

**12**  
'20-'21



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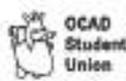
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KING HAS A BFA FROM OCAD UNIVERSITY & CURRENTLY LIVES & MAKES ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES OF THE HURON-WENDAT, ANISHINABEK NATION, THE HAUDENOSAUNEE CONFEDERACY, THE MISSISSAUGAS OF THE CREDIT FIRST NATIONS, & THE MÉTIS NATION IN TKARONTO, TURTLE ISLAND.

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# PROPOSITION 1: HANDS

IVETTA SUNYOUNG KANG

ESSAY BY



JENNY (YIPING) ZHANG

When was the last time you held someone's hand? Did you enjoy it? What if it helps you to relieve your lingering anxiousness from an unforeseen future? Certainty plays a considerable role in our lives; it guides us to make decisions and provides alternatives in various situations. Vice Versa, uncertainty can create

many negative mental responses within us. The unpredictability of time, space and people has the power to fabricate fear and anxiety, and it can grow like a disease. We are often taught to fight against the fear of uncertainty or even to ignore it, *Proposition 1: Hands* by Ivetta Sunyoung Kang suggests something different.



A black & white single-channel video installation indicates a series of hand positions involving two participants in which the artist has transformed a child game from South Korea into a therapeutic process for healing. As part of Kang's long-term research project, Ivetta Sunyoung Kang's *Proposition 1: Hands* takes on the perspective of resolving anxiety and nervous energy. Kang's work implies that alongside the happiness that we are always trying to achieve, negative emotional responses also need to be emphasized as a large portion of urban life. Accompanied by an informative booklet that demonstrates the massage steps, audiences are invited to sit on the chairs provided, play the modified child game, and acquire the other participant's energy flow and warmth.

As the connecting process begins in the video, the recipient has to let their guard down and deliver trust into another's hands. Each step represents a stage of sharing and trusting; hands-holding creates immediate bonding between two persons. The bonds help the recipient to acknowledge that this is a safe space, and time

to give in and exchange; as you are not only the recipient but also the one who provides. In this context, the two participants act as therapists for each other and themselves. The process does not aim to walk away from the complexity and concerns, confronting it instead, to take in power and rejoin. The name of this installation, "propositions," suggests that these hands positions are only the physical actions. In order to establish a strong interconnection, the therapy also involves the participant's mental hints and imagination. Kang's installation works more like a capsule that gathers all the negative emotions during the performance and provides time to temporarily walk away from commoditized social structure, to magnify those negative mental aspects.

During the performance, one of the subtitles states that "Admit that you cannot help those hands get warmer," which signifies that, although this therapeutic exercise is partially supported by the other person, it is also dependent on yourself. Energy starts to flow naturally as the performance continues; the other hand will



seize all the emotions that's been awoken from the designated hand and reconcile with it. The designated hand will feel pressure but mostly a sense of firm reliability, and awareness that there is no permanent eradication of these anxious fragments but could always be overcome temporarily. Once the designated hand is worn out after a series of massages, such as slapping, clenching, and rubbing, the other person dabs their saliva on the hand and helps it get warm again. Then, the healed ones practice the exercise on the other. The experience may vary from person to person, it could be hard or easy, but energy will be shared as concerns are resolved.

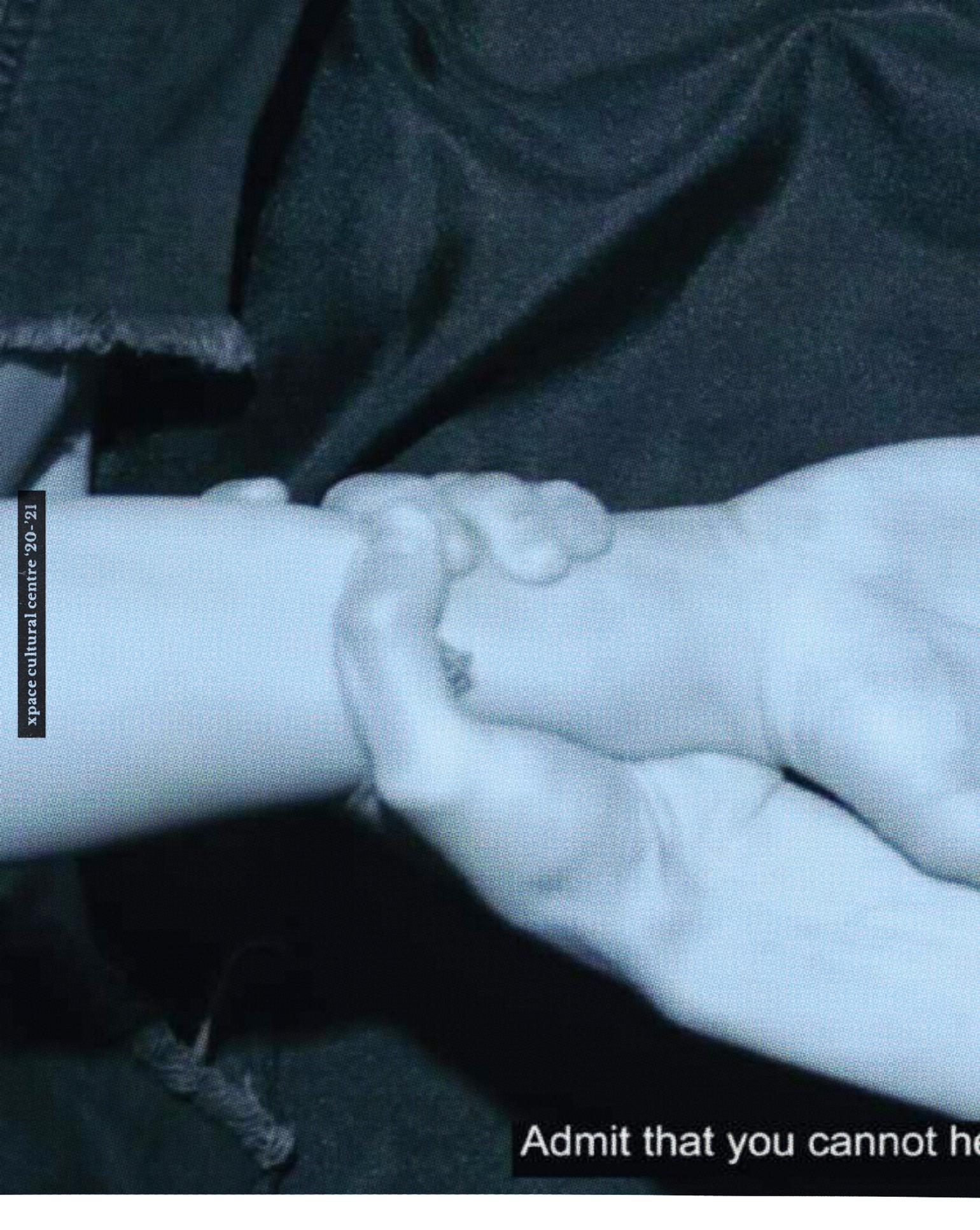
COVID-19 has been unprecedented, and, even until now, there has been no way to fully know how to proceed. The fear of uncertainty has heightened since we are collectively going through this present trauma; connections between people are receded. This pandemic has not only isolated society but also kept us away from its reunion. Social isolation has redefined original forms of communication, and it has changed



how we fulfill our emotional needs; materialistic fulfillment can no longer substitute our mental demands. We are gradually beginning to adopt new ways of living and socializing, intimate connections such as hugging and touching have been averted to its maximum extent; the pandemic is building up fear for intimacy. However, after strict sanitizing procedures, *Proposition 1: Hands* encourages physical contact through the practice on-site, which may seem taboo in our current time. The artwork emphasizes the importance of body touch and sensing other's presence while taking care of all the emotional impacts caused by the uncertainty of living we are experiencing.

*Proposition 1: Hands* represents a poetic way of mediation that can be easily practiced anywhere and anytime; it completely fits into our fast-paced urban life. Kang's work has created a momentary gateway for audiences to reflect and rebalance. It speaks to our empathy for pain and anxiety from current collective trauma; the need to commune with people is unavoidable and shouldn't be forgotten. Despite our living environment being made of materialistic matters and the limitation of body touch due to our current living model, the foundation of inner happiness is not necessarily about how much we grasp. Perhaps, now is the best time to rebalance our genuine emotion demands and boundless commodity desire; to face the fact that uncertainty will always be there, but there are ways to embrace and tolerate it.





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Admit that you cannot h



Help those hands get warmer.



# HANDS THAT GATHER & FORGET

ANA LUISA BERNÁRDEZ NOTZ  
SEBASTIÁN RODRÍGUEZ Y VASTI

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



MARIA ISABEL MARTINEZ

## In The Mind's Eye

Every December, Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz and Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti return to Venezuela, where they are both from, to visit their families. On these trips, they take photographs; two separate individuals, two different families, one same country and one similar practice. These trips are overrun with emotion: of home, loss, comfort, fear. **Es como una anticipación,**<sup>1</sup> an anticipation, that the minute they land, something will be taken away. Photographs reconcile this loss and offer a way of addressing it.

Due to the pandemic, the artists tell me they anticipate they will not be returning this coming December; and again, like the anticipation of leaving, the future holds an emptiness. Yet, in this moment of the pandemic, some of us have been gifted time.

What questions have we finally asked, and answered, with this time? What can be created with the space made available by this collapse?

Bernárdez and Rodríguez have disinterred their archives for their exhibition, *Hands that gather and forget*, in the Project Space.

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<sup>1</sup>Ana Luisa Bernárdez Notz, in discussion with author Maria Isabel Martínez, August 2020.



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ABOVE: ANA LUISA BERNÁRDEZ NOTZ & SEBASTIÁN RODRÍGUEZ Y VASTI, *HANDS THAT GATHER AND FORGET*, 2020.



“The archive is inaccessible,”<sup>1</sup> Ana Luisa keeps saying to me. The collection of photographs, taken during trips spanning 2015-2019, is inaccessible because of its vastness. It is overwhelming. In Venezuela, Bernárdez and Rodríguez take photographs with a near absentmindedness, a kind of compulsion. They record instances and people while immersed in the moment, then later forget some of the photos were even taken at all. As a consequence, the number of photographs accumulate and sit.

These images are something brought back, something to hold onto.

The forced slowness of a pandemic encouraged Bernárdez and Rodríguez to pause and dig through their collection, arriving at pictures of forgotten moments. They would not have paused without the lull in travel. The archive would have kept swelling, only now, they have turned to look.

The large number of photographs is akin to the largeness of memory; Where does it all go? How can we keep track? We acquire experiences, emotions, and pains over and over, in excess. Eventually, our memory becomes so full it begins to escape us, or we escape it.

In the Project Space, the images hang, printed on silk organza, to form a falling cloud. They drip with a ghostliness, and we, the observers, must approach this ghost and try to access it. We are invited to turn and look, much like the artists themselves have done. We enter each photograph, a scene, first as a whole, then one-by-one. Each image carries a consequence.

We see two cats, lounging on one another in a tender familial embrace. We see an elder staring back. We see a man and a woman, arms wrapped around each other, walking through an airport.

Hanging amidst the printed fabric are blank ones – what to make of those? I’ll offer this: If you ask me about memories of my childhood, it would be something like opening one of these blank sheets. Where did it go, and yet here it is.

Although the work is rooted in documenting personal moments, Bernárdez and Rodríguez resist an individualistic narrative. They do this first by working together and merging their archives, and second, by offering something beyond themselves. The Venezuelan migrant crisis looms over the installation, much like the cloud of pictures hanging looms over us. It is something not directly named, yet immensely present. “The circumstance in which [the photographs] are created is not a pleasant circumstance.”<sup>1</sup> Ana Luisa and Sebastián are separated from their life in Venezuela due to an ongoing socioeconomic and political crisis; they are two individuals within a mass exodus of Venezuelans from their home.

When dealing with loss and grief, one might experience an urge to relieve it, or otherwise make the sensation more intelligible. Sebastián describes the act of taking photos as, “A device, or a response, or a meaningful action that allows me to deal with a feeling, and to solve it, or to address it.”<sup>2</sup> It has been said before: the personal is political; here, political circumstances pervade personal experiences. It creates

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<sup>2</sup> Sebastián Rodríguez y Vasti, in discussion with author Maria Isabel Martinez, August 2020.



ripples, waves, across shores and continents.

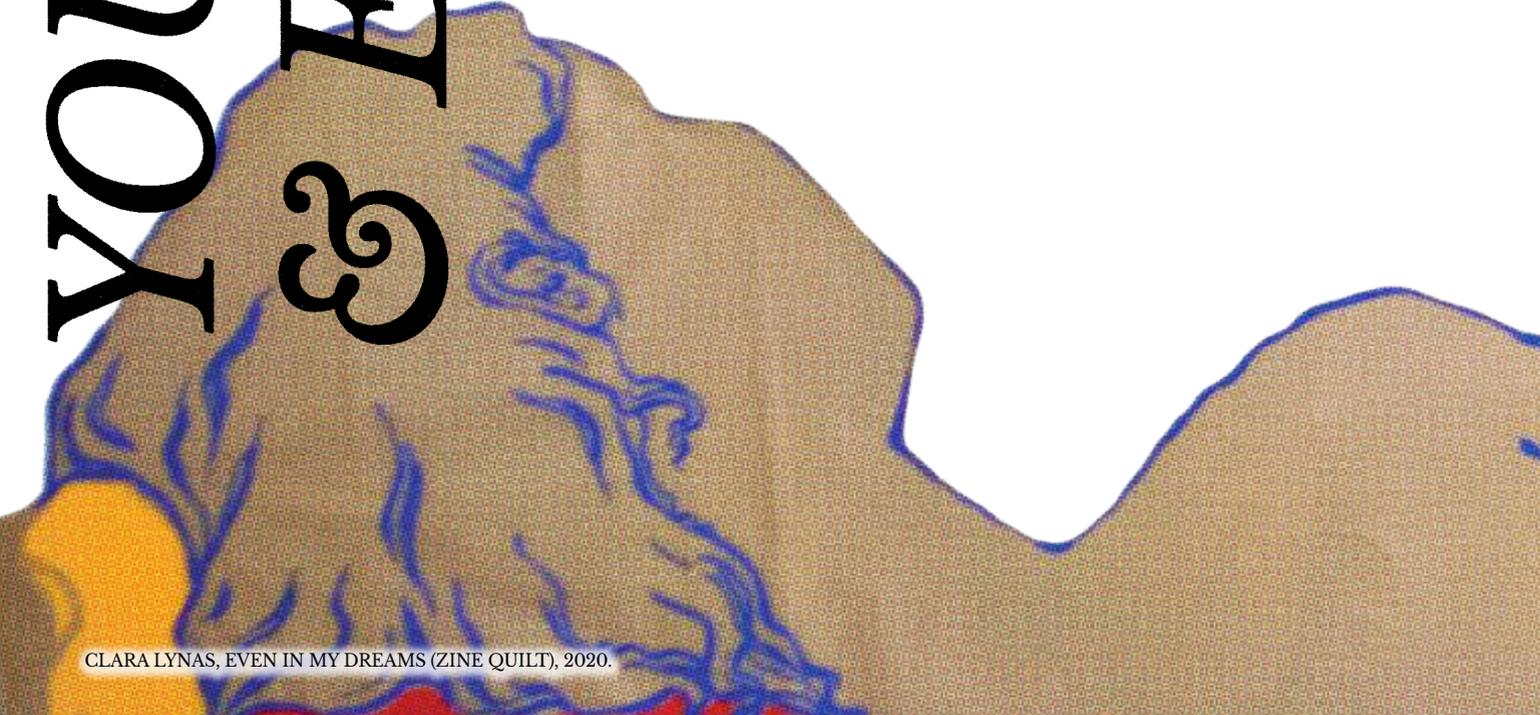
*Hands that gather and forget* is about fractures – of proximity, memory, and the self.

The transparency of the silk organza operates to make us aware of the fractures, to soften them, and to call us towards the breakage. As an observer up against the printed silk, one has to wonder: Who are these cats? Whose grandmother could that be? I might assume them to be relatives of the artists, and I might begin to reflect on what it means to be away from such meaningful relations. What becomes of the experience of closeness when loss is around the corner?

Clouds, like memory, like grief, are difficult to access from where we stand. These photographs, first as a digital archive, then as floating silk, challenge us to move towards the difficult. “There is something within me that is particularly sensitive to this sort of attack, this sort of pressure from the outside world,” says Sebastián referring to the political and social conditions in Venezuela. “I have a relationship with images in general and this just hits right on the spot.”<sup>2</sup>

*Hands that gather and forget* is an invitation to visit this spot and to reflect, much like the artists have done, on what survives a loss. Or better yet, how to survive a loss.





# YOUR HANDS & EYES KEEP US ALIVE

CLARA LYNAS  
KAYA JOAN  
FOREST VAN WINKLE

CURATED BY

CLEOPATRIA PETERSON

ESSAY BY

*Your Hands and Eyes Keep Us Alive* is a love letter: from me to you, to my friends, to the zines, and to the stories we tell. A zine is a self-published print publication, they can take a variety of forms, be it the paper, the genre, or medium. The best part about a zine is that everyone can make them.

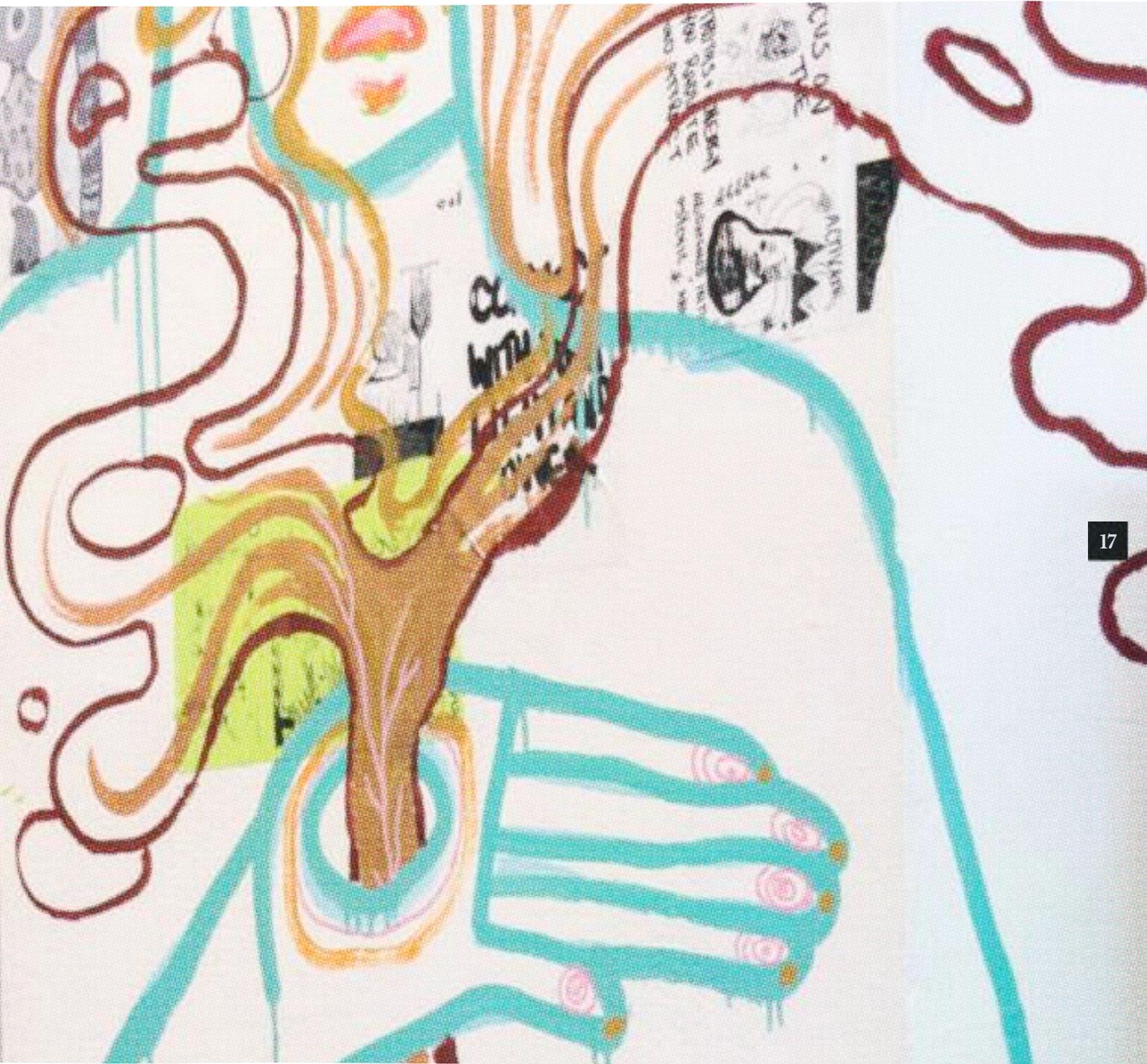
I may be the curator in residence, but collaborator might be a better title. The work that was created for the exhibition would not have been possible without my collaborators: Clara Lynas, Kaya Joan and Forest Van Winkle. This also includes the people who had made the work before me with the zines archived in the library. In responding to the publications in Xspace's Zine Library, I sifted through their history and grabbed what spoke to me one way or another. I read, I learned, I experienced.





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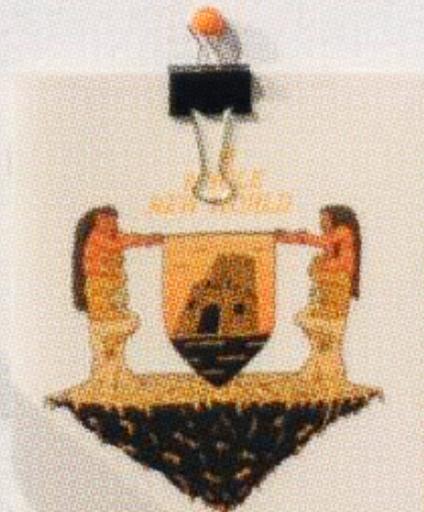
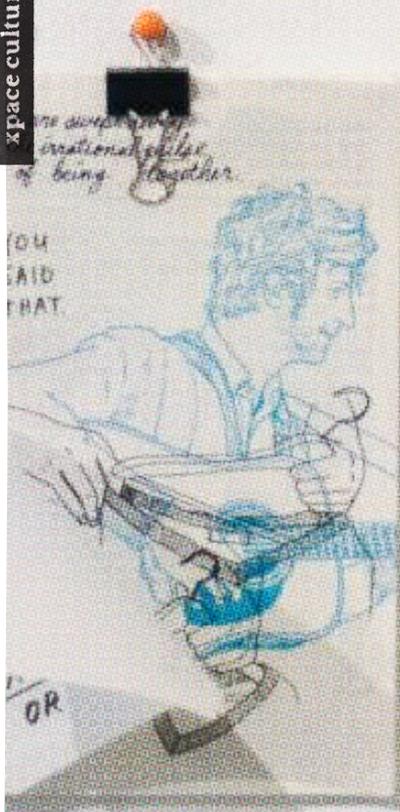
LEFT & RIGHT: *YOUR HANDS AND EYES KEEP US ALIVE*, 2020. INSTALLATION VIEW, WORK BY CLEOPATRIA PETERSON, KAYAJOAN, FOREST VAN WINKLE, AND CLARA LYNAS IN VIEW.



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A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG KERMIT



How

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Then, I wrote it all down. I didn't know how else to respond to the work, writing is the only comfort I've found in the pandemic, and it was through this I began to have a conversation with the work, but also myself.

I could get into my fragmented identity, the ones that make my presence in a gallery even more important, but let's just accept that I have and will continue to be denied space as long as I live. The pandemic rushed in and everything I had spent a year working towards left with it. This is out of anyone's control, but through something like this, you learn that an institution is not your friend; it will always put capital over your wellbeing, especially if you are on the margins. An institution is not the mentors and people, the work, the community that come out of it. This exhibition was my way of giving space to myself, but also my communities, friends and people I admire. This is probably the most selfish I've been in making art, filling a gallery with my thoughts and writing, sharing personal windows into my identity, but it comes out of the loss of space and the inability to make art for six months. In the end, stories are what keep us alive.

Despite responding to work from as far back as 1980, it was impossible to not speak to the present. Zines are a way to hold time. Our exhibition will come down one day and only your experience and our intention will remain. As I write this, we are experiencing a pandemic, police brutality is higher than ever, and as a result, the death toll rises and rises. But there are protests, there is community, and we are on

the edge of change. We just don't know what will happen when we jump or fall. In looking through these zines, I struggle with change being possible; there are histories here that are still the present. There are also things we left behind in the past. We have the power to make change. I think we need to be reminded of that. I've seen collaboration and community excel in light of how hard it has been to exist in this world.

My reasons for wanting to work with Clara Lynas, Forest Van Winkle and Kaya Joan are purely because I wanted to collaborate with them. Due in part to the abrupt cancellation of a graduation show, I wanted to give everyone space for their work, and I was interested in what could arise from the large gallery space. I did not know what we would create, but our work in its differences has managed to speak to each other. Themes of touch and desire, our ancestors and ourselves, our histories and how stories are a portal. These themes have all arisen in conversation with another. Paint, wheatpaste, sewing, and textile. All of our backgrounds wove into one.

This is such a large collaborative project; we are creating with each other and those who came before us. They are the people who make it easier to survive. I was excited to see how they would approach having free reign to such a large space. I'm glad I got to experience their work, their practice and kindness. Their warmth and joy.

While working on this exhibition I read an essay where Hil Malatino writes about experiencing trans archives: →

“I’m haunted by these archival specters, and by my sense of duty to them. Because, in some small way, by existing—however minimally or maximally, however “part-time” or “full-time” they were—they have made our existence possible. Because our lives are, in some opaque and difficult to capture way, entwined. Because I want to do justice to their struggles and joys. Because, in my own way, and with all of my own projections and fantasies intact, I have fallen in love with them. **To love the dead is for them to remain with you, introjected, present.**”<sup>1</sup>

Through Malatino’s words, I found the thesis to *Your Hands and Eyes Keep Us Alive*, and the love I have for what has come before me. Every story you read shapes you, even if it’s a bad one. Someone put their intention into the work, and no matter how you receive that, by interacting with it you bring breath to a work. To a person who you don’t know or someone who has passed.

So much of the work, be it my own, or my collaborators responds to this. I asked Clara Lynas, Forest Van Winkle, and Kaya Joan their intention with their work.

*Even In My Dreams (Zine Quilt)* by Clara Lynas

Drawing from the archives, I have created a mural in the form of an interactive quilt, interconnecting my own stories in response, reflection, and conversation with those I have read. A quilt, a zine, a story, is something that, by nature of its making, has been held by many hands, and is intended to be held by many more. In stit-

ching together an account of how we connect to stories, how we live in them, **I also wish to hand down a blanket to crawl under and keep warm.**”<sup>2</sup>

*Secret From Two Wombs Ago* by Forest Van Winkle

“Sometimes stories are forgotten on a shelf somewhere, but they’re never really lost. With discarded material, I tell my way back to them. In a way that is shared, the material and I have histories woven into us that are sometimes too quiet to discern. Some of my stories were misplaced before I could hear them. But somehow, I don’t think the stories that I whisper to myself as I sew are much different from ones I might hear at the feet of a grandmother. Sometimes **I remember that I am the story she told.**”<sup>3</sup>

*They Hold Infinity In Their Blood.* by Kaya Joan

“Story is a portal, and I am in love with all the portals I encounter. The ones in my blood that take me to my ancestors, the ones tagged onto concrete that urgently challenge Babylon, the ones in little paper books passed between the hands of my community and kin, all these methods of projecting into worlds where all is possible. I want to create the infinite sense of wonder and **safety I feel when I am held by all these stories.**”<sup>4</sup>

We are all made of a multitude of stories. They keep us alive, they give the dead a voice in the present so we can learn to go forward. I hope that by telling my own stories in response to the past, I’ll live to see many years to come. Maybe I or my collaborators will live rent free in

1 MALATINO, HIL. “Something Other Than Trancesters: Hirstory Lessons.” Essay. In TRANS CARE. S.L.: UNIV OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 2020.

2 Cleo Peterson in conversation with Clara Lynas

3 Cleo Peterson in conversation with Forest Van Winkle

4 Cleo Peterson in conversation with Kaya Joan

your brain. I hope that if you engage with the work you start to tell your own stories if you were afraid to do so before, that your zines end up in their own library, hopefully in the Xspace Zine Library. I hope twenty years from now this work can act as a touchstone for somebody and someone else will come along and engage with our stories and that's how we will be kept alive, through your hands, and your eyes.



# NEW WORDS TO DESCRIBE OLD THINGS

FLORENCE YEE

ESSAY BY



## MARSYA MAHARANI



### 1. A hesitation.

When Florence Yee and I started chatting, the artist asked me, “Did you read my residency proposal? Maybe it’s best if you hadn’t.” They say, “It’s changed since then.”<sup>1</sup>

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Yee had originally pitched a project that sought to unravel the tradition of Chinese knot-making, intentionally re-learning it to make it anew. These traditional knots, I learned during our conversation, are often accompanied by characters for “happiness” and “fortune” that culturally signal heteronormative and capitalist ideas of success. “You may have seen these ornate knots in stores,” Yee added. They are usually red or gold in colour. Perhaps they are marketed as Chinese New Year decorations. Also likely: they are sold or purchased as what the artist calls **ethnic exotica:**<sup>2</sup> a diminished representation of a culture into kitsch.

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<sup>1</sup> Florence Yee, in discussion with the author, August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The term is borrowed from feminist academic and activist Yasmin Jiwani, in “Framing Culture, Talking Race,” in *Canadian Cultural Poesis*, eds. Garry Sherbert, Annie Gérin, and Sheila Petty (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 101.



Nonetheless, they saturate and adorn commercial, public, and domestic spaces. One by one, they suggest that success equals marriage and wealth. In response, Yee is interested in inserting into the tradition the newly emerging characters that broaden these definitions of success. So, accompanying their own interpretation of the Chinese knots, the artist hand-embroidered the new word combination for gender neutrality: the characters 氵 (water) and 人人 (person).

I don't see that the work had diverted too far from the artist's original pitch, but I sense a hesitation that is familiar.

## 2. Success and failure are fluid concepts, right?

Growing up as a first-generation immigrant, I've interpreted the pressure to succeed as to perform well within cultural norms. The stakes are higher because in "failure" we risk falling further into the realm of otherness. Anyway,

the Immigrant Success Story sells. It's the one people want to hear about. Though to be honest, I started feeling the pressure to succeed way before moving here. In Grade 1, I cheated on my exams.

There are failures that I, personally, consider very real. These usually happen when I try to "be" Indonesian. In an introductory email to a famous Chinese-Indonesian artist, I tried writing in Indonesian to sound authentic. I described myself with a word that I thought meant "Indonesian-born," but actually is widely used by right-wing nationalists to express anti-Chinese sentiments. She told me this. I had no idea.

Indonesian is my mother tongue. I used to know the old words. They now seem to describe new things. Or is this me, still unlearning the anti-Chinese racism that I picked up in my childhood?

### 3. Unresolved distance.

How could I know, when I'm so far away? Yee's *New words to describe old things* builds on an older work titled *Trying*: a series of knots produced during the artist's first attempt at learning the craft. Yee sought to regain linguistic and cultural knowledge following multigenerational loss of knowledge through assimilation. "The knots were a metaphor for being tongue-tied, as my Cantonese was very nursery-level at the time," the artist explained.<sup>3</sup> Their language skills had improved since then – after spending more personal time with other Cantonese-speakers – and with this, Yee gained a sense of agency to work with the language.

But even still, there's always that hesitation that comes with distance. For *Trying*, Yee watched YouTube tutorials with their grandmother, who had moved from China to Vietnam at age six, and then again to Montreal where she now lives. They questioned this distance in relation to the pressure to represent one's cultural tradition accurately, and the authority to queer such tradition. How do you resolve this when you're always geographically, generationally, culturally, linguistically, materially removed?

I am a cliché: a "Western-educated Indigenous elite" living in diaspora who has both a romanticized calling for their homeland in adulthood, and a dose of critique that is conceptualized through a Western framework. Both of them are rooted in a ghostly understanding of my own culture.

I tried to collapse this distance through a one-month trip to meet new art friends in Jakarta. In trying to understand the contemporary art landscape there, I asked questions that are informed by entirely Western experience of the current discourse, bringing up topics like gender-fluidity and feminism. Sometimes, these questions failed. And when I try to elaborate on why I'm asking them, I hear myself sounding preachy. Have I co-opted the saviour complex?

In the Indonesian national language, there are no gendered pronouns. Traditionally, certain cultures within the Indonesian national borders recognized more than two genders. Still, heteronormative, patriarchal, and capitalist values were the dominant values being promoted when I was growing up. Maybe in asking these questions, I was searching for some sort of signal for a destabilization of the conformity I had witnessed. I wanted to know this distance, between what I remembered and what is.

#### 4. "What authority am I relying on to draw my knowledge?"

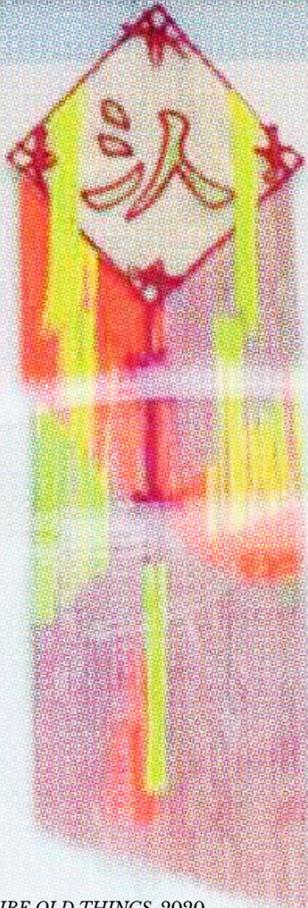
*New words to describe old things* takes on the vocabulary of a commercial storefront. A scrolling digital marquee and three knots are hung within the Xpace Cultural Centre window space. By choosing the traditional Chinese knotting cord, Yee's installation embraces the hyper legible ethnic exotica markers of such decorations. But they introduced a new →

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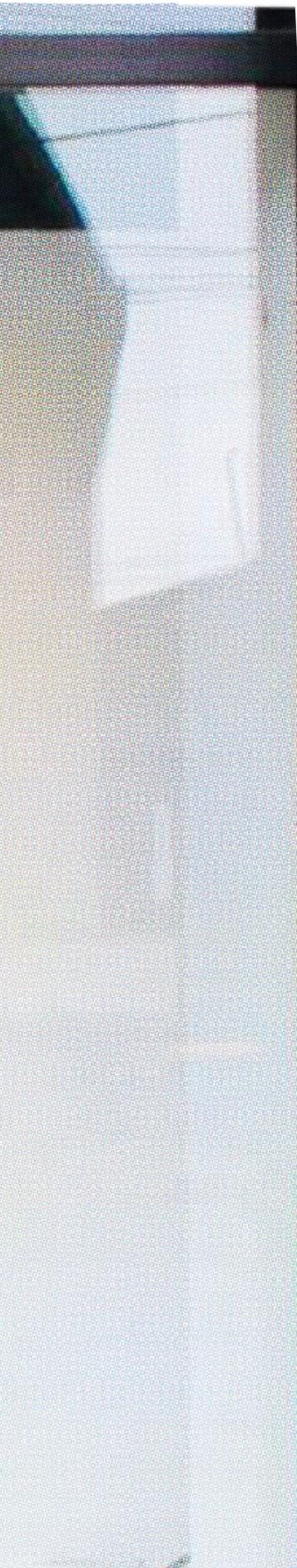
<sup>3</sup> Florence Yee, email message to author, September 3, 2020.

xpace cultural centre '20-'21

AIN AND LOSE



LEFT & RIGHT: FLORENCE YEE, *NEW WORDS TO DESCRIBE OLD THINGS*, 2020.



visual context too, by playing with materials like a mesmerizing shiny spandex, a glittering organza, and fringes made of neon and pink embroidery threads. Of course, those who read Chinese can readily recognize Yee's queering of the tradition to support gender fluidity.

I think of Yee's labour-intensive process in making these works in order to say these two characters. Again, and again, and louder. As if conjuring up a truth that is as old as tradition.

In contrast, the marquee speedily spells out:

*MY GRANDMOTHER AND I LEARNT TO TIE KNOTS FROM A YOUTUBE TUTORIAL. WHAT DO WE GAIN AND LOSE FROM USING THE INTERNET AS A SOURCE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE? YOU ARE A FUTURE ANCESTOR. HOW ARE YOU PREPARING?*

Far from passing thoughts, the artist's questioning of their own stakes in this act of queering lingered throughout the process of making. They asked, "What authority am I relying on to draw my knowledge?"

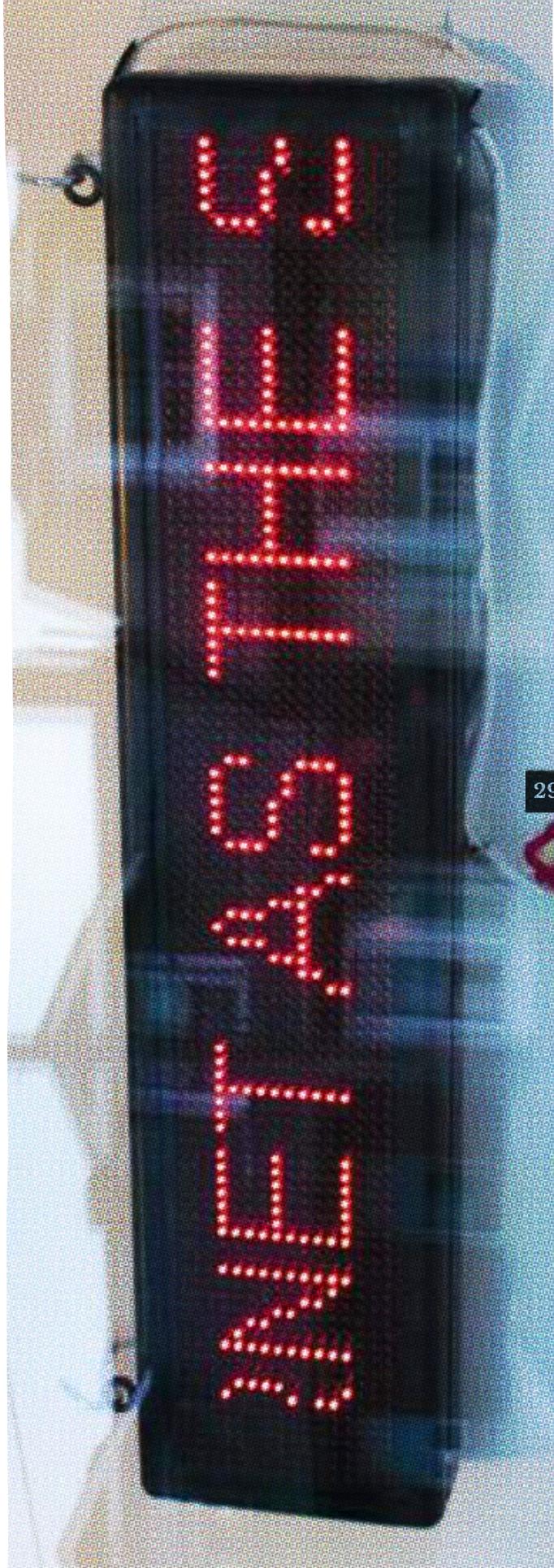
One time I googled how to say "I speak Indonesian" in Indonesian. You can say this is some sort of preparation.

I learned about my grandmother's weaving tradition as an unpaid intern at the Royal Ontario Museum. Together with a white curator, I went through the collection of a white donor whose floor-to-ceiling cabinets were full

of the type of textiles I used to see in family celebrations. I emailed my Mom some photos: “Do they look like tourist trinkets to you?” Should I send my children to the ROM?

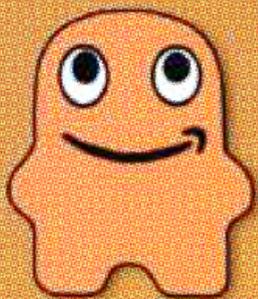
Someone recently asked me if I feel comfortable being formally introduced as “an Indonesian curator.” “Exactly, right?!” I said. What does that even mean? What authority do I hold in identifying myself as an Indonesian curator when I’m stumbling over the correct words? When I can’t distinguish tradition from ethnic exotica?

How am I doing as a future ancestor? These hesitations, ambiguities, uncertainties, untidy narratives, and fragmented stories are inevitably what I’ll be passing on. I find comfort in how these also thread through Yee’s practice. They may be unresolved, but they are resolute. They are certainly less dangerous than any single story. Less dangerous than the authority. Within the dominant culture, neat endings are preferred. Toronto’s multiculturalism diminishes entire cultures into consumable exotic foods and knick-knacks, while making little room for different ways of thinking. Yee’s fragments invite me to come in, my own hesitations and all.



# ABRA

HIBA ALI



ESSAY BY



SAJDEEP SOOMAL



## Amazon.com, Inc. is a warring nation

The percussive beat that opens new media artist Hiba Ali's latest experimental music video *Abra* (2018) places us along the frontier of the Amazon.com empire, where a battle is raging between the exploitative company and its under-recognized workers. In this five-minute video, the artist exposes the technologies that Amazon.com and its holdings subject to its workers, while asking what new worlds might be birthed if we dismantle and re-appropriate its machinery. The video opens with Hiba taking the capitalist machinery in hand to produce a different beat, one that lays the foundation for a protest song that elucidates precisely how Amazon.com functions as a restless empire of expansion and domination.

CEO Jeff Bezos has built an abusive enterprise to satisfy his possessive desires. Working in tandem with other powerful neoliberal states, corporations and individuals that govern our world, Amazon.com aims to take hold of the world economy by transforming into what journalist Brad Stone calls "The Everything Store."

Despite starting out as an online bookseller, Amazon.com now controls approximately 40% of all e-commerce in the United States alone, with Amazon Web Services controlling almost half of the **cloud-computing industry plans.**<sup>1</sup> And they are aggressive. Amazon Web Services is continuing to wage a legal battle to win a contract with the **US Department of Defense.**<sup>2</sup> In the past few years, Amazon.com has expanded into new economies at a back-breaking pace, establishing themselves in security services, streaming services, health care, groceries, parcel delivery, and cloud computing, among others.

And so, Amazon.com is the latest iteration of the warring family-turned-nation, saturated with all the prototypical abusive behaviour that you might expect. Hiba chants against the steel: Amazon.com and its subsidiary companies are neglectful ("can't think twice"), withholding ("no insurance for your life"), controlling ("back-breaking is on sale") and unwavering ("I only think in labour").

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<sup>1</sup> For more about Amazon, read: [theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/11/what-jeff-bezos-wants/598363/](https://theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/11/what-jeff-bezos-wants/598363/)

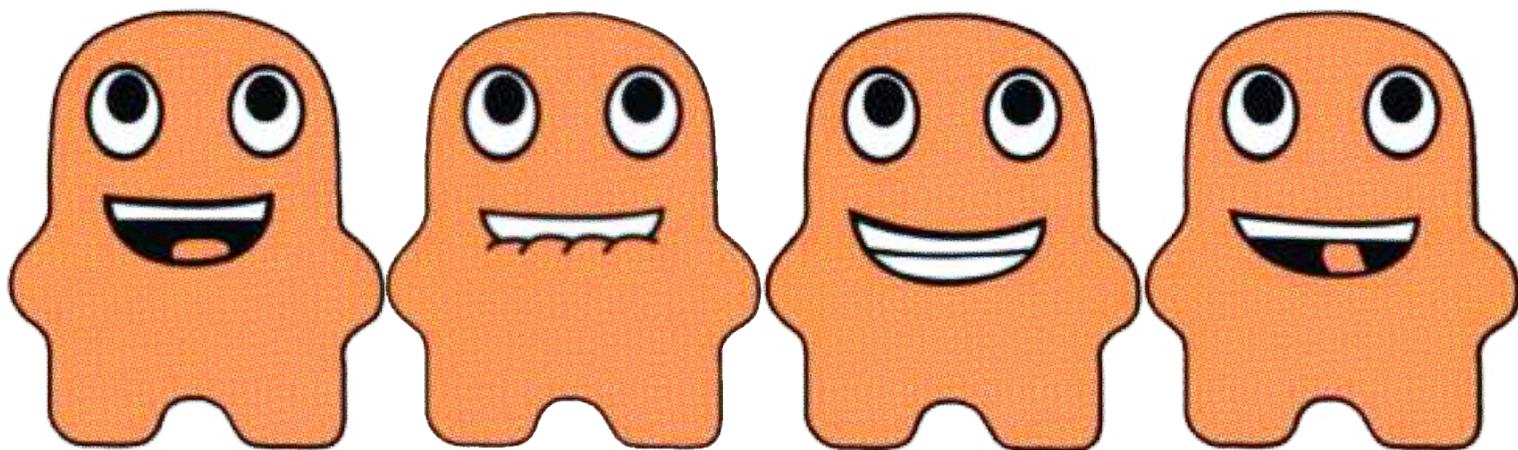
<sup>2</sup> While the contract has been awarded to Microsoft, Amazon continues to protest. Read the full report here: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/04/pentagon-says-it-will-stick-with-microsoft-for-jedi-cloud-contract.html> and for details about Amazon's latest commentary on the situation, consult: <https://aws.amazon.com/blogs/publicsector/jedi-why-we-will-continue-protest-politically-corrupted-contract-award/>

Amazon.com brands itself as one of the good guys – an innocent do-gooder dedicated to public service. But in truth, the future that Jeff Bezos imagines is inflamed in orange. I recently found out that the official, national colours of Amazon.com – Orange Peel #FF9900 and Vivid Cerulean #00A8E1 – are drawn from an image that Jeff Bezos conjured of open fires raging through the **rainforests of the Amazon river.**<sup>3</sup> The sun may never set on the British empire, but Jeff Bezos wants to conjure the sun itself, in **all its hot and fiery glory.**<sup>4</sup>

Confronting Amazon.com's orange dreams in *Abra* (2018), we watch as the company razes and paints over all the workers, laws, and unions that are getting in his way. It is unsurprising to hear that the company has deterred union formation by using aggressive digital surveillance tools and labour management tactics that include scanners, wristbands, navigation software, as well as thermal and security cameras **against its racialized workforce.**<sup>5</sup> These technol-

ogies are wielded by Amazon.com to preemptively destroy anyone in its way.

Hiba Ali is one of those workers in the line of fire. A few years ago, Hiba entered the belly of the beast, working at an Amazon Fulfillment Centre outside of Austin, Texas. The experience offered them a firsthand experience about the nefarious labour practices that Amazon.com rolls out across its facilities. During their time at the high-tech digital sweatshop, Hiba began tearing away the layers of mystery that shroud Amazon.com's diverse portfolio of colonial possessions. Speaking over the phone, Hiba explained to me that Amazon.com serves as an orange front for a behind-the-scenes imperial lineup of products and services that are invested in developing a global, privatized all-knowing data hub and surveillance apparatus that is always up for sale to the highest bidder: police, states, bad men, you name it. And that is why the orange workers, in yellow safety vests, employed by Amazon.com are picking



<sup>3</sup> Amazon created a version of its logo that depicted fire spreading along the Amazon River. The treatment of orange as fire was concretized with the launch of Amazon FireTV. You can view the logo here: [turbologo.com/articles/amazon-logo/](http://turbologo.com/articles/amazon-logo/)

<sup>4</sup> For more about the metaphor of the sun and its relationship to imperial expansion, you can read this informative Wikipedia article: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_empire\\_on\\_which\\_the\\_sun\\_never\\_sets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_empire_on_which_the_sun_never_sets)

up the tools in front of them and banging them together. Amazon is an ever-expanding surveillance bubble, economic bubble, abuse bubble. That is why Hiba is blowing bubbles for us, so that we might momentarily look beyond the orange paint and yellow vest and see the full scale of their labour. Visible one second and gone the next like bubbles, we must listen to the workers speak up, to sing about the labour that Amazon.com has already extracted and covered up. When language runs dry in the face of pain, I have come to learn that rage takes over and transmutes itself into percussive sound, exploding from the body into song. And so listen to Hiba chant and join the crowd. Make noise and jam the system with interference. Otherwise Peccy might poison your mind. Peccy is the mascot you didn't know that Amazon had.<sup>6</sup>

Peccy is an orange ball of fire, or perhaps a solar flare, who is heralded as the ideal Amazon worker. Plastered with an immutable smile and direct, surveillant gaze, Peccy is the ordinary

policeman who maintains the arrangement of power. Images of Peccy are affixed to the walls of the every Amazon Fulfillment Centre, paired with didactic instructions about how to be a good worker. Peccy is a puppet; a virtual minion who takes his orders from Bezos himself. And so Hiba talks back to that bad man.

Corrupt Peccy before he reduces you to manageable data. Chant the protest song and make noise interfere:

*No surveillance business.*

*No police business.*

*No oppression business.*

*No surveillance business.*

*No police business.*

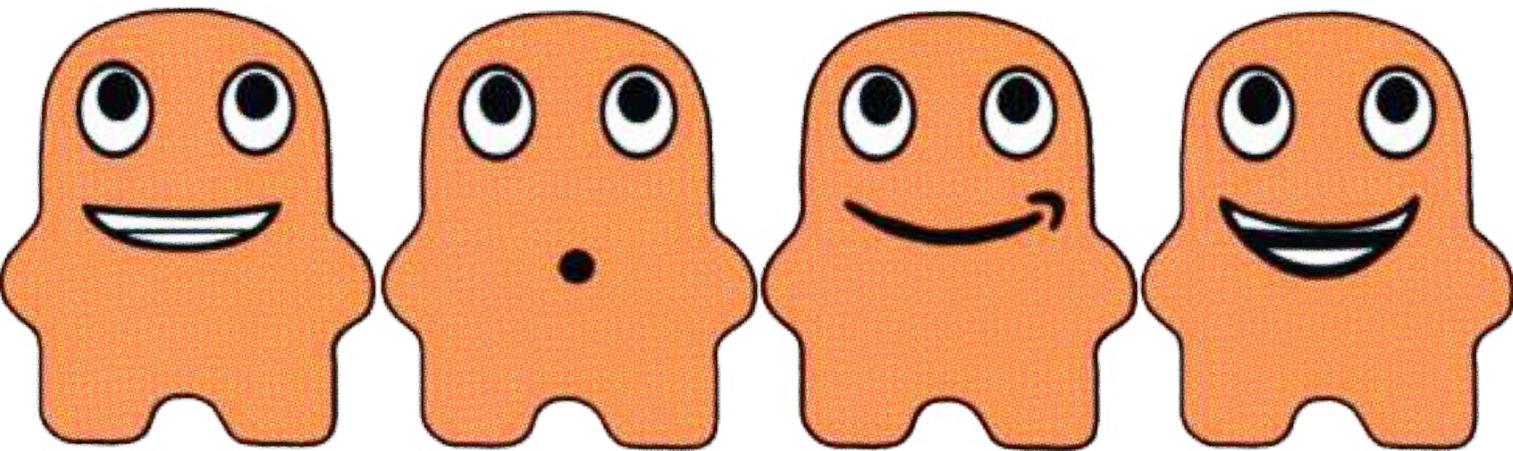
*No oppression business.*

*No surveillance business.*

*No police business.*

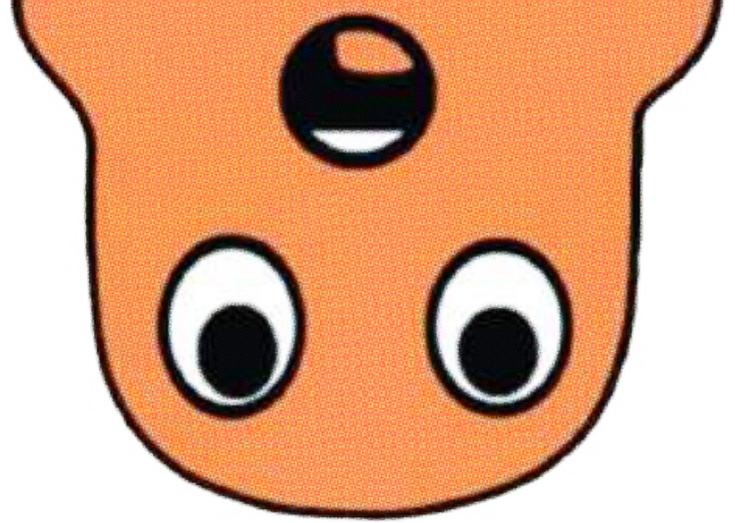
*No oppression business*

→



<sup>5</sup> The surveillance technology that Amazon employs have been well documented. For the most recent writing, consult Nandita Bose: [ca.reuters.com/article/idCAKBN25R2LI-OCATC](https://ca.reuters.com/article/idCAKBN25R2LI-OCATC)

<sup>6</sup> This phrase was coined by Harry McCracken for an article published in Fast Company, where he writes more about Hiba Ali's work: [fastcompany.com/90329525/amazon-peccy](https://fastcompany.com/90329525/amazon-peccy)



Jeff Bezos started a company named Amazon. com, named Abra Cadabra, named Relentless. com, named Browse.com. It is a company that is an empire that is a family that is a nation that is obsessed with fire, with expansion, with possession, with murder. And Hiba Ali wrote a song that is a chant that is a scream that is a free world that is magic. It is a song for the river, the under-recognized, the dead and the struggling.





# FAÇADE THROUGH THE FAÇADE

LEILA FATEMI

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



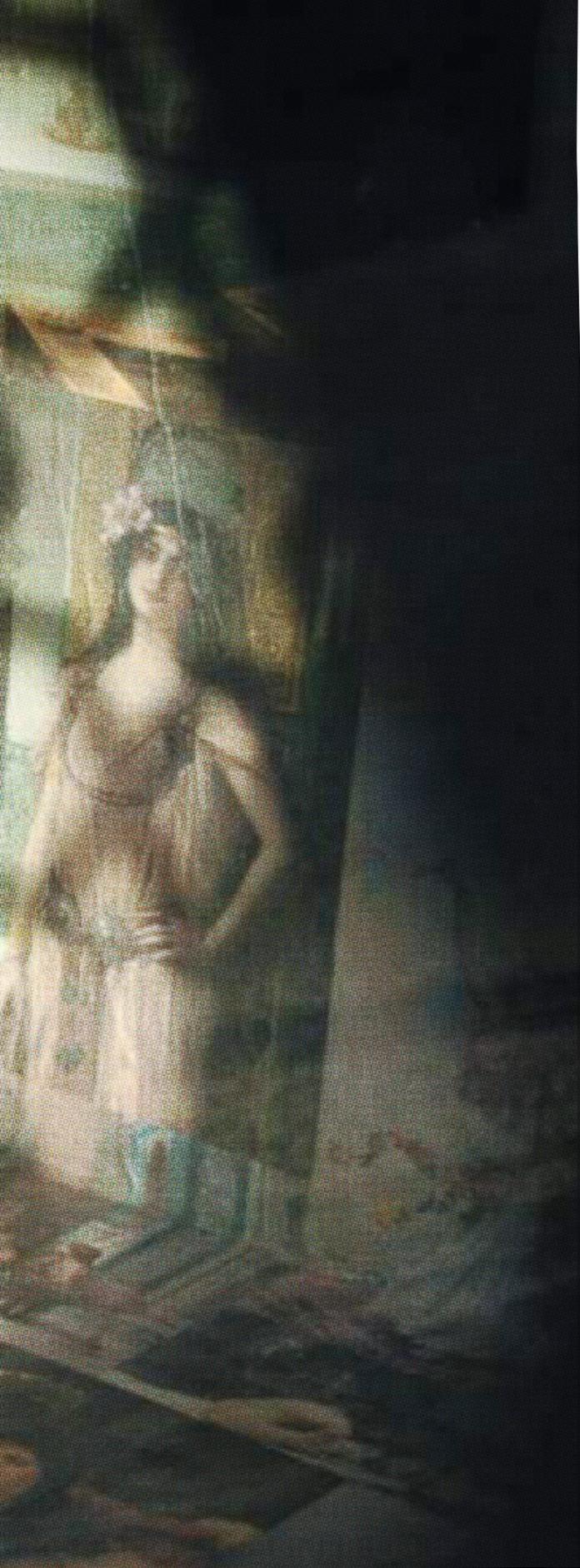
*Where the colonizer undresses her, the native's nakedness stares back at him both as the defiled image of his creation and as the indifferent gaze that says, "there was nothing, no secret to be unveiled underneath my clothes, that secret is your phantasm."*

MITRA FAKHRASHRAFI

Rey Chow, 2004







The mashrabiya is an ornate latticework screen traditionally found in homes and courtyards. Informally translated as “Harem Window”, the mashrabiya circulated fresh air, filtered sunlight, and acted as a kind of ‘architectural veil’ wherein women and families could gather and “see, without being seen”<sup>1</sup>. In *Façade through the Façade*, a site-specific installation that expands on Leila Fatemi’s ongoing series, *Disorienting Orientalism*, the vinyl mashrabiya frames the viewer’s access to a seemingly unending collection of Orientalist fantasy paintings assembled behind the window. Making the viewer complicit in an apparent invasion of privacy<sup>2</sup>, what Fatemi reveals and conceals is not incidental. Merging Orientalist harem fictions with Islamic architecture, the work creates a voyeuristic environment where the viewer is invited to challenge their reading of the scenes behind the screen.

In describing the conception of ‘Orientalism’, or the ways the native ‘Other’ is represented as backwards, dangerous, and in extension, conquerable, Edward Said reflects on an unbridgeable divide between the experience of being an Arab and the artistic representations of Arabness.<sup>3</sup> In stark contrast to Said’s ‘Orientalism’ and devoid of near any critical engagement with power, ‘the Orientalist painting’ is a term used to categorize 19<sup>th</sup> century European artistic depictions of the ‘East.’ Commonly associated with the Harem, the Orientalist painter portrayed a world of exoticism, of seduction, of excess, of unfettered masculine power, and notably, of his fantasy. While some European artists at the time chose to distance themselves →

1 Susan Hefuna, *Woman Behind Mashrabiya I* artist statement, 2004.

2 Ibid.

3 Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. London: Vintage Books, 1997.



from institutions, the Orientalist painter was most often state-sanctioned; funded to be the ambassador of Western rationality and actively participating in ‘race science’ (see also: scientific racism) ethnography.

Peering through the sacred geometric patterned mashrabiya, the super-realism of each painting is in plain view. Drawing from Said who observed that “Orientalism has always rested on the premise that the West knows more about **the Orient than the Orient knows about itself**”<sup>4</sup>, Rana Kabbani suggests this high finish and meticulous detail articulated a desire to convey “truthful”, “rational” and even archival images of the ‘East.’ Although many Orientalist painters had never set foot in Algeria, Egypt, or any of the other places they depicted (often drawing from letters or other literary representations), the Orientalist painting was generally engaged with similar to the documentary photograph; encouraging the spectator to view the artworks as having **“caught the Orient, exactly as it was.”**<sup>5</sup>

Troubling the entanglement of Orientalist artistry and ethnography, Fatemi’s collection of repetitive and sometimes almost indistinguishable ‘Eastern women’ in highly sexualized and compromising manners renders the works to appear frozen in formula and fetish. Despite some variations in technique, the paintings assembled behind the window bleed and blur into each other, distorting the realism and forcing the viewer to question their own gaze as

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4 Edward Said, “Imperial Pursuits: Orientalism – 25 years on”, *The Guardian*, August 2, 2003.

5 Rana Kabbani, “Regarding Orientalist Painting Today”, *The lure of the East : British orientalist painting*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

they absorb works borne from colonial fantasy. Challenging “the stories that settler states tell about themselves”<sup>6</sup> and the ‘Other’, Fatemi refuses to present the Orientalist paintings as ethnographic. Fatemi also spares no time ‘reclaiming’ the images or ‘rewriting’ more accurate representations of the Muslim women. Instead, she turns our vision inward, thinking through the intimate relationship between seeing and knowing or, more specifically, between Orientalist visual culture, the white gaze, and colonial knowledge production.

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*The colonial attitude... is characterized by a drive to see, to traverse, to know, to translate (to make equivalent), to own, and to exploit. It is based on the belief that everything should be accessible [and] is ultimately a potential commodity or resource.”*

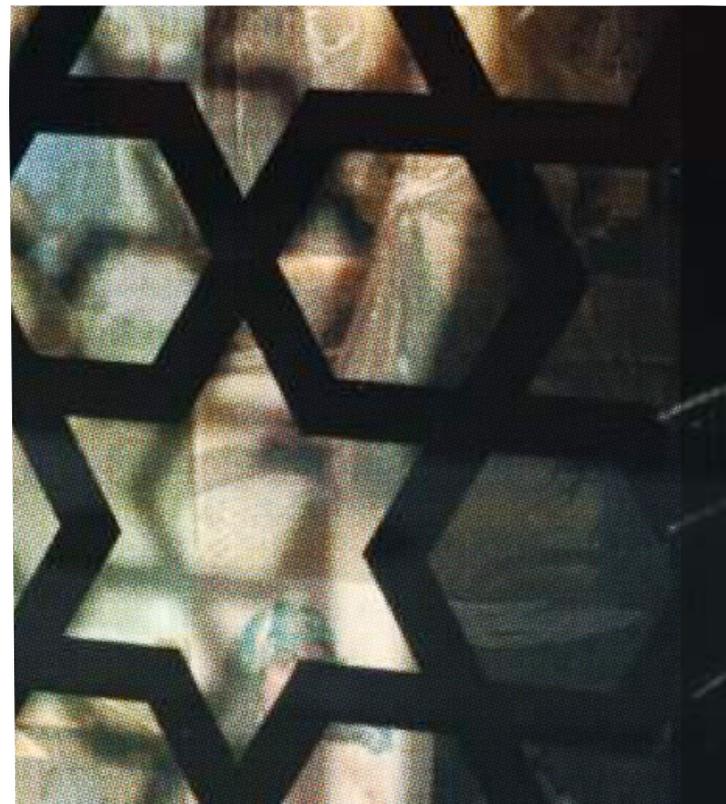
David Garneau, 2012, 29

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From race science ethnography that categorizes the white European as ‘rational’ while disavowing all other, coexisting modes of being to imperial borders that, first and foremost, cross communities without consent and with impunity, colonialism and its Orientalist offshoots are nothing if not a form of spatial management. Determining, by force, who is in or out of place, the colonial project ultimately attempts (but never succeeds) to deterritorialize Indigenous peoples materially and symbolically. Indeed, in the words of Sylvia Wynter, the distinction →

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<sup>6</sup> Audra Simpson, *Savage States: Settler Governance in an Age of Sor-*  
*row*, presentation, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, 2018.



between 'rational' and 'irrational' or 'backwards' is always intertwined with the theory of sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> To this point, in describing the limits of what an archive can do (namely, function as the state's cataloguing via the 'violence of fact' i.e. scientific racism which developed in tandem with colonial expansion), Mandeeg Mohammad insists on the importance of looking to silences, gaps, and ethnographic refusals as a point of departure for thinking through Blackness in the archive.<sup>8</sup>

Guided by Mohammad, reading for the gaps and fictions that abound in Orientalist paintings is equally important in disorienting their meanings. By example, Adrienne L. Childs observes that some of the most notable omissions depicted in Orientalist paintings are relating to the Black women and men depicted: "the Oriental fantasy" served to divert immediate relationships such as North African domestic enslavement, Trans-Atlantic enslavement and the plantation economy "to a largely ornamental... fictitious setting."<sup>9</sup> Signalling to arts as a project for naturalizing enslavement, for Childs, what goes unsaid or unseen in a painting allows for expansive understandings of colonial encounters and attempts to conceal them.

Likewise, in depicting the 'Eastern' woman as hypersexualized and highly submissive, the Orientalist painting produced a "pictorial catalogue of the 'goods of empire'"<sup>10</sup>, emptied of politics. More specifically, 19<sup>th</sup> century

French and British colonialism were marked by strikes, riots, rebellions, blockades, impoverishment, famine, hangings and massacres – resistance movements Muslim women were a part of and organized violence's they were distinctly impacted by. Ignoring "historical witnessses of women's agency"<sup>11</sup>, the omissions of the Orientalist painting not only reveal the disconnect between the European painter and his subjects but also place him in direct relation to the "rough designs of Empire."<sup>12</sup>

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If pictures, paintings and different kinds of representations are often weapons to exert violence... the image is implicitly the place where battles are fought and strategies of resistance renegotiated."

In contrast to the human figures that mark each Orientalist painting, Fatemi's geometric patterned mashrabiya is an ode to the infinite. Framed and obstructed by sacred geometry, the paintings assembled behind the window function differently – and even in opposition to – their historical references. Toying with the untruths depicted in the archive of Orientalist paintings, *Façade through the Façade* asks for us to consider what old and new insidious colonial strategies and mediums continue to function as 'rational', 'universal', and 'natural'. Laws determining Muslim women's dress. Passports as markers of 'legality' and 'illegality'. And so on.

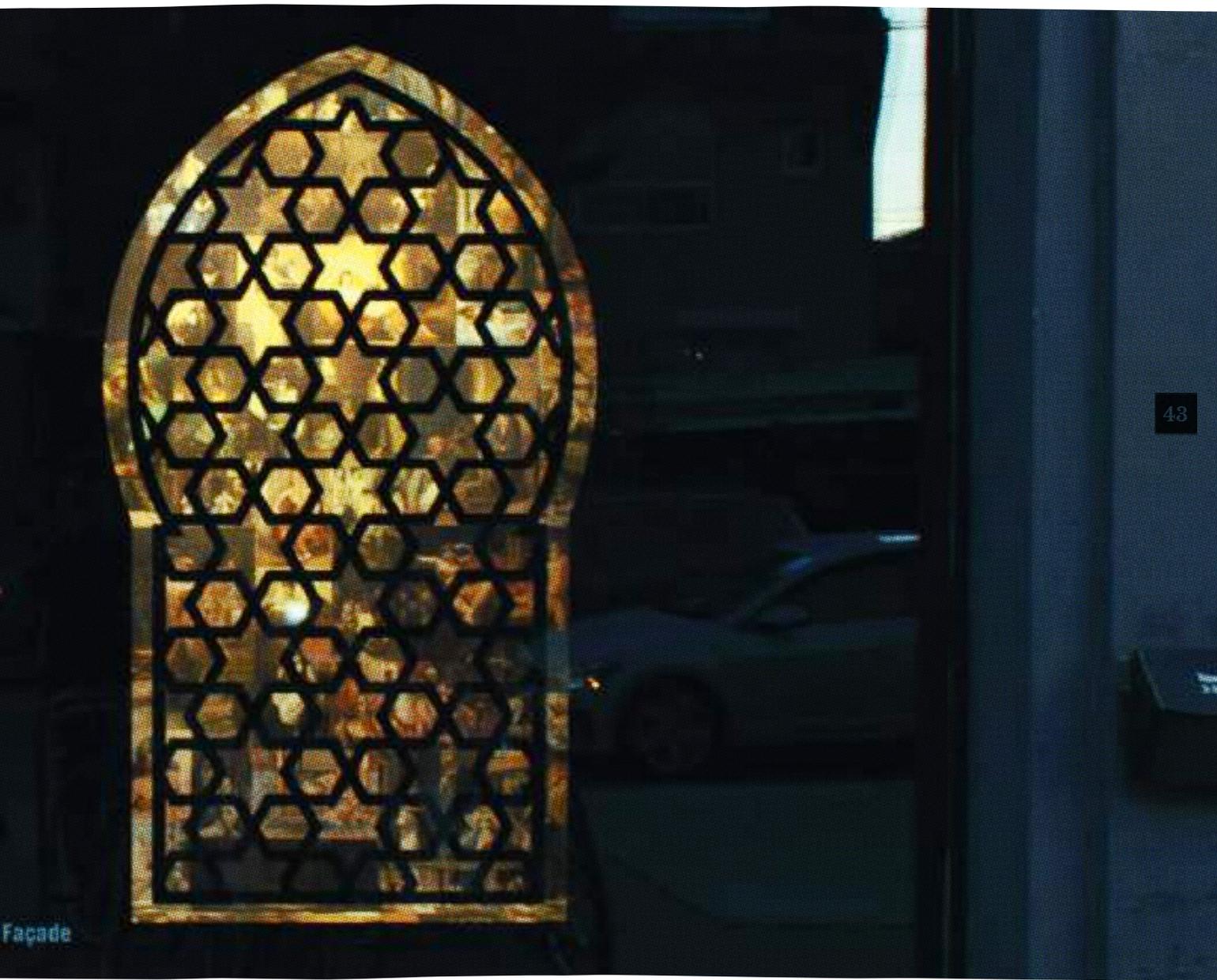
7 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument", *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3, 2003.

8 Mandeeg Mohammad, "Somehow I Found You: On Black Archival Practices", *C Magazine*, Issue 137, Spring 2018.

9 Adrienne L. Childs, "The Black Exotic: Tradition and ethnography in nineteenth-century Orientalist art", Phd diss., University of Maryland, 2005.

10 Rana Kabbani, "Regarding Orientalist Painting Today", 41.

Anchored by reflections on what an archive can or cannot do, through disruption and disordering, Fatemi looks to the gaps, the abstractions, and, of course, the outward fallacies – disallowing the white gaze, and, by extension, Empire.



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11 Fatema Mernissi, “Seduced by ‘Samar, or: how British Orientalist painters learned to stop worrying and love the darkness,” *The lure of the East : British orientalist painting*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

12 Ibid.

xpace cultural centre '20-'21



LEILA FATEMI, FAÇADE THROUGH THE FAÇADE, 2020.



# YÉDII KWÉ

LAURA GRIER

ESSAY BY





How does a stone think? Is it aware of its own weight in our hand, or blissfully ignorant when we drop it and it thumps against our feet? How might we be able to speak to it, teach it, share with it, and how might it teach us back? If a stone can feel, can it hold onto that feeling? Remember it. Keep it for years and years and years and years, until it becomes sand and the memory is scattered across a beach or caught in the lines of our feet as we attempt to brush it off in a car.

Investigating the stone, or *Kwə*, as Dene artist Laura Grier names it, is part of her lithography print practice. Locating the inherent knowledge deep in the lines and smooth grooves of *Kwə* and exploring how this relationship between girl and stone might bring out Grier's own inherent knowledge. The deep spiritual understanding she, as a Dene woman, has carried since birth and from before she entered this side.

“One day,” Grier writes, “while graining in the studio, I found myself wanting to talk with stone (*Kwə*) and tell them all about my experiences in love, heartache, sexuality, depression, of my tireless pursuit to research my Inherent Dene spirituality and teachings. Finally, *Kwə* just said, “show me.””<sup>1</sup>

*Yǝdǝ Kwǝ* is a collaborative series of eight stone lithography prints, dances, and conversations between *Kwǝ* and Grier, captured on thick cut paper with accompanying poetry as well as three handmade lithography fans. The series uncovers Grier's own investigations towards a new form of printmaking she calls *Yǝdǝ* (Spiritual Being) *Kwǝ* (Stone) which centers her inherent Sahtu Dene understandings of Spirit, navigating process and ceremony to create a new syntactic language which can only be truly understood by other Indigenous printmakers.

This syntactic language is the markings of Dene spirituality and dreams, the transcript of Grier's personal process of understanding herself as an artist and as an Indigenous person. "They [the prints] are all different themes of the current reality I'm living with. My sexuality, learning about my Indigenous spirituality, and having dreams. All this colliding with depression and displacement."<sup>2</sup>

Lithography is a process of printmaking involving the immiscibility of oil and water and a flat stone, images are worked using an oil substance that ink adheres to while repelled against the non-worked areas. Described by Grier, "When I draw on the stone it holds the memory of the drawing so I can then ink it up."<sup>3</sup>

In Grier's practice of printmaking *Kwǝ* must remember. Must hold onto their intimate conversations through the process of etching. The stone then exists as transcriber; as diary, as equal partner in the conversation.

Examining the methodologies behind Grier's practice of enacting an Indigenous understanding of relationality with *Kwǝ* allows us to interpret the stories behind each object, each print, and each movement. Accompanying Grier's prints are '*Kwǝ* Lithography fans' and her own brush, which Grier understands as ceremonial tools. These tools allow her to create her work and go through a process of deep therapeutic conversations in the process. She has also written short pieces, lifted from these conversations with *Kwǝ*, that locate her work and where she was during the process.

Grier uses unconventional materials for her prints including cheezies turned into powder and placed on her lips and crushed up antidepressant pills. The prints are all accompanied by poems written by Grier that function to narrate the collection as well as exist as a time capsule of her process with *Kwǝ*. *Kwǝ* remembers their conversations, the poems hold their words. →

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<sup>2</sup> Emma Steen in conversation with Laura Grier, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



K'enetlA Ft.Cheezies (lip print)

*Touch me.*

*Her heart is hurt, his heart is  
absent*

*My mind is in the wild  
alone*

*Dajchu sine*

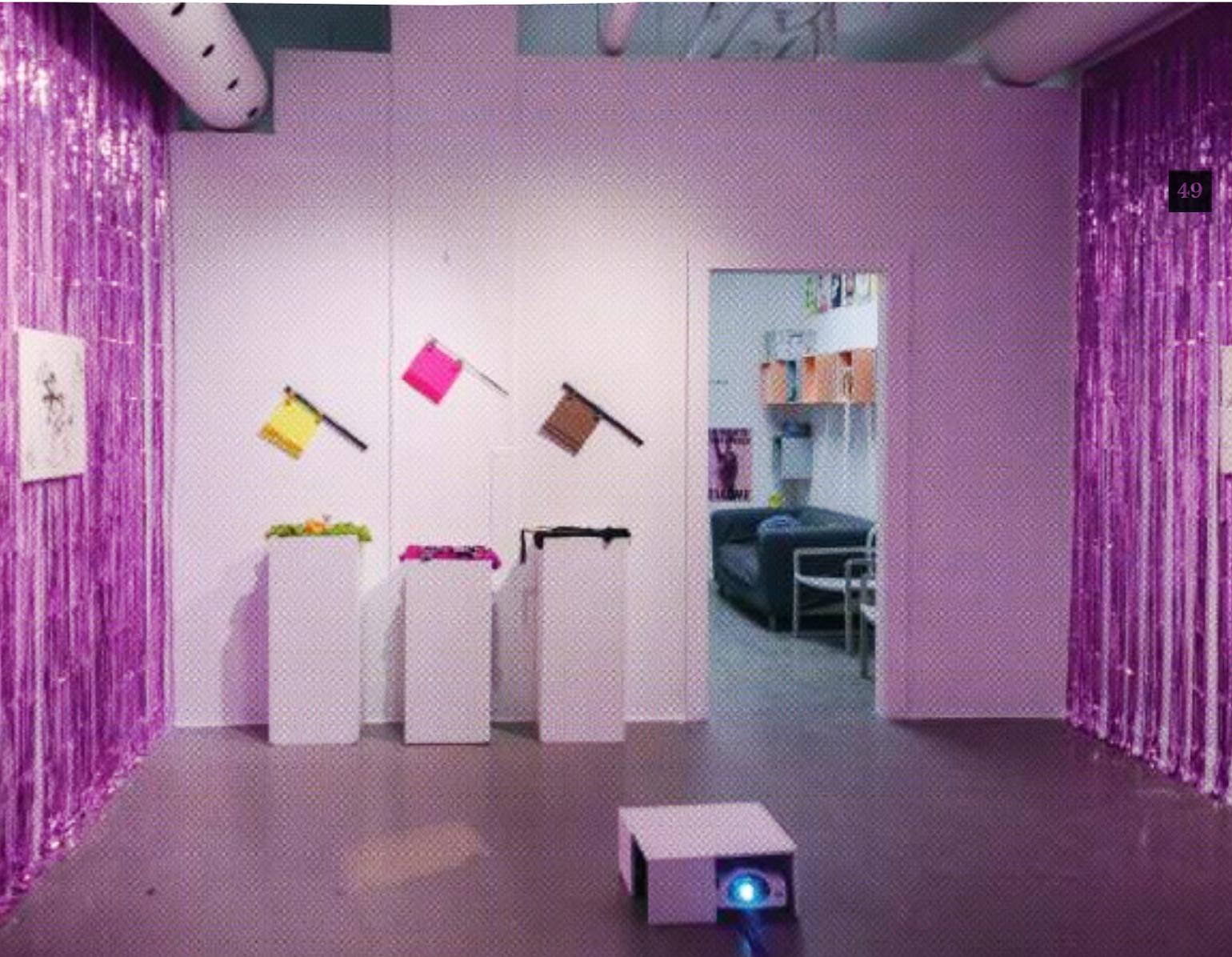
*Bedzie'eya, Bedie'hule*

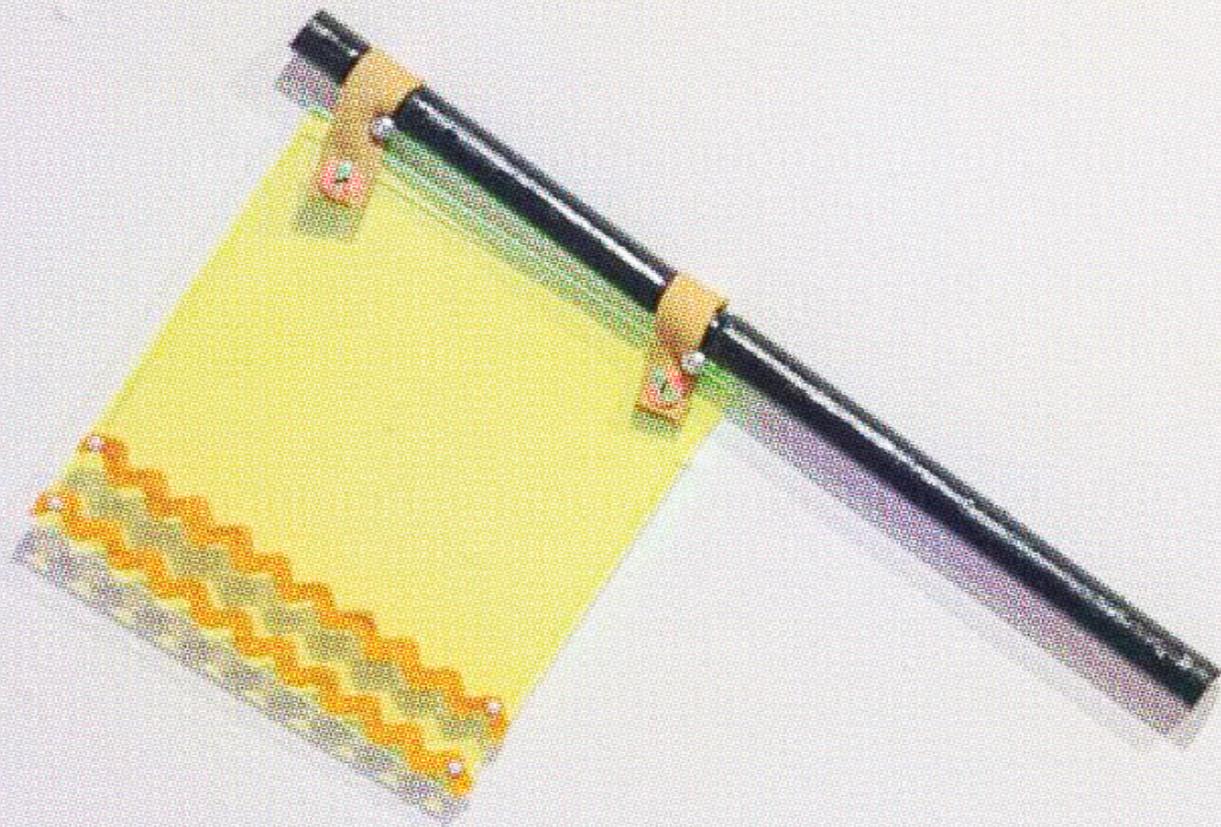
*ânihižá*

*Gowhane*

*segha*

*K'enetlA*





LAURA GRIER, 'INSTALLATION VIEW FROM YƏDII KWƏ', 2020.

Grier's poetry is deeply personal and speaks to an intimacy developed over time with *Kwə*. As shared by Grier, "I can tell my friends so much, but I can tell the stone more." Bearing witness to the prints and poems feels like an honour, a vulnerable glimpse inside Grier's process towards understanding herself better. Her indigeneity, her inherent spirituality, and the knowledge she holds *somewhere* deep within her that she works tirelessly to regain.

*Yədı́ Kwə* highlights the processes which surround printmaking, and explore Grier's medium as a method towards ceremony, healing, and Indigeneity. Grier emphasizes relationality between maker and material in her collection seeing them as bonded together, stating "It is within these relationships that I want to reveal the story of Dene Spirit Printmaking and *Yədı́ Kwə*."<sup>4</sup>

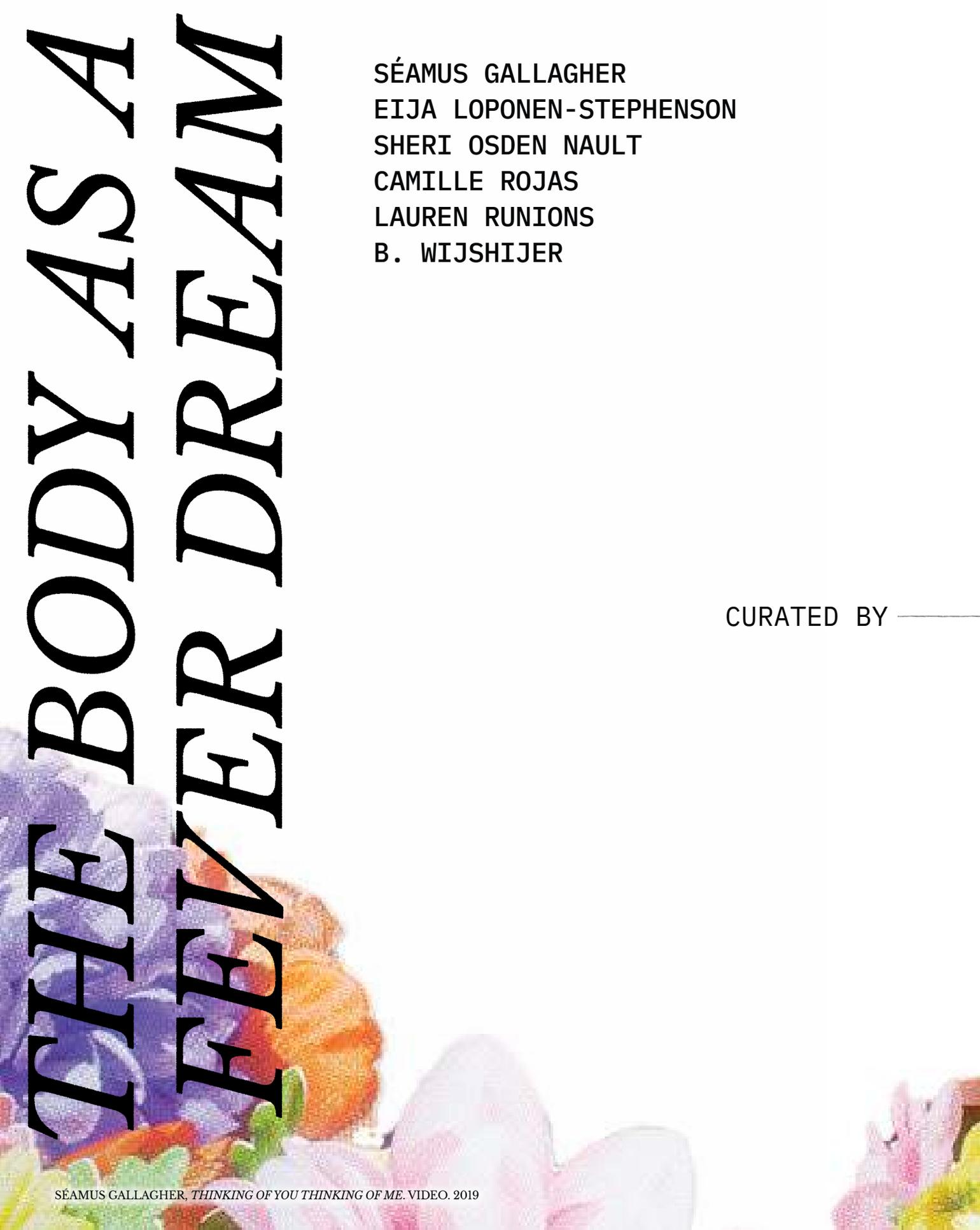
Grier's *Yədı́ Kwə*, the prints, fans, and words together all tell an Indigenous story on relationality. The process of creation goes beyond just that of a standard print, and connects with a deeper understanding of Dene personhood and Grier's own identity as artist and storyteller. The story of *Yədı́ Kwə* is one of process, of healing and of memory. *Kwə* holds the memory of the long conversations they had with Grier. Grier's poetry, prints and tools enact ceremony and honour the memory of those conversations with *Kwə*. "It is a story of the process of the print, the tools of the print, and together they create *Indigenous Spirit Printmaking*."<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> 'Artist Statement,' Laura Grier for Xspace Cultural Centre. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



# THE BODY AS A FEVER DREAM

SÉAMUS GALLAGHER  
EIJA LOPONEN-STEPHENSON  
SHERI OSDEN NAULT  
CAMILLE ROJAS  
LAUREN RUNIONS  
B. WIJSHIJER

CURATED BY \_\_\_\_\_

ESSAY BY

DALLAS FELLINI

“I’ve done women’s suits before,” he says in a thick, ambiguous European accent. “For women police officers I did a nice women’s suit pant. For uniform.”

I’m no woman police officer.

The fabric swallows me. He’s rolling up and pinning my pant legs, my sleeves, taking in the suit jacket at the back. Marking it with white chalk. There are a lot of white markings.

“Can you leave the shoulders, please. I like the wider cut on the shoulders.”

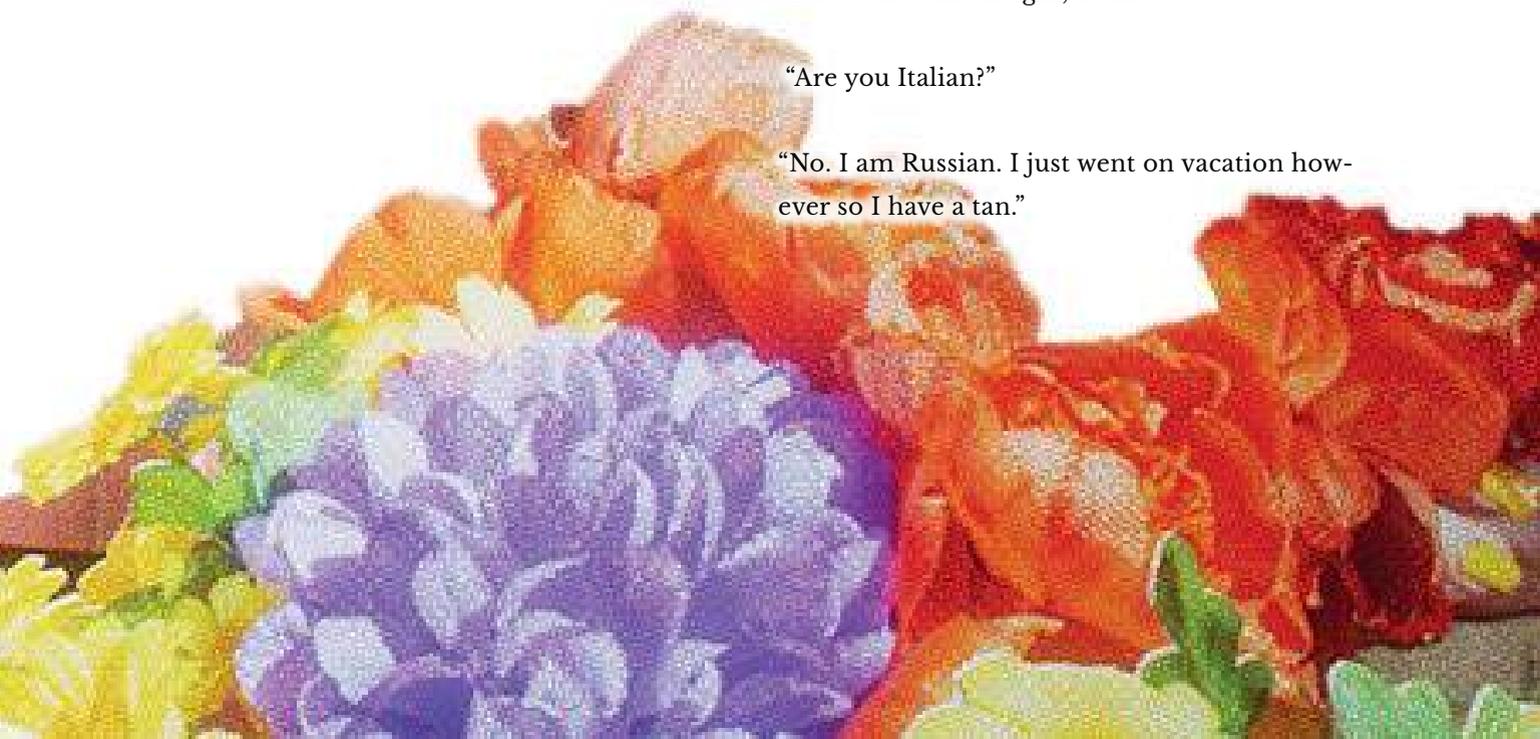
“Yes, it’s okay like this, it’s better with the shoulders smaller but I’ll do it like this.”

The whole store smells uncomfortably of fish. The neighboring shop in the market sells seafood.

“It’s good to keep the pants longer. For short men – and for women – like me and you it’s good to keep the pants longer.” Me and him are almost the same height, he must be 5’5” or 5’6”.

“Are you Italian?”

“No. I am Russian. I just went on vacation however so I have a tan.”



There are moments where we have felt ourselves disappear. Times where the monotony of existing weighs too heavily on us, fracturing our experiences of ourselves and moving us to exist in the inbetween. *the body as a fever dream* inquires into these moments: the moments when we can't feel our breath, when our physicality enters a limbo state between presence and absence. How can we be sure that we exist?

As a trans non-binary person, my experience of my body is characterized by fluctuations of comfort, understanding, and presence. These shifts materialize in public and in private, in sickness, in medicine. They materialize as I stand statue-still, getting fitted inside the men's suit shop. These are experiences shared by marginalized people across different identities, their presence in their bodies undone by external forces that render them alien, endangered, invisible or hyper-visible. We are left to navigate the space between feeling dispossessed by our bodies, or inversely feeling triumphant. Within my trans body, the specifics of how and when my body is understood are difficult to maneuver and leave me with questions about the ebb and flow of corporal presence.

When are our bodies politicized? When are they policed? How does my body exist as I get my garment tailored at the men's suit shop? How does my body exist when I sit in the sauna at the women's spa? How does my body exist when I (hypothetically) fuck my girlfriend at the Spa at the Four Seasons? When I refill my prescription? How does my body exist when my vocal cords thicken? When my slacks can no

longer fit over the growing musculature of my thighs? When my form shifts? How is my body present as I compress it, as I will it to disappear?

The works in this exhibition confront the contradiction and duality of a bodily presence/absence. A digital dance performance ties this phenomenon to broader conventions of how the bodies of performers take form in gallery settings and how meaning is made in their absence. Positioned in a visual dialogue with the artworks in the exhibition, the performers activate and un-inhabit, care for and then abandon these works, leaving behind an environment that is just as characterized by the traces of presence as it is by the heaviness of absence.

### In situ

Eija Loponen-Stephenson's *Net Interface* hangs nearly from floor to ceiling, and spills out onto the gallery floor. The tarp-like device is made from privacy netting, a material often used to block off demolition and construction sites from the public. This tarp is supported by a scaffolding-like structure, secured in place by buckets filled with broken-up asphalt, recalling the sites for which this material is intended. Loponen-Stephenson understands privacy netting as a material that not only enacts a role as a physical divide between the public and sites we are not intended to access, but also as a visual barrier, keeping us from what we are not intended to see. Loponen-Stephenson imagines the rubble that exists beyond these barriers as being unsettling to a hypothetical viewer, undoing their understandings of architectural

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<sup>1</sup> Loponen-Stephenson, Eija, in conversation with the author, September 22, 2020.

forms as unfluid, as they watch kitchen sinks and cabinetry intermingle with demolished external facades.<sup>1</sup> This material amalgamation is further complicated when human bodies are integrated. Extending from the surface of Loponen-Stephenson's textile are four gloves, cut from the same green mesh cloth, which invite subjects to touch and insert themselves into the work. Inside the gallery, the net forges itself into curtains and a rug, shapeshifting to embody indoor furnishings rather than demolished exteriors. Wheatpasted images dispersed around the space document a performance that Loponen-Stephenson facilitated in 2019, in which *Net Interface* was unfolded over a demolition site in Kensington Market, an area in Toronto that has fallen victim to severe gentrification.<sup>2</sup> In Loponen-Stephenson's images, five human bodies intermingle with the rubble underneath the netting, their presences unannounced except through the raising of gloved arms, or the vague shape of a head protruding from a sea of forest green. Loponen-Stephenson's device presents the potentiality for a body, a body that may be crawling through scaffolding and steel beams or that may only exist as a hallucination of flesh.

In Sheri Osden Nault's work *Hold*, a discarded log sits upright in the space, its bark corroded by insects. Plaster hands seep out of the log, as if seeking to fill the inverse vacancies of Loponen-Stephenson's gloves in *Net Interface*. As Loponen-Stephenson's hands reach out, Osden Nault's reach in, seemingly offering a material presence to the empty gloves that hang flaccidly from Loponen-Stephenson's tarp. Accom-

panying *Hold*, are a range of other bodily works by Nault: *Sovereign Bodies 01* – a tree branch adorned with a fringe of straight, black human hair – and *Mimic, Lake Ontario* – a series of small plaster-cast body parts resembling stones, that are scattered throughout the space. These works explore the possibilities of an intimate symbiosis between human bodies and nature. Nault's positioning of the human as inseparable from the non-human is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. Their works create a queer landscape where the body remains in a state of indeterminateness, ungendered and unracialized. The plaster-cast fragments document Nault's own body over the course of two years. They distort and camouflage the body, speaking to trans practices of reimagining and reconstructing, depressing what was convex, swelling flesh to create a materiality in a place where it was previously absent.

As much as they speak to a physical absence, Nault's bodies speak to a historical (and on-going) absence: the colonial forced relocation of Indigenous people in Canada. Nault, who is Métis, is the first of their family in over

150 years to live as far east as Toronto – a milestone foregrounded by decades of their ancestors' westward dislocation.<sup>3</sup> Nault's plaster cast body parts are molded as imitations of stones found at the shores of Lake Ontario, and sit among these stones atop pools of Lake Ontario sand, allowing for a sly reinsertion of their body back into a landscape from which it has been systematically removed. Elbows, lips, nipples, hands masquerade themselves in white plas- →

<sup>2</sup> Beaton, Bruce. "Kensington Market." The Canadian Encyclopedia. August 14, 2017. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/kensington-market>.

<sup>3</sup> Nault, Sheri Osden, in conversation with the author, September 22, 2020.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP-LEFT: *THE BODY AS A FEVER DREAM*, 2020. INSTALLATION VIEW. WORK BY EIJA LOPONEN-STEPHENSON & SHERI OSDEN NAULT IN VIEW.

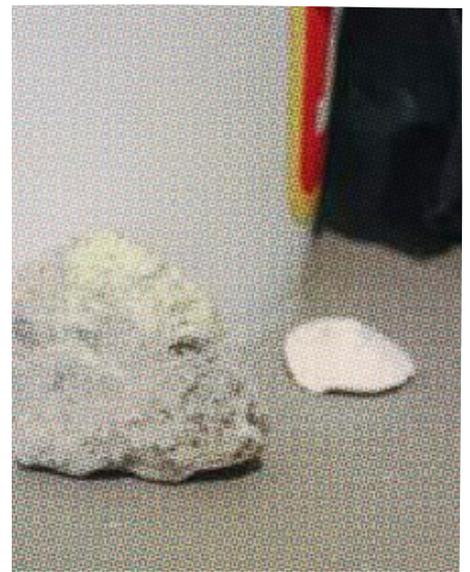
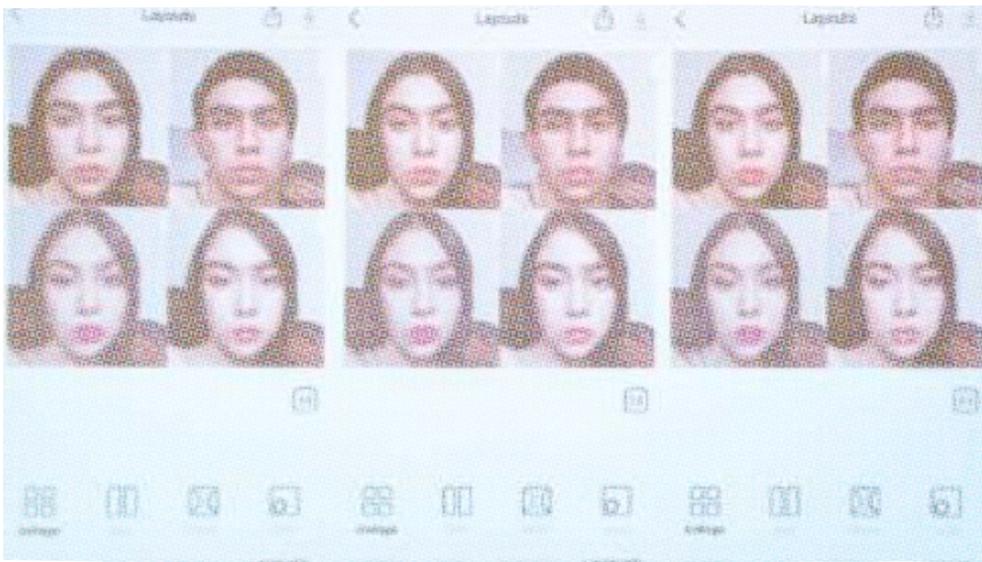
B WIJSHIJER, *HOW TO EDIT YOUR SELFIES*. VIDEO. 2019

SHERI OSDEN NAULT, *MIMIC*, LAKE ONTARIO. ONGOING WORK CONSISTING OF MULTIPLE PIECES. PLASTER. 2018 TO PRESENT.

SHERI OSDEN NAULT, *SOVEREIGN BODIES 01*. FOUND WOOD, HUMAN HAIR, EPOXY, NYLON ROPE. 2018

SHERI OSDEN NAULT, *HOLD*. LOG, PLASTER, ACRYLIC MEDIUM, EPOXY RESIN. 2017

EIJA LOPONEN-STEPHENSON, *NET INTERFACE* (PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION, IMAGES BY MIKE GONTMAKHER). WHEATPASTED PRINTS. 2019



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ter, becoming yet another stone on the shore. This work brings to mind early settler-colonial landscape paintings of so-called-Canada, which depicted the land as desolate, as a vast uninhabited wilderness ready to be seized through **white manifest destiny colonialism**.<sup>4</sup> Sheri Osden Nault allows their body presence in a way that upsets this violent colonial myth.

Séamus Gallagher similarly presents the body through processes of imitation. Their video work *THINKING OF YOU THINKING OF ME* likens drag performance and experiences of **passing and not passing**<sup>5</sup> to mimicry in nature: “species that mimic other life forms for protection,” as Gallagher describes the phenomenon in their video. They perform this work as their drag persona Sara Tonin, appearing in a 3D-rendered paper mask that comprises Sara’s wig and face, as well as the heads of two balding male suitors who pucker their lips and kiss each of her heavily-blushed cheeks. Séamus Gallagher is a non-binary artist, but Sara is a womanly woman. She enters onto a stage through a pair of shower curtains, their synthetic surface printed with an image of a much more luxurious, velvet curtain. A sequined Jessica Rabbit dress hangs off of Sara’s paper tits, which are simulated using the same 3D-modelling technology that forged her paper face, fragmented into hundreds of interlocking triangles. The way that she holds herself, the way that she poses – angling her head on a slight diagonal and drawing her hands up to her hips with sultry grace – exudes femininity. She offers a few transgressions in her highly gendered performance: hair appears under

armpits, stubble peaks out from under her mask. Gallagher assures us that these transgressions do not equate a failure but rather an intentional assertion. “I am a sight for sore eyes. A site for bewilderment. A lovely sight, have a **real good look**.”<sup>6</sup> Gallagher allows themselves to take joy in moments that are often dangerous, moments where the cis-gaze identifies you as other, where it rejects your body. They reframe these as moments where the queer body is embraced as uncategorical, where it refuses the preset classifications that allow it to be understood by the cis-gaze, rejecting a confining corporal presence.

In B Wijshijer’s video work *How to Edit Your Selfies*, they swipe through a myriad of filters on the facial modification mobile application FaceApp, each filter represented by a different icon: a white person wearing Makeup, a white person with a Smile, a white person wearing Glasses, a white person who is Old, a white person who is Male, a white person who is Female. Wijshijer layers the “Male,” “Female,” and “Female 2” filters over their selfie until their image is unrecognizable, disguised under layers of deepened facial creases or sanded down entirely to resemble a 2D caricature of a “woman.” Their skin becomes concrete, their eyes glass, their body a glitch. In masculinizing and feminizing Wijshijer’s face, the software jumps back and forth between different skin tones and racializations, revealing that their identity as a mixed-race non-binary person is unlocatable to the algorithm, and suggesting an absence of diverse facial data within its training. This digital absence renders them as unreadable,

4 Nakamura, Naohira. “The Representation of First Nations Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario.” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 45-46 (2012): 420.

5 Passing is a term used within trans communities to describe being per-

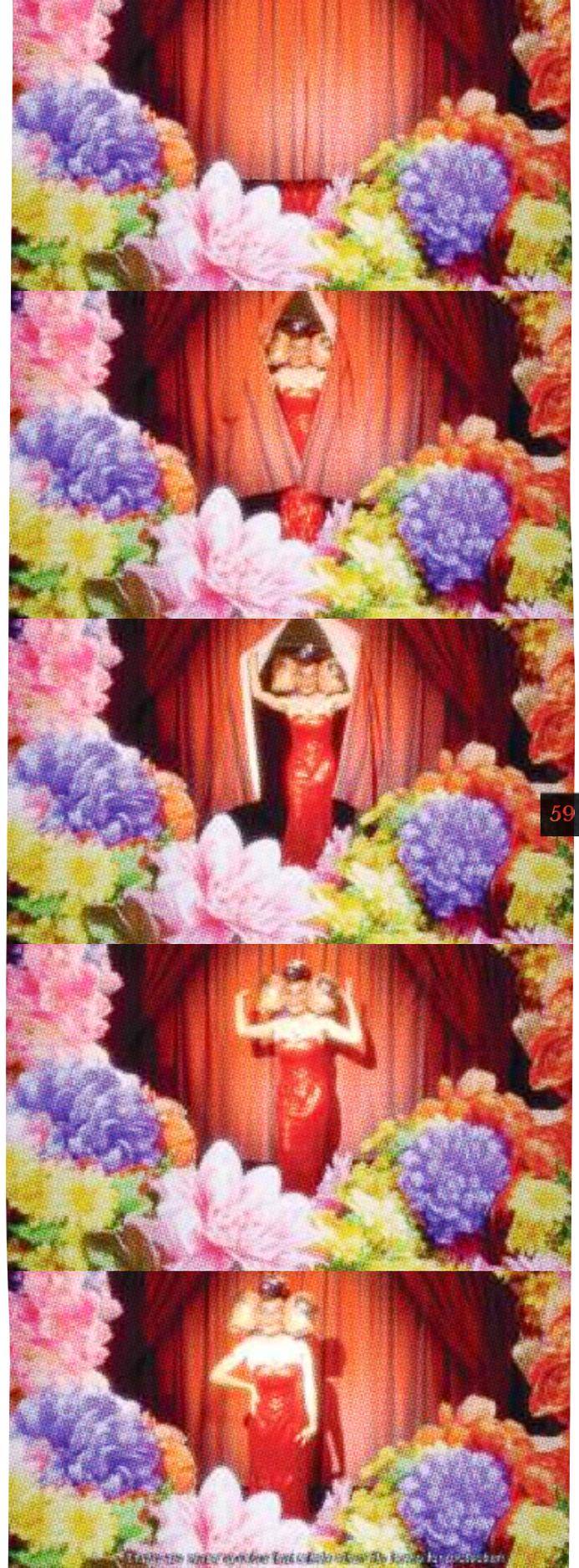
ceived as cisgender by cisgender people, rather than as the gender one was assigned at birth. If I were to use it in a sentence, I might say “I never thought that I passed at all until a beefcake daddy gay mistook me for a twink and started hitting on me at work.”

and their body disappears under the algorithm's inability to accurately categorize it. At the end of the video, Wijshijer scrolls through hundreds of saved images of their digitally altered face, some of them representing what the software understands as embodying hyperfemininity, and others hypermasculinity. An army of monstrous faces stare back: mutations derived from the app's own gender-normative and highly binarized software. Wijshijer turns these softwares inside out, exposing their guts and using the fabric built by cis perceptions of gender to instead unravel these perceptions.

### Through fever dreams and rage blackouts

In an exhibition about the big, academicized term *the body*, how do real, visceral, experiences of the body actually take form within the space? How do we make meaning about bodily presence in a moment when bodies are being increasingly policed, when physical connection to other bodies is scarce and source of our collective anxiety?

On Monday October 12, 2020, a performance is hosted in the gallery space. No one is in attendance – in fact, the gallery is closed to the public for the colonial celebration of Canadian Thanksgiving, or, more accurately, simply in correspondence with Canadian statutory holiday laws. Two performers, Camille Rojas and Lauren Runions, enact an improvisational dance performance in the space, positioning their bodies in conversation with the exhibited works. The performance is documented through video, and eventually shared digitally →



xpace cultural centre '20-'21



However, t  
clumsily



the world is still full of imperfect mimics,  
adopting traits of others for security.

through Xspace's website and online platforms. In the transitional period between this performance existing as a private encounter and a public one, traces of past actions stand in for the bodies that executed them: foot and hand prints are pressed into the sand on the gallery floor, objects are shifted, the details of how they moved from one place to another temporarily obscured.

This calculated absence operates in contrast to the expectations of hyper-presence in contemporary dance performances in gallery settings. Claire Bishop – a thinker who I periodically returned to while reformatting this exhibition to operate in alignment with Covid-19 guidelines – compares this hyper-presence to the webpage in her text “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention.”<sup>7</sup> Bishop characterizes the contemporary dance exhibition as a site for audience distractedness, extended temporalization, and the omnipresence of technology, likening it to “the multiple temporalities of the webpage” with the “refresh rate of headlines, stories, videos, ads, banners, pop-ups.”<sup>8</sup> What is lost when we cannot gather in the gallery to witness dance performance? And what is gained? A technological omnipresence is fundamental in this moment; it is how we go to work and kiss our loved ones and attend openings at the gallery. It is also how we extend temporal access to all of these things, for better or for worse. A digital performance might produce a more present viewer, undistracted by daily operations within the gallery, but it also condenses the viewing experience into the same visual plane that everything else in our lives is now situated within.

Consume this performance from your work-from-home laptop, surfing between tabs for online shopping, public health stats, tabs for grant applications and mutual aid.

Consume this performance distractedly as it is the only way we can engage anything right now.

Consume this performance while committing time theft. Consume this performance in the middle of the night.

Consume this performance on a statutory holiday.

Consume this performance while thinking of a lover, watch arms pour into gloves and hands cleave to body parts in a way that feels foreign. Memorialize bodily closeness.

Camille Rojas and Lauren Runions position themselves in the deserted gallery space, enacting movements that are pedestrian and gestures that are characterized by care. They are six feet apart. Acting as companions to the works in the gallery, they slip their limbs into Eija Lojonen-Stephenson's *Net Interface*, imbuing a presence into a space where absence used to reign. Here, in the gallery, this device can no longer join human bodies and rubble, but instead amalgamates the bodies of the dancers with the gallery space itself. Rojas and Runions turn to participate with *Mimic, Lake Ontario*, picking up Sheri Osden Nault's plaster body parts and letting them inform their movements. While they answer to the works they also answer to each other, reacting intuitively to the

7 Bishop, Claire. “Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention.” TDR: The Drama Review 62, no. 2 (2018).

8 Ibid, 34.

9 Nault, Sheri Osden, in conversation with the author, September 2<sup>7</sup><sup>th</sup>, 2020.



*QUARTET WITH "NET INTERFACE" & "MIMIC, LAKE ONTARIO", PERFORMED BY CAMILLE ROJAS & LAUREN RUNIONS AT XSPACE CULTURAL CENTRE. WORK BY SHERI OSDEN NAULT & EIJA LOPPONEN-STEPHENSON. 2020.*

rhythms and gestures that each of them put forward. Stone-like body parts are lifted from the bed of sand they rested on and are pressed against human flesh: hands, hips, shoulders, in a series of actions that “fragment the body without it feeling like a violent gesture.”<sup>9</sup> Their performance is informed by co-creation and mirrors the desire for a convergence of human and nonhuman bodies manifested in the work of Lopenen-Stephenson and Nault.

After the performance is over, a pronounced absence hangs over the works. Shadows of Rojas’ and Runions’ bodies are left in the sand, chalk outlines evidencing moments of intimacy.

The mesh netting that had acted as an apparatus to connect bodies hangs limp, already forgetting the just-passed moments where its arms lifted and its hands formed gestures. Perhaps it was just a dream.



# HANBOK

# /한복

ENNA KIM

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



“How do you describe in-between-ness?”

Between any two or more items, there is an in-between: a boundary separating a person and another, or more abstract divides such as generations, languages, identities, or spaces. Rather than naming a specific location or object, the in-between is instead the gap whose defining requires the things around it. Set over a steady rhythm featuring traditional Korean instruments, *HANBOK*/한복 – a video work by Enna Kim – straddles digital animation, textile, dance and projection installation to place and disrupt this transient space.

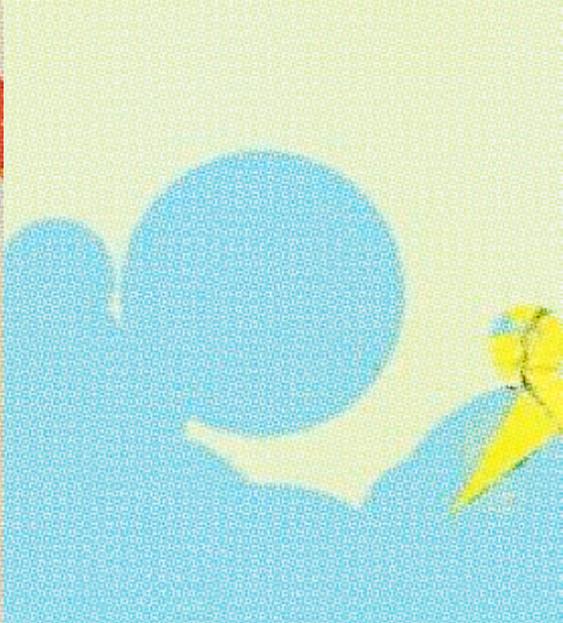
**Worlding**<sup>1</sup> is often understood as the practice of conceptualizing the world we live in; “the world” implies a singular entity that all bodies and identities take part in. Rather than finding new ways to relate to “a world” and its status quo, *HANBOK* considers worlds – the conceptual spaces of cultures, collective or understandings in which we exist in – as multiplicitous and fluid. One finds another world in a person, in objects, textiles, and digital planes; multiplying, mirroring and projecting into another. In this context, the body, with the donning of a hanbok, opens the door to another world and knowing.

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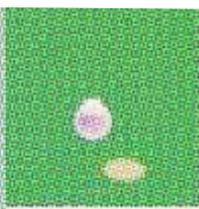
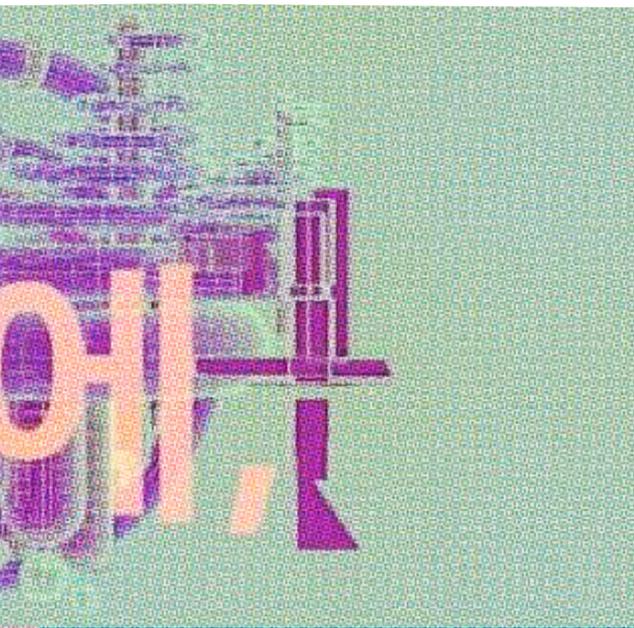
<sup>1</sup> The practice of worlding broadly refers to the conceptualization of the space in which we live in, in speculative or categorical ways (such as “a better world” or “world literature”). The concept originates from Hannah Arendt’s critique of Martin Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world”, an expansive and universal conceptualization of the world as a singular plane of existence on Western bourgeois terms. Contemporary discussions of worlding include contestations of the default Western world, and of what or who is in a world - - which implicates what or who is valued. Relevant to these concepts is Sylvia Wynter’s discussion of the overrepresentation of the Western world as the only world, and Sami Schalk’s engagement with fiction and speculative worlds.



xspace cultural centre '20-'21



ENNA KIM, 'STILLS FROM HANBOK', 2020.



In *HANBOK*/한복, Kim uses the mirror as a projection from the self, to examine or interact with another world – the one of our parents, or simply a different knowing or identity. The projection into or onto another world is perhaps the only way to relate others in the fluid and multiplicitous geometry; here, the body is a medium that contains us yet provides the means to relate outwards. A mirror projects the self onto another pane and invites another version of oneself reflected back, perhaps reflecting the consideration that the ‘other’ we see is ultimately a construction of our own subjectivities. It is in this mirroring and projection – and the literal projector images onto a wall and Kim’s dancing figure – that describes the in-between-ness as fitting together and then apart.

The overlay between multiple mediums also reflects the fractal potential of worlding, as each medium moves in the video to depict an in-between-ness in relation to another entity on the screen. This is perhaps most evident in the exhibition’s namesake, a hanbok that speaks to Kim’s connections and ties to Korean culture through their mother; the inheritance of physical objects and garments reflects the inheritance of a culture – in addition to the cultures and understandings that a person grows up with outside that culture. The body is again a medium to these connections, and can furthermore bridge gaps towards these connections by wearing a hanbok, or moving the body to music, or on the level of kinship and intimacy.

Kim’s dance movements help reflect the flow that connects the body and the garment, and negotiates the projection of additional images onto the body and the wall behind it. The overlay on top of the body, and the body’s own in-betweenness, shows the fitting together yet differentiation between multiple worlds.

In the same way that body and textile are mediums into another world, the digital, speculative renderings of in-between-ness act as a door. The geometric, nebulous renderings of worlds harness projection and mirroring, but more importantly illustrate the act of falling or “fitting perfectly into place...and then disappear.” In the speculative, digital rendering, appearance and disappearance are not expressed by an absence of an object, but by its realignment: as rows of discrete 3D rendered objects shift into view; their multiplicity is magnified by a change in perspective, then diminished when the perspective shifts again to only reveal one, the rest hidden perfectly behind. Alignments and realignments show falling in and out of place of worlds that can fit together perfectly, if only briefly. Here, *HANBOK*/한복 seems to show that being with another’s world is as simple and fleeting as brief yet perfect realignment.

Also fitting together and falling into place is a sense of acceptance and belonging, especially amongst the variations of emotions one has for their loved ones. Like certain previous projects, Kim treats *HANBOK*/한복 as a letter of love, in a speculative, digital space where there is the



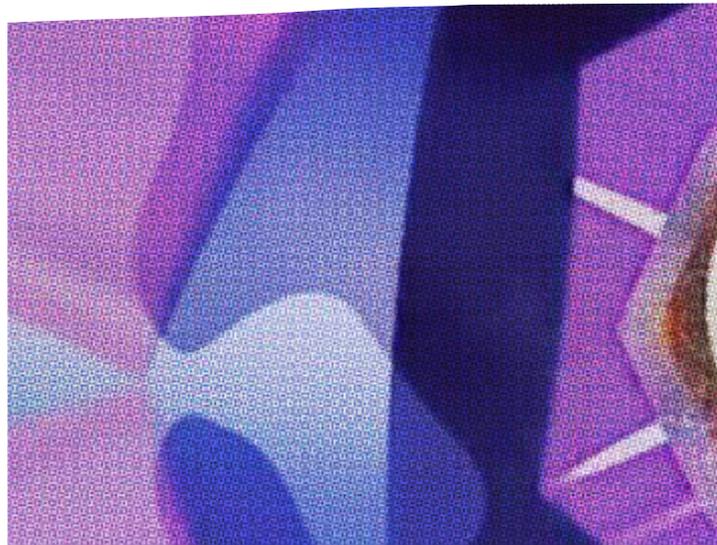
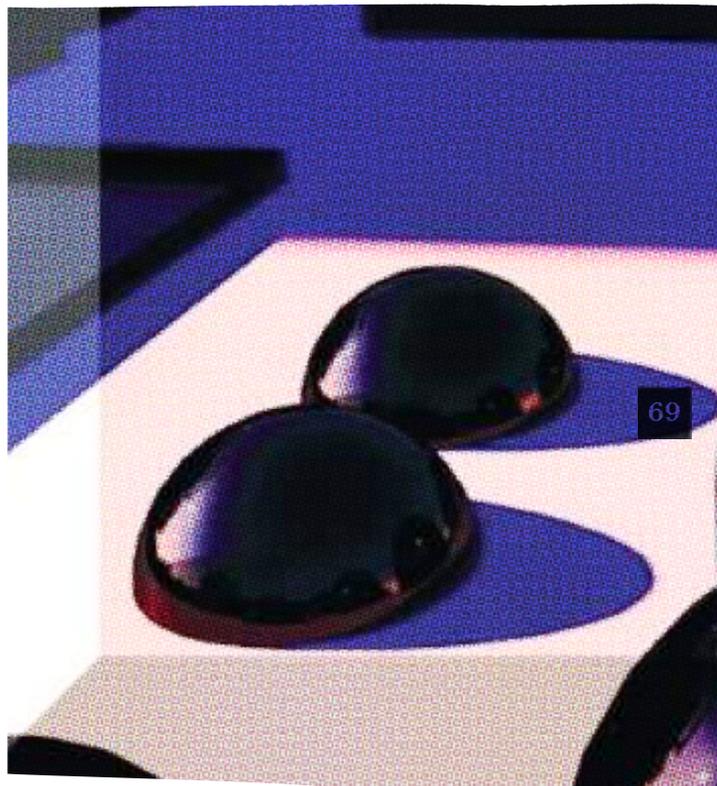
comfort to express as truly oneself. In the precarity of in-between-ness, and in the many gaps we find ourselves in, care and love are generative forces that provide or come from the moments where these gaps are reconciled. In watching gaps fill and un-fill themselves, and as things fall into place fleetingly yet repeatedly, viewers experience this speculative space as one of comfort, acceptance, knowing and love.

Rather than treating the speculative space as a utopia from reality, *HANBOK/한복* considers the speculative space as one that has been experienced yet difficult to name – it is speculative in that it is not physical and perhaps intangible, yet puts into visuality dynamics that the speaker experiences. The speculative is in many ways a reflection of the ‘real’ world we experience; in placing this space as an ode to those who experience and seek to fill the gap, *HANBOK/한복* appeals to affect as a viable and legitimate way of knowing ourselves and our worlds.

The speculative, by showing different ways in which space and time can behave, furthermore challenges our assumptions of how worlds and worlding is conceived. We do not only inhabit a single “the world”, but also the different worlds between.

*HANBOK/한복*’s power lies in creating a space for in-between-ness to bloom, which enriches our own grappling with the various in-betweens or gaps. Many of us straddle between cultures, or generational gaps, or either sides of a screen,

or the different knowings and traditions that look for space in today’s singular world. The multiplicity and movements of *HANBOK/한복*, offer us a way to make sense of these gaps, with a stability in relating to the unstable, and with love and acceptance of the gaps that may be bridged, if only briefly.



# MÂSIKÎSKÂPOÏ

MEGAN FEHELEY

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



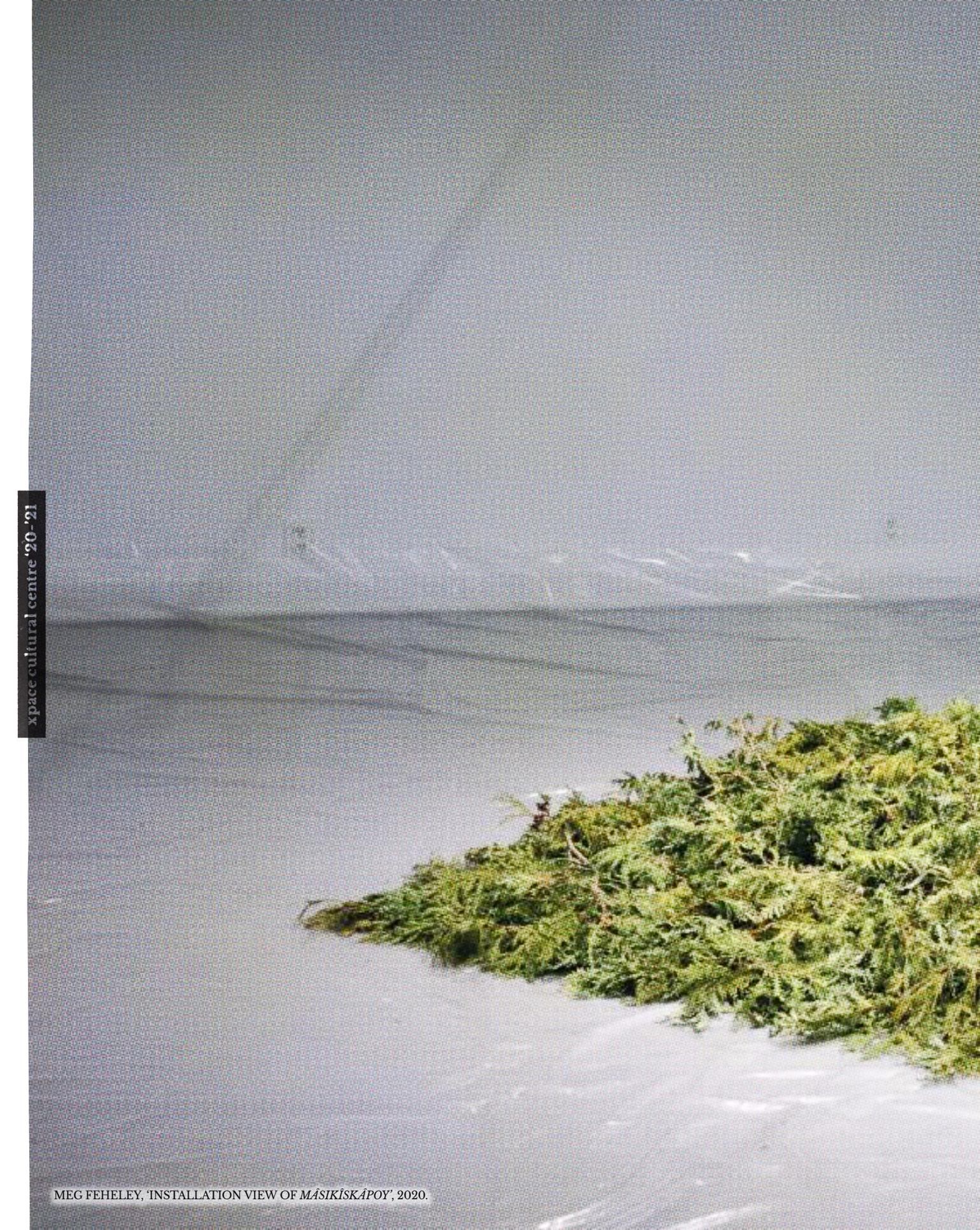
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## KAYLA CARTER

Tobacco has been frozen inside of ice that is connected to a chain that is suspended from the ceiling. Beneath the ice, we see a large square of cedar that has been meticulously placed on the ground. When all of these things are put in conversation with one another, you are presented with *māsikiskāpoy* by Meg Feheley.



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MEG FEHELEY, 'INSTALLATION VIEW OF *MÁSIKISKÁPOY*', 2020.



Something very apparent about this piece is the precise way it exists in the space. Yes, of course all pieces that are part of an exhibition tend to require tireless work and razor-sharp precision. However, the precision that I am speaking of is one that cannot simply take place when an artist decides. What I am speaking of is the precision that is revealed when an artwork has been given the space to exist in its own right.

More importantly, to honestly exist in its own right, outside of settler-colonial ideas of time, and space.

Upon taking in Meg's work I was instantly struck by the fact that despite knowing that *māsikiskāpoy* was created in 2019, it felt as though the piece in its totality had existed far before Xspace was created. This piece makes the exhibit space seem like nothing more than a brutalist afterthought. Furthermore, despite being a static image, there is a movement that exists in the piece that illuminates a haunting. Through an astounding thought process and creation, Feheley orates to us what we have worked so hard to forget.

Our society has a deep obsession with polishing Wand making everything palatable and shiny, especially our history of violence. This obsession leads us to think that, simply because we have manicured something to the point of nothingness, that it loses its energy, essence, and life force. The beginning for *māsikiskāpoy*, as Meg describes it, was when they were walking in Kensington market and saw a perfect square of cedar poking out from a fence. In seeing this

perfectly framed square Feheley describes it as seeing a "Landing spot for the melting of time and a portal". As previously mentioned, when looking at a static image of the piece there is an undeniable movement and vibration about the piece that causes it to glow. From these specific characteristics, I was forced to ask, at what moment in space and in time am I experiencing this piece?

The ice from the chain above the cedar is starting to melt. The water that is now showing itself as it spreads from underneath the piece. The water creates such an intense amount of surface tension, it eventually bursts from the dam of its own making. The water flows where it pleases, as it leans into the shallow valleys and crevices that make up the exhibit space floor!

Feheley engages with and holds space for water in ways that remind us that water exists beyond its availability for our consumption. In using water in all of its distinct forms, but more importantly, by simply allowing water to exist, Feheley gets us to witness the ways in which ice is a holder of memory – and that as the ice melts we are also watching the melting and collapsing of time. In *māsikiskāpoy*, Feheley puts ice and tobacco in conversation with one other. Tobacco as a form of medicine, but also an offering that holds deep ancestral meaning and knowledge for not only the Cree nation but for many Indigenous people across Turtle Island. Once the ice melts and the tobacco is released, it symbolizes being released from a generational curse. "Release without absolution ... part of a haunting that did not need to be fixed, it was just a haunting that let itself go".

Most of us have received an education that is grounded in the idea that colonial occupation and impact precludes knowledge and existence. As I spoke with Meg, a sense of haunting was a recurring theme. As we, the viewer, continue to absorb and humble ourselves to Feheley's work, we soon come to realize that what was originally thought of as an exhibition, is a piece of land actively and deliberately reclaiming its rightful place. Every part of *māsikiskāpoy* exists within its own rhythm and time, with a permanence and at a frequency that makes it impossible to forget or be naïve to what we are witnessing. Every part of this magnificent piece reminds and haunts us through the knowledge that despite intentional attempts to eradicate it, its knowledge and existence cannot be eradicated and continues to exist, in part, via the magnificence of haunting.

Haunting by the abject, the gone and the assumed extinct will always exist, as long as colonization and its keepers continue to think that the violence on and towards this land can be called progress.

Meg Feheley's ability to distinctly suspend and collapse time and space reminds us in the most palpable way, that Canada's history and institutions of violence will not be forgotten despite the incessant neo-liberal performances of reconciliation. Feheley's work is so much more than a commentary on reclaiming space. *māsikiskāpoy* exists boldly and magnificently across time, space, and function.



# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

MADDIE ALEXANDER  
DANA BUZZEE  
FAITH ALEXANDRA MARIE  
ADRIENNE HUARD  
WREN TIAN-MORRIS  
B.G-OSBORNE

PUBLICATION DESIGN



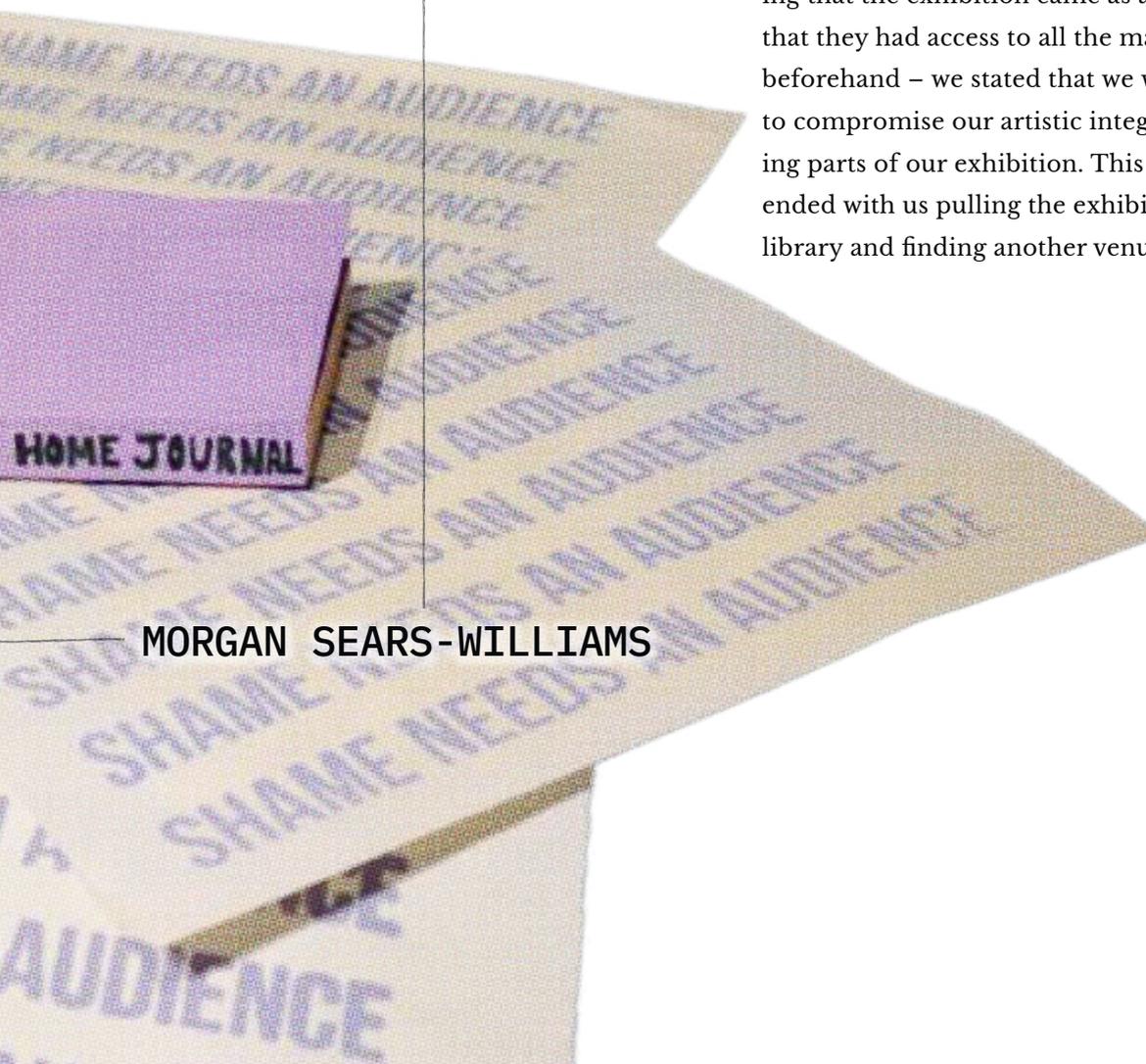
CULTIVATED BY

## ESSAY BY

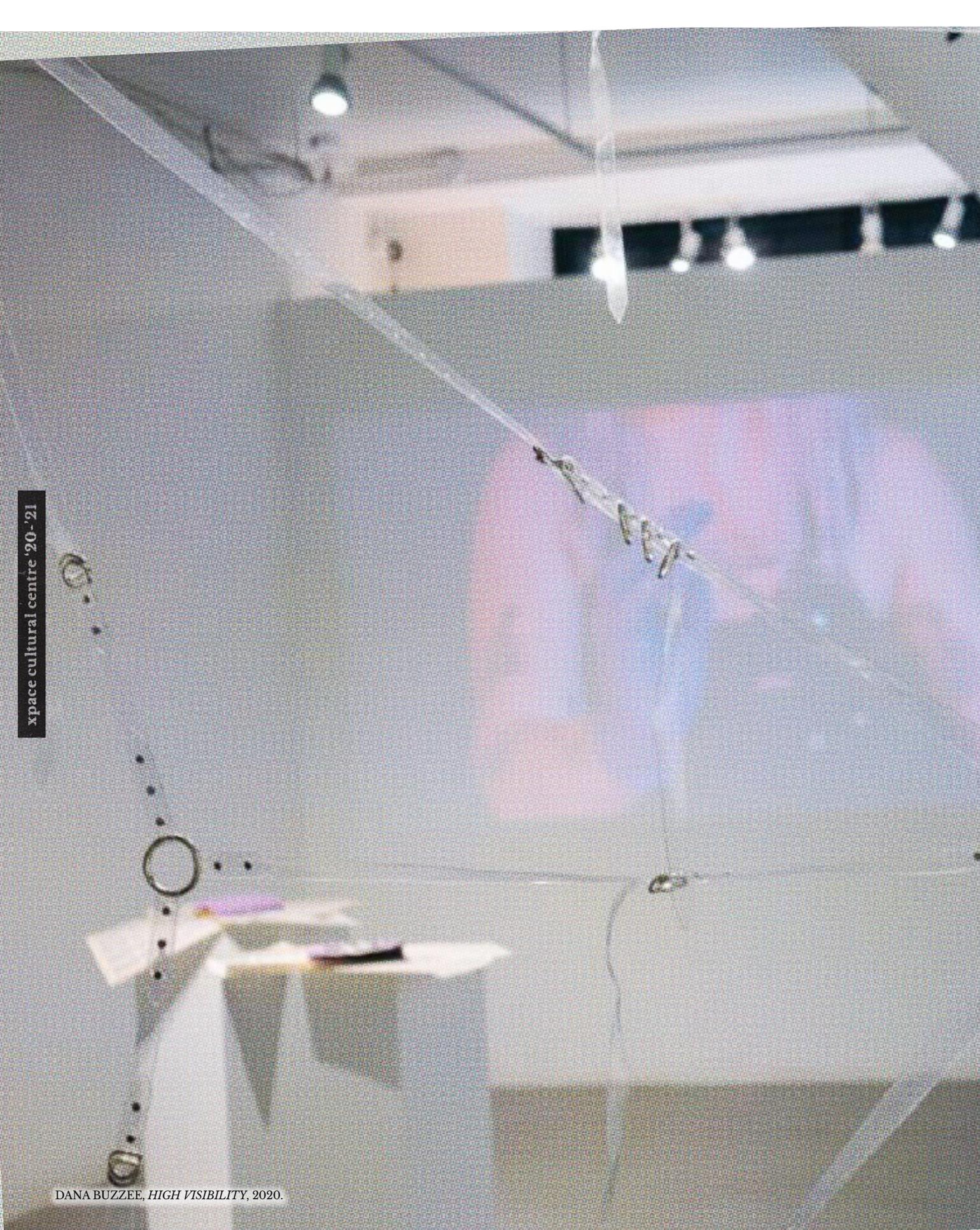
LINA WU

In November 2019, I was en route to Calgary to install *Femme4Femme*, a collaborative exhibition with Maddie Alexander, in a local downtown library. We were excited to have our work publicly accessible in a conservative city and were thinking of the young queer and trans folks who would be able to view our work. We hoped that young queer and trans folks would be able to see themselves through our work, and to be able to offer a space where they would feel validated, supported and acknowledged. During the installation, in a short conversation with a senior library staff member, I was told that in order to continue with the exhibition we would be asked to remove parts of the show – in particular, the parts that referenced safer sex practices between queer people. While explaining that the exhibition came as a whole – and that they had access to all the materials months beforehand – we stated that we were unwilling to compromise our artistic integrity by removing parts of our exhibition. This conversation ended with us pulling the exhibition from the library and finding another venue.

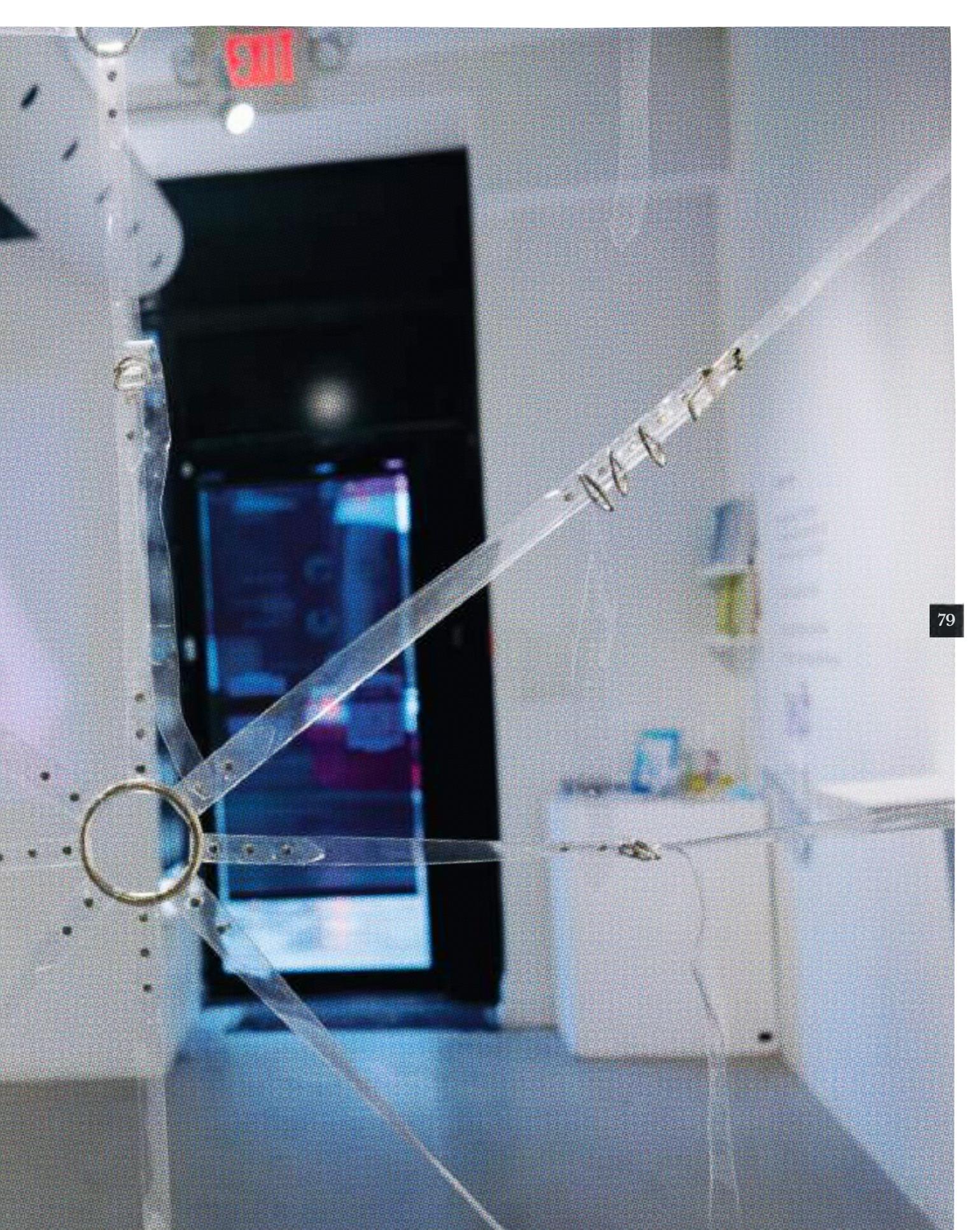
MORGAN SEARS-WILLIAMS



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DANA BUZZEE, *HIGH VISIBILITY*, 2020.



*behind the curtain* is an exhibition that seeks to create an exchange about these experiences that happen often within institutional spaces, where works that are deemed “obscene” are pushed behind a curtain or removed altogether rather than allowing a potentially difficult dialogue to occur. The artists in this exhibition interrogate their own feelings regarding censorship from organizations or institutions, while also unpacking instances of their own self censorship.

Maddie Alexander’s work is an act of intentional practice working through personal and embodied experiences. They are able to weave small moments – moments of solitude, exasperation, deep love and joy – and put them into objects that speak to me as a queer person. Acknowledging the shame and hurt that can come with their queer lived experience(s), their work is a celebration – a mirror held up to you, in a way that validates and provides a warm embrace.

In their video work, *untitled*, presents safer sex materials acts as a form of education and as a recognition of queer sex educators. *untitled* is presenting queer sex, that is seen as ‘outsider’ material – as something so normal. The safer sex materials and explanation of different tools and techniques for queer and trans sex is a nod to past queer and trans safe sex activists – such as ACT UP – , and is also a method of continuing the practice of intergenerational knowledge sharing to queer and trans youth.

*1978//2019*, another work by Maddie Alexander, references three books that were seized in pass-

age to Halifax’s leftist bookstore Red Herring Cooperative Books.<sup>1</sup>

Both in response to our experience in Calgary, and to ongoing censorship of queer and trans literature, Maddie has coated the books in lavender paint – a colour signifying queer resistance – and included a cut-out storage place within where safer sex items are held. Historically, the colour lavender has been used by queer folks to signal their queerness discreetly and has been used by heteronormative society to fuel discrimination and oppression. Most notably Betty Friedan, President of the National Organization for Women, labelled their lesbian readership a “Lavender Menace” insinuating that lesbians would threaten the feminist movement which was met with a reclaiming of ‘lavender’ by queer activists.

*If Every #Trans Had a Diary* transports us into a pixelated, black and white world through the use of a PX-000 camera – a toy camcorder from 1987 which records to cassette. Wren Tian-Morris’ work explores relationships between pleasure and the body as a trans, non-binary person of colour navigating the world of (online) sex work. In these intimate vignettes, we see a hitachi magic wand, a playful bitten lip, and the artist’s hands caressing their body. While this work is seen as a personal exploration by the artist, there is also an element of healing and affirmation in their performance. Through the 8 minute video work, the artist is the only one present and active within the frame, centering their own pleasure as a queer and trans person of colour. Often looking at the lens

1 In 1978 Canada Customs seized a shipment from Diana press, a local lesbian feminist publishing house in California, that were on their way to Halifax’s leftist bookstore Red Herring Cooperative Books. The title of the three books seized were Lesbian Lives; Lesbi-

an Home Journal, The Lavender Herring, and The Ladder. When Red Herring Cooperative member Denise Roberge asked the customs officer “you mean to tell me that books on lesbians aren’t allowed into the country?” he replied “Yes, that is exactly what I



MADDIE ALEXANDER, 1978/2019, 2020.

as they put on latex gloves, apply lube to a dildo, wear a leather face mask, or jerk off. There is a playful nature in how Wren touches their body that teases the audience and dares us to be turned on.

A circular ‘peephole’ – resembling an eye, watching – is layered on the video work on a self-directed course, allowing the audience limited access where the concealed sections of the frame are left to our imagination. The self-directed peephole allows focus on the pixelated details of the work and demands more consideration to Wren’s intentions through their movement. *If Every #Trans Had a Diary* makes us question, as an audience, what our own preconceived ideas of what belongs in private spaces and what is allowed in public spaces. In particu-

lar when it comes to queer and trans desire, and how often historically and in contemporary culture, queer people have been characterized as deviant or obscene for expressing or speaking about desire in public spaces.

*behind the curtain* offers several video works in which the artists use their body to present, acknowledge, or question what is in front of them and the anticipation of their audience. In each of these works, Maddie Alexander, B. G-Osborne and Wren Tian-Morris are striking with their active participation: they remain in control of how they present themselves to us. In both the letting in and the refusal – what we are allowed to see and what we are not – the works do not exist without our participation as viewers. →

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mean to tell you.” (Before the Parade by Rebecca Rose, page 57) Rose, Rebecca. Before the Parade. Nimbus Publishing Limited, January 1 2020.

“1994. Fell off small bridge in my backyard while gathering flowers, fell face first into a log. Received 16 stitches inside of lip and mouth.”

B. G-Osborne narrates, and a photograph flashes, imprinting a lingering image in your eye of a small child looking at the camera. Osborne’s work, *Trans Body with Scars*, is an homage to Lisa Steele’s *Birthday Suit With Scars and Defects* (1974) through a trans butch lens. In this video, Osborne unpacks a selection of scars and their respective origins, in presumed chronological order. After each scar is presented, an image appears for a fraction of a second. Osborne allows the audience brief access to the photographs, while refusing to provide full entry. This refusal asserts the artists agency over their performance of their body and the presentation of their memories.

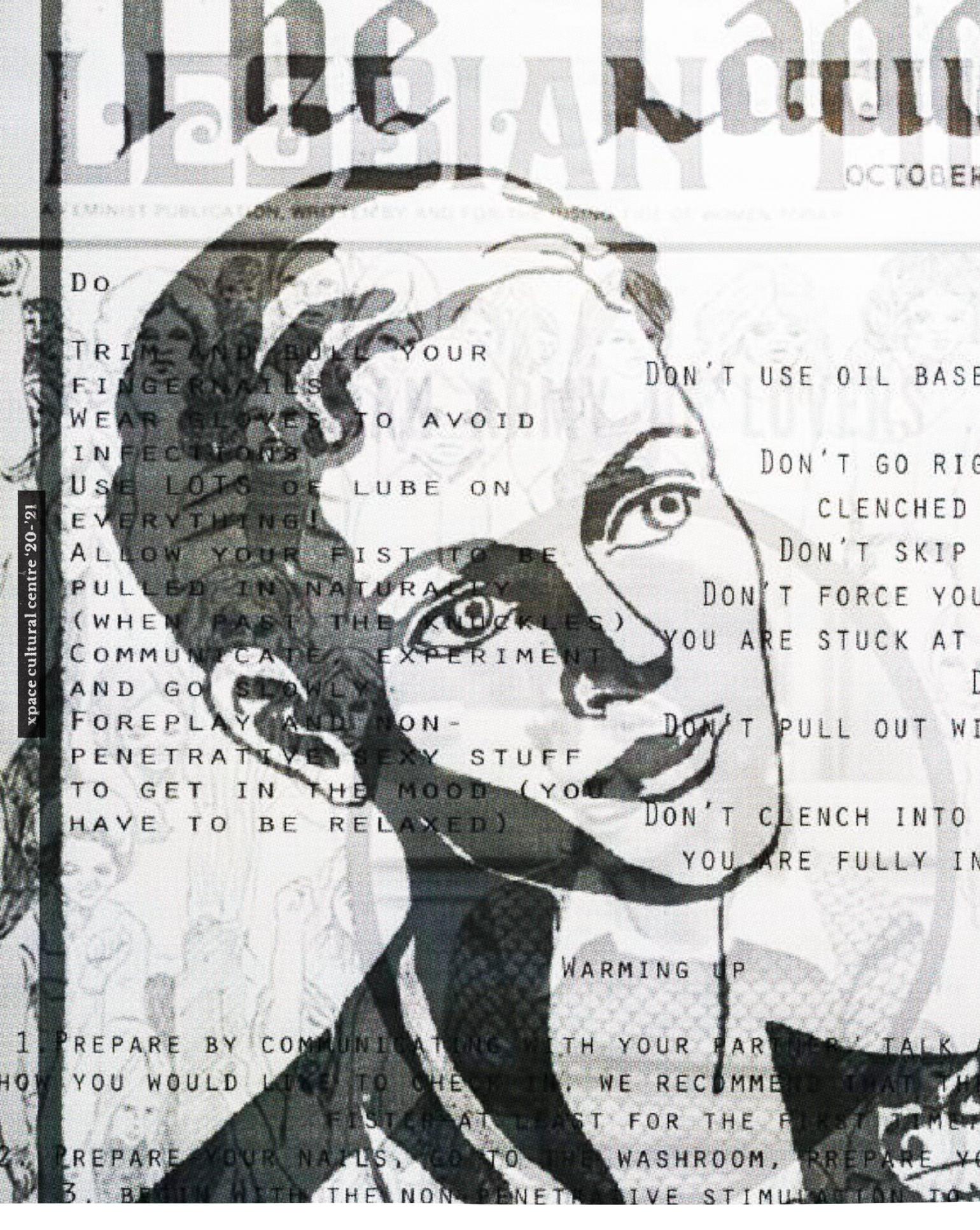
Thinking through how trans bodies are often examined to the point of dehumanization by mainstream cisgender and heteronormative society, Osborne maintains control over their childhood photographs and does not allow that process of examination to begin. Only the artist is granted full access to these images, their examination, and their meaning. *Trans Body with Scars*, in the context of this exhibition, is a work that signifies refusal and measured access. Beck’s work allows ambiguity in their recollections, and an entry point for queer and trans viewers to understand how their refusal provides them a sense of agency over their memories and image.

As Dana Buzzee has said to me before, her work is often soft censored – that is, gentle

suggestions to hide her work from view, hang a curtain, or include signs explaining it is for a mature audience. These are suggestions that are made discreetly, involving her participation in censoring her own work. Dana Buzzee’s work *High Visibility* acts as a physical anchor for the video work, one that holds it together symbolically through a web design, and one that presents a deconstructed harness material, imagery similarly referenced in both Wren Tian-Morris and Maddie Alexander’s work. In the gallery, the web hangs from a large pillar to the adjacent wall, measuring 8.5’ long, obstructing the way in which audience members enter and navigate their path through the exhibition. *High Visibility* creates a physical form in which suggests a curtain or wall, something that obscures, yet is constructed of clear plastic vinyl. There is a humour that Dana is hinting at with her title *High Visibility* and calling on her experiences of curators suggesting to hide her work from view.

The physical labour involved in the construction of the web cannot go unnoticed. The work is ambiguous and non-representational, while speaking to queer sex and BDSM through material and construction. The materials honour fetish such as latex, rubber, leather and vinyl and long for sweaty bodies that can turn this object into an activation of queer desire. *Highly Visible*, and Buzzee’s studio outcomes in general, actively resist pandering to heteronormative sensibilities. In self-aware and proactive obscenity, they focus deviant desires as a source of resistance to the hegemonic force of heteronormative sensibilities, centering and mirroring queer pleasure. →





# LIBERIAN WOMEN

OCTOBER

EMINIST PUBLICATION, EDITED BY AND FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE LIBERIAN WOMEN'S PARTY

xspace cultural centre '20-'21

DO

TRIM AND BURL YOUR  
 FINGERNAILS  
 WEAR GLOVES TO AVOID  
 INFECTIONS  
 USE LOTS OF LUBE ON  
 EVERYTHING!  
 ALLOW YOUR FIST TO BE  
 PULLED IN NATURALLY  
 (WHEN PAST THE KNUCKLES)  
 COMMUNICATE, EXPERIMENT  
 AND GO SLOWLY  
 FOREPLAY AND NON-  
 PENETRATIVE SEXY STUFF  
 TO GET IN THE MOOD (YOU  
 HAVE TO BE RELAXED)

DON'T USE OIL BASE

DON'T GO RIG  
 CLENCHED

DON'T SKIP

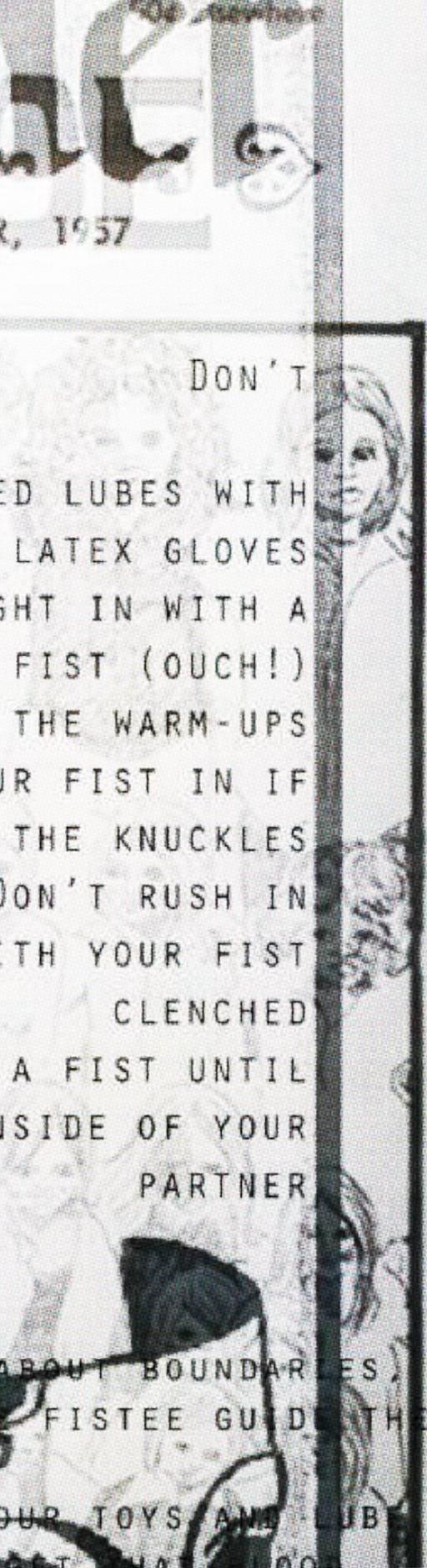
DON'T FORCE YOU  
 YOU ARE STUCK AT

DON'T PULL OUT WI

DON'T CLENCH INTO  
 YOU ARE FULLY IN

## WARMING UP

1. PREPARE BY COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNER. TALK  
 HOW YOU WOULD LIKE TO CHEAT IN. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE  
 FISTED AT LEAST FOR THE FIRST TIME.
2. PREPARE YOUR NAILS, GO TO THE WASHROOM, PREPARE YOU
3. BEGIN WITH THE NON-PENETRATIVE STIMULATION TO



While at times *behind the curtain* feels as a response – to larger oppressive structures that can feel out of our control – it is also an offering to honour queer and trans makers, desires and embodied experiences. Maddie Alexander, Wren Tian-Morris,

Dana Buzzee and B. G-Osborne all use dynamic entry points materially and conceptually, providing an understanding of the overt and covert censorship of 2SLGBTQIA+ artists. Calling on historical, contemporary as well as visceral lived experiences, the exhibition exudes an intentional, experimental and deeply personal atmosphere. *behind the curtain* is an experiment, stemmed from my personal experience, but one that has brought me to a grounding place. *behind the curtain* is the colour lavender, it is unapologetically queer desire and self determination, it is beyond belonging, enfolding us into an embrace.

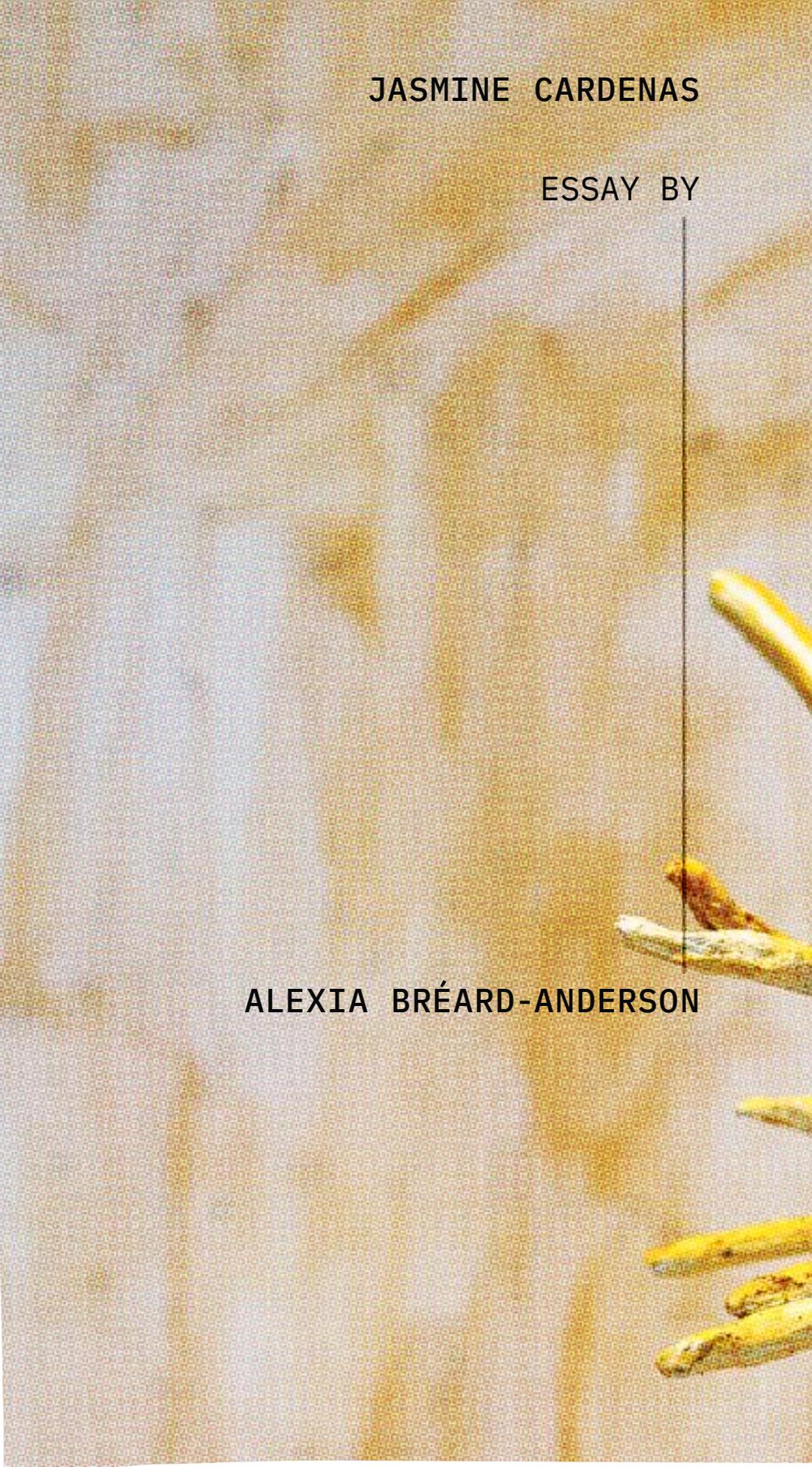


# TO SAVE / TO MAKE

JASMINE CARDENAS

ESSAY BY

ALEXIA BRÉARD-ANDERSON



*Why do I do physical things? It is a language I've used since I was a child [...] I made objects to entertain myself, to explore materials, to gift to people. I collected and created. Using my hands comes natural to me.*

[excerpt from Jasmine Cardenas journal notes]



Jasmine Cardenas is an Ecuadorian-Canadian artist whose practice explores childhood memories and cultural hybridity through the collection of personal images, objects and stories.

As a child, she would watch her mother cook with achiote almost every day. These heart-shaped fruits can be found growing in clusters on shrubs and small trees in tropical regions throughout **Abya Yala**<sup>1</sup> and **Southeast Asia**<sup>2</sup>. Although the plants are known by multiple names, the word achiote derives from the Uto-Aztec language family and Nahuatl term *achiotl* – which roughly translates as:

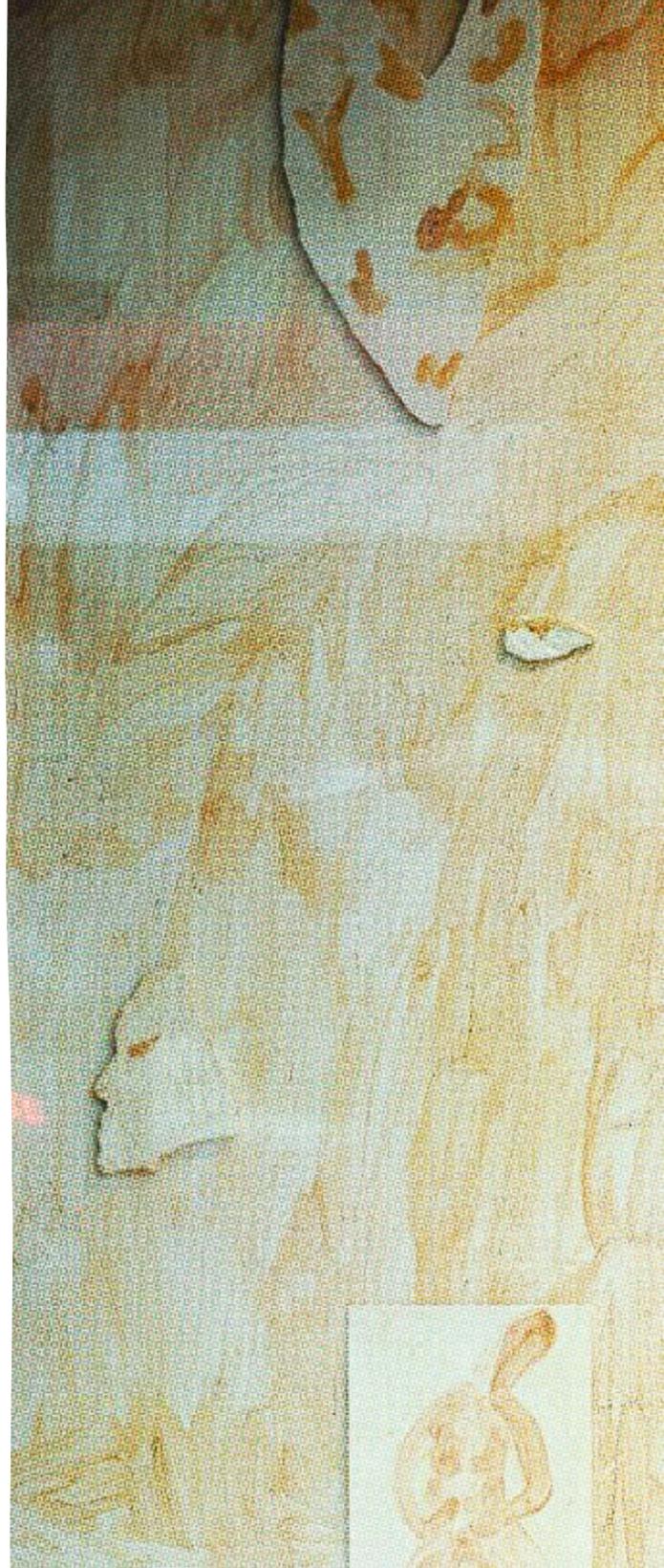
*a tree from the seeds  
of which is made a paste  
used as a seasoning  
and for coloring things orange.*<sup>3</sup>

Covered in a protective, bright-red fuzz, the achiote fruit ripens slowly with the sun; falling off the tree once fully mature and splitting open to expose the numerous seeds within. After being soaked in water or warmed in oil, the pulp surrounding the seeds can be mixed into a paste for a vibrant yellow-orange dye – which Cardenas uses as a natural pigment and the material foundation of her multimedia installation *To Save/To Make*.

Both literally and figuratively, the achiote acts as glue, bridging lived experiences and honoring the artist's memories as she works through the anxieties of carrying and reckoning with a dual identity in a settler colonial society. →

1 "For those unfamiliar with the term Abya Yala, the concept emerged toward the end of the 1970s in Dulenega, or what, for others, is today San Blas, Panama, a Kuna Tule territory. Abya Yala in the Kuna language means "land in its full maturity." Emilio del Valle Escalante, *Self Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala* <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala/>

2 "Found primarily in tropical and sub-tropical regions in Central and South America, plus the Caribbean. Additionally, the Spanish brought it to India, Sri Lanka, and Africa in the seventeenth century. Nicholas Gill, [NewWorlder.com](http://NewWorlder.com) [www.newworlder.com/article/17912/achiote](http://www.newworlder.com/article/17912/achiote)





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3 Online Nahuatl Dictionary, edited by Stephanie Wood: <https://nahuatl.uoregon.edu/content/achiotl>

*Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar.*

*Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.<sup>4</sup>*

Because the pigment is quick to dry, Cardenas moves swiftly – yet with intention. As the floors and walls become her canvas, intuitive brushstrokes evoke traces of brujería and stories of superstition within her family. The street-facing window, once blank, is now transformed as the artist summons a sweeping, a clearing of energies, a protection against *mal de ojo*.<sup>5</sup>

Achiote for passion, for clarity, for courage.

The bright, orange brushstrokes cast a veil over the walls, revealing multiple sketches on recycled pulp paper: some suspended from the ceiling, others scattered throughout like the seeds themselves. Abstract, dream-like figures emerge from these pieces: a floating tree branch, a silhouette, a crescent moon. The achiote takes up space seamlessly, acting as a transient self portrait as Cardenas extends her limbs to paint the out-of-reach corners, contemplating her ancestral and personal histories.

During our studio visit earlier this year, we spoke of the multiple ways in which traces of colonialism seep into our bodies and become embedded into extensions of ourselves. We exchanged stories of insomnia and sleep paralysis, and reflected on the emotional roots of disease and how they are carried over generations and manifested in the body.

When asked where her choice of medium falls within this process, Cardenas voices her desire to approach these emotions through playfulness, choosing quite intentionally to work with the simple tools and techniques she used as a child – as seen in the sculpture that sits in the centre of the installation, crafted intuitively from paper mache. The artist also expresses her use of natural materials as a way of remaining mindful and accountable towards the earth within her artistic practice.

I'm reminded that, in addition to being used as a dye and spice for preparing food, that achiote is an ancient medicine. Its bark, roots, fruits, flowers and seeds, when prepared properly, can reduce inflammation, treat skin damage, lower blood pressure and protect the eyes and liver – among many other properties.<sup>6</sup>

In our conversation, we spoke of lucid dreams as portals of remembering, however vague and ephemeral we may find the experiences to be. We discuss how belonging to a diaspora often feels like not belonging at all – and mull over the multiple ways in which – as children of immigrants and guests on stolen land<sup>7</sup> – we've been taught to hold each other up, to build homes wherever we find ourselves.

I envision the hard shells of the achiote fruit. An intuitive red, a refusal to crack open

4 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

5 Mal de ojo: a Spanish term that translates to Evil eye, believed to be an illness brought on by another's evil intention

6 Ryan Raman, What is Annatto? Uses, Benefits and Side Effects [www.healthline.com/nutrition/annatto#benefits](http://www.healthline.com/nutrition/annatto#benefits)

7 The Toronto Purchase (1787) is deemed as the "surrender" of lands in the Toronto area from the Mississaugas of New Credit to the British crown, however the lack of the treaty's legitimacy has been proven time and time again. Author Unknown, Specific Claims Research Centre: <https://specific-claims.ca/the%20toronto%20purchase%20specific%20claim>

against their will, an honouring of boundaries, a protection against things to come – or perhaps things past. As I shift slowly from one painting to another, I find my eyes resting on the asymmetrical spaces Cardenas has left in between: making room, perhaps, for these tumultuous emotional currents of nostalgia and longing and childlike joy to pass through.

A lone eye rests to the left of the wall space, and I imagine *To Save/To Make* as an altar of sorts, acknowledging our ancestors guidance and honouring the resilience of the generations before us and everything they survived and fought for to bring us into this world. A deep knowing stirs in Cardena's gestures: a remembering that, time and time again, may only be channeled through a brush dipped in water, a hand buried in soil, a breath.

Achiote, in honour of the earth, of la tierra, our most ancient elder.

As the sun begins to set, the bright orange pigment seems to dullen, and I think of the term mestizaje, or mestizx which translates to "mixed"<sup>8</sup> and how – in an academic attempt to compartmentalize a dual identity, it perpetuates a deeply rooted colonial vision of Abya Yala that actively erases Black and Indigenous ancestries, making room only for whiteness and prioritizing anything in its proximity.

I think of the complacency of non-Black and non-Indigenous Latinxs in upholding white supremacy and in our immense responsibility to continue unlearning and dismantling racism within our families and communities. To remember that scarcity is a capitalist myth: that it was never about not being "enough" of our heritage, but about honouring the lineages that have brought us here and everything that we carry as a result : and choosing to leave behind what no longer serves the collective path towards liberation.

Perhaps this is the true clearing, the mal de ojo being unearthed and alchemized as we undo ourselves and recognize our wholeness.

*May we pick up the pieces  
and remember abundance,  
and like Cardenas' achiote paintings,  
may these wounds heal  
and fade with the sun.*



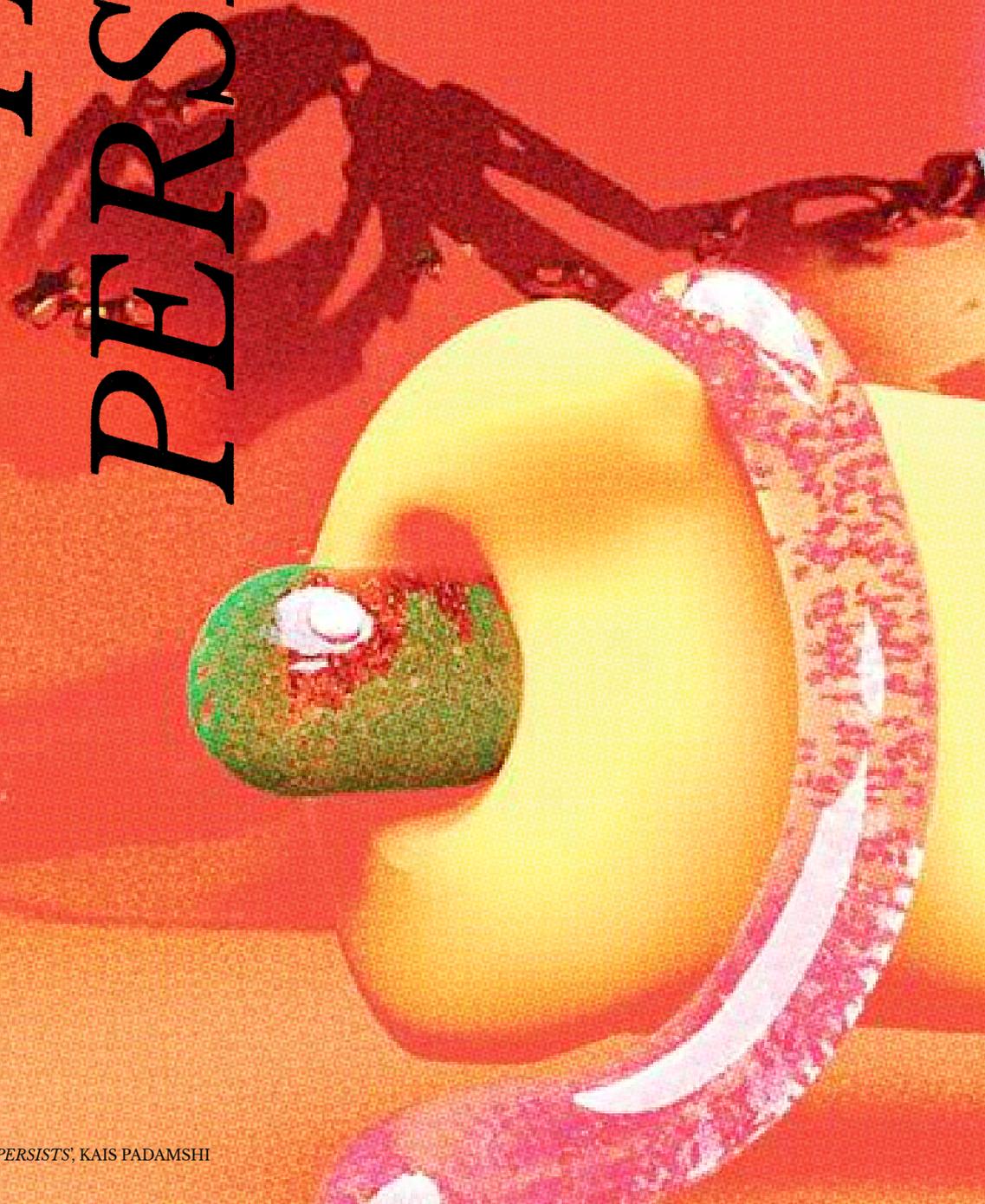
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<sup>8</sup> Ana María Enciso Noguera, Structural Racism in Latin America remains hidden under the idea of mestizaje: <https://aldianews.com/articles/politics/structural-racism-latin-america-remains-hidden-under-idea-mestizaje/58654>

# THE WINTER THAT PERSISTS

MALIK MCKOY

ESSAY BY



'STILL FROM *THE WINTER THAT PERSISTS*', KAIS PADAMSHI

## KAIS PADAMSHI



Relationships by nature can be complex and conjure continuous cycles of anger and frustration. Some relationships strike even deeper chords, unraveling, shaking us to our core. Malik McKoy's work "*the winter that persists*" meditates on these hardships that some relationships can incite through the use of 3D rendered digital motion visuals and light projections to represent their broader contemplations. McKoy expresses the result of these detrimental effects on their personal and career-related choices leaving them feeling further isolated.

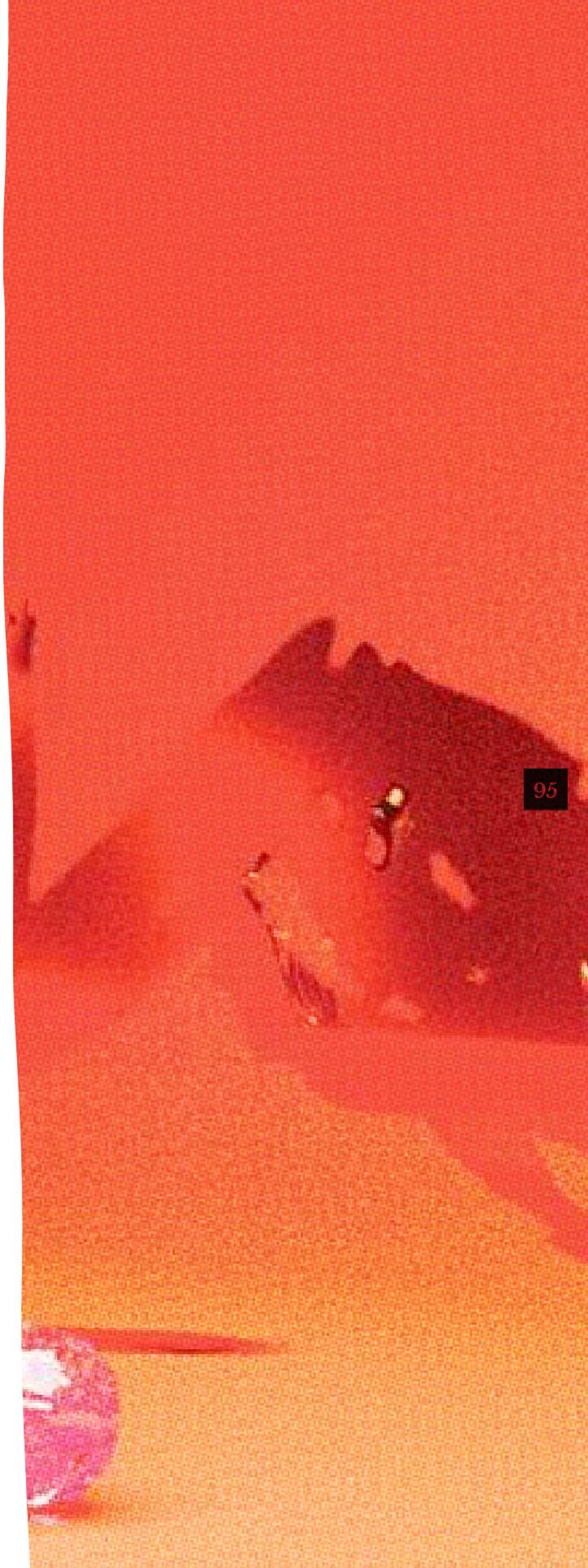
He grants a closer look into his harrowing psychic manifestations inspired by these distressful relationships showcased through a vast digital landscape that iterates the pervasiveness of his inner turmoil; the results of what is left behind, haunting him displayed in three separate perspectives. During his process of creation, Mckoy delves deeper into his feelings of frustration, anger, and isolation through digital media elements. These digital media elements include an abstracted figure that lays at the center of the first panel and an ominous apparition appearing in the first and third panel (left to right). The ominous manifestation moves slowly within the background on screen but within the mind of the artist entirely. The work additionally incorporates animations and light projections informing the structure of the space “while simultaneously highlighting the multi-layered presence of the artist’s inflamed and solitary emotional state. Furthermore, the flashes of light surrounding the realm of the artists’ psyche that is also synchronized with the distortions of the walls representing their connections to the external world. Through incessant self-reflection, *“the winter that persists”* echoes the internal dialogue of the artist and bids to a universally shared experience of never-ending emotionally tumultuous cycles.

With a visceral stimulation of flashing lights and saturated colors ranging from light and dark red hues to warm sun-like radiation, the environment houses an abstracted figure that lies motionless at the center spirited by these aching displays. Within the first panel to the left, the figure is depicted by translucent glass-like

material and laid upon a luminescent and reflective surface. The surface is embossed with illegible marks that yield a rugged texture underlining the agitated and distorted scape. Upon a closer look through the second panel at the center, the central figure is fixated on a smaller screen, where the screen draws them further in. The screen that engrosses the figure acts as a meta-narrative device that exhibits a psyche that has completely dissociated from both the environment and itself entirely. The artist situates a horizontal rectangular mirror within the scene that further accents the visually pulsating and flashing nature of the space amplifying the work’s underlying emotional unrest. The presence of the mirror serves as a visual device to invite a deeper layer of introspection by reflecting the figure back unto itself even though the figure remains preoccupied and motionless. The introspectiveness posed by the mirror is positioned more so for the viewer than for the figure themselves, it is to deepen the viewer’s insight into the contents of Mckoy’s mind. Although the mirror reflects the central figure, it also contains another form representing the innermost disturbance and the primary anchor for work’s unrest.

The manifestation lurks hauntingly within the mirror casting an ominous and menacingly charged presence within the space juxtaposing the central figure, who lies helpless at the center. Within the third frame, to the far-right, the audience is given a direct introduction to this manifestation of a nightmare and the embodiment of the artists’ anguish. The haunt-

ing figure seems to emerge from the surface with a rippling effect and by doing so influences the unsettling nature of the textured ground and amplifies the agitated temperament of the space. The grandiose stature of which spans the entire width of the third-panel is framed within the darkest and chromatically intense background that further accentuates the scene's density and imposition onto the artist. Mckoy's "innermost demon" as it would appear is seen to then hazily fade father back into the depths of their psyche and reappear once again as a consistent reminder of a continuous torturous cycle. "*the winter that persists*" partitioned into three separate perspectives that provides an enthralling and encompassing examination on the artist's contemplations inspired by the calamity on what strenuous relationships can leave behind and manifest haunting. Mckoy intimately draws the audience into his emotional scape by providing an animated visual experience on what these emotions of frustration, anger, and isolation can look like not only for themselves but for the viewer, who now finds themselves trapped in the mind of the artist all along.



# BELONGING TO EACH OTHER

MISBAH AHMED

ESSAY BY

MELINA MEHR



## Morning

The first time I remember committing an act of preservation was storing a small snowball in the freezer after playing outdoors. This morning as I clean, I find a creased envelope of fading grocery store receipts from a trip several years back. The tulips on my coffee table begin to wilt, petals peeling open like a clutched hand going limp. Crossing the street I overhear a stranger on the phone speaking my mother tongue, a private pleasure I carry with me until I forget.

Upholding memories through visual cues and relishing in everyday occurrences serve as reminders of my inherent relationship with my surroundings, an encouragement to find value in the mundane. I often feel as though my rolodex of memory has secretly slipped into a lake and become permanently drenched. I reach back into my mind for information or details, but every instance that I gather is illegible. Smudged by the disaster of time.



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MISBAH AHMED, *BELONGING TO EACH OTHER*. 2020



## Afternoon

It's unusually bright for December. I video call artist and illustrator Misbah Ahmed to talk about her large-scale mural, *Belonging To Each Other*. She appears in a mostly empty room: a bookcase, plants, and early sketches of her mural taped to the wall and spread across the floor. In 2018, Ahmed visited her home city of Islamabad, Pakistan. The bloated anticipation of returning to her childhood street was pinched once confronted with a mall sitting idly on a formerly large forest behind her house. Ahmed asks me: "does belonging exist in adulthood? Or is that something inherent to being a child?"<sup>1</sup>

*Belonging to Each Other* is a landscape of ancestry, a resistance to the colonial terror and political extremism that sought to blanket so much of South Asia's rich history. Ahmed created her mural while holding her recent trip home closely; the work envisions a place beyond her own family lineage,<sup>2</sup> uncovering the spirituality of connecting with one's community and environment – an impossible configuration under the violence of capitalism. In the thick wetness of Toronto's winter, *Belonging to*

*Each Other* swells open and invites us into a homeland, a space of tenderness and relief.

My conversation with Ahmed now splits into the paralleled ways our respective parents have denied their cultural histories, sometimes intentionally, but more often innocuously – slipping outside of themselves for a moment here and there, using a Western nickname, only whispering in their native language. But it accumulates. When we refuse to acknowledge our origins, we perpetuate a homogenous understanding of existence, in turn validating systemic attempts to flatten diverse experiences under an exploitable guise of global governance.

How then, do we contend with multiple origins? With feeling at once accustomed to our daily routines yet deeply frayed by the exclusion from the land that bore us?

*Belonging to Each Other* is as much about remembering as it is about creating. The homeland slowly disintegrates in our memories by the inevitable elements of time, as it does physically with the destruction of natural land for capital extraction. This duality of erasure functions

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<sup>1</sup> In conversation with Misbah Ahmed

<sup>2</sup> Ibid



cruelly, and is further exacerbated when we attempt to disassociate ourselves from deeply embedded cultural markers. Consider the immigrant and first-generation experience, the mind's endless geographical leap between homes and histories, attempting to maintain a sense of belonging. Ahmed's mural, although grounded by its infinite and uncontaminated desert, expands the ontology of inclusion to reach beyond material location, placing it instead on each other and the greater community.

The desert in Ahmed's mural visualizes a depoliticized milieu wherein brown feminized bodies exist in full indulgence without the creeping prospect of harm or control. Women adorned in Earth-toned clothing are coupled with each other and the surrounding ecosystem. The day is connected by touch; a seated figure leaning against another, their swept-back hair drizzled together. Two women behind them stand with linked arms as one cradles a baby. Others embrace animals, a lounging tiger and goat. There is growth in the desert, a narrative in progress. The afternoon sun warms the sand. When you place your hand on the small grains, it holds the same heat as the seat of

a loved one once they rise. Heat clutches onto a moment and the moment creates heat. Palm trees and flowers dot the ground and spring upwards to accompany the sky. Mountains in the distance undulate, forming the side silhouette of a woman laying on her back, exhaling.

### Evening

Perhaps the benefit of an impermanent memory is the ability to extend imagination to the real world, to create an archive that has been pressed together by both physical truths and emotional sensations. Often, the practical result is to collect materials ascribed with meaning: my apartment, busied with cracked but cherished objects, found oddities, various lists scribbled on loose paper. But beyond collecting objects that transport us, the ability to create art allows knowledge and remembrances to thrive with a special vitality.

Do you remember how it feels to be cared for? What does it look like? Art functions as a way to dry off the forgotten and ricochet us back to a precise instance. Its meaning is derived in a multitude of ways, allowing us to insert our- →



selves in the artist's narrative without drowning their hand, their voice.

*Belonging to Each Other* exercises art's capacity to care for the viewer by offering a liberation from the ills of structural oppression. Ahmed's mural, mythological in its rendering of the homeland, is still rooted in truth. When we establish ourselves to be in service to our communities, our friends, the networks that call for support, then we subsequently empathize with our environment in a meaningful way that sustains our responsibility to this land. The participatory nature of experiencing the medium – the artwork – is a blooming of exchange between viewer and artist, you and me.

I clench my mother tongue in the back of my throat. The tulips on my coffee table peel back their petals, pollen flicking everywhere. Place your hand on the small grains, it holds the same heat as the seat of a loved one once they rise. Heat clutches onto a moment and the moment creates heat. Palm trees and flowers dot the ground and spring upwards to accompany the sky. Mountains in the distance undulate, forming the side silhouette of a woman laying on her back, exhaling.





# THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING BY JOSI SMIT

RAÚL AGUILAR CANELA  
VIDA BEYER  
OLIVIA KLEVORN  
KARICE MITCHELL  
RYAN DANNY OWEN  
ADEN SOLWAY

PHILIP LEONARD OCAMPO

ESSAY BY

CURATED BY



*This project is dedicated to my friends;  
my chosen family  
because when I reminisce about nights dearest to me  
my greatest nights  
I miss you endlessly*



105

105



xpace cultural centre '20-21

*THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT*, 2021. INSTALLATION VIEW, WORKS BY VIDA BEYER RAÚL AGUILAR CANELA, OLIVIA KLEVORN, RYAN DANNY OWEN, KARICE MITCHELL & ADEN SOLWAY IN VIEW.

1-877-957



## Foreward

If the year 2020 is a benchmark in which we may consider the rest of the decade to come, then we're off to a difficult start. I spent the past year alternating between feeling the unbearable weight of collective fear and numbly writing-off the year entirely, all from the necessary confines of my own bedroom. From thinking that everything matters so much to thinking that nothing matters at all is a disorienting dynamic; I still can't help but feel this way, but I try to do so more lucidly these days.

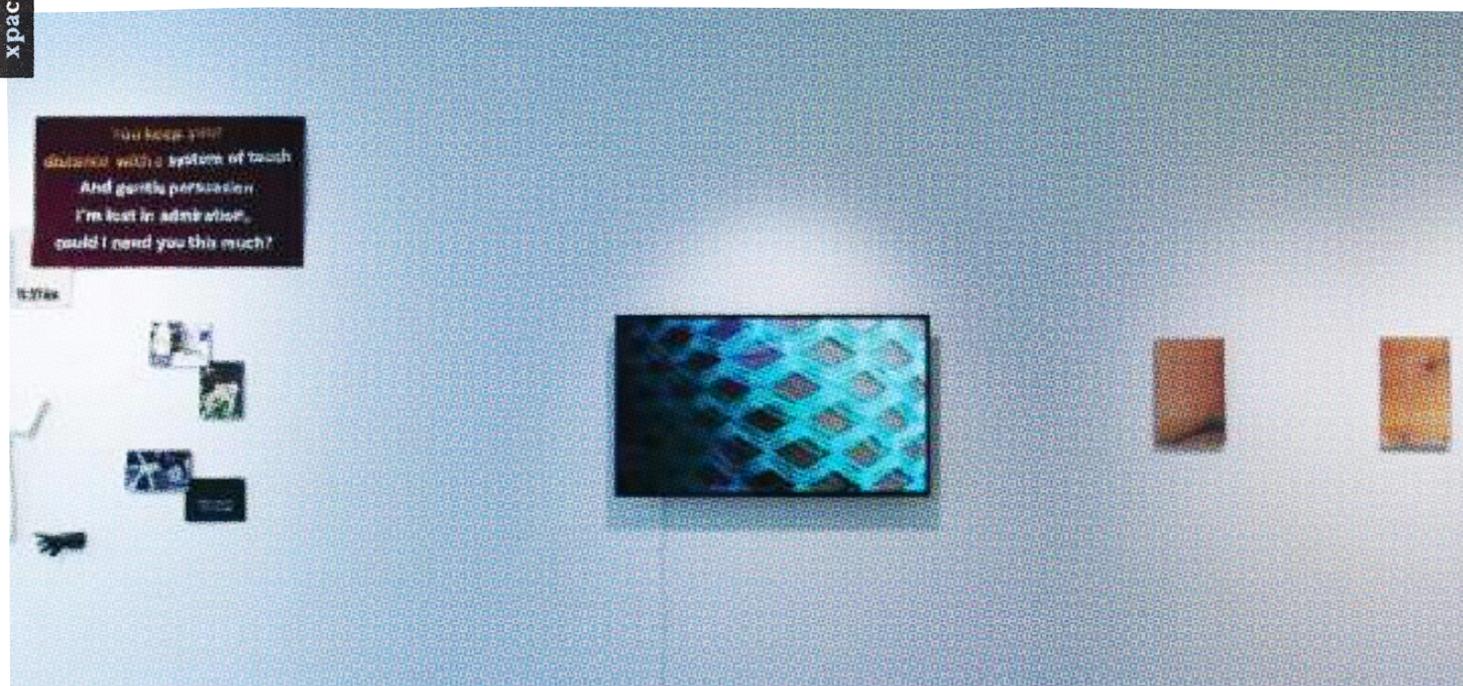
In the current state of the world, remembering serves a number of purposes; we may use it to both long for moments passed and project ourselves into brighter futures. But how will this present time be remembered in the decades to come?

Any event or piece of media with cultural significance that is included in the paradigm of life

as we previously knew it will be remembered as either it did not happen (expected) or it did happen (unexpected). The 2020 Summer Olympic Games were cancelled; the only other times this had happened since the games inception in 1896 were during the first and second World War, once and twice respectively. Inversely, the 2020 MTV Video Music Awards were the first (and only) iteration of the awards show to happen without an in-person ceremony, instead consisting of pre-recorded performances streamed online. These one-off deviations will forever be known as idiosyncratic; notable in their own histories, as well as the canon of popular culture as singularities forever linked to this moment of time. They're byproducts of universal shifts.

If an exhibition were to happen right now what would it look like? The obstacles are glaringly present, as is the inescapability of its con-

xpace cultural centre '20-'21



LEFT: OLIVIA KLEVORN, *NOSTALGIC, BLACK, AND QUEER*, 2020.

RIGHT: ADEN SOLWAY, *COMPOSITION IN ONE PART (A MALAPROPISM)* MATERIALS: STEEL, HARDWARE, ENAMEL PAINT, SEWN COTTON, SEWN POLY-COTTON, MOTHER'S SHIRT (1960S), DRY-CLEANING RECEIPT (2020), DEPRESSION GLASS VESSELS, COCKTAIL GLASSES, HOME & GARDEN MAGAZINE "COLOR GUIDE" (1978), TIN, QUILTED FABRIC, RUBBER.

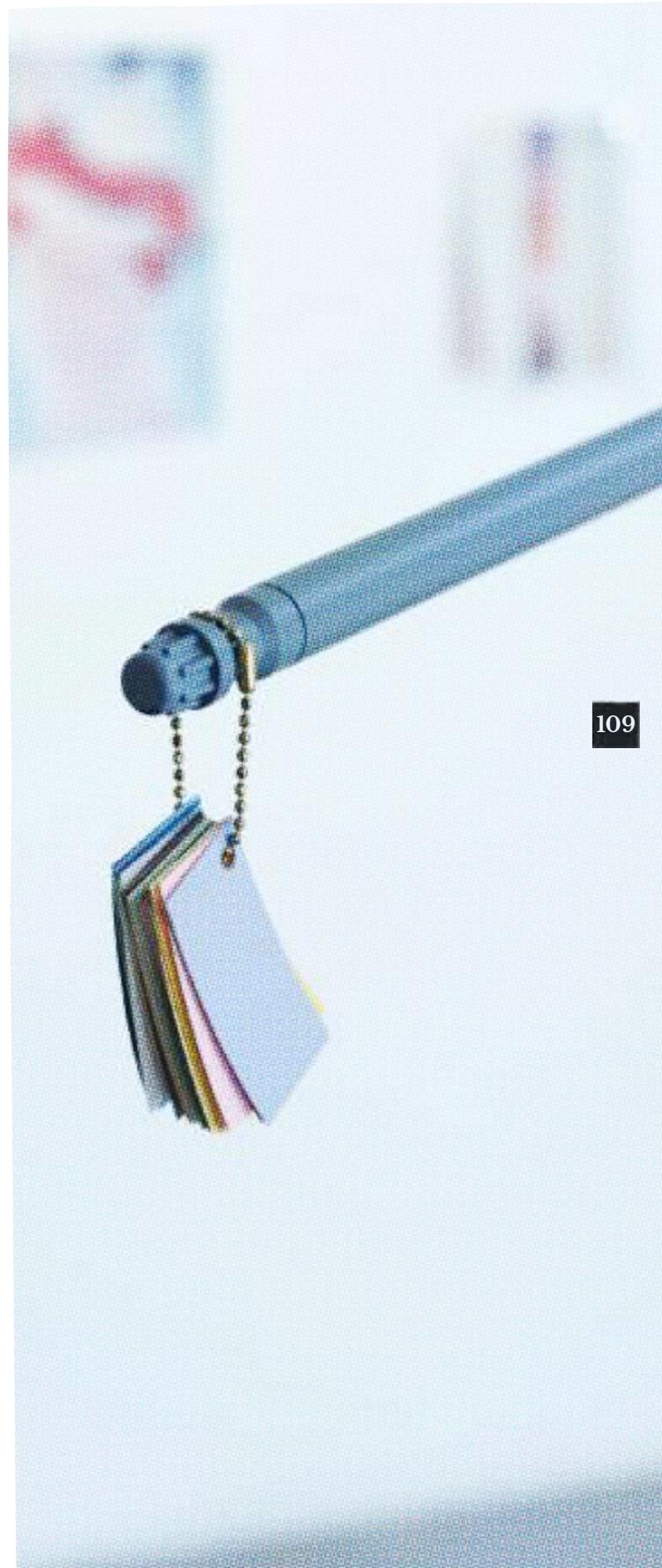
text. How do you intentionally proceed with a project at this time that isn't solely based in contingency?

*The way you look tonight* brings together works from artists who are considering these questions through conceptual, virtual and physical frameworks. Brought together through the broad theme of “nostalgia”, this exhibition has been developed and created within the logistic parameters of unprecedented times, as two distinct sites of exhibition. Both material and immaterial, the multiple projects by each artist are seldom a mirror of each other: Considering how they compliment and contrast with each other and the ways in which they run parallel or perpendicular is prioritized over attempting to directly translate one experience to another in measured ratios. *The way you look tonight* presents artworks that are conscious of their own capacity to look presently, forwardly and retrospectively along the nonlinear track of memory as it remains intertwined with histories that we've documented and idealized. This project is knowing of its unique circumstances as an exhibition happening during this specific place and time, but seeks to not be beholden, defined by or conceptually adhered to it.

From their willingness to resourcefulness, I'm grateful to have been able to share this space with these artists, as opportunities to cultivate new friendships right now feels so special.

I hope this project resonates with you just as much as it did with us.

→



space cultural centre 2016-2021

nds are strong and  
and when you go  
n me it feels like  
rain inside a tent

12:27 AM

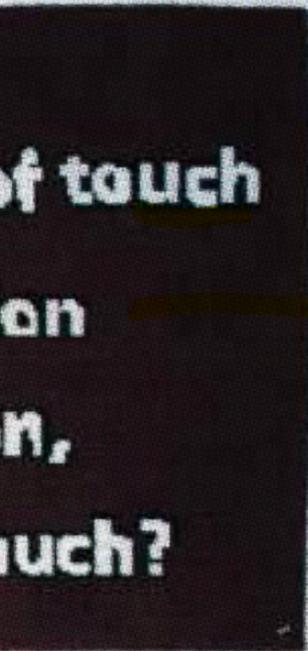
You keep your  
distance with a system of  
And gentle persuasion  
I'm lost in admiration  
could I need you this m

The women who fight the tide  
from instant clusters, their feet  
outward and hidden, claspings to  
nothing  
narrowed to bone and dry hot cheeks  
The woman who holds the dairy  
hunger into capital  
the breath of light  
of a scream  
that smother the night and fills  
the mouth with singing



Wolke' in my mind  
without any time

ABOVE: VIDA BEYER, EXCERPT FROM: NIGHT MOVES (2016-2021).



*I've never seen you looking so gorgeous as you did tonight,  
I've never seen you shine so bright.  
And when you turned to me and smiled, it took my breath away,  
And I have never had such a feeling,  
Such a feeling of complete and utter love, as I do tonight;<sup>1</sup>*

Singer-songwriter Chris de Burgh's classic 1986 ballad, *The Lady in Red*, recounts the artist's first encounter with a significant other, who is clothed in a dazzling red dress. Crooning over a soft but sweeping chorus backing, he sings of her beauty over guitar plucks that make the song sound distinctly 80s. The lyrics are sentimental and the vocals are sweet: Its romantic fanfare helped garner widespread popularity among mainstream audiences of the time, establishing the single as an iconic song for lovers, new and old. Making use of the word tonight, de Burgh sought to preserve a moment of time, using the song to denote an experience like no other; no night like that night, just right then and there. It was a moment of profound importance that he wished to remember forever, immortalizing the night in melody and harmony.

By the logic of nostalgia, the word tonight can escape the inevitability of time passing, becoming a timeless site of return and igniting our longing for the past experiences we look lovingly upon. While music is just one vehicle through which we can relive experiences in deeply personal and empathetic ways, popular culture and history can influence our own relationships to the memories we carry, and the things we feel nostalgic for. The elusive ambiguity of the word tonight is what this exhibition seeks to encompass as a namesake. →

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<sup>1</sup> de Burgh, Chris. *The Lady in Red*, A&M, 1986.

*The way you look tonight.*

As an embodied sensation, nostalgia allows that which we recall fondly to emerge again, briefly invoking moments of bittersweet familiarity in our daily lives. The malleable nature of this phenomena – and its ability to interpret time and romanticize memory – is what assembles the works of *The way you look tonight*. Bringing together text, drawing, painting, sculpture, video and image-based works across virtual and physical exhibition platforms, this exhibition presents artworks by Vida Beyer, Raúl Aguilar Canela, Olivia Klevorn, Karice Mitchell, Ryan Danny Owen, and Aden Solway that seek to explore nostalgia as a complicated method of both remembering and forgetting. Celebrating, subverting and reimagining how popular culture, generational experiences, and documented histories influence our personal and collective archives, the works of this exhibition are interested in reevaluating the complex relationships we have with the past; regardless of whether or not we've actually lived them.

Raúl Aguilar Canela's practice reinterprets the visual iconography of popular culture into syntax that alludes to personal experiences of heartbreak, labour and loss. Raúl sources assets from a growing archive of images he's culled from the online sphere – from miscellaneous images, memes and screenshots to personal notes and text documents – and depicts moments of quiet introspection in his meticulously crafted drawings and paintings. In his online contribution to the exhibition, *Canela confides in Poochie*, a disembodied entity in which his deepest personal thoughts may be held and heard.

Presented as a mock desktop, Canela faces an internal dialogue outward, staging a composition of confessions from the perspective of the artist himself – reliving an honest moment of emotional catharsis from his very own desk.

On a snowy day late last year I received a drawing by Canela in the mail as a letter of shorts, sent from his home to mine. Simply populated with a few words and an image skillfully rendered in ink, I interpret its sparse but intentional contents intuitively; Wet, high and tired, each written in different fonts of red encapsulates states of precarity and euphoria that are shared among culture workers (Raúl and I included). *4EVER my love* lends an offering of tender solidarity, signing off the letter with good wishes and care. In the background, Eva-01 from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* kneels humbly with its head lowered. Considered to be one of the most iconic anime series of all time, Eva has long been revered as a children's television program that dared to explore ambitious, broad subject matter such as consciousness, individuality, depression and social interconnectedness. Considering the series' existential thematic subtexts, I can't help but think of how these themes might also feel immediate to the artist and immediate to myself, how the two of us relate to each other, and the way we may relate to the changing world around us.

Drawing from a similar process of accumulation and collection, Vida Beyer has been gradually amassing artworks for *Night Moves* (2016

-2021), a body of work that has been in development for a little over half a decade. Exhibiting a smaller configuration of works within this series, Excerpt From: *Night Moves* (2016-2021) consists of needle points, watercolours and stitched clothing. A text message, karaoke lyrics, paintings of personal images and scenes from films across various decades; this selection of items display an ambiguous timelessness in the way they render vignettes of fiction and reality as not immediately discernible from one another. Instead, Beyer collapses these moments into a timeline that entangles the two; a certain cinematic magic is found across each. Accompanying this work is an online playlist called *Night Moves: I need a rendezvous*. Featuring music from Robyn, PJ Harvey, R.E.M, Blood Orange and more, this collection of songs illustrate an encounter at twilight – mysterious, romantic, curious and transportive.

As these items, songs and artworks inhabit similar spaces, Beyer reiterates the role that popular culture plays in the way we project our memories outward: picturesque moments inspired by the media we watch, hear and otherwise absorb.

Mimicking the perspective of a viewfinder, *Die Alpen*, a new video work by Aden Solway, dollies horizontally along a snowy German mountainside as if the viewer is standing at the highest point of a lookout with a gorgeous landscape in view; Below the footage is a collection of postcards consisting of what appears to be the

same pink mountain with different sites in its foreground. As a nostalgic representation of the majestic landscape, no such pink mountains actually exist; the original postcards embellish a true landscape with a rosy veneer. Obscuring the line between fiction and reality by fabricating an idyllic, picturesque space that feels more aspirational and scenic in nature, Solway similarly fabricates a scene set within the same continuity. →



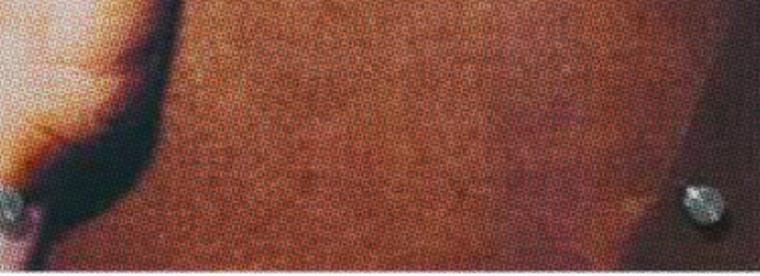


By this logic of revisionist histories, Aden Solway works in the same process as Vida Bey-  
er, both exploring truth, fiction, and what hap-  
pens when such timelines collide. On site, the  
artist presents a configuration of new and old-  
er artworks and utilitarian objects which col-  
lapse multiple timelines. Assembling a mixture  
of artworks and objects dating back as early as  
the 1900s, the arrangement is anchored around  
a central sculpture, *Composition in One Part (A  
Malapropism)*. In this work, Solway constructs a  
replica of a lighting fixture mistakenly seen in  
a shot of the 1967 romantic comedy *Thorough-  
ly Modern Millie*<sup>2</sup>, a film that is set almost 30  
years before its production began. Such a glaring  
historical inaccuracy was the anachronism  
that served as the impetus for this selection of  
objects (*Composition in Three Parts (Tier, Mirror,  
Eagle)*). Solway drapes swimming trunks flirta-  
tiously on the lighting fixture and sprawls cups  
and martini glasses across the gallery floor.  
Representing time untethered, Solway com-  
bines utilitarian and decorative items as props  
into a fictitious pseudo-set. Invoking the spir-  
it of hedonistic scenes – skinny dipping in a  
pool, and the remnants of an evening of drink-  
ing, the work alludes to some other reality; a  
night lived, as if people had been in the space  
not very long before you arrived.

With this stage of remnants set, consider this  
scene: The sweat, the heat, the music, the flash-  
ing strobe lights and the haze of smoke con-  
suming the euphoric dance floor. As a site of  
gathering, the dance floor has always been a  
space to lose your inhibitions and realize joyous  
potential. Artworks in this exhibition by Olivia

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<sup>2</sup> Starring Julie Andrews, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* is a 1967 American musical-romantic comedy film directed by George Roy Hill. The film follows flapper Millie Dillmount's escapade in pursuit of her wealthy boss.



Klevorn and Ryan Danny Owen speak to the idea of the empty dance floor as atemporal space in which we may inhabit in alternative, immaterial ways. Exploring how queer and Black histories have always been intrinsically linked to dance and dance music, Klevorn and Owen remain implicated to the histories that they're ancestrally connected to. Olivia Klevorn's *Nostalgic, Queer & Black* pulses with the lights we might



typically see on a dance floor. Its undeniable aesthetic – dark and cavernous, yet ticking with saturated blues, reds, purples and greens – has become unfamiliar to us in times of necessary distance. A closeup of Klevorn's body grooves in isolation as her movements are superimposed with found footage, personal videos, and other archival materials. The fabric stretches and moves across her stomach spritely to the soundtrack of Donna Summer, Sylvester, Whitney Houston and others. Klevorn narrates a text of internal dialogue about inherited histories manifesting both physically and psychologically.

There is something therapeutic and healing to the repetition of dance music and dancing as an act itself. Call it a mantra, call it cathartic – Klevorn honors the dance floor as a site of liberation, incorporating an extensive variety of sources indicative of the timeline of dance music into the video and its accompanying text work, *Sweet Dreams*. Hailing from Chicago, this bears specific poignancy, as the genre of house music itself was born in the city during the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> As the beat of the song repeats almost endlessly, *Nostalgic, Queer and Black* ends with an excerpt of a BLM dance party in Chicago as nostalgic Youtube comments pop in and out of the frame. Klevorn dedicates the work to loved ones and Chicago, both whom the artist longs to see again. →

<sup>3</sup> Magana, Daisy. "The History of House Music Starts in Chicago." 6AM, June 8, 2020. <https://www.6amgroup.com/the-history-of-house-music--chicago/>.

The word nostalgia derives from the Greek word *nostos* ('return home') and *algos* ('pain').

Call 1-877-957-7818, and you'll be greeted with audio messages of music, poetry and other audio soundbites composed and cycled out daily by Ryan Danny Owen. Advertisements for the hotline number teem with the tantalizing promise for telerotic fulfillment.

*Torrid fictions & Midnight callers.  
Private dance tonight,  
To anthems of endless love  
in beautiful rooms of glass and light.*<sup>4</sup>

This work seeks to conjure the remnants of physical spaces that do not presently exist, transforming the empty dance floor into a liminal, embodied dreamscape instead of a space we can't even be in anyways; an ephemeral meeting place of utopian fantasy. In the context of contemporary times, the idea of the empty dance floor is indicative of our current inability to gather physically. But here, the nonphysical space points more reverently to the AIDS epidemic, which historically claimed the lives of many queer people during the 1980s and continue to affect many queer people today. Owen speculates about what a dance floor in the *heavens could look like*<sup>5</sup>, and how we might be able to access such an intangible site.

The mysterious telephone number invites you to call nightly, and let its contents invigorate you with sonic wonder. →

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<sup>4</sup> Ryan Danny Owen, *MIDNIGHT CALLERS (1-877-957-7818)*, 2021. Vinyl, posters, online project, & mail out publication

<sup>5</sup> Ryan Danny Owen, in conversation with the author, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



**CURRENT SPREAD:** ADEN SOLWAY, *COMPOSITION IN ONE PART (A MALAPROPISM)*. MATERIALS: STEEL, HARDWARE, ENAMEL PAINT, SEWN COTTON, SEWN POLY-COTTON, MOTHER'S SHIRT (1960S), DRY-CLEANING RECEIPT (2020), DEPRESSION GLASS VESSELS, COCKTAIL GLASSES, HOME & GARDEN MAGAZINE "COLOR GUIDE" (1978), TIN, QUILTED FABRIC, RUBBER.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE:** KARICE MITCHELL, *SHE IS SOFT, SHE IS LIGHT, HER NAME IS "VENUS"*, 2021.

KARICE MITCHELL, *SHE IS SOFT, SHE IS LIGHT, HER NAME IS "VENUS"*, 2021.

RYAN DANNY OWEN, *JOCKSTRAPS*, 2020 (JOCK, DEC 1989).

RYAN DANNY OWEN, *PARTITION*, 2020 (THE FRESHMAN, 1990).

VIDA BEYER, EXCERPT FROM: *NIGHT MOVES* (2016-2021).

VIDA BEYER, EXCERPT FROM: *NIGHT MOVES* (2016-2021).

In the gallery, these same conceptual interests materialize as rubbings, archival images taken from vintage pornographic magazines dating from the early 1970s to the late 1990s – in sync with the emergence of AIDS and the later emergence of the virus in the public sphere. Enacting the sexual act of rubbing, Owen's images have been partially deteriorated by removing and rubbing pigments with acetone, sand paper and an eraser. Purposefully diminishing the quality of the images, Owen enacts an intentional loss of information upon archival material imbued with significant historic weight. In doing so, these altered images re-enter a queer timeline while acknowledging the inter-generational loss that can be felt today. They encompass queer futures and queer pasts.

Through Owen's material interventions, the figures of these photographs become shrouded in a white haze; the nude men meet your eye longingly through the smoke in the air, akin to the sublime haze of the crowded dance floors of the past that inspire it.

Making advantageous use of the scanner bed as a lens-based practice, Karice Mitchell similarly distorts archival materials, appropriating Black pornography through digital manipula-

tion. Mitchell's processed based interventions consist of clippings from magazines that are warped, cropped, and technicolour. The images radiate with vibrant blues, yellows, reds and greens. Blowing the materials up to extreme degrees, representations of the Black women body are expanded to intensely detailed resolution, revealing the pixels that constitute these images and breaking down the artifice that mediates these cultural depictions. Exploring how race has been interpreted by popular culture, Mitchell seeks to counter racist histories of representation – images of Black women in these magazines mirror an ongoing stereotype of the Black body as hypersexualized. Across both streams of the exhibition, this collection of new artworks are exhibited alongside the archival images that are used to create it. Reframing the vintage aesthetic appeal of 90s pulp pornographic magazines, these works are as elusive and revealing as the artist intends. Mitchell challenges the source as a means of misrepresentation, how Black bodies are remembered, the embodied realities of these assumptions, and whether or not archives were ever a site of objective knowledge.

Time, as extensible as it always seems, is entirely subject to an myriad of encounters in our

1-877-957-7818

everyday lives. You may lose yourself on the dance floor as the night bounds by, or lie in bed restless and unable to sleep as the hours almost stop entirely. In my life I've commonly heard that to feel nostalgic is to feel melodramatic and overly emotional. Though I don't disagree, these criticisms fail to acknowledge the importance of remembering in such exaggerated ways: Informed by culture, history, our collective and personal experiences, nostalgia has the unique capacity to wield time. It's an embodied desire that helps us process and interpret its complex irregularities. *The way you look tonight* asks its contributors to look knowingly at this fleeting sensation. And in doing so, they assert agency in exploring the histories that inform how we may relive the spectacular, unforgettable, or otherwise formative nights of our interconnected lives.

*Always slipping from my hands*

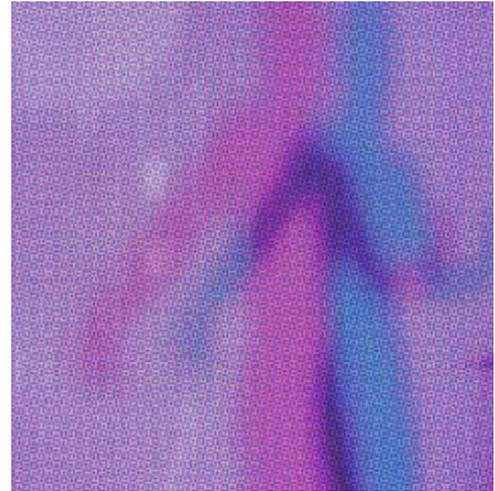
*Sand's a time of its own*

*Take your seaside arms and write the next line*

*I want the truth to be known*<sup>6</sup>



*This exhibition featured Nightwind Radio, an adjacent virtual program by Toronto-based artist Josi Smit which debuted on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*



*Styled after the freeform shows that once populated FM radio, "Nightwind Radio" mixes disco, funk, and electronic cuts from the seventies and eighties into themed sets interspersed with anecdotes and dedications. Tune in and let the airwaves carry you away into dreams of bygone nights spent swirling under disco lights...*

*Check out the Nightwind Radio tracklist via the QR code!*



# MINDALAES IN QUARANTINE

SAMAY ARCENTALES CAJAS

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



MICHAELA COYOLI

*"We need something like this that's full of beauty, that's handmade, that has a bit of spirit, that explains many stories and legends; and it is through that that people get a sense of belonging, & it sort of reminds people that we are part of mother earth in that way"*

Marcos Arcentales





Indigenous traditions are cyclical. They move in all directions and experience time in all dimensions. They constantly re-learn, but never forget. They morph and shape – through prosperity and hardship – into forms seemingly unrecognizable, but very much the same. They are the balance between constant change and all that remains the same. They are rooted in land and based on its intricate relationships. They migrate and travel, but always come back. They learn to build a home away from home, and extend it to those found throughout the web of relationships they weave on their path. They are ingenious, creative, and inventive for survival. Because ingenuity and creativity are gifts of resilience and resistance.

Throughout this past year, the places that allowed us to feel connected to the community that helped us feel at home in Tkaronto had to be cut off from our daily lives. We could no longer frequent places like Pacha Arts, a fami-

ly-run Indigenous storefront that offered artwork, craft, and medicine from North and South America. The store, run by a Kichwa family from Peguche, Ecuador, materialized the condor-eagle story that teaches good relations based on respect and reciprocity. In an act of reunion, adaptability, and reconnection, Samay Arcentales Cajas opens the door to the Pacha Arts family's home. They allow us to sit around their living room to listen, to giggle, to learn. In *Mindalaes in Quarantine*, Cajas documents the way their lives had to suddenly change due to the worldwide pandemic and their efforts to care for themselves and the community.

In seemingly unprecedented times of sickness, fear, isolation, and uncertainty Patricia, Marcos, Kinoo, and Samay show us that even though it feels like we've never been here or done this before, it takes remembering the things we do know, and the places we have been in order to survive.



According to Samay, Mindalae is a relatively new term that describes a Kichwa person who travels with their culture. They are diplomatic in their conflict resolution because they are travelling merchants. They practice putting in place verbal and ceremonial protocols and respecting those of the nations they visit. This has allowed them to build homes away from their homelands in Otavalo, Ecuador. Even though they call other lands home, they always try to come back. They find strength and resilience in their homelands, their work, their relations, and their historic ability to adapt. Samay beautifully captures this feeling by showing the way the Arcentales Cajas family live out their tradition in times of the global pandemic. They carried out their traditions when they first came to Canada following extensive pow-wow trails, continued practicing them through the running of the storefront, and now continue to live them through times of quarantine. Although they look quite different due to the restrictions

for travelling and gathering, they still hold the teachings of family, community, and resilience at their core. Samay says “leaving the store was hard, but work has always come from home. We just grew up that way”.

*Mindalae in Quarantine* is a gift. It is archival work for future generations from Indigenous folk for Indigenous folk, done in the unfolding and continuation of the Kichwa mindalae tradition. The subject and production of the film contribute in their own way to the values set by the family's traditions. Ingeniously filmed and edited with the tools available to Samay during quarantine, it holds so many teachings in a simple, quotidian, and intimate way. In an elegant extension of their father's words, Samay makes a piece full of beauty and spirit. It holds stories and legends through which people get a sense of belonging and that reminds us we are part of mother earth.

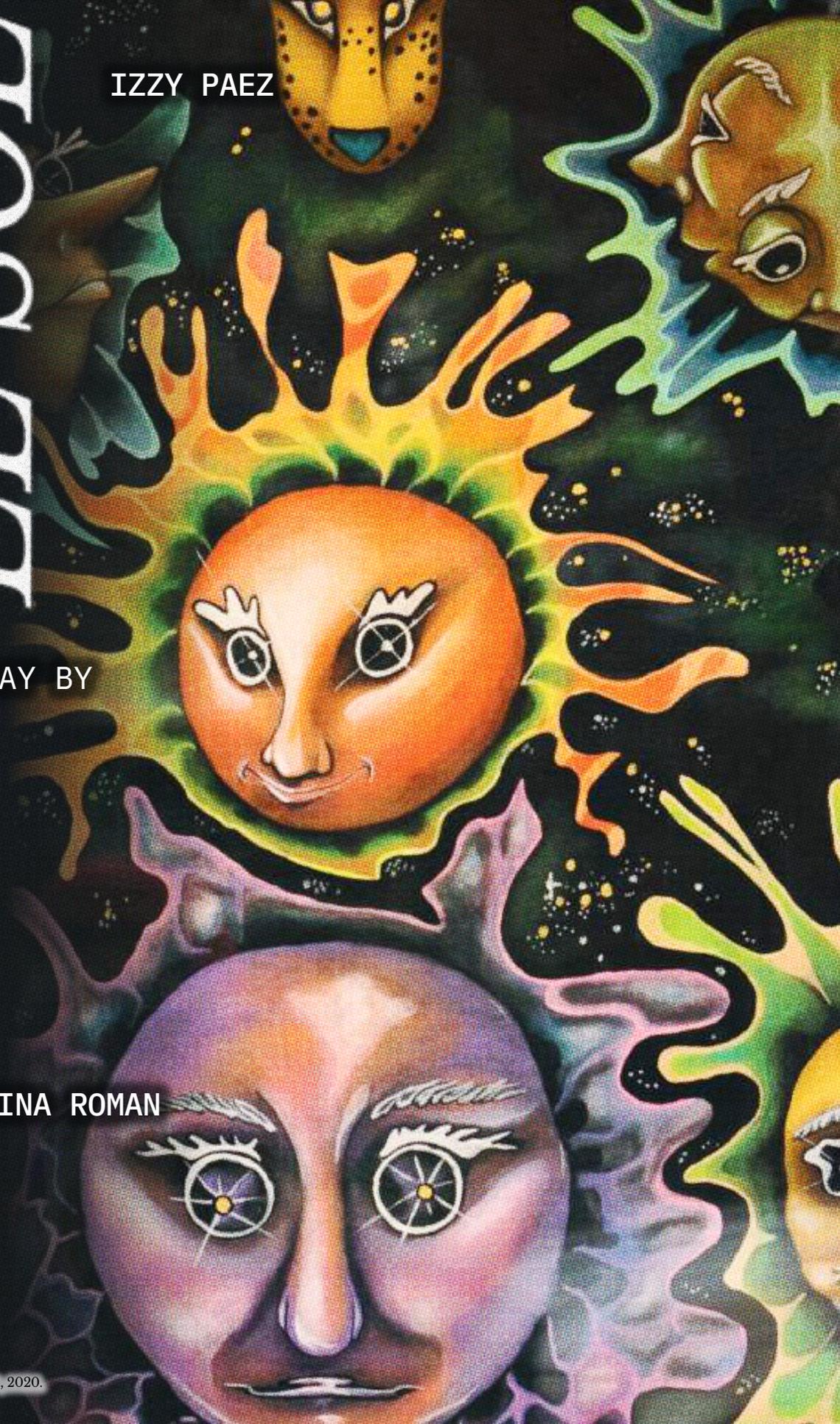


# DONDE BRILLA EL SOL

IZZY PAEZ

ESSAY BY

KARINA ROMAN





*¿Dónde Brilla el Sol?*

*Where are you now?*

*Is the sun visible from where your body is located?*

*Can you sense its warmth or its absence?*

*Have you ever tried to catch a sunbeam between your fingers?*

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Izzy Paez's *Donde Brilla el Sol*, 2020, is a 66"x 60" acrylic on canvas painting situated in Xpace Cultural Centre's Window Space, that showcases a rich, cosmological universe where a conglomerate of six colorful suns fills most of the surface, each sun revealing singular face-like features. Over the blackish background, the suns seem to float among a purplish stardust fog, around them jaguar faces that resemble masks join in unison, as if staring at them. The painting is framed by a rain of yellow paper cempasúchitl flowers on both of its sides.<sup>1</sup> Through this window installation, Paez presents to the viewer a sneak peek of a dynamic and lively universe. Inspired by Mexican traditional artwork, Paez's work reflects the aesthetics of the diverse art objects that decorate the restaurant their family has run since the early 90's on the Danforth, El Sol.

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<sup>1</sup> Cempasúchitl flowers or marigolds have a powerful meaning in Mexican celebrations and traditional rituals. Mostly known for their presence during Día de Muertos celebrations, where these flowers, in their yellow and orange variations, are used to make a path that leads the death to their respective altars and ofrendas. Cempasúchitl resembles the shape and the brightness of the sun, for this reason they are used for this kind of paths. To light up the way of those beloved ones long-gone to other realms.

Like in *Donde Brilla el Sol*'s universe, the interior walls of El Sol's are filled with masks and suns, part of a ceramic collection – from the Guerrero region – full of bright colours that harmonizes with an atmosphere filled with the smells of simmering sauces, flavors of corn tortilla, beans, and machaca, and the sounds of moving pans and ebullient conversation, characteristic of a restaurant like el Sol. A vibrant environment that became essential to Paez's childhood and that brought them closer to their Yaqui-Mexican roots. As a self-taught artist, Paez started bringing the imagery of Mexican handmade artwork to the canvas since they were 10 years old. In *Donde Brilla el Sol*, Paez projects the essence that El Sol holds as an emotional and physical place, by painting what they have absorbed from its imagery. Such absorption is carried in different levels since it is not only sensorial but spiritual. Paez's own personal process lets themselves be inhabited by the richness and abundance of their cultural Yaqui-roots. A connection kept alive by intergenerational family relations after their family arrival to Canada about three decades ago. As a member of a diasporic community, Paez thrives in their own journey to remain connected to their roots.

### El Rostro del Sol

Most of the time we take the sun's presence for granted, forgetting that it is an essential source of life. *Donde Brilla el Sol* compels us to stop and face the sun; actually, it makes us look at the many faces of the bright astro. From the canvas, not one but six incandescent suns manifest to the passer by, each performing a distinctive

gesture, like a smile, *una sacada de lengua*,<sup>2</sup> or a serious look. Every sun seems to embody a character with a well-defined personality. In this sense, Paez shows us the sun as a multiplicity that interpellates our own. Their depiction of the sun is not just a reference to the incandescent star, but to the inner lively energy all alive beings carry inside, an internal source of life, a spiritual dimension that is diverse in itself.

The sun has many meanings in diverse cultures. For the Yaqui, the Indigenous peoples of the Yaqui River valley in the Sonora sierra, the sun, the moon, and the stars are deities; and at the same time, they are their siblings, because there is a kinship between them through the *connection of their world*.<sup>3</sup> Paez's suns are also about kinship, that of family, community, and ancestry. As part of a diasporic Yaqui community, Paez and their family members are each like one of *Donde Brilla el Sol* distinctive suns, different faces that belong to a whole. El Sol as a site and as a symbol, is the manifestation of their Yaqui and Mexican identity and legacy.

### El Jaguar Tras la Mascara

The presence of the jaguar is not arbitrary in the painting; the jaguar is an important presence in the cosmology of many Mexican cultures. For the Aztecs – Yaqui are Uto-Aztecan speakers – the jaguar was perceived as a powerful entity and was related to the night, since it is in its darkness that it moves around. It also brings the end of day or cycles, as revealed in some *Codices*.<sup>4</sup> In *Donde Brilla el Sol*, jaguars and suns juxtaposed, represent a day-night duality,

<sup>2</sup> 'Una sacada de lengua' is the gesture to sticking out your tongue, which can connote playfulness, defiance, or irreverence.

<sup>3</sup> Yaqui aniam (worlds or realms) are organized within their cosmological worldview, not as segregating categories but as interconnected realities that have diverse relationships of time and space. Among the Yaqui aniam is the teeka ania which encompasses all that is in the sky and in the universe, there is also the sea ania, flower world very present in their traditional deer dance among many others.



but rather than a binary is a complementary nature, a balance.

Paez's jaguars are masks, but instead of a disguise for a potential wearer, they are a medium to become the jaguar, not to act as one.

Becomings are recurrent in Paez's work: in their painting *Jaguars in the Desert*, 2020, a human-jaguar hybrid appears running on a path. The human's ears are that of the animal and their flowy dress is filled with the animal's print. The dream-like imagery recalls that of Remedios Varo or Frida Kahlo, since some of their most striking paintings depict the merging of human with animals, plants and even places. The intertwining of worlds. But far from being a surrealist depiction, Paez's becomings are about growth and a spiritual dimension that interconnects us with the beings and the realms around us. The yellowish tone of the jaguar masks is enhanced by the matching cempasúchitl flowers, their colour enlivens the painting due to its complementary relation to the purplish background. In medium and content, the viewer can unveil dualities that mix and intertwine with one another. *Donde Brilla el Sol* is all about the realms we inhabit and that inhabit us.

During the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought uncertainty in many aspects of our lives, and for Paez and their family, the possibility to continue with the family business has been a latent concern due to the impact the everchanging local closure policies have had on small businesses. The artist holds on to *el sol* while wondering, if it is possible for the sun to →

4 Guilhem Olivier, "El Jaguar en la Cosmología Mexicana," *Arqueología mexicana*. no.72(2005): 52-57.



fade away? In uncertain times, we might as well go back to ancestral knowledge and take some time to look at our outer and inner suns.

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*Look at or imagine the sunset  
hold the sun with your fingers  
as if it was a small delicious candy  
swallow it  
let it shine inside you  
ahí es donde brilla el sol  
now draw, mold, sing or scream  
that sunshine back to the world*

×



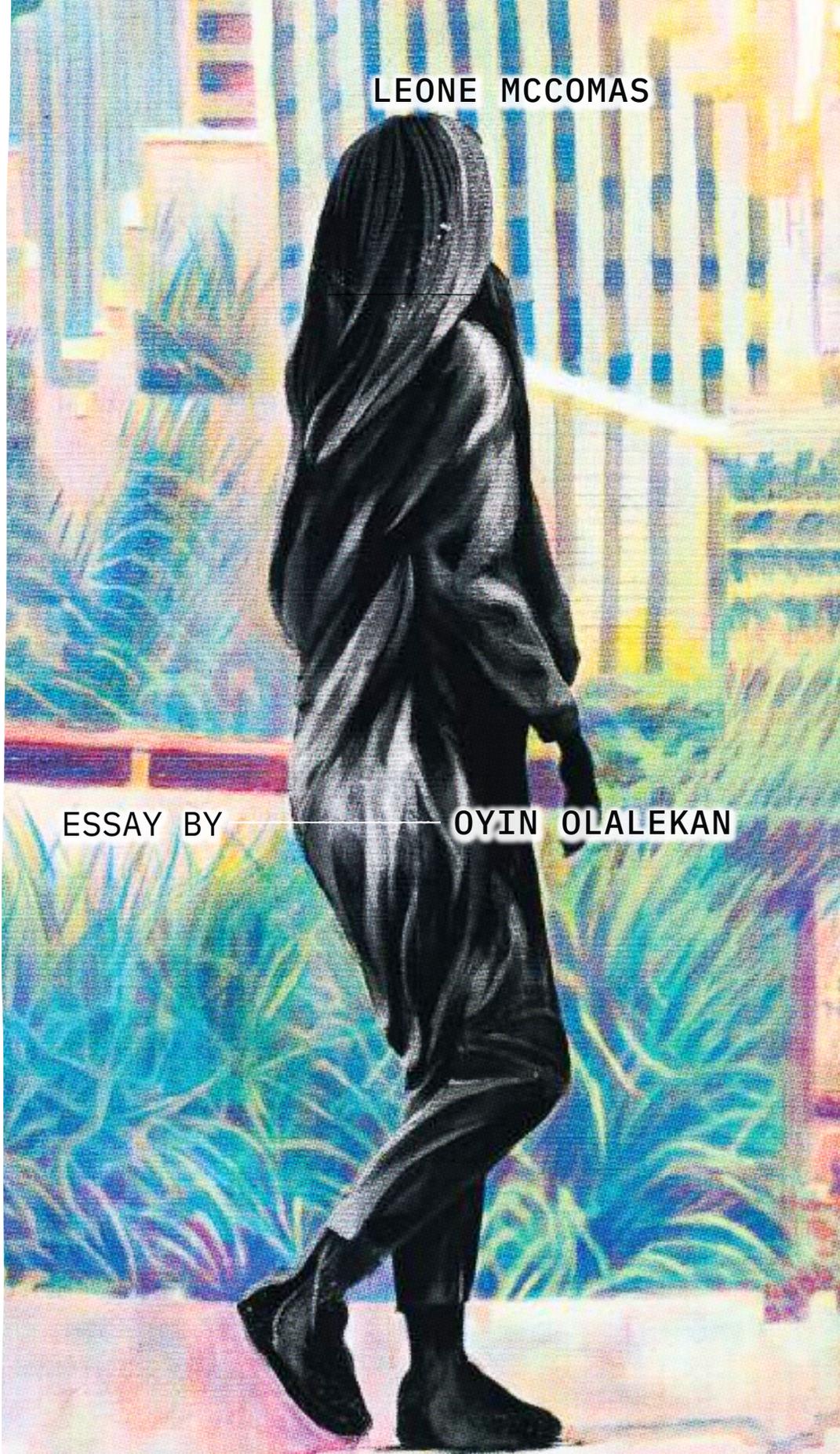


# BLACK & REFLECTIVE

LEONE MCCOMAS

ESSAY BY

OYIN OLALEKAN





*Black and Reflective* by Leone McComas is an immersive exhibition which threads together portraiture and mural art to capture the impact of a single conversation, and reflects upon the ontological experiences of self-identity and Blackness. The exhibition includes a series of paired paintings: first an intimate portrait, then a landscape to highlight the subject's navigation of self-identity and their environment. The conversations that animate this series of paintings span two and a half years and draw on individual experiences throughout the Black Diaspora.

When asked about her process, McComas expresses that the guiding meditation of each painting is the impression her subject leaves behind. Each person has their distinct approach to questions of identity along with their stories to match, and McComas' attention to what separately defines her subjects, and reverence for what connects them can be seen throughout her painting style.



xspace cultural centre '20-'21

In *Nyenyeye: A Portrait Study*, the subject looks askance lost in thought, and is shrouded in swirls of colour. When your eyes look to *Nyenyeye: Like Oil & Water*, you will find that there is no face to settle on but rather a landscape that is steadily shifting and repeating. It is as though the internal landscape has manifested externally. Look closer at the central figure to find that she is in motion as much as her surroundings. Keeping in mind that Nyenyeye and McComas met in 2016, later reflecting on their shared conversation a theme emerges: the desire to be understood and the practice of listening to understand. To be othered, even within the very life one inhabits is an alienating experience.

Yet the subjects of these paintings are not abstracted by alienation. Take the landscape painting of *Framing James: Cherry Blossom* for example. The figure of James is intact, and the essence of himself is projected around him, standing in stark contrast to his surroundings. When asked, McComas describes James as a man determined



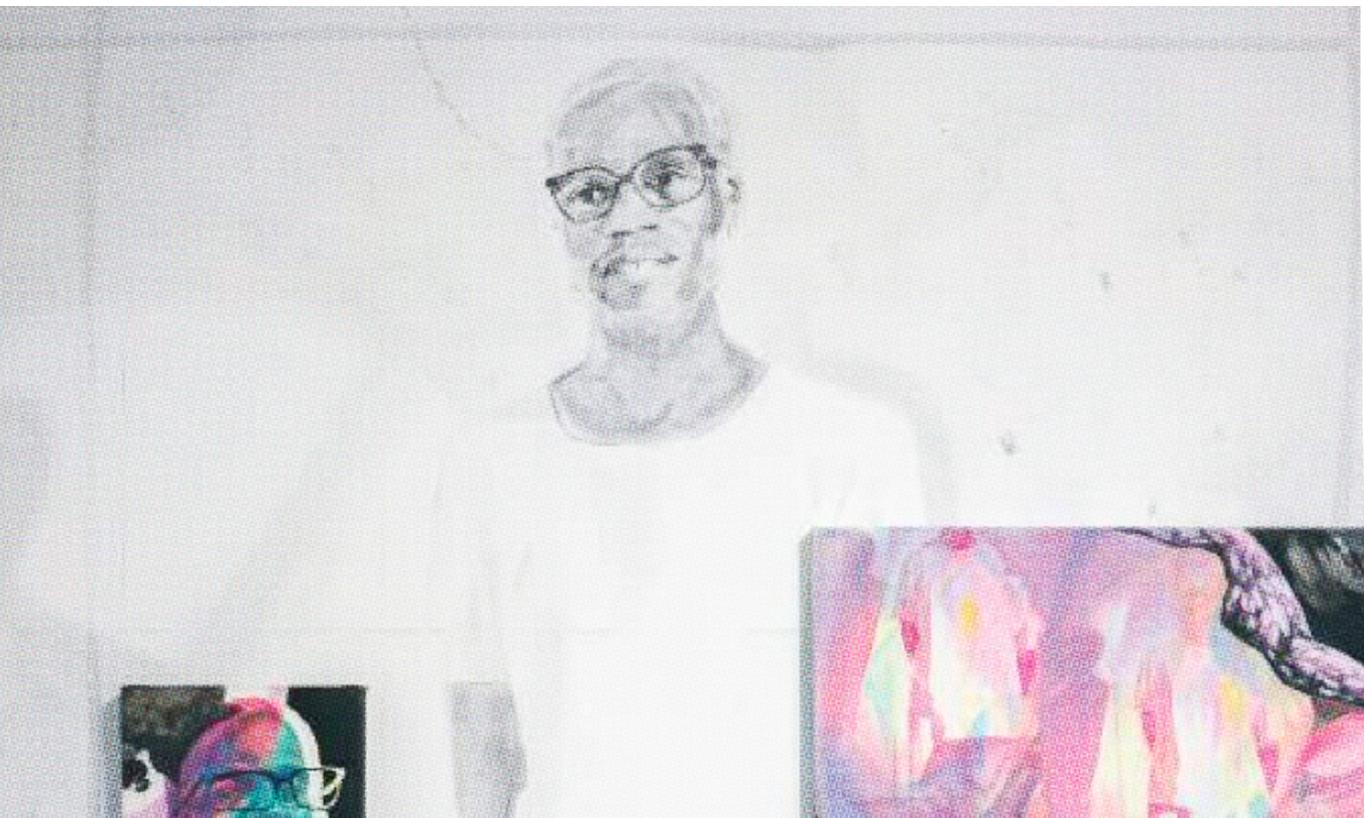
to be unboxed. His plans and dreams are the things that grip his mind. It's not about the past; he refuses to be framed by struggle. This assertion claims for James a flexibility and dimension that McComas captures both in her portrait and landscape painting of the subject.

Every time McComas met someone for this series she found herself simultaneously unpacking her story as much as theirs. The questions that began to guide her practice were:

*What is missing from the conversation on identity and race today?*

*Who am I trying to have the conversation with and who am I unpacking this conversation for?*

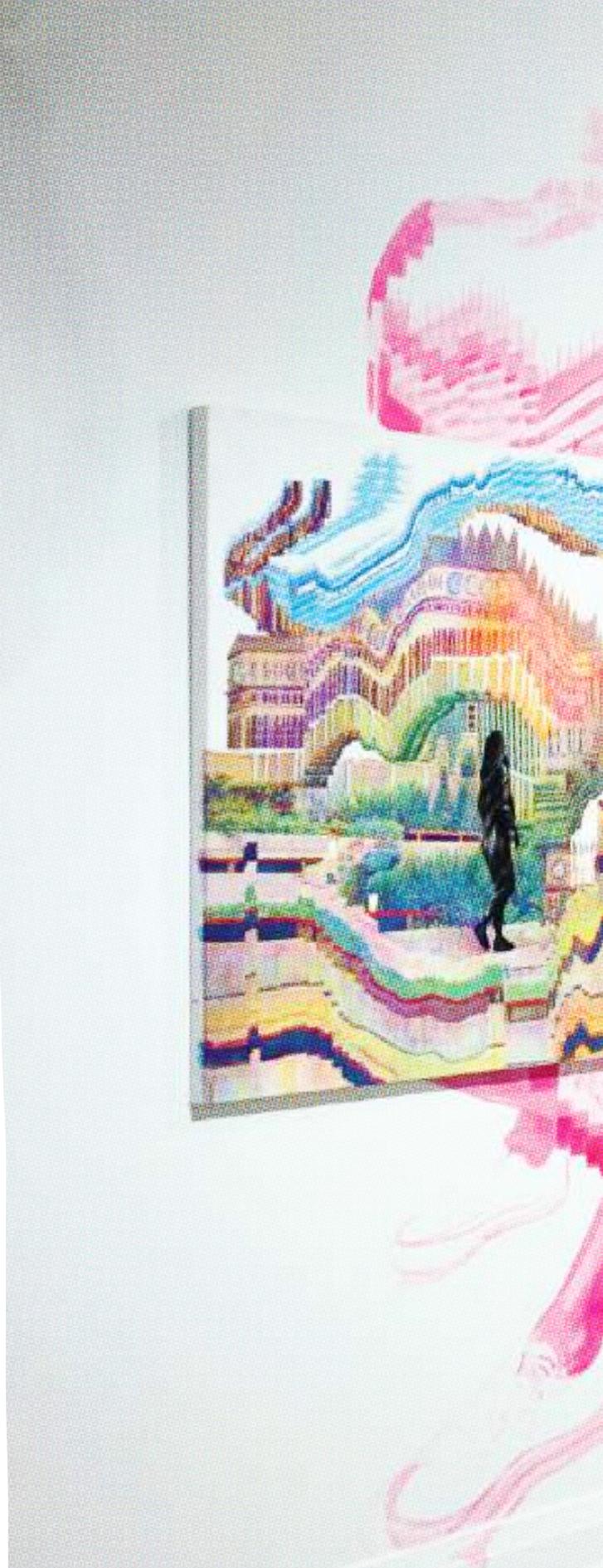
McComas' reflections on these questions become apparent not only in her treatment of the subjects in each painting, but also in the recurring motifs in her painting practice. There are no hard lines or boundaries, rather it is as though the self of each subject is constantly emerging →

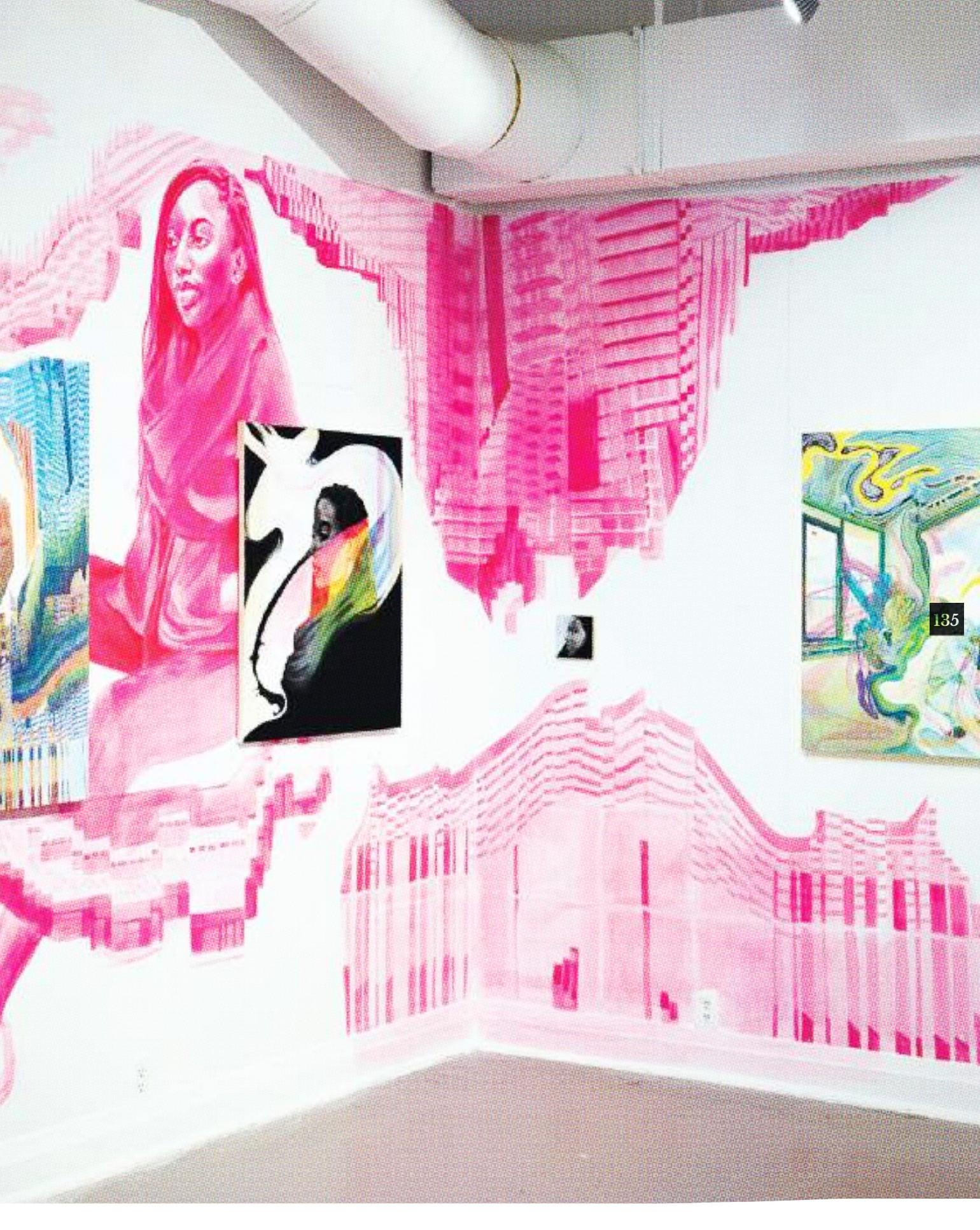


from its surroundings. The refracted images of her main subjects combined with her layered flat strokes to create depth and play with color all add up to create the sense of light passing through to illuminate the painting.

Traditionally, oil paints are layered from dark to light in order to mimic light, but McComas flips this technique and uses the canvas itself as light, saying “no mixed color comes out as bright as the canvas itself”. McComas attributes this style to her desire to capture honesty and truth and allowing the internal to shine through – just one example of how often the spirituality of the painter as a witness is made apparent in her process. McComas describes the streams of colour as seen in the background of the portraits of Raquel and Timothy capture the “things that can’t be known” about a person’s identity.

Let your eyes rest on these paintings and take note of the open wonder captured in Raquel’s portrait, and the pensiveness reflected in Timothy, and what you might find is an invitation to be hospitable with the stories and essence of each subject therein captured. At times, the viewing of a group of Black folks lined together can often be flattening, “instructive”, and even extractive. But here you have four separate opportunities to remember the love and curiosity that started this conversation and to discover that Black is not always a prefix to struggle.





# SLOW HORIZON

DONYA AREF  
MITRA FAKHRASHRAFI  
KIM NINKUR  
ADRIENNE MATHEUSZIK

CURATED BY

gallery

KARINA ISKANDARSJAH

[Click here to view the essay as a PDF](#)

## slow horizon;

a phenomenon/state of simultaneity; of past and future, hope and pessimism, utopia

Nona Faustine's photograph *Liberty or Death, Sons of Africa* is the jacket of Claudia Rankine's book *Just Us*. Part of a series that confronts American national monuments (in this case, the Washington monument) as simultaneous sites of narrative for different peoples, the photograph's darkened horizon conceptualizes tension and the "weight of all of that history"[1] in *Just Us*, Claudia Rankine's contemporary conversations and encounters that she has experienced in

*slow horizon;  
a phenomenon/state of simultaneity; of past and future,  
hope and pessimism, utopia and apocalypse.*

Liberty or Death, Sons of Africa (2019), Nona Faustine

## I

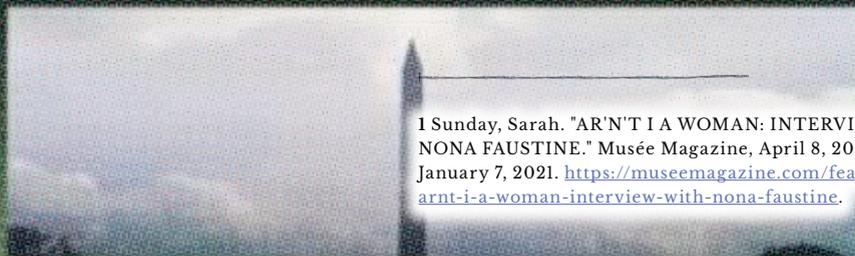
Nona Faustine's photograph *Liberty or Death*, Sons of Africa is the jacket cover image for Claudia Rankine's book *Just Us*. Part of a series that confronts American national monuments (in this case, the Washington monument) as simultaneous sites of narratives for enslaved peoples, the photograph's darkened horizon conceptualizes tension and trauma; "that black bar is what's hidden in all of that history."<sup>1</sup> In *Just Us*, Claudia Rankine analyzes contemporary conversations and encounters that she has experienced in which race and racism casts a shadow over the scene. Despite the exhausted breath I can almost hear in between Rankine's lines, she is determined in her role of educator to make connections, have compassion, and find ways to bridge communication and understanding.

bios

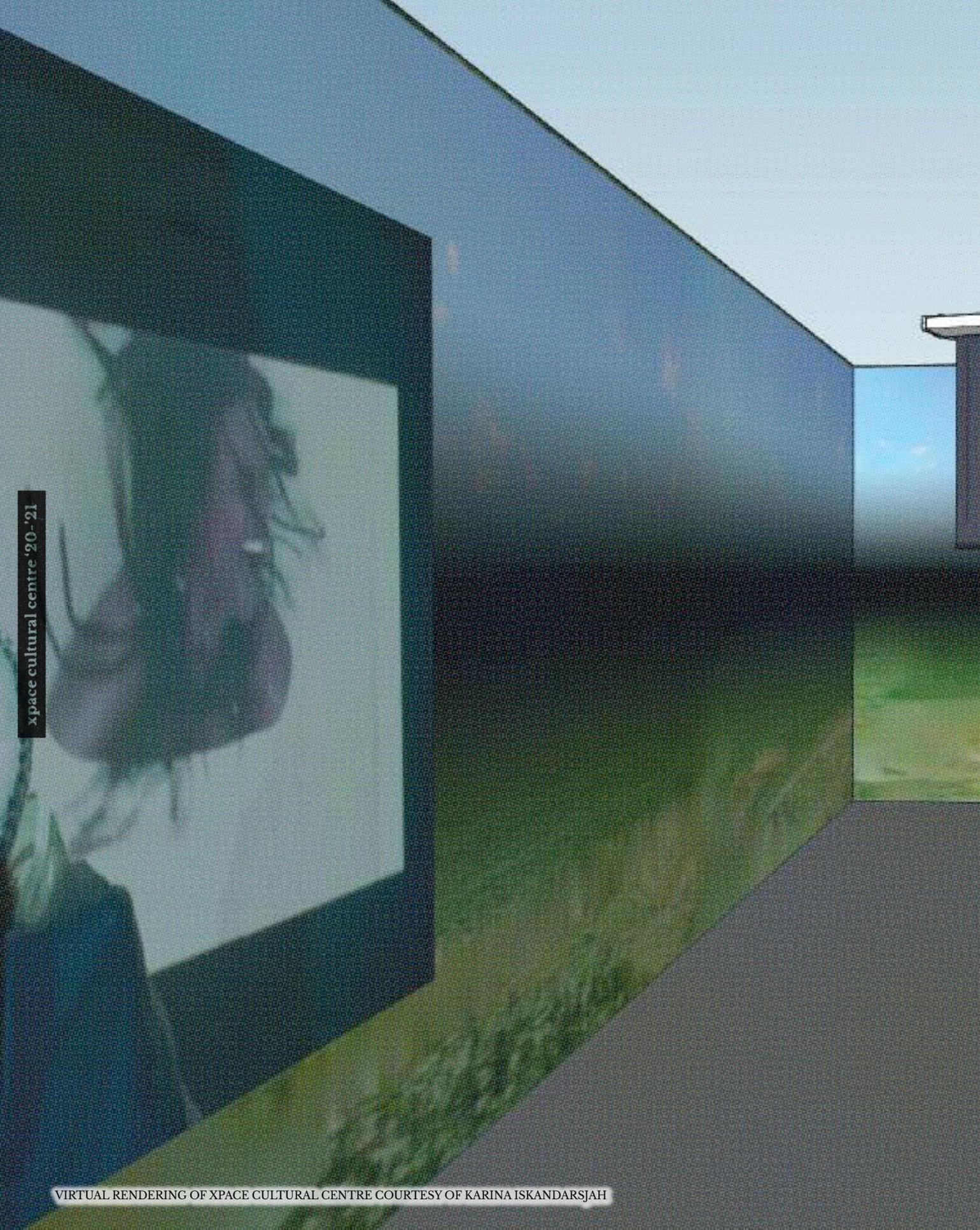
ESSAY BY

...ia and apocalypse.

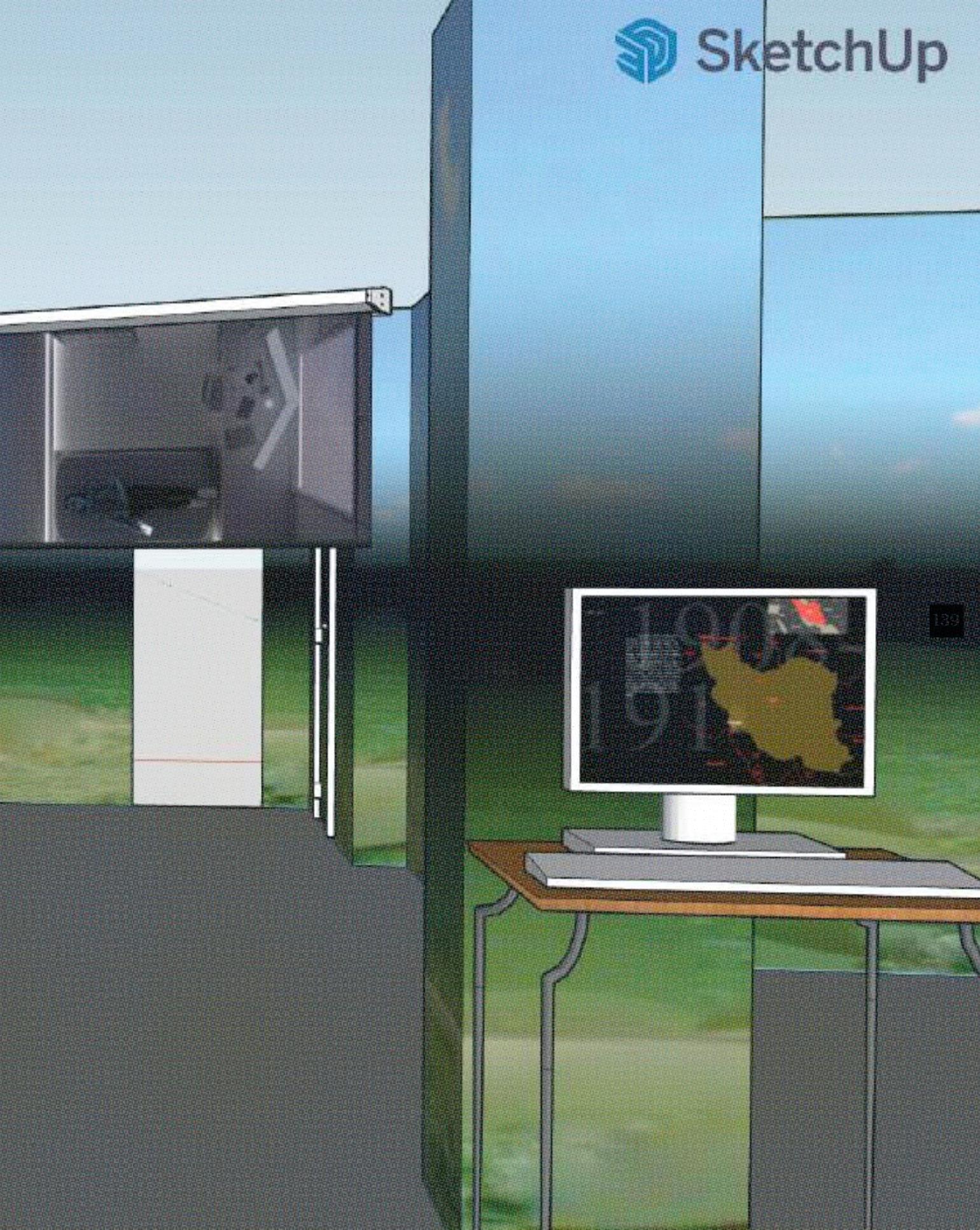
...t cover image for  
...tional monuments  
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...uma; "that black  
...Rankine analyzes  
...n which race and



<sup>1</sup> Sunday, Sarah. "AR'N'T I A WOMAN: INTERVIEW WITH NONA FAUSTINE." Musée Magazine, April 8, 2020. Accessed January 7, 2021. <https://museemagazine.com/features/2019/4/8/arnt-i-a-woman-interview-with-nona-faustine>.



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I start writing this essay, on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a day after white supremacists gathered in mass, during a global pandemic, at the US capitol to display a weaponized tantrum in protest of the presidential election results. Watching the news unfold, I try to make sense of this phenomenon of existing simultaneously in the past and the future – witnessing a kind of violence and division often framed as something of the past, while looking towards thinkers whose vision for equity is often framed as too radical for the present. Science fiction writer and theorist Chisoxical simultaneity in a 2014 keynote speech at the Earth Day Conference of the Nelson Institute:

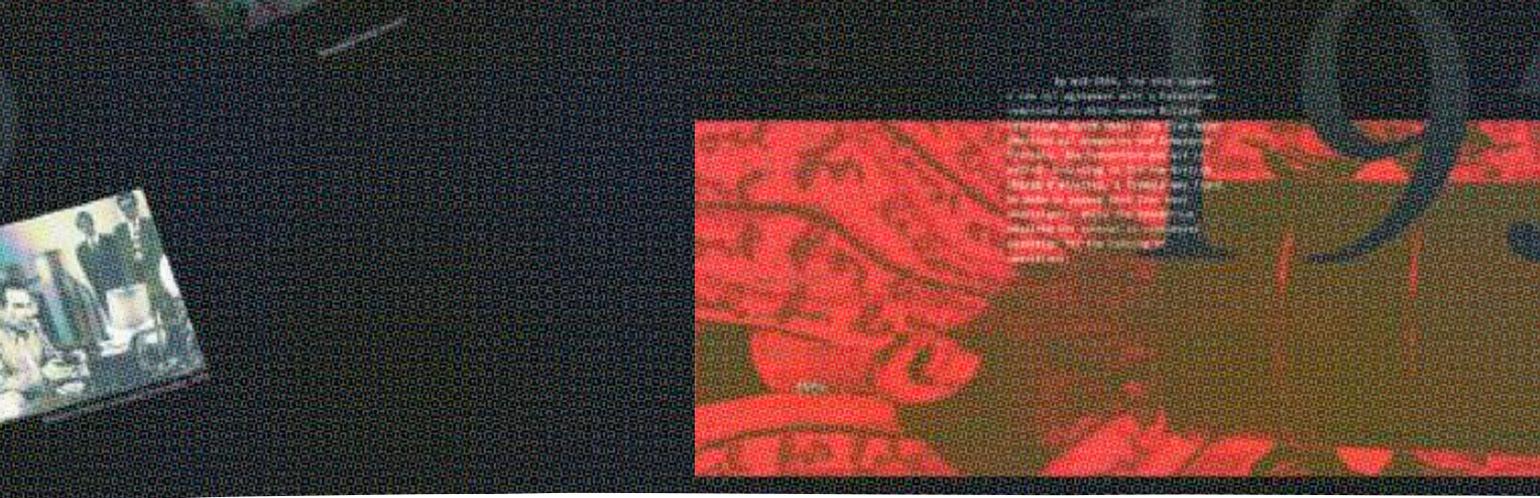
“Apocalypse and utopia: the end of everything, and the horizon of hope. Far from antipodes, these two have always been inextricable [...] The utopia of togetherness is a lie, [...] we are not all in this together. Which means fighting the fact that fines for toxic spills in predominantly white areas are five times what they are in minority ones. It means not only providing livings for people who survive by sifting through rejectamenta in toxic dumps but squaring up against the imperialism of garbage that

put them there, against trash neoliberalism by which poor countries compete to become repositories of filth.”<sup>2</sup>

*slow horizon* is a group exhibition that takes inspiration from Miéville’s declaration of our world’s contemporary paradoxes, Rankine’s determination towards understanding and compassion despite inherent failures, as well as Faustine’s conceptual black bar of unknowable histories, framing its form as a blank horizon onto which we can project predictions and desires for a future.

The exhibition selects new media and hybrid-format art works by Donya Aref, Mitra Fakhrashrafi, Kim Ninkuru and Adrienne Matheuszik. These artists use data visualization, design communication, and science fiction tropes as tools to uncover fractured, disturbing and ambiguous narratives brought upon by colonial legacies and late-stage capitalism. The works range in form: a website, textbook syllabus, and performances by digitally animated clones. They hybridize a sense of self with multiple histories and speculative fictions to transcend our present moment and

<sup>2</sup> Miéville, China. "The Limits of Utopia." In *Futurity Report*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020.



become non-synchronous to the very issues they speak to.

## II

In the 90s and 00s, art critics and writers like Hal Foster and Mark Godfrey argued for the importance of artists who take on the role of historian/archivist. What is not included in their testimonies however is that the modus operandi of the artist – historian is crucial for the marginalized and colonized subject, whose imagination is needed to put together the fragmented, violent and buried histories critical to understanding contemporary inequalities and global hierarchies. Donya Aref and Mitra Fakhrashrafi take on the artist-historian role in their works *Of Violent Extractions* and *Salt of this Sea Syllabus*. They articulate narratives through accessible and engaging formats that disengage from the Coloniality of Power that has marginalized the very histories and issues that their works spotlight.

*Of Violent Extractions* is an interactive web-based timeline project by Donya Aref that outlines events that resulted in the 1953 Iran coup, led by

the CIA. The timeline accounts for how a century-old oil crisis between Iran and Britain caused more recent antagonism between Iran and the U.S. It argues for the position that, were it not for the coup, Iran would now be a mature democracy, and that the 1953 coup and its consequences were the starting point for much of the political climate of the Middle East today.

Scrolling down Aref's dynamic interface, a chronology of text, images and design elements float past non-synchronously. *Of Violent Extractions* creates an atmosphere of a deconstructed zine in the matrix, in which the clicking and hovering of your cursor animates collaged elements and imbues them with faux-materiality, revealing careful digital renderings of texture and dimension. In the hands of the artist, this historical information is re-imagined and given an afterlife as digital debris, to be extracted and reinserted as counter-perspectives to western imperialist narratives.

In Mitra Fakhrashrafi's similarly hybrid-format zine, the banality of imperial violence becomes clear, but even more so, the inevitable tide of →

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KIM NINKURU, 'INSTALLATION VIEW OF *THESE ARE MY REPARATIONS (PART II)*', 2019.

resistance against it. A direct response to Aref's work, Mitra Fakhrahrashi's *Salt of this Sea Syllabus* offers an unusual use of institutional language: that of the academic syllabus. Equipped with intertextual hyperlinks, this digital zine is a prescribed list of media and reading resources that trace stories of Black, Indigenous, and racialized people who have long experienced water both as a source of threat and a source of possibility. Complementing Donya Aref's digital timeline of a battle over a vast natural resource between a pseudo-colony and its imperial master, Fakhrahrashi illustrates the persistence of imperial violence at bodies of water.

*Salt of this Sea Syllabus* borrows its name from the title of Annemarie Jacir's 2008 film where Soraya, a forcibly displaced Palestinian-American woman, gazes at the sea where her grandfather swam before the illegal Israeli occupation and apartheid. Connecting essays, poetry, art, and film, Fakhrahrashi's crash course offers a holistic view of vast but interconnected contemporary issues related to "watery borderlands,"<sup>3</sup> which are simultaneously sites of mobility and immobility. It includes readings about how identities are shaped by cartography and nationhood as well as case studies which take a close look at how colonial infrastructure and water management have had a lasting impact on life and labour – and by extension – access and mobility.

Fakhrahrashi's intentions are made clear in the course description; "as colonial border violence continues from the Mediterranean Sea to

St. Marys Bay (Mi'kmaq territory) and beyond, readers are invited to wade through history, nurture imaginings of a world without borders, and demand no less."<sup>4</sup> *Of Violent Extractions* and *Salt of this Sea Syllabus* both contend with the senseless greed of imperial domination. They decipher materials of the past in order to make visible the persisting tendrils of colonial legacies (turned into capitalist ventures), and demand that we simply reject the extremely uneven and deeply racialized allocation of natural resources.

### III

"Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor."<sup>5</sup>

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* by Saidiya Hartman, examines the fragmented and incomplete archives that accounted for the lives of "riotous Black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals" in Philadelphia and New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. Weaving fictional elements into archives to fully immerse the reader in her subject's lives, Hartman retaliates against the unjust treatment and exploitation of her archival characters, whose lives and likenesses were exploited by the white gaze that recorded them. The lives of marginalized and racialized peoples are erased from narratives of the past as often as they are →

3 Fakhrahrashi, Mitra. "Salt of this Sea Syllabus." 2021.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020.

erased from narratives of the future. Particularly, science fiction has been criticized for being rooted in the imagination of Western colonialism; “a managerial, bio- and ecopolitical place”<sup>6</sup> in which economic productivity – the plantation, mine, or factory – are means of suppressing other futures.

Theorist Kodwo Eshun argues that science fiction is often “neither forward-looking nor utopian,” rather – through the white gaze – it focuses on distortions of the present, in turn producing future horizons of white utopia, creating a feedback loop that comes back to shape the present. If science fiction narratives are present distortions of colonial imposition, then Afrofuturism (according to Eshun) is an intervention that envisions life “beyond the determinism of Western technoscience.”<sup>7</sup> In line with Afrofuturist conventions, Kim Ninkuru and Adrienne Matheuszik embrace science fiction tropes in their works *These are My Reparations (Part II)* and *Somewhere* to critique current racial tensions and the social conditions that produce them.

*These Are My Reparations (Part II)* by Kim Ninkuru was originally created for Dispatch, a line-up of performance art works by Black creators during the 2019 Toronto Biennial. The work is a video performance and installation that presents a robot performer named RadioHead, created in the likeness of the artist. “What would you like to hear?” RadioHead asks at the start of the performance. She stands in front of a video of the artist pacing around in an empty room, a musical lip-sync performance gradually trans-

forms into dissonance between the sound of RnB music, heavy breathing, a glitching robot and distressing shots of the artist’s body being dragged away.

This scene is part of a larger and continually unfolding narrative which takes place in a future where, since the revolution, live entertainment no longer exists. Unknowingly signing her freedom away, a young woman accepts to sell the rights to her likeness to be used for an AI robot designed to perform live music to the rich elite. Through a dichotomy of cultural expectation and horrific discomfort, Ninkuru illustrates the paradoxical reality of the co-opting of Black/femme identities into popular culture (especially within the entertainment and art industries) while disregarding their lives within the violence of white supremacy.

“Water lea  
salt rema

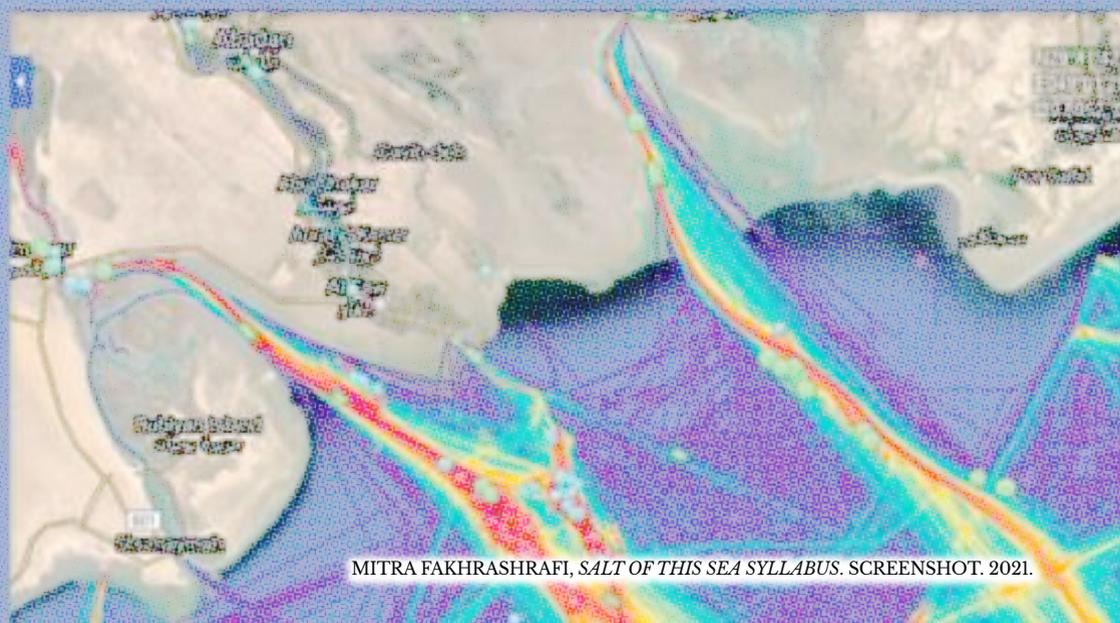
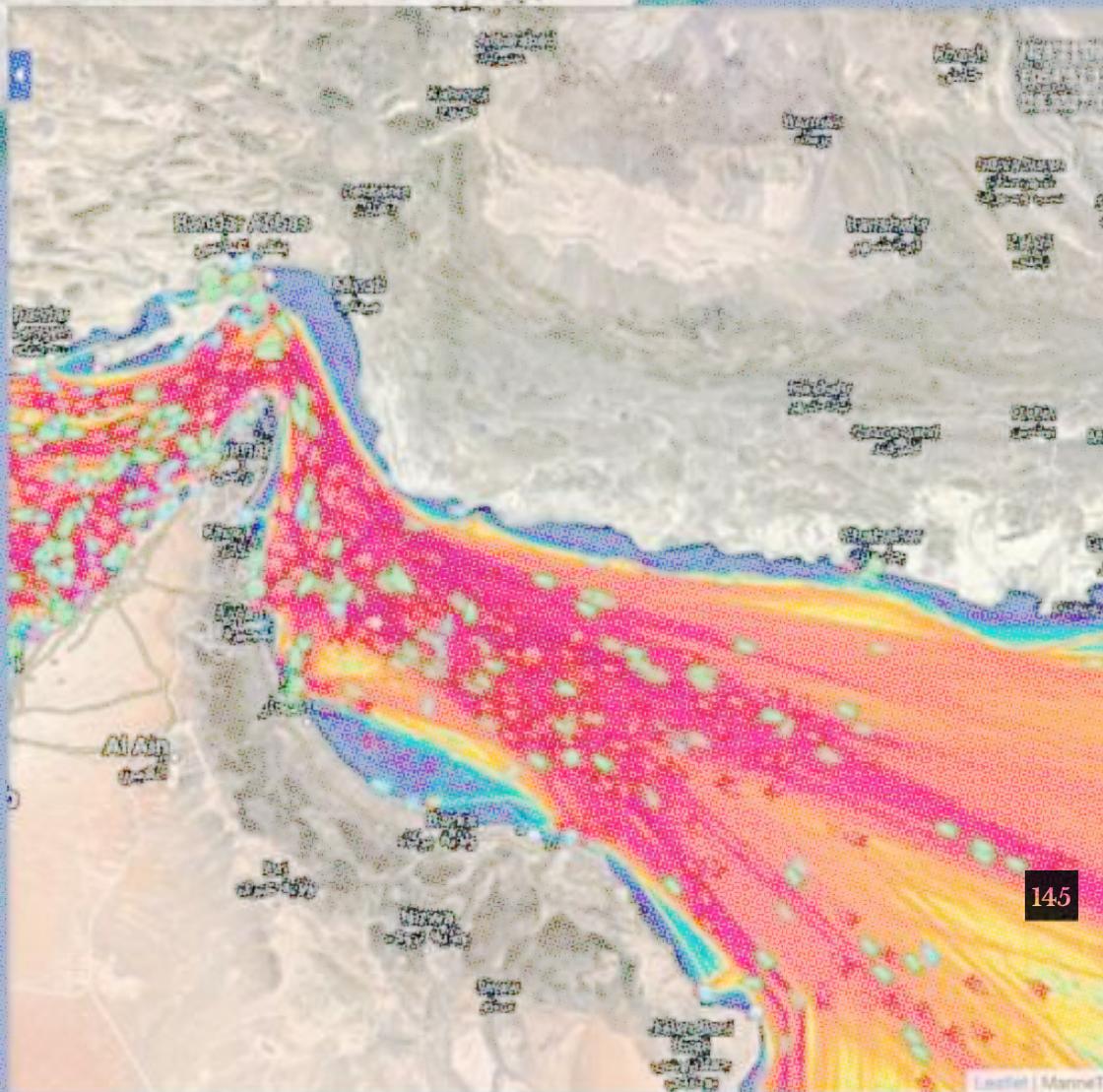
Rooted in the affirmation that “blackness is past, present, and future, always,”<sup>8</sup> Ninkuru’s science fiction world is a queer and open-ended narrative unrestricted by time or place. Despite being the first iteration of this story, the performance is deceptively labelled “(Part II)”, insinuating a state of chronological precariousness around issues of representation, reparations, and sanity. →

6 Marques, Pedro Neves. “If Futurity Is the Philosophy of Science Fiction, Alterity Is Its Anthropology: On Colonial Power and Science Fiction.” In *Futurity Report*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020.

7 Eshun, Kodwo. “Further Considerations of Afrofuturism.” *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 2003, 287-302.

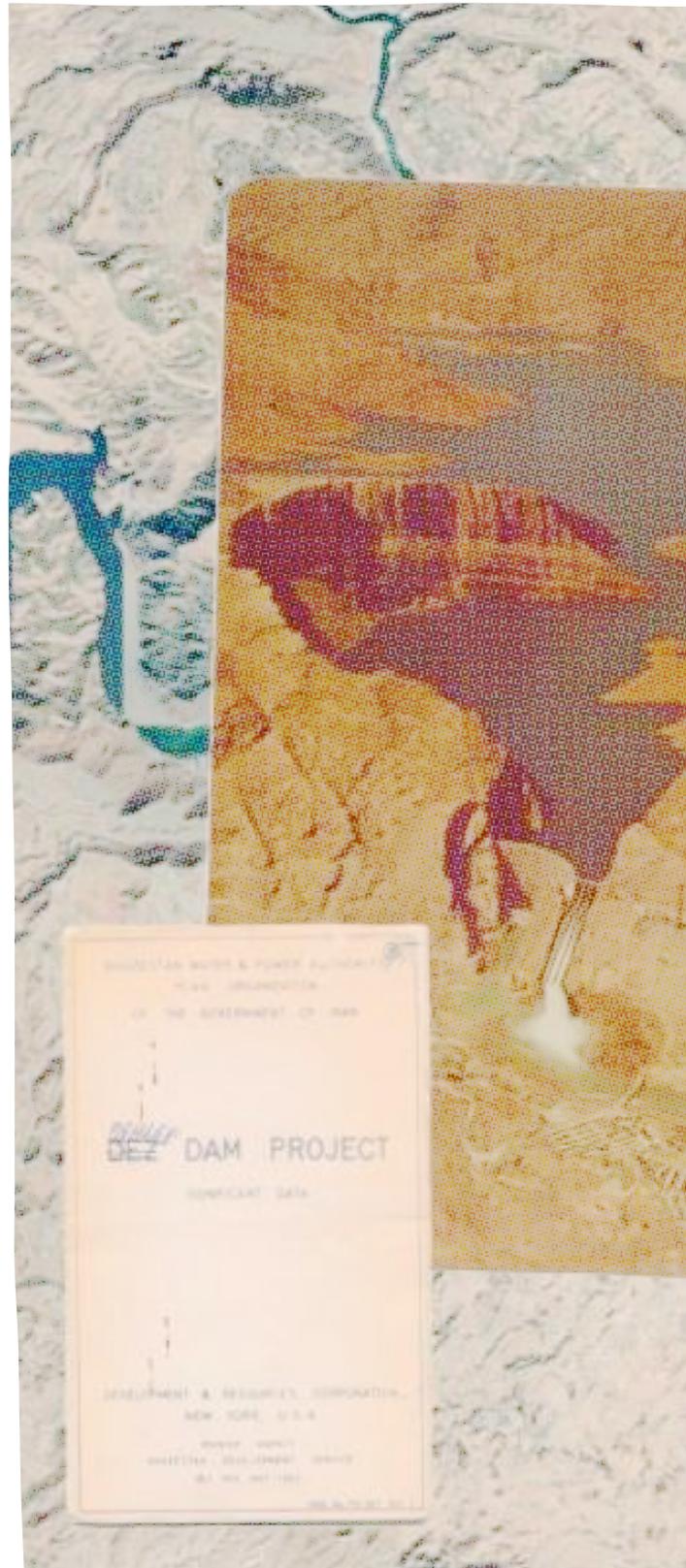
8 Ninkuru, Kim. Artist biography, 2020.

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Similarly, *Somewhere* by Adrienne Matheuszik is a work that takes place in an indeterminate universe where time is unfixed by an eternal state of liminality. *Somewhere* is a short animated film part of a larger series of works titled *Ambiguous Origins* that surveys new media technology, science fiction, and mixed-race identity. Through sculptural installations, 3D animation, and augmented reality, *Ambiguous Origins* investigates the boundaries between physical and digital space as an analogy for ethnic hybridity and the experience of being misidentified. The film *Somewhere* features a digitally animated clone of the artist, referred to as “the other adrienne”, who is alone on a ship moving through space. In her travels, the other adrienne repeatedly encounters the Object of Ambiguous Origin (OAO), forms an affinity to it, and begins to envision her existence devoid of any social or environmental context.

The title *Somewhere* refers to a song that ties into stories based on fears of racial mixing. It was written for the 1957 Broadway musical *West Side Story*, a reimagining of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (a plot about racism and fears of miscegenation) and expresses the protagonist’s desire for “a place,” and a future. However, in her thesis paper, Matheuszik frames this desired future “place” as a problematic concept. Responding to a 1993 Time magazine cover labelled “*The New Face of America*” (a computer morphed face of fourteen models of different racial backgrounds), Matheuszik notes that a racially ambiguous person “exists as a dream of the future – post-racial and utopic – [but] does not offer any real solutions to the present realities of racism and oppression.”<sup>9</sup>



9 Matheuszik, Adrienne. "Ambiguous Origins: Mixed Race and Mixed Reality." Master's thesis, OCAD University, 2019.



Although a position at the border of race and culture offers new possibilities and perspectives, an overemphasis on hybridity can conceal the actual violent politics of these borders. Similar to Ninkuru's performance, Matheuszik's vague and atmospheric narrative embraces hybridity in multifaceted ways. However, they do so to directly intervene in the perception of racialized identity. In both *These are My Reparations (Part II)* and *Somewhere*, representations of the self are combined with speculative fiction. In turn, they successfully address issues grounded in the present and reveal unrecognized layers of lived experience by transcending the constrictions of time and space.

#### IV

The works by Aref, Fakhrashrafi, Ninkuru, and Matheuszik look towards conceptions of the past, present, and future to intervene upon the catastrophes of colonial legacy and late-stage capitalism. Through their aesthetic interpretation of archival materials, *Of Violent Extractions* and *Salt of this Sea Syllabus* are firmly committed to education as means to encourage members of the public to demand accountability and transparency from their governments, overdue reparations, and release from exploitation. Contrastingly, *My Reparations (Part II)* and *Somewhere* experiment with abstracted lived realities to subvert expectations of clarity in the perception of racialized identity, especially when violent contradictions are inherent within them.

If the horizon of the near future looks blank, it's because we can no longer accept the unjust

circumstances fixed to the imaginations produced by coloniality of power. *slow horizon* advocates for the desires and predictions made by artists in the margins, whose points of view dispel the notion of a "utopia of togetherness" and dismantle violent political and socio-cultural borders.



# IN COLOURING GRIEF

YASMEEN NEMATT ALLA

ESSAY BY

RAZAN SAMARA

Her purse was gone. At some point while making her way through the infamous crowds of one of Alexandria's metros, someone swiped it. People hurried along in every direction, the thief among them, perhaps somewhere near, or far – the crowd offered no answers. She made her way back home, devastated that the photograph she had of her daughter, which she kept in her purse for safekeeping, was gone with the chaos.

Later, she would tell her granddaughter of how one day she found the purse outside her doorstep, the thief had returned it and its belongings, with exception to the 100-pound bill. She would tell this story over and over again, perhaps to subtly teach her granddaughter that in grief and loss there is always love.

*In Colouring Grief* is an exchange of grief between the artist, Yasmeen Nematt Alla, and an online audience. Over the course of a month, Nematt Alla asked audiences to share their stories of personal grief with her by completing a Google Form or by messaging her through social media. In response to stories, Nematt Alla wrote and mailed poems as an iteration of what was shared, or as Nematt Alla puts it, “a translation that has gone through her and then back to the audience.”

In confidence, Nematt Alla would read through the expressions of grief, giving care and attention to each of the stories shared with her. The stories varied: some took the shape of essays, and others were one-sentence long, some felt familiar, and others detailed grief Nematt Alla hadn't encountered before. A few of the submissions were written in anonymity and expected nothing in return. Regardless of what Nematt Alla received, the act of witnessing someone's truth was deeply connecting to her. *In Colouring Grief* was an invitation to hold and be held, in distance and in closeness, in silence and in exchanges of language.

Mirroring her experiences as a translator, Nematt Alla would write a poem as soon as she would receive a grievance. In this exchange, she would deconstruct one story and rebuild it again. Akin to using Google Translate to translate a text from one language to the next, and then back to the original language, the poem manifests the idea that it's impossible to tell the same story twice – some things may be added, missing, or simply make no sense.

Neither the grievance nor Nematt Alla's poetry translations are static, rather through this exchange process, the stories are shaped by the way they are told and received. The audience and Nematt Alla were telling and retelling stories within the confines of their own ideas of what's "worth telling" and "worth hearing"<sup>1</sup>. For example, it felt right for Nematt Alla to translate descriptions of emotions in one of the poems into mythological references. She relied on the universality of mythological allusions

to express the intended meaning, even though there was no guarantee that the audience would make the same connection or any connection at all.

As exemplified with *In Colouring Grief*, translation is at the root of Nematt Alla's practice and her attempt to translate the human experience into art that would resonate with others. Nematt Alla embraces and struggles with the ways translations and words can fail her, acknowledging that there is no such thing as a "perfect" translation. Even when her attempts seem futile, she asks herself, what if you make something that once felt incomprehensible to someone and now suddenly makes some sort of sense?

Nematt Alla offered a gesture of care, a confidential space to share and hold grief, to whom ever decided to respond to the invitation. In recognizing the importance of choice, the audience was left to determine the extent of their participation. The exchange was complete when the audience needed it to be.

These themes; language, experiences, care, grief, and community-building are inherent to all her work. As an artist, Nematt Alla wonders if her role is to highlight the unseen and forgotten gestures of care and empathy through recreating them in art spaces. Through *In Colouring Grief*, Nematt Alla is asserting that there is space for community grieving in art-making practice that is separate from institutionalized care. Nematt Alla sees value and comfort in artists and community members holding space for another, particularly for marginal-

1 Polanyi, Livia. (1981). The Nature of Meaning of Stories in Conversation. *Studies in 20<sup>th</sup> & 21st Century Literature*. 6. 10.4148/2334-4415.1627.

2 Excerpt from Yasmeeen Nematt Alla's portfolio: [yasmeeennematt.com](http://yasmeeennematt.com)

3 Term created by curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s to describe the tendency to make art based on, or inspired by, human relations and their social context.

ized community members, such as herself, who don't see themselves in more categorical or fixative forms of care.

The raw, honest, and vulnerable responses Nematt Alla received speak to the notion of art experiences' potential to be a fulcrum of community care. When grief is shared, there's often a fixation on offering advice and solutions, even when we know we have very little or nothing to offer. *In Colouring Grief* offered respite from this pressure, acknowledging that sometimes all we want is to be heard. If we don't have spaces that acknowledge this truth, Nematt Alla asks, how do we tell each other anything?

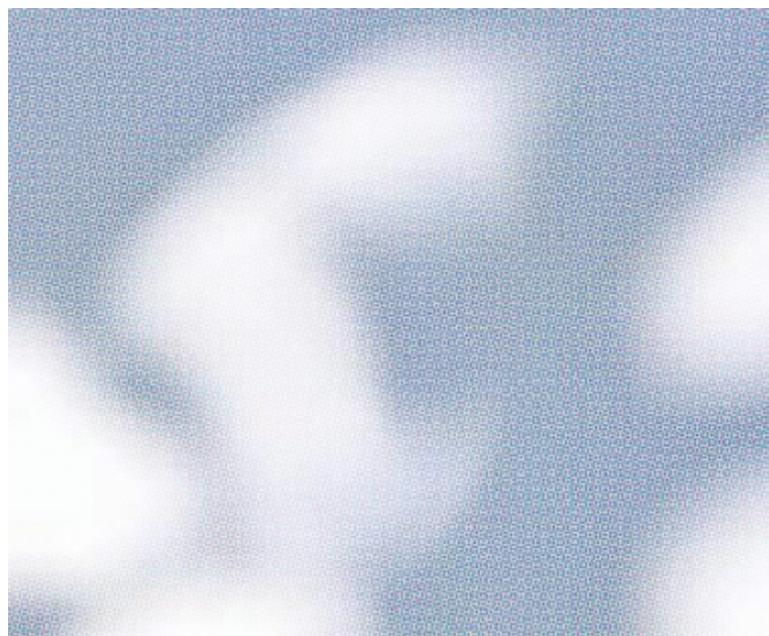
We don't, instead we hold on until we can't anymore. Years later, when Nematt Alla's grandmother could no longer carry the grief, she told her that the purse, along with the picture of her daughter, was gone. It was never found by her doorstep. Nematt Alla writes, "you've given me your grief here and in it I have not found a reason for you to suffer. And yet here we are grieving and suffering."

For Nematt Alla, art mirrors life. Holding space is simply what she does and has always been an implied component of her work. This is most evident in her exhibit *Not Traumatic Enough for a Shock Blanket*, where she placed traumatic narratives on shock blankets and let the audience "bear witness to the truth of these experiences and by extension carry some of the weight of the narratives."<sup>9</sup> During the opening, the narratives emotionally moved audi-

ence members who saw their own stories in the work but never thought they were worthy of saying out loud. Nematt Alla did what she knew she could, she listened to the audience with care and held them in warm embraces.

*In Colouring Grief*, however, demanded more of her. For the first time, Nematt Alla wouldn't be in a physical space with her audience. She felt immensely guilty at the thought of having someone share something precious with her and not being able to hold them in the ways she's used to. She is reminded of her daily conversations with her grandmother, who is alone in caring for her husband as his dementia worsens, and all the moments she wanted to hold her but couldn't.

In thinking about the intimate and whispered conversations over phone calls, Nematt Alla complemented her poems with a relational aesthetics<sup>3</sup> audio piece that guided participants through a step by step ritual of letting go. The audio piece is in six parts, of which the last part is a music composition titled "*In Giving Sound A Name*" and created in collaboration with artists Rana Nemat Allah and Tanishqa Sinha. →



My body  
I've ever  
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paper cu  
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I even, I w  
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me so cl  
taste the  
lose you  
which is  
hope, of  
standing  
being kis

y has known more about me than  
bothered to learn, has protected  
hurts and made them feel like  
ts, has drawn out parts of it to  
ve, living, and breathing and in the  
ave been drifting to you, drifting in  
grail of the things I think I'm  
d to be, only to find myself  
only to find myself unsatisfied, will  
wonder, will I ever be satisfied,  
ou, in the back of my mind, gets  
ose to satisfaction I can almost  
e summer heat, and if or when I  
I'm so afraid of losing that to,  
not a question or an answer, just a  
me living, this body loving, me  
in empty road, feeling my skin  
ssed by the sun.

While intertwining narratives of her own grievances, Nematt Alla's gentle voice encouraged the audience to sit with their grief, read the poem she had mailed to them out loud, tear it apart, and place it in a glass filled with water. After some time, the poem, and in turn the grievances, dissolved in the glass. The water is left murky with remnants of the poem, it might not dissolve completely, but perhaps just enough.

After the poem has dissolved and the recording of Nematt Alla's gentle voice ends, the audience is left to play "*In Giving Sound a Name*", a musical composition of what grief could possibly sound like, to fill the silence should they choose to. As a final gesture, Nematt Alla invited audience members to respond to her poems (or to the experience) in a collaborative document shared with everyone who participated in the exchange.

Throughout her artistic process, Nematt Alla would ask herself, is this enough, am I enough? As she encountered the heaviness and heart-break that was shared with her, doubt was replaced with faith and trust in the audience to take her for who she is as she took them for who they are. Perhaps it's not a matter of being enough, but simply being there: holding a place for grief that has nowhere else to go.



# MUNDA (THE FIELD)

CHIEDZA PASIPANODYA

ESSAY BY

RENELYN QUINICOT

Does the modern use of the word 'ancestor' rather than 'late grandparent' or 'past relative' add a layer of mystique or romanticism to the persons imagined – maybe even more prestige and upon a perceived pedestal, more honour? In the words of African-American poet Dudley Randall, "Why are our ancestors always kings and princes and never the common people?"<sup>1</sup>. What if our ancestors were much simpler than the assumed weight the modern use of this term carries? After spending my entire life imagining possibilities of what my mother's father looked and acted like, she finally found a photo of him this past week. I use the photo as the lock screen on my phone to notice what recognizing him visually would bring up in me. His simple, tired body, scrawnier and smaller than I imagined, brings me to realize how much I had romanticized who he must have been. I see the reflection of my own silhouette overlay the image of him on my phone when the sun glares on its glass screen. We often hear phrases like "You are your ancestor's wildest dream"<sup>2</sup> and I can't help but wonder if sitting around on our electronic devices for hours in a day would've actually been what my elders would've hoped as the continuation of their legacy. If we had shared a lifetime, would our personalities even get along? Would our beliefs and ways of being align? Would I love and respect your being as much as I do your remembrance?

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<sup>1</sup> Dudley Randall, "Ancestors" in *The Black Poets: A New Anthology*. New York: Bantam Book, 1985. pp148

<sup>2</sup> Referencing nothing in particular but a general use of this word as remembered in pop culture through social media captions, t-shirt slogans, lyrics and poetry.

On the first day of Spring, I visit Chiedza Pasipanodya's studio to view their work, *Munda* (*The Field*) in its last stages of completion. *Munda* stands as a collective of conical forms very similar to one another, but that differ in height, widths and markings. In their sameness yet difference, they illustrate the ghostly silhouette of a family, each height marking a different generation, or life lived. Chiedza smears more graphite over each figure as its final polish of skin. They bring their fingers up to my face so I can see the way graphite sparkles once spread into a fluid state.

In Innocent Pikirayi and Anders Lindahl's studies of the ethnohistory of ceramics, the use of graphite-burnishing in pottery is written about as a continuation of Zimbabwe-Shona (Chiedza's lineage's own) traditions. The two researchers share that its use allows for a metallic lustre much like an enameled pot's<sup>3</sup>. Graphite has been used as a tool for sealing a process, and binding a story of intimate care, touch and focused time. Though each structure of *Munda* is also finished to a shine, when pressed against skin, its top charcoal-coloured layer can recede further and reveal the memory of its first shades and original materials underneath. This last coating of Chiedza's pieces becomes a medium of interaction, through touch, but also through its ability to reflect the gaze of its viewers upon its polished finish. Impacted by every interaction it meets, each sculpture of *Munda* acts as a memory-keeper.

*Munda* is comprised of eight pieces total, with the tallest height at 6 feet. Some figures lay on their side to reveal their hollow interior, some stack almost seamlessly in support of one another. The element of change in each form is also present in the ways they will react to the times of the day. Once the sun is down, *Munda* fills the glass vitrine of Xspace with a stilled scenery of the first marker of change, and continued life we can recognize in nature – a sunset. Overhead lights of orange, rose and blue illuminate the glass-enclosed space of the window gallery. It is an environment that holds into meditation, the moment a day ends and begins to prepare for a new. Scholar and artists Nathalie Batrville and Shaya Ishaq describe the malleability of clay by writing: "The process of working with clay can feel as though it brings us closer to the chaos and perpetual change of life itself." This statement rings true in the pre – and post-treatment of Chiedza's work.

Chiedza's ceramic landscape's ongoing capacity to have its layers repolished, rubbed and cared for into further becoming, echoes the purpose of the Southern African termite mounds they are inspired by. These mounds are built using mainly termite saliva, feces and dirt<sup>4</sup> – tools that act as evidence of life consumed, processed and shed<sup>5</sup>. These architectural forms outlive their makers and become a space of passing for new colonies to enter, pick up where the previous occupants left off, and contin-

3 Innocent Pikirayi and Anders Lindahl, "Ceramics, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography: Locating Meaning in Southern African Iron Age Ceramic Assemblages". *The African Archaeological Review* Vol. 30, No. 4 (December 2013), pp. 455-473. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42641840?seq=1>

4 Nathalie Batrville and Shaya Ishaq, "Red Dust and Black Clay"

/ Canadian Art. January 28, 2021. <https://canadianart.ca/features/red-dust-and-black-clay/>

5 Stephanie L. Richards, PhD, Medical Entomologist, "Termite Mound Structures". Terminix. <https://www.terminix.com/termite-control/colonies/termite-mounds/>

ue to improve the structures for the beings that will follow. Similarly, the body is a meeting site : where past, present and future intertwine. Though a termite mound can easily collapse **beneath heavy rainfall**<sup>6</sup>, they become more informed by the labour that precedes them in order to rebuild homes even more resilient and strategic toward longevity and impact. The continuity of a mound's lifespan performs the very processes of inhabiting a family's lineage: we are born into a one, and consciously or not, we undertake actions of labour and care from where our ancestors left off. These efforts can stand as gestures of gratitude for how those before us have carried the lineage so far and helped land us into where we've ended up. We uphold this body as home to a continued story, carried within its being for the time we have, while constructing the future stories the next generation will tell of their ancestors. "Leave spaces better than you enter them", we often hear, is a reminder of how we can show respect.

It seems like a heavy weight of pressure to imagine. How can I possibly make up for the paths that have been laid out for me? Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés writes, **"The body is a living record of Life given, Life taken, Life hoped for, Life healed. Anywhere the flesh is pressed, wrung, even touched lightly, a memory may flow out a stream"**<sup>7</sup>. The body inhabited by life at all, is a continuity of labour and loving. The body – like termite mounds are to new interaction, safe- →

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6 Our saliva is crucial to how we digest our food, dirt is what upholds and grows lands upon which termites live upon, feces act as a metaphor for what we learn to let go of psychologically, once processed in the body, mind and heart. <https://badgut.org/information-centre/a-z-digestive-topics/saliva-more-than-just-drool/>

6 Lisa Margonelli. "Collective Mind in the Mound: How Do Termites Build Their Huge Structures?". National Geographic (2014). <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/140731-termites-mounds-insects-entomology-science>

7 Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés. "Chapter: Joyous Body – the Wild Flesh". Women Who Run with the Wolves. Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.

keeping and communal nourishment within it – , is a homecoming for stories, memory and imprints passing through. A body houses experiences of processing, lasting, and shedding to make room for more. The in-, and out-flow of breath is the continued reception and sharing of life given.

Chiedza prepares the kiln one last time to be left on its own for the night, the last pieces of the *Munda* installation inside, warming into its hardened form. Chiedza places the “DANGER “EXTREMELY HOT” sign on top of the kiln warning their studio mate of the life being formed within. The care in Chiedza’s placement of the sign imitates the ways a parent would tuck their child in for bed. We both walk away from the kiln toward the exit, giggling at the nervousness of only being able to hope for the best in the way the last pieces of *Munda*’s forms will turn out. With our backs turned, I yell jokingly behind me to the pieces inside, “Good luck in there!”. You can spend hours – like I’ve been fortunate to witness through video documentation Chiedza has – , pressing, smoothing, wrapping your own body around your pieces with 360°, top to bottom care and precision toward the stacks and coils of its making and armoured protection. However, once it enters the kiln, it is freed into a life of its own. Once the timer marks its completion, the suspenseful lift of the kiln’s heavy lid can either reveal a disheartening, or exciting surprise of results. A new version of your making, shifted and warmed into decisions and altered states of its own. Offering lessons to learn for the next either way.

We walk out, into the residue of Winter, chilled winds competing with the new longer day of sun. We continue discussing our experiences with the book, *The Artist’s Way*<sup>8</sup>, which I had noticed sitting on Chiedza’s studio desk earlier. A read we both have in common which functions like a self-exploration and creativity course and includes a daily task to free write for three-pages every morning with no goal nor edits. It is an exercise of courage, commitment, and letting go. I think about this practice in relation to a ceramicist’s care for their creations.

Further, maybe this is a practice we can consider for all offerings in this lifetime. The freewrites, a part of the Artists’ Way, teaches our creative-hand and mind to trust without attachment to the result. To live without the pressure of living better or more impressively. To love and honour without pedestal.

I go home to meditate, reconnect into my body, slightly overwhelmed by a rare outdoor venture since lockdowns. “Hold your breath with tenderness rather than tensing,” the meditation-class teacher instructs, “like you could hold life without gripping”<sup>9</sup>. I imagine the visual of someone holding a tight fist and slowly unravelling their fingers one by one. Can you allow a life to sit here, in the softness of your own open palm, and trust that it can still be connected to you? Can you allow its state of being to feel held by you, but with space for it to be?



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<sup>8</sup> Julia Cameron. *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> A Kundalini Yoga class taken on ZOOM with instructor, Krista Schilter owner of <https://www.goldenchainforever.com/>



ATMOSPHERIC  
ARRIVALS:  
(A) RESTLESS SPIRIT  
RETURNS THROUGH  
QUEER TIME, SPACE  
& MEMORY

AYO TSALITHABA

VIDEO BY

ESSAY BY

This film is at once a living archive/polytemporal memory bank and a love letter to my other selves. I consider the act of revisiting my personal archives a time travelling practice and incorporating this into my films is an exercise in making said practice legible to others.

*“Atmospheric Arrivals”* is about home and the (im)possibility of return. The “atmospheric arrival” captures a means of coming into being through memory and imagination; by reaching across spacetimes to “fetch” parts of the self that may exist in elsewhere.

To attend to the atmospheric denotes the practice of active presence in and across spatial temporalities. The atmospheric is a way for me to imagine. It allows me to be aware of the present while gesturing towards multiple futures and pasts in order to carve out a space (even artistically) where my being is holisti-

cally possible. I use atmospheric here in a few ways, but it emerged (for me) out of a discussion about Sylvia Wynter and the “Third Event” or the “Great Leap” in a class that I took in the fall of 2020 (Alagraa, 2018; Wynter, 2015).

I am also inspired by the work of Akwaeke Emezi, Keguro Macharia, Sylvia Wynter, José Esteban Muñoz, and others who have pushed me to think about queer elsewheres and Black diasporic desire and (be)longing.

This is a project that is constantly evolving. If you are interested in reading more about this, I have attached a short essay titled *“Atmospheric Arrivals: The Ceremony Found, Homo Narrans and Illustrating Autopoesis.”* If you are still left wanting more engagement about this, you can email me and I will get back to you as soon as I can (or DM me on Instagram @ayotsalithaba)

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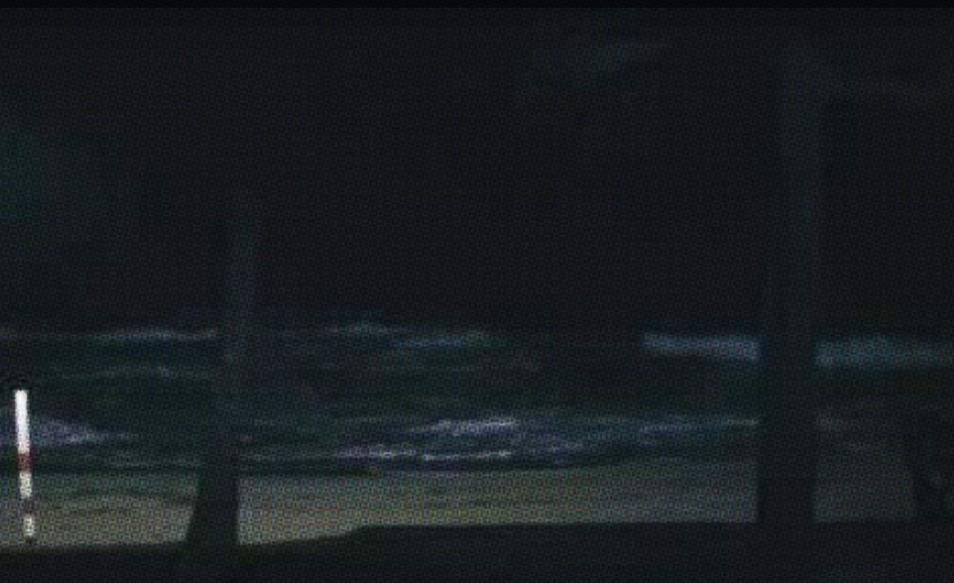
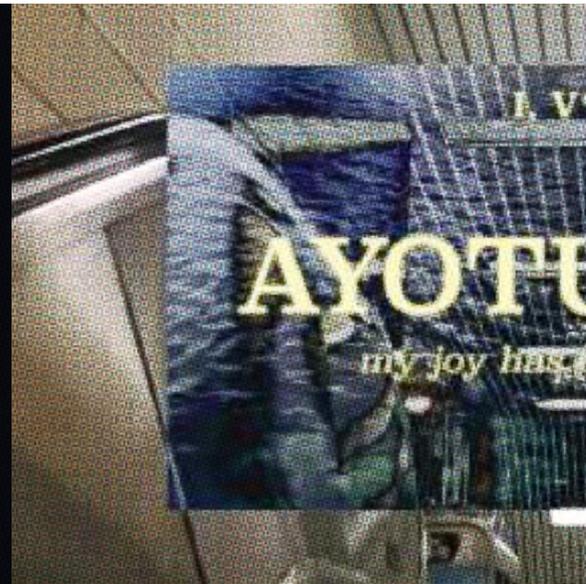
Alagraa, B. (2018). Homo Narrans and the Science of the Word: Toward a Caribbean Radical Imagination. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 4(2), 164–181.

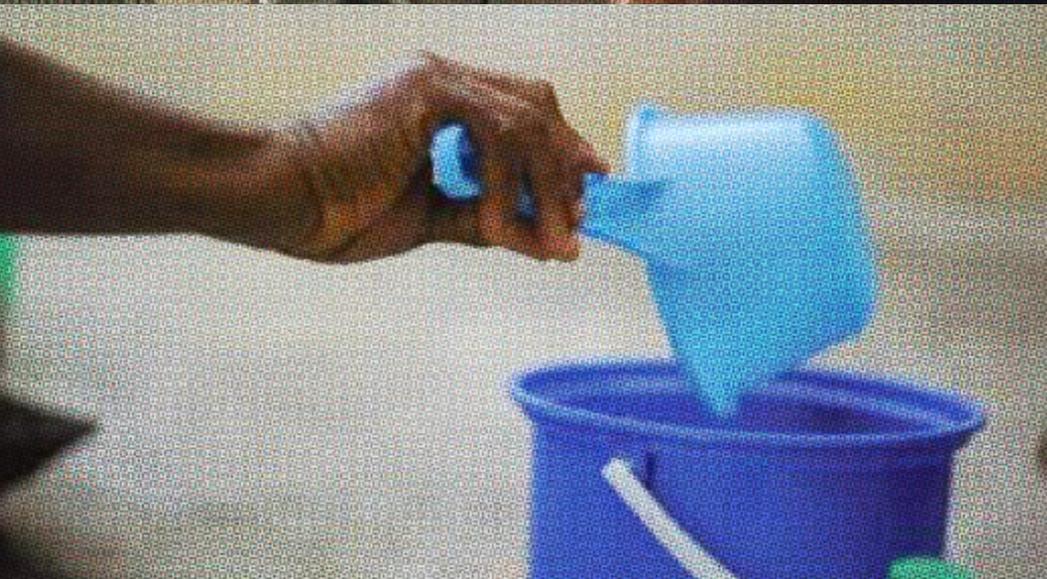
Tsalithaba, A. (2021). Atmospheric Arrivals [Digital illustration].

Wynter, S. (2015). The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition. In *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*. Liverpool University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gn6bfp.12>

# ATMOSPHERIC ARRIVALS\*

(A) restless spirit returns through time, space, and memory.  
This is an archive in/of Black star\* space.





xspace cultural centre '20-'21

\*in tense/intense longing  
re-turn(s) and belonging



## Atmospheric arrivals: The Ceremony Found, Homo Narrans and Illustrating Autopoesis

This project is a written and visual response to and exploration of Sylvia Wynter's ideas of autopoesis and the Third Event through two key texts: Wynter's "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overtturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-) Cognition"; and Bedour Alagraa's 2018 essay "Homo Narrans and the Science of the Word: Toward a Caribbean Radical Imagination" (Alagraa, 2018; Wynter, 2015).

Working from the orienting questions and key arguments in Bedour Alagraa's (2018) "Homo Narrans and the Science of the Word: Toward a Caribbean Radical Imagination", I explore Sylvia Wynter's idea of autopoesis, and how we can become routed towards what Wynter names the "Third Event/Fanonian break", or rupture of European humanist overrepresentations of Man (p. 164). I use digital illustration as a method of engagement with Wynter's ideas because of my interest in the role of imagemaking in autopoesis.

Wynter's "autopoetic turn" is rooted in the propositions of two key thinkers: Césaire and Fanon. In "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn" (2015), Wynter puts Césaire's science of the "word" in conversation with Fanon's sociogenic principle and extends them outward to posit that humans as "hybrid" beings "enact ourselves as humans" (pp. 209–210). Here, Wynter is suggesting that it is through story, and specifically the stories that we tell about being human, that we come to under-

stand ourselves and what makes us human (Wynter, 2015, p. 217).

In her essay, Alagraa begins by introducing Wynter's idea of "the human as a figure on the horizon" as an alternative to Enlightenment formulations of the human – Man1 and Man2 (2018, pp. 164–165). It is through the figure of the human on the horizon, of the "hybrid" self-authoring being, that we can find a path towards a "non- Eurocentric genre of the human" that lies in the yet to be completed Third Event (Alagraa, 2018, pp. 164-166). In her study of works of Caribbean fiction, Alagraa finds traces of the rupture/break/event because of the role of language, art and imagination in the project of moving away from the "semio-linguistic limits placed on our own imaginative realm due to the afterlife of colonialism and racial slavery." (2018, p. 165).

I am interested in expanding this by looking at how language, art and the very process of image-making allow us to approach the rupture from various planes, through a process that I am naming as atmospheric arrival.

Alagraa describes autopoesis as the regenerative process of forming or creating oneself (Alagraa, 2018, p. 167). She offers a line of inquiry towards the Fanonian break through works of Caribbean fiction that open the door to the imaginative realm, wherein lies the room to explore alternative modes of being human. It is through her readings of *The Autobiography of My Mother* →

and Texaco that Alagraa foregrounds the importance of story and radical imagination in exploring questions about what it means to be human, and how we can be otherwise (Alagraa, 2018, pp. 178–179).

I believe that working through and across forms is the best way for me to engage with these ideas and communicate some of my interventions. I am conscious of the importance of explaining these ideas in writing, but art and image-making adds to the writing by providing me with a different mode of engagement and my reader with another way to see the ideas. My artistic process involves illustration, filmmaking, collage and photography – mediums that allow me to map ideas and put them in conversation. I am able to understand things differently and look at them from many sides when they are presented visually, and my artistic process gives me new tools to understand big concepts. I am paying close attention to some key words presented in this piece: autopoiesis, imaginative realm, horizon. These words appear in the digital illustration that accompanies this piece of writing.

Alagraa's definitions of autopoiesis leads me to questions of queer and trans being and becoming that need more time, care and consideration than I can offer them (in writing) at this time. The idea of autopoiesis as a means through which "binary and oppositional epistemic codifications of sameness and difference" are called into question and challenged is a compelling assertion that generated a set of questions for me around Blackness, trans\*ness, being and becoming that I explored in my image-making practice (Alagraa, 2018, p.167). I appro-

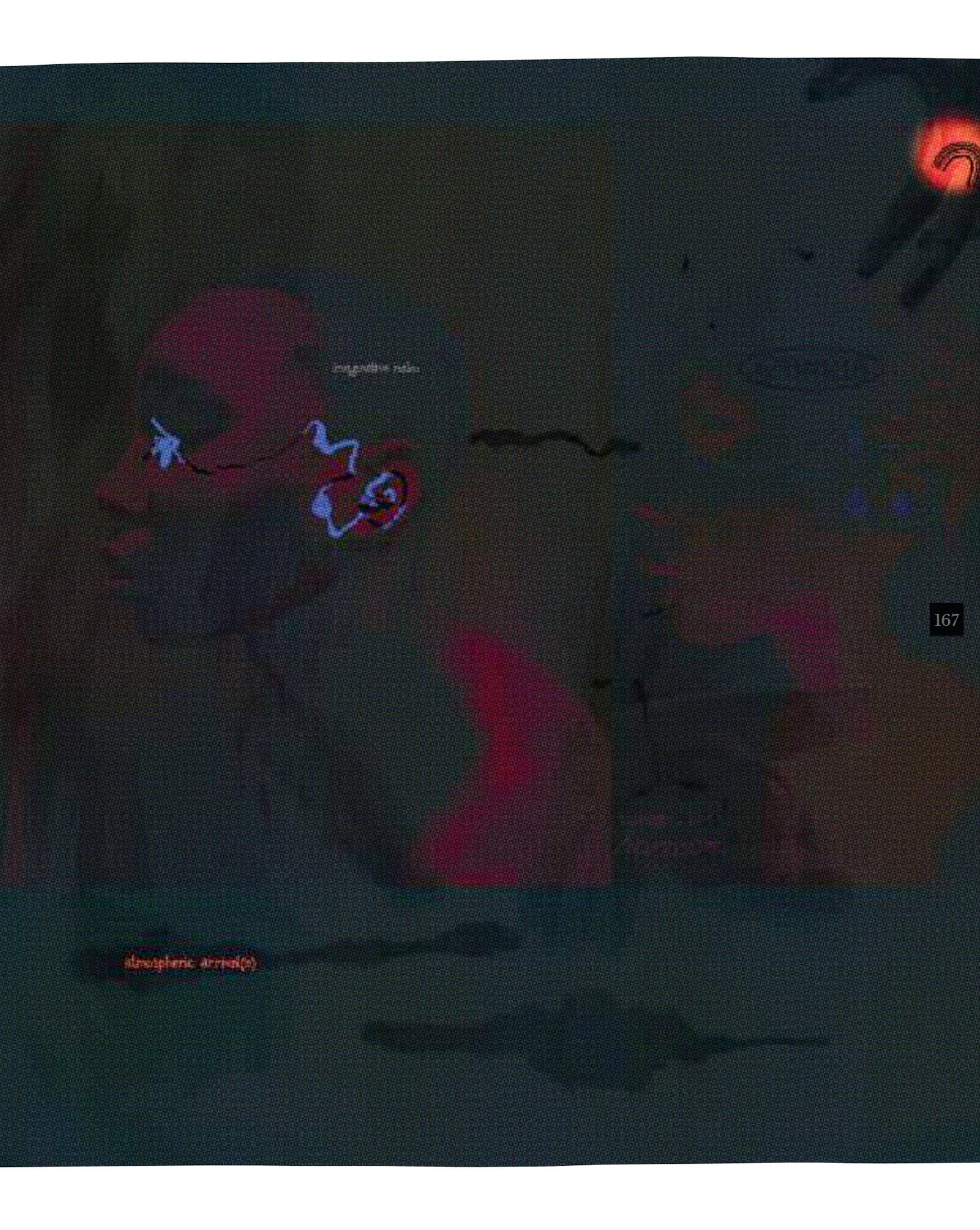
ached my visual response with this set of questions: In what ways can autopoiesis and the "autopoetic turn" inform our path towards the great leap forward? What does reading autopoiesis and the Third Event through a Black queer and trans lens allow us to see about this project?

My conceptualization of atmospheric arrivals through autopoetic image-making as a mode of understanding and working through the Third Event is not intended to be a reconfiguration of Wynter's ideas. Instead, I hope to offer a way of articulating these ideas that gives us new ways of understanding them that are not in opposition to what Wynter and Alagraa present. The atmosphere makes these ideas feel possible to engage with. The atmosphere touches on the particularities of these ideas.

In her piece, Alagraa explores works that are "committed to a Caribbean radical imagination as an expression of political possibilities on the horizon" (2018, p.167). However, in reading through these works alongside Alagraa, I am compelled to rename these "possibilities on the horizon" to possibilities in the atmosphere. Furthermore, Wynter's core idea of the human as a "figure on the horizon" paired with Alagraa's argument that imagination may lead us out of our current predicament, create fertile ground for us to think about how to put the metaphor of the atmospheric to work towards the great leap (Alagraa, 2018, p. 165). I am interested in the ways in which people are already enacting forms of sociality that may point to the "alternate" modes of being human that exist outside of and in opposition to Enlightenment representations.

negative rain

atmospheric arrival(s)



# DIGITAL INTIMACIES

ARIA EVANS  
CAMILA SALCEDO  
FLORENCE YEE  
LACIE LEE BURNING  
NOELLE PERDUE

CURATED BY

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_ EMMA STEEN

## The Internet is for Lovers

Intimacies, the familiar way we understand and connect to ourselves and others, have been at the top of my mind this past year. As we navigate the many ways in which we need to be distant from others, I have been struck with how little I hear about intimacy being affected during this period of isolation. Although we do not need to touch to be intimate, closeness, affinities, and the yearning to be understood by someone else are made additionally difficult by imposed social-distancing protocols due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. When we lose the ability to find intimacies with others, does that need turn inwards or fully disappear? If we can't access intimacy physically, what are our options for filling this void?

With methods of meeting others already present at the click of a button, *digital intimacies* are at an all-time high as we all turn to our screens in order to access affirmation, care, and human connection. I have always been interested in art that explores bodies, sex and love. The politics of **who we are and the inherent agency we have**<sup>1</sup> over our bodies creates dynamic work when choosing to move, share, or project what we feel about ourselves outward. For many, our bodies are what makes us feel most vulnerable, but also they are often the only things we can control. I am interesting in how we engage bodies, sex and identity in art and the methods we use to find fun, power, and humour in those vulnerabilities. Dating websites, where all we have to share is our picture and a few lines, feels like an epicenter of vulnerability – unabashedly putting ourselves out there in search for intimacy.



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<sup>1</sup> Or are fighting to enforce



About Me

LACIE BURNING



SIGN:

Libra sun ♎

Virgo moon ♍

Sagittarius rising ♐

PERSONALITY TYPE:

INTP?? Definitely introverted and shy but love exploring new things! :)

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR:

I never know what I'm looking for until I've found it. But somehow I always find myself searching. Plus, I'm a Libra so I'm very indecisive. Dreaming of the karaoke bar and a table filled with friends. Dreaming of



HOME

OUR STORY

MEET OUR SINGLES

ESSAY

Images

Admin Notes

**BEWARE THE RED  
BEWARE THE RED**



*Digital Intimacies*, above all else, attempts to find some levity in the strain of isolation. Greeting you in the form of a late 90s or early 2000s dating website<sup>2</sup>, *Digital Intimacies* attempts to evoke the vulnerability, silliness, and discomfort of being online as a means to connect, popups and all. Using the online dating site as a cultural and aesthetic touchstone, the artists' individual pages are set up as their dating profiles, their artworks attempting to make their own connection with the audiences passing through the site. The artists invited to join this project were tasked with considering how they themselves explore gender, sex and love while in isolation, and how they access intimacy through the digital. The artists who worked on *Digital Intimacies* all come from different artistic backgrounds and approached these prompts through vastly different means and perspectives activating .gifs, memes, old footage, and their own bodies to engage with the themes.

Camila Salcedo, also known as Lil Arepa, is a performance and mixed media artist and DJ. Salcedo's to be (or to be with) Bad Bunny: a queer love letter via memes is an unapologetic ode to the Puerto Rican rapper, contextualized through Salcedo's process of dealing with being in a long distance relationship (LDR) during a global pandemic. Through a series of ten memes, Salcedo inserts her face onto images of Bad Bunny or the women (often the Spanish musician, Rosalia) pictured next to him. Accompanying the images are texts written in both Spanish or English, turning Salcedo's compositions into proper meme formats that play up

her crush on the artist as well as her own queer identity. Stepping in and out of differing drag and high glam personas, one meme presents a diptych of Salcedo dressed as Bad Bunny beside an image the artist with his arm around a woman with Salcedo's face, reading "ser queer es like, no se si quiero ser o estar con Bad Bunny"<sup>3</sup> or "Being queer is like, I don't know if I want to be or be with Bad Bunny." Salcedo also references her loneliness during isolation and being away from her partner, as well as the general state of affairs living in Toronto during the pandemic. As a gift to the audience, and possibly other lonely lovers visiting her page, Salcedo adds a link to her LDR Playlist, expertly crafted to flex her music knowledge as well as her longing heart.

In Lacie Burning's *Untitled (beware)* series, Burning approaches the conversation of the digital as it connects to western capitalist appropriation of Indigenous iconography and the relationship between desire and colonial consumption. Considering the immediate availability of art, knowledge, and customs shared online,<sup>4</sup> Burning warps the ease in which many non-Indigenous folks comfortably take from and fetishize Indigenous makers and community, by putting forward what can only be read as a soft threat, Beware the Red. Taking inspiration from old mass-produced T-Shirt logos<sup>5</sup> and found footage from past disposable cameras, Burning overlays their statement 'Beware the Red' overtop of an unidentifiable image of the sky and of a picture in their Ista's backyard on their home in Six Nations. Pairing their statement with images of intimate and comforting

<sup>2</sup> Thinking Match.com, Plenty of Fish, or eHarmony circa 2000

<sup>3</sup> Camila Salcedo, "to be (or to be with) Bad Bunny: a queer love letter via memes," 2021.

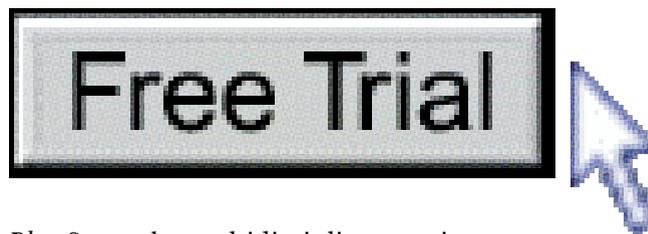
<sup>4</sup> Many young Indigenous creatives have turned to TikTok and Instagram as a means of sharing selected practices and teachings, and of connecting with other Indigenous youth from across territories.

<sup>5</sup> Chevrolet's 'Red is for Racing,' and 'Beware the Red Bowtie'

images, Burning creates a work that cannot be appropriated by non-Indigenous individuals who may try to pull from Burning's inherent being and knowledge, using the intimacy of the work as Burning's strength to go against those who would attempt to take from them. The work itself exists as a forceful declaration to those who may attempt at co-opting something they could never understand, making abundantly clear that it is not for them. Burning's work engages with critique of digital accessibility as it feeds into non-Indigenous fetish and consumption during a push for more Indigenous representation, while also creating a work that showcases the power of Indigenous community against colonial greed and desire. Burning engages with desire as it relates to both fetishism of Indigeneity and the lustful nature of colonialism, playing with the exhibition of *Digital Intimacies* itself as a parody of a dating website to turn our regular expectations of desire and want on its head and expose the negative association of fetish. Beware the Red critiques colonial wants while functioning to determine Indigenous creative and inherent sovereignty over knowledge, land, and individual being, engaging with intimacy as the tool to push back against these forces that seek to only take.

Florence Yee is a community organizer and multidisciplinary artist who often works in the collaboration of texts and textiles. Their piece *Lettersize* is a text-based work with accompanying images of a silk tapestry they made in what *feels like a past life*.<sup>6</sup> The text follows the production of the silk piece and documents the company around Yee while they slowly worked

on their weaving. *Lettersize* reads like a longing diary entry of a time where we could sit with others in a room and work, listening to someone read or gossip, with the company inevitably inferring onto the final product. Yee writes, "The next two [inches] were done around the middle parts of Kai Cheng Thom's *A Place Called No Homeland*.<sup>7</sup> It was a reminder of times and people that were not that far behind, and some that even linger when they aimlessly scroll through *instagram at two in the morning*.<sup>8</sup> Their poetic styling transports you into their creative process of art-making with community, slow work methods, as well as a nod to the unfortunate dependency on Amazon to supply hard-to-find materials. The images of the silk tapestry support the words, instead of the other way around, now the living evidence of the process Yee went through making it, and of a time they yearn to quickly return to.



*Blue Screen*, by multidisciplinary artist, porn script writer, and Artificial Intelligence coder Noelle Perdue, is an AI generated short film which draws from three porno films produced during the years 1969-1984, colloquially referenced as the 'golden age of porn,' during which time sexually explicit films received positive attention from mainstream cinemas, critics, and audiences alike. Training the AI by watching *Hot and Saucy Pizza Girls* (1978), *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Getting Into Heaven* (1970), the final →

6 Read: before Covid

7 A poetry collection that navigates Chinese and Canadian cross-cultural expectations of gender and identity.

8 Florence Yee, "Lettersize," 2021.

Fill your heart with good things.



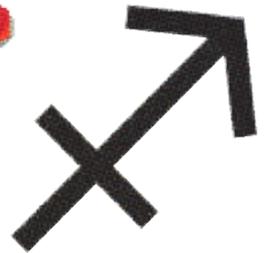
ENTER

CLICK HERE

Love Links



MATCHES



LOVE ONLINE

Guestbook

Click Here Now!

Don't be the last to find out....

piece the computer generates is a distorted, bizarre, yet still sexually charged 3 minute video that shows the somewhat identifiable warping of flesh and bodies against blue and green backgrounds. Perdue's *Blue Screen* considers the internet's presence in contemporary sexuality, stating in their accompanying essay, "human sexuality has started to become distorted – truck sized hentai titties, robot vaginas that suck like a microwavable Hoover vacuum, chatbots whose sense of humour can be upgraded for as little as \$3.99 – the landscape has changed for those interested in fucking."<sup>9</sup> The artwork itself pokes fun at the peculiarities of porn and highlights the perversion, messiness and humour that arises from sex, whether we're partaking in it or just watching, (though only the latter follows social distancing guidelines.) The accompanying essay displays Perdue's niche in the history of porn and the world of contemporary digital sex work, offering educational and critical takes and resources to compel the audience to consider their own engagement with porn in a larger framework of ethics, capitalism, and the ongoing struggle for the full decriminalization of sex work.

In movement artist and training intimacy coordinator Aria Evans' *TELL ME YOU MISS ME*, Evan's physicalizes the weight of each word of the title through movement captured in five animated .gif files. The statement itself came from an early pandemic moment of, in Evans' words, seeking "attention and validation"<sup>10</sup> from someone they had started seeing. Though the .gifs themselves tell a story of the artist's deep want, the piece as a whole is a reflection on Evans'

needing to learn to change the way they communicate, stating "how when so much of our current communication is using some form of a digital platform, I have to be more vulnerable with asking for my needs to be met."<sup>11</sup> As well as the .gifs is a collage of cut-out letters spelling *TELL ME YOU MISS ME* in all capitals, made up of physical letters people sent to Evans' over the years. The .gifs can also be read as an homage to the many solo dance parties that they performed throughout the pandemic. Using their body to perform the growth and process of learning better communication, and also of having only their body to hold them during periods of being alone, *TELL ME YOU MISS ME* is a raw exposure of many of our own insecurities around being vulnerable and the difficulty of asking for what we want. To use Evan's words, "*TELL ME YOU MISS ME* is an homage to finding love and finding the words to ask for what I need inside of it."<sup>12</sup>

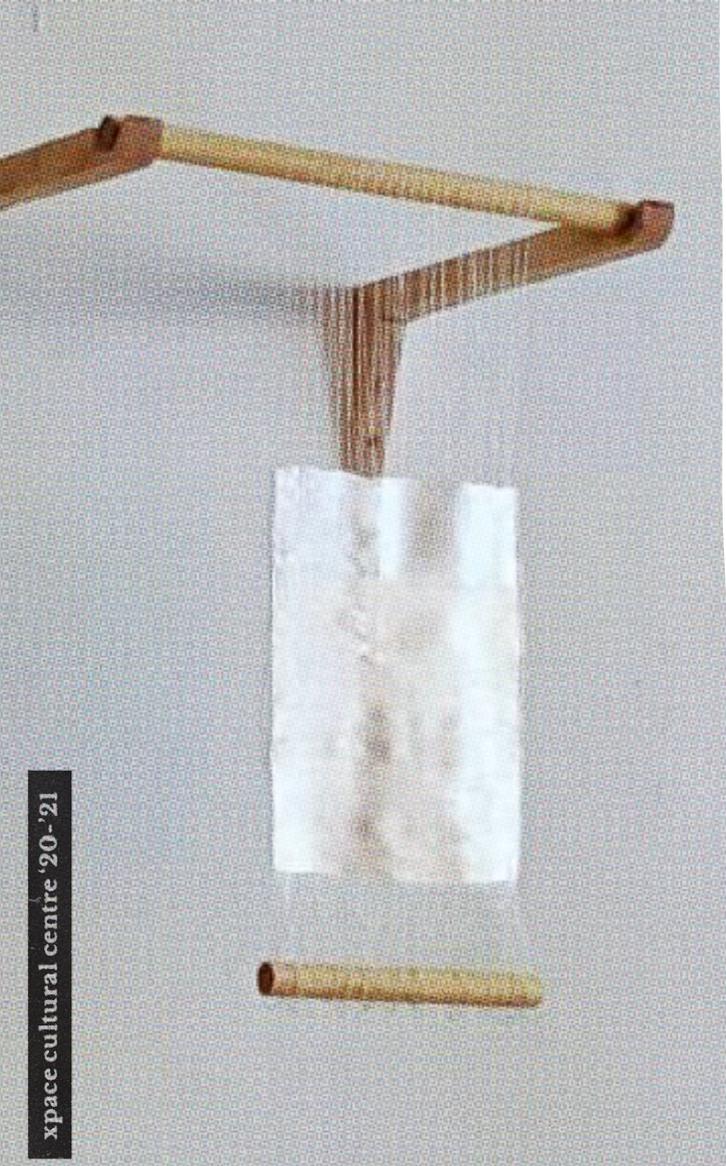
The many differing approaches to considering sex, gender, and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic by the artists in *Digital Intimacies* highlights that there is no one way to process this shared experience. Though many pandemics and crises have in the past forced people indoors and away from social settings, this pandemic has arrived during a time of extreme online accessibility. To reflect on what has happened over the past year through a digital lens allows for a pluralistic exploration of the many ways we have kept ourselves engaged and connected. Though each work considers what has been lost, the access to physical company or intimacy, each artist brings a lightness and vul- →

<sup>9</sup> Noelle Perdue, "Blue Screen," 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Aria Evans, "Tell Me You Miss Me," 2021.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*



xspace cultural centre '20-'21

nerability to their piece which in turn manifest new methods of intimacy and connection.

The artworks exhibited will exist long after the pandemic is over, and serve as a capsule of sorts, of a moment in our search for intimacy. My hope is that audiences moving through this digital exhibition will be struck by how honest, clear, educational, and funny the artworks exhibited are, and that they find elements of their own experiences reflected back at them through these explorations. I hope audiences feel that they have stumbled upon a space to find their own digital connection while we find ourselves still apart from each other.

As splashed across the homepage for the exhibition:

“You’ve come to the right place”



LEFT: FLORENCE YEE, *LETTERSIZE*, 2021.

RIGHT, FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE: ARIA EVANS, STILLS FROM *TELL ME YOU MISS ME*, 2021.

CAMILA SALCEDO, *TO BE (OR TO BE WITH) BAD BUNNY: A QUEER LOVE LETTER VIA MEMES*, 2021.

CAMILA SALCEDO, *TO BE (OR TO BE WITH) BAD BUNNY: A QUEER LOVE LETTER VIA MEMES*, 2021.

ARIA EVANS, *TELL ME YOU MISS ME*, 2021.

NOELLE PURDUE, STILLS FROM *BLUE SCREEN*, 2021.

NOELLE PURDUE, STILLS FROM *BLUE SCREEN*, 2021.

CAMILA SALCEDO, *TO BE (OR TO BE WITH) BAD BUNNY: A QUEER LOVE LETTER VIA MEMES*, 2021.

CAMILA SALCEDO, *TO BE (OR TO BE WITH) BAD BUNNY: A QUEER LOVE LETTER VIA MEMES*, 2021.

# ME

us then vs. us now



to be (or to be with) bad bunny: a queer love letter via memes



ItzJessa 10/14/2020

In "so pretty solo" and "Gato", world-famous Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny explores the themes of gender fluidity and sexual expression, while breaking boundaries within a social and homophobic genre. In this essay I will...



getting my CERB cheques last year felt like:





# SALVATION & ABSOLUTION

SONALI MENEZES

ESSAY BY



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## NIMA SALIMI

### Gestural Solace: A Reflection

*Salvation and Absolution*, two video works by Sonali Menezes presents the body as a carrier of the past, as a place of love, and a place of conflict between the other and the self. In everyday rituals, the body partakes in acts of service, participating both actively and passively in forms of cleansing. In both pieces, the body is anonymous, framing the feet and hands to focus on the functional and symbolic purposes of these body parts within the context of social status and skin colour. The act of washing hands and feet presents two different perspectives; both in its place of service and purpose of action. Whereas our hands bridge our connections with others through giving and receiving, our feet are in service of ourselves; moving us forward and carrying the weight of our history through the world.

In *Salvation*, Menezes is influenced by the holy and sacrificial act of Jesus washing his Apostles feet. She sits passively as a white woman bathes her feet, only her hands shown within the frame. Carrying the weight of personal and generational history Menezes' feet are symbolic, obscuring the boundaries between privilege and authority. In allowing herself to be bathed by another, she establishes autonomy while interweaving the historical and hierarchical context between the white and Brown body. Menezes reclaims and reverses this dynamic while also critiquing the white hegemonic hierarchy deeply embedded in Catholicism as Jesus partakes in an act of humility by washing the feet of those below him. Salvation reinforces this shifting sense of authority and equality between the self and the other in an intimate act of service. How does the colour of our skin change our worth? How can we reclaim and empower ourselves and the generations before us? What does it mean to be beautiful and desired? In switching hierarchical roles through acts of respect and care, a process of healing is formed by giving oneself up to be entrusted and cleansed by another.

In comparison to *Salvation*, *Absolution* is an internal representation of resolution in identity, performing a kinesthetic dialogue of meditation for the self rather than the other. The brown body partakes in an active role of self-care rather than a passive role. At 7 minutes in length, Menezes washes her hands until a soap bar completely dissolves, revealing an intimate movement of inner dialogue between the object and the self directly. Around the soap bar and

the sink, her hair tangles into the soap residue. Standing strikingly clear against the whiteness of the object, her dark hair entangled within floats amidst the water as time moves forward. Passed back and forth between Menezes hands, the soap acts as an object of thought in the process of cleansing and healing itself through feelings of jealousy created by white supremacist standards. In longing to restore power imbalance and injustice embedded in the narrative of her skin, Menezes washes her hands until the bar of soap disintegrates, bringing a sense of urgency to her intentions. In this movement of rumination, a question is formed in the shape of a soap bar; is jealousy a sin? Through this process, her hands dance in a conversation between each other. As the soap dissolves into the water, the same thought disintegrates down to whispers, finding stillness and empowerment in a narrative etched beyond her skin.

The dialogue between the body, water and movement is a fundamental component to *Salvation and Absolution* as a part of Menezes expression of her healing process. Both pieces reflect each other as external and internal reactions of being othered within white hegemonic social structures; a parallel in response to the gestural movement of hands in service of washing. Easily moved by outward phenomena, water shifts violently and silently, mirroring an image in its emotional state. In the act of giving oneself the time and love to process pain and trauma, Menezes confronts the reflection of her past through its transparent and solitary nature. The softness of its energy reflects the powerful imagery of time and movement, altered

by the dynamism of a performative gesture and gathering it back towards stillness through repetition. The emotional nature of Menezes expressions in rumination shows through the malleable, shapeshifting qualities of water. Pulling the viewer into the cyclical movements of thought in its process of contemplation, Menezes isolates fragments of everyday rituals, creating a space of intimacy and solitude for both the performer and viewer to experience.

Through the repetition of these gestures Menezes stitches together memories and pieces of speculation to the surface of her skin, confronting wounds from her past and tending to them with integrity and sincerity. In this process of healing, she reveals these injustices by expressing perseverance through the physicality of her body, piecing back together the wholeness of her being through forgiveness.

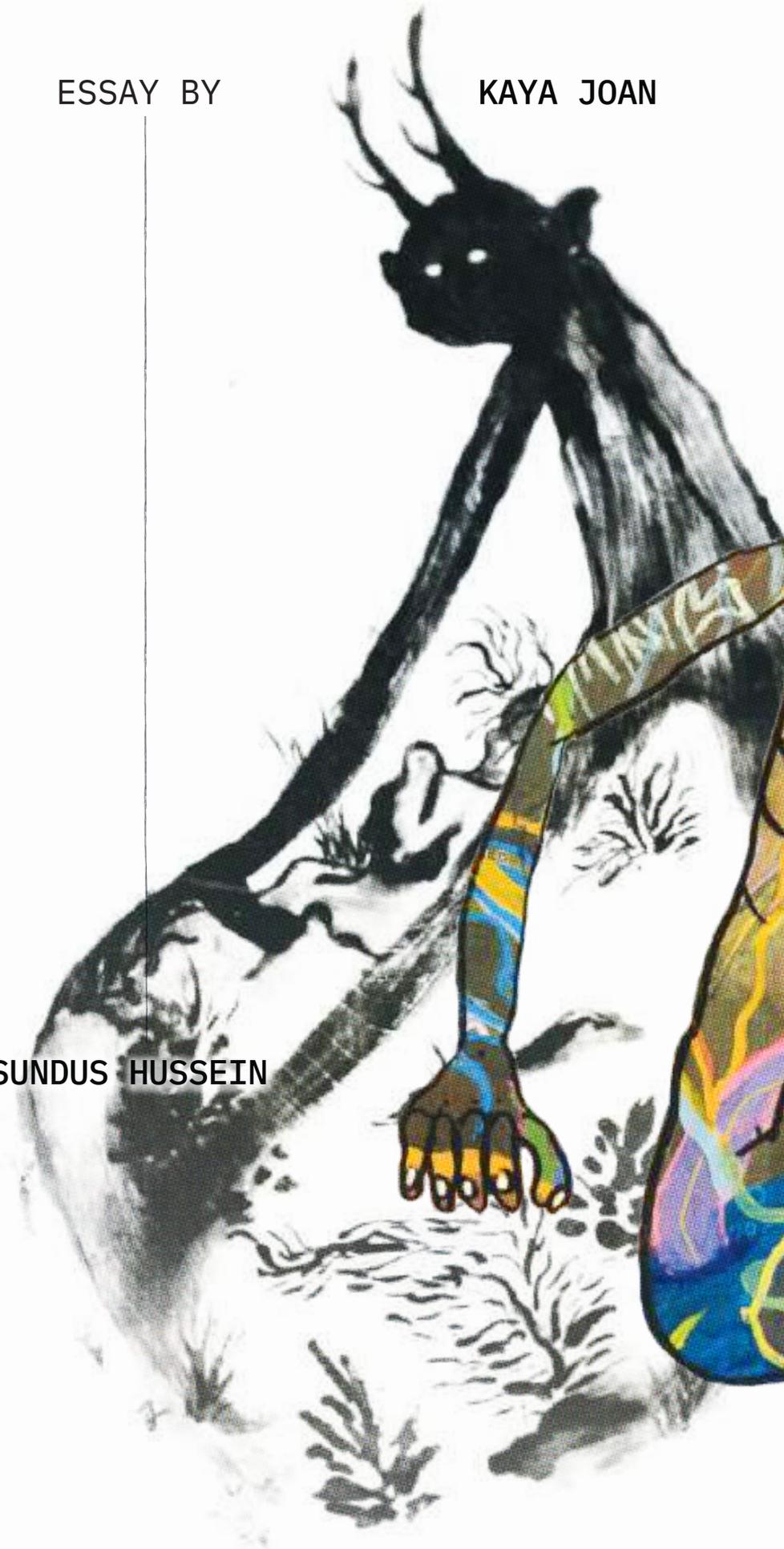


# FUGITIVE WANDERER

ESSAY BY

KAYA JOAN

SUNDUS HUSSEIN





limbo pathways w/ Kaya Joan's *Fugitive Wanderer*: mapping blood memory btw manifested multidimensions

The multidisciplinary Afro-Indigenous artist, Kaya Joan, unfolds memory. As a community artist and facilitator of six years in T'kranto, Dish with One Spoon treaty territory, their works unearths stories, conjures the past and leaves futuristic trails as medicine. In *Fugitive Wanderer*, their spirituous storytelling manifests a blend between portraits and portals. To discern both spiritual summoning and those who will arrive on Earth later, Joan gathers repurposed material, wood, graffiti, poetry, and dreams to mark a place in between skies, alleyways, and diasporic, moving blood. Their body of work is a living, breathing map that lightly etches the subconscious and collective memory as decolonizing aesthetics; an anchor in liminal space.



*Fugitive Wanderer* appropos us to the ancestors and other unseen beings. Between blood and dub inspired dreams as a diasporic, Indigenous person, Joan gathers, traces and conjures guides from specific motifs, such as snakes and stars. Their pieces bridge multiple truths; of their Jamaican, Vincentian, Kanien:keha'ka (Kahnawake) city dwelling identity. All of the multiplicities of their identity are efforts to engrave totality and liberation onto urban landscapes, expressing “ne ne akwé:kon iakwat-atenónhkwe” / “all my relations”. They document the entities who pave a way toward a future. Ahead of their materialized dreams lies *A Duppy Awoke*, a green spirit that had just arrived to the waking world holds an approaching partial eclipse at their neck in complementary harmony with a hot pink six pointed star. Tangled in webs and bursts of celestial rays, there is pencil lead in the distance, curling underneath repurposed poster mantras that are both torn and intact around the figure. “Tektehrat-irónta” / “I pull up the roots” in moth-wing green is signed above a burst of light on the wooden slate, illuminating the meeting of these multiplicities throughout.

Trinidadian-Canadian artist Curtis Talwst Santiago presents a question Joan proves to answer through their alterity, the gathering of their ancestors and dimensions and the thesis of *Fugitive Wanderer*: “if there is ancestral trauma, why not ancestral imagination and joy?” Joan actively pulls instances of mourning, resilience and emergent joy in a symbolic feat between dreaming and the living to counteract the one-dimensional storytelling of diasporic Black and Indigenous pain. In *Grandmothers*, Joan visits ancestral closeness, remembrance, and channelled intergenerational healing. In liminal fashion, the painting is split in shared similarities and differences to invoke a moment between ancestor and youth. The right side of the painting suggests the entrance of the past and an ancestor, lined in mauves, purples and deeper forest greens with shades that have aged, experienced, and witnessed tests of time and spatial resistance in comparison to the left one’s lighter linework. There are also wisps of teal and lilac that don’t make their way to the other side but the two sides share a space and differing similarities of transparent or full bloom flora and fauna resting on their shoulders and skin.



The background is in separate (but meeting) whirlpools and distinct descending corners of mystifying blues contrasted against warm, celestial yolk-like spheres that quietly seep into the sea/sky. In the center, a strikingly earth-toned ancestor and future kin face each other sitting in fetal positions with a pink outline, resonating *Duppy Awoke's* star while being orbited by the rhythm of Joan's heavenly reimagined cyclic emblem. They carry imprints of tree branches, swirls of flower petals and snapshots of stardust sharing complementary tones with one another, hinting at a distant, familiar actualized dream or duppy.

Excavation is crucial in Joan's process in weaving a trail for future kin. Whispers between kin reveal motifs on revival, protection, and noting the "other" – be it either world or person. Split between light and shadow, this gateway contains differentiating textures, overlapping waves, distant birds and deepened silhouettes that evoke both skyscrapers and figures, accompanied by the outline of a protective serpent in soft green crayon. As they stamp "I DREAM OF OTHER WORLDS" on the upper

right corner of sky, the eye catches a curl of yellow in its lower left murky ends. Joan's intentions are cohesively emergent throughout. *Unbury* is another painting that embarks on exploring differences in its merged styles. It features thin linework depicting starlight to represent the beyond while there are elements that aim to ground, place and familiarize oneself with the earth. There are peeking dandelions and weeds on opposing edges, electric poles and a figure below the elongated graffiti. The purpose of their stark outlines is to demonstrate presence against the odds of being erased and obscured.

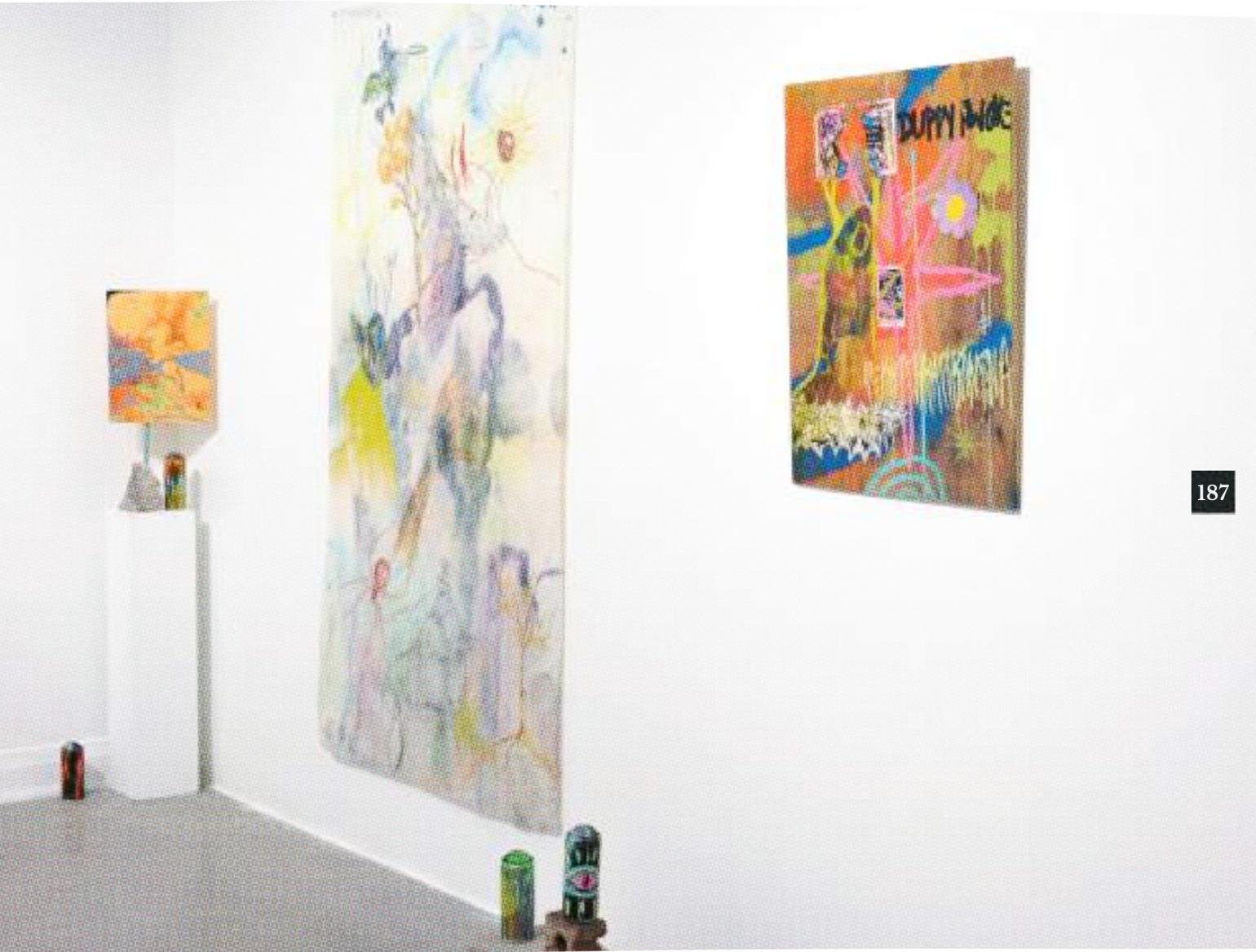
Immersing us in multiple places, Joan unlocks and engages with materials aimed to function spiritually and medicinally. As a means to placemake, *Portal Keys* are six spray cans that are each marked with circles and four or six pointed stars, indicating navigation. *First Dream, Breathe* →



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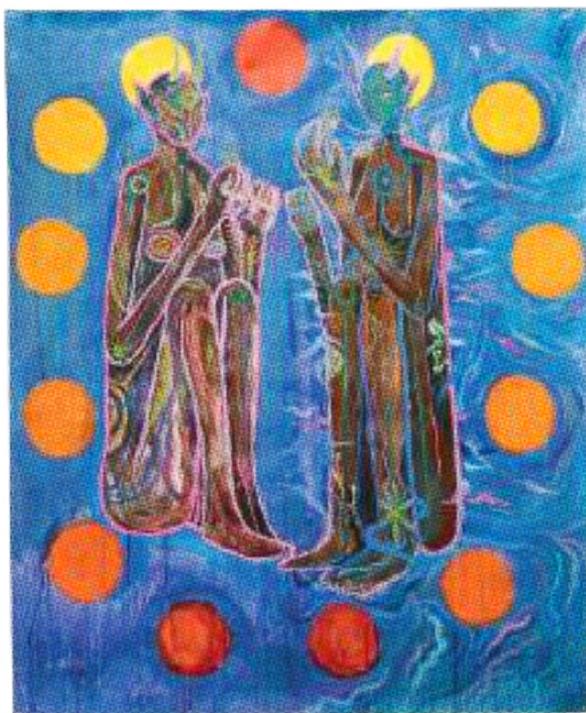
KAYA JOAN, 'INSTALLATION VIEW OF *FUGITIVE WANDERER*', 2021.



also plays on location, displaying a map of trails across a harmonious slate of twilight inspired colours and poetry.

To heal, their artistic choices and process is not without the environment, cosmos, or their physical being. Their style evokes shapes of blood, water, shadow, and celestial light on pieces of wood, cans and traffic cones picked up in alleyway walks and DT strolls, mapping the diasporic city dweller. Making most of what is already here is a direct transformative response to intergenerational pain. Joan traces this process with dream recollection, pulling from their relationship to nature and marking oneself. In *They Dream of Mangos and Smoke*, greenery at the lower left ruptures in a myriad of warm and cool colours, bleeding and warping citrus fruit and waters. A petal extending to the right alludes to a tearful eye and nearby lips. Imprinted in white: “unburied traumas”.

The direction of the *fugitive wanderer* ebbs and flows between materiality and spirit. A guarded gatherer in search of being and knowing against forces both unseen and seen, Joan is equipped with dreams and spray cans to keep the beyond alive and at bay. They capture the liminality in both arriving and belonging up against the tides of erasure in vibrant and intentional displays. Their reimaginings interact and meet the line of sight as maps of blood memory, defying chronological timelines as they stake their place and others among (and in) various intersecting worlds. These resilient roots Joan forms are in between juxtapositions of “here nor there” in opposition to nowhere, displaced. All intersections, ancestor talk, and prophecies to the yutes are gathered, ritualized, and materialized. In limbo and on earth, the *fugitive wanderer* is: the healer, the placemaker, and are cosmically conjoined with many.



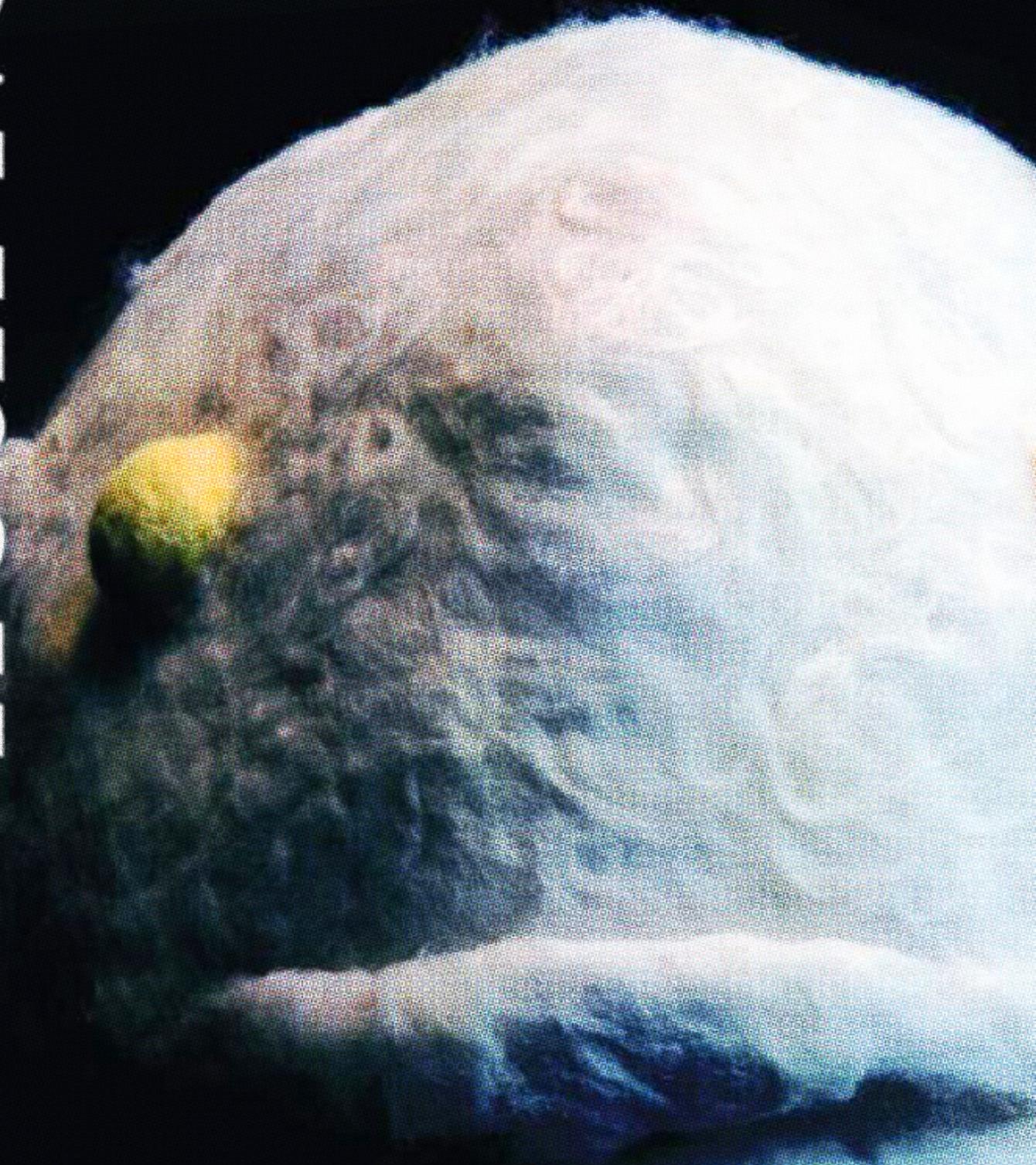


STRAW  
BERRY  
WILL  
TAKE ME  
OTHER

# HUSH NOW

SYDNEY MADIA

ESSAY BY \_\_\_\_\_



Opening a wound for others to enter. Opening a conversation. Opening oneself to openness.

The decision to continue a relationship, to work at, to endure, to cherish. Sustaining the connection through inner strength and resilience, rather than force or coerce. Severance is an easy decision, black+white, linear, predictable. Naming it is simple. “The way you can go, isn’t the real way. The name you can say, isn’t the real name.”<sup>1</sup> Healing is a non-linear, cyclical process, rewardingly painful, seemingly unending. A scratched scab will form back, time and time again.

*Hush Now*, a Window Space installation by artist Sydney Madia, evokes a coo of comfort but also of silencing; that dark space that exists between us, unspoken.

Sydney Madia is a practicing illustrator, ceramicist, sculptor and comics-artist based in downtown Toronto.

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula K. LeGuin, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 3

An immense white wool sculpture floats quietly, serenely, surrendering. Just barely above the floor, occupying the bottom half of the window space. It's in the form of a whale, mouth agape, a large pink gash on its side. Distant, pale-yellow eyes. Seen in profile from the window front, it faces towards the entrance of Xspace, greeting those who enter, a somewhat rare full-face confrontation in this time of masks. Set against an intimate black background, the natural white of the wool is striking, soft; the wound jarring, disarming. This abyssal blackness suggests both a suffocating pressure and a womb-like security. In an almost mobile-like suspension, a series of smaller deep-sea wool sculptures form a visual ribbon through the air, guiding the eye, leading down to the wound. Protective, sympathetic, cherubesque. The whole tableau suggests a proverbial elephant in the room, but one that is being now touched, recognized, named, loved; evoking tenderness.

—

In conversation about the work-in-progress Madia explains the intentionality of *Hush Now*: meant as a cathartic meditative exercise and a medium exploration. An opportunity to, through the act of painstaking repetition, cycle through her own tangled thoughts, forming them. Metaphorically emulating the physical process of needle-felting; binding together disarrayed fibres into a whole. Emulating the metaphorical process of holding a relationship together, through endurance, processing and growth.

Subject-wise the mammoth whale sculpture is intended to open access for difficult conversations about + with loved ones. Acknowledging the bruising process of healing a wounded person. "Only the wounded physician heals."<sup>2</sup> "To give no trust is to get no trust."<sup>3</sup> Dispelling shame around a taboo topic to open avenues of communicative healing with love and support.

—

Madia shows me her homemade large-scale felting tool: a paint brush with 5 barbed needles attached by green tape. A remark is made at how similar in configuration + shape to a tattooing needle it is.

In the early stages of the main body of the sculpture, it is a small mound in the living room. Chicken wire wrapped unceremoniously around a pile of couch pillows, a large blanket of white felted wool. The ghost of a felt. The shape of a whale.

She pricks herself with a needle and the barb catches, the needle disconnects from its handle and sticks out like a thorn from her thumb. "Happens often." No blood, lucky, and uncommon. Blood on the wool, although symbolically rich, is unideal. Madia contemplates the colour of the wound to-be.

Needles are pricked into the loose wool, binding the fibres together. It's an intimate act. A small tender violence. It reminds me of tattooing; the obsessive, meditative, repetitive action of stabbing something a hundred times over. Yet,

<sup>2</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Random House, 1963)

<sup>3</sup> LeGuin, *Tao Te Ching*, 21

<sup>4</sup> The "Sacred Wound" is a new-age spirituality concept, hard to find the original source for this reason. Often associated with the metaphorical suffering of Christ it may also be observed in classical mythology. In his lecture collection *Eternal Drama: The Inner Meaning of Greek*

unlike tattooing (which by nature is an act of physical harm/wounding), the needle felt produces a much softer/gentler/more tender final product. As a fibre medium there's a holistic + ambient "healing" quality to the binding of wool. An expansion, a whole-object approach; urging, coaxing, sculpting. Building upon, layer by layer. As opposed to the piercing/mending/binding of disparate fabric objects by needle and thread. Like a tree that is gently guided into a shape as it grows, over years.

A notoriously labour intensive medium, needle felting is not often chosen for large-scale projects. As a needle felted object, the center-piece of *Hush Now* functions as an exploration of the artistic functionality/boundaries of the medium: To suggest softness amidst hardness. To create a large, observably laborious, physically intensive yet softly evocative piece. A natural shape, a nurturing shape, a nurtured shape. As Madia puts it, "the forms in the felting process must be "suggested" or "nurtured" over time + labour, shaped into itself." The piece itself is corporeal, physical, in the flesh, yet the softness of the form + texture denotes an almost ethereal/cloud-like quality. There's a suggestion of both floating (in water as described by the scene + setting) or flying (in the air, as denoted by the cloud-like-ness, and the physical suspension of elements in the windows air). The intuitive navigation of those undefined, liminal spaces of sea and air, no fixed earthly boundaries, that is not unlike the intuition of the needle felting process and the intuition required to traverse into the emotional space of another.

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Mythology (1994), noted Jungian analyst Edward F. Edinger points to Prometheus as a great example: for humans to receive fire (the gift of knowledge) the exchange of eternal suffering (consciousness) must be made.

—  
Together, Madia and I contemplate the symbolism of a whale; isolation, compassion, sensitivity. It's mammalian physicality, the image of a mother and it's calf, a coo, a cry. In the context of *Hush Now* the whale elicits a feeling of vastness, of disconnect; a thing that cannot observe itself or those around it. There's a monstrous quality to it. Not grotesque but daunting and troubling. A problem, unspoken, that has grown bigger and bigger, untenably so. The sea-elephant in the room. How to heal a wound that the wounded struggle to perceive themselves? A colossal undertaking.

The gash, strikingly pink, is an opening. A tearing, a wound. Symbolically, not unlike the "Sacred Wound"<sup>4</sup>. The sacred wound that can be understood as all human suffering; in birth we arrive into this world covered in blood, screaming. "To take the body seriously, is to admit one can suffer. If I weren't a body, how could I suffer?"<sup>5</sup> But a wound is also an opportunity to heal. It's an abrupt/forced opening that may be followed by a process of mending or an opportunity of salvation. Opening and closing. Opening a conversation.

The black of the background, the suggestion of water and the bottom of the ocean. Water of the womb: returning to water. Blurriness/obfuscation /suffocating yet tenderness/primordial/ cradling. There's an implication of secrecy in the dark, something sinister, beyond words. But the radical act of naming a thing, seeing a thing, →

5 LeGuin, Tao Te Ching, 16





recognizing it; illuminates, takes away fear, and dispels shame.

Above the whale, and leading down towards it, is a trail of small seraphic creatures. Suspended, hanging, like charms, like a nursery mobile. Floating ephemera. Directing the viewer's gaze to the gash, ribbon-like, tether-like, umbilical-like. Many small acts of support. A nautilus, a conch, an urchin. Passing down the family line, echoes of each other, intergenerational trauma. Light pink, iris, plum red. Emotional/rational/irrational reactions vary. Pale-yellow eyes. Identification, recognition. The emotional affectation of a situation, rippling through a family, a community. Working in tandem, being present in their own way, overcoming their own circumstances. Being, together. The decision to remain, to exist, to love.

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As someone who tends to retract + isolate from difficult relationships, contemplating Madia's *Hush Now* pierces me in the heart. The resilience, the decision, the un-decision, the continuation. It inspires; respect, hope, awe.

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Hush Now  
Sydney Madia



END

XPACE CULTURAL CENTRE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL PAST  
& PRESENT COLLABORATORS FOR CONTINUING TO SUPPORT  
OUR COMMUNITIE(S).



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