

Volume  
XI  
Xpace  
Cultural  
Centre  
2019-  
2020

THIS BOOK CONTAINS DIRECT  
LINKS TO EXHIBITIONS AND  
PERFORMANCES.

CLICK ON TABLE OF CONTENT,  
TITLES AND SOME IMAGES TO  
VIEW VIDEOS OR LISTEN TO  
SOUND.

Volume  
XI  
Xpace  
Cultural  
Centre  
2019–  
2020

## STAFF

### **Director**

Emily Gove (2015 - February 2020)

Alexia Bréard-Anderson (from February 2020)

### **Programming Coordinators**

Philip Leonard Ocampo

Natalie King

### **Programming Assistant**

Enna Kim (to April 2020)

### **Graphic Designer**

Paz Pereira-Vega

### **Print**

TLAC Toronto Printing

All photography by Polina Teif

## FIND US

2-303 Lansdowne Avenue

Toronto, ON M6K 2W5

**web:** [xspace.info](http://xspace.info)

**facebook:** Xpace Cultural Centre

**instagram:** @xpacecc

**twitter:** @xpacecc

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## **XPACE CULTURAL CENTRE**

is a not-for-profit artist-run centre dedicated to providing emerging and student artists, designers, curators and writers with opportunities to showcase their work in a professional setting. Xpace is committed to maintaining an anti-oppressive, queer positive environment, prioritizing Black and Indigenous folks, people of colour and marginalized artists.

## **VOLUME XI**

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 Xpace'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 September 2019 to July 2020.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Xspace Cultural Centre would like to acknowledge the Indigenous land on which our space operates on. Written collectively, we wish for this land acknowledgement to function as an understanding of the land and our relationship to it, as individual arts practitioners / cultural workers living and working within Tkaronto as well as the collective entity that constitutes Xspace.

This sacred land has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years, serving as the home of Indigenous people and nations long before the colonial project. These are the original territories of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, and the Métis Nation.

This territory exists in connection to the One Dish, One Spoon Wampum belt, a peace treaty dating back to before the 18th century which is a mutual agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to share and care for the land and the precious resources around the Great Lakes; The dish representing the land itself and the spoon representing responsibility in sharing its resources, never taking more than you need and sharing with others. We must continue to uphold this Treaty -both as Indigenous folx and non-Indigenous / settler folx - as it addresses our relations and relationships.

For Xspace, this treaty informs our intention to support artists who exist on the margins through public programming and the sharing of additional resources for arts practitioners. A sharing of knowledge, hospitality and opportunity; our fellow peers across the vibrant arts community that has developed here.

We stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities against the violent forces and effects of colonialism and white supremacy, we wish for this land acknowledgement to be a call to action. Support can look like many things, including working within institutions to dismantle systemic racism and inequities, ending violence against Indigenous womxn, 2spirit individuals, and advocating for Indigenous rights, sovereignty and stewardship of land.

## STAFF BIOS

### DIRECTOR

**Alexia Bréard-Anderson** is a writer + arts administrator of Argentinean descent, born as a settler to Tkaronto. She is dedicated to forging space for emerging creatives through intuitive + collaborative arts programming based in care and equity. Alexia has a web of experience overseeing group and solo exhibitions, talks, workshops, events, screenings, publications and mentorship programs.

Alongside a BFA in Art Criticism & Curatorial Practices from OCAD University, she recognizes the abundance of ancestral, community and earth-based knowledge that informs her everyday learning and unlearning; and is deeply grateful for the opportunity to lead Xspace through these expansive social, economic, political and spiritual currents.

### PROGRAMMING COORDINATOR

**Philip Leonard Ocampo** is a queer Filipino artist and arts facilitator based in Tkaronto, Canada. Ocampo's sculptures, paintings, and public programming usually explore phenomenon, magic, and memory, using the extraordinary to reconcile and better understand personal and collective experiences. He seeks to access aspects of existence that are invisible, intangible, or inhuman in nature, often through a diasporic focus.

He holds a BFA in Integrated Media from OCAD University (2018) and is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xspace Cultural Centre a founding co-director of Hearth, a new artist run space in the Annex area of the city.

### PROGRAMMING COORDINATOR

**Natalie King** is a queer Anishinaabekwe artist, facilitator and member of Timiskaming First Nation. King's practice ranges from drawing, painting, and installation as well as community engagement and activism. Often involving portrayals of femme identities, King's works are about embracing the ambiguity and multiplicities of identity within the Indigenous queer femme experience. King's arts practice and facilitation work operates from a firmly critical, decolonizing, equity-oriented, non-oppressive, and future-bound perspective, capturing the realities of lived lives through frameworks of desire and survivance.

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# MAIN SPACE



*Opening Reception for  
Memorial: Work by Artists of the Venezuelan Diaspora*



*Gucci could Never, 2019. Installation view. Works by Alexi Pedneault in view*

*Sean Sandusky, The Great Temple of Unicornia, 2019.*



## **GUCCI COULD NEVER**

*curated by Dana Snow*

**Binary Rainbow, Lenox Daley,  
Alexi Pedneault & Maximilian Suillerot**

September 6– October 5, 2019

**Note: please read this essay in your  
most serious scholarly tone.**

There have been decades of discussion over what is and is not Camp; culminating most recently in heated discussion around the 2019 Met-Gala: an annual celebrity costume ball based in New York City to benefit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The theme for this year's ball was based on Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Notes on Camp".

What we all seemed to get wrong during this event was: Camp is not debatable. Either one gets the immediate sense of Camp or one does not – the answer varies from person to person. What can consistently be said about Camp is that it is not a simple flattened aesthetic. To Camp is to deflate pretension and dismantle hierarchy<sup>1</sup> – it is a social practice and way of identification whose elusiveness denies hetero/cis/patriarchal interpellation. On a more personal note: Camp carried the first forms of identification and disidentification with queer culture I had growing up in a 'don't ask, don't tell' community – where glimpses of queerness through pop-culture were one of the few forms of seeing oneself.

*Gucci could Never* is a group exhibition that practices camp in the gallery space; it figures a place of queer belonging, world building and performance that becomes tangible to the visitor through installation, text, craft and image. It is a space where I would have felt comfortable in the tumultuous navigation of my own identity as a younger person.

Maximilian Suillerot's *Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors* invites the viewer to consider queer presence in the face of systemic absence. The primary palate of pink and teal originates from the original pride flag. Once the hand dyed and sewn flag was commercially reproduced, pink and teal were omitted.<sup>2</sup> Pink – symbolizing sex – and teal,



*Maximilian Suillerot, Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors, 2019.*

**Maximilian Suillerot,**  
*Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors*, 2019.

**Lenox Daley,**  
*What I Gain, I Lose*, 2018.

**Gucci could Never**, 2019.  
Installation view. Works by  
Alexi Pedneault in view

bolizing art and magic become a signifier for loss, memory, and re-presenting in the context of queerness. Each character presented becomes a point of relation for the viewer through re-grammable personality types. They carry queer coded items such as rollerblades and back pocket hankies. Their names refigure queer persons of history; such as Sappho of Lesbos and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. We are reminded of them and are invited to see them every time we pass by their namesake colours – a source of belonging and care. *Introducing the Sex Magick Warriors* is a healing presence in the face of omission, but isn't afraid to have a little fun with its origins. Through the series' attention to theatrics and its re-appropriation of queer symbology, Camp finds itself woven tightly into a world of performance and community work that the warriors present.

Binary Rainbow's *Eau d'Bedroom Dancing* speaks to the experience of coming out as a queer person. Approaching their work as a synesthete, they fuse music and feeling to create immersive environments of soundscapes. In 2001, Le Tigre released their LP *From the Desk of Mr. Lady* and Binary Rainbow came out. This work is a fusion of the two events; the album "perfectly encapsulated how it felt to be a queer teen at that time...that [one] was seeing way more of the world than it felt like most people were."<sup>3</sup> Each room draws inspiration from seminal surroundings of Rainbow's teenage-hood (their bedroom and blog layout to name a few) leveraged with the neon glow of Le Tigre's audio-visual impact. Acting as a comprehensive environs of kitsch and punk influence, the work performs a clear announcement of exactly what it means to be a little too loud for comfort; to live unflinchingly in the limelight. *Eau d'Bedroom Dancing* presents us with a set design for a performance that already took place; a sincere setting for the use of camp as formative to identity. Sitting directly beside the portraits of Canadian performance stars and the *Sex Magick Warriors*, we see possibilities of inhabitants in the gallery.

*Binary Rainbow, Eau d'Bedroom Dancing, 2019.*



*Lenox Daley, What I Gain, I Lose, 2018.*



Alexi Pedneault's shrink film portraits find their inspiration in the current world of Canadian burlesque and drag performers. Shrink film (commonly known as shrinky-dinks) has been used in fan and DIY culture for decades. The medium itself becomes an iteration of camp – the complete embrace of arts and crafts culture in the serious space of fine art. Pedneault is a burlesque dancer, and makes work to reflect the diverse community of boundary pushers and artists. Functioning as an active archive of Canadian drag and burlesque culture, the works capture the zeitgeist of current queer performance stars from Beardoncé to Imogen Quest. These are depictions made with great care, from the careful detail of their linework to the powerful poses they strike. By their fixed gaze and poised stances they remind the viewer of what fun it is to camp about, and set the stage for future performers looking for inspiration.

Lenox Daley's *What I Gain, I Lose* pokes fun at the gallery go-er. The gallery conditions us to believe we are in the sacred space of white walls and the gaze of the transcendental eye; *What I Gain, I Lose* reminds us that we are in fact, creatures of the abject and the grotesque.<sup>4</sup> Points of entry to the outside world become contaminated by waste, the mind/body divide becomes impossible to propagate. Daley's work twists the gaze to look unflinchingly back at ourselves – we are not, in fact, a perfectly evolved rational system to enjoy the finer things in life. We find ourselves breathing the same air as others in the space. The element of the grotesque is imperative to this work. *What I Gain, I Lose* plays into camp through its use of the feminine and the abject to "denaturalize and make comic the compulsory heterosexuality that is imposed [upon these bodies]."<sup>5</sup> To co-opt the abject body into the heteropatriarchal gaze is obscene; *What I Gain, I Lose* holds a threat in self to a gaze that typically operates the gallery space. Instead of rejecting the work or feeling repulsed by it, we find ourselves on equal footing with this goblin femme and see no one deserves the kind of dignity that

comes at the expense of someone else's shame. By democratizing the gallery space through the abject sense of camp, *What I Gain, I Lose* lets us revel in filth.

Sean Sandusky's *The Great Temple of Unicornia* promotes a wholistic approach to queer spirituality. The installation features the original Unicorns of The Indus Valley, the first recorded instance of the mythical creatures, predating their symbolic use in Christianity. The work is a tender approach: "You may seek the unicorn, but you may not always find it."<sup>6</sup> Using ready-made plastic figurines, a constructed alter and a dreamscape fantasy environment, unicorns and rainbows are freed from the restraining bonds of contemporary significance and produce a vast world-being that precludes exclusive ideas of purity. *The Great Temple of Unicornia* invites us to perform our spiritual connection to the ideal pasts and futures we seek. We are welcomed into a place where we are loved and cared for deeply, where we may mend and refresh ourselves. Using camp sensibilities through the playful and kitsch elements of the installation as and repurposing Christian coded imagery, the work welcomes us into a place where we are loved and cared for deeply, where we can mend and refresh ourselves.

*Gucci could Never* plays with humour, text, theatricality and general camp aesthetics as a means to express agency and community through camp-y code.

Positioned against the flattening of late-capitalist and Neo-liberalist aesthetics, each work functions as a mode of entry and identification into the diaphanous world of being and performing and being as performing. From goblins to unicorns, the works position themselves within Camp as a deeply meaningful transmission of belonging and care.

by Dana Snow



Lenox Daley, *What I Gain, I Lose*, 2018.



Sean Sandusky, *The Great Temple of Unicornia*, 2019.

#### NOTES

- 1 David M. Halperin, "Beauty and the Camp" in *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2012. 207. 2 "Pride flag creator Gilbert Baker on the rainbow's real meaning" CBC Radio. 2015 <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/schedule-for-friday-june-26-2015-1.3128742/pride-flag-creator-gilbert-baker-on-the-rainbow-s-real-meaning-1.3128763> 3 Email from Binary Rainbow 4 Brian O'Doherty, "Notes on the Gallery Space" *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Santa Monica, CA: Lapis Press) 1986. 14-16. 5 Barbara Jane Brickman "A Strange Desire That Never Dies": Monstrous Lesbian Camp in the Age of Conformity. *Discourse* 38 (2016) 358. 6 Conversation with Sean Sandusky.

## waabandiwag

curated by Natalie King

Monique Aura, Aylan Couchie,  
Kadrah Mensah, Karalyn Reuben, Curtia Wright

October 18 – November 16, 2019

so consider as you live your days,  
that we live ours under the gaze  
of generations watching us  
of generations still in act  
of generations still to be  
seven forward,  
seven back

Thomas King, *I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind*<sup>1</sup>

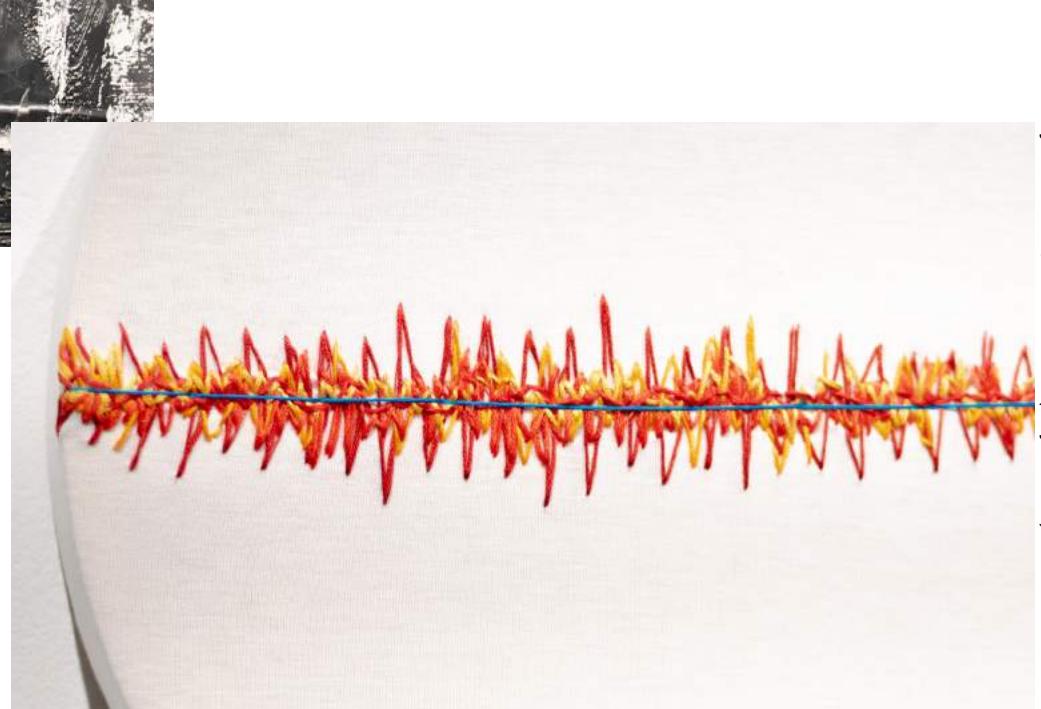
**waabandiwag** (Anishaabemowin) / **they see each other** (english translation<sup>2</sup>) calls upon tenderness, joy, radical love, pleasure and ancestral knowledge. through our collective consciousness, intersections, and shared lived experiences, **waabandiwag** seeks to create partnerships of intergenerational healing and our projections of the future, as informed by where we find joy and love. **waabandiwag** celebrates our resiliency, confirms our creativity, and re-inscribes QTBIPOC women and femmes as leaders, who have always been at the forefront of our collective cultural histories. **waabandiwag** is an attempt in what we hope will be a continuing collection of collaborative stories and an ever-broadening back and forth between female- and femme-identified BIPOC folks, focused on the love, support and connection that QTBIPOC women and femmes experience with each other within our communities. Through this essay, I believe in the artists' ability to speak to their own works and intentions, and I prioritize their ability for the artists and their works to speak for themselves. **waabandiwag** seeks to provide an entryway into dismantling Western cultural and art historical notions of what our art is and how we speak to these works.

Monique Aura is a Onyota'a:ka (Oneida) artist, currently based in Tkaronto. Through her art practice, Aura uses mixed media, beadwork, mural work, and digital illustration

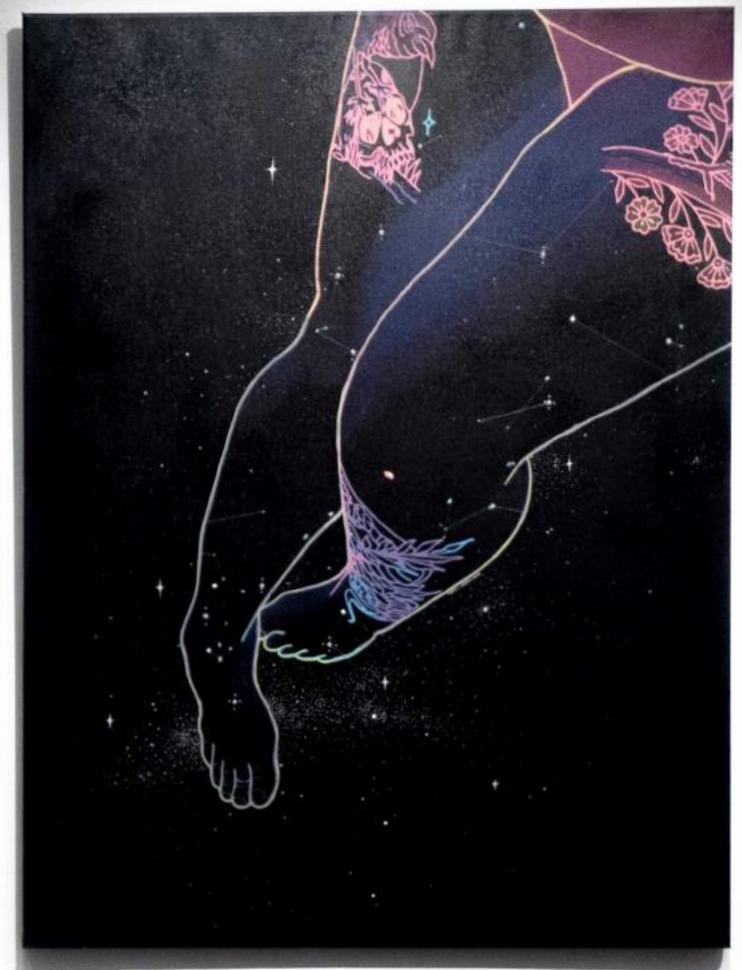
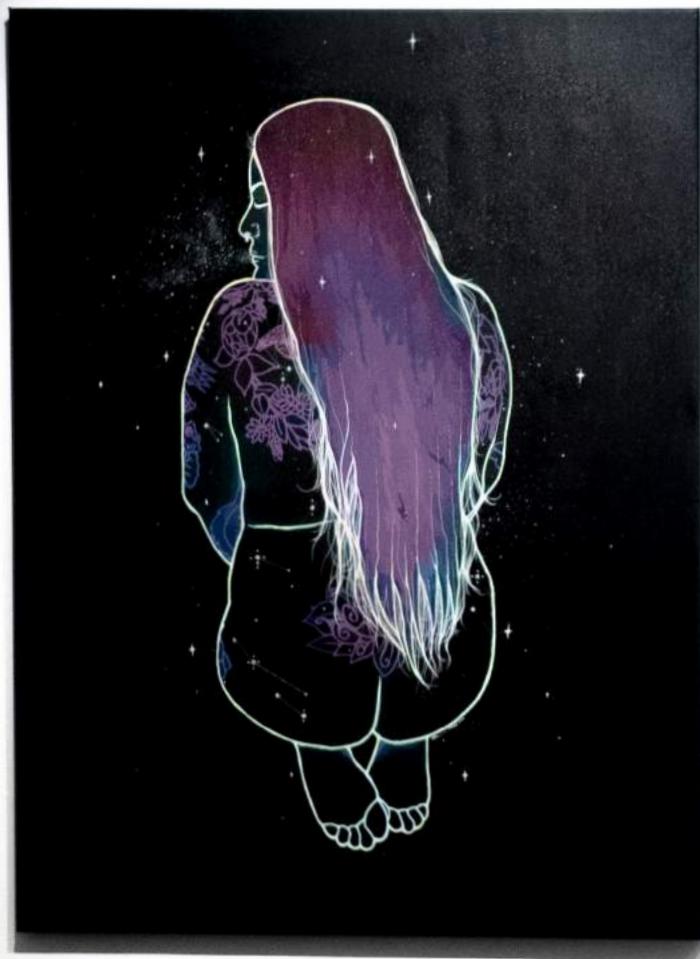


Karalyn Reuben, *maškawimakan (it is powerful)*, 2019.

Kadrah Mensah, *Kiki Kanboulay*, 2019.



Aylan Couchie, *Noondam na? (do you hear?)*, 2019.



**Monique Aura,**  
Constellations of Scars, 2019.

to discuss intergenerational healing, identity, and mothering. She looks to community to collectively explore personal storytelling and truth sharing. In her work *Constellations of Scars*, Aura speaks to self-passion, reflection and ancestral healing through picking. Through her journey Aura has used the act of picking her skin to soothe anxiety and redirect stress. Aura describes that the work is "about healing and unpacking the things I carry, and that my mom and grandmother has carried" through her interest in personal story telling.<sup>3</sup>

In two canvases hung together in the middle of the gallery, Aura shows us her scars, mapping out the connections of these scars as constellation, with tactile materials such as beads and thread. Connecting one scar to the other, she shares with us and tells us her story through these large illustrative prints of her body. Aura views this work as ancestral healing as well as harm reduction, describing that "the picking has saved my life and has been a coping mechanism. I'm doing the healing work. So, if you think about that in those terms it's like, this is how I shift my focus from self-hatred to self-love. Because it is more about the light, the stars, the beads."<sup>4</sup>

Aura reflects on her practice as well, sharing that she began her portraiture series because she "wanted to convey empowerment through the vast history of Indigenous peoples" as "we all come from different histories, we speak different languages, everything is different, it's not all one way."<sup>5</sup> Aura gives the portrait participants "the power to decide how they are represented" with the starting point of consulting how one wants to be seen.<sup>6</sup> The collaborative nature of her works emphasize questions of coming together in ways that are meaningful to our peoples, and in a full circle moment of coming into her own, Aura is also doing this for herself in this work.<sup>7</sup>

Community is demonstratedly one of the most integral parts of Aura's work - she is all about sharing knowledge, reciprocity and learning. "We want all of our people

to succeed, that is where community is. Like what do you want to do? What do you need? I love to be a support person in that role. Even though I'm still learning so much I love to be able to create these spaces for people to be able to do what they want. Because they are usually many barriers and how can we shift that and tear the barriers down so we can continue to do that good work and uplift one another."<sup>8</sup> This relates to Aura's own healing journey, because sharing with others is also a part of her healing process. The work is just as much personal storytelling as it is sharing stories from community to community. Aura adds that, "the journey is challenging and difficult and exhausting but it's really important work that we are all doing and I don't want to do anything else."<sup>9</sup>

Aylan Couchie is an Anishinaabe interdisciplinary artist and writer from Nipissing First Nation, her art practice consists of exploring the various intersecting histories of First Nations stories of place and culture, as well as researching and investigating issues of cultural appropriation.

Couchie's Installation *Noondam na?* (*do you hear?*), consists of one hand drum mounted on the wall, approximately 16-18" in size. The drum is wrapped in fabric. Embroidered into the drum is the visual transcription/pattern of sound waves of protests world wide, that have been led by Indigenous women and their songs. These women are all here, singing sounds about the water, the future, the land. Layering the sound waves over each other on the drum in thread with various colours such as red, yellow, orange, Couchie reminds us that Indigenous sovereignty is global. "Across the world, Indigenous Nations fight for their rights, their land and their waters. From New Zealand to Standing Rock, Hawaii to Brazil - *Noondam na?* invites you to take in the layered voices of five Nations gathered in protest and song. Though separated by oceans and thousands of miles, their hearts drum in unison with the earth and each other as they fight for their sovereignty, and, in doing so, our collective futures

Monique Aura, *Constellations of Scars*, 2019.



Aylan Couchie, *Noondam na?* (*do you hear?*), 2019.





Curtia Wright, *Retravel*, 2019.

in a time of climate crisis.<sup>10</sup> The audio component of the piece focuses on the songs from all of these protest actions, compiled and layered on top of one another. The voices are Sami, Samoan, Maori, and Anishinaabemowin. Couchie plays the audio component for me and I mention that it sounds like one song, rather than its reality of several songs spanned out across the world in different languages. This piece pays homage to Indigenous water and land protectors across the globe.

"I think it's interesting that each component is done in the language, they are each singing their Indigenous languages, so I think it also responds to the year of Indigenous Language well, International Indigenous language."<sup>11</sup> Couchie adds, "I think there is a real beauty in having a conversation about this urgency we are all feeling right now in terms of climate change and Indigenous sovereignty running so close hand in hand, in particular, noting the recent destruction of the Amazon forest.<sup>12</sup> "There is an urgency in the audio file, but also beauty in that. With Standing Rock, there was barely any mainstream media coverage even though it was huge. So, it's these voices are urging

to be heard, and the amplification of that."<sup>13</sup> Couchie in her work is speaking to the strength of the drum, amplification of voices and urgency. "I think we need to think of our art globally, not only in terms of our own sovereignty but the sovereignty of other nations worldwide" and I tend to agree.<sup>14</sup> Curtia Wright is a multi-disciplinary artist who primarily works through mural and painting. Wright is interested in the way societies perceptions of black bodies and how their narratives have been made without consent. Curtia Wright's works delve into the spiritual and mental health of African peoples and the connection to mythology, while also disseminating what 'fantasy' is and whom it belongs to.

In *Retravel* Wright explains her connection to identity and the act of splitting and repair, conveying reconfiguring identity. Wright speaks to her work as metaphor, as a garden, with the emphases of death as an identity shifting, and of re-birth or growth as an identity forming or becoming strengthened. Wright explains that "our bodies are in constant states of undoing and repair" and that this work "shows the

splitting of the body while simultaneously being sutured and pulled together."<sup>15</sup> For Wright, "there is a beauty in these acts of splitting and repair; we create our own universes, our own gardens, and ultimately our own realities."<sup>16</sup> The work is a love letter to herself, "a reminder that identity is not static, to be accepting of and embracing love, to connect with my past, to heal and to give myself time."<sup>17</sup>

In this installation, a figure floats in the corner space of the gallery, painted on dyed canvas, which is loosely woven. It is woven so large so that Wright can take it apart at the seams as material evidence of the splitting of identity. Wright has also added charms, all of personal significance, including a skeleton key from her grandfather.

Wright explains the significance of this piece within her own practice: "With this piece, and other pieces I've worked on. I touch on performing femininity and what it means to me, and how a lot of my identity was formed without my own jurisdiction, like everyone picking apart how I look or dress or how I performed, they kind of informed my identity without me. My work is taking back my position in the world and why I felt like I had to perform how I expected to."<sup>18</sup>

In *Retravel* Wright questions her positionality, reflecting on the fact that who she was perceived as throughout most of her life was never who she really was. Wright is undoing identity and in her own terms. We discuss the importance of place, and the times in these spaces in which we never quite feel ourselves, anyway. Wright shares that "I've always questioned where I belong within different spectrums of identity, I'm starting to realize you don't really belong anywhere. Your identity is non-linear. Nothing is static or placed, that's why I really like the fabric I'm painting on, because it's breaking and then coming together."<sup>19</sup> This piece is emotional for Wright in that it brings together many themes that she has sought to take up in her work but to date, had not had the opportunity to.



Curtia Wright, *Retravel*, 2019.

Kadrah Mensah is an interdisciplinary artist, with origins from Ghana and Trinidad & Tobago. Mensah is often focused on the integration of art, technology, and culture to expand on representations of queer black identities.

*Kiki Kanboulay* is Kadrah Mensah's journey through queer black existence. Mensah explains that this is not a recent manifestation. "We have always been celebrated. In Haitian Vodoun, we are reflected and protected by the Ezili Iwa. In Trinidad, I see us in the *Jamette*, the name given to a socially deviant person condemned for their fearless sexual expression and rebellion against colonial rules. Linking these histories to our present-day existence, I see rebellion in the underground spaces we use as sites of celebration for our continued will to exist."<sup>20</sup>

In Mensah's installation *Kiki Kanboulay*, Mensah uses a vanity to portray a queer black person reflecting on the self, and more specifically, how the self is linked to past and present histories. Above is a video, in which Mensah documents the process taken to transform into Kiki Kanboulay, a drag queen, whom she herself is portraying. KiKi starts bare faced, and begins to add make-up, glitter, and a wig, making herself up while listening to a variety of Caribbean and house music. Her make up style derives from typical carnival make up, with the exaggerated flare of drag. KiKi takes selfies and enjoys the act of getting ready. Whether KiKi is preparing for a stage performance or to participate in carnival remains ambiguous. The line between carnival and ball culture are intentionally blurred to show how similar these practices are.

We speak about the significance of underground culture to queer black existence. "I started looking into Vodou and Voudon, it something in both my cultures that was always taboo, and seen as fearful. I found these Ezili figures, referencing things about protecting queer people, and surpassing gender binaries. This one character,

Ezili Freda, was subverting femininity and owning her sexuality. And it made me start to think about rebellious women figures, I started reflecting on the term, which is Trinidadian/French term called '*Jamette*'. It's a derogatory term, almost like slut. It came from slavery in Trinidad and it was around when slavery was being abolished and these women, around carnival time, would go off, being sexual showing their bodies, having fun, dancing."<sup>21</sup> These women were seen as debaucherous because they were anti-colonial.

Mensah and I speak about the significant link between carnival and the *Jamette* and Vodoun characters, and how this spirit has carried <sup>22</sup>on: "Ezili Dantour (one of the Ezili characters) always has a mirror with her. So, I liked the idea, of looking at yourself. There's shame connected to looking at yourself and admiring yourself. I think as a queer person you need to. That's the spirit I see in carnival, I am rebellious, I am free. I am free to express myself, and that how I feel when I am in carnival, I am limitless."

Karyl Reuben is an urban mixed Oji-Cree German-British artist, based in London Ontario. Reuben is uncovering her Oji-Cree identity through learning and knowledge. In furthering her knowledge based in her current research, and in receiving traditional teachings from her father she has come to understand concepts of Anishinaabe knowledge.

*maškawimakan* (*it is powerful*), is a part of an ongoing series of self-portraits. In *maškawimakan*, Karyl Reuben reflects on her ancestors. Reubens' connections, tied and re-tied, culminate in conveying the small moments in recognizing yourself within your culture and the power of inter-generational knowledge. Reuben discusses the work: "I've captured this ephemeral moment of myself in the act of smudging. Inviting the viewer into this private practice, showing this act of self-care and self-love, with ancestors behind me since time immemorial, guiding me and revealing to me my journey."<sup>23</sup> Reubens' work features



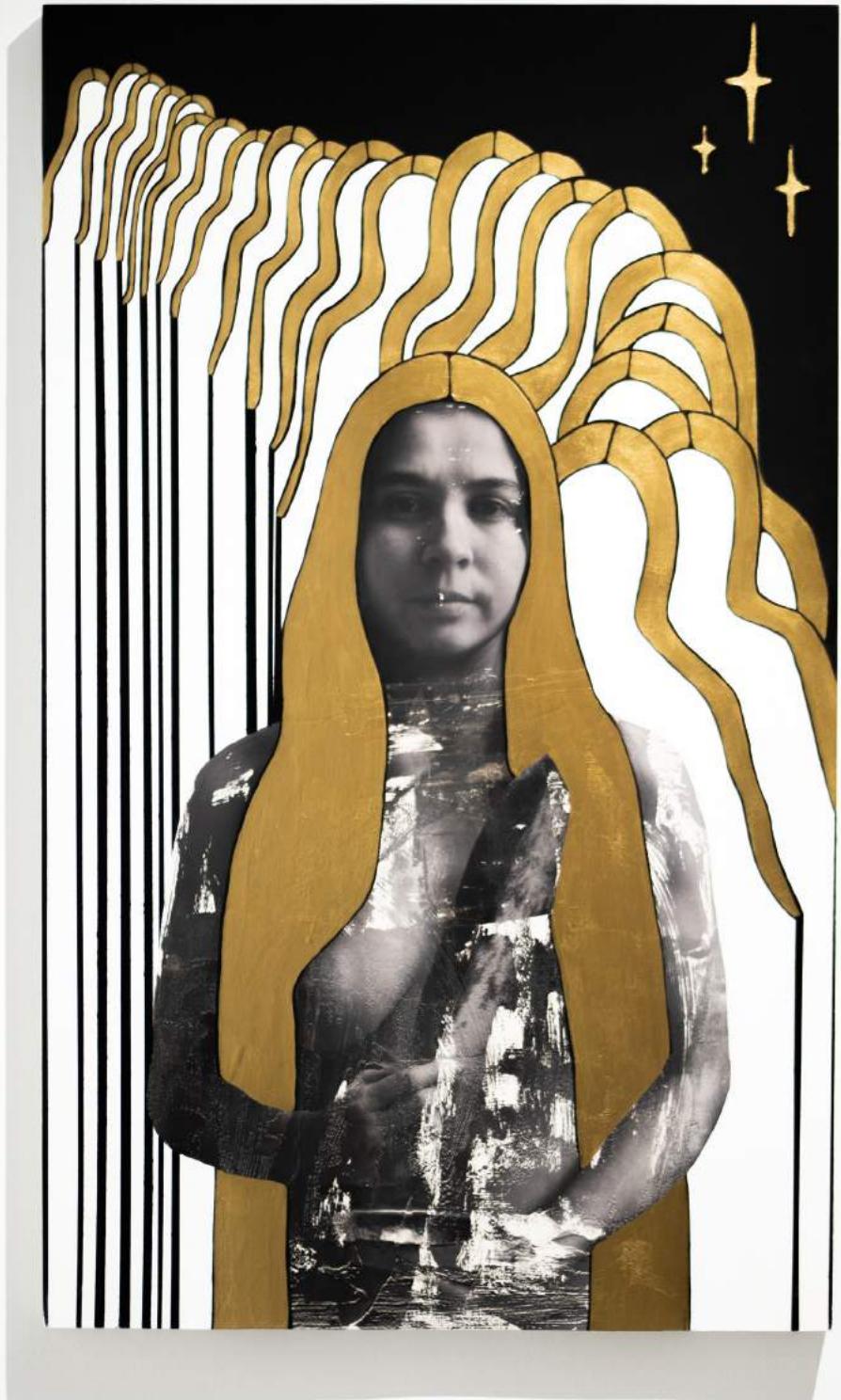
the image of the artist smudging with one feather in hand, Reuben has also drawn her ancestors behind her, layers of generations, one by one. The image is mesmerizing. Reuben adds: "It is thrilling and self-affirming when you come to recognize your path under your feet, it instills in me my sense of purpose. In cladding the ancestors with hair of gold, speaks to the power and resiliency of my ancestors and their strength that exists in me, that intergenerational resilience."<sup>24</sup>

We constantly re-aware of the current power of our love, care and community. Through the works of Monique Aura, Aylan Couchie, Kadrah Mensah, Karalyn Reuben and Curtia Wright, we see this. We also see this in the land, in our ancestors, in our families. We speak to the strength of each other, our communities, our kin. We can express love to our elders, past and present and we can provide guidance to new leaders, artists and collaborators.

by Natalie King

#### NOTES

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# SEÑORITA COLOMBIA: EXHIBITION AND PERFORMANCE

Orly Anan, Li Saumet and Lido Pimienta

December 2–14, 2019

*Señorita Colombia* is born out of the themes and inspirations behind Lido Pimienta's upcoming record, *Miss Colombia*, "cynical love letters to Colombia." Alongside Colombianas Li Saumet (based in Santa Marta city) and Orly Anan (based in Mexico city) who collaborated on the album, the group will transform the gallery into a COLOMBIA TROPICAL bizarre utopia, packed with VIBE altars, ceramic and textiles masks, nouveau kitsch and media. At opening night *Senorita Colombia* will express the dread of the "perfect Colombian lady" expected to "marry rich" and "improve the race" in an art performance that integrates movement and semiotics.



## Orly Anan

Inspired by the search of deeper spiritual paths, Anan works within the intersections of ritual, culture and contemporary art. As an artist and production designer, Orly Anan's practice is informed by the lives of different artists and philosophers all while travelling fiercely around the world in the search of understanding how she could blend and manifest art through acts of faith.

Through her experimental, surreal and strange production design, Anan takes the viewer into the "otherworldly" without departing from reality, nature and mixed identity, one that belongs to the present, past and the future.





## Liliana Saumet

Colombian singer and an icon of irreverent and bright style, her spiritual approach to living, has positioned her as one of the most unique voices of South America. Saumet is the lead singer of super group *Bombarra Estereo*, though her work in the band, she actively uplifts the voices of women, mothers and children in the Colombian landscape, all while working as a spiritual healer, through meditation and the creation of altars composed of wild flowers, plants and the fruits of her native land in the north coast of the country.

Liliana's altars call to action for mother earth, the moon and the ocean. They are fruitful offerings that bring peace, secrets and hidden messages of poetry and love.

## Lido Pimienta

Lido Pimienta's visual works are portraits of a community left, forgotten and displaced. Indignity and blackness at the forefront of the discourse in her practice, these characters in the resistance are the protagonists of the quest for cultural enlightenment in the Latin American diaspora and vernacular.

As an interdisciplinary musician and artist-curator, Pimienta has performed, exhibited, and curated around the world since 2002, exploring the politics of gender, race, motherhood, identity and the construct of the Canadian landscape.

# **EMOTIONAL OBJECTS**

curated by Emily Gove

Ana Morningstar, Yasmeen Nematt Alla, Yahn Nemirovsky,  
Danny Welsh, Hannah Zbitnew with Lisette Markiewicz

January 17 – February 15, 2020.

*Emotional Objects* explores the transformative and affective potential of textiles. The works in the exhibition employ methods of construction, de-construction, and re-forming to re-imagine garments, samplers, and practical everyday items and affirm their potential to express emotions that often go unsaid. Through employing sensual experiences such as scent and touch, the works in the exhibition by Hannah Zbitnew, Danny Welsh, Yahn Nemirovsky, Yasmeen Nematt Alla, and Ana Morningstar explore witchcraft and folktales, identity, queerness, trauma, and indigenous land sovereignty.

In, *The Absence of the Witch Doesn't Negate the Spell*, Hannah Zbitnew has designed and hand-fabricated a collection of three leather, ceramic, and woven shoes, each representing a third of the neopagan Triple Goddess: Maiden, Mother, and Crone, with each phase representing a phase of a woman's life. The work's title, a quote from Emily Dickinson, recalls how the "absence of functionality does not mean a shoe is not a shoe."<sup>1</sup> Displayed here with performative documentation by photographer Lisette Markiewicz, the shoes range in fabrication and functionality to perform their assigned role. The choice of woven uppers is deliberate as Zbitnew suggests this through the act of weaving. "You spend so long with [the cloth] before it's actually worn that some of the energy you put into it as a maker must carry over to the wearer."<sup>2</sup> The Maiden shoe has an upper woven from deep green cotton, attached loosely to its raw ceramic sole. The loose threads may be tightened, or further woven, suggesting the malleability of youth: "It's easy to slip out of, as it rests gently on the foot, open to outside influence."<sup>3</sup> The Mother shoe features a red clay sole, affixed to a tan insole. The body of the shoe is woven from wheat-coloured cotton, and a large circular 'buckle' of raw ceramic wraps around the



Hannah Zbitnew with Lisette Markiewicz

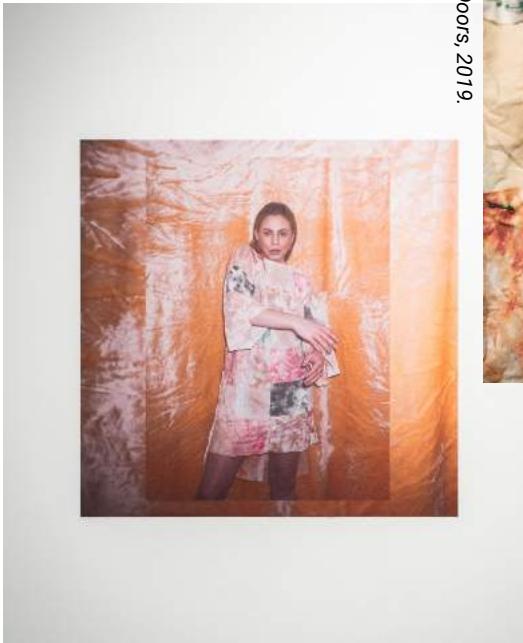


*The Absence of the Witch Doesn't Negate the Spell*, 2018.



Yahn Nemirovsky, *The Sampler in Your Pocket*, 2019 – 2020.

Danny Welsh, *Behind Closed Doors*, 2019.



Danny Welsh, *Behind Closed Doors*, 2019.



Yahn Nemirovsky, *The Sampler in Your Pocket is a Thing Well Kept*, 2019 – 2020.



foot. To Zbitnew, this Mother represents, "the conversation between forms, industrious, multi-relational experiences."<sup>4</sup> In practical terms, the Mother shoe is a step between the relative un-wearability of the Maiden shoe, towards the more practical Crone. The most functional of the three, the Crone shoe is a 'babouche' style, a flat slipper with a pointed toe; it has a flat, functional leather sole and a woven upper. The leather sole will mould to the wearer's foot with wear, suggestive of the passage of time and a life lived. In folktales, the figure of the crone is often represented as fearsome; however, the crone also represents wisdom and repose, and "an understanding of the relationships around us."<sup>5</sup>

In, *Behind Closed Doors*, Danny Welsh also works with the materiality of a garment, rather than its functionality. The piece consists of a dress created from used make-up wipes held together with small, formerly gold safety pins. The dress is displayed here on a theatrical, plush peach textile, alongside a photograph taken for Instagram, and an incantation. To create the garment, Welsh has saved their makeup wipes after removing that day's 'face,' patterned them out into a shift dress, then, rather than sewing, held each square together with golden safety pins. The material used speaks to both public performance and private rituals of transformation that take place behind closed doors by reconstructing the physical means of private transformation for public consumption. Since its original fabrication, the gold safety pins have now oxidized to green, taking the garment through its own physical transformation. The garment also emanates the conducive scent of cosmetics as well as the artist's own pheromones. Scholar Camilla Power speaks of "Beauty Magic," a concept that regards the application of cosmetics not as a way to beautify one's self or to construct a "fake identity," but rather to locate one's self "in the social cosmos."<sup>6</sup> The piece is displayed alongside an incantation that speaks to the application and removal of make-up and its role in fashioning identity, "...a performa-

tive re-occurring ritual / secretly spiritual / heavily habitual..." It is easy to imagine Welsh performing this re-occurring ritual, instilling a habitual practice with a spirituality that is unrevealed and hidden.

Yahn Nemirovsky's, *The Sampler in Your Pocket is a Thing Well Kept*, consists of a series of pocket-sized paper/textile samplers displayed on plinths throughout the gallery. Created before the advent of printed designs, an embroidery sampler was a personal cloth used to record and reference various stitches, designs and effects in order to recreate them later in new pieces.<sup>7</sup> Samplers commonly use as their subject matter personal stories, intended to be passed on through generations, a theme commonly seen in zine culture. The artist notes, "Both the zine and the stitching sampler are objects determined to be transitory in nature, created through processes of duplication. Both are objects known to house 'mistakes,' and in their housing, to celebrate them."<sup>8</sup> Nemirovsky's samplers have been crafted on ephemeral hand-made textiles intricately woven from paper, these each an experiment in its own right, using a variety of embroidery, drawing, dying, and painting techniques in each piece. In at least one of their samplers, Nemirovsky is inspired by a uniquely confessional text-only sampler created by Elizabeth Parker around 1830, describing what Sharp sees as her weaknesses and sins, ending, "Be sincere, what will become of my soul."<sup>9</sup> Nemirovsky's personal re-interpretation reads, "Be sincere what will become of my ever-loving gender-fuck heart." The pieces embrace 'sloppy craft' theory, a term first coined by artist and instructor Ann Wilson, to describe a: "critical, content-driven decision to work sloppy."<sup>10</sup> Sloppy craft stands in opposition to the ideas of completion and skill as the benchmarks of value creation, and, according to art historians Elissa Auther and Elyse Speaks, queers the medium of craft by activating, performing and activating craft's central codes, while at the same time scrambling them.<sup>11</sup> According to Nemirovsky, "When

*Emotional Objects*, 2020. Installation view, Shock blankets by Yasmeen Nemat Alla in view.



we make--slowly, a cross stitch sampler--or--quickly, a one-off pencil crayon zine, we generate a DIY spirit of keeping which is archival in its own right."<sup>12</sup>

Yasmeen Nematt Alla's shock blankets are machine-embroidered on orange felt with text received through an exchange with others. To create this series, Alla put out a call on social media seeking participants who were willing to share stories that begin, "I wouldn't call this a traumatic experience, but..."; in exchange, Alla would share her own story with them, each story previously deemed worthy of never being told, of being deemed "worthy... in a societal hierarchy of trauma."<sup>13</sup> The resulting pieces of text have been drawn from the more than 90 stories and sewn into the weighted blankets, which viewers are invited take off of their hooks to touch and wear. Alla's interest in working with shock blankets began after seeing them used on television where she discovered, "during traumatic experiences, when our bodies experience shock, we feel cold and experience an out of body experience. A shock blanket is provided to the victim, and it is very much a weighted blanket that warms you and tethers you to the ground during your shock." As items coded with both trauma and comfort, in Alla's work shock blankets become vehicles for storytelling, and a gesture of kindness and care to the viewer, for whom the works may trigger previous traumatic experiences.

*In, I Am Buying My Land Back One Bag At A Time & I am Getting A Receipt This Time,* Ana Morningstar creates a physical manifestation of a popular Facebook status-cum-meme by Jay Jay Tallbull, one of the first widely-shared indigenous memes. In seeking of indigenous meme culture specifically, writer Billy-Ray Belcourt describes the meme as "a makeshift form of connectivity. It circulates among those with shared good and bad feelings; it props up an effective infrastructure within which we hail ourselves as a part of something..."<sup>14</sup> Utilizing four DIY tarp bags printed with slogans like, "I Can't Believe It's Not Rez Dirt,"

and "For up to 500+ Years of Resistance!" Morningstar creates the titular bags of soil; by using four bags in total, one for each cardinal direction of North, East, South and West, and the four directions teachings, to address the many facets of the ongoing efforts of indigenous land sovereignty.<sup>15</sup> Soil is spilling out of the sacks, and on close inspection, the viewer can detect small glass trade beads mixed in with the dirt; the beads reference the historic, long-standing means of bartering and economy, legal documentation, and legal agreements referencing treaty rights.<sup>16</sup> The work uses absurdist humour to address and critique the absurdity of broken treaties, stolen land, and tokenized efforts towards reconciliation, through the farce of physically buying back one's own land, one bag at a time.

In her own writing about her piece, Hannah Zbitnew conjures the concept of enclothed cognition, a term coined by researcher Adam Galinsky that speaks to, "the magic of cloth, it can carry moods and abilities that exist outside of you into your bloodstream, your brain, and change you in quiet but measurable ways."<sup>17</sup> While Galinsky's research was limited to garments specifically, the textile works that encompass *Emotional Objects* aims to expand the approach to the alchemy that takes place in textiles fabricated or transformed by hand; in which the body of the maker transmits knowledge, thoughts, meaning and magic.

by Emily Gove



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- 4 Zbitnew, p 11
- 5 Zbitnew, p 11
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- 7 Author unknown, "Embroidery – a history of needlework samplers," Victoria & Albert Museum, date unknown: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers>
- 8 E-mail with artist, January 9, 2020
- 9 "Embroidery – a history of needlework samplers," Victoria & Albert Museum
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# **MEMORIAL: WORK BY ARTISTS OF THE VENEZUELAN DIASPORA**

curated by Camila Salcedo

Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, Andrea Dudier, denirée isabel,  
Cecilia Salcedo and Camila Salcedo.

February 28 – March 28, 2020

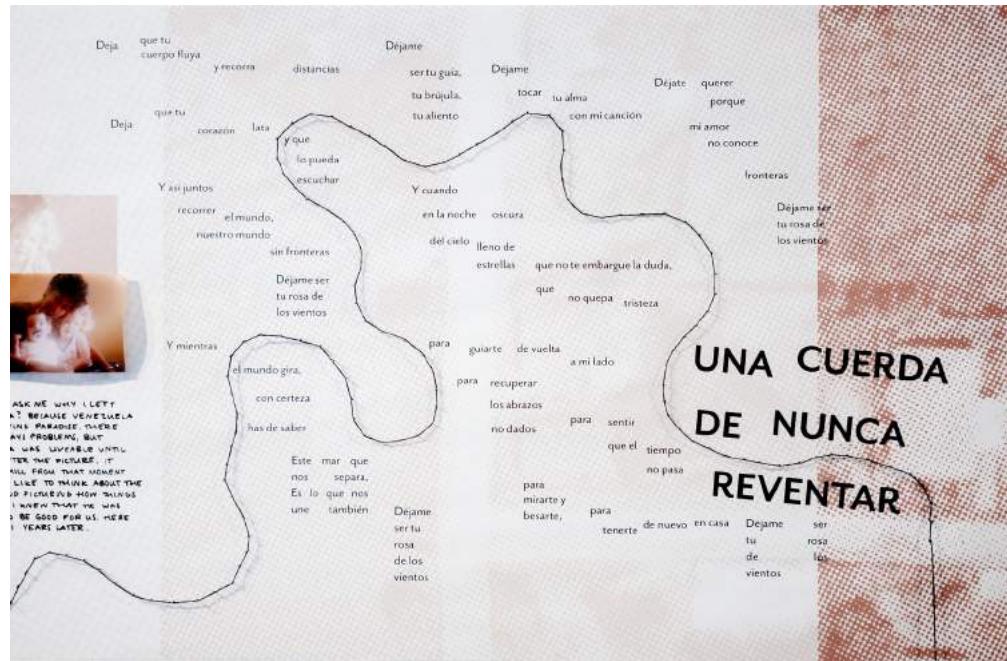
**Opening night performances by:**  
**Ana Luisa Bernández Notz**  
**and Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti.**

The title “Memorial” is a reference to both mourning and memory, themes that are broadly touched upon through our work as a result of geographic displacement. The works of Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, Ana Luisa Bernández Notz, Andrea Dudier, denirée isabel, Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti, Cecilia Salcedo and myself deal with immigration through our own unique lenses, being affected in different ways by the current Venezuelan migration and humanitarian crisis. Our work manifests through issues around home, nostalgia, childhood, family longing, culture and collective grief – coming together to share our desires to utilize art-making as a channel for dissemination, conversation, healing, and community-building. Our work intends to be non-partisan, without siding with any specific political party in the context of Venezuelan politics, rather, we aim to talk from our own lived experience about issues affecting ourselves, our friends, our families, and other Venezuelans in- and outside of the country.

## **Family Histories and Memories**

Since the start of the migration crisis, family histories and how we remember them have become increasingly important to Venezuelan immigrants. With family members often times scattered all over the world, how do we come to terms with notions of quality family time, and preserving family memories, when we are so far away from each other?

*to the strangers i love deeply* by denirée isabel is a textile installation in which the artist explores her relationship to family, community and love by framing textiles as “love



Cecilia Salcedo, *Una Cuerda de Nunca Reventar*/Collectors, 2017-2020.



denirée isabel, *to the strangers i love deeply, 2019.*



denirée isabel, *to the strangers i love deeply, 2019.*



Cecilia Salcedo, *Una Cuerda de Nunca Reventar/Collectors*

gestures". This particular gesture includes delicate woven textiles, along with digitally printed family photographs of her grandparents who still reside in Venezuela, and who are far away in memory and physical space. Looking at her work, I daydream of Saturday afternoons in a Caracas home, sitting on a couch with a window cracked and a warm breeze penetrating through. There is a warmth and familiarity to this piece, almost as if she is attempting to enlarge these photographic moments in order to prevent them from disappearing.

*Una Cuerda de Nunca Reventar/Collectors* by Cecilia Salcedo is an interactive PDF adapted into a large print and audio work for this exhibition, which reflects on the histories of immigration on her (also my) father's side of the family. With family members scattered all over the Americas and Europe, the artist attempts to catalogue each individual story into a comprehensive family archive. These fragmented stories, disconnected in physical time and space, come together into a continuous timeline. Our grandfather always referred to family mannerisms as "a string that never

breaks": a direct reference in the title and an ode to our intergenerational lineages which carry on and connect.

*Estela/Wake* by Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti is a reading of a bilingual poem. The title, *Wake* is used as a metaphor for mourning, memorializing, and water –physical waterways, emotional drowning and tears. Sebastián reflects on growing up near the water, and on his recent separation from his family. With his immediate family scattered and dispersed throughout the world, the poem points to the uncertainty that this separation poses –when will they see each other again?

"The water that once was host  
is a ghost. And the coast  
that we sat in  
is at most a border."<sup>1</sup>

@Reu / Keepsakes by Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz, who performs as Ana Luisaaaaaa, is an immersive DJ performance which includes samples of voice-notes, and a slideshow of old videos and photo projections from her closest friends. Reu refers to the word reunión or reunion, and is a common way of referring to house



Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti, *Estela/Wake*, 2020.

[Click to view performance](#)



Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz (@Reu / Keepsakes)



@Reu / Keepsakes, 2020.

[Click to view performance](#)

parties and gatherings. Since 2015, her friends have immigrated to many countries around the world, while some are still in Venezuela. This makes group chats on social media platforms, and photo-archive sharing important to remembrance, recounting and retelling. This performance, therefore, becomes a space of honoring joy and celebrating nostalgic memories through playing songs the artist and her friends grew up dancing to.

#### News/Crisis

Reading the news, receiving scarce texts from our families during power outages, and hearing stories from our families and friends in these times of crisis becomes gruelling, draining, and depressing. Art is a clear form of catharsis and a necessary vehicle for dissemination especially when journalists in Venezuela are often and consistently silenced, and english-language news or reliable articles outside of the country are hard to come by.

*Venezuela, país de ausencia* (*Venezuela, country of absences*) by Andrea Dudier is a series of GIFs originally intended for sharing on Instagram and created as an act of catharsis. She uses the GIF as a method that is analogous to poetry, and as a revolutionary visual tool for liberation through images of decomposition. These beautifully composed 6-8 second snippets of time aim to portray some of the many absences in Venezuela, where basic necessities are not widely available. She touches specifically on the lack of electricity, water, medications, food and freedom through simple gestures of scouring through the trash, ice melting or pills being consumed.

*Fabricated Realities* by Alejandro Rizzo is a series of staged photographs about the current socio-political and economic issues within the context of Venezuela. In this particular exhibition, two photographs from the series are displayed. One aims to directly reflect on the general perception the Venezuelan population holds in regards to the military's authority. While the other

aims to depict the hardships of daily life in Caracas, including people doing long line-ups to buy groceries, and pushing cars manually because of lack of gas. Using the language of documentary-style photography, he creates digital photo-collages that mix personal memory with larger issues. In addition, *Here and There, Now and Then* is a sculpture work made of bills and coins, illustrating the current disparity in economic value between Venezuela's and Canada's currency, because of Venezuela's exorbitantly high inflation.

*Alternate Reality (Santa Paula, El Cafetal, Caurimare, Caracas)* by myself, Camila Salcedo, is a video collage in which I utilize created 3D drawings found Google satellite photos, Google user 360° images, and YouTube videos to attempt to recreate the neighbourhoods I grew up around in Caracas. It also examines the Venezuelan government banning Google Streetview, creating a gap in our digital-space – and challenging the one potential way I would have been able to "travel back", as I have never returned. What do these spaces look like in my current memory and how can I fill in the gaps with the use of found footage? The sound design is by Felipe Martin.

*Memorial: Work by Artists of the Venezuelan Diaspora* reflects the ways in which we remember our families, friends, and distant spaces, manifesting in our work as our own versions of reality. Through our diverse works we are archiving not only our somatic memories of physical space, but also spaces which exist in our minds and dreams. As immigrants, we naturally question ideas about home, where we once were, where we are now, and why we are here.

Gathering under the pretenses of a shared homeland, we aim not to represent an Imagined Community<sup>2</sup> because we will never be able to know every Venezuelan. We aim instead to come together in our shared artistic community so as to no longer heal or cope in isolation, but rather to gather, create, and share space collectively. //

Spanish: Traducido por Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti y Camila Salcedo

## **MEMORIAL: ARTE por ARTISTAS de la DIÁSPORA VENEZOLANA**

curado por Camila Salcedo

**Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, Andrea Dudier, denirée isabel, Cecilia Salcedo and Camila Salcedo.**

28 de Febrero – 28 de Marzo, 2020  
**Performances de apertura por:  
Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz y  
Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti.**

El título "Memorial" es una referencia a el proceso del duelo y a la memoria, dos temas que abarcamos en nuestros trabajos como resultado de haber sido desplazados. El trabajo de Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz, Andrea Dudier, denirée isabel, Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti, Cecilia Salcedo y yo aborda el tema de la migración desde la perspectiva de cada uno de nosotros, siendo afectados por la actual crisis migratoria y humanitaria en Venezuela. Nuestro trabajo se manifiesta a través de temas como el hogar, la nostalgia, la niñez, el anhelo de estar con nuestra familia, la cultura y el duelo colectivo – juntándonos para compartir nuestro deseo común de utilizar el arte como vía para la diseminación de información, la conversación, la sanación y la creación en comunidad. Como artistas, nuestro trabajo aspira a ser no-partidista, evitando alinearse con partido político alguno en el contexto de Venezuela. Aspiramos, en cambio, a hablar desde nuestra propia experiencia, y sobre cuestiones que nos

afectan a nosotros, a amigos, a familia y a otros venezolanos dentro y fuera del país.

#### **Historias de Familia y Memorias**

Desde el inicio de la crisis migratoria, las historias de familia y cómo las recordamos son cosas que se han hecho cada vez más importantes para los inmigrantes venezolanos. Con familiares dispersos por todo el mundo, ¿cómo nos reconciliamos con ideas como la del tiempo de calidad en familia y la de preservar recuerdos familiares, si estamos tan lejos el uno del otro?

a los extraños que amo profundamente por denirée isabel es una instalación textil en la cual la artista explora su relación con las ideas de familia, comunidad y amor, estableciendo tejidos como "gestos de amor". En este gesto en particular, ella tejió delicados tejidos instalados junto con retratos familiares de sus abuelos, quienes todavía viven en Venezuela, impresos digitalmente. Al ver su trabajo, casi como soñando despierta, me transporta a la tarde de un sábado en Caracas, sentada en el sillón de una casa, con una brisa cálida entrando por una ventana entreabierta. Hay cierto calor y familiaridad en esta pieza, casi como si denirée estuviese intentando ampliar los momentos o recuerdos en las fotos para que no desaparezcan.

*Una Cuerda de Nunca Reventar/Collectors* por Cecilia Salcedo es un PDF interactivo que ha sido convertido en un trabajo de audio e impresión para esta exhibición. Ofrece una reflexión sobre las historias de migración de la familia del lado de su padre (que también es el mío). Con familiares esparcidos por toda América y Europa, Cecilia intenta recoger y catalogar las historias individuales de cada uno para formar un archivo familiar. Estas historias fragmentadas, en un tiempo y espacio físico, se juntan como una línea de tiempo continua. Nuestro abuelo siempre se refería a nuestras peculiaridades como "una cuerda de nunca reventar", cosa que es referenciada en el título, y que es también una oda a nuestros linajes que

continúan y se conectan.

*Estela/Wake* por Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti es una lectura de poesía de un poema bilingüe del mismo título. El título Estela es utilizado como una metáfora para el duelo, la conmemoración, y el agua –cuerpos de agua, el ahogo emocional y las lágrimas. Sebastián reflexiona sobre haber crecido cerca del agua, y sobre la separación reciente de su familia. Con su familia dispersa por todo el mundo, el poema apunta a la incertidumbre de esta separación – ¿cuando se volverán a ver?

"Mi casa está alumbrada,  
cogió fuego una cama,  
y el agua no llega ni hoy ni mañana."<sup>3</sup>

@Reu / Keepsakes por Ana Luisa Bernández Notz (Ana Luisaaaaaa) es un DJ performance que incluye sampling de notas de voz, y proyecciones de fotos y videos de sus amigos más cercanos. Reu es una manera de llamar a las reuniones y fiestas caseras nocturnas que frecuentaban. Desde el 2015, muchos de sus amigos han migrado a distintos países alrededor del mundo, y otros siguen en Venezuela. Por esto, tanto los mensajes de grupo, como los archivos fotográficos compartidos representan procesos importantes para recordar y recontar. Este performance, entonces, se convierte en un espacio para disfrutar, honrar al pasado, y celebrar viejas memorias al mezclar canciones que ella y sus amigos crecieron bailando.

#### Noticias/Crisis

Venezuela, país de ausencias, por Andrea Dudier, es una serie de GIFs originalmente hechos para Instagram, y creados como un acto catártico. Andrea utiliza los GIFs de una manera análoga a la poesía, y como una herramienta visual revolucionaria para la liberación a través de imágenes de descomposición. Estos retazos de 6-8 segundos, bellamente compuestos, quieren retratar algunas de las muchas ausencias en Venezuela, en donde productos de primera necesidad y servicios básicos no son

disponibles para todos. Andrea lidia específicamente con la falta de electricidad, agua, medicina, comida y libertad a través de imágenes simples como buscar entre la basura, hielo derritiéndose o pastillas siendo consumidas.

*Realidades Fabricadas* por Alejandro Rizzo es una serie de fotomontajes sobre el actual contexto sociopolítico y económico de Venezuela. En esta exhibición en particular, dos de las fotografías de la serie están en muestra. Una aspira a exponer la percepción general de los venezolanos hacia la autoridad de los militares, mientras la otra demuestra las dificultades diarias de vivir en Caracas, como "hacer cola" en el mercado, o empujar carros por la falta de gasolina. Utilizando el lenguaje de la fotografía documental, Alejandro crea foto-collages digitales que mezclan el recuerdo personal con problemas más grandes. Adicionalmente, *Aquí y Allá, Ahora y Entonces* es una escultura creada con billetes, que ilustra la disparidad de valor, debido a la hiperinflación, entre la moneda venezolana y la canadiense.

*Realidad Alternativa (Santa Paula, El Cafetal, Caurimare, Caracas)*, por mí, Camila Salcedo, es un video-collage en el cual utilizo dibujos en 3D, fotos satelitales de Google, fotos de 360° de usuarios de Google y videos encontrados en Youtube para intentar recrear los vecindarios en los cuales crecí, en Caracas. También reflexiona sobre el hecho de que el gobierno venezolano prohibió el Street View de Google, creando así un hueco en nuestro espacio digital, que es una manera en la cual pude haber "regresado" a Venezuela, dado que nunca he vuelto. ¿Cómo se ven estos espacios en mi memoria y cómo puedo llenar esos vacíos con el uso de material que consigo en internet? El diseño de sonido es por Felipe Martin.

*Memorial: Arte por Artistas de la Diáspora Venezolana* refleja la manera en la que recordamos a nuestras familias, amigos y espacios distantes que se manifiestan en nuestros trabajos como nuestras versiones de la realidad. A través de nuestros diversos trabajos, estamos archivando nuestras experiencias somáticas en espacios físicos y espacios que existen en nuestras mentes y nuestros sueños. Como migrantes, naturalmente nos hacemos pregun-



Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, *Fabricated Realities*, 2019.



Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, *Fabricated Realities*, 2019.

tas sobre lo que significa un hogar, dónde estuvimos en algún momento, dónde estamos ahora y por qué estamos aquí. Cómo artistas compartimos la experiencia de haber nacido en el mismo país, pero no intentamos representar una Comunidad Imaginada<sup>4</sup> porque nunca vamos a poder conocer a todos los venezolanos. Entonces, nuestro objetivo es reunirnos en nuestra comunidad artística compartida, para crear, sanar y compartir espacios.

por Camila Salcedo



*Andrea Dudier, Venezuela, país de ausencia (Venezuela, country of absences), 2020.*

#### NOTES

- 1 Excerpt from *Estela/Wake* by Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti. 2 A term coined by Irish historian, Benedict Anderson, exploring the ideas of nationalism and nations as communities that people societally feel "a part of". 3 Extracto de *Estela/Wake* por Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti. 4 Término descrito por historiador irlandés, Benedict Anderson, quien analiza el nacionalismo, y las naciones como comunidades con las que las personas socialmente se "sienten parte".

Alejandro Rizzo Nervo, *Fabricated Realities*, 2019.



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*I Hope You're Doing Well*  
by Danielle Coleman

# **HOW THE CURVE FITS INSIDE THE SQUARE**

by Arshia Salesi

Originally opened in  
October 26 - January 6th, 2019

Arshia Salesi's ongoing series, *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*, uses abstracted Arabic letters to investigate painting's relationship to its three-dimensional surroundings: the perceived and tangible real world. In its fourth iteration, a text-image cooperation is used to explore the function of language in public space. Through the use of colour, the artist aims to challenge Orientalist views and provide new possibilities of understanding; according to Edward Said, "Orientalism is a perspective that emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences between Eurocentric and Eastern cultures."<sup>1</sup> This work analyzes the nuances of transculturality through a non-hierarchical lens by visualizing a newly developed complex space that has resulted from the intermixing of various cultures in a diverse cosmopolitan city like Toronto. The work describes the process of understanding that occurs through a constant negotiation between Iranian and Western modes of thought.

Like a diorama, or perhaps a vitrine in an electronics store, the Samsung TV box painting is overwritten with the artist's own linguistic forms. The image resembles two anthropomorphized bodies: the black calligraphic and the green graphic stencil are floating and hugging, yet caught and loosely suffocated, perhaps alluding to the traditional practice of Iranian black-ink calligraphy in relation to contemporary Iranian type and graphic design; the black/dark-brown inks used in Iranian calligraphy signify formality and adherence to tradition. The TV box is not just a rectangular plane to paint on, it is also an item that speaks to commodity and globalization. These traits, in relation to the TV box, refer to the global acceptance of television sets as commodities and fixtures of homes; furthermore, televisions represent the most readily available resources for seeing, experiencing and gaining understanding of what is foreign and unknown. The TV box also alludes to Iranian satellite TV channels, showing integration of two languages with a preferred frontal image that usurps. This linkage of thought is why Salesi paints on non-art objects.





It is a comical approach to a typical and mundane rectangular plane and an attempt at exploring the variants of a paintable rectangular surface.

Here, the installation mimics a storefront vitrine, as if the work is formulated for advertisement. The disconfigured Farsi Samsung sign looks like there was a malfunctioning during its production. Unlike previous iterations from this series of Salesi's work that invited the viewer to enter the painting, viewers are instead situated outside of the work, looking inside the Window Space; but it is nonetheless encounterable. "Having spent a significant amount of time in this neighbourhood, I'm understanding its culture better; a place where immigrant's residents and businesses are situated; it's fulfilling to be able to contribute to that."<sup>2</sup>

Painting on the wall and the plastic hanging sign come together like a large-scale collage as the paint engulfs the space. "It's merging many ideas, and for me the biggest challenge is controlling how everything comes together because part of the work is previously constructed, but part of it is made on the spot."<sup>3</sup> The Window Space creates a pictorial image from three-dimensional works inside the small space. "Every work I make, I consider the space that it will be displayed in; that space is its frame, square or cube; I want to talk about that space, not leave it out. I think it's important because the work's containment becomes just as important as the piece itself."<sup>4</sup>

The painting goes beyond the cardboard plane and reaches every corner of the walls in the window space; as if Salesi used the edges of the material as guidelines instead of absolute limitations; painting both on the panel and outside of it, Salesi engages with the space within and beyond the surface.

Her blocky letters, filled with colour, have a graffiti-like appearance. However, she herself may argue against this description on the grounds that graffiti tends to rely on letters and language to convey meaning.

Salesi, on the other hand, partially relies on skewed and deformed letterings to illicit conversation. The strictly formal elements of Salesi's work are neither primary nor secondary, just the borderless way she prefers to talk about language, culture, transculturality, painting and installation.

"Maybe the work is interesting in this context of Canada, as opposed to Iran, where the dominant language is Farsi. Often I grapple with that. Is the other, the unknown, more interesting to engage with because the unknown is just simply exotified?"<sup>5</sup>

*How the Curve Fit Inside the Square* is less about language and more about culture: a non-straightforward, non-store-bought Western ideal often sold to us; a complex transcultural space, where fluidity begets movement. If language forms the way we think, then finding new ways of communicating could unlock new and more complete understandings of other cultures in a non-hierarchical way; a in which all cultures are valid, and none dominate other. The curve describes fluid forces and beings inside a well-defined and rigid structure: whether it be the paint on a rectangular plane, the confines of institutional space, strict parental upbringing, or societal/governmental laws.

by Benoni G. Green



#### NOTES

- 1 Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon Books), 1978
- 2 Salesi, Arshia. *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*. Conversation with the artist, 2018.
- 3 ibid
- 4 ibid
- 5 Salesi, Arshia. *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*. Conversation with the artist, 2018.

# TENDER LOVING CARE

by Liza Konovalov

September 6 – October 12, 2019.



Through found and personal objects, humour, and colour, Liza Konovalov's *Tender Loving Care* shows us what is possible when we treat our objects with compassion. In looking at the value of objects and "stuff," not for their material cost, but for the people connected to them. These disparate objects and ideas come together to create a cohesive vision. *Tender Loving Care* highlights the value of relationships and the love people share.

*Tender Loving Care* illustrates the shift between private and public spaces. As we peer through the window, we are transported into another world, reminiscent of a dream, or an enchanted bedroom landscape. Taking inspiration from Peter Maxx's psychedelic motifs and colours from the 1960s-70s, we become immersed in textures, colours and patterns. The back wall is painted as a bright colourful landscape with shades of pinks, purples, smiling clouds and a sun. The mixed media installation includes collage, drawings, ceramics and found objects. A chandelier is installed with sparkling gem shaped beads, catching the light and reflecting it back at the viewer, allowing us to become immersed in the space. A second hanging sculpture is embellished with translucent plastic beads, doll and cast ceramic heads, and plastic objects in bright yellows, pinks, oranges, and purples.

A model train slowly circles through the space, rhythmically humming along the oval track. A whimsical atmosphere is created through colours reminiscent of dreams, sunsets and clouds at dusk; it's like looking at the world through lilac coloured glasses. The work is both nostalgic and humorous using these distinct items collaged into new art objects, anchoring them in our memories and childhoods.

The display features personal and art objects from the artist's life. Each item has been carefully curated, each sharing the same value and importance to the work as a whole. The installation acts as a celebration of not only of objects, but also of our relationships with other people. Objects hold sentimental value because of where they came from, who gave them to us, and the memories

associated with them. Liza's work shows the viewer a genuine collection using found and gifted objects from the people in her life. For example, her sister's childhood stuffed animal has been incorporated into the display, with the promise that it shall be returned unharmed.

The eclectic, visual fullness and maximalism illustrates a vibrant, compassionate world. New, mass-produced store bought objects lack the emotional weight of gifted, found or handmade pieces. The desire for things, fullness, colour, and vibrancy is in stark contrast to the contemporary/modernist idea of the white cube. Minimalism has become synonymous with gentrification, upper classes, and wealth. When we think of the modern art gallery, the minimalist white cube is often synonymous with "good", "contemporary", "new" art. Objects with notches, bells-and-whistles are seen in a negative light; as low-brow, junky, kitschy. Our relationship to stuff is difficult, especially while simultaneously critiquing Capitalism and consumerism; the critique of Capitalism isn't, "we should not have stuff;" rather, it's to be considerate and mindful of the stuff we do have.

Being critical of planned obsolescence leads us to question what objects we do value, why we want certain products, and which objects hold social versus personal value. The quality of our relationship to the things we keep has been diminished in a world where everything is seen as disposable and is telling of how we as a society treat other people and our planet. The art we make and keep sends a message of who we are and what is important to us. Ultimately, art doesn't need to be isolating, heavy and austere. Let's instead escape into a better future; let's dream together of a world where we can escape to. *Tender Loving Care* strives to have our everyday lives saturated with color; with stuff. Objects act as tethers to other people, helping us to immerse ourselves in spaces that radiate care and affection.

At present, the current world is "a dystopi-

an hell-scape" said Liza when we chatted over coffee<sup>1</sup>. On the surface, the work is aesthetically pleasing, humorous, and joyful. When we look a bit closer, we are being shown what we are currently lacking in our society. This dream of a future, that centers on community, inclusion, trade, and accessible transportation highlights the gaps in our current world and points to basic human needs which are being overlooked. The work acts both as a symbol of hope for the future, and a warning of what is at stake.

These luxurious textures, colours, and objects are loud and demanding of attention and notice. *Tender Loving Care* highlights the value of compassion and interpersonal relationships, and the ritual of gift giving. It looks at wanting, the desire to look at stuff, of visual decadence and the need for a connection to other people and ourselves.

by Lucia Wallace



#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From Interview with the artist, August 14th 2019

# **WEAR YOUR SOUL IN WORDY YESTERDAY GOLD**

by Xuan Ye

October 18 – November 16, 2019.

**While Yeast Sings I'm Worried Yard Groans**

## **An Action is an Impulse to Satisfy a Desire**

Desires arise out of some need. We make the choice to direct our activity towards satisfying a particular desire. These desires produce our reality, including the techniques we use to satisfy our desires. The techniques inform other desires.

I need to sleep, I need to eat, I need to empty myself, I need things, I need to communicate. I will go to great lengths to sleep, eat, empty myself, get things, and communicate. Environment is chaos. Imperfect, I impose order. Yesterday's language captures my mouth in speech, my hands in writing. Feels like my tongue even though it is common, was taught to me. Language goes out into the world and makes things, makes places. It captures the chaos of the world, turns everything out there into elements of itself. Feels like perfection, making sense of the world. Makes everything feel like my things, my organization, even though they don't belong to me. But I like order. Feels impartial but it's not. I'm operating under a regime that benefits from a neutral appearance.

I am organized by this city. It's a technique. I stay in my room or find another to relax, go to work to make money to get food, clothes and books, and when I have time I talk to people. They say the same thing. We all like organization. It's impartially fantastic, it's imperial fantasy. How can I break out? With a different technique. I will go online. I will crosscut the geometry of space to not have to go to great lengths for answers any longer. Hardly alone, I'm usually moving, looking, talking faster than I ever thought possible. Searching only raises more questions. Writing this text is no different. My desire to communicate inflates in the shape of the object I speak to.



## Nowhere, Another Technique

This iteration of Xuan Ye's installation *Wear Your Soul in Wordy Yesterday Gold* is a condensation of their previous installation *What You See is Where You Go*. It consists of two formal elements:

- a. Caret
- b. Checker

Let's look at them individually and see where they take us.

### a. Caret: Being at The Edge

Composed of a single vertical bulb suspended in the centre of the window vitrine, this caret is the insertion point in a body of text. The bar flickers endlessly in place. The caret sits wherever Ye has left off, as if representing their own position within an ongoing conversation. It pauses here only for the duration of its installation slot as a particular point within a larger process of elaboration.

The throbbing of the caret presents writing as the machinic expression of desire; communication as yearning to be understood. An insertion signals an instance within this process, in this case locating the threshold of correspondence itself. Here, my whereabouts within some infinity is revealed as a temporary limit, my sense edging ever closer to nonsensical, the familiar self shed before assuming another temporary pose. All writing expresses this, however virtuality has changed my navigation in terms of velocity. I'm a little runner striding along the navigable surface, assembling identity as activity.

This icon denotes a disposition towards a state-of-affairs as I switch platforms, send messages, leave comments, make notes, scroll endlessly to receive information. I articulate my whereabouts through this activity - contextualized comments becomes arguments. Now I sit silently, cursor flickering, wanting words simply because I can. Even inactivity is expressive, my fidgeting without moving forward produces for



you a “read” or “is writing” icon, forks over a discrete relation within a larger context of change. I want to hear back so fast. Easy navigation allows me to spore outward so fast I break semiotic containers of clear representation and grasp at the shock of raw attrition. It’s not what I say but how I say it. *What You See is What You Get* spins off to become *What You See is Where You Go* and mutates again as a command. Now *Wear Your Soul in Wordy Yesterday Gold* rests on holy acrostic in title alone, hunting hungrily anagram reassembly. Sharing at this speed shatters predictable forms of self-explanation in favour of a deeper, granular synthesis. Sure, this technical system has provided easier ways to communicate but I fell hard for its speed, got used to its surplus, crave even higher intensity. I can see anything, go wherever.

What let me get to this point? The openness I seek could mean complete disintegration. When I lag out and crash, or when I get my flight from single organism into a communal entity is ruined, dashed back to partiality, interior kept alive. My craving for togetherness cannot rest, I end up unsettled, trembling trapped in a circle of noise. The vibratory stillness of extreme speed lead our activity to exist as some kind of bare utterance, a moan-cry that is beyond words. This kind of communicative mode breaks methods of vocal and bodily representation and demands disembodied force of desire. The soul leaks out. Crumpled *Wear Your Soul In Wordy Yesterday Gold* is a smear in cyber-ectoplasm - what I saw and where I went end up as gooey auteur whey hiss woe. My shriek playfully folds in and out within. But within where?

#### b. Checker: Cruising the Web

Let's slow down a bit. Blink and you'd miss that lingering checker. At first glance, the second element of Ye's installation is just a checkerboard background placed across the entire wall of the window space. Second glance: this checker is the standard representation of transparency in graphics software. This representation of transpar-

ency is interesting in its very existence as a representation. It isn't 'nothing', not the vacuum of container space. It is the relational space where our interactions take place that allows for those relationships to exist. However, it isn't as if this space doesn't do anything and simple let participants to do what they wish. Power relations are already present, so I am left carving words with a reed along the grout between these white and grey tiles, a scribbling germ within this interior for digital life.

We can read the inclusion of a checkerboard background as a kind of institutional critique of the virtual courtyard, a space where everywhere there are cronies of corporate interest. The neutral element of transparency is not experienced outright but signalled by the superimposition of a checkerboard: a simulation of neutrality. It might look sterile but we aren't conversing in any place wherever. We are inside a specific place that allows us to connect in certain ways. In the same way that physical representation of a void is afforded by the existence of a painted wall belonging to a particular white cube, or commercial space, digital neutrality is afforded by a veil over the program's coded infrastructure.

The web deploys a field of diffuse control to structure how and what we desire. It is a machine that grew specific tools such as giving us access to vast amounts of information and potential to socialize, yet elements of its actualization seem predatory. Infrastructure such as the empty background Ye's icon rests in front of direct our methods with character limits and censoring, encourage rates of engagement, and keep track of all this activity. It's simply another organizational technique: the social programs incentivise acting on certain wants, make us care about free relations rather than the architecturally politicized environment they take place in. By reflecting on this simulated checkerboard backdrop we can better understand what happens when technical systems are treated as neutral extensions of wants by users despite being developed with

manipulative intentions. Ethical relations, even the quickest exchanges sent over text, are compromised. Even outside of perceivable space our relationships exist within a system whose hidden back-end is informed by political and economic ideologies that want to exploit our behaviour, control our interactions and extract wealth. It seems like everything needs to want something.

#### Now Here I Went

If anything, we must remain open to this mystery. Stuck communicating within channels no matter what, maybe our best bet is to at least circumvent how valuable our data is to organizations that harvest and surveil. Our faces have twisted, eyes caves leading to mirrors reflecting what this environment causes us to crave. Swim in these tunnels: we can find a new way to become something else, unleash flows of expression that heighten our awareness of bodily activity that can cap exploitability.

If our networks bloodlet, we can poison our blood. We can interact randomly, con the interface, scroll like a razor, appease the system unchained from desire, fill boxes blindly - in the end relate differently to our online environment by understanding the context we act within. We can randomize affect to become excessive forms of reality instead of sterile sense events. This pragmatic action might totally unravel the self, produce unpredictable varieties that could exist outside of language. Until we get there, let's keep the conversation going !

by Benjamin de Boer

# HA HA WALL

by Erika Verhagen

January 17 – February 22, 2020

## **Sleight Objects**

### The Window

My neighbor picks up leaves on her lawn one by one with her bare hands. She wears a sweater set, demurely squatting, picking up leaves until her hands are full. She doesn't look up as we walk pass, and why should she? She's in her space, and we acknowledge it by averting our eyes. We are glimpsing an invisible border, one that separates the public sidewalk and the private green grass.

*Ha Ha Wall*, the title of Erika Verhagen's installation is perhaps a good place to start. The 18th Century *Ha Ha Wall* is a wall built into the landscape in order to not disrupt the scenic view of the countryside, keeping out those that are not wished in<sup>1</sup>. Built usually out of stone directly into the land, the wall is constructed to be invisible from those that are 'inside' the area the wall borders, but can be seen by those on the outside. In other words its an 'invisible' border separating the 'outside' from the 'inside'. And here is where Verhagen's installation sits. Literally situated in-between Lansdowne St. and Xspace, in a window space bubble from which both the street and gallery are visible. It straddles a semi visible line of exposed and protected.

*Ha Ha Wall* feels odd coming out of your mouth. It's a mismatch of words that should not equal what they do. It's an odd sticking of a verbal exclamation and a hard impermeable structure, and so it follows that the work *Ha Ha Wall* represents is not what you expect.

Verhagen has created an implied living space<sup>2</sup> where domestic-ish objects are trapped in behind closed door actions. The hooked rugs are draped or hung loosely on wooden armatures, an upended glass sits atop a woollen spill across from a chair illusioned to look like a shadow of itself.

### The glass

The glass cup is Erika's *Ha Ha Wall*. It's tricky. It sits



upside down on the floor but is still filled with water. Reminiscent of a neighbour placing a glass to a wall in order to listen, but the glass is filled with water, instead of amplifying the sound the water silences it. A physical, invisible distance separates you like wearing noise cancelling headphones. When you enter Xspace, audio inaudible from the outside greets you. A loop that replays and replays the glass breaking on a hardwood floor, an event that will never come to pass, and yet it could have already happened. Like a sonic afterimage Verhagen replays for your ears the event she has hooked with wool, a white milky spill surrounds the glass, circling it, but not venturing underneath. The glass itself sits on the ground, it has a long shadow carved out of the rug, displaying the white of the painted floor beneath it.

The audio presents a trapped interior action, you hear a domestic scene: a glass falls, shattering on the hardwood floor, a pause, the ceiling being stuck with a broom from the downstairs neighbour.<sup>3</sup> But the real glass isn't shattered, instead it's as though the glass fell and landed upside down without spilling a drop. Instead the carpet has absorbed the fall, mimicking the spill.

When a wall isn't a wall it's a haha.

#### The rug

*Sleight* as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary means: 'deceitful craftiness'.<sup>4</sup>

Sleight of hand is usually associated with magicians, but in Verhagen's work it's everywhere. Deceitful craft, and not negatively deceitful (but instead tricky) informs all of the work in *Ha Ha Wall*. Verhagen employs the medium of craft to pull pranks, or twist visual metaphors. She transforms rugs into sneaky events: they don't fade into the background so much as become part of the background, the spill around the cup, the shadow beneath the chair.

Closest to the front of the window a rug



lies in bed. The rug is draped over a low wooden frame, and gently personified it becomes both the bed and the subject. At the 'head' of the bed it has sculptural cut outs, highlighting lumpy round pillow-like forms in creams and greys. Near the middle faint heather blues and greys come together to form the geometric shapes of a quilt pattern, bordered by a wide cream rectangle finishing in long rounded strips like fingers, reminiscent of tassels on woven rug.

and domesticity has a border  
and here you are in it and here you are not

### The chair

Here, there is a shadow that is actually a hooked rug.

The chair itself has a round seat and a curved back, it looks like a kitchen chair, not out of place around a table. Stretching from its legs is a deep grey shadow and hooked seat covering in the shape and colour as the shadow beneath it. As though the seat was gone and all you were left with was the wooden frame. Here again is a frozen action, or maybe a muffled action is a better fit. Verhagen is employing craft to trick, to fake the would-be sitter out of what would truly be a soft chair, padded with the very thing that is pretending to not exist.

When we spoke on the phone Erika was worried/joking that this was 'the tiniest furniture showroom in Toronto'. Meaning that she worried that the work looked too 'designy' the furniture was too much just that, furniture. But that sentiment is perfect for *Ha Ha Wall*, furniture showrooms are sort of exactly what Verhagen is getting at. They are the perfect inside/outside space, one that is both intimate and impersonal. You walk through a false depiction of your own interior space surrounded by strangers, purchasing products to furnish their own spaces. Verhagen describes her sculptures as "objects that cross over into real life".<sup>5</sup> The lines get blurry, the showroom starts to swirl and then freezes with shadows permanently etched into rugs, and

glasses perpetually falling.

### Leaks

On Lansdowne facing *Ha Ha Wall* the sounds of traffic from College and Dundas West crash over you on either side, a different kind of soundtrack to the work. You swing open the glass door to Xspace and have that unique auditory experience of moving from one soundscape to another. From dense street noise to calm gallery quiet. And as you walk through the gallery at Xspace you will hear sound bleed in from Verhagen's window. Soft recorded interior noise recorded at her apartment: talking through a door, an alarm going off in another room, a glass smashing on the ground, and lots of dead air.<sup>6</sup> This sound leak follows you as you walk through the space, bringing a bit of the domestic with you- like the smell of onions on your clothes. But if you walk back towards the window space you'll notice a new leak, the sound of the street worming its way back in, mixing the inside sounds with the outside.

by Lucy Pauker

### NOTES

- 1 "Ha-Ha." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Jan. 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ha-ha>.
- 2 Interview with the Artist, 2019
- 3 Interview with the Artist, 2019
- 4 "Sleight." Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sleight>.
- 5 Interview with the Artist, 2019
- 6 Interview with the Artist, 2019





## I HOPE YOU'RE DOING WELL

by Danielle Coleman

February 28 – April 4, 2020

In the same way a musician would write a break up album, Danielle Coleman uses her art practice to explore the experience of a partner ending their five year long relationship. Through academic research, intuitive mark making, and the transformation of letters written by her former partner, *I Hope You're Doing Well* incorporates craft elements and kitsch aesthetics, to create a final love letter. In the process of making this work, Coleman validated her own experiences exploring what to do with all that former love, and found space to sit comfortably with the idea that the person who she was romantically entangled with doesn't exist anymore; that version of him ended along with their relationship.

Drawing influence from a maternal relationship with her grandmother, and the oversaturated sticky sweetness of the dollar store around Valentine's Day, Coleman strategically utilizes a range of symbols that express love to grab the viewer's attention. Through imagery from décor found in her Grandmother's home, she explores how nostalgia, items designed for care, and personal experiences can influence our needs of romantic love. Juxtaposing nostalgia with the language of kitsch through sculptural materials like glitter and pipe cleaners, and carefully selected colour choices of red, purple, pink, yellow, silver and golds, Coleman brings an idealized version of romantic love into her installation; often represented as the perfectly sweet heart-shaped idea of 'forever'. Using kitsch aesthetics to create an overly sentimental, garish, and excessive visual artwork, Coleman reclaims a space for herself and her understanding of the lovers' discourse within academia. By leaning into the notion of cliché and including materials that represent idealized romantic love ironically, her work aims to recontextualize what it means to create visual representations of romance and heartbreak within art.<sup>1</sup>

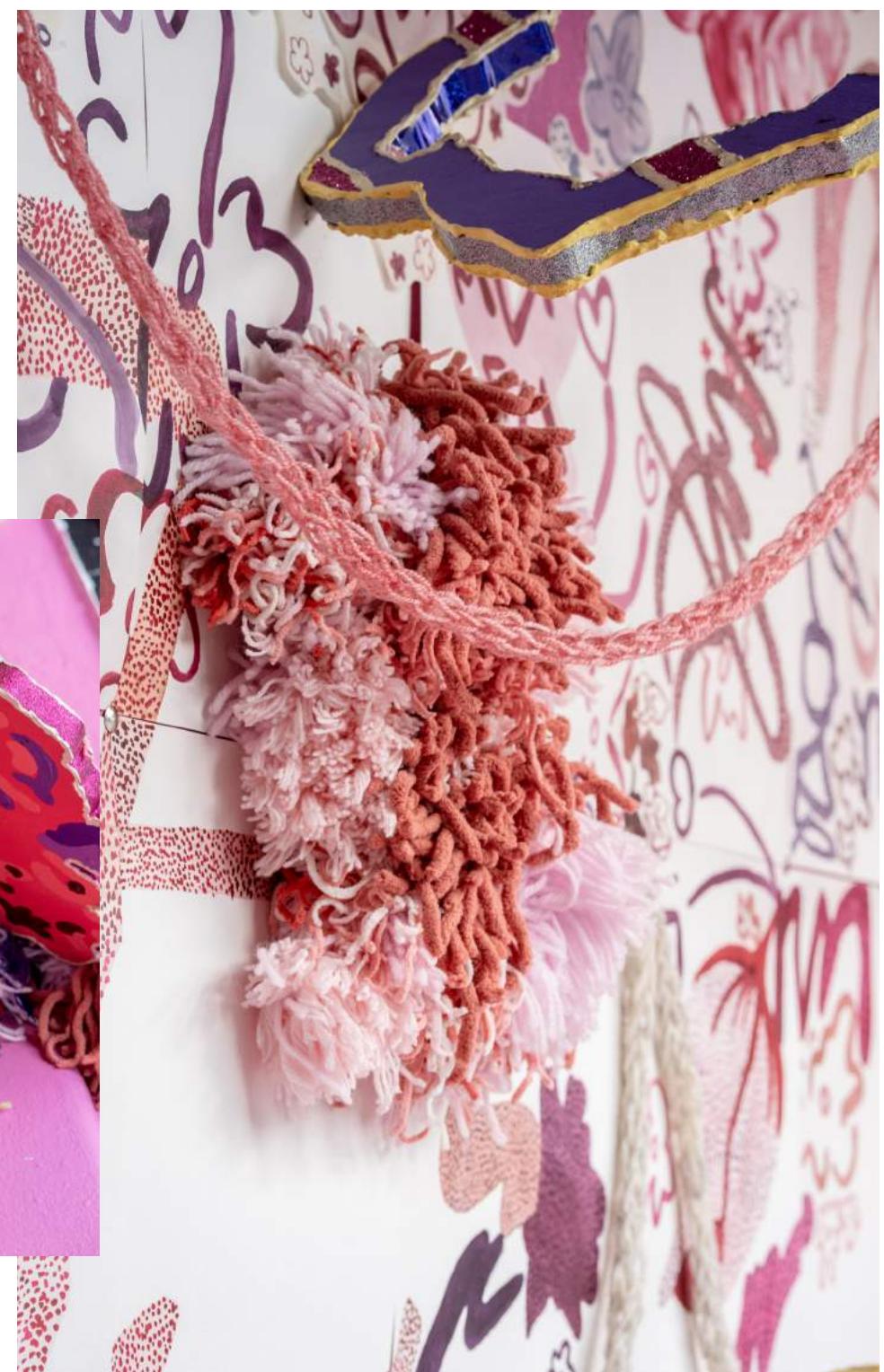
Against a bright pink background are sheets of watercolour paper covered in floral patterns, quilted together by organically shaped letters that move beyond the page breaks. The floral motif invokes memories of tea towels

and bedding in Coleman's Grandparents home, and the shapes were taken directly from the pages of love letters written by her ex-partner. Together, these elements explore the impact of memory; the flowers representing the feeling of being comforted by someone you love, with the letters directly involving her former partner in the installation. The bleeding pigment of watercolour paint is reminiscent of tears, but also becomes an avenue for transformation. By tracing over the shapes again and again, defining sections with pen and ink, Coleman creates new forms from the language of those love letters, visually communicating to her audience that while traces of this relationship will always be a part of her, Coleman is no longer the person her ex-partner was in love with.

The letters are also incorporated as three-dimensional wooden shapes that hang off the wall. Despite being the same marks, the softness of the watercolour letters changes when recreated in wood. Originally a dresser, Coleman cut and sanded each piece into its specific shape and while these letter shapes appear weightless when hanging off the wall, they are in fact very heavy. Different on either side, the wood letters split the installation into two languages. On the left side, the sculptures are full of hearts, created from red pipe cleaners and piping paint through an icing bag, reflective of nostalgia. On the right side, the sculptures are wrapped in stripes of glitter ribbon, representing Coleman's constant state of growing through this process.<sup>2</sup> These juxtaposing materials reflect the dual impact of the love letters; a soft and sweet comfort when received during the relationship, but being re-read in the aftermath of the breakup, those same words instead hit hard like a punch to the gut. Hanging from the watercolour pages and wood pieces on the wall are braided chains. Created through the process of finger knitting, these chains give weight to the work, despite the inherent softness of the yarn. Including the sensual aspect of touch recontextualizes the work within a history of craft, and the act of literally weav-

ing multiple pieces of yarn together into something stronger symbolizes Coleman's emotional processing of the relationship; a representation of her ultimate transformative healing.<sup>3</sup>

At the base of the smooth, pastel-toned wall, abstract floral shaped sculptures create a sharp contrast with their rugged edges and heavy opaque colours. These sculptures are made from the offcut wood from the wall pieces and are painted with bold synthetic reds and purples; a nod to shiny foil wrapped heart shaped chocolates often gifted on Valentine's Day. Glitter and gold painted edges highlight their rugged



shape, and the floral and letter imagery is continued on the body of the sculptures. Here her marks are much more heavy handed than the watercolour pages of the wall.<sup>4</sup> While the softness of the wall work is a necessary nostalgia of Coleman's past partnership, these wooden floor sculptures remind the viewer that this relationship did indeed end harshly, in heartbreak.

*I Hope You're Doing Well* is a final love letter, the last thing Coleman needed to say two years later. Despite the negative ending of that 5 year relationship, the installation does not seek to vilify her former partner, but rather arrive at some sort of conclusion. Through a long process of self validation, research, exploration, and experimentation, Danielle Coleman invites the viewer into her personal healing, and reminds us that the act of processing emotional trauma through her art practice is ultimately a compliment. While traces of a former love are woven into the installation, the process and ultimate closure was never about him. His letters become simply another material choice, an element to further her understanding of their lovers discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Looking at the installation, I'm reminded of Coleman's own words about her work:

"this is what feeling feels like".<sup>6</sup>

by Emily Condie



#### NOTES

- 1Coleman, Danielle, "I Hope You're Doing Well: Fragments," OCAD University thesis paper, April 2nd, 2019, p. 5
- 2 Coleman, p.7
- 3 Coleman, p.8
- 4 Coleman, p.6
- 5 Coleman, p.5
- 6 Danielle Coleman, in conversation with the author, January 30th, 2020

# PROJECT SPACE



*Opening Reception for  
Señorita Colombia: Exhibition and Performance*

# **PLACE OF BE(LONGING)**

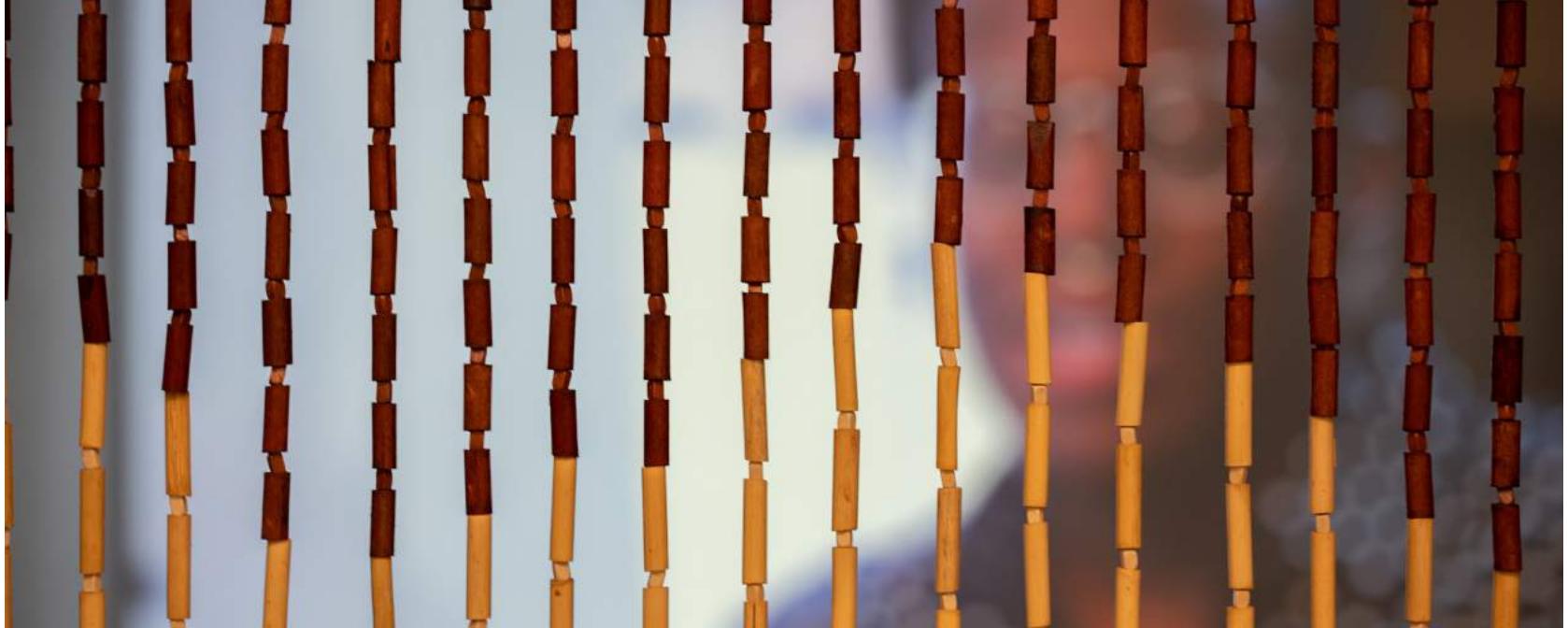
by Taymah Armatrading

September 6 – October 5, 2019

## TL;DR.

*Place of Be(longing)* is a video installation aimed at disturbing the historic notion of Canada as a sanctuary for racialized individuals. The work centers the dialogue of five West Indian Canadians invited to the table for a traditional Caribbean meal. This work functions as both a method of retracing and representing silenced black histories and as an assertion of black identity.

This work addresses issues of representation, systemic erasure, and anti-black violence within a Canadian context. At its core is the aim to contextualize these histories, combatting the perpetual erasure of the black presence in Canada.



### An Offering

#### "DUMPLINGS<sup>1</sup>

A familiar mode of cooking with flour to people of the Caribbean; by people I mean women who do 99.9% of the cooking in the Caribbean. Dumplings for frying and dumplings for boiling:

Dumplings with sugar, yeast or salt. Boiling dumplings with casava flour, corn-meal or oatmeal.

NB. A good boiled dumpling is one which grabs your teeth as you try to bite it and squelches with satisfaction as you bite.

#### You will need:

8oz self raising flour  
½ tsp salt Oil  
¾ cup of water

For sweet dumplings add 2 tbs of sugar  
For light dumplings add ½ oz yeast "

### An account on the work

This exhibition is called *Place of Be(longing)* and is made by Taymah Armatrading.

Taymah is a Black, trans and queer Toronto based artist.

Their work is grounded in discourses around Black subjectivity, African & Caribbean diaspora, foodways, and rigorous critical art practice.

They are interested in activating this research through their art practice in order to push Black histories and Black voices into a visual realm, surpassing their longing for belonging, into a space where they refuse erasure.

*Place of Be(longing)* is an installation based work that seeks to unsettle the notion of Canada as a sanctuary for racialized people.

This full-room installation features a table set from a traditional west Indian kitchen, a carpet, a projection of a video installation, a hutch with familial objects and plates

and knickknacks from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. At times there may be an offering of Sorrel.. If you know what it is, enjoy.

The work is 22 minutes in duration.

The viewer is invited into the space to sit, observe, reflect, and then engage with the dialogue.

In Taymah's words, "the realization of this project means the creation of a space that disrupts the colonial ideologies pervading the existing Canadian social and political systems. The space is a starting point to an envisioned possibility of progression and black liberation specifically within a Canadian context. It also stands as a space of comfort for racialized bodies, where Caribbean culture, food, and memories are centralized, inviting room for both: participants, and viewers—to breathe, unburden, and heal."

The video does this by centring five Black, Caribbean Canadians at a table in a home



and um, we have to draw



for a traditional Caribbean meal..

Here, this meal is a place maker; the cutlery, dishes, table cloth and mats - markers of class, culture and origins.

Taymah sought to use food and story as a medium with which they could generate comfort, conversation and truth-telling.

In this video installation, conversations often heard in Black backyards, BBQs and in the confines of basements are brought to this white walled gallery space intentionally.

Through this kind of insertion, Taymah is setting the tone for a space where if the audience is given the space and time, a sense of care and patience may rise to the surface

Using their extensive knowledge of staging and years production experience both in front—as a long time actor—and behind the camera—shooting documentaries and films—Taymah sets the stage for something that is meant to be witnessed, meant to have an audience.

If eating together, talking and laughing together is an act of communion, what is proposed in the watching and listening of this communion. Who does the audience become?

For one thing, they are speaking to the ways in which the Black Caribbean experience in Canada has its own centre.

This centre is a place that is rich, diverse, overlapping and also distinct. This centre is a place of power, a place that as writer and scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says “is the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there can never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world have their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question [is] therefore of how one centre relates to other centres.”<sup>2</sup>

How does your centre relate to this centre?



Much like the recipe for dumplings, the space to bear witness to this work, is an offering.

For some, while watching this, you may feel pushed to a periphery, but do not panic. Stay present as you witness. Like cooking Caribbean food, the calibration from your centre to this centre, just takes time and love - that's it.

This creates a site of intervention, where Black experience in the shadow of slavery in Canada is pushed within and beyond the frame.

This site of intervention becomes one that can name and contextualize the current erasure of Black Caribbeans. It does this by reaching as far back as the enslavement of thousands in Canada until August 1834, to the more recent shared trauma that was the Halifax Explosion in 1917, in which a French ship full of explosives crashed, killing thousands of black folks on the coast, with those affected being offered little to no support at the time due to ongoing racism. By naming these events, the subjects in this work are then able to also make visible for the audience how racism functions and how erasure is employed, to this day.

In this way, *Place of Be(longing)* functions as a kind of offering. One that is an old story told in a new moment with fresh eyes, plights and faces. One that is rightly inserting itself into many other narratives of the Afro-Caribbean diasporas. Healing and reclaiming of space is part of why this work is so needed and why it is relevant now.

The subjects in this video, through stories of migration, discrimination, food, family, loss and of course love, present an opportunity to contextualize the Black Caribbean experience as one that is tender and worthy of witnesses and recording.

In documenting this moment through recording, Taymah is creating an homage

to members of the Caribbean diaspora that stands as a way of locating one another, like an antenna.

The esteemed poet, novelist and activist Dionne Brand has said of the Black Caribbean experience, "we're rooted here, and they can't pull us up."<sup>3</sup> *Place of Be(longing)* affirms this through its resolve to take a seat at the table, centre stage and to pick up the first dumpling.

by Chiedza Pasipanodya



#### NOTES

- 1 This recipe is written by Claudette Williams and is featured in *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Williams, Claudette. "Caribbean Dumplings".* *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Reflections from Women.* Compiled by Sue O'Sullivan. Sheba Feminist Publishers: London, UK, 1987
- 2 Taken from Nigerian curator Bisi Silva's forward in *Asiko: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa* (2017). Here she cites this quote from Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993).
- 3 Bristow, Peggy, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, And Adrienne Shadd. *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History.* University of Toronto Press, 1994. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442683273>.

## **TRACING THE GUTS OF A GHOST**

by HollyJo

October 18 – November 16, 2020

*Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* acts as a public ritual of mourning and transformation. It is a process-based work, which grieves both physical death and loss through familial estrangement. Calling on the echoes of lost culture and home, this is work of return and transmutation. Death and loss are welcomed back from their exile; they are returned to their rightful place as part of the fabric of our lives. The familiar and the (e)strange(d), the everyday and the always unspoken, the comforting and the taboo, HollyJo invites us to occupy the tension between these seeming opposites, and to inhabit the space where they overlap. We are invited to face the things we hide from, to speak the things we do not say.

Situated within the lineage of an Italian Canadian immigrant family, *Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* takes us to Salemi, Sicily, returning with the tiles from the artist's mother's birth home. These ruins provide the ground we stand on, a beginning which is already tied up with loss. Atop the tiles lies a traditional Sicilian cookie that celebrates fertility with an egg wrapped in pastry. Here, instead of an egg, is a plaster cast of the artist's daughter's urn. Birth, death, home, and loss occupy a single space, rather than being in conflict these realities build a productive tension. They require witness and a willingness to be with what is. They offer an opening into a different way of being with death and with loss.

Here, in the room, the artist's mother is hiding behind the curtains, her feet peeking out at the bottom of familiar fabric. The feet are a mold of the artist's mother's feet, which the artist took in her hands and covered in plaster. Travelling to her estranged mother to carry out this intimate act is a process that occupies the space along with the feet themselves. Like the journey to Salemi to retrieve the tiles from the ruins of her mother's birth home, the trip to Sudbury, Ontario to mold the mother's feet is a journey to find roots, and to return.

Intimacy and estrangement are two sides of the same





coin. Secrets are part of the fabric of family. Hiding in plain sight, present and denied, the pain is passed down, generation after generation, until someone takes it in their hands, names it, witnesses it, speaks it.

Through mourning the death of her daughter, the artist moves backward in time, being transported both to her own childhood and to her mother's childhood. Through speaking the unspeakable grief of the death of her child, the artist offers us all the gift of grief work. We are invited to go back, to return to that which we have left behind us, perhaps too hastily. We are invited to be with what we are rushing away from, to face that death and loss are always with us. By being with death and loss intentionally and consciously we begin to unravel the secrets which burden us. We no longer keep our pain secret from ourselves. We step out from behind the curtain, take the plastic off the furniture, face the ruins of our lives, the fertile ground of the present moment.

Grief is a process of undoing. The experience of profound loss changes us irreversibly. We come apart and are driven into a space of death-like oblivion. In order to move through grief we must be willing to be changed, to be unlike the person we were before the loss. This transformation is some of the hardest work of our lives. All too often we are alone in our grief, not feeling welcome to bring our pain into our day to day lives. HollyJo's work of public mourning breaks the binary of public and private, inviting all who enter the space into a conversation on grief and mourning. While this work is about the artist's own process with grief, it simultaneously opens space for all of us to be with our loss. It carves out a much needed space of community empathy in which we can together witness and hold the grief in our own lives.

*Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* is the intimate act of facing what is hidden, of saying the things we are forbidden to speak, of placing our hands inside of the immaterial, bringing it back to corporeal form. Through

this public ritual of mourning we are called on as witnesses and invited into our own processes of grief. We are reminded that the journeys we take to return to ourselves will necessarily take us through the landscapes of our loss. When we integrate these losses, when we offer them time and presence and care, we begin the work of healing, for ourselves and for the world.

by Clementine Morrigan



# **\*SCREAMS INTERNALLY\* (FOR ATTENTION)**

by Samirra Sada

January 17 – February 15, 2020

Using found items and craft-based materials, Samirra Sada combines disparate objects into absurd physical collages that viewers are encouraged to engage with and react to as they move through Sada's immersive installation, *\*Screams Internally\** (for Attention).

Sada's new series of artworks attempt to pass an assortment of fabricated objects off as items and textures that are reminiscent of real life, creating re-interpretations that deliberately fail as exact replicas of their original counterparts. This is intentionally not their purpose: Instead, the works of this exhibition function as symbols that are instilled with personal memory, accessing moments of nostalgia and common experiences of everyday living. The walls of the Project Space, painted entirely in sky blue, is not quite a blue sky; it's psychedelic patches of wood grain texture suggest something is off about this space. Sada's narratives provide an entry point into reimagining mundane experiences, seeking to intrigue viewers into further exploring her environments.

The ability of Sada's objects to function as artworks and symbols emblematic of real life results in an installation that balances of humour and an awkwardness that is difficult to place. Sada speaks of humour as "a way to engage with vulnerability and sadness in a way that is accessible"<sup>1</sup> but also serves as a means of placing the viewer within the installation, through their own relationship to the objects. *Oh Girl It's not looking good (1-3)*, Sada's series of three clay hands clutching objects rest on shelves demonstrate this humorous negativity. The hands, accessorized with sparkly pink nail-polish and glossy red nail extensions, sit on plinths wrapped in imitation wood, marble, and brick patterns. The hands respectively clutch a Magic 8-Ball revealing the word 'NOPE', an iPhone showing the search results for 'MY CRUSH' (of which there are none), and a 'CASH FOR LIFE' Scratch & Win with 'NOPE' written all over it. Though these moments of sadness are experienced by



*\*I look up to the Sky and Scream Aloud\**  
*"Please Lord send me some Chilli!"*

*Oh Girl It's not looking good (1-3).*



*\*I look up to the Sky and Scream Aloud\**  
*"Please Lord send me some Chilli!"*



*If You Don't Mind  
Destroying Everything  
You've Built your Life  
Could Be Just like  
a Pop Song.*



\*I look up to the Sky  
and Scream Aloud\*  
"Please Lord send me  
some Chill!".

many, their wonky appearance will make you laugh while wondering why exactly you're laughing and what you're actually laughing at.

Embodying these pluralities, the accessibility of the subject matter and materiality seeks to encourage viewers to think of moments of life that are commonplace or and nostalgic. Sada mounts a psychedelic renaissance painting in the likeness of herself on an archway draped with fake vines that have been studded. Ladies and Gentlemen Nostalgia is One Hell of a Drug relishes in the things that Sada enjoyed in younger years, like the studding of old denim jackets or a paint-by-numbers crafts project. Not only are Sada's objects themselves familiar, but so are the materials with which she has constructed them, contributing to the irregularity of the work.

Understandings of what is and what is not valuable further complicate and compound the balance of humour and out-of-place nature of the work. Sada's material choices deliberately suggest inexpensiveness. Their value is highly personal and directly referential to the original objects that they replicate. A wall-like structure with a print of stained glass chained above (\*I look up to the Sky and Scream Aloud\* "Please Lord send me some Chill!"), embodies this. Though made from styrofoam covered in paper mache, the stamped brick pattern repeated across the wall mimics the repetition of a real brick wall. Instead the stamped bricks are the size of dominoes, implying a scale where the viewer is made aware of their own size in relation to it. The wall houses a combination of objects that suggest a narrative waiting to be uncovered, though we are not privy to this narrative, we are given the opportunity to make one ourselves. The items shelved on it are miscellaneous: A Salvador Dali melting clock and a framed miniature of the Mona Lisa function as souvenir art objects, drawing from the rich cultural significance of their origins, a fresh pitcher of lemonade, a glass encased polymer clay rose, and a functioning light box with the phrase

"ALL BAD AND I KNOW THAT". The objects do invite the viewer to make sense of its randomness.

Despite being highly personal to the artist herself, the ubiquity and commonness of her material choices allow the viewer to draw their own conclusions and reflect on typical experiences for the sake of imagining new possibilities of the stories these familiar objects could tell. \*Screams Internally\* (for Attention) guides the viewer through the installation, and encourages an embracing of its strangeness.

"Nothing here passes as real but we're going along with it anyways" <sup>2</sup>

by court gee

#### NOTES

- 1 Samirra Sada, in conversation with the author, January 15th, 2020. 2 Samirra Sada, in conversation with author, January 15th, 2020.



## **EXERCISE NERVE (MEN IN FACE OR MANY FACES)**

by Aaron Jones

February 28 – March 28, 2020



A figure stands between tall hedges, their shadows engulfing him on all sides. He approaches an opening and starts his Sisyphean task. He comes to the maze every day, but has yet to reach its centre, where he hopes to find the answers he seeks. Some days he follows the path dutifully, hitting dead ends and starting anew. On other days, his frustration overcomes him and he hacks through the bush, deconstructing and recreating his own path to understanding. The maze always rebuilds itself.

This is his ritual, a daily practice of searching for that which evades him.

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Aaron Jones is a Jamaican-Canadian artist who uses collage to work through ideas of self-reflection, identity, masculinity and melanin. Through a ritualistic practice of deconstructing found images—from an ever-growing personal archive—he creates characters that subvert and challenge archetypes. In the title *Exercise Nerve*, exercise refers to the development of a practice, in this case one of bold, forthright behaviour. The process of searching for images and the subsequent gluing, mark-making and ripping apart is integral to Jones' conception of his characters, that are often self-portraits. He scours the pages of encyclopedias, back issues of magazines and non-fiction books for images he can relate to and builds the characters piece by piece, changing their context and imbuing them with new meaning. “First and foremost, everything comes from a place of finding myself in print media<sup>1</sup>”.

In this show, Jones' collection of collages are scattered across the walls of the space, which are painted black. A cube sculpture is set on the ground in the middle of the room, with four identical amorphous faces on each side (an X-ray that he found in an old Life magazine). The root of Jones' inspiration for the cube is a belief held by a small sect of the Nation of Islam, that 6,000 years ago an immor-

tal being was created. Jones refers to the being as an actor, with the ability to change his face from that of a human to a monster to a robot and many other faces. He uses that ability to present himself as less ominous to us, humans. Jones has rendered a version of this being as the cube and all four white faces are watching the collage characters on the walls. To put it plainly, he said "the 'man I face' is the cube and the 'many faces' are the collages I make,"<sup>2</sup> in reference to the secondary title of the show. He's also referencing the character Man-E-Faces, from the cartoon series He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, who could change his face at will.

Can we talk about a Black artist without discussing their inherent Blackness? Since Jones' work often explores his own identity and masculinity, it's often discussed in terms of "Blackness."

"I am at a place where I just don't want to say Black anymore [in reference to my work]. It's quite redundant and very evident. Human beings are visual creatures. But, I am Black. And I can't escape it, especially in this context. But, at the same time, I just want to focus on being a person with emotions and feelings related to regular stuff. And many things come before the colour of your skin in reference to white people."<sup>3</sup>

\*\*\*

Within the corridors of the dark, twisted maze the figure is looking for himself.

The maze has its own agenda. It wants him confused, angry, lost. It wants his sense of identity in ruin. That's how the maze wins.

But the figure has a few tricks, he can play the game. He knows when the maze is watching and exactly what it expects to see. And while he's performing a spectacle of appeasement, he's scheming ways to get to the centre. He pats his back pocket discreetly, ensuring his secret weapon is still safe.

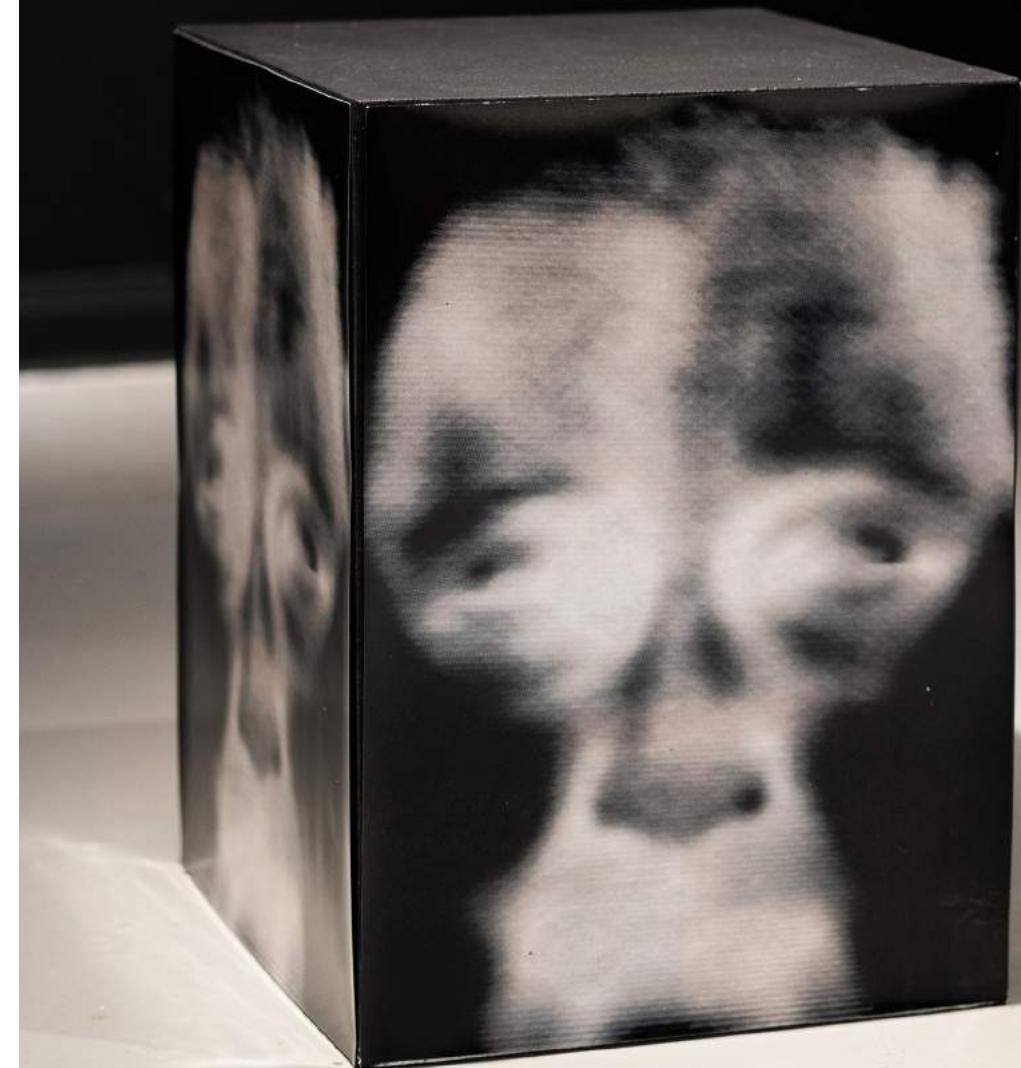
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In a corner, a ceramic figure of a Black samurai rests on a plinth. He's dressed in regal attire, in a fighting stance, with piercing eyes as if staring at his next opponent. On the walls, the defiant gaze and wide-spread wings of the figure in Self Portrait (2017), the layers of identity in Self Portrait (2018) or the coy smile of a face carved out by mark-making in Seeing Space (2018) point to a multiplicity of experiences, meanings and storylines. The space is covered in interwoven narratives, all of the collage creations in conversation with each other. Although Jones doesn't consider his characters to be people, they are made up of elements of people and speak to the anxieties and joys of being human.

A relationship emerges as the omnipresent cube-being surveils these figures made up of elements of Black people. In my reading of the work, the cube is representative of the ways whiteness can insidiously permeate and manifest itself differently to benefit white supremacy. Considering the immortal being's many faces, we have the stoic and apathetic robot that turns a blind eye, the relatable and agreeable human who feigns friendship and the colonial, capitalistic monster that devours. All one in the same. All watching the spectacle on display.

There is a figure of a man in Election Ship (2018/2019) with his arms jubilantly outstretched, as if celebrating some kind of victory. As Jones "looks for himself" amongst the pages of magazines and books he's adamant that he's looking for more than Blackness. "It's a disservice to say I'm just looking for Black people. I'm actually looking for things that I can relate to. It's been a harder search to find actual images of men that don't look like they just want to play sports or to find a variety of emotions and stuff. It's just been a search for normal ass men."<sup>4</sup>

Exercise Nerve is a tribute to the visible presence of Jones' practice in his artwork—it is in the ritual of doing and



undoing and doing again that he reaches a consensus. The meanings and narratives ascribed to the figures are malleable, dependent on the current configuration of paper on paper. Permanence is not the end goal, mutability is.

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Potassium chlorate drags across red phosphorus. A spark and then a flame. The figure drops a match into the bush and lights another and another and another. Soon, the whole maze is up in flames. He watches as its towering hedges fall, revealing the route to the centre. He starts on a new path of his own making.

Sometimes, the only way through is to burn it all down and start again.

by Kelsey Adams



#### NOTES

1 Aaron Jones, in discussion with author Kelsey Adams, February 2020. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid. 4 Ibid.



# EXTERNAL SPACE



## The Library

Curated Library

Boogie Woogie Library

Zine Library

*Opening Reception for  
Part Three by Kaya Joan*

# **CHICKEN AND NOODLES: A PORTRAIT OF MY FATHER**

by Larissa Yeung

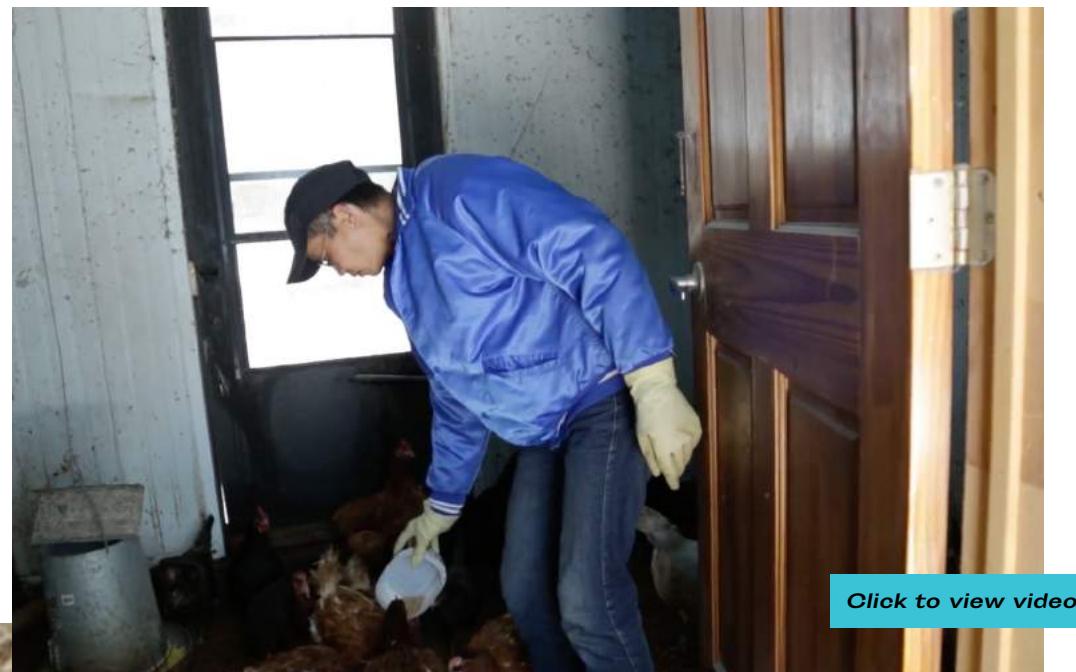
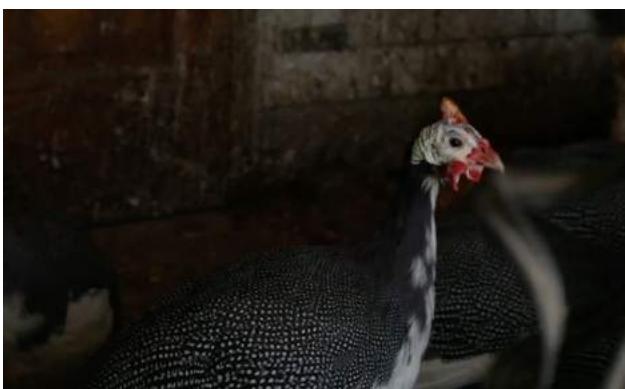
September 4 – October 22, 2019

In a backyard shed on a cold day in Whitchurch-Stouffville, a small town in the Greater Toronto Area, Yik-Cheung Yeung is tending to his makeshift chicken farm. We witness his daily chores through the vantage point of his daughter, Larissa, who is following along with a clunky, somewhat heavy camera.<sup>1</sup> He shushes the flurry of excited and hungry bawks, and he receives a surprising amount of success. The viewer watches as he retrieves some freshly laid eggs, and pets a curious chicken nearby. He shows off multiple buckets of chicken feed and sprinkles the mix around the ground for his chickens to eat, demonstrating a quiet affection in the way that he takes care of them.

Larissa Yeung's *Chicken and Noodles: A Portrait of My Father* offers up an intimate look into the artist's father's dedicated chicken and farming hobby, his job at a chicken processing facility, and a rice noodle factory. The video work allows the viewer to follow the journey of the artist's own efforts to explore a more nuanced, individualistic depiction of the immigrant experience: one that seeks to favour a personal subjectivity instead of indulging in the common narratives we see prevalent in stories of immigration.

Though the story of Yik-Cheung Yeung's life is significantly shaped by his experiences as a Chinese immigrant, this film instead opts to highlight aspects of his identity that exist outside of those experiences: His resourceful and friendly demeanor, his work ethic and his interest in chickens (to name just a few).

Yik-Cheung Yeung has been working in the poultry industry since immigrating to Canada from China in 1980, and has had experiences in farming for even longer.<sup>2</sup> From overseeing his own poultry facility to raising chickens and other animals with his father in his childhood,<sup>3</sup> his working history with food (and chicken more specifically) has been long standing.



[Click to view video](#)

Now working occasionally assisting in the maintenance of some of the machinery in the aforementioned chicken processing facility and rice noodle factories, his relationship to it has changed significantly. What was originally a laborious, difficult and un-glamorous job necessary for sustaining and supporting himself as well as his family (a need common in many immigrant families) has now become a leisurely activity. Through diligent and dedicated work, he now enjoys financial freedom and personal enjoyment in his semi-retirement<sup>4</sup>, allowing for his fascination in poultry to flourish into his own independent farming endeavor.

The energy of his workplace environment, though they exist as same type of jobs he worked in the past, transforms into something more amicable and enjoyable. This same sense of levity can be felt from the film's footage of the chicken and noodle facilities. As Yik-Cheung gives the roving camera a tour of his two workplaces, many curious employees greet Larissa (offscreen) and inquire about both the camera as well as the project itself. His co-workers chat as they



expertly slice and divy up the chicken, and send them cascading down into a comically large pile of other chicken cutlets. The camera focuses on the hypnotic, automated packaging of the chicken legs and the production of rice noodles. Yik-Cheung jokes with his colleagues as he moves around the space collecting the discarded noodle scraps that would later be used in his chicken feed mix – his compensation for his informal work at the factory.

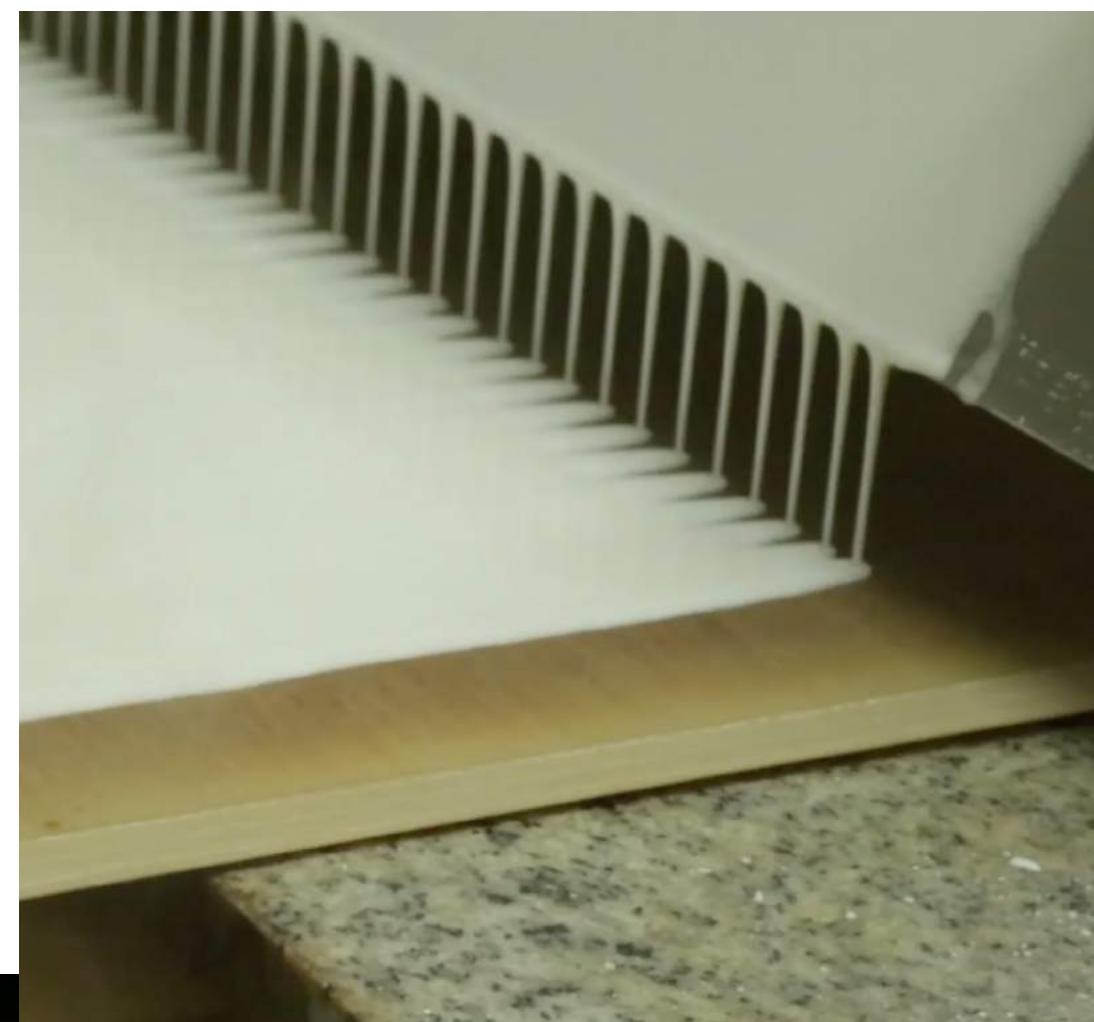
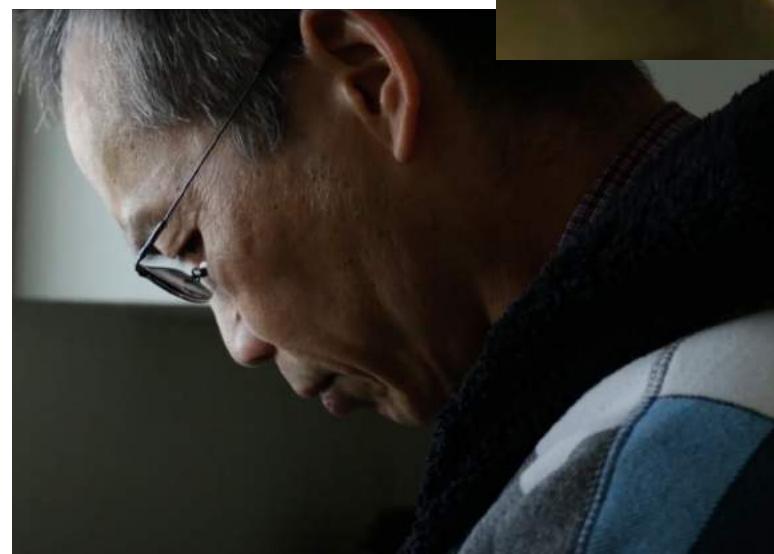
Larissa's camera work isn't perfect. The camera occasionally zooms into miscellaneous spots in order to adjust the camera focus to the lighting of the film's various locations. However, such imperfections are embraced, and become an intentional decision in reminding the viewer that they are stand ins for the artist herself: As a way to examine how her second generation Chinese-Canadian identity has been shaped by how she was raised, Larissa learns more about her father, his profession and his work ethic as she films, just as the viewer becomes acquainted with him through watching. The camera shakes, wanders and readjusts, akin to the filmmaking style of Cinéma vérité, using improvised camera work in order to unveil truth through observing its film subjects.<sup>5</sup>

In 2011's *Samsara*, a non-narrative documentary film directed by Ron Fricke, footage culled from 25 different countries around the world seek to capture moments of human existence that range from the extravagant and wondrous to the mundane and everyday.<sup>6</sup> This work, channeling the film's approach to illustrating the beauty in even the smallest of moments, Larissa Yeung's *Chicken and Noodles: A Portrait of My Father* concludes with a simple act. The film cuts back to Yik-Cheung patiently washing the eggs that had been laid earlier in the work. He dries each one before placing them into a tupperware container, to be refrigerated and later cooked and eaten at a later date.

Though this ending isn't climactic, it encompasses much of what this docu-

mentary explores. A daughter honoring her father; a Chinese immigrant's narrative as something that acknowledges collective experiences while also honoring a personal history. But most importantly, a quiet moment of a father enjoying a leisurely hobby, now enjoying the rewards of his hard work throughout the years, finding peace and quiet after a long life of labour.

by Philip Leonard Ocampo



#### NOTES

- 1 Larissa Yeung, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019
- 2 Larissa Yeung, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019
- 3 ibid.
- 4 ibid.
- 5 Nam, Yoommy. "Cinéma Vérité Vs. Direct Cinema: An Introduction." Resources. New York Film Academy, April 16, 2018. <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/>.
- 6 "About SAMSARA." About SAMSARA | The official site for the films SAMSARA and BARAKA, n.d. <https://www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/about>

# OH MARIA...

by Maria Patricia Abuel

October 23 – December 21, 2019

**"How do you solve a problem like Maria? How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?"**

These two lines repeat throughout "Maria (*The Nuns*)," a song from the 1965 American musical film, *The Sound of Music*, that plays in the background of Maria Patricia Abuel's video work entitled, *Oh Maria...* This song, edited for Abuel's work, begins at a higher pitch than its original tuning, and then switches into a lower, eerie pitch throughout the duration of the video. Using the altered voice of the performer, Abuel's video-work weaves together a video-collage of pop-culture references in television and music videos in addition to symbols, and scenes from the Catholic church and videos of the artist herself. The collage of clips explores intersecting themes of purity and secrecy, virginity and sexuality, femininity and collectively idealized constructs of womanhood. The changes in pitch throughout the song trace a path between the polarities of innocence to rebellion as a Filipina woman from a conservatively Catholic family. *Oh Maria...* guides a reflection on how Abuel's family's connection to the Catholic church and Catholic Filipino community construct the pressures and expectations of which her sense of womanhood and explorations through guilt are built upon.

*Oh Maria...* utilizes a split-screen, single-channel format to unravel the ways in which Catholic female tropes influence the artist's experience of individualized femininity. Through repetition, prayer, hymn and ritual, the excessive use of the symbol of the Virgin Mary is implied to be an overarching guide to the embodiment of an idealized Catholic woman. The camera pans over a table of scattered pamphlets with the Virgin Mary's image, and photographs of the stages of growth a Catholic woman undergoes as a member of her church. We see images of Abuel being baptised, and at with her hands in prayer at her first communion, as Abuel remembers and foreshadows the ways the image of Mary has instilled religious, cultural and communal beliefs of women as being pure



[Click to view video](#)





from sin, sex, and tainted consumption.

In a recent essay by Manila-based scholar, Jeanne C. Peracullo, she challenges the loyalty that specifically Filipino Catholicism has to the symbol of the Virgin Mary, describing this cultural image as “a colonial trope to uphold a particularly harmful myth of a “good” woman. However, it turns out that this “good” woman is also both a weak and passive one.”<sup>1</sup> Peracullo continues by dissecting the expectation of the Filipina identity as obligated to mimic Mother Mary’s nurturing and kind nature is a construct of the Spanish colonization of Philippines, the hierarchical rule of the Roman Catholic Church, and emphasized from decades of migration of Filipina woman to North America as nurturing nurses and caregivers. At 3:08 in the video, this echoes in taunting irony, when the artist unintentionally captures a video of her mother praying to the statue of the Virgin Mary in their church while holding a Hudson’s Bay Company re-usable shopping bag, oblivious to the HBC’s connection to colonization in Canada, and the violent involvement of the Catholic church.<sup>2</sup> In both Canada, and the Philippines, the imposition of the Catholic faith has been used as a tool of erasure and assimilation. Although, to a First or Second Generation immigrant, despite the ways colonial and religious collective constructs of womanhood have been instilled in the artist’s experience of her femininity, she uses the medium of video to admit indulgences in what would be perceived as sin anyway.

Besides performative scenes that are recorded of the artist herself, all videos of spaces and objects where the subject of Mother Mary echo, appear to be footage that is unplanned and raw. As if we are following an intimate process of reflection, the collection of different ways the visual appears in the artist’s life suggests an overwhelmed feeling of attachment to what the symbol of the Virgin Mary represents, and what she mirrors into Abuel’s sense of self-fulfilment or self-lacking as a member of her family’s practices of Catholic beliefs.

The remaining song lyrics of “Maria (The Nuns)” speak about the titular character as being ‘unfit’ for the ideals of how a woman should act to become a nun of the abbey. In a playful, cheery melody, the song describes the movie character Maria as a woman that is clumsy and disorganized, too free-spirited and is therefore, belittled in a way that is comical to those around her. This connects to countless phrases that circulate Filipino culture, used by women to judge other women. There are phrases for women that are too promiscuous, too social, too loud, and too sloppy. These phrases, like slang, are culturally specific and passed down by a lineage of Lolas and circulated amongst Titas.<sup>3</sup> They are then, repeated from mothers to daughters in order to protect and forbid them from becoming another talk of the family or neighbourhood. Shameful talk becomes a tool to elevate others at the expense of another. When a collective shames people outside of their own, shame is used to protect others from being subject to the same judgement and exclusivity, by redirecting their own fear and guilt towards somebody else. The pairing of uniformity and choir within Abuel’s choices in mixed media questions the purpose of collectively imposed ideals over a woman as being more shameful, than they are supportive. The culture of shame is strong within the Filipino Catholic culture. Though mass is a place of prayer and forgiveness, religion is tied to socializing, and a place of gossip or, “tsismis.”<sup>4</sup> Especially within a family context, our actions as a woman represents the reputation of the other women in our lineage. When a mother scolds her daughter, she is also protecting her name within the gossip of her church, her community, her family. As if linked by a string, guilt is feeling that ties our actions to our perceived responsibilities as a member of a community, a family, a collective identity. Uniformity is explored as a system of safety, to not disturb the peace of synchronization, to not disrespect our elders.

A few seconds of the American television series, Jane the Virgin, shows a younger

Jane being taught by her grandmother, in front of her own mom, to squeeze a white flower in her palm as a metaphor for the purity of virginity. The inclusion of this clip in Abuel’s work, continues a prevalent presence of characteristics of the Virgin Mary in the artist’s life. This series is about a virgin who swears not repeat her mother’s mistake of early unwedded pregnancy but ends up accidentally inseminated. In this specific clip, the flower exists without its stem, playing into the pattern of hiding and uncovering between the polarities of pure and tainted, good and naughty. A woman’s devotion to her ‘purity’ is represented only as white and pristine in site, though it is the sharpness of its thorns and the stiffness, and rigidity along the path of its stem that had carried it that far. This important detail connects to the perfectionism the nuns of the abbey from The Sound of Music expect from the character Maria, and that the Catholic Church presents the Virgin Mary as – untainted, un-stemmed. In this scene, familiar themes bridge *Oh Maria...* to previous works by Abuel such as #selfie (2014) and Islands (2017), which use photography and video to speak to the overbearing presence of whiteness to the diasporic Filipina identity. Just as the whiteness of images of Mother Mary’s Caucasian skin reiterate, in these past works, we learn about whiteness as a symbol of Spanish and colonial rule over the Philippines, and how it influences idealized beauty, even in the popularity of soap used to change brown Filipino skin, to a superior shade of white.

In another segment of the video, Abuel is getting dressed in a room alone; Maria documents herself layering clothing-pieces to complete her full Catholic high school girl’s uniform over top of a black lace bra. Before buttoning her white blouse up, she holds her bra, presses it against her breasts, and has a moment to hold herself in her own hands. This gesture offers an acknowledgement of a feeling, belonging to her, from her, before becoming fully dressed into roles that connect her to others. She plays into a stereotype of promiscuity and Catholic misbehaviour as a silent reclama-

tion of her agency and sexuality.

At the last minute of the Abuel’s video work, the song fades to an end, and a moment of silence transitions into an audio recording of the Abuel reciting a prayer to Mother Mary. This audio is paired with a video clip of the artist flipping a wine bottle from a liquor rack at a local house party between its up-right label reading, “SAINT”, to the up-side down text below it that reads, “SINNER”. Conflicted, and suggestively mischievous in her contemplation, Abuel oscillates between the two labels in her hand. *Oh Maria...* is a playful and contemplative peeling away at the layers of instilled shame and guilt a conservative Catholic upbringing can instill. The work continues a conversation through Maria Patricia Abuel’s body of work that use a range of performance to sculpture an installation, to journey through cycles of covering, and uncovering of sets of beliefs that have been taught and are now being individualized in her own reflections as a Filipina-Canadian. Her mediums of choice become bridges of agency, to allow systems of morality the artist has grown into, to become individualized, questioned and more personally refined. Specifically focusing on the moralities of honing her own sexuality and femininity under her family’s roof, Abuel is still in full receptivity of the gifts and impositions of her family’s Catholicism and collective prayer. Though the artist still practices her self-explorations through art with a layer of guilt, and carefulness in respect to her family, Abuel’s *Oh Maria...* is an honest pursuit toward of self-identification with full conscious of what it risks, and sometimes in irony of that. It is the conscious tainting of expectations of purity. *Oh Maria...* is accepting, yet playful into the upheld secrecy Abuel practices against her family in the ways she is learning to self-claim her agency as a Filipina woman and how these free explorations will always tie to challenging the expectations of her identity.

by Renelyn Quinicot Javier



#### NOTES

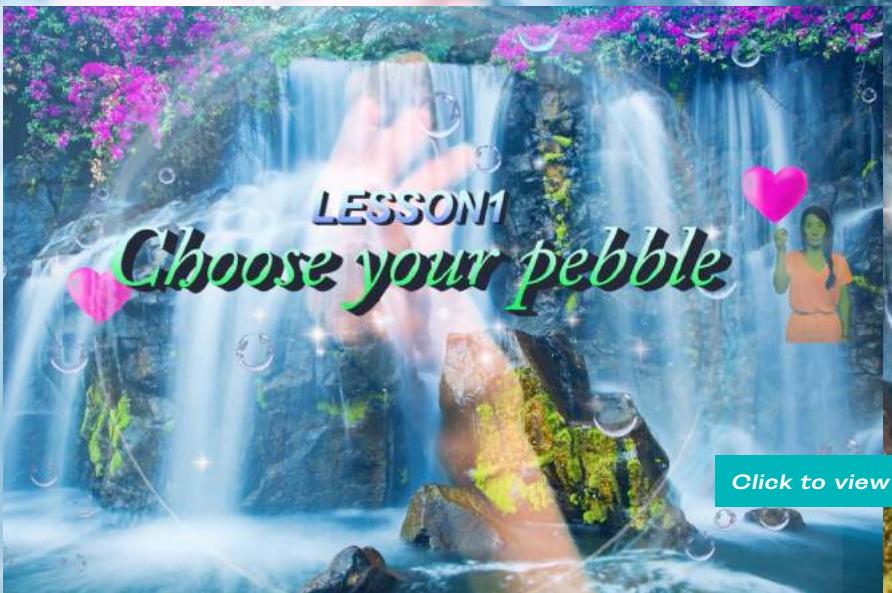
1 Peracullo, Jeane C. "Maria Clara in the Twenty-first Century: The Uneasy Discourse between the Cult of the Virgin 2 Levesque, Olivia. "The Fabric of Colonialism". *The Argus*, The Argus. ca 5 Mar 2017, <https://theargus.ca/?p=20959> 3 Lola's is Tagalog for Grandmother, and Tita is Tagalog for aunties. 4 "tsismis" is a Tagalog slang word for gossip..



## HOPPING FOR HOPE

by Ahreum Lee

January 8 – February 18, 2019



We play games for fun. We play games for pleasure. We play games with first timers who tell us 'I don't know what I'm doing.' We give them instructions, run through the steps of how to play. If they beat us, we call it beginner's luck. Luck is thought of as an important factor when it comes to games: it suggests outcomes brought on by chance rather than our own actions; it provides an explanation for things we couldn't see coming. Maybe there's a higher power pulling the strings—karma, fate, some invisible authority governing success and failure. Are they really invisible, or are we just blindly playing along to protect our sense of control?

Growing up, games teach us how to follow directions. They provide us with a structure in which to play—parameters outside of which we are not meant to step. There are games we play to learn order; games to help us build morals. Games we play at home and games we play at school. In kitchens, in classrooms, on playgrounds with other children. One such common playground game is Hopscotch, a children's game played all over the world. The foundations of the game are generally the same in every nation: toss a marker into a pre-drawn court of shapes, then hop with one foot through all the spaces to retrieve it. To trip or fall out of line is to lose. These simple directions come in different variations; rule additions are made depending on who is teaching them and how they learned to play. Ahreum Lee delivers her version of Hopscotch in *Hopping for Hope*, an instructional video that whisk viewers into a fantasy realm of unicorns and butterflies backdropped by floral waterfalls and stars.

The artist appears dressed in all white threads to demonstrate the game: a pebble is cast through serene imagery of bubbles and stars into a rectangular court of uneven, jagged shapes reminiscent of a map. Numbered rules in colourful text tell us that in this version, making one's way through all the spaces without any slip-ups earns a second throw—but this time, it must be made with eyes closed. We play the game of blind luck. If the stone lands in a space, the space becomes ours. We play the game for occupation of drawn-out territories. The process repeats itself until





all the mapped spaces are successfully captured.

Playing a solo game as Lee's film suggests means the validation of success becomes ours and ours alone. Others don't have to know if we win or lose. With no one watching, we may play the game and bend the rules. We may play the game with a strategically drawn court; may erase border lines, redraw them to our advantage. While the artist's map may look one way, ours may look another. Interpretations tend to differ; no two hand-drawn maps are the same. We may choose a marker that's easier to handle: a flat stone that won't roll out of place. Lee's Hopscotch court nods to cartography to intimate at the immigrant experience: unsettling and settling into a new space where we may find ourselves surrounded by new lines to be wary of when navigating. If we throw a marker over the border line, we may kick it back into the space we were going for. In-between changing cultural landscapes and hegemonic systems, not all of us get this chance to realign. Even still, we may trip and fall and turn a blind eye—get up and recover as if nothing happened. If we keep quiet, what others don't see, they don't know. The only person we have to answer to is ourselves. The only eyes we have watching are our own.

But forego too many rules, and a game may become unrecognizable. To be able to play with others means we must own up to our own disregard.

When we play with others, the same game asks us to empathize. We must endeavour to see the playing field from another person's perspective. International Hopscotch versions may share a similar foundation, but the game exhibits differences all over the globe: in Iran, it is played with six or more side-by-side square spaces. In France, on a spiral course. The lines we draw may look different to others; they may have their own parameters that

look nothing like ours. In Germany, there is a space that can never be touched. In Australia, one must cross their legs as they jump. Other people's rules may have been filtered through someone or something else, making for a different game than what we know and play. Is one way better than the other? Most would claim the 'right' way is their own—what we learn and adopt as ours often dictates our standards.

If we choose not to engage with these different ways, we remain blind to them. Choose to see them, and the different ways to play the game helps us determine how these filters alter our rules and regulations. *Hopping for Hope* shifts in tone two thirds of the way through to interrogate the digitally mediated experience of the contemporary consumer that encounters politically charged propaganda via various technological platforms that alter our perception. Media giants such as Google depict the borders of our world map differently depending on the country it is accessed from. When viewing things through our computers and phones, what we see isn't always the same as what others see. The effort is made to keep us blind to these variations—to have the system play us—but we can learn to game these systems when we play together.

We play games and win. We play games and lose. As we get older, the hope is that we learn how to lose 'gracefully': take it in stride and without question—but Lee's work reminds us of the dangers of sedation when it comes to playing into societal games that seek to keep us in line. If we're playing to win, we can't rely on blind luck.

by Keiko Hart

## **PART THREE**

by Kaya Joan

February 19 – March, 2019

**"How do you solve a problem like Maria? How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?"**

### **"Part Three": An Abridged Conversation with Video Poet Kaya Joan**

Kaya Joan's video titled *Part Three* describes the movements of a gender ambiguous being through a spirit world that exists parallel to our own, navigating rituals of grief, blood memory, and the medicine of dreams along the way. The character awakens in a world unlike our own, experiencing the grief of a spirit companion's passing. Dreaming of their loved ones in a half-remembered prior life, the light of our waking world is, "...bright and artificial / some called me a name I thought I had forgotten / it tickled my ears and birthed visions of a different life." Kaya's voice narrates the poem with a blend of English and Kanien'keha, and animates simple line drawings laid over video captured with a mobile phone. To local Tkaron:to'a:ka<sup>1</sup>, the complex associations Kaya draws bring to life a Onkwehonwe presence in a city landscape usually posed as opposite, or even hostile, to native identities and practices.

Kaya and I met at a favorite coffee shop recently to discuss the making and meaning of "Part Three".

**KAYA JOAN:** I've never been to Kahnawake. My mom went for the first time last year and my grandma the year before. I was born and raised in Toronto and identify Tkaron:to'a:ka as my home. My thesis work unpacks that with the notion of blood memory. My family was forced to assimilate. There's a lot of anti-Blackness on my black side, and denial of Indigeneity on my Indigenous side. My job here is to unbury and recover. My work can act as a portal into the past but also into the future.

**ROWAN RED SKY:** What do you think about urban Indigeneity?



**KJ:** It's a valid identification. I'm very inspired by urban themes and aesthetics. I received all of my teachings and learned so much from the land here. I continue to learn about the history of Toronto, the meaning and protocols of Dish with One Spoon, and the history of the Toronto Purchase. The buried rivers are a metaphor for the buried histories within myself.

**RRS:** Tell me about the scene of the bird on top of the tree. The cultural association it brought up for me was the Tree of Peace.

**KJ:** Alleyways are in-between spaces in the city. There's less distraction from things my spirit wants me to focus on. I take medicine from little things, allowing myself to notice and sit with them. That bird was singing in the alleyway and I really needed that medicine, so I made a video with my phone. An Anishinaabe word, mamatowis-owin<sup>2</sup>, means to be in the flow of things so deeply that your spirit and everyone behind you are guiding you.

**RRS:** How do references to technology fit into the poem's nature imagery?

**KJ:** There was an apocalypse in this world we're in now, so this being had to go underground and re-emerge into this different space parallel to our own world. As an introvert, technology is a way that I connect with community. Leroy Little Bear wrote about how technology carries spirits. For this person, that's the way they remember a lot of their connections.

**RRS:** You mention, "They gifted me a song." What importance do song and music have for you?

**KJ:** I'm as much a musician as a visual artist. Both of my parents are musicians and singers as well, so song has always been central to my life. I sing in my dreams and those are always the most powerful. Song is important medicine for connection with my voice and truth I need to speak.

**RRS:** Crossing-water-on-a-horned-beast



is a motif in Onkwehonwe stories. Tell me about the horned beast illustration and the choice of clip you laid it over.

**KJ:** I've always drawn a lot of spirits and weird creatures. I see these beings and their faces in another layer of reality poking through at me. The horned beast imagines what might exist in another dimension. The clip is a river in Mississauga. I went there with my mom and her partner last spring to see bald eagles, geese, great white herons, and little song birds. It was an incredibly powerful space of song. This is where I think spirits would dwell--Maybe a portal exists there.

**RRS:** What's the importance of Otsihkxes<sup>3</sup>, the fox spirit?

**KJ:** Creatures like foxes and deer often show up in my work. Foxes are really special creatures. I've seen them a handful of times in my life living in Toronto. Recently, me and my partner drove down to the water at night and a fox was in the parking lot of Ashbridges Bay. Those moments of seeing wildlife that you don't normally see in the city are powerful to me.

**RRS:** Tell me about the tso'tso:ron<sup>4</sup> Otsikwes reveals to you at the end.

**KJ:** We had a family cottage in Haliburton surrounded by magnificent birch trees. When my great-grandfather died, we had to sell the cottage. I was thinking about this person, in their moment of grief. Otsihkxes gifts them knowledge in a dream of how to construct a vessel that will transition them out of this space of grieving. To come to this magnificent birch tree represents an important moment of deciding, "Okay, I'm going to move through by crossing the lake."

**RRS:** The Peacemaker story is all about a war that is self-perpetuating because everyone is in grief. That's the culture of the League, the condolence ceremonies were about how to grieve in a good way and how to unify while in grief. Were you thinking

about the Peacemaker story and his stone canoe?

**KJ:** The Peacemaker story is the only teaching on canoes that I have, so that's how I know we had dugout canoes. A really interesting part of the Peacemaker story is the motif of travelling while carrying something that you need to carry with you, in this vessel.

**RRS:** You animate the canoe in the final scene on top of a photographic image of water, which is shot from shore. The canoe leaves an illustrated place over on the distant horizon, and comes closer to the viewer. Deconstructing the layers in my mind, I felt that they were leaving in the canoe, and through this visual poetry, they return to themselves. Where are they going in the canoe?

**KJ:** I'm not sure yet. They had to leave a lot of themselves behind to transition out of this world to the other world. The next part would return to some part of themselves, whether reconnecting with community or ancestors or whatever that may be. I think my intentions are to connect with people on the other side and discover that they're not the only being in this other world.

**RRS:** From one urban Onkwehonwe to another, this is Onkwehonwe poetry.

**KJ:** Nia:wen, I'm going to hold that with me. I experience a lot of anxiety and doubt, and so to have moments like this where you see me? That's cool.

**RRS:** People prey on those doubts, especially in urban environments. Our relationship to land feels mediated when we live in the city. We rely on traditional people to mediate a connection to creation. How can we connect to creation, our traditions, and ourselves on our own terms as urban people? And confidently move forward into our future instead of worrying if we're matching up with the past properly?

**KJ:** Blood memory is huge to me. Finding

that my imagery is referential to stories I know are within me? That helps me a lot.

To hear the podcast in audio form, please visit the file through this [link](#) or scan QR Code



#### NOTES

- 1 Translates to English meaning, 'People of Toronto'.
- 2 "Mamatowisowin is the capacity to connect to the life force that makes anything and everything possible... [developed] through dreams, visions, and prayer." Battiste, Marie, and Barman, Jean, eds. First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds. Vancouver, CA: UBC Press, 1995. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 20 March 2017. 110.
- 3 Refers to *Daucus carota*, commonly called Queen Anne's lace or wild carrot in English. A beneficial companion to vegetables and fruits, but easily mistaken for the highly poisonous *Conium maculatum* or poison hemlock.
- 4 Refers to *Betula alleghaniensis*, commonly called yellow birch in English. A large species of birch, its hardwood is used by humans as a building material and its bark makes a convenient water-proof firestarter. An important food source for wild animal species.



## THIS COULD BE YOU

PRESENTED by BUMP TELEVISION and XPACE CULTURAL CENTRE

WELCOME WEARY TRAVELER. SELECT A TOPIC, TELL US UR



### Submission Guidelines

This project is a collaboration between BUMP TELEVISION and XPACE CULTURAL CENTRE.

By uploading, you consent to having your video, still images, audio and quotes being used for promotion and documentation purposes by BUMPTV and Xpace.

BUMP TV reserves the right to refuse any video.

Videos promoting racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, or nonconsensual behaviour will be refused, full stop.

XPACE

[Click to view video](#)

## THIS COULD BE YOU

by Bump Television

March 29 – July 16, 2020

### **"THIS COULD BE YOU!"**

A man clad in biceps and 16-pack abs shouts through my Instagram explore feed.

### **"THIS COULD BE YOU!"**

A university recruitment ad screams at me in Helvetica while riding the subway to work:

### **"THIS COULD BE YOU!"**

A body spray commercial where hordes of models chase after our hero with cannibalistic fervor.

(In this one I'm not entirely sure who in this scenario I could be: our semi-clueless dude- bro to root for, or the ravenous size 0s pinning him down in the middle of a busy intersection.)

Apparently, I could be a lot of things. I could be an astronaut or a mechanic. I could be a rich mogul or famous pop star. I could be a McDonalds burger flip or H&M sales associate. I could be the proud owner of a BFA or a BMW.

Or...

***"This Could Be You"***

An interactive video broadcast project devised by the ever frenetic internet public access "television channel", BUMP Television, posits that *I could be them*.

>>  
<https://www.bumptelevision.com/you>  
>>

A video screen greets me with a reflection of myself.  
I turn my head reflexively to study my own face, my eyes fixed to the ones studying back.  
I'm Narcissus, and this screen is my pool.<sup>1</sup>

The text above me reads in an 90s Arcade font:

## "This Could Be You"

>>  
Below hangs the options to: Record - Play - Upload

>>  
I look up to catch my eye again.

>>  
I write in my username, and open a drop down menu of topics below the video screen.

### Show And Tell...Announcements?

*I've got nothing going on.*

### ...Musical Performance

*\*croaks out one soggy note and shudders\**

### ...Reviews...Recipes...Rants...

I could violently wax poetic about just about anything...

>>  
Finger to my lip and eyes darting like a ravenous moth to my porch light, I stir up a bit of performance anxiety.

I look up again

## "This Could Be You"

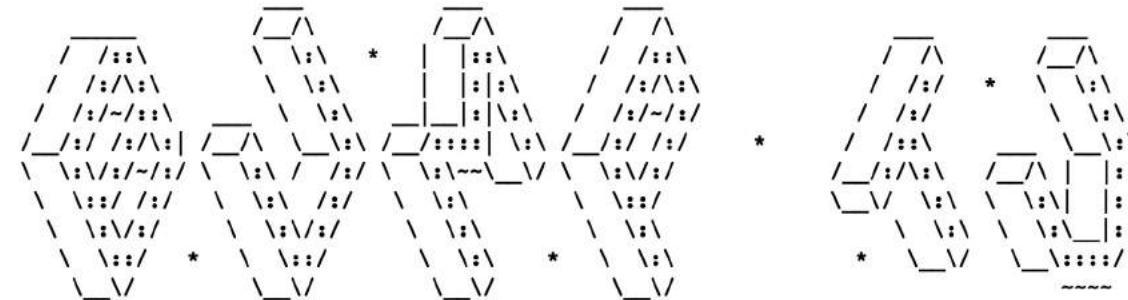
...  
The collective has an awareness about this concept: In a way, this is perhaps the most convoluted, though honest, recruitment gesture ever mechanized. However, there's nothing predatory about the air of BUMP Television. BUMP is far less invested in building up their them-ness as much as they are uplifting your you-ness.

For just about two years, BUMP Television has been broadcasting a wide array of submitted and self-generated material on their 24/7 streamed "public access channel". In providing studio space, equipment, and workshop access, BUMP has gathered a community willing to get involved; either in the casual zeal to make some new work, or at its best in simply fucking around.

Tom Hobson, a founding member of the collective, reassures that the main goal for BUMP Television is to place importance on the "pleasure of the creative process" over output.

A synthesis of love for television, and the vintage fetishism that is associated with the broadcast form, re: high contrast analogue green-screening, BUMP Television has created a new way for regular people and emerging creatives to participate in broadcast media and television. It is a medium that is being further removed from accessibility in the wake of the internet, which sadly is succumbing to the gatekeeping that has plagued TV with an awareness of potential monetization. Gone are the days where YouTube was a refuge for the weirdos who had too much time on their hands, and particularly idiosyncratic style of humour. In our current click-based economy, misleading titles and suggestive thumbnails vy for our compensatory viewership, saturated to a point where the content (as it has been duly dubbed) is pretty transparent about its transactionary business model.

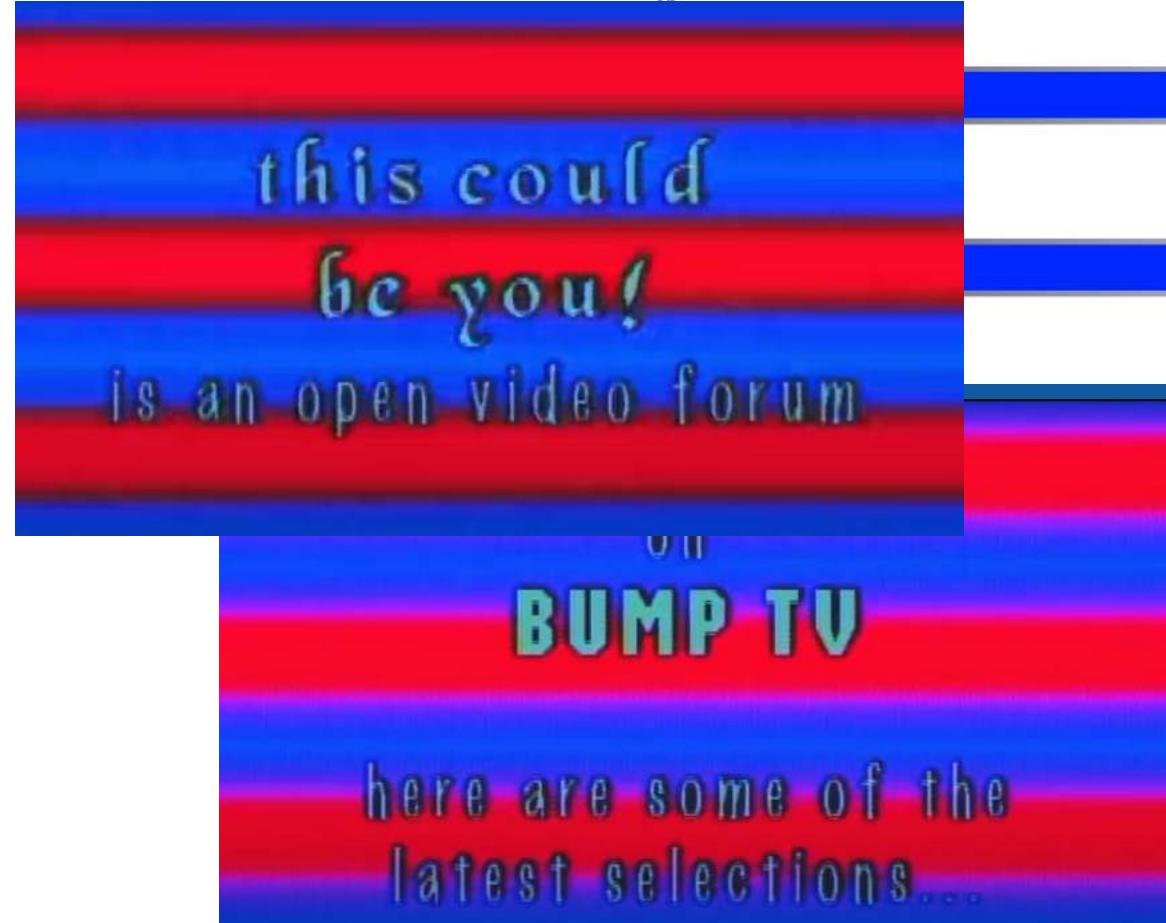
BUMP serves as a soft retaliation against this. In acknowledging the faulty quality



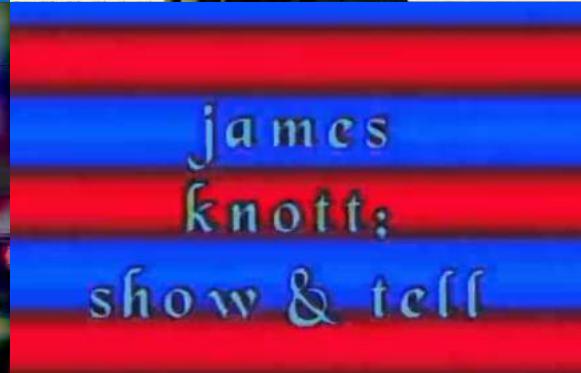
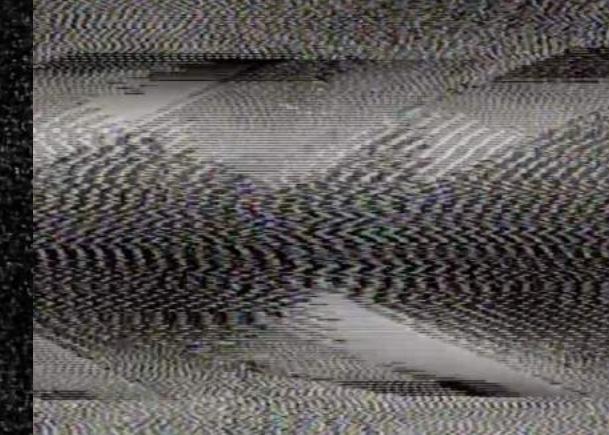
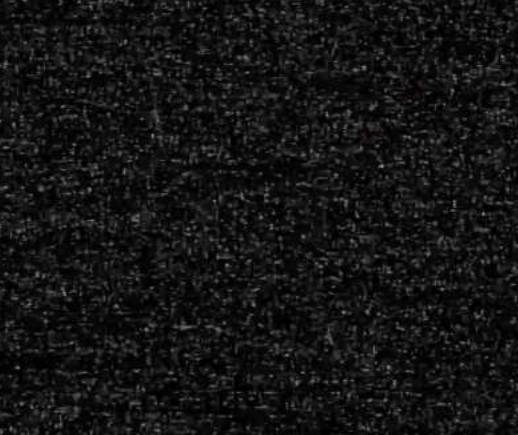
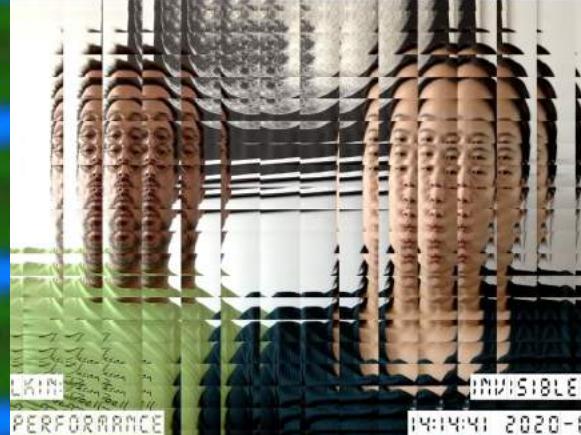
BUMP TV is a 24/7 public access internet television station.

Anyone can submit original content OR make a show in our Toronto studio.

SUBMIT UR VIDEOS



invisible  
out;  
musical  
performance



control for “Real budget TV”, nodding their head to the string of questionable output being funded and produced on engorged platforms like Netflix, BUMP’s volunteer-based committee screens submissions that demonstrate the palpable zeal to create, rather than aspirational monetary returns.

This often results in the kooky humour and aesthetics of groups of friends simply having FUN. Like those homemade movies that a kid with their dad’s camcorder would cook up, not clouded by the potential for YouTube virality. We’re talking special effects such as blanket forts and ketchup as blood, or often in BUMP’s case, analogue green screening and paper-mache props. Hobson describes this as the “best & worst aspects of DIY culture”<sup>2</sup>, an unpretentious, unironic willingness to allow the cracks to show, and let that remain the beauty of it.

“It’s valuable to be silly”<sup>3</sup>, he asserts. Silliness, a currency which BUMP Television is rich in, includes a cast of the freaks and weirdos of Toronto: underground voices willing to band together in the Toronto Media Arts Centre late August 2019 to participate in a live “telethon” fundraiser. Replete with paper-mache super mario indebted power ups; Hobson gets routinely slimed to the point in which the now drying sponge has synthesized his hair to his scalp and tweed suit.

A live audience cheers and hoots, callers routinely ring in to donate to power up or slow down their favourite racers (often their friends) to wide eyed gasps and toothy grins.

And

## “This Could Be You”

...

I choose “Show and Tell” and hit record. A timer pops up in the corner counting down from **01:30:00**, and my mouth runs a mile a minute.

In the heat of having nothing to do during isolation, an abundance of tchotchkies and memories have been excavated from the archeology of spring cleaning my family’s home. I muse about a small children’s timer that was once used to monitor my time-outs (and my ingenious method for making them go by faster! [...I’d just move the clock hand forward to be closer and closer to ringing])

The timer blinks red as I have 20 seconds left and before I know it I’m cut off. For good measure, as I probably wouldn’t have stopped otherwise.

I review the footage, scanning myself under the scrutiny of vanity, and hit upload.

Footage from these submissions will be posted intermittently on the BUMP Television’s instagram page, before being collected in a “clip show” to be scheduled and broadcast on the their web channel.

Bump board member Peter Rahul dubs it a “telepresence soapbox”<sup>4</sup>.

A podium of the utmost access for you to say your piece, release it to the ether, and move on or hop back and on and do it all over again another time, and/or in another way. Broadcasts of *You*s that were and now are.

Something someone sometime somewhere.

And so here I am. Sitting in my room, watching my face materialize in the mosaic of pixels coalescing into the cranial vision of my reflection on this screen.

BUMP Television is not so much asserting that I could be them. But rather, *they* could be *me*.

Populated by the faces of those willing to dare to be creative, to just do or say something, and have fun for the sake of it.

And *this* could be *you*.

To get involved with Bump Television or submit something to be broadcast visit:  
<https://www.bumptelevision.com>

by James Knott

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology, Narcissus (of whom the term ‘narcissism’ derives from) fell in love with his own reflection and brought forth his own death because his love could not materialize.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Hobson, in conversation with the author, June 3rd, 2020. <sup>3</sup> Ibid. <sup>4</sup> Peter Rahul, in conversation with the author, June 3rd, 2020.

# MY BUILD, MY BILLS

by Dylan Glynn

August 4 - September 3, 2020

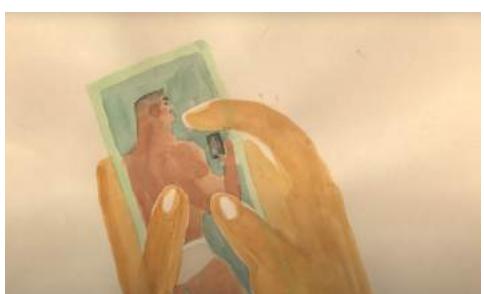
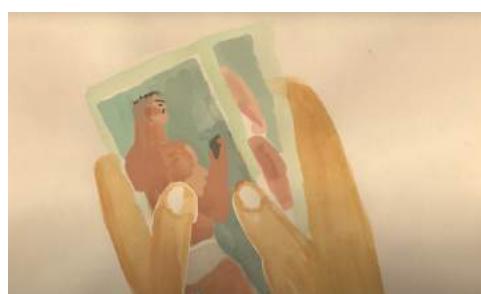
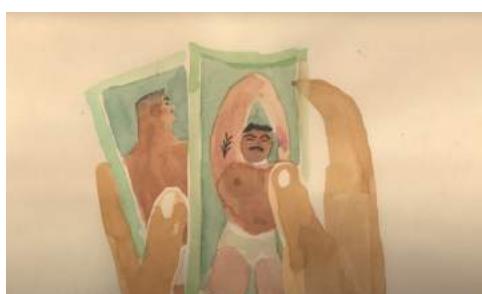
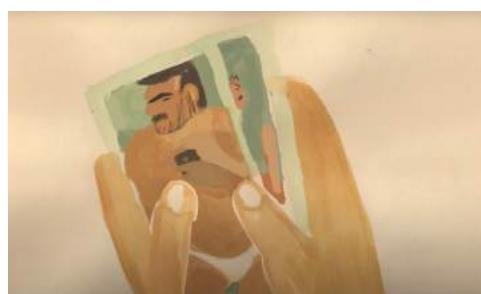
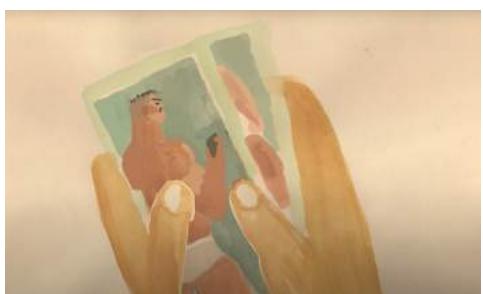
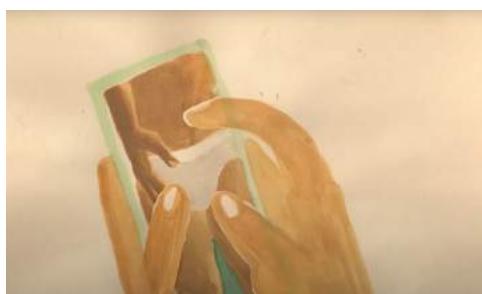
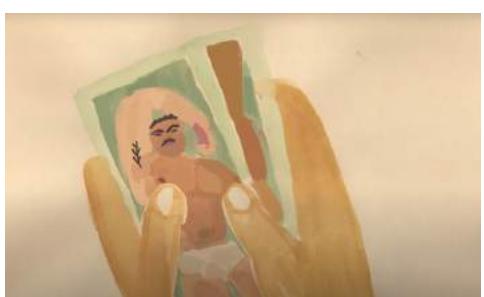
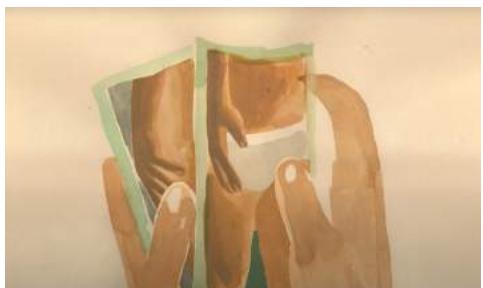
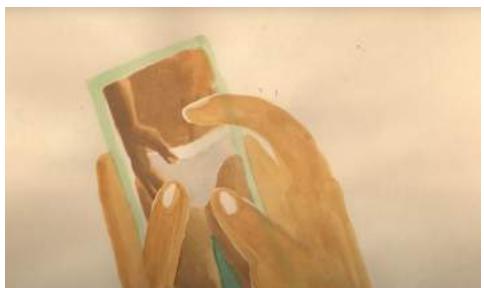
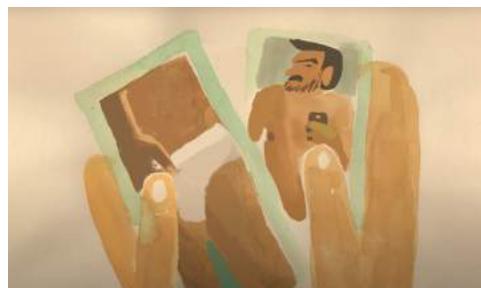
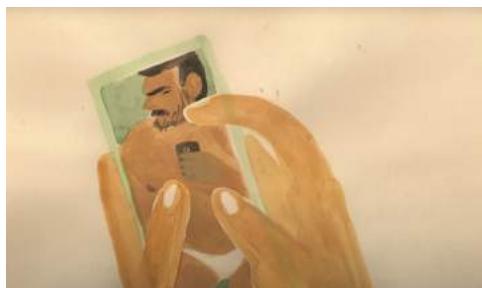
A pair of hands shuffles a stack of green dollar bills on a seamless animated loop. Each frame of the animation is hand-painted softly in watercolour using a warm fleshy palette, creating a tender feel. Rather than images of monetary symbols one might expect to find on currency, we see bills that depict solo shots of lightly erotic, robust male figures, naked aside from their white underwear. They have black hair and their painted skin tones fluctuate between paler complexions and more ochre pigments – and the artist's statement identifies these figures as Asian. The men are posing in ways which frame a different “sexy” body part. Bare asses, crotches, big chests, armpits, a few of the bills even feature them taking selfies. These pictures recall shots you might see on dating apps like Tinder, or more likely, the hookup app Grindr, where queer men post photos showing off their physique to an invisible audience. However, the painterly rendering of these men, relaxed and gentle, relates comfort, rather than vanity.

In the post-Gay liberation world of the 1970s, emphasis on hypermasculine traits began to rapidly formalize in the media (mostly porn) targeting White American gay culture<sup>1</sup>. While fashion has changed over time, the signs of masculine virility – big muscles, thick facial hair, and a dick which is ideally both – remains a default standard of beauty which a large portion of North American gay men gravitate towards. With the establishment of these aesthetic conventions, a culture around objectification and body dysmorphia has become hyper-focused and encouraged. And by extension, that attaining an idealised, masculine body allows the most privilege, in gay cisgendered male spaces. In this dynamic, physical attractiveness becomes currency for acceptance and appreciation. Dylan Glynn's animation *My Build, My Bills* makes allusion to this premise. Setting a direct visual metaphor that feels lighthearted but critical in its observation of a simple, yet deeply intersectional subject.

The images of men Glynn re-imagines as money feel familiar to the shots you might see on hookup apps. As these ‘sexy selfies’ get shuffled for an almost obsessive duration, the manly bodies become repetitive patterns that seem



[Click to view video](#)



to hypnotize. This combination of selfies and a scrolling gaze, calls to mind how we engage on social-networking apps. Particularly Grindr, which is popularly known as a method for arranging hookups and is targeted towards gay, bi, trans and queer individuals. Users create profiles where they post photos of themselves, detail their sexual preferences and are then placed in a cascade of profile images based on location proximity. Such digital spaces offer readily available, nonheterosexual worlds which make them the easiest way for queer people to meet. While they allow for new forms of self-representation, they are also structured as highly visual environments where users compete to establish status and connections with others.<sup>2</sup> With Grindr in particular, identity becomes reduced to profile images within a hypersexual sphere. One that encourages users to make quick judgments and exaggerated forms of self presentation. In such a space, the hypermasculine standards of beauty gay men set for themselves play a larger role in choosing who to interact with. So as Glynn's work illustrates, a 'masc'<sup>3</sup> body (presented via selfies) can metaphorically work as a kind of currency. A measure to potentially help gain connections and appreciation amongst other gay men. On the flipside however, it also forms a basis for both objectifying and excluding those who do not (or cannot) fit these standards.<sup>4</sup> Alongside encouraging a culture of body shaming and femmephobic attitudes, as individuals feel pressure to conform to masculinity in order to gain acceptance. That said, it would be wrong to place the blame for this squarely on Grindr. Technology is often just a catalyst for inequities already present in a community<sup>5</sup>. As such, a structure of social currency is indicative of broader issues within gay culture.

Through the playful, handmade qualities of his animation, Glynn avoids the angst that could easily become associated with this topic. And this refreshingly candid approach is very useful in how it allows Glynn to open another difficult subject. Namely, how objectification and social capital are

intrinsically linked to racialized experiences in the gay community. The artist's choice to render Asian men as seductive figures is a frisky defiance of their historic desexualisation in North America – especially within a White-dominated gay culture. Stereotypes around Asian men tend to portray them as nerdy, passive or emasculated. Unlike Asian women who experienced being fetishized by the colonial gaze, Asian men have been desexualised over time through historic forms of exclusion. For example, in the early 20th century, anti-Chinese immigration laws isolated male populations of workers who had come to North America as laborers. Separated from their spouses, these 'bachelor societies', with their excess of Asian men, were mocked as effeminate as they were viewed as having few interactions with women<sup>6</sup>. A perception that grew stronger when these men were eventually forced to work in industries traditionally associated with women (laundries, cooks, domestic service, etc.).<sup>7</sup> These attitudes were rooted in misogynistic notions about the perceived inferiority of women in comparison to men, at the time. By labeling these male Asian immigrants as 'womanly', it put them into a pseudo-gendered binary relationship where they could be seen as inferior to White American masculinity.

This desexualisation has also been further echoed in the media. In his seminal essay *Looking For My Penis*, video artist and cultural critic Richard Fung examined the absence of Asian men in gay pornography and wider media. Written in the 90s, he noted that Asian male characters in cinema were often consigned to stereotypes such as 'brainy wimps' or 'martial arts ascetics'.<sup>8</sup> Both desexualised tropes who were rarely portrayed as individuals capable of feeling desire for another. This denial of sexual subjecthood led to an absence, particularly felt in gay porn, as Fung stated "if Asian men have no sexuality, how can we have homosexuality?"<sup>9</sup>

Intriguingly, rather than focusing solely on counter-representation, Dylan Glynn's *My Build, My Bills* clarifies the reality of

social objectification in the gay community. As well as the contradictions and intersections that gay men (particularly racialised ones) find themselves shuffling. On one hand, the artist seems critically aware of how his painted, racialised figures participate in a system that rewards masculine bodies with acceptance. But despite this, it feels as if there's a sense of empathy for their struggles that moves them beyond feeling superficial. Glynn's cheerful painterly touch is key to this. He gives a friendliness to the bit of eroticism the figures have. Something that helps them avoid coming off narcissistic and objectified – instead feeling gentle, approachable and at ease with themselves. This sensitivity for the figures is perhaps reflective of the artist's own insight into the "inner scrutiny and sexual discounting Asian men face in a community obsessed with appearance and sexual capital."<sup>10</sup> Glynn is able to give us a frank but charming observation of this reality and its deeply embedded complications. And does so without imparting too much judgement for the anonymous shuffler who is forever counting their bills with both tenderness and obsession.

by Ron Siu

#### NOTES

- 1 Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, "Marginalization Among the Marginalized," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 42, no.1, (2002): 9
- 2 Christopher T. Conner, "The Gay Gayze: Expressions of Inequality on Grindr," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 60, no. 3, (2019), 402
- 3 Slang term for a stereotypical and idealised masculine body
- 4 MacCallum, Fiona and Heather Widdows, "Altered Images: Understanding the Influence of Unrealistic Beauty Images and Aspirations", *Health Care Analysis*, 26 no. 3, 235–45 (2016). Quoted in Christopher T. Conner, "The Gay Gayze: Expressions of Inequality on Grindr," 401
- 5 Christopher T. Conner, "The Gay Gayze: Expressions of Inequality on Grindr," 413
- 6 John Lung, *Chinese Laundries: Tickets to Survival on Gold Mountain* (Yin & Yang press, 2007). Quoted in "Analysis," Chinese Laundry Services Victoria, University of Victoria, <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/mappinghistory/about/>.
- 7 John Lung, *Chinese Laundries: Tickets to Survival on Gold Mountain*
- 8 Richard Fung, *Centre the Margins* (1991), 1991, <http://www.richardfung.ca/index.php?articles/centre-themargins-1991/9>
- Richard Fung, *Looking For My Penis* (1991), 1991, <http://www.richardfung.ca/index.php?articles/looking-for-mypenis-1991/>
- 10 From correspondence with the artist

# THANK YOU

**POSTER DESIGNERS /** Cecilia Salcedo / Chris Carriere / Christian Piasentin / Enna Kim / JG / Joaquin Varela / Laura Rojas / Marina FAW / Marisa Fulper Estrada / Mary Chen

**WORKSHOP FACILITATORS/ EVENT COLLABORATORS /** Amanda Low / Andrea Budgey / Brian Borts / Chiedza Pasipanodya / Curtia Wright / DJ Soft Drink / Enna Kim / Francisco-Fernando Granados / Geneviève Wallen / Jaycee Tu / Jesse Harris / José Andrés Mora / Kadrah Mensah / Kais Padamshi / Karina Iskandarsjah / Liz Ikiriko / Maggie Helwig / Marsya Maharani / Maya Wilson-Sanchez / Michaela Coyoli / Nezzy / Petrina Ng / Piera Savage / Polina Teif / Renelyn Quinicot Javier / Ryan Martin / Theresa Wang / Timothy Yanick Hunter / Yovska / jes sachse

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