEFT), ANGIE QUICK (RIGHT)

tain range is somehow changed by a strange, wandering light – casting an otherworldly wash over the landscape. A phantom emerges from centuries buried deep in rock – whose cheeky, grinning Face (2016) gleams through a violent volcanic eruption. Casting characters of nature as mythologies, Findlay's work examines the idea that "myth is a system of communication, that it is a message."¹⁷ In these paintings, the moon and mountain become messengers, communicating a history that exists outside of human time. They explore the supernatural through a musing treatment of the natural, whose stories "are not content with meeting the facts: they define and explore them as tokens for something else."

Anna Eyer's video, *How to Live Forever (Trimming the Myrtle-bush)* (2016), explores otherworldliness through simulation set in the Second Life (SL) virtual environment – evoking the "disappearance of space ... alongside the disappearance of time"¹⁹ inherent to haunting. In Eyer's work, indefinite yet geometric shapes are animated to squeeze, gyrate, and pulse in apparent discomfort within strange virtual environments that conflate natural, supernatural, un-natural. These characters are not quite ghosts – they are haunted, stuck inside some phantom place. In this universe, "the actual is surrounded by increasingly extensive, remote and diverse virtualities: a particle creates ephemera, a perception evokes memories."²⁰ Here, they hum, hovering and whimpering captive in their cold cells – where "the circles contract, the virtual draws closer to the actual," and "both become less and less distinct."²¹ In this "erosion of spatiality,"²² they are kept – living out their lonely sentence, pacing through their endless time.

Stanzie Tooth creates portraits in the shape of her own loneliness, in her series *Moon People* (2016), made in plaster, pigment, and felt, she offers this series as stand-in portraits of herself, and what haunts her. The influence of a childhood lived in a "pastoral valley" backing "a dark, dense, tangled forest"²³ – a duality of setting



STANZIE TOOTH



MICKEY MACKENNA

resembling the ghost story as "the strange and sinister embroidered on the very type of the normal and easy"²⁴ – is evident in her past landscape paintings inhabited by distant, creeping figures. But in this new series of work the landscape is seemingly erased – and these ghosts are more materialized. This shift from landscape to portrait finds these figures embodying a perceived absence, a negative space, emerging from a landscape compressed to grey and an imagined invisibility.

Considering the ghost story in these different ways, this exhibition explores how personal narratives intersect with a broader definition of haunting. The works offer a contemplative look into these narratives and definitions. They consider the difficulty of memory, history, and how the two blur in ways we might not fully understand, in ways that leaves behind traces that might be called ghosts. They look at how these ghosts inhabit physical space, how they blur definitions of time.

Time seems to wind down in the fall – turning things inwards and towards the past. The days are shorter. The air moves slower. The trees get tired and their leaves crawl graciously to their beds. In the hotter months everyone is buzzing electric from the fear of losing time. But the cold draws us in – into the warmth of the home, into the comfort of the mind, to "confer age upon our memories."²⁵ Is this why Halloween comes at the end of October? It's the time when we're ripe to be possessed – ready to be haunted by ghosts of the past.

"When the winter rains come pouring down on that new home of mine – will you think of me and wonder if I'm fine?"

Will your restless heart come back to mine – on a journey through the past?

Will I still be in your eyes and on your mind?"²⁶

¹ Geordie Buxton, Ed Macy, *Haunted Charleston: Stories from*

- ¹the College of Charleston, *The Citadel and the Holy City*, (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 84.
- ²Ra'anan S. Boustan, Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds. *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214.
- ³William H. McCullough, Saburo Ōta, Rikitarō Fukuda, eds., "Spirit Possession in the Heian Period", in *Studies on Japanese Culture*, 1973, 356.
- ⁴Britannica, Dale Hoiberg, Indu Ramchandani, eds., *Students' Britannica India*, Volumes 1-5, 2000.
- ⁵Jacqueline Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 166.
- ⁶Colin Davis, "Etat Present: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms" in *French Studies LIX* (3), 2005, 373.
- ⁷Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?" in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 1, Fall 2012, 19.
- ⁸Frederic Jameson, "Historicism in *The Shining*", 1981, [visu-al-memory.co.uk/ank/doc/0098](http://al-memory.co.uk/ank/doc/0098)
- ⁹Geordie Buxton, Ed Macy, *Haunted Charleston: Stories from the College of Charleston, The Citadel and the Holy City*, (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 84.
- ¹⁰Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 54.
- ¹¹Bachelard, 1969, 8
- ¹²Fisher, 2012, 19
- ¹³Georgia Douglas Johnson, "Quest" in *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1918)
- ¹⁴Mickey Mackenna, in an email, 2016.
- ¹⁵Mickey Mackenna, in an email, 2016.
- ¹⁶Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), 107.
- ¹⁷Barthes, 1957, 107.
- ¹⁸Fisher, 2012, 19.
- ¹⁹Gilles Deleuze, *The Actual and the Virtual*, english translation by Eliot Ross Albert (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 150.
- ²⁰Deleuze, 1983), 151.
- ²¹Fisher, 2012, 19.
- ²²Stanzie Tooth, in "Showtime: Stanzie Tooth Q&A", an interview by Jess Bloom, *Studio Beat*, <http://studio-beat.com/art-news-blog/stanzie-tooth-inhabited-general-hardware-contemporary-toronto/>, 2015
- ²³Henry James, *Ghost Stories of Henry James*, in the Introduction by Martin Scofield, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2001).
- Bachelard, 1969, 41.
- Neil Young, "Journey Through the Past", in *The Archives Vol. I 1963-1972*. 1972.



LAURA FINDLAY



ANNA EYLER



LAURA FINDLAY (FOREGROUND), SARAH SANDS PHILLIPS (BACKGROUND)



ANGIE QUICK (FOREGROUND), SARAH SANDS PHILLIPS (BACKGROUND)

WHERE IS HOME?

JESSICA GABA, KARINA ISKANDARSJAH,
 ZANA KOZOMORA, ANNIE PATIÑO-MARIN,
 MAXIM VLASSENKO CURATED BY ZVIKO
 MHAKAYAKORA

JANUARY 6 – FEBRUARY 4, 2017

Where Is Home? features the work of five artists and designers, Jessica Gaba, Karina Iskandarsjah, Žana Kozomora, Annie Patiño-Marín and Maxim Vlassenko, exploring various notions of home. The highlighted definitions of home examine themes of identity, cultural reclamation, surveillance, ancestry, survival strategies, intimacy, fear of discrimination, and tradition. This exhibition highlights the ways in which the concept of home can be heavily influenced by narratives of migration. In "Canada's largest city, Toronto, the average resident today is what used to be called a foreigner, somebody born in a very different country."¹ As a result of displacement, colonization has had a huge influence on the ways that we as individuals view home. Many survival strategies have been used in order to maintain cultures while allowing outside influences from dominant European traditions. For example, the adoption of 'tea time,' by many who live in British colonies. With this in mind, how then can contemporary design and art practices be used as tools to reclaim and decolonize the concept of home?

In *Zakono*, Jessica Gaba explores themes of displacement, systemic forms of erasure such as government-endorsed ethnic cleansing, and the intimacy of 'coffee reading' to introduce Albanian Romani cultures and traditions to the gallery space. The installation and performance is named after "zakono yekh," the Romani Law of purity and tradition. Tasseography, the art of reading cups, is considered an intimate act, done in the privacy of one's home.² By presenting this practice in the space of the gallery, Gaba invites us to experience this tradition publicly. When migrating, cultural sustainability depends on various strategies of survival, identity building and adaptation. The definition of home, then begins to shift, which leads to the following question: when one migrates, does the meaning of home shift to include the cultures and traditions carried when *relocating*? Like Gaba, Karina Iskandarsjah also explores themes of displacement in her work. In *LIEUTENANT MAMIYA'S INTROSPECTION ON THE MOVEMENT OF TIME*, Iskandarsjah shows us footage of Ladakh, an Indian-controlled



JESSICA GABA (LEFT), KARINA ISKANDARSJAH (RIGHT)



JESSICA GABA



JESSICA GABA (FOREGROUND), KARINA ISKANDARSJAH (BACKGROUND)

region in Jammu and Kashmir under territorial conflict with India, Pakistan and China. Ladakh is renowned for the beauty of its remote mountains and culture, yet has also been the subject of political warfare, mostly between China and India. Though agreements were signed in 1947 to respect Ladakh as owned by India, China closed off borders with Tibet and Central Asia in the 1960s, making it difficult for those living in Ladakh to receive international trade. For Iskandarsjah, the idea that 'home' does not reside comfortably within the borders of a nation-state is very problematic and seemingly dangerous. Many immigrants continuously cross borders in search of freedom of speech including artistic freedom, political stability, and a place to call home. Home is where we expect to feel safe, but what happens when that safety is challenged by occurrences that are not within our control? Recently, we have seen the movement of populations from countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Tunisia. Our world is made up of arbitrary borders, which often dictate the land that we call home. Thus, where is home? The confusion around land ownership is one that exists in many cultures around the world. Can land truly be owned?

Prior to the colonization of Canada by Europeans in the fifteenth century, the concept of owning land did not exist. Land existed for the benefit of the First Nations people; the European concept of ownership of land for capital gains had not yet been introduced. This being said, "a reconnection to homeland and of 'traditional' indigenous land-based cultural practices

[has] proven in many cases to be key to the reclamation of spiritual, physical and psychological health and to the restoration of communities characterized by peace and harmony and strength."³ The definition of home is one that continues to evolve. Writer Taiye Selasi argues that rather than ask where a person is from, ask where they are a local. This can then open up discussion on the subject of home and what it really means to individuals.

Examining themes of surveillance and lived experiences in armed conflict, Zana Kozomora's piece, *Motherland*, delves into generational trauma. In the piece, Kozomora invites the viewer to rest their head on a cushioned pillow atop a vintage cabinet, this act symbolizing resting on a mother's breast. Inside the intimate sculpture, Kozomora displays digitally created postwar tourist footage juxtaposed with archived journalist footage during the 1990's Yugoslavian conflict in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza. It is said that the Siege of Sarajevo was the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. Kozomora investigates themes of displacement during the war, which claimed the lives of approximately 13,952.⁴

The concept of home is ever-changing for artist Annie Patiño-Marin, as she has lived in Colombia, the USA and Canada. Ancestors is a series of 8 photographs that explore her ancestral lineage. Using various graphic design techniques such as typography, Patiño-Marin studies each photograph in depth providing a detailed analysis of the time period, the various



influences, as well as the physical and psychological similarities between herself and those before her. By handwriting on these photographs, Patiño-Marin performs a study of her own identity.⁶ The chosen images range from the 1890s to the 1980s. Through these studies, Patiño-Marin discovers the probability of an indigenous branch of her family, that is likely to have been camouflaged by her ancestors due to this ancestry not being historically embraced in Latin American culture due to colonial mentalities. Writer Pico Iyer discusses the creation of the idea of home: "nowadays, at least some of us can choose our sense of home, create our sense of community, fashion our sense of self, and in so doing maybe step a little beyond some of the black and white divisions of our grandparents' age".⁷

Through his video, *Coming Home*, Maxim Vlassenko "deconstructs the experiences of adapting to a new setting and dealing with a different culture [and language] from childhood into adulthood".⁸ The footage begins with shots of downtown Toronto, framed to be reminiscent of Vlassenko's childhood spent in a small village in Kazakhstan. The footage in *Coming Home* doesn't feature many signs of life within its frames, with the exception of Vlassenko's voice. Vlassenko speaks of the experiences that have shaped the ways in which he views Toronto as his home, first in Russian and eventually in English as he juxtaposes the his old self with his current reality. The piece explores the power of language, and how it is possible to feel at home in a foreign place when you hear your language spoken to you. Language locates and can "define who you are to a people".

Gäba, Iskandarsjah, Kozomora, Patiño-Marin, and Vlassenko challenge the multiplicities that exist within the definition of home. When we move, either by choice or not, the meaning of home changes with us. We may need to change in order to feel at home, whether that is by learning a new language, adapting to new cultures, assimilating, using art and design to express ones' thoughts, or learning ones' identity

to know how one fits in. Through these works we are provided with a glimpse into what home means when other factors are considered. Where is home for you?

-Zviko Mhakayakora

Where is home? is part of the Toronto Design Offsite Festival 2017

¹Iyer, Pico, "Where is home?" TED talk, 2013. Video. https://www.ted.com/talks/pico_iyer_where_is_home

²Gaba, J. 2016. Artist Statement. Zakono.

³Alfred, Gerald Taiaake, "Colonialism and state dependency," *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, November 2009.

⁴Selasi, Taiye, "Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local," TED talk, 2009. Video. https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local

⁵Study of the battle and siege of Sarajevo: Final report of the United Nations Commission of Experts pursuant to security council resolution 780 (1992), 1994. <https://www.phdn.org/archives/www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/ANX/VI-01.htm>

⁶Patiño-Marin, A. 2016. Ancestors.

⁷Iyer 2013

⁸Vlassenko, Maxim, artist statement, 2016

⁹Noah, Trevor. 2016. *Born A Crime*. 1st ed. Spiegel and Grau.



ZANA KOZOMORA



ZANA KOZOMORA



MAXIM GASTENKO

BLOOD TIES CURATED BY EVE TAGNY & GENEVIÈVE WALLEN

OMAR BADRIN, SHAHIR
OMAR-QRISHNASWAMY, ADITI OHRI,
FALLON SIMARD, EVE TAGNY, CURATED BY
EVE TAGNY & GENEVIÈVE WALLEN

FEBRUARY 17 - MARCH 24, 2017

Blood Ties investigates the spiritual, corporeal and material bonds that cultivate sentiments of belonging shaping familial histories and intimacies. The keys to understanding where we come from and where we are heading are not readily available to us; we must actively create them ourselves in conjunction with our kin. In this context, this exhibition aims to generate a necessary space to allow reflections about one's relationship to their immediate landscape, ancestral connections and transmission of knowledge, as well as the layered inter-cultural exchanges informing our familial ties.

The selected artists - Omar Badrin, Shahir Omar-Qrishnaswamy, Aditi Ohri, Fallon Simard, and Eve Tagny - explore themes of kinship and social imaginaries. The presentation of narratives stemming from individuals from transnational and translocal families is intended to demonstrate the ways in which familial bonds are subjected to social and spatial negotiations underlining periods of longing, absence, silence and fluctuations.

As curators, we chose to focus on certain aspects related to familial bonds, as we felt that in this space and time, family units have tremendously shifted. For this exhibition, we created a space that holds narratives conveying the leg of colonialism, migration, White supremacy, and patriarchal absence and violence, as we came to understand that these factors affected all family histories (especially for BIPOC people).

"What do you want to tell me?" I ask my ancestors.

Shahir Omar-Qrishnaswamy's path to connect with their ancestors manifests, in this instance, through a series of wax sculptures and a collage. Amorphous and multi-textured, wax silhouettes personify the difficult process of probing and meditating on healing ancestral wounds.

The muddy, sticky textures of the sculptures invoke the emotional labour of excavating

passed-down traumas and intergenerational behavioural patterns, conditioning familial bonds. The tensions examined by the artist are uncomfortably rooted between one's personal quest for inner fulfillment and external expectations. The artist observes that:

"It's always going to be a struggle because family, a lot of the time, they project a certain image of what they want you to be onto you, especially when you're living a radically different life from what they envisioned. There's a lot of judgment from them but it also comes with their own inner joy to see you flourish or live your life in a freer way than they thought they had."¹

The earth-toned sculptures are formed by an intense layering of diverging elements: transformed synthetic and natural elements, relics amassed during the past artist's travels, pieces of a hijab that belonged to the women of their family. Whilst some objects are apparent and interwoven, some remain hidden, yet they are part of the sculptures' core. It's in their subtlety that all materials reveal themselves, in the attention to details. Yet as viewers, we are condemned to have only access to a limited number of points of view, leaving us craving for more but also pushing us to imagine and reflect on the unseen.

Bad Beti vs Good Beti
Aditi Ohri's video and textile work *Modern Style Sari* (2010-2013), also refers to the practice of familial excavation. For this exhibition, she has created a transgenerational portal reminiscent of a historic and specific female space: the zé-nana. Until the turn of the 20th century, in India, this room was reserved for women's gatherings in Hindu and Muslim homes. The artist embroidered on a veil, a honeycomb pattern inspired by Mughal architecture -- intentionally bridging the present and the past.

Romanticized by the artist, this communal place appears as a promising site to uncover empowering narratives pertaining to the women of her lineage. The potentiality projected onto the ze-



SHAHIR OMAR-QRISHNASWAMY



OMAR BADRIN

nana as a beautiful, peaceful, and safe place to examine darker histories within her family tree is also an entryway to start conversations with other members of the diaspora about issues related to caste, class, mental health, domestic violence, and family dynamics. Ohri explains:

"I hope to connect with other South Asian women, betis² who are conflicted about how to speak honestly about injustice and honour their families at the same time. I feel a tension between the empowered and rebellious "bad beti" that artists Hategopy and Babbuthepainter represent and the "good beti" that many of us are expected to embody at home. Can the zenana as I imagine it be a space where we can be both? Or neither?"³

During her trip to India in February and March 2017, Ohri sent clips of her travels to Xpace, with the intention of changing the projection during the course of the exhibition. These short videos are dedicated to saris showing "their fabrics, their patterns, their falls, and their function as markers of social class and caste."⁴

Being safe is being self-governed

"I found my grand-mother in a YouTube archive; my grandma was leading the Idle No More marches in my community, Couchiching. Seeing her presence in the archive was very powerful and rare. Rare because of the way the Canadian state works to erase women's roles in community, governance, and politics. Archives of Indigenous women as matriarchs who lead social movements and hold spaces of power are needed and powerful!"⁵

Fallon Simard's video *Continuous Resistance Remix* (2016) covers the history of violence connecting Indigenous communities across Canada (from East to West). Mixing audio with 30 YouTube video archives about residential schools, resource blockades by Elsipogtog youth, Idle No More footage from Couchiching First Nation and forest fires, this work highlights

the ongoing oppressive systems perpetuated by the state, white supremacy, and colonial hetero-patriarchal values. Continuously fighting for land and humans rights, and ultimately for sovereignty, it is clear that what is at stake is cultural and land sustainability to secure a healthier future for First Nations families. By embedding the intimate and the personal in specific issues affecting Indigenous populations, Fallon actively tries to reconnect with aspects of their ancestral culture and familial relations that have been violently disrupted by white supremacy.

In *Womb* (2016), Simard re-centers matriarchal voices, and their crucial roles as keepers of ancestral knowledge. Women and Two-spirited people are presented as not only giver of life but also the carrier. Simard's meditative and abstract animation invites the audience to listen and ponder on the extent of labour implicated in keeping a community and culture alive. As protectors of the life created both in the domestic and public spheres, as leaders in the struggle for self-governance, this work posits the matriarch as the most potent force in reclaiming of both body and land, which in Simard's creative realm are inextricably intertwined.

White and African

A large, inscribed paper unfolds from the ceiling onto the floor recalling both sacred scriptures and a disposable newspaper. While the materiality of Eve Tagny's text-based piece seems familiar, its content is only revealed as one gets closer.

"Digging through my mother's archives, I found these texts that were read at my baptism in 1988, probably at a time where mixed children were not so common in Quebec. The first one was an adaptation of the traditional religious texts that my young Mother wrote. The second one was written by this unconventional, very open priest. Yet it was so striking, the choice of words to describe my cultural affiliations sounds so crude and inappropriate today. So I

thought these two very revealing texts were a good way to explore notions of belonging and identity as a visible minority.⁶

By calling attention to certain words such as "White" and "African", the piece speaks of the difficulty of language in expressing realities that stand outside of normativity. What does the vernacular we employ to speak of culture and nationhood contains or reveals about our ideas, perceptions and values. The choice of words expresses both a desire for inclusivity, at a period marked by the utopia of multiculturalists politics and interculturalism in Quebec, and a gauche othering, that is evidently carried out unknowingly. Terms like "White tradition" repeatedly employed by the priest seem crude today and is revealing of the shortcomings of the time.

Nearly 30 years later, the new version shies away from gawky specifics about origins or nationality. The wishes expressed by the mother for her daughter are open towards "all cultures, all nations," open towards the world. There's an implied privilege, positioning the daughter as someone who has the means to be mobile, to transcend place yet not necessarily race.

Friends and family are not reduced to "sides", are not divided into two traditions. The family support network is not solely inherited but is built through time, care and effort. Its multiple locations are to be navigated, bridges to be constructed on every shore.

I see myself in her by my actions
Colourful and intricate, Omar Badrin's masks are both alluring and perplexing. Each of them appears as though they could recount an individual story of origin, but together they seem to be part of the same community. Within this exhibition, they epitomize the knotty and interwoven chronicles of events defining the singularity of one's family history.

Longing, absence and silence are amplified in Badrin's work as they respond to his biography as a transnational and transracial adoptee. This reality is translated in his masks through holes, hanging threads, disfigurement, and the sheerness of the crochet as his ancestral history has been unavailable to him. However, his work speaks beyond any reducing boxes ticking his multi-local identity. Although Badrin is addressing the profound racial and cultural tensions lived as a person of Malaysian descent growing up in Newfoundland, his body of work furthers the concepts of cultural legacy. As his practice centers on a craft techniques passed down by his grandmother and his mother, it testifies to matriarchal forces anchoring traditions and genealogical continuity.

In Badrin's case, learning to crochet is an active process maneuvering against genealogical bewilderment and ancestral disconnections. He

is thus creating a relational language for himself and his kin, expanding understandings of love and ancestral knowledge. Badrin states:

"I have many memories of my grandmother and mother crocheting at home. Subconsciously, these moments, and the activities that family members perform, are the ones we end up identifying with these individuals... Crochet is an activity that I associate with my family history. It's also a skill that I can take with me anywhere and continue to share. I hope that this tradition will be just as meaningful to later generations of my family as it is to me."⁷

As issues around translating his positionality arises in his work, Badrin confectioned a visual language which both connects inherited familial traditions and a broader cultural fabric.

All parts shaping this exhibition, also conceal, protect, and withhold information marking a great level of intimacy when familial affairs are discussed. Some of these artists investigate the family unit directly, how we interact within it and with each other according to our status -- son and daughter of our mothers, of our fathers, older and younger siblings, related by blood, marital alliances, adoption, or any other forms of created bond. On the threshold of what is inherited and what is acquired (or yet to be acquired), one can observe in *Blood Ties* that these relationships are unresolved but active. In each body of work, there's a soothing poetry in accepting that behind the surface of what we see and know lies hidden potentialities for further discovery and understanding of one's present realities.

– Eve Tagny & Geneviève Wallen

Blood Ties was supported by Myseum of Toronto and was part of Myseum Intersections 2017

¹ Sharir Omar-Qrishaswamy, interview with author Eve Tagny, January 30th, 2017.

² Ohri was inspired by the work of artists Hatecopy and Babbuthepainter. In an interview with Samantha Edwards for Toronto Life, the artists mention that Beti means daughter in Hindi. "Bad Beti" then means bad daughter. Samantha Edwards, "Six explosive works by Hatecopy and Babbu the Painter, the Toronto pop artists who are adored by Mindy Kaling", Toronto Life, December 13th, 2013.

<http://torontolife.com/culture/art/hatecopy-maria-qamar-babu-lakhesar-babu-the-painter-bad-beti-art-show/>

³ Aditi Ohri, interview with author Geneviève Wallen, February 1st, 2017.

⁴ Aditi Ohri, interview with author Geneviève Wallen, February 1st, 2017.

⁵ Fallon Simard, interview with author Eve Tagny, January 28th, 2017.

⁶ Eve Tagny, interview with author Geneviève Wallen, February 7th, 2017.

⁷ Omar Badrin, interview with author Geneviève Wallen, February 4th, 2017.



OMAR BADRIN



FALLON SIMARD



ADITI OHRI



EVE TAGNY



SHAHIR OMAR-QRISHNASWAMY

VPN TO IRL

RONNIE CLARK, MARLON KROLL, SOPHIA OPPEL, AND TOMMY TRUONG
CURATED BY TAK PHAM

MARCH 31 – APRIL 29, 2017

"Facebook wants to know your location. Block or Allow." A notification box appears at the top left corner of a Chrome browser every time Facebook detects that the user has no existing cookies on their computer. Technology always wants to know where its users are, how they move, and where they travel, so it can provide a tailored technological experience unique to each person. "Were you just at location X?" "Are you at cafe Y? Here are some reviews." "What is your destination?" *VPN to IRL* brings together works by artists Ronnie Clarke, Marlon Kroll, Sophia Oppel and Tommy Truong to inquire into the role of invisible data collecting technology in contemporary living.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become ubiquitous in contemporary living. Its finest manifestation to date, the smartphone, has crept into every micro-corner of Western society,¹ to the point where it is possibly both the first and last thing an average Canadian interacts with on a daily basis. In the names of convenience and easy living, ICT takes hold of the user's social experience through seemingly harmless suggestions that prioritize expediency over self-security -- for example, the series of suggestive communicative gestures exemplified by the above questions generated by Facebook. The operation of ICT depends on its capacity to extract information from its users in the form of data. This data, in turn, goes to a selected number of beneficiaries of the technology, who will then use the information to strategize ways to use the public as disposable resources. To ensure smooth operation, the owners of the technology hide the exploitative device behind a transparent and reflective façade – a two-way mirror – that reflects to the users their own images. Consumed by narcissism, the users may hardly notice how much of themselves that they have given away until it is too late. Under a data-centric regime, awareness marks not the moment of realization, but rather the moment of expiration; subjecthood ceases when there is no more data at disposal.

In "The Image and the Void" (2015), Trinh T. Minh-Ha concludes that in a world where the visual is dominant, "invisibility is built into each instance of visibility, and the very forms of invisibility generated within the visible are often what is at stake in a struggle."² For Trinh, examples such as the chairs at international congregations left vacant for Chinese activists and academics who were imprisoned or under house-arrest, signify a corporeal phenomenology in the intangible - the very characteristic experienced by the Internet users. Whereas Trinh's case studies emphasize the affluence of absentia, the exhibition *VPN to IRL* takes an interest in the insidiousness of the unseen. The curatorial vision of the exhibition addresses the 'unseen' less as a sign of resistance, but more as a manipulative strategy designed to conceal the exploitative mechanism of the technology from, and go unnoticed by, users.

Recognizing the influential scope of the unseen, this exhibition employs an incognito strategy that imitates one of the communication tactics in Internet warfare used by activists: a Virtual Private Network (VPN), a secured system of point-to-point private connection.³ Designed to protect the exchange of information on unsecured public internet networks, as well as under totalitarian circumstances where user's activity and information are of interest to the government, the technology navigates the restraints of the network by detouring on an encrypted connection directly to the host server. Expanding beyond the common visualization of data on screens, the projects in the exhibition virtually expose the real-time exploitative effects of data-collecting technology on the self as an effort to awaken the user's consciousness before their body expires. Together, Clarke, Kroll, Oppel and Truong realize the curatorial goal by establishing a virtual private network inside the architecture of Xpace. The artists maintain a stable reciprocal relationship among the four unique projects to establish a secured network allowing an opportune space to emerge while remaining unseen. Within the 'VPN' of the exhibition, the works mobilize a political act of



RONNIE CLARKE

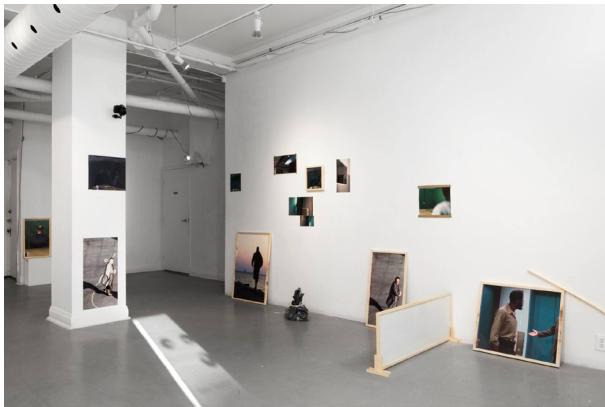
revealing - where the user experience protests, manifests, and actualizes the consequences of concealment and the prescription of technology.

Digital artist Tommy Truong creates a minimalist and strictly protocolled entry to the exhibition's experience. His enlarged QR code reverses the intimate intention of the technology, and abstracts it into visible fractals of data-bits. The significant scale of data is intended to overwhelm its viewers, forcing them to engage their whole body by physically moving away from the work in order to activate it. Once they are 'online,' viewers are provided with identifiers that translate the relationship between their body and their environment into a set of digital coordinates. The smartphones used to access Truong's QR code become the mediating screen through which the user's control of their body resembles the experience of dragging the yellow body along the grids of Google Maps. Cognitive scientist James Miller's 2014 analysis of the inter-corporeal effect of smartphones, suggests that technology integrates our bodies into an ecological media system where the functionalities of the media become naturalized elements of the built environment where these bodies inhabit.⁴ In the current reality, the body is abstracted into x-y coordinates, the environment is broken down to grids, and movements are traceable. The locative number changes as the body maneuvers through the space. Each movement and action is time-stamped and recorded diligently on a host server that only the artist has the authority to access.

In his installation *Tell Me Everything You Saw, and What You Think It Means*, sculptor and installation artist Marlon Kroll opens a portal to allow the viewers access to the other side of the surveying double mirror. Featuring still images of people's backs taken from the movies *Others* (2006), *The Conversation* (1974) and *Rear Window* (1954), the work seeks to trouble the ethics of watching people – a harmless act until the intention becomes clear. The backs of the figures, and the empty mirrors in Kroll's photos act as a firewall, keeping the intention of the

subject out of sight. Kroll's subjects appear to be ordinary people engaging in mundane activities. From the back, they all appear unaware of being monitored and surveyed by viewers. Kroll borrows the interface of a surveillance room to composite a series of framed and unframed inkjet photos in various sizes that are installed across the wall. The rectangular screens eliminate the physical boundaries and virtually shorten the distance between the observer and the subject; however, this disparateness can never be fully integrated. A sense of suspicion will remain with the subjects whose backs always orient towards the viewer. The effort in "making visible the invisible"⁵ affirms the influential role of optics in one's manifestation of gestures and behaviours. The discrepancy between perceived behaviours and intentions suggests that surveillance is speculative. The desire to overwrite the unseen fuels the obsession of data collecting, of tracking points of reference, and of invading privacy. Through the collage of images, Kroll highlights the subjectivity in viewer's perception of reality, and how perceptive it is to sophisticate influences that are induced by the invisible.

To further explore how the invisible can produce corporeal effects on the viewers, Sophia Oppel's multimedia installation, *Terms of Service*, explores the corporate employment of virtual concealment as a tool for exploitation. The work explores the hegemonic yet decentralized power that is inherent in digital infrastructure. Oppel builds an architectural representation of digital surveillance that physically engages the viewer's body in order to trouble the perception of a 'safe space,' and questions the validity of personal authority on the Internet. Oppel's architecture takes shape on an empty white wall as the data builds up negative spaces that are branded and incorporated. 3D scanned fragments of Xpace's interior are rebuilt with transparent acrylic sheets inside the gallery. Despite being disruptive to movement, the material is transparent and smooth. A small camera mounted out of sight captures the viewer's movement in the gallery, and projects it back onto the acrylic structure and the wall. Viewers



MARLON KROLL

will eventually catch a glimpse of themselves, as well as the transparent text from corporate terms of service from corporations such as Facebook, Instagram, and Axis Communication engraved on the architectural surface. The immersive experience captures the very moment of enlightenment. The complete experience of the work signals the expiry of subjecthood and the full nullification of individual rights.

The inherent bio-politics of Internet technology throughout the exhibition is prominent in Ronnie Clarke's experimental work, *READING TOGETHER*. Comprised of video, text and performance, this virtual reality-based project uses text as an agent to choreograph movements. Clarke has used Google Street View to create a textual environment for the VR headset – the spatial experience in the text referencing movement across distance. As the VR wearer moves their body to read the text, they also read it aloud to the second performer who performs the instruction. The VR headset allows the wearer to become the technology, granting them the autonomy over their technical behaviour. Despite the expectation to synchronize, the two bodies interpret and move incongruously. This discrepancy re-emphasizes the illusion of an optimal efficiency promised in the statements expressed in Oppel's *Terms of Service*. Moreover, the exertive tension between the two bodies highlights the impact that technology structure has on corporeal experience. Social researchers Per Skålén, Kotaiba Abdul Aal, and Bo Edvardsson in their study of the role of communication technology in 2011 Arab Spring (2015) suggests a transformation of service systems with a value co-creation in contention. Defining "service system" as dynamic configurations of actors and resources,⁶ the three researchers identify "op-

portunity spaces", where activists can counteract the protocol or the regime by displaying the frictions along social divisions. In a virtual reality/Internet context, the discord between the two performing bodies in Clarke's work allows the opportunity space to widen providing refuge for the bodies that have been over-exploited by corporates and those who hold the means. Clarke's space is built on the webbed system of Google Maps; however, it exists off the grid by building a virtual private network of transformative actions.

Despite their perceived ephemerality and transparency, all four projects elicit physical annoyances. They transform visual exuberance of digital graphics into obstacles that trigger the viewer's paranoia. In visually obscure areas of the gallery, the theme of surveillance repeats itself in different manifestations. The viewer's experience oscillates between active and passive participation while engaging with each work. The exhibition immerses the viewer's body in a network of constant experiential feedback between the viewers and the artworks. It exposes the viewers to the insidious mechanism of data surveillance technology while protecting them from being compromised by the system. They become aware of not only how the virtual system of experience is constructed, but also how their reactions are suggested by the very architecture of the system. The regime of surveillance operates on the ability to collect and exploit by 'invisibly' observing, and the very same awareness is shared by regular VPN users whenever they access the Internet using a vulnerable network. They codify their online behaviours to protect their bodies from being exploited. They are aware that they need to watch their back and proceed with caution on any smooth surface of the Internet.



TOMMY TRUONG

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¹Beatriz Colomina, and Mark Wigley. *Are We Human: Notes on an Archeology of Design* (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2016).

²Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "The Image and the Void," *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 2 (2015): 132.

³Per Skålén, Kotaiba Abdul Aal, and Bo Edvardsson, "Cocreating the Arab Spring: Understanding Transformation of Service Systems in Contention," *Journal of Service Research* 18, no. 3 (2015): 250-264.

⁴James Miller, "The fourth screen: Mediatization and the smartphone." *Mobile Media & Communication* 2, no. 2 (2014): 211.

⁵Trinh, *The Image of visual culture*, 131.

⁶Skålén, "Cocreating the Arab Spring," 251.

RONNIE CLARKE
PACE. LET Y
TO YOURSELF
BACKWARDS



SOPHIA OPPEL

recurrence

KIM NINKURU, FALLON SIMARD, KAMIKA PETERS,
ADRIENNE CROSSMAN, ALLI LOGOUT
CURATED BY MAANDEEQ MOHAMED

JUNE 16TH - JULY 15TH , 2017

recurrence

recurrence explores the strategies we use to confront both current and inherited historical violence. How do small acts of resistance make for queer wiggle room within the constraints of existing power structures? Collectively, the works in the exhibition offer playful takes on everyday queer life, femme intimacies, camp aesthetics, rewritten colonial archives, and black trans refusal.

In trans and queer life, the party is generative, the site where (especially for black bodies) "in the back of the club, yeah we feeling alright" (Mykki Blanco). It is curious then, that Kim Ninkuru picks *Dodo Night Club* as the title for her two-channel video installation. The videos feature intimate recordings of the artist dancing in her bedroom. On the title, Ninkuru notes that, "dodo nightclub" is " a phrase used in Burundi for when you're not planning on going out that night. For example, if someone asks you "where [are] you going tonight?" you'd reply, "dodo night club" (dodo meaning to nap, or sleep). It suggests a playful refusal of the nightclub-- the gay party's imagining of a queer future fails in many ways, cannot escape anti-blackness and transmisogyny. By refusing the nightclub (and there is power too in this refusal's playfulness, its nonchalance- why protest the function, when one could be staying in, or sleeping?), the piece instead poses a more important alternative: getting free could be found in a moment as simple as rejecting the gay club as never enough. More fun can be had while twerking in your bedroom.

Dodo Night Club's brief interrupting of normative limits on gender and sexuality, is especially urgent in light of how such limits form an integral part of colonial regimes. To the white settler state, black and indigenous bodies were made necessarily queer, containing the gendered and sexual differences through which whiteness was able to define itself. How are we to reckon with this historical violence that we have inherited? Kamika Peters takes up this question in *Brackish Waters*, a mixed-media work featuring a ceramic sculpture of a ship,

accompanied by a pair of abstract paintings. In black diasporic imaginaries, the ship is a loaded image, bringing to mind the Middle Passage. While the ship in *Brackish Waters* certainly invokes this traumatic history, it also poses the ship as a site of generative possibility, suggesting that, as Edouard Glissant writes, "the boat is a womb, a womb abyss." For water (brackish or otherwise), can also be a radically stateless space, challenging the nation state's imposed borders via the queer and slippery routes we have taken to survive legacies of settler colonialism and slavery.

More specifically, legacies of ongoing settler colonialism are further examined by Fallon Simard. Playing with meme cultures and low-resolution images, Simard's multimedia installation features a looping video of a colour-manipulated landscape titled *TerraNullius5000*, alongside a large-scale meme where the text, "just a little dissociated" is juxtaposed against an image of a McDonald's meal. It is notable that the landscape depicted in *TerraNullius5000*, consists of a low-resolution image. Commenting on the political significance of digital (and especially low-resolution) images, Hito Steyerl writes, "The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility...the image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance." What does it mean when colonial tropes in so-called Canada's art canon- such as the landscape painting, which rests on the idea that indigenous land is infinitely available to settlers- is re-imagined as a "poor image"? *TerraNullius5000* manipulates, and reworks the colonial archive to the point where any idea of indigenous land as 'empty' or to be 'discovered,' is thoroughly unsettled.

Simard notes that the placement of the "just a little dissociated" meme alongside *TerraNullius5000*, highlights "the linkage between mental health and profound disconnections from land as a direct result of genocide and colonialism." Unsettling the archive, as Peters and Simard

do with colonial and racist tropes, introduces other ways of engaging with the foundational violence of the state. We can ask, for example: what strategies do we have to live with these inherited historical traumas? Certainly, an important one would be the ways in which queer and trans folks have, despite everything, still managed to navigate everyday life- right down to our most mundane, ordinary tasks (in other words, as Martine Syms notes, "the most likely future is one in which we only have ourselves and this planet"). In a lot of activist work, there is so much waiting and so much desiring for a future that may never be realized in our lifetime. Alli Logout's short film, *Lucid Noon Sunset Blush*, explores what we are to do in the meantime, while we wait for better futures. The film beautifully depicts a constellation of femmes of colour in the U.S. south, as they navigate everyday life: sex work, collective and personal traumas, baby gay years, femme intimacies, and all

those moments that contribute to our survival.

Adrienne Crossman's *Queer Still Life Part I* also looks towards the mundane and everyday as a queer survival strategy. The piece features 3D printed Furby sculptures on plexiglass shelves surrounding a video displaying a stack of canonical queer theory texts, alongside a Tamagotchi quoting Audre Lorde's now-iconic phrase, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." In Crossman's piece, something as ubiquitous as a Furby is made uncanny, with campy bright colours interrupting routine by finding queerness in the mundane (invoking Sarah Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology). In light of overwhelming power structures, these small acts of resistance can make for very queer and very odd wiggle room within the constraints of existing power structures. The small confrontations collectively posed by the exhibited works do not necessarily change immediate political realities for queer, trans and racialized bodies. Rather, the forms of resistance taken up could best be described as productive interruptions, introducing minor, queer breaks and pauses from colonial regimes, all towards a momentary utopic feeling. Sometimes, that's enough.

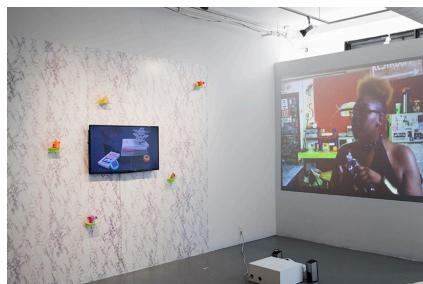
- Maandeeq Mohamed



KAMIKI PETERS



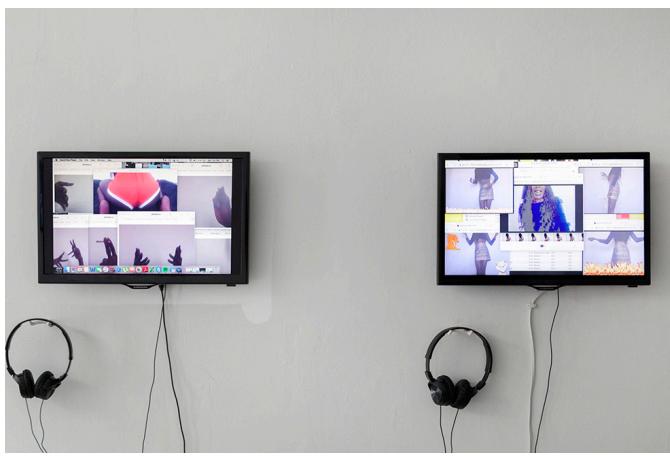
FALLON SIMARD



ADRIENNE CROSSMAN (LEFT), ALLI LOGOUT (RIGHT)



ADRIENNE CROSSMAN



KIM NINKURU

Xspace acknowledges the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council for this exhibition.

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ADRIENNE CROSSMAN



ALLI LOGOUT



A close-up photograph of sand dunes, showing intricate, wavy patterns of light-colored sand against a darker background. The texture is fine and granular.

project

3

OUT OF PLACE DON'T FORGET TO

DANA PRIETO

You can tell a lot about a person from their trash. The intimate details of anyone's life are indeed found in what's left behind: an old lover's note, scar tissue, the hiding spaces so good that they're forgotten. Some artists know this all too well, taking arms to history by destroying their material past (Charles Dickens, Barnett Newman, Agnes Martin are but few belonging to the historical purging club), others infamously bare all; Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998) displays the dirt of intimacy in brazen splendor. An archive of detritus is not new; it could be said that much of human life is spent managing the dirt. However, a neighbourhood as seen through its trash brings a new level of intimate exchange between inhabitant and place.

How to know a place defined by constant transformation, demolition, renovation, and re-use? A poetics of trash lends some answers. Dana *Prieto* creates a cartography of personal encounters as varied, inconsistent, and vital as the places it represents.

Sitting down with Dana Prieto we discuss the beginnings of her installation *Out of place Don't Forget To*, displayed on the wall behind us. Secured to the wall with masking tape, the items appear carefully organized, though no obvious formula emerges: like-shapes form a vertical display of looping elastics, a BIC lighter, fragments of construction materials fill the space in between. An ominous work glove hangs half-inflated, nestled between remnants of construction barriers that partially warn "caution" and "danger." The display expands across the wall to include artificial plant, bottle caps, plastics, twisted metals, and bits of packaging. The formal properties are visually fascinating: an indulgent mixture of industrial waste and city debris.

Dana explains that the objects were foraged during her walks around the gallery's neigh-

SEPTMBER 9 – OCTOBER 15, 2016

bourhood. Guided by her interest in material histories, evidenced by her recent work, *The Rags Between Us* (2015)—an expansive performative project where the artist explored story sharing, intimacy, and gender through collected cloths—in this installation Prieto shares a portrait of the neighbourhood through its (previously) forgotten and unwanted debris.

The artist does not have criteria for her collection aside from their found status. The selection process is entirely emotive—the objects more or less find her. The area, Toronto's transforming (gentrifying) west-end, finds its own logic to what is left behind. As we investigate and discuss her finds, the dots start to connect and stories are pulled from the wall.

I recognize a leathered banana peel from its familiar blue sticker. I don't know this at the time but on the blue sticker is an image of Miss Chiquita of Chiquita Brands International Inc., a smiling Latin American woman who was brought to life in 1944 by Elsa Carmen. Miss Chiquita's look references the "tutti-frutti" outfit, famously worn by the famous Luso-Brazilian actress and songstress Carmen Miranda in American film, *The Gang's All Here* (1943). I watch Miranda on a clip recovered off YouTube, shaking her hips while voluptuous Latinas dance with pre-Oldenburg banana props on a highly artificial island set. The dancers' bodies choreograph quasi-vaginal forms, raising the overtly sexual symbolism of the scene. The Lady of Fruit, a fertility goddess for the South's raw materials, shipped to the North for consumption.

- Robert Stam

It's true that the collection is an exercise in care, story-telling, and the afterlife of objects.

On closer inspection, I find that the objects are annotated with small hand-written narratives that vary from single adjectives to fragments of personal experience: And you forgot to climb those stairs! And we thought we would be able to fix it...The plastic bag holding the banana peel reads Export, its meaning explicit. The wall display offers a poetic mediation on the secret life of objects—the ways they gather economies of affect, circulation, personal histories, and geographies. Poetry and garbage are not unlike, sharing similarities through their excessive natures, surplus to the economies of language and production while revealing their mechanisms.

A Nestle wrapper from a Kit-Kat bar is pinned to the wall and Dana shares her experience of smelling chocolate during her walk, at the time unaware of the Nestle factory's nearby location on Sterling Road. Her distaste in the company is evident and backed by criticism of Nestle's exploitation of Ontario's water; their violations against fair labour regulations in their cocoa chair supply, among many other reports over the years. The candy bar wrapper is surrounded by rubble from the area—material evidence of the continuous rebuilding.

There's more to uncover from the heap: an instructional article on Cree settlement, a Backwoods "Wild n' Mild" cigar package sold at local pipe shop, packaging with French inscriptions—one of the few traces in Toronto of our bilingual national identity. We talk about object relations and how stories travel. For the artist, the wall display is a roadmap of intersectional stories both political and personal. Is it a portrait of the artist or a portrait of the neighbourhood? Maybe both, perhaps neither. What can be gleaned is an homage to materials' afterlives once they've left their circuits of distribution and consumption.

The initial display formulates the basis for *Out of place Don't Forget To* and from there the project continues to expand into the performative. The approach is ecological: Dana returns to the site where she found each object and leaves poetry in its place, reinforcing a reciprocal exchange of value. The artist then invites people to interject their own stories about the neighbourhood, resuscitating unremembered and erased narratives with oral history and object lessons. Some objects are translated into edible chocolate that visitors are invited to eat. I'm reminded of the way children put objects in their mouths to explore their taste and feel, to understand the world through nonverbal methods. *Out of place Don't Forget To* encourages people

to participate with their environment through intimate exchanges apart from economic cycles that have dominated the area's social history. Disrupting these larger narratives, the artist offers an invitation to participate in the vibrancy of the area through material and memory, towards a poetics of trash.

- Sara England

This exhibition and its accompanying essay were created during Xpace's 2016 residency for OCAD U graduates.

¹Robert Stam. "Carmen Miranda, Grande Otelo, and the Chanchada," *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 84.²²



THE SIDE PROFILE SERIES

SHANTEL MILLER

Shantel Miller's *The Side Profile Series* deconstructs the performativity of black bodies in socio-political settings. The series of eight oil paintings explores the implications of racial profiling and the politics of looking and being looked at. Inspired by mug-shot portraiture, the works also spotlight black male vulnerability, systematic power imbalances and misconceptions of blackness. The work features men from Miller's life painted in profile, with their shadows. The shadow not only references the likeness of the subject but also represents society's faceless caricatures of blackness. By capturing both the figures and their precarious positionality, Miller's paintings inevitably become two-way mirrors. So, if all portraits are two-way mirrors, then is a portrait of a black man simply a reflection of the systems, which abuse him? Is this room filled with black men merely a mirrored reflection of the thoughts and opinions of those who enter it? Is it true that "at the end of every path we take we find a body that is always already colonized," and can our subjectivities ever be of our own making?

Among the discussions I assumed would arise while working with Shantel Miller I hadn't expected that choosing a title for her exhibition would be the most provocative. As a practicing artist of colour myself, it has always been my concern that my work would never be read correctly by those who couldn't understand my experiences. I've always feared that my work would be lumped into a category of tokenism and otherness. Miller's series focuses heavily on perception, reading and looking, so choosing a title that could eloquently describe black vulnerability without referencing something outside of itself was crucial. It was during this process of naming that I remembered a particular quotation by James Baldwin: "As a Negro, you represent a level of experience [people] deny." We quickly realized that using a colonized language to construct a title that embodied these denied experiences would be far more difficult than we imagined.

SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 15, 2016

Yellow Room

This title is subtle enough, right? It focuses more on the room itself rather than what exists within it. The cadmium and cyan walls are comforting, inviting and say nothing about blackness that could seem 'too political' or 'race related.' This title is a trap—although it invites, excites and sets the viewer up for joy and laughter, it isn't completely disengaged from the work and its concepts. The yellow humanizes the men of Miller's paintings and removes them from a state of object-hood. By complimenting the redness in their skin, the yellow emphasizes that these subjects are alive and are not merely paintings on a wall. *The Yellow Room* invites subjects into a space where they are prompted to think critically about race and oppression. But it's a trap.

Say My Name! Portraits of Us

Olivier, Teekay, Khanya. The names we give ourselves speak to our individuality; while the names we are given by society say more about the social uniforms we are cloaked in. The subjectivities of bodies of colour are so often categorized in a singular sameness. Miller contends this very misconception throughout her series. During our first meeting, Miller clarified that it was not at all her intention to piggyback on Black Lives Matter. However, I reminded her that the work would inevitably be perceived as doing so. It wasn't Miller's brother, Sebastein's, intention to wear a grey hoodie as tribute to Trayvon Martin, but rather as a declaration of his own identity. Desi, Corey, Sebastein: the first names of Miller's subjects also act as the titles of each portrait. By saying these names, the speaker recognizes each man as an individual. Then why are their experiences lumped into a single taxonomy? *Say My Name* was not an adequate title because it can be so quickly linked to BLM, and *Portraits of Us* to the entirety of black people. But the oppression of black males exists outside of police brutality and experiences of injustice vary from person to person. Blackness does not exist in singularity, nor does it only appear when riots begin. These portraits are not solely inspired by recent events, but rather by everyday experiences.

Periphery

Periphery - a marginal or secondary position in, or part or aspect of, a group, subject, or sphere of activity.

Periphery - noun: the outer limits or edge of an area or object

Peripheral Vision: side vision; what is seen on the side by the eye when looking straight ahead.

Our final attempt was *Periphery*. Not only did this title recognize marginalization but it is also brought peripheral vision to mind. *Periphery*: the outer edge, the tip of the iceberg, the place between the 'now' and the 'what's next?' Seated in profile view, each man refuses to meet the gaze of his spectator. However, their diverted eyes do not render them powerless but rather powerful, as the act is a method of reclaiming one's subjectivity. Mug-shot portraiture behaves as a vehicle for looking, yet Miller successfully disrupts the viewer from seeing the entirety of the subject's face and by doing so she returns the power to the subject. *Periphery* prompts the spectator to consider the difference between being gazed upon and being looked at and those who are so often seen from a side view. The openness Miller acquires through painting allows her to refute the ontology of the mug-shot by idealizing and tracing over her subject's intimately.

The title 'The Side Profile Series' championed over all as alternative titles seemed to constrain Miller's efforts to re-contextualize the black body, while this title simply described the way in which each subject was painted. As Miller's intentions were multi-faceted it was important that they were left open for interpretation. By initiating a conversation about individuality and vulnerability, she reveals the civility of human bodies regardless of skin colour. Yet, each painting exposes the masses to black male's oppression and reveals Miller's concerns as a sister to black men. This sensitivity and kinship notes that behind every black man there is someone who looks and someone who gazes.

-leaf jerlefa

O'Grady, Lorraine, "Olympia's Maid," *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*. New York, NY: Icon Editions, 154-70. Print.



BODIES OF WATER

CALDER HARBEN

"We're trying to keep plastics from coming into the ocean.
Once they're in the ocean there's very little you can do."
—Max Liboiron, scholar and activist

"Water comes from the sky and the highest place
yet it never wilfully rises above anything
it will always take the lowest path in its humility.
Yet of all the elements, it is the most powerful."
—Adopted July 31, 2014

Okanagan Nation Annual General Assembly
Spaxomin, Sylix Territory

Amisiguapua'q. Elasugwet. A'sugwesugwigij.
Asoqomasugwet. Gesigawitg. Getapa'q. Esa-
mqwat. Gijigapa'n. Gta'n. Jipu'ji'. Lampo'q. Lapa-
tnewel. Magatgwig.

Water is an ancient realm. Water intervenes and connects. Water is movement and history. Water holds and protects. Water releases and bombards. Water is ecology and future. Water traumatizes and witnesses. Water silences. Water resolves. Water is absent and violent. Water survives. Water is wound and healer. Water speaks.

The politics of water, and the politics of embodiment – social, cultural, and gendered constructions of inhabiting a body – are inextricably linked. Artist Calder Harben continues a global conversation about water, and expands this dialogue with their exhibition, *Bodies of Water*. Harben invites visitors to the exhibition to absorb the ocean, to listen, and embody the depths of the Mediterranean Sea off the east coast of Sicily. Working with a hydrophone recording, a special microphone created to record underwater sound from OBSEA Ocean Observatory that is lowered 2000 meters into the ocean's underbelly, Harben distorts live sound waves and sonically documents the ocean and its inhabitants 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through a subwoofer.

JANUARY 6 - FEBRUARY 7 2017

Through OBSEA's collection of interpretive and scientific data charting salinity levels, temperatures, currents, tides and audio/seismic data, Harben brings the ocean in a sound installation, which is almost a private soundscape, into the context of a city, a public gallery space, and questions what is sound. How do we listen? What do we hear? What do we choose to tune out? What can't we absorb? How do our bodies listen? What can we trace inside and outside ourselves? How do we react to the memory of water? What is the sound of water? What do we absorb from sound if we can't hear it? But first, we need to listen, and hear the water. It's been speaking to us, and through us for centuries.

Ocean noise pollution isn't romantic; it's raw violence. Imagine thousands and thousands of container ships, boats and bodies being carried across water. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), over 350,000 refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean Sea fleeing their lives, and taking their hopes and fears in unsafe boats through horrifying conditions. Bodies above and creatures below water can't tune out the sound of refuge.

Harben believes listening is an act of embodiment, a gesture of political and ecological relationship¹. As we listen, we connect to an emotional space, which reorients our mode of hearing.

Bodies of Water requires deep listening as means of communicating with the sonic depths of ancient waters, yet these sounds are almost inaudible, silent even. Harben asks us to metaphorically enter the ocean and pay witness, encouraging us to listen deeply with our bodies, our spirits, our beings, perhaps even commune with our ancestors, and essentially become water.

Harben's work requires us to take off our proverbial wetsuits, and dive in – to absorb oceanic vibrations through our pores, to get drunk on listening, and hydrate ourselves.

As I am writing this essay, news has broken that

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, an American federal agency, will not grant easement to cross Lake Oahe for the proposed four-state \$3.8 billion Dakota Access Pipeline² (*The Toronto Star*) – thanks to the water protectors at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation – and is currently seeking alternative routes. The project has been temporarily stopped.

This victory is massive, a political and ecological shift. I am breathing an oceanic sigh of relief, bowing to the territory, and a nation of Indigenous relations, and offering deep gratitude to thousands of water protectors at Standing Rock who left their families and territories, and bravely stood – even after being arrested, pepper sprayed, struck by rubber bullets and concussion canons³ (*The Washington Post*) – and suffered trying to protect the water. In Harben's *Bodies of Water*, the ocean is omnipresent, and commands urgency.

Every water protector knows: water is life. We have nothing without water. We are nothing without water.

This isn't about one territory. This is about all Bodies of Water. Standing Rock represents all oceans, rivers, lakes, ponds, waterfalls, glaciers, icecaps and passageways.

In reflecting on Harben's *Bodies of Water*, I am honouring the ancestors and all my relations who fought to protect water, generation by generation, and paying witness to this essential work, recognizing our roles as critical thinkers, artists, and global citizens to protect, and listen to every body of water – our oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, icebergs and waterfalls. To hear each other. It's our only medicine.

We are not separate from water. What happens 2,000 meters below the ocean off the coast of Sicily affects all of us on Turtle Island. Every particle of garbage in the ocean carries through our bodies. Water is borderless.

Harben's *Bodies of Water* asks us to question our relationship to water, to listen, and take into consideration our embodiment, and bodies beyond ours. As we listen to the water we begin the process of hearing, and in this form a bond of protection for our internal and external oceans, and each other – every lake, river, and waterfall. Every single body of water needs protection. Every single body deserves protection.

Bodies of Waters invites us to listen, to witness, and react – to return to the water; the very existence of us all.

Wela'lioq water protectors. Wela'lin.

We are made of oceans. We are made of inaudible waterways. We are volatile undercurrents. We are upstream. We are replenishing downstream. We are rushing rivers. We are winding waterfalls. We are overflowing lakes. We are wayward waterways. We are wild swimmers.

We are liquid ceremony. We are vapour. We are unnamable fluidity. We are pollution in the sea. We are languages of saliva. We are bodies of water.

-- Shannon Webb-Campbell, poet and member of Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation

The artist acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council for this exhibition

Bodies of Water is part of the Toronto Design Offsite Festival 2017

¹ Calder Harben, email exchange with the artist, July 2016.

² James MacPherson. "Dakota Access pipeline protesters staying to find out what Trump will do" *The Star*, December 5th, 2016. <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2016/12/05/dakota-access-pipeline-protesters-vow-to-stay-following-major-victory.html>

³ Steve Hale. "The police crackdown on pipeline protesters in North Dakota" *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-watch/wp/2016/11/23/the-police-crackdown-on-pipeline-protesters-in-north-dakota/?utm_term=.fdb1154418a8



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

KENDRA YEE AND TOVA BENJAMIN

"Memory is attenuated by gaps and misrecognition, charged by desire and fantasy, and shaped by the canalizing powers of emotional investment and habit. Equally, its content is revised by subsequent knowledge, lost by forgetting and disease, recast by new shadings of recall, and remade by contestation and revelation."¹
 -Renee Baert

To Whom It May Concern, a collaborative exhibition by Tova Benjamin and Kendra Yee, explores the exchanges between meaning-making, memory, and relationship. Using an overhead projector, a series of Tova's intimate, unsent and previously confidential letters to various recipients and diary entries are projected onto a wall - in the literary and literal limelight. The audience is free to sift through, project and read the letters in the manner of a 'choose-your-own-adventure' book. The letters are presented in a reflexive conversation with a collection of art objects and illustrations devised by artist and Tova's friend, Kendra Yee. Visitors may navigate the letters by their own accord, negotiating potential narratives. Kendra has illustrated and sculpted a complementary series of whimsical, quaint and fanciful scenes and sculpted bronze casted and ceramic objects that comprise visual responses as reader of these documents; they demonstrate simultaneous nuances of fact and fiction. The exhibition is an exploration of the materialization of memory, the dynamism of social interpretation and the displacement of realities across lenses of lived experience and personal chronicles. Tova and Kendra invite the audience to undertake a speculative exploration that navigates and investigates multiple levels of significance, sentimentality, intimacy and biography. As Kendra gives material form to Tova's words in sculpture and illustration, artifacts of her responses - at once authentic and folkloric - are made manifest.

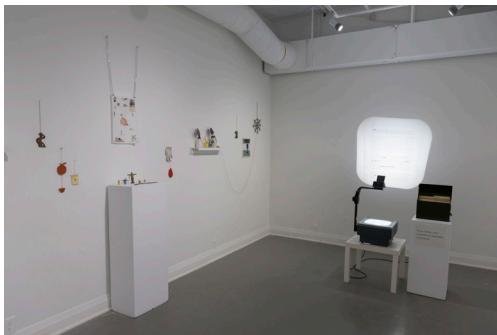
Kendra's personified artworks expand on and articulate her own relationship with Tova. The illustrations she produces have a strange yet playful quality, enlivened by a slightly dark and nebulous sense of humour. The characters she brings to life appear both comical and domestic, and may be

FEBRUARY 17- MARCH 24, 2017

read as icons, symbols, and ephemeral presences in devious scenarios. As audience members read more letters and look closer to the artifacts recurring themes unfold: religion, time, sexuality and sexual violence, family ties, friendship, travels and personal struggles. Featuring a fragmented and eclectic collection of sculptures and illustrations, this visual account of four years of memories highlights the intrinsic labour of translating one's personal experiences. The work of sorting out the meaningful from the mundane, further demonstrates the complexity in remembering and recounting one's story. If one pays attention, they can notice that referred friends, family members, writers, and literature constitute the thread connecting Tova's stories into one narrative. Organized as a dream dictionary, Kendra's visual interjections echo the narratives and words cast across the gallery wall. Feeding on each other's beliefs and obsessions with dream symbols, ghosts, and otherworldly creatures, through their work process, these young collaborators are playing with the perspective of individual versus collective memory. Tova's letters are just as much art objects, as her words take on semiotic weight in meaning making - they are artifacts of identity, in both correspondence and expression. Lost in translation, Kendra's creatures incarnate as corporeal versions of Tova's words.

During Kendra's process of art-making, the letters were read, interpreted and responded to with limited knowledge of their origins and without any communication with the author. The audience should note: it is a mystery as to which response comes from which letter. Furthermore, although dated the chronology of the exhibit is mysterious: the controversy of memory is paramount to the negotiation of this space. One is left to speculate the expanse of time these conversations span. The narrative is not linear and what is considered 'past' is negotiable.

With both cerebral acuity and poetic cadence, Tova's art engages 'meaning-making' as an intimate experience through both the lenses of language and material form. Memories swim in streams of narrative. 'Fact' is fragile and 'truth' malleable in



digressive streams of consciousness. What are the implications of presenting such letters as 'artifacts,' especially when many lenses of interpretive revisions are applied? Are they re-constructed, contrived, or meant to become new versions of themselves? By playing with the human desire to engage with personal stories, Tova dares the audience to pry and speculate on the personal content of each letter, satisfying the urge to peer into intimate moments of humanity. She has surrendered her control over the outcome by opening the privacy of her communications to a public gaze, while on the other hand, each typed letter has been carefully censored by hand. A great deal of *To Whom It May Concern* deals with trust - in both the relationship between the artists, and between the artists and the audience. The installation is deeply personal, as the essence and nature of letters, both sent and unsent, can be at once tragic and cathartic, enlightening and liberating. She demonstrates, in each letter, poetic transcripts of her traumas, some haunting and stern, others coy, walking lightly through the events of a day. Tova draws on religious and cultural metaphors in various styles of monologue and confession, drawing attention to her reception as friend and lover.

This dialogue is the fulcrum of an ever-expanding conversation between subjects and subjectivities: we come to know one another' perspectives better as we contemplate the nature of communication. As listeners and as messengers, we ponder the messages we carry as the intermediaries ourselves. Ultimately, there is an intrigue in the 'detective' approach: this exhibit provides the dimensions of tactile choice, as well as uncertainty. Comprehension of sequence and order is left with an audience that is encouraged to immerse itself in the collaborative effort to solve the mystery within these stories. Whether the audience approaches these as observer, tourist or voyeur, the temptation to enter a suspension of disbelief is real. We are given the opportunity to engage at will in a puzzle of many emotional valences, subtleties of vulnerability and shades of exposé. Yet, Tova has been deliberate in her selections. This is reflected in the process of selection and engagement that is offered to us.

To Whom It May Concern is a negotiation of personal realities. As the letters are translated into art objects and visual images, the transfiguration that occurs somewhere between Tova and Kendra- and then, moreover, the audience as interpreter- speaks to a polyphony of possible dimensions produced from these relationships. Recounting the milieu of places, histories, and persons as in a diary, Tova presents articulations of her life experience as malleable in both literal and psychological projections of 'The Truth.' It may be that a multiplicity of truths and versions of these histories compete. Be that as it may, the paradigmatic sentimentality the exhibition retains its charm. The content of each letter acts as an intimate memorial - both a memento and testimonial to each recipient. The meaning of these memories and messages are thus subject to new formulations in the unfolding of the individual, social and cultural reflexivity to each person who encounters them.

-Dana Rosemarie McCool

Bâcher Renée. *Trames De Mémoire/Materializing Memory*. Saint-Hyacinthe: Expression, centre d'exposition de Saint-Hyacinthe, 1996, pp.18-21 (published for a touring group exhibition held at Expression, centre d'exposition de Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec, May 1-21, 1996). Catalogue.

MAPPING TIME: HARMONIC STUDIES FOR VERA RUBIN

MEHRNAZ ROHBAKHSH

In this age of fragmented reality, Mehrnaz Rohbaksh's *Mapping Time: Harmonic Studies for Vera Rubin*, is a fresh and welcome contemplation of universality and scientific truth. The work is a meditation inspired by galactic motion and grounded in the physical reality of gravity. The scale of the drawings, as well as the dark walls and lighting of the installation serve to evoke awe and even reverence, but rather than appealing to personal deities, Rohbaksh points us to the skies, to the galaxies and to a simple but absolute truth that we all share: the effects of gravity.

Rohbaksh's work is dedicated to Vera Rubin, the astrophysicist responsible for providing much of the evidence for the existence of dark matter, who was a pioneer both as a scientist and as a woman in a male dominated field. She was the first woman to use the telescopes at Mount Palomar Observatory (women were literally banned from using the telescopes until the mid 1960s). While Rohbaksh pays personal tribute to Rubin in her title, the work itself strictly focuses on the scientific concepts to which Rubin contributed.

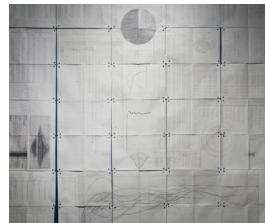
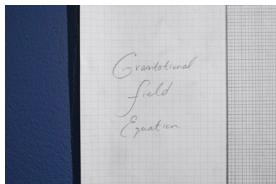
The first drawing describes Albert Einstein's gravitational field equations. While there is no direct mapping of the equations to the drawing, it very effectively conveys two central ideas about Einstein's theory of gravitation. The panel on the left conveys the non-linear relationship of the gravitational attraction between two objects and the distance between them. This is a feature shared by the gravitational theories of both Einstein and Isaac Newton. While Newton's gravitational theory was very successful in predicting the large scale motions of planets and stars, eventually more precise measurements of Mercury's orbit revealed discrepancies from the theory, the resolution of which eventually required a new way to model gravity. The repeated curves overlaid on the grid background in Rohbaksh's first drawing evoke the search for a new theory: the existing one had the right shape, but the measurements revealed irregularities. While the measured irregularities

MARCH 31-APRIL 29, 2017

seemed small, it turned out that in order to resolve them, Einstein had to construct a theoretical framework that broke radically from Newton's theory. Rather than thinking of gravity as a force signal that travels through space and time, Einstein instead saw gravity as a deformation of the fabric of space-time.¹ The panel on the right conveys this central concept of Einstein's gravitational theory – that the space behind the action of the curve is active in all kinds of detailed and compelling ways.

The second drawing depicts graphs from astrophysicist Vera Rubin's original research, which accumulated evidence for the existence of dark matter. The drawing includes graphs from a 1976 publication in which Rubin was able to deduce the motion of our own galaxy through a deep analysis of observations of far-away galaxies,² and graphs from a work published in 1980 in which she presented detailed measurements of the rotational velocities of a range and variety of galaxies, which amounted to the first set of robust evidence for dark matter.³ This evidence comes from measurements of the rotational velocity of spiral galaxies along the radius of the galaxy. Rubin and her team observed that the edges of spiral galaxies move at the same rate as the center region. Given the galactic mass distribution observed through telescopes, it was expected that the peak velocity of rotation should be somewhere near the center of the galaxy and that the edges of the galaxy would be moving much more slowly. The conclusion that fell out of the measurement analysis was that there must be a lot more matter in the galaxies than we can see, and this invisible matter was dubbed 'dark matter.' Rohbaksh's drawing conveys the laborious process of assembling the detailed observations and comparing them to modeled predictions, which then presents the assemblage of evidence that introduced dark matter to our human body of knowledge.

The third drawing serves as an illustration of the rotational properties of spiral galaxies from a spatial perspective, detailing the complexity and variety of textures within galaxies. While



the second drawing maps the velocities of and within various galaxies, this third drawing illustrates a galaxy from a spatial perspective, their literal layout as they would look through a telescope. This is the only colour illustration in the installation, but it is monochrome, in blue, referencing the sky, and architectural blueprints used to map spatial layouts.

The installation is completed by a sonic piece that translates the drawings into an immersive soundscape.

Rohbaksh's practice is outwardly reflexive rather than inward looking. Instead of identifying a personalized perspective from which to speak, she hopes to let the universal speak. In her practice, she positions herself as a neutral interpreter: learning how to better coax equations that reveal physical truths into expressing themselves through her artistic visualizations and through her sonic works. She doesn't position herself as a woman, as an immigrant, as a daughter of refugees, but instead as an interlocutor of ideas, big ideas, ideas that exist beyond individual human identities. Rohbaksh aims to express universals, to create work that

stands alone on its ideas, on its conceptual and formalist principles. Such expression is a privilege that has been traditionally only afforded to white men, but Rohbaksh claims it confidently and unassumingly, not unlike the way Vera Rubin confidently and unassumingly claimed the privilege traditionally only afforded to men of observing, recording, and explaining the motions of the universe.

- Ana Jofre

¹ Another important feature of Einstein's theory is that it does not differentiate between space and time, therefore physicists refer to the substance of the universe as a single entity, named space-time.

² "Motion of the Galaxy and the local group determined from the velocity anisotropy of distant SC I galaxies. II - The analysis for the motion" V. Rubin et al, *Astronomical Journal*, vol. 81, Sept. 1976, p. 719-737.

³ "Rotational properties of 21 SC galaxies with a large range of luminosities and radii, from NGC 4605 /R = 4kpc/ to UGC 2885 /R = 122 kpc/" Rubin et al, *Astrophysical Journal*, Part I, vol. 238, June 1, 1980, p. 471-487.

FREEDOM TUBE: LOST IN X SPACE

jes sachse

As if buoyed by some invisible force, a forest of white-and-red straws float ethereally toward the ceiling, imposing a low threshold over a small room. Inside, a riot of ebullient pinks colour every object, transporting the viewer down an Alice-in-Wonderland-esque rabbit hole. This assemblage, aptly named *Freedom Tube: Lost in X Space*, is the work of jes sachse. It attempts to communicate the experience of disability via prosthesis, opening the viewer's eyes to the infinite possibilities of a realm where accepted discourses of power are turned on their heads.

In creating a liminal space through an assemblage of found objects and choreographed space, sachse attempts to build community through affinity. The low height of the sculpture inhibits anyone from entering the space unless they are either short or seated in a mobility device, inverting the everyday barriers faced by the disabled/Crip community and limiting the access of the able-bodied into this almost sanctum-like space. Obstinate repetition renders the straw, an object that is crucial to the survival and engagement of Crip folk with their everyday world, into a conduit for experiences across barriers of ability, gender, sexuality and race. *Freedom Tube* confounds our reading of the straw as a disregarded piece of refuse. It also actively posits modes of community building, philosophies of care and empathy that can be possible through the exploration of that which is often wantonly discarded.

In the context of an exhibitionary complex¹ that continually asserts the power of the center, rendering all that is not white, able-bodied, cis-gendered, heterosexual and male as 'other', sachse's gesture is incredibly potent. *Freedom Tube* questions the value of 'visibility' and awareness in a surveillance society wherein visibility does not often equate to power.² When symbols of erstwhile emancipation become flattened containers devoid of meaning, destabilizing and confounding signifiers becomes imperative. *Freedom Tube* forces its audience to wade through a threshold of uncertainty.

JUNE 16TH – JULY 15TH, 2017

Enigmatically, the work possesses no outward markers of otherness and makes no outsize claims to being an insider-informant. Objects, stripped of their quotidian meaning and set afloat on this gentle psychedelic current, congregate of their own volition, finding in their formal and material affinity, a new home in a fantasy world. Although by accident, a pattern of reds and whites emerge, echoed in two book covers- Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body* - and a red-and-white patio set- contemplates youth, desire, aging and the oppressive burden of normativity in a disabled body.

In a mild Duchampian nod, a pink toilet sits rooted to one corner- belying unrequited queer desire in its lush pastel pink. Upon closer inspection, it is found to have been lovingly cleaned and sanitized for presentation. sachse lets slip that this element is a literary allusion to Alice Munro's short story *Shining Houses*, which they encountered during a difficult episode of their life, cleaning friends' houses with their mother to make ends meet.³ The story's curious protagonist explores their world by seeking motifs amongst the repetitive humdrum of life and toil. This poetic modality is not unlike sachse's process in creating *Freedom Tube*.

This passage in particular stands out as a possible means of approaching the work:
 (...) Mary found herself exploring her neighbor's life as she had once explored the lives of grandmothers and aunts — by pretending to know less than she did, asking for some story she had before; this way, remembered episodes emerged each time with slight differences of content, meaning, color, yet with a pure reality that usually attaches to things which are at least part legend.⁴

The viewer is thus similarly asked to shed their preconceptions, and attempt, even if by pretense, to find an underlying beauty through repeated encounters with the unfamiliar. These objects congregate by accident, collectively finding affinity in colour. Quite similarly, the commu-

nity around it gathers, seeking common ground and mutual safety. The commode also brings into sharp focus the drudgery of subsistence labour and the ever-present precarity of the artist-maker. In an intimate and vulnerable gesture, sachse effusively turns a critical gaze toward domesticity and all that is laboured and lost in service of social conformity; and to sanitize of the messiness of lived experience. Woven together, this assemblage of banal objects allows a whimsical, almost utopian alterity to emerge, in which barriers are inverted, care and labour are reciprocal, and in which an enduring queer futurity can be imagined. Yet, this alterity is a fragile one, sustained in hushed whispers in safe places, disappearing into legend under duress from a cruel material reality.

Freedom Tube's imagined alterity is not simply limited to the realm of metaphor; however. The work tangibly engages with social reality and strives to act as a counterbalance to the coercive power structures meted out by the institutional core. It accommodates difference and values an experience of the profound amidst the oppressively banal. "Rarely do we engage willingly with the magnificence of this unique terrain—that is with difference and abjection," writes sachse, poignantly about their work.⁵ "The language of disability, for example, is an ever-shifting dance of 'I see a person, not a disability,' which simultaneously denies experience and legitimacy of voice."⁶ *Freedom Tube* dares to seize its positionality as queer and disabled, becoming a site of affective engagement in which the audience can interact with the multi-faceted barriers that disabled people face every day— the droning monotony of a life coloured in the familiar 'disability blue,' the sleights of passers-by, the sheer exhaustion of the body through labour rendered worthless by socio-economic norms. This 'insider-informer' position unwittingly conferred upon artists is a fraught one: the token inclusion places the burden of representing an entire spectrum of

people within one enigmatic poetic turn. It others by its tokenism, extrapolates the intimate violence of everyday experience into an amorphous socio-political crisis with no seeming solution and a lot of hand wringing. But what happens when we, with force and intention, reconstitute the author in this field? sachse's work possesses an ebullient self-assuredness and a nonchalant flippancy that doesn't tolerate the condescension and pity of the able-bodied. The conceit of a threshold, a malleable and liminal space is an integral device in *Freedom Tube*. It represents a quagmire of shifting possibilities alluding to an identity crafted around euphemisms, erasures, and polite deferrals in sign. The knowledge here is not flagrantly demanded by the expanding bureaucracy of the institution, but lovingly granted by an artist to their community. Activating the banal and transporting it to the realm of the ethereal, sachse makes it so that the presence of the banal and the monotonous objects such as the straw can be transformed through a series of incredulous encounters.

-Vince Rozario

¹Borrowing from Tony Bennett's coinage, referring to Foucault's framework of power and knowledge when applied to the dissemination of objects in a museum/gallery setting. See Bennett, Tony, "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage." *The International Handbook of Museum Studies*, 2015, 3-20.

²Siddiqui, Ayesha. "Arts Journalism and Criticism in a Digital Age." Lecture, *Superscript 2015*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.

³jes sachse, interviewed by Vince Rozario, Toronto, ON, June 5th 2017

⁴Munro, Alice. "The Shining houses." In *Dance of the happy shades : and other stories*. London:Vintage, 2000.

⁵sachse, jes. "Crip the Light Fantastic: Art as Liminal Emanicipatory Practice in the Twenty-First Century." In *Mobilizing Metaphor: Art, Culture, and Disability Activism in Canada*, edited by Christine Kelly and Michael Orsini, 199. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2016.

⁶Ibid



external

3

THE JOY OF ATLEIGH: REVIEW OF GOUACHE

ATLEIGH HOMMA

The Joy of Atleigh is artist Atleigh Homma's YouTube channel, a platform to share her passion for art by reviewing paint mediums, related art essentials, and teaching painting techniques. Titles such as Q&A, *My Boyfriend Does My Portrait*, *Review of Gouache*, *What Inspires Me*, and *My Top Five Art Supplies*, reveal a familiar communicative pattern found in YouTube's vlog culture. Vlogs are an extension of personal blogging and web-cam video diaries, and similar to these formats, creators (or vloggers) select a niche subject catering to particular audiences. The success of a vlog is based on an array of factors from the technical aspects behind the camera to online self-representation. One's ability to self-brand is key to establishing a growing viewership, making casual entries into personal details an essential tactic. From parading their partners in front of the camera, responding to Q&As, and sharing quirky interests/stories, vloggers demonstrate an applied and conscious effort to balance their narrative between expectations and authenticity. Thus, the specificity in vlogging resides in its host's delivery. Interestingly enough, Homma's channel serves as a distinct extension of her art practice, while debunking the mechanics of online self-representation, the performativity of self-marketing as an artist, and expanding the breadth of performance art. For the purpose of this essay, the focus will be on one of her most recent videos; *Review of Gouache* (2016) encompasses the aforementioned claims and offers an interesting shift in regard to the authoritative ephemerality of performance art.

Review of Gouache begins with the artist acknowledging and apologizing for the time gap between this video and the last, which is important as it hints to a palpable anxiety on material production. Homma then segues to her topic by stating: "a lot of people have been recommending gouache to me because they said: 'oh you really like water colour, you're probably gonna love gouache'"¹. As benign as it seems, this affirmation further suggests that vlogging is rooted within a two-way communication system engaging the vlogger and commenters.

SEPTEMBER 1- NOVEMBER 31, 2016

Although vlogs could be interpreted as a non-interactive platform, it is arguable that this user-created media feeds from the conversations created with their audience and other vlogs. Without subscribers and comments, a vlog becomes unanimated. Hence, scholars Jean Burgess and Joshua Green explain in their book *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* that "vlogs are frequently responses to other vlogs, carrying out discussions across YouTube and directly addressing comments left on previous vlog entries."² Riffing off that dynamic, Homma integrated in *Review of Gouache* a caption from a previous video, *My Top Five Art Supplies* (2015), in which she talks about watercolour. This addition has a grounding effect, asserting a sense of continuity in her entries. However, what is truly noteworthy is that there are no traces of previous comments from subscribers asking about her interest in the medium. Still, by echoing an already existing communicative pattern from other art vlogs, Homma taps into a bigger YouTube conversation. Perhaps, the motivation brought by one's viewership goes hand in hand with the labour behind maintaining an appealing vlog. One could also add that the invisible labour in vlogging sheds light on techniques of self-marketing and shaping one's online identity. Since vloggers are public entities, a negotiation between reality and authenticity is often at play. As a platform on which the line between front stage and backstage conflates, self-editing and directing give freedom to carefully curate which aspects of the self will seamlessly be unveiled or re-invented. Yet, Homma creates little disruptions furthering the conflation between the final product and behind the camera while positioning her video within an amateur aesthetical realm. Pixelated Photoshop editing and cropping as well as asymmetrical lighting are some of the few elements leading to a conversation about authenticity.

In comparison to other self-made popular art channels such as Baylee Jae, Audra Auclair, and Happy D. Artist,³ Homma delivers unpolished recordings- letting through a less calculated personhood. By keeping moments when she

is snorting and zoning out in Q&A (2016), or choosing a bloody scene to depict in Review of *Gouache*, these editing choices allow the artist to display a multifaceted identity supporting her uniqueness. Particularly, when considering the revelation about her passion for wrestling. Being a female artist, who is also a female wrestling fan, Atleigh is positioned in the ethos of a subculture within a subculture. Via her depiction of infamous wrestlers Kane and Mankind with their manager Paul Bearer from WWE, she not only reviews gouache as a medium and gives a well-rounded tutorial about it, but also opens a channel in which art intersects with sport. Moreover, the young painter goes beyond expectations, as she elaborates on her relationship to wrestling and unravels her knowledge. Atleigh ultimately makes her work accessible for a whole other type of audience. Homma is able to mark herself from other female artist vloggers, who generally employ feminine subject matters such as Disney princesses to lead their tutorials.

It is this unexpected mix, which distinguishes her brand identity. Rather than repeating the tropes of female vloggers, who tend toward a

straight-forward use of ingratiation, or audience pleasing⁴ strategies, Atleigh infects the friendly script. In this case, by demonstrating the materiality of gouache, she paints a bloody scene of staged violence, rather than the expected pretty princess portrait. At the 4 minute mark, she describes the affect audiences might have in reaction to the painting.

"I love the idea that one image can be both so frightening and... visceral, and come off as being something scary and like real if you don't understand the background. Or you can just like laugh when you look at it 'cause you know it's a joke."⁵

The painting and subsequent description metaphorically reveal Atleigh's self-awareness in her performed or branded online identity. She is gently challenging her audience to question their expectations of her as a vlogger, "...subverting femininity... ... to capture the complexity of the continuous process of negotiation and resistance with women moving between different positions at different points in their lives or in different situations."⁶ This painting extends her brand to include an inter-



est in wrestling, thus her persona is not fixed within the confines of expected roles as an artist, vlogger or cis-woman.

The very platform YouTube occupies is one that destabilizes and demystifies the hierarchy that art is meant to exemplify. Review of *Gouache* demonstrates Atleigh's painting abilities, and general interest in wrestling, the former in reaction to a recommendation that she try using the paint. The inclusion of an outside recommendation as fueling the content for this video is particularly important; she is revealing the reasoning for her choices of what to include as content, and that she is subject to critical input. This subjectivity is reflective of YouTube as a platform where "...authority is no longer given by some 'Official' site, and taken for granted by the audience, as had been and often still is the case in many institutional (education or other) sites."⁷ It could be said that the rough style, or 'amateur aesthetic' of Atleigh's vlogs, reflect this disrupting affect. The unrefined Photoshop overlays of her painting around her talking head, combined with her recounting of her passion for pro-wrestling make the vlog entry feel personal. That subjectivity serves to "...unmake and remake structures of power in social relations – a seeming inversion in power..." as described by Bezemer and Kress, establishing space for vloggers to contribute to information exchanges subjectively, and for audiences to judge and question.

Used as a performative platform, Review of *Gouache* engages art viewers to another form of theatrical subjectivity. Although some would claim that the interest for performance art has nowadays deflated, as James Westcott further confirms: "the ubiquity of digital spectacles and curiosities today is of the reason performance art has had its thunder stolen".⁸ On the contrary, it is actually more alive than ever, because of the advent of social media as it generated an alternative scene on which a diverse array of subversive interventions are possible. Whether it is through trolling or re-appropriating a social media platform as an art medium, performance is always central to those endeavors. Through an extensive research on vlogging language and textures, Homma examines the potentiality of vloggers as performers, artists as performers - painters as performers. She exposes the performative in creating works that inform the process of making, while sustaining a viable art practice adjacent and within vlog entries. Comparable to the expectations placed upon a vlogger regarding a quick rhythm of content production, aesthetics, and marketability, artists face the same challenges. Vloggers tacitly understand it is expected of them to refine their craft: to perform for the camera. Another notable facet of this new interaction with performance and the body is the archival material

remaining behind. One of the valued aspects of performance art is its relationship to time. Performance is most celebrated because of its ephemeral quality. Once you have missed a performance, access to a video recording barely does justice to the emotions at play when seen live. However, these emotions are not lost if the medium chosen is the Internet. This means an altered expectation is now inferred onto the vlogger-to-commenter exchange, and how that relationship extends onto other social media platforms, like Instagram and Facebook. What must now be negotiated is that artists like Atleigh "...increasingly respond and intervene in the landscape of both media creation and media consumption, they must find ways to impersonate themselves into existing systems in order to find their audience, their viewer, their fans, and their collaborators."⁹

-Geneviève Wallen & Cameron Lee

¹Atleigh Homma, "Review of Gouache". Filmed [2016]. YouTube video: 8:16 mins. Post [March 5th, 2016]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KomI68DY6o>

²Jean Burgess, Joshua Green, "Youtube's Participatory Culture", *Youtube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. (Polity Press: UK,2009),54.

³Baylee Jae: <https://www.youtube.com/user/BayleeCreations>, Audri Auclair: <https://www.youtube.com/user/elopiful> , and Happy D. Artist: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLifP-WG7OUD_PcC2w_-B0g/featured

⁴Maggie Griffin & Zizi Papacharissi: "Looking for You: An analysis of video blogs," Volume 15, Number 1 - 4 January 2010, <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2769/2430>, accessed 22 September 2016.

⁵Homma 2016

⁶Anderson Eric, Jennifer Hargreaves, *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality*, Routledge, 2014: p246.

⁷Bezemer, Jeff, Gunther Kress; *Multimodality, Learning and Communication: A Social Semiotic Frame*. London, Routledge, 2015, p85.

⁸James Wescott, "A Culture of 'Perform Yourself'", New York Times . August 8th 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/08/18/did-youtube-kill-performance-art/a-culture-of-perform-yourself>. Accessed September 17th, 2016.

⁹Cook, Sarah, "The work of art in the age of ubiquitous narrowcasting? What early artist-led intervening can teach artists about putting themselves online," *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube, Institute of Network Cultures*, Amsterdam, 2008. p180



SHIFTING GESTURES (FATHER / DAUGHTER)

ZANA KOZOMORA

NOV. 1, 2016 – JAN. 2, 2017

Coffee is the most popular beverage among adults in Canada; it is undeniably part of our culture. Think back for a second to the last time you drank coffee.¹ You might have downed it as you were rushing out the door this morning, or you popped over to Timmie's and dashed back to work with your cup of liquid caffeine. You have most likely consumed your latest fix on the go, and alone. In comparison to North American coffee culture, the ritual surrounding coffee consumption is entirely different in Bosnia. The ritualistic gestures related to the beverage are a combination of careful preparation and communal tradition, symbolizing hospitality and friendship.

In her video work, *Shifting Gestures (Father/Daughter)*, Serbian-Canadian artist Zana Kozomora investigates the action of preserving and documenting intangible cultural rituals through the performative act of learning traditional techniques of grinding Turkish coffee from her father. The work functions as a candid portrayal of a father teaching his daughter about family traditions, and references institutional documentary by providing the viewer with visual and auditory instructions.

In a mirrored video stream, father and daughter perform the laborious action of manually grinding coffee beans. Kozomora has composed the shot to direct focus to the repetitive gestures of their hands. The video begins with presenting the paternal figure before slowly introducing the opposing child figure, indicating that she is always one step behind. The two streams are displayed side by side to further highlight the disparity of the experienced, smooth rotation of the father's hand, juxtaposed by the jerky attempts of the daughter. Her struggle is further intensified by the moments in which she pauses and seems almost ready to give up. This raw footage of fatherly guidance, paired with the artist's awkward motions creates an honest portrayal of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

The work questions the underlying notion of

archiving, protecting and preserving things that are not 'tangible' objects. The artist notes that most people today, including her father, have begun to use electric coffee grinders because they get the

job done efficiently, making traditional manual coffee mills increasingly obsolete (outside of serious and minor groups of practitioners) and relics of a previous century. The following questions arise: why should anyone make the effort to pass on increasingly obsolete and laborious cultural practices into a continuously shifting, fast paced, globalized future? Is an intangible ritual endangered as its performance and purpose changes over time, evolving to serve the needs of future generations?

Throughout the video, Kozomora's father instructs her in their mother language of Serbian. While detailing his own personal narrative of the tradition, he stresses the importance of learning the proper grinding and infusion techniques, speaking of the ritual as a living, embodied thing. This dialogue is translated and displayed as English subtitles on the screen, allowing the father's words to become accessible in an institutional context, transmitting his knowledge to a wider audience.

The work oscillates between personal and general, private and public. The opposing figures are dark in contrast and their faces are cropped out, following documentary film techniques of depersonalization. They are stripped of personal details other than their own gestures in order to show the experience of not one particular father and daughter but any and all. At the same time, the video is set in a private domestic space, allowing for the vulnerable and often invisible trial and error process of learning ritual labor to be seen. The viewer witnesses both the detailed instruction and formal visual documentation of the ritual, and the artist's intimate process and laboured acquisition of her family's valued cultural heritage.

The practice of preparing and consuming Turkish



coffee was nominated for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) database of intangible cultural heritage in 2013.² The database is populated through a national nomination system and aims to preserve and promote cultural cohesiveness. However, it fails to grasp and present how these rituals are actually performed, passed on, altered and evolved through migration and globalization, or even forgotten in certain living communities. Kozomora takes it upon herself to do what UNESCO has not yet been able to by documenting the raw essence of the cultural exchange, while questioning what it means for intergovernmental agencies to collect and archive such practices.

Kozomora's invitation to us to witness this practice references the history of ceremony, which evolves and spreads through living cultural performance, thousands of years of colonization, war and, more recently, globalization. Rituals are constantly collecting and losing partakers simultaneously.

Methods of preparing coffee are tied up in the complex history of the Balkans, where this communal ritual has created a kind of social mesh for multiple cultures, ethnicities and traditions. During the Ottoman rule of Bosnia from the mid-15th century to the late 19th century,

locals assimilated and internalized Turkish heritage, demonstrating that intangible practices can weave through physical borders and develop across ethnic boundaries.³ Kozomora's family brought the ritual overseas to Canada when they fled from the Bosnian Civil War in the 1990s, adding to the layers of communal traditions, simultaneously connected by similar coffee making practices of the East, and disconnected by the fast-paced, pay-and-go culture of the West. In the video, as Kozomora faces her father in an attempt to reclaim a sense of cultural identity, she questions how the performance of living rituals can ease the transition of peoples across borders and communicate ideas of culture and identity to future, displaced generations.

- Réka Szepesvári

¹"Beverage consumption of Canadian adults" Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2008004/article/10716/6500244-eng.htm>. Accessed October 13, 2016

²"Turkish Coffee Culture and Heritage" UNESCO. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>. Accessed October 10, 2016

³"Serbianna" *The Bosnian Conflict: Origins and History - Bosnia-Herzegovina under Ottoman Rule, 1463-1878*. <http://www.serbianna.com/columns/savich/014.shtml>. Accessed October 29, 2016

1973 - 1979

LUCILLE KIM

Lucille Kim's practice travels between drawing, video, performance, sound and photography. She uses these mediums to learn and uncover the history of Cambodia, her parents' birthplace. Her work fuses different mediums to explore memory. For instance, in *Moving from Refugee Camps to Homes* (2013), a piece that can be conventionally considered as drawing, Kim connects with her family's history. This piece juxtaposes the housing conditions in which her parents lived in refugee camps in Thailand and the various homes that they have inhabited in Canada. For Kim, the act of drawing echoes the tediousness of the repetitive labour that her parents have performed throughout their lives. In Kim's stop-motion animation / video-performance *1973-1979* (2015), a coin functions as the drawing medium, with the body as its canvas. This technique not only expands the definition of drawing as a practice, but also critically examines our relationship as artists with the subjects we study and portray through drawing. In this work, rather than making a drawing of a subject, the artist draws on the subject, her father, as someone who shares kinship and reciprocates care and healing.

Slowly going from upper to lower body in an orderly fashion - the neck, the spine, arms, back, shoulder blades, thighs, calves, and feet - Kim thoughtfully and patiently performs coin therapy on her father. This healing technique was taught to the artist at the age of ten by her parents; it originated as *gua sha* in China and has been adopted and translated by many Asian cultures to relieve a variety of aches and pains, fevers and colds. While the practitioner may control the level of pressure, this method, when applied to its most effective, is inherently painful. In the video, the viewer witnesses each mark and its intensity evolve frame by frame as toxicity releases from the body - a body healing through pain. With each scrape, Kim's father's body tells a fragment of its recorded story. As Diane Roberts theorizes in the Personal Legacy¹ work that she developed in collaboration with Heather Hermant and Lopa Sircar, the body remembers; the body stores and recalls.

JANUARY 4 - FEBRUARY 21, 2017

Thus, the marks inflicted by coin therapy explicitly display the pain this body went through between 1973 and 1979.

While the slow motion of marking sets the ambiance of the video, the specificities of its narrative are told through the added soundtrack. The audio symbolizes the memory of three days between 1973 and 1979 that Kim's father's spent working in rice fields during Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime. On day one, the audience hears an axe cutting trees and sounds of physical exhaustion. On day two, more layers of sound are introduced as he began to experience increased pain from being overworked, and feelings of illness and dehydration. At that time, he was so thirsty that he dropped his shovel and drank water from a nearby creek. On day three, he caught malaria. The shivers, cold sweats and muscle aches are represented with more abstract and distorted sounds at an increased volume, intended to reflect his state of mind. As Kim writes, "the same sounds of boiling water, spoon hitting the bowl, eating, and mumbling words of [her] father appear at lunch and evening time as flies buzzed around him".² The artist retells a story that she once heard through imagined soundscape - a movie made with field recordings and recreated sounds. As the artist explains: "I want the viewer to feel how I feel, watching [and] guessing."³

The impossibility of accuracy speaks to our desire for it. In conversation with Kim, we chatted about what it means for us, as immigrant children, to involve our parents within our art practice, especially when our parents don't really 'get' it. Her father keeps a collection of photos that he took of the refugee camp. Kim reflects, "[my father] wants to tell the stories. He wants people [in Canada] to know the history and culture of Cambodia."⁴ One can see such collaboration as an intergenerational practice that brings untold stories to light. However, I suspect that this process affects Kim more personally and intimately than simply wanting to share stories on behalf of her father as it influences her identity formation. This vulnerable state, common to



practitioners from diasporic communities poses the following question: what are the ways through which one can connect to their cultural heritage, especially when this history involves the parents' traumatic experiences of migration that cannot be shared with ease? Perhaps art is a tool allowing histories of violence to resurface, granting space for intergenerational translation bridging ancestral stories with our existence and positionality as artists in the contemporary world.

The marks surfacing on Kim's father's skin seems like a *déjà vu* of a past dictatorial regime; the pain of the unspeakable trauma released bit by bit, through the repetitive labour of a caring child and the alleviating pain that comes with each scrape.

1973-1979 is a performance of knowing and documents the artist's multi-faceted attempt to connect with her heritage. Kim learns from her father's storytelling - through words, the literal; then she takes the information to viscerally explore these feelings that she imagines her father might have experienced. In the video, Kim's repetitive hand movement is paced deliberately, a kind of spiritual act in which she tries to feel the pain that is not only in the present but accumulated from the past. At the end of the video, we see red lines of bruises forming a skeleton on Kim's father's body. "He was skinny

back then, I am sure,"⁵ said Kim in a speculating tone that comes from uncertainty. While attempting to know every aspect and detail of the story, each frame represents only a fragment of their memory. Migration-related trauma makes us forget what happens in between and how we got here. We only remember who we were and where we are now.

Intergenerational pain is directly related to how we heal. As the artist draws with what is part of her cultural heritage, we learn that healing and pain prove not to be a dichotomy, but rather co-existing entities. We understand that, one cannot heal without being in deep pain.

- Alvis Choi

¹The Personal Legacy work is an embodied, "physical/dramaturgical process based on a combination of West/Central African dance, ritual, and story traditions exploring Ancestry." It aims to "bring the actor into alignment with their authentic cultural-historical body as a grounding tool for subsequent character development work." See "Recovering Memory : A Personal Legacy" in *ÂJIVVA: Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas*. SUNY Press, 2011.

²>Artist Statement 1" the artist's website. <http://www.lucille-kim.com/statement.html>

³Conversation with artist, 29 November, 2016.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Conversation with artist, 29 November, 2016.

AFTER DARKNESS

MANUELA MORALES

FEBRUARY 22-APRIL 4, 2017

Blue skies and wispy clouds cover the top of the frame, a rickety and broken dock spans out onto the lake, while tall swamp grass reaches to the sky bending slightly with the force of the wind. The lake is frozen over, and beyond lies tall green trees softly creating a narrowing horizontal line. We draw ourselves away from the landscape to see a white screen appear parallel to the right; two sisters are speaking to each other, we follow their words as they are being typed. The screen fades to white and bigger text appears. It reads: "Everything started when I was nineteen years old. My sister is quite a bit older than me and he is even older than that. I kept it secret for over four years." |

After Darkness, intertwines narratives of survival and support while deciphering the aftermath of a sexual assault between two family members. The two-channel video juxtaposes calm landscapes with family e-mails, where the family reacts and negotiates how to support each other. Morales positions the viewer as both observer and investigator, noting the conversations and attempting to understand the incident, as well as the artist's relationship with their family.

As the story unfolds, viewers witness the difficulties of navigating a tumultuous event through online communication. Meaningful and clear interactions become essential, and while we are able to observe the complexity of familial relationships, the disconnect between family members becomes obvious. As the correspondence progresses and more information is revealed, moments of silence palpate, as some of the e-mails remain un-answered. As a result, uncertainty and doubt rise as the family members begin to question themselves. While the family wants desperately to connect and support each other, the physical distance and the events that are unfolding cause a rupture between them.

As the piece illustrates, many victims of sexual assault know their assailant well, therefore many people are affected and involved before and after the assault.² The text in *After Darkness* creates a nuanced and honest conversa-

tion about the effects of sexual assault on a personal and collective level. After experiencing a traumatic event, survivors may experience fluctuating emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, fear, self-blame and denial, all of which are intricately woven into the responses and reactions featured in the video's dialogues. By involving the viewers in the narrative, the artist indirectly pinpoints how rape culture informs the ways in which sexual assault victims are delineated as either "good" or "bad" (someone who is asking for it). Morales challenges this duality by revealing the complicated evolution of the discussion. Welcoming the audience to watch the typed conversations in real-time, viewers are meant to pay closer attention to their own positionality with the subject matter. Here, there is potential for the viewer to more comprehensively engage with the messiness, complexity and emotional layers of surviving sexual violence. As raw as this video is, it provides a framework for familial and community support. The artist invites viewers to reflect on how this topic might have affected people from their close circle of friends or family members.

The conversations in the work are balanced with wide-angle shots of rural landscapes and the accompanying environmental audio of those spaces. Sounds of birds, footsteps, wind and grass flowing back and forth sets the tone of the viewer's reading. The landscapes lead the viewer to an imagined space that bears witness to the process of trauma endure by this family. While *After Darkness* centers around one family, the issues explored in the piece are not isolated. Morales herself recognizes that the elements of the story are not necessarily unique, as many families and individuals experience trauma, violence and assault; the way in which the artist weaves audio, landscape and text in the work offers one interpretation of the subtleties of processing sexual assault.

While the text can act as a didactic, the landscapes provide a place of refuge, contemplation and space to situate oneself within the work. This allows us, as viewers, to have a nuanced

understanding of how sexual assault and violence can cause long-lasting harm to victims and survivors.

As the story continues, the words of the father resonate with us: "This is not just a series of events with an ending, but an ongoing explosion."³ The storytelling breaks the common narrative that things will get better with time, insinuating instead that things will change or shift, but will remain in constant negotiation. Morales is able to bring viewers in through the gripping aesthetics of the landscapes, and pique their curiosity through the conversational format of the e-mails, while illustrating how sexual assault can change how relationships are navigated. The piece is educational for people who are distanced from the reality of sexual and gender based violence, and is informed by rape culture and ideas of a "good" or "bad" victim is contextualized within the framework of patriarchy. *After Darkness* stands as a piece made by and for survivors, an act of solidarity and of shared collaborative storytelling that challenges idea of a 'good' victim, instead illustrating a realistic story of a family coping with the aftermath of sexual assault.

- Morgan Sears Williams

¹ After Darkness. Dir. Manuela Morales. 2016. Web. (1:31)

² According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), of sexual abuse cases reported to law enforcement, 93% of victims knew the perpetrator, and 34% were family members. "Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN." Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN. RAINN, 2016. Web.

³ After Darkness. Dir. Manuela Morales. 2016. Web. Time: 9:00



SEASCAPE

KELLY ZANTINGH

APRIL 5 – MAY 9, 2017

"Those least responsible for climate change are worst affected by it."

-Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil; Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*¹

In Kelly Zantingh's animated video, *Seascape*, plasticine plants grow and chirp, appearing as hungry lips and fingers. In close-ups in hues of pink, purple, green and blue, the vegetation silently waves through stop-motion water. Perennial, ever changing and under-the-radar, underwater communities of shrubs float in unison and individually, happily living their lives. A sense of playfulness, naïveté and sincerity permeates throughout the motion of these floras. Seconds into the animation, an outbreak infringes on this vegetation. Bright and lively, the floras become diseased, flowering sinister mold-like warts. The plant life closes in on itself and turns to mush, revealing the malleability of its form. The viewer watches the plants die a painful death. Plants are individually stricken, lending a sense of panic for both the underwater community and viewer alike. Vegetation shrivels, fingers twist.

The shrubs seem to urgently scream for help, but the viewer hears nothing. The viewer is now implicated in this scene and is made aware of their complicity within the destruction of the earth; the animation's silence points out that humans are observing the mute collapse of nature and, in turn, are unsure how to respond. The artist, in this sense, holds the viewer accountable against their voyeurism and detachment from nature.

Referring to the process of coral bleaching², the animation features many close-up shots of individual and clustered seaweed. These humanizing images lend a linear narrative to the life cycle of the vegetable kingdom. Using time lapsing, large amounts of time are condensed and paralleled with small areas of the ocean. Here, Zantingh aims to demonstrate the phenomena of time and space. The time lapse also illustrates humans' interactions with nature,

specifically how they attempt to control the biological aspect of time.

Zantingh's work explores the popular understanding of nature as a place of refuge. The artist thinks that people see uncultivated natural areas as locations to romantically separate from the rest of society, as vacation destinations.³ Because holiday vacations are optional, humans' passion for protecting the Earth is all too often fleeting. Their lax sense of responsibility for Mother Nature allows humans to haphazardly protect her. Fetishizing, patronizing and ultimately refusing accountability, a human on the planet must accept responsibility for their maladroitness. The animation is essentially cute but dark, fun but pointed.

Zantingh originally became involved with environmental activism while completing her MFA at the University of Guelph. Discussing issues of land rewired her beliefs of nature as a pristine sanctuary. Zantingh instead began to interpret the reality of the environment as a site of violence, a location that has been exploited for political gain. For the artist, climate change is one of the most important topics of our time, something that she is constantly thinking about. For inspiration, the artist looks to the innocence of youth and their curiosity in ways that adults might otherwise take for granted. Zooming in, human fingerprints are visible on the plasticine that forms the video's vegetation. The artist, who likens her work to that of children using Play-Doh, compares her aesthetic to films such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964) and *Pingu*. Due to the malleable nature of plasticine, viewers can see how her work was made. Zantingh cites filmmaker Ron Fricke's films *Baraka* and *Samsara*'s time-lapse techniques as inspiration for her editing process. Thematically, the artist looks to the concept of the sublime in landscape painting, the naïveté of children and the contrast between human and nature's relationship with entropy/equilibrium.

Zantingh cites artists Mark Dion and Katie Paterson as encouraging allies. As an environmentalist/artist, Dion's work acknowledges the

repercussions of the human impulse to dominate nature, particularly in his 2016 piece, *The Library for the Birds of New York and Other Marvels*.⁴ Katie Paterson's practice acknowledges the imminence of climate change. Her 2008 exhibition, *Langjokull, Snaefellsjokull, Solheimajokull*, features three records made of glacier ice, played until they melt.⁵ Both of these artists use multimedia installation to deal with the connection between art and science. Zantingh, meanwhile, hopes that if her audience has no prior knowledge of environmental activism, her animations will, at the very least, spark curiosity on the topic, and even provoke a sense of anxiety in the viewer.

Seascape presents the viewer with an unsalable truth: humanity is implicit in the destruction of the Earth. Zantingh has crafted an endearing scenario that relies on the viewer's sense of nostalgia for stop-motion animation. Fundamentally, however, this scenario belays a somber truth of our planetary state. The viewer, as predicted by Zantingh, can close the browser, return home, or distract themselves in other socially acceptable ways in order to forget about wildlife and their responsibility. All the same, hiding, cannot protect humans from the truth: the Earth is being destroyed and we are the only ones who are able to effect enough change to stop this. While no amount of sugarcoating can deny this truth, Zantingh's interpretations offer the viewer an insightful opportunity to take action.

-Katie Kotler

¹ Vandana Shiva. *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015).

² When corals are stressed by changes in conditions such as temperature, light, or nutrients, they expel the symbiotic algae living in their tissues, causing them to turn completely white.

³ Zantingh, Kelly. Interview by Katie Kotler. Skype Interview. Montreal/Toronto, February 2, 2017.

⁴ In this piece, 22 live birds cohabit with books, ephemera, images and objects related to birds from popular, art historical, scientific, and film sources. Central to the installation is an 11 foot high white oak, referencing a range of important philosophical and scientific constructs: the tree of life, the tree of knowledge, and the evolutionary tree, which serves to illuminate the phylogenetic system created by man to understand the structure of the biological world.

⁵ Paterson, Katie. *Langjokull, Snaefellsjokull, Solheimajokull*. <http://katiepaterson.org/icerecords/> (February 4, 2017).



IT CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING

JESSIE SHENG &
CHANTELLE HARTLE

Jessie Sheng and Chantelle Hartle's *It Can Only Mean One Thing*, attempts to represent the contemporary ubiquity of the Internet. By laying visuals, including news segments, cheesy '90s commercials, and Drake's well known choreography from his ever-present music video, *Hotline Bling*, the video appears to embody the fragmented narrative that is the Internet.

To some, the Internet can be experienced sequentially through newsfeeds and timelines, containing a YouTube video, a friend's photo, a news story. At the same time, the Web has become its own entity in and of itself, neither inherently malicious nor divine. The Internet is where the polished meets the raw ore; the Internet is where cat videos meet serious political discourse.

This meeting of dichotomies is messy. As an overarching narrative of human experience, the Internet is chaos. It combines everything that it means to be human into an omnipresent entity. Sheng and Hartle's collage rotates and swirls, swapping clips of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaking in the House of Commons in 2015 with viral videos of affectionate cats. The artists describe the Internet as a fragmented narrative, a narrative that no one person can ever truly fully experience. We only see a fraction of what ends up on the Web, filtered through algorithms and marketing plans.

Memes are a perfect example of how amorphous the Internet has become. They snapshot a collective interest in a single image. When something goes viral, it becomes embedded in the current events of the day. In meme culture, one viral image may be used to express separate contradicting views. Take, for example, Drake's dance moves in his *Hotline Bling* music video. These moves feature prominently in the collage as multiple Drakes dance alongside images of news broadcasts. Screen caps of Drake's iconic moves have been used to both promote emotional vulnerability in men, but to also mock it. While some meme artists use his amusing facial expressions to relate to their

MAY 16 - JUNE 13, 2017

insecurities, there are others still who will use his own lyrics as ammunition for attacking his masculinity.

These images and memes all exist alongside each other and never truly disappear—they exist forever online. While they may temporarily fade from popular interest, there is always a website, an Internet archive, or a screen capture saved in a folder on someone's hard drive that can be accessed for human consumption at any time. Like the clips of old commercials for breakfast cereals seen in the video, even outdated advertisements are available at our fingertips, their marketing purposes served.

It Can Only Mean One Thing also observes another phenomenon of the Internet: the collective understanding that comes from sharing these in-jokes. By taking part in Internet culture, there are certain things that we have come to understand to be iconic of the Internet: cat videos, nostalgic commercial reels, or video game playthroughs on YouTube. The viewer is meant to understand that the piece is about the Internet simply from watching these passing references.

Sheng and Hartle's work does not attempt to condemn or praise the Internet. Instead, it explores the Web's simultaneous immensity and obscurity. Because of the Internet's accessibility, anyone, anywhere, can contribute to its contents. No longer are there limited resources for research and recreation. We are no longer confined to a limited choice of newspapers or news broadcasts. With this new technology, the Internet affords its users an infinite amount of validated opinions, no matter how extreme.

There are parts of the Web that have been deemed by the mainstream 'dark' or 'secret' but nonetheless have thriving communities, debating topics that have long-since been considered proven. You can find white supremacist communities in these online spaces along with the groups dedicated to *dismantling them*.

Between advertisements, paid content, forums, memes, and the rest of the vast Internet, it is hard not to become overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of available information. Content deemed 'reliable' can get lost amid a sea of think-pieces and fan art. With blogging platforms like Medium and Wordpress, suddenly it is just a few mouse clicks to design web pages that appear professional and reliable. A clear distinction between journalism and speculation is no longer apparent.

Currently, the threat of 'fake news' seems plausible as data can be easily manipulated. Photos and videos are increasingly easy to alter and edit; there are a number of blog posts that claim to back up nearly any opinion. There are studies that contradict other studies and reviews of those studies that criticize their validity. Instead of having a singular source of information or just a handful of them, we are forced to filter through millions of opinions and statistics and potentially biased studies to come to our own critical decisions.

It Can Only Mean One Thing embodies the Internet as it is regularly consumed: twirling, flipping and ever-changing. Sheng and Hartle's work contains all of this and a hit single that at one point the viewer has heard multiple times a day as an accompanying soundtrack, whether they chose it to or not. Each individual piece on its own is not indicative of the Web's cultural experience. Likewise, the Internet cannot be experienced in snippets, but rather as a cohesive whole. The Internet is its own culture and its own domain.

-Mariah Ramsawakh



SOLE PURPOSE

RONNIE CLARKE

Dance, like all your selves are watching

"Every time I dance,
I'm trying to prove myself to myself".

— Misty Copeland *Elle Magazine* Interview, 2015.

In her performance-based video installation, *Sole Purpose* (2015), Ronnie Clarke draws the viewer into the intimate moment of breaking by exploring her relationship with dance and art. The self-described "dance school drop out" is also a London/Toronto-based conceptual artist who began working on this project while completing her BFA at Western University.

"[*Sole Purpose*] was informed in the simplest way from a class at the time. I was given an assignment and our prof asked us to think outside of the box. I take things literally, I guess."¹ Clarke chooses video as the prime medium for her interrogation of being a ballet dancer while confronting the moment just before she hangs up her shoes for the last time. This juncture is performed poignantly, dramatically, ceremoniously, spiritually and rife with tension. *Sole Purpose* begins with Clarke, the subject, approaching a small plywood stage with bright pink drywall covering its surface. She greets the board with ease, wearing ballet point slippers and begins a "loosely choreographed"² interpretive dance against the backdrop of wintery snow banks. The drywall that she performs against is still wet and the pink layering malleable, allowing her shoes to glide across the platform. Her movements are assertive and forceful — bouncing, slipping, stomping, flailing — and then switch to a more controlled and fluid sweeping motion. Here, Clarke's work becomes a ritualistic reshaping of the body.

"This chapter of my history as a dancer was previously left unresolved."³ When Clarke created this work, she had left the Martha Hicks School of Ballet three years prior. "I had to question why I left and what was left out of

JUNE 21- SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

that process."⁴ Often the only black ballet dancer in the studio, Clarke confesses she "felt weird in the room" and remembers feeling like she was "performing as someone else."⁵ After having left dance school and currently pursuing visual art, the intention behind *Sole Purpose* is to examine what role ballet presently serves in her life.

"It was difficult. It felt like squeezing yourself in[to] a space, sometimes smaller, sometimes bigger; ballet tries to make you like everyone else."⁶ From the shoes to the tights, the "uniform didn't fit my skin tone,"⁷ and the demand to conform was imposed upon her body. Now in *Sole Purpose*, the viewer witnesses Clarke stomping out pent-up energies of perfection, confinement and structure.

"This is what is asked of you. Sameness."⁸ Sameness, however, is an impossibility as a black ballet dancer. The leading question that guides Clarke's meditation while performing her work was: "How do you break out of something you are not sure you can break out of?"

It is an uneasy task for the artist to challenge her life before, during and after ballet. *Sole Purpose* does so by existing within a time-lapsed landscape. Even the moment when the tripod enters the frame, the viewer is reminded that this work includes documentation. This is a hybrid performance, exploring both form and fracture; and yet the very space itself becomes atemporal; a dimension of contestation as Clarke pushes up against the regimented nature of ballet with liberating and complex gestures. By capturing the spirit of her transition, the work shifts between being aggressive, poetic, sobering and finally, a silent space(s). Another marvel from the performance *Sole Purpose* is that it was created in one take. "[Originally there were] two cameras but one died because it was so cold...the second one died right after the performance was complete."¹⁰ The chilled climate is evidence of *discomfort* in Clarke's dance moves, and yet she continues, as if the action must be completed for closure sake. Immediacy and

timing, the specificity of that captured moment, holds **Sole Purpose** within this in-between realm.

"There is always a mirror facing you,"¹¹ Clarke explains as she elaborates on her experiences during ballet school. "Standing in a mirror for several years...that is the atmosphere of dance. And for me, you are either the other or othered."¹² Now, approaching graduating the school of visual arts and having created works beyond *Sole Purpose*, Clarke creates in a new space. "My studio is in my brain. I can't be working or brainstorming sitting down. I'm making playlists...I'm dancing or blasting '90s or 2000s hits or obscure [songs] and I'm making playlists for the studio."¹³ Movement clearly continues to inform her work and Clarke shares that, "I want to put myself into it."¹⁴ Being visible in her videos, with a keen focus on her body, most notably in **Sole Purpose**, Clarke concludes that "[the work] help[ed] me be authentic in what [artists] want to do – and pushed me to go beyond the [grading] mark."¹⁵

The dynamic energy in which Clarke moves in *Sole Purpose* is a reclaiming of the self and arguably, in multiple selves. Situated outdoors, here the subject is fully participating in a new form of inner reflection, instead of spending hours seeing one's reflection in a sterile dance studio. We are privy to close-ups of her feet, the contrast of her skin and shoes. The vibrant cement under her trembling movement suggests a struggle for release. Nearly the end of the performance, hunched over, hands on knees and head down, the viewer witnesses a conjuring of conclusions, an unspoken finale that explores how these shoes will be put to rest.

this is not ballet.

this is a breaking.

this is how one breaks ballet inside of them.

After the video installation, the ballet shoes were left for casting, serving as a physical monument to the artist arriving at a final relief, Clarke explains. In contrast to the dynamic

movement of the dance, the shoes are suspended in time. This stillness offers solace for both the artist and dancer within Ronnie Clarke. "*Sole Purpose* signals a break but [it also] choreographically borrows from the ballet I learned and I will never forget."¹⁶

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¹Ronnie Clarke (artist) in conversation with author; May 2017.

²Ibid

³Ronnie Clarke "Sole Purpose".Youtube, accessed May 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqKEybIAOTI>.

⁴Ronnie Clarke (artist) in conversation with author; May 2017

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ronnie Clarke (artist) in conversation with author; May 2017

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ronnie Clarke (artist) in conversation with author; May 2017.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ronnie Clarke "Sole Purpose".Youtube, accessed May 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqKEybIAOTI>.



