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Volume



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VOLUME is Xpace Cultural Centre's annual anthology highlighting our exhibitions, exhibition essays, and extended programming. The exhibition essays demonstrate the breadth of artists, designers, curators, and writers that contribute to Xpace, and situate us as a prominent space in the OCAD University's community as well as the Toronto Arts community at large. This publication includes programming across all four of our exhibition spaces, as well as virtual programming, from September 2021 - July 2022.



Xpace Cultural Centre is
a not-for-profit artist-run
centre dedicated to
providing emerging and
student *artists, designers,*
curators and *writers*
with opportunities to
showcase their work in a
professional setting.

Xpace Cultural Centre is
committed to maintaining
an

*anti-oppressive, queer
positive environment,*

prioritizing

*marginalized, racialized,
Black and Indigenous
folks.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge this sacred land on which Xpace Cultural Centre operates. It has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. The territories include the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, and the Metis Nation. The territory is the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Tkaronto is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.



Xpace is supported by the OCAD Student Union and the Toronto Arts Council.

ABOUT THE XPACE TEAM

AVALON MOTT

(she/her) is a curator, arts administrator and lens based artist originally from Vancouver BC, now calling Toronto home. She holds a BFA in Photography from Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and is pursuing her MFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practice at OCADU as the recipient of the Presidential Scholarship and Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

Avalon's curatorial practice is rooted in supporting emerging and under-represented artists, alongside a commitment to fostering accessibility in the gallery space. Her thesis research is rooted in process and studio culture, and how these long standing traditions when brought into the gallery can aid in promoting accessibility and provide the viewer with a sense of agency, alongside a platform for learning.

Avalon was a founding member and the co-director of FIELD Contemporary, and has curated for numerous BC institutions. She has also curated public art installations for the City of Richmond, the City of Vancouver, and Capture Photography Festival among others.

DIRECTOR

PHILIP LEONARD OCAMPO

(he/him) is an artist and arts facilitator based in Tkaronto, Canada. Ocampo's multidisciplinary practice involves painting, sculpture, writing and curatorial projects. Exploring world-building, radical hope and speculative futures, Ocampo's work embodies a curious cross between magic wonder and the nostalgic imaginary. Following the tangents, histories and canons of popular culture, Ocampo is interested in how unearthing cultural zeitgeists of past / current times may therefore serve as catalysts for broader conversations about lived experiences; personal, collective, diasporic, etc.

He holds a BFA in Integrated Media (DPXA) from OCAD University (2018) and is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xpace Cultural Centre and one of the four founding co-w of Hearth, an artist-run collective based in the city.

PROGRAMMING COORDINATOR

NATALIE KING

(she/her) is a queer interdisciplinary Anishinaabe artist, facilitator and member of Timiskaming First Nation. King's multidisciplinary arts practice includes video, painting, sculpture and installation as well as community engagement, facilitation, curation and arts administration.

King's works are about embracing the ambiguity and multiplicities of identity within queer Anishinaabe experience(s). King's practice and facilitation work operates within a firmly future-bound and anti-colonial perspective, reclaiming realities of lived lives through frame-works of care and survivance.

King has a BFA from OCAD University and currently lives and makes on the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, and the Métis Nation in Tkaronto, Turtle Island.

PROGRAMMING COORDINATOR



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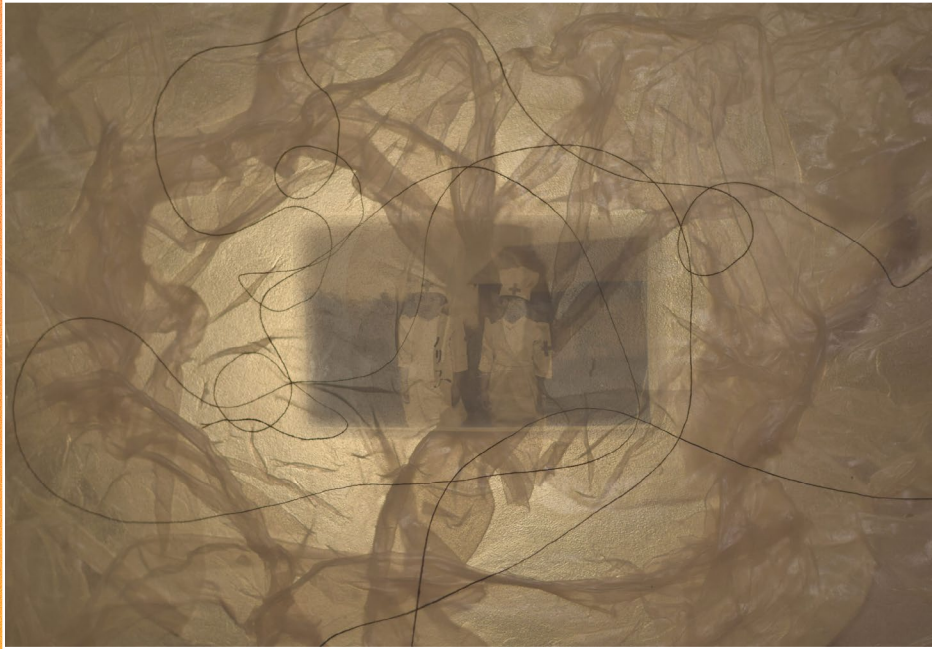
Project Space

FAMILIAR GHOSTS- ARCHIVING GENETIC DOMESTICITY

In South Korea's traditional funeral culture, the dead in the family are buried side by side. Graves are generally placed underneath the earth in a dome shaped mound. In the countryside, as I now remember my childhood memories spent in South Korea, it was common to find these types of graves without tombstones, which would have otherwise told me what lineage the buried person had carried. Graves placed next to one another among kins without a border draw an image of a collective, massive community in the afterlife. Souvenirs are gathered and stored together in the grave, as the living reminisce about segments of the deceased. The objects would be neatly cleaned and finally settled in the final juncture where the bodies now silently rest.

Dead bodies and their belongings are granted an eternal home. All the memories of the deceased passed down through genealogy have become more ephemeral at the loss of the person. Nonetheless, the history of the disappearing memories is still shared with living family members. From there on, the collective area of graves embraces the connectedness between the dead and the living-- "*The stack of memories with my loved person lying underneath the earth will last through my life*". It is this commemorative consensus between the living and the dead in which histories and legacies of the dead will continue to be present, surrounding the inner and external fabric of the living's life.






Home does not only mean physical occupancy but also emotional and perceptual interactions with it as memories. When part of the dead's memories sustain in the living person, the home in which the person lives becomes a gateway to the memories than a mere house. Through the gateway weaving the actual home and graves, the living person becomes a living home that stores the memories. Therein, the idea of home is transformed into two entities—a private contemplation lingering in the living and public territory that evokes their remembrance.

In Marli Davis' new work *Familiar Ghosts - Archiving Genetic Domesticity* the idea of the split-but-shared home recurs throughout ritualistic conversations with ancestors and perpetual research on their histories. The residency first took place in her home,

long owned by her ancestors, first-generation Japanese-Canadian immigrants. It begins, upon the domesticity gently offered by its spatiality, with the archive that the artist found in cabinets, traditional display cases, and But-sudan altars. The household objects summon tranquil times that awaken their owners' memories, dispositions, characteristics and physical and psychological foot-prints—the person themselves. In Davis' work, the personal hospitality that such domesticity offers to the viewers, inviting them into the artist's familial vestige, is escalated by the well-preserved documentation of her lost ancestral memories.

Starting in 1942 during WWII, the Canadian government segregated people of Japanese descent to enforce their deportation. Several Japanese - Canadian homes were built in British Columbia to detain Japanese Canadians forcefully separated from other family members. Those who had been the first-generation immigrants in Canada were labelled as specimens stamped on their immigrant document, while the other Japanese - Canadians born and raised in Canada were stigmatized as "unqualified" Canadians who failed to be neutralized into western society. Their actual homes were sabotaged, and it caused more than 21,000 Japanese - Canadians were left with no home but encampment shelters that were neither shelter nor home but prisons.



The history of the displaced home and lineage had long remained in peripheral gaps that were involuntarily disconnected before the artist discovered remnants of the ancestors' lives. The forgotten spirituality contained in domestic dwelling sealed within wardrobes and cabinets has been revisited, researched and reactivated by the artist's hauntological investigation. Within her work, every corner of the furniture is fully cast by water-soaked edible rice paper that metamorphoses between temporal states of malleability and solidity by their circumstantial reactivity. Selected documents, including photos and letters passed down over decades, become part of the three white-ish, transparent sculptures of countless stacked rice papers, as if settling in their new home. The archive fills in bleak gaps and cracks between tangible

layers of rice papers, speaking to non-linearity to the lineage deeply embedded in the archive through material illumination. During the artist residency, every cast had to be done at the artist's home due to the fragility of the material involved. In this intimate, vulnerable apparatus, each cast is inevitably compounded with the artist's hair, nails, saliva and dust from clothing—infinitesimal DNA strands marked by the lineage. They join the interior of the domestic objects and home handed down her ancestors. The entire sculptures, installed in the Project Space, are surrounded by rice grains, resembling a bowl of rice on a funeral table as an offering to summon fragmented connectivity between the living and dead in East Asian culture. The audience is asked to remove their shoes and put on slippers as if entering a home.

In this way, the artist's DNA segments entangled in/outside of the varying components compound with other DNA segments parted from bodies of the audience are merged into the space where the artist's Japanese heritage attempts to settle in as sacred objects and the interconnectedness of the piece. If looking at the piece as a new home in which the archived memories of the ancestors are relocated, nurturing the representation of the history, your trait as an audience and attendee will further fulfill the foundation of the home. If you

think time flows from the past to the present, horizontally like the flow from a life to a death, Marli's action of haunting backwards through the historical genealogy in her family subverts this by configuring a circle of general temporality where the dead reincarnate as living memories and objects reified by the memories continue to be recalled by the living. The new *home* Davis Marli is creating in the public space reclaims statically lost narratives by animating a circulatory in one's genealogical system, physical manifested to sit amongst fragmented heritage. It is the ceremony which we all are attending to evoke internal commemoration into a public narrative, for all deaths sparse underneath unknown graves carrying unresuscitated histories, like the deceased in monumentless graves in South Korea.

- IVETTA SUNYOUNG KANG

1. Marsh, James H. "Japanese Canadian Internment: Prisoners in their own Country". The Canadian Encyclopedia, 17 September 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/japanese-internment-banished-and-beyond-tears-feature>. Accessed 10 September 2021.

NOT ONLY OVER SEAS BUT SOIL



Shannon Lewis' *Not Only Over Seas but Soil* (2022) features more than thirty collaged tableaus printed on silk chiffon. Suspended on horizontal white cords, the works are of varying lengths and depict arrangements exploring migration and layered histories. Across the works, a faceless, bronze figure poses and plays, surrounded by various decadent imagery from marble and gold to cocktails and Christian Louboutins. Using a visual language that is familiar to an audience over-saturated by media, Lewis offers us assemblages of high-fashion, social media and shifting portraits to construct narratives. Gleaming bodies reminiscent of magazine covers, and vignettes like designer advertisements, these elements are familiar yet foreign. As the viewer attempts to read the images, they find a narrative that is chaotic, comforting and nostalgic.

SHANNON LEWIS

Project Space: February 1st - February 26th, 2022





Diamonds and Dolce & Gabbana, elements we culturally identify as markers of wealth decorate the compositions. Alongside them, we find images that evoke water, from fossettes to drinking glasses to rudder pintles. Water imagery is used to symbolize migration and transience, illuminating the subject's diasporic voyage from one context to another. Yet, each symbol rewrites itself taking new meaning in different compositions. Cocktail glasses embody coming-of-age, freedom and religion, the notion of being love drunk and in the spirit juxtaposed by ideas of gospel and being moved by the Spirit. The water imagery is both baptismal and transformative. While the artist claims the role as narrator, the viewer is invited to navigate these layers physically and metaphorically as they forge their own pathways for exploration. Performed on a sumptuous

fabric, the figure transforms before the viewer, mapping itself within the space. Architecture and landscapes set the scene by crafting luxury interiors in which Lewis' characters shape-shift and adapt in order to fit. Lewis' compositions are like code-switching for the body, and only certain limbs find a place in the frame. The fashioned figure becomes a metaphor for mimicry. Clumsily navigating a space and finding that certain movements are no longer permitted, certain gestures have become exaggerated and profane. The body must navigate new rules in new locations, adjust— though never adjusting fully. Our bodies twisted, our tongues tied, how must our muscles contort in order to fit?

the body becomes a map

our bones

the road, the soil, the sea, the stories

lost and uncovered

our muscles

our journeys, our joy, our migrant dreams

naive and optimistic

how much can the body hold?



We suffer for fashion to walk in heels that are uncomfortable and do not fit; we adorn—sometimes painfully—piercing ears, curling lashes; we spend a fortune on status and prestige in order to project images of wealth and success: this is the labour of luxury. British-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed writes, Bodily transformations may also transform what is experienced as delightful. If our bodies change over time, then the world around us will create different impressions. As our cultures evolve so too do our bodies, we acclimate to new geographies, relationships and routines.

In viewing Lewis' compositions, we begin to contemplate culture, luxury and labour. How do we connect to our layered histories? How do we recall the past? In one attempt, we co-opt gestures and practices that our ancestors once viewed as chores, and renew them as tradition, evocations of a simpler time, routines that remind us of the journeys before us. Suddenly, hanging your clothes out to dry and baking bread become elements of luxury. You've managed to escape or resist a culture of rise and grind to slow down, nestle into nature and enjoy the fruits of life. This stillness is a privilege in a capitalist society obsessed with productivity. As the body navigates the labour of luxury and the luxury of labour it finds itself in murky, chaotic waters.

The promise of happiness embedded in the narrative of migration is contested by the reminder that transience is not always a state of privilege, and the realization that to go also means to leave. These are porous boundaries.

Without a doubt, navigating a space for the first time is a sensory experience. Lewis' installation calls to our senses using shadow-play, sound and tactility. Printed on several of the works are the shadows of vegetation, farmhouses and rot iron gates from the Woodbrook district in Trinidad & Tobago. Layering foreign shadows into the composition tricks the viewer's eyes, prompting them to look again. The eyes then become unreliable narrators, thus tempting the viewer to explore the works using other senses.

Sheets of white silk chiffon hung on a clothesline remind us of childhood and laundry. Washing, and drying and washing again, every wash leaving a trace of the last wear. *Not Only Over Seas but Soil* (2022) maps our journey through chaos. As you read through the works, each tableau becomes a trace of the last. The narrative evolves, multidirectional and unfinished.

past, present and future
how it navigates
with unbridled confidence
hesitant, still deciphering the
memories
messages
written in muscle
what the mind forgets, the body remembers
the sea, the sand, the soil
have salted your skin.

- LEAF JERLEFIA



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29-53.

DOUBLE



Work by **Ramolen Laruen**.

-EDGED



Work by **Sepideh Dashti**.

Upending Grids

At the age of 10, one of my closest friends' father began the—I'm assuming—exhausting journey of teaching her how to play chess. He walked his young daughter through each of the pieces: their roles, their failings and their constrictions, and explained to her how the pieces were predestined to move in certain ways inside of the grid. My friend tells me the story half smiling; "I kept moving everything wherever I wanted and he gave up on teaching me a bit later." We both laugh, her because she's never really been able to grasp the game, me, because I quietly see the logic of her ten-year-old self: Why should any of the pieces have predestined roles in the first place? Why should the grid trap them at all? Can't I just save them from it and take them away? Let them make their own decisions beyond the rules of a mere pattern?

As one might have guessed, I do not find much comfort in grids. They're too orderly, constricting, often a simplification and foreshadowing of linear structures of control, and more than anything, they give me a headache if I look at them too long. The irony was therefore not lost on me that when introducing their exhibition, artists Sepideh Dashti and Ramolen Laruan tell me that grids were the beginning of their conversations when first discussing their collaboration.

On a glitchy zoom call, Dashti shares her screen and showcases an image of her hands holding a larger needle as she embroiders hair into an off-white piece of fabric, a working shot of her piece *Tangled*. Dashti speaks about the Keffiyeh, a patterned square scarf that has symbolized the resistance of the Palestinian people for as long as I have been a witness to the occupation of their lands¹, and even decades before I was born.

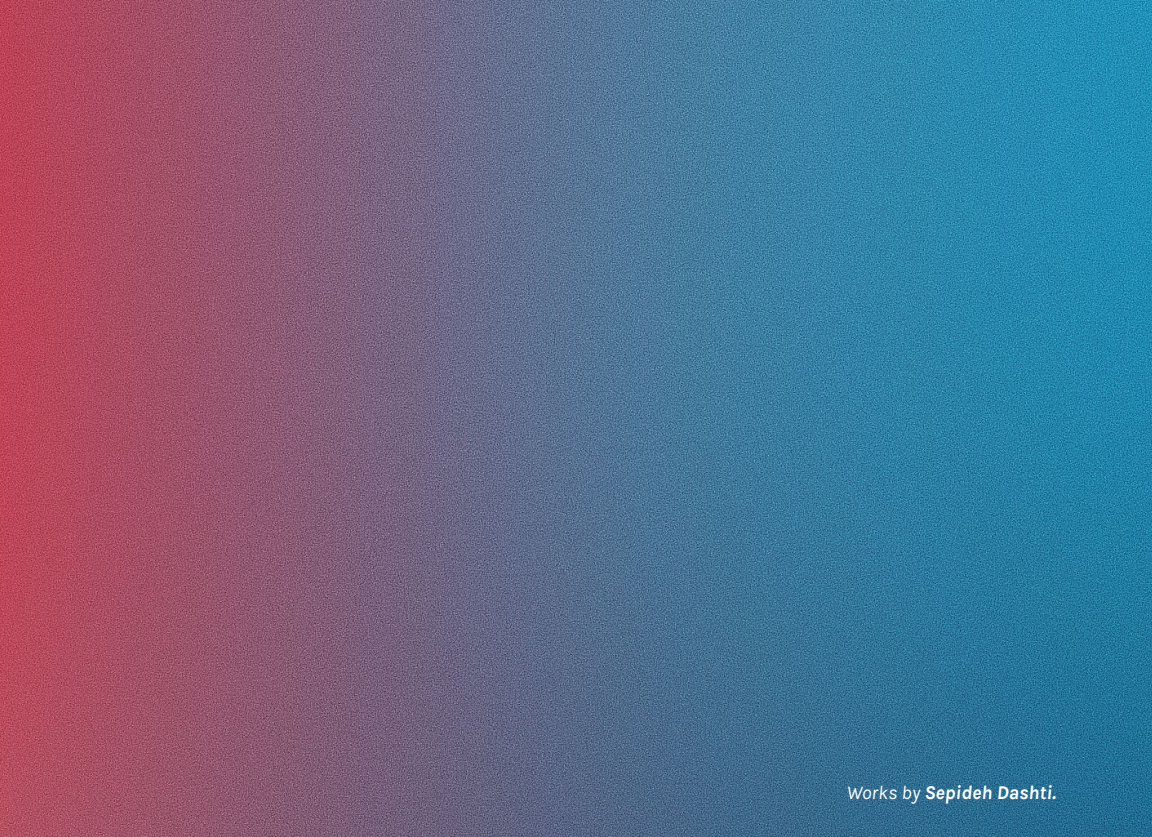
Dashti, however, sees the pattern as it has been adopted by one of Iran's military divisions—a symbol of warning. In Iran, a Keffiyeh means that the Basij militia were coming. The Basij militia, a division responsible for controlling the Iranian female body, redefines a grid that has historically embodied the survival of a colonized people as a method to enforce control over Iranian womanhood. This context is essential in understanding how a work like *Tangled* becomes an act of protest. Reclaiming symbols is often an impossible act—how do we unsee the images that have marked our traumas? Dashti chooses to reclaim the Keffiyeh by embroidering her own hair into the intersecting lines of the pattern. The very hair that Iranian women have to cover when they witness these limits is now used to create it. Using the grid as a means of insurgence, Dashti breaks down this pattern into its bare essentials: intersecting lines that are controlled by their creator, not a entrapment that is enforced upon her.



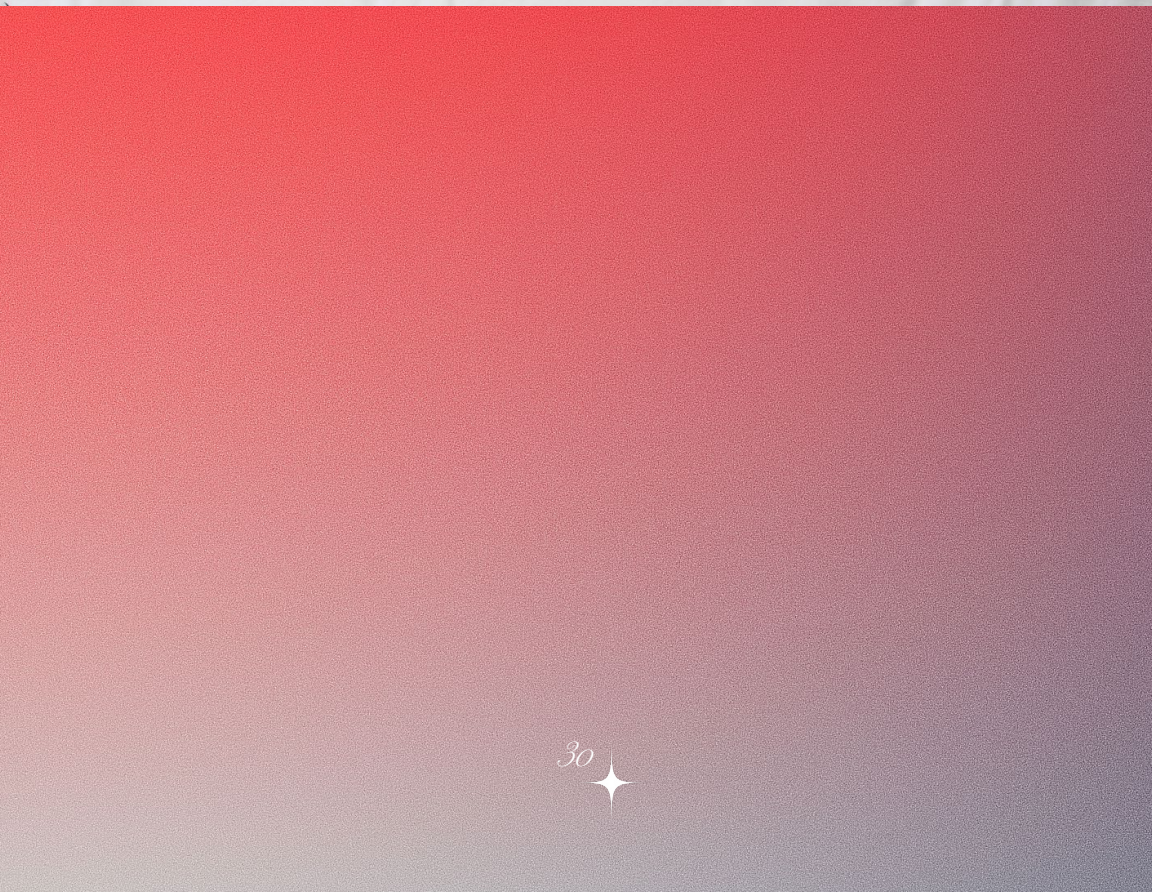
Visually similar, Laruan offers her work follow as a counterpart to Dashti's *Tangled*. On a large off-white thrifted bed sheet, follow offers deconstructed embroidered lines that hold their audience inside of the work as the lines lead the eye from pattern to pattern, never allowing your sight to stray from the mazelike embroidery. With loose threads bleeding from the fabric which forms a pattern reminiscent of a traditional Filipino house, Laruan creates a grid with linework that carries the viewer gently from line to line as they build a home with one another. During our Zoom call, Laruan comments on her years-long investigation of the grid and her relation to it—How does a Filipina Woman of Colour adopt and challenge a historically patriarchal and formalist pattern? follow responds

to this question by offering an alternative to the confining nature of grids. Their military formations get unpacked and displaced, carving space through structures rather than around them. In many ways, follow serves a similar function to the audience that *Tangled* does: by disrupting the pattern and shaking the repetition, we spotlight the potential for cracking and rebuilding anew. In order to break the grids and the structures that govern us, we must upend them into creations that prioritize us.





Works by Sepideh Dashti.





Work by Sepideh Dashti.



Work by Ramolen Laruan.

These two works root *Double Edged*, both as a conversation and as an exhibition. The rest of the installations orbit Tangled and follow the way planets orbit the sun. Dashti's *No East No West*, a photograph of a human figure with sewn in hair balls on its face, plays off the notions of the Iranian Keffiyeh. The figure wears a shirt with the words *No East No West* embroidered into a grid in both English and Farsi once again distributing the grid by introducing language and text into the stitches. Detached from Dashti, the hair adorning the figure's face becomes lifeless and therefore outside the bounds of control. Using the repetition of patterns and the recreation of the stitch, Dashti reintroduces the grid as both a visual and a conceptual trapping.

This is echoed once more in Laruan's that could dream without a thought. Creating overlapping pieces of bleached salvaged denim, Laruan abstracts grids to create a sky-like visual that encourages the audience to envision their dreamings and findings. As the work engulfs audience members in both height and width, that could dream without a thought envelopes the onlooker into looking beyond the pattern to manifest a world where they are free from its confines. Laruan creates an escapism for her audience from the grids and prisons that chain us to our everyday, giving her work the

space to both trap and let go of the viewer. duplicates, a series of photographs formed as replicas of themselves, similarly invites the viewer once more into an empty world they could occupy. These photos, taken on Laruan's trips to the Philippines, capturing haunting and mundane emptiness, are also void of humans and their presence, making space for the audience to occupy them as a method of creation beyond the multiple repetition of the photographs themselves.



Work by Ramolen Laruan.

As Laruan's photographs make space for the audience to occupy the empty spaces, Dashti's *Zolf*, a two Channel video featuring the artist swallowing and unswallowing her own hair, does the same in the opposite direction. The video has a visceral physical effect that disrupts our very occupation with the work in the first place yet traps us into witnessing Dashti as she expels the hair that has trapped her in grids—visually through a dual Channel video and metaphorically through her confinement to the action. We cannot see the artist's eyes and general features beyond her mouth, pushing the viewer to replace themselves with the articles, inserting themselves in her stead as she produces more of her thick braided hair.

In one of our Zoom calls, Laruan explains: "The contrast of breaking the rule is most stark beside the rule itself, no matter how small the act." And this statement stands true when presenting the above works. The circularity of the grid, of the shifting of repetition, the way a square can make a circle, how a straight line makes a connection and then collapses, and the way it leaves space for emptiness, for dreamings, and for rupture. As we take a needle to stab into a piece of fabric then stab it back pointing towards us, Double Edged presents artists who choose to use the same sharp edge that they create with to point at themselves and wonder, Why should any of us have predestined roles in the first place? Why should the grid trap us at all? What rules can we break now?

- YASMEEN NEMATT ALLA

1. For more information on the historical origins and symbolism of the Keffiyeh, see: The Palestinian keffiyeh: All you need to know about its origins <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/palestine-keffiyeh-resistance-traditional-headaddress?fbclid=IwAR-1mOanWDGC7Cm7zTUQcx-6dpCL-MyGwqLdFjiTjKSnt-Glqy5C7o-HtnJXmc>



Work by Sepideh Dashti.



Project Space: March 15, 2022 - April 23, 2022

IN AMBER

Project Space: May 27, 2022 - July 3, 2022

Possessions

I want to possess, and I am possessed by wanting. It is this word, possession, which I have found to be a hinge connecting the works of the two artists we find in the exhibition *In Amber*. In playing with and adapting the commodity form, Kyle Mowat draws attention to our possessions and the possession they can have over us. Lina Wu's work shows figures in our world seemingly under the influence of forces outside of it, possessed by a starry and ungovernable wind. But both these artists do more than simply critique the world — they re-enchant it.

Before he began focusing on sculpture, Kyle Mowat was working as an animator. However, drawing for hours on end began to cause him pain and he was eventually diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, a condition that prevented him from drawing in the way he was used to. As a result, he was forced to adapt his artistic practice, developing a method of sculpting in

which he slowly applies material over time until the sculpture is finished, an antithesis to the grinding pace of production required in life as an artist under capitalism, the very thing which triggered his condition in the first place. As such, Mowat's practice and process is informed by disability, which can also be seen as a form of possession, the body taken over by unseen forces.

Sometimes, Mowat's sculptures resemble tools, which brings to mind questions of usefulness that are also relevant to the subject of disability. Implicit in the dominant understanding of disability is the idea that the body is useful towards one particular aim, that it is a tool geared towards a normative set of actions and ways of interacting with the world. By subverting the usefulness of the everyday objects which he sometimes adapts into his sculptures, such as a hair-comb, Mowat asks us to question our relationship with usefulness and instrumentality. Just as he was forced to adapt his practice due to disability and strenuous work conditions, Mowat adapted these objects away from their original use and into new modes of being.

KYLE MOWAT, LINA WU

Another relationship to objects that is outside of usefulness is that of devotion. Mowat's interest in idols, icons, and devotional objects stems from his family's Irish Catholic background, and in one piece he even adapts a figurine that belonged to his grandmother, extending an angel's broken wing to cartoonish proportions. When I look at Mowat's sculptures, it often appears as if alien spirits have come to possess these everyday forms, a kind of re-enchantment of the world, to use Max Weber's famous phrase, who described the way that these animistic and magical presences were dispossessed by the forces of scientific rationalism. Lina Wu's strange and often uncanny pencil drawings for *In*



Amber also deal with possession, although in this case it is the figures themselves who appear possessed. In *Drunken Angel*, powerful and primal forces are mixed together into one chaotic tableau, the viewer's eye being drawn from one focal point to another in a state of unrest. In the background, a girl sings into a microphone as a crowd cheers her on. A glowing white rectangle is in front of her, and upon further inspection it is clear that she is performing karaoke. At first glance, however, this glowing portal appears as a kind of ethereal emanation, a message from god. And isn't karaoke a form of possession, the channeling of another's spirit through one's own body and voice? Closer to the viewer, and near the centre of the composition, one figure presses another into the floor. Perhaps they are playfighting, but there is something sinister about this part of the image — the aggressor has a smile on their face, while the other's face is obscured, which calls into question the nature of this violence. When our attention shifts to this part of the image, the crowd no longer seems to be cheering on a karaoke performance, instead becoming the encouraging witnesses of a beat-down. This tension between innocence and violence runs through many of Wu's images in *In Amber*, violent rage being another expression of possession, an unruly force that "rational" society tries to contain but which can at any moment erupt.





Another image that comes to mind when I look at *Drunk Angel* is that of Jacob wrestling the angel, a biblical story which has been represented countless times throughout the history of western art, infusing this everyday scene with a divine aura and significance. In this story, Jacob spends the night alone in the desert, where he encounters a man with whom he wrestles until daybreak. When they part ways, Jacob learns that he has in fact been wrestling not with a man at all but with God, who then blesses him and renames him Israel. The characters in Wu's drawings often seem to be unaware themselves that they may be in the presence of some greater spiritual forces. In

Chapel, two figures kiss, their faces obscured, in front of a glowing chapel door. They cannot see the door, but we can, and we have the sense that these lovers are under the influence of a force to which they are not entirely privy. They are possessed, if nothing else, by desire, and in many of Wu's works, desire seems shaded by an aura of threat, connected perhaps to this loss of control which one feels when eros has possession over us. The framing of the image is in the shape of a star, and stars have long been considered guiding forces in our lives, particularly relevant today with the prominence of astrology. In another image, *Laughing When the Lights Went Out*, two figures dance in the rain. One appears to be wearing some sort of parka, perhaps the cheap disposable plastic kind, but in the context of the exhibition and Wu's work as a whole, it appears more as a religious robe of some sort, like a monk's habit. These conjunctions of the everyday and the divine find parallels in Wu's interest in the mixing of high-brow art—images like *The Roving* taking inspiration from Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*—with other forms of art typically seen as low-brow informing her drawing techniques such as Wu's preferred manga which she describes to me as being "heavy with romance bullshit."¹ This mixture is also reflected in Mowat's work, in which everyday objects seem to be possessed and infused with spirits and otherworldly beings.

1. In conversation with Lina Wu.



As I was leaving a rave recently, I had a flash of déjà-vu. Passing by the columns of the Dovercourt House, I suddenly felt as though I was in one of Wu's drawings, the hyper modern dance music mixing with this setting of usually unnoticed architectural grandeur. A similar feeling struck me in the days after visiting Mowat at his home studio. I began noticing beautifully sinuous lines in bits of plastic refuse on the street, or the visceral mumbles of bubbling pink insulation bursting from a wall, everything appearing sculptural, animated. It was like the experience of reading a great book when I was an adolescent, looking up from the page to find a world that was slightly altered from when I had looked down. I came out of my engagement with Lina and Kyle's work with my vision renewed, the world around me possessed.

-YOYO COMAY



Main Space

Work by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.



Main Space: September 24, 2021 - November 6, 2021

WOVEN—

Objects, Materials and Space(s) Beyond Measure



Kristi Chen
Akash Inbakumar
Leeay Aikawa

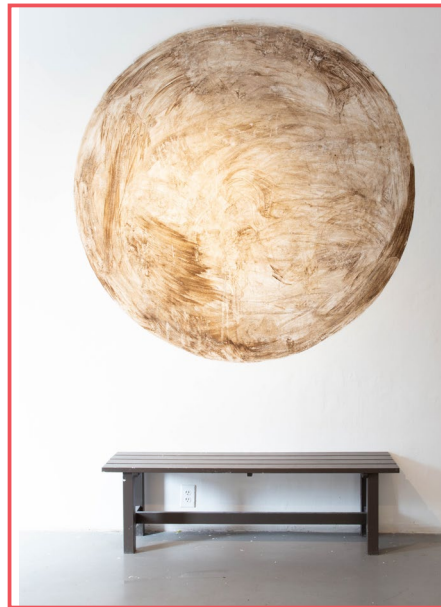
Woven – Objects, Materials and Space(s) Beyond Measure is a craft-based project that investigates material kinship and body awareness. How do we use our body as a tool to understand the world around us? Where do the lines of our body and the lines of the material begin and end? This exhibition will work through material play and sisterhood.

These works will be constructed with a combination of traditional and unorthodox material and weaving techniques in reaction to T'karonto/Toronto. Through collaborating, Kristi Chen, Akash Inbakumar, Leey Aikawa and material(s) engage in worlding a future that blurs the lines between the human body, material, soil and process.

“The first cultural device was probably a recipient Many theorizers feel that the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier.”
- Ursula K Le Guin,
The Carrier Bag Theory Of Fiction

Throughout these breezy summer months past, my weaving kin, sisters Leey and Akash came together to share, experiment and explore the concept of weaving while spending time in the lush, green parks of T'karonto. Building works collaboratively by using foraged, found objects sourced from our own spaces became the begin-

ning of Woven. By rekindling communal practices and passing one seed, thread or reed into the hands of different lives, experiences and generations, we learn, share, let go and grow...one weave and stitch at a time. The intuition and urgency of experimentation are the primary foundations that draw our works together. The water bucket slowly emptying itself, bundled fallen pine needles, and North American prairie grass wilting away are materials that are time based, speaking towards our intuitive nature of foraging and finding materials to create sculptural beings. Our collaboration is familial, as Akash, Leey and I feel as close as sisters as we world this exhibition together. From one to another, we've developed a kinship by passing knowledge through our own ancestral backgrounds and exchanging skills as we make.



Work by Leey Aikawa in view.



LEEY STITCHING OUR BLOOD LINE WITH RED THREAD, AKASH FELTING FIBERS INTO FUZZY SKIN-LIKE FORMS ME PLAITING A MAPLE REED MAT



Work by Akash Inbakumar in view.

Woven, in my perspective, means to intertwine and to narrate. Using materials that are foraged, found, pre-made, has given us an opportunity to combine elements we each brought in and collaboratively create a narrative that commemorates our lived experiences. Utilizing elements of soil, water, plants, pre-manufactured materials and found objects questions what our position on this land is. What is our story?

These questions may not have definitive answers, but we instead seek to nurture an open-ended conversation. In this exhibition we are using techniques that are indigenous to our cultures by using materials sourced around us creating a trans-cultural experience. My sisters and I are settlers in T'karonto, therefore it is important to think about how we interpret our identities to acknowledge this geography. For example, as a collective, we wanted to use materials and techniques that are easily accessible to

our own resources and space. Using our hands to paint with mud, making baskets, foraging and felting are all additive techniques derived from ancient practices we personally resonate with. Basketry, especially for me, sits heavily in my lineage from many generations in the past. My paternal side of the family originates from Shouning, Fujian Province. This village/town has a vast history of basket weaving from utility to celebrations. Weaving symbolizes a sense of recultivation and survival, as my father is unable to weave. The action of me and my sisters weaving conveys strength and resilience to push forward sustaining inter-generational knowledge. Even the communal interactions of us sharing the same studio space, having meals together, talking, sharing, laughing are portraying a similar ambiance to a community in a village and reflected in these woven works. The skill of basketry and many other woven techniques are craft practices that are slowly diminishing in the hands of our contemporary world through mass industrialization and globalization. *Woven - Objects, Materials and Space(s) Beyond Measure* hopes to challenge this and explore the revival of familial techniques through sisterhood and togetherness.

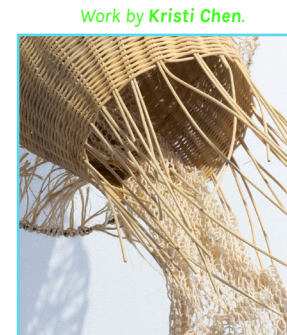
-KRISTI CHEN

By being in touch with the wholeness of nature on a daily basis during the isolation forced by the pandemic, my desire to work with other artists became stronger, searching for ways in which artists suggest the oneness of a mutually thriving Earth Community. To me, finding my sisters Kristi, Akash and their work felt like intuitively finding my kin. I didn't feel any hesitation asking about them to work together even though we never really knew each other (okay maybe a little). Co-creating with them symbolizes the union of our individual practices: basketry, weaving, ceramics, drawing, foraging and wood-working, addressing both individual freedom and community identity. Together, the project attempts to shift the notion of competition to collaboration while subtly echoing the biodiversity of forest-wellbeing, where everything thrives and works together.

Like many artists, collaboration was new to all three of us. It involved many activities such as writing this collective essay, discussing project themes, experimenting with backstrap weaving with a tree, and touching each other's hair like how sisters do. These are all part of kin-centric learning and care, and a pathway forward to healing from disconnectedness with each other and the environment. When Akash suggested that we should try weaving for our project, on the

one hand I was excited, but on the other hand, I went through a mini anxious period wondering how I would contribute to the team with craft of weaving, and still express who I am in my work since I had no formal weaving experience in a traditional sense prior. When we got accepted to the Xpace summer residency program, I didn't stop my routine, – I continued paying a visit to nature on a regular basis and foraging during my walks. With the project Woven in mind though, I started to question why weaving has thrived in almost every culture, such as Peru, Guatemala, Ghana and especially within non-european communities throughout history in relation to their connection to the land. This question has navigated me through overly digitized (zoomed) culture and ecological devastation we witness today.

I started to pay more attention to how nature does the weaving during my walks in the forest. Staring at the shadows of the leaves breathing, and dancing to the dazzling sun one afternoon, I found my own spontaneous shadow woven into their authentic breathing rhythm with no separation from the environment. My senses stimulated and awareness heightened, I showed up fully to the whispering energy of trees and plants. It was this interlaced dimension of here and now in which I experienced the beautifully integrated tension



Work by Kristi Chen.

of care from the Earth, an inspiration for Woven. I began to see weaving beyond technicality but rather as breathing, reconnection with Earth, and even as a way to rediscover inner self.

Through this framework, I connect weaving with my interest in yogic philosophy and my ongoing intention to find harmony between polarities. As a practicing yogi and a yoga teacher, this could be balancing the right and left sides of my body through asana (physical) poses. This could be inhaling and exhaling evenly or uniting the body, mind, and spirit. This could also be about balancing of masculine (yang, sun) and feminine (yin, moon) energy. This points to a sisterhood with Akash and Kristi, which meant for me to re-channel a wavering feminine energy within myself. Born to modernity, our society tends to promote the act of 'doing' and value productivity over passivity, which makes us unbalanced and separated both mentally and spiritually as a result of overly increased masculine (yang) energy. Over-dominated by yang-masculine energy in my female body, I find it subconsciously nurturing to work through sisterhood and Mother Nature in relation to craft.

Similarly, working with a traditional tool such as the Japanese saw, which cuts with 'pull,' rather than 'push' reminds me to slow down and be in alignment with the rhythm of the Earth.

This is again a feminine gesture informed by what may be traditionally known as a man's tool. The saw also becomes an extension of my arm, which transcends my body, tool, and the material, allowing the agency of the tool to take part. It is nostalgic working this way, reenacting something long forgotten within me.

These historical craft processes have been what raise my five senses in the present moment, awakening me to rethink my relationship to the world and materials:

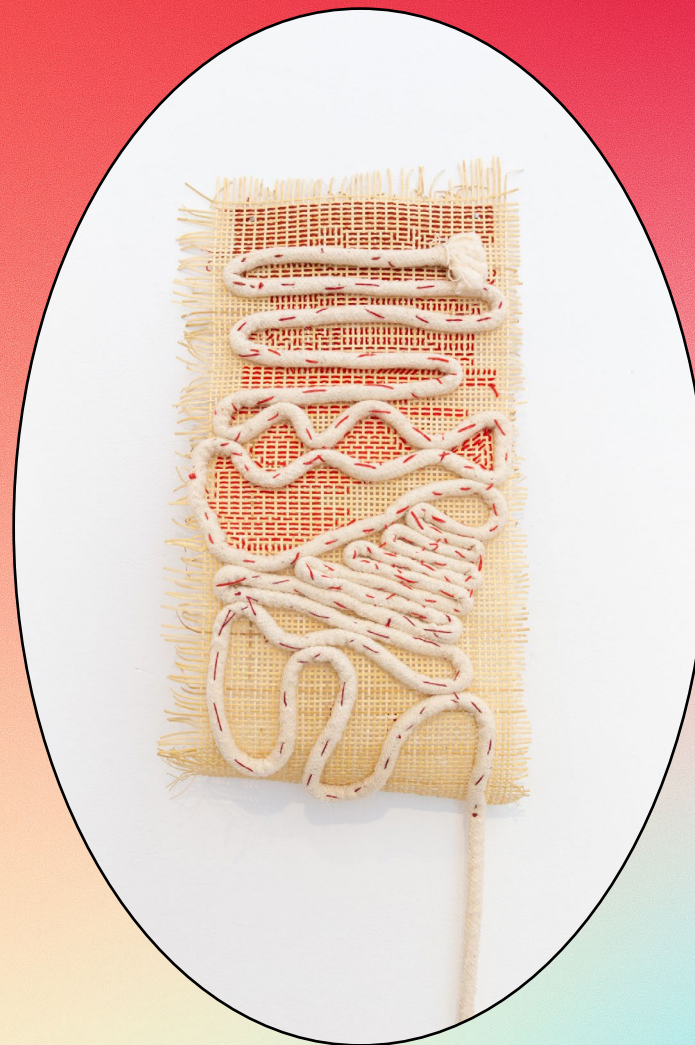
Touch: I cut my hands so many times through touching woods or the sharp leaves, but I was saved by the springy textural essence of dog hair.

Smell: It was the aromatic smell of the pine needles that enticed me in the duration.

Sight: I rested my eyes peacefully on the gently moving silvergrass, and that was all I needed to do to find my sense of whole.

Taste: Sometimes we shared green tea, from which we painted a corner of the wall, now showing me the subtle colour of my culture.

Sound: I can now recognize *Sorghastrum nutans* by the plastic sound they permeate when shaken against a tree.



Work by Leey Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar in view.



Woven – Objects, Materials and Space(s) Beyond Measure, 2021. Installation View.
Work by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.

I will never be able to see these materials as a mere object, because I now worked with them and this is Woven to me, expressing oneness of warp and weft, oneness of time and space, oneness of past, present and future, oneness of human and non-human, oneness of my consciousness and that of materials, oneness of body, mind and spirit.

I am just left with one question now: whether we explored weaving through sisterhood, material play and body awareness or if we actually explored sisterhood and material kinship, and body through weaving? Without any one answer, I know that all these experiences are woven into a new understanding that I am still in the process of weaving who I am as a person, as an individual, as a collective being and as a responsible member of the Earth community. This is Woven beyond measure.

WEAVING WHO I AM AS A PERSON THROUGH:

Pineneedle hanging (2021)

Open the third eye (decalcify pineal gland) by hanging this piece at a place where you see it everyday.

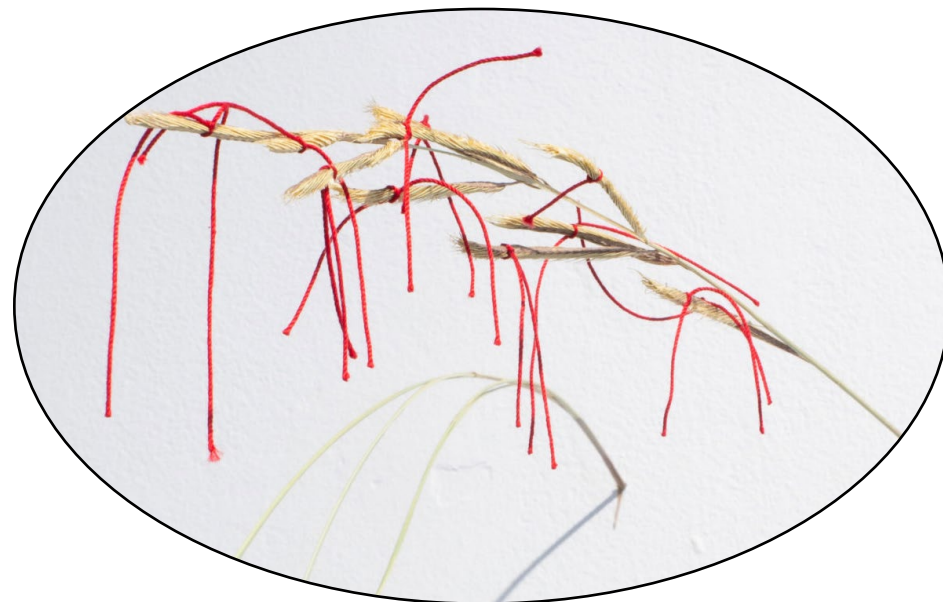
Dog hair day (2021)

Collect dog hair from the park and 'weave' them with the branches. Use a piece of tall grass to gently push through to see them bounce back.

Braiding kin (2021)

Cut 3 inches of your hair and your kin's to weave them together with tall grass to honor the land which you stand on, as well as to honor where you come from.

- LEEAY AIKAWA



Work in view by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.

Kinship is relating to others beyond the ties of genetics and blood for mutual survival. *Woven: Objects, Materials and Space(s) Beyond Measure*, explores the relations between Kristi, Leeay, myself and the surroundings we occupy through migration and settler structures. Us three sisters call T'karonto (Dish with One Spoon treaty territory)¹ home, here we foraged and sourced raw materials, found and bought objects or had things shipped in. By working with these materials and using craft methodology/processes/theory, we are able to conceive object-kin that represent the partnerships of the material ecosystem in T'karonto and our-

selves both collaboratively and independently. In this project we propose a future of partnerships between soil, plants and critters along with plastics, refined metals and imported goods, from other lands. These partnerships call for a speculative-future to embody these symbiotic relationships that are currently strained. We are often taught that 'un-natural' materials have no place being with or near 'natural' material, and yet when you look around T'karonto, they often occupy the same spaces. Collections of people's old belongings curbside are sprawled out next to the grasses and flowers growing out of the

cracks in the sidewalk, plastics used to send packaging or serve us food are nestled and grouped in the spaces between the reeds, blown together by the wind. This leads us to envision new ways to work with multiple materials and apply craft processes such as weaving, stitching, knotting, basketry, woodworking, and felting to bring them together. To birth/conceive objects and narratives for a speculative-future, that is contextualized by the present and past.

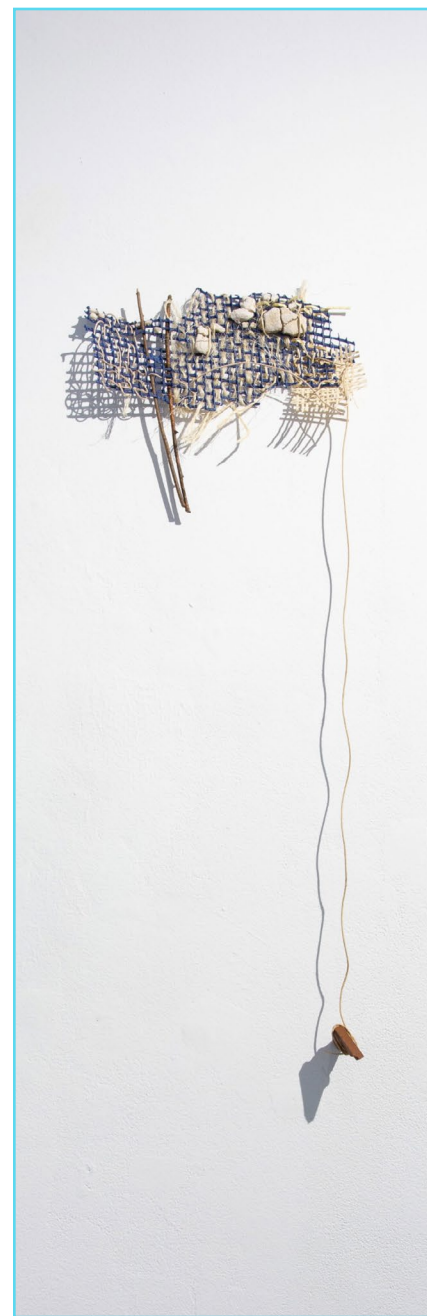
Craft as care is a conceptual pillar to this project. Crafting is a full body experience- a repetitive task; it requires a reaching towards from the hands of the maker and the material. This meeting asks that both come to the table as equals, ready to learn, teach and desire. Crafting as worlding reveals labour as more than the production² of objects, instead understanding crafting as transformation, conception, stories, touch, symbiosis, care and kinship. Worlding through craft dismantles the human from the center and instead reframes us in the web of ecology. What can I do for this material and what can they do for me? How did we come to meet one another? What threads connect us, intersect, weave in and out? How does our coming together, ripple into our shared surroundings and future? Like a game of cat's cradle, we work together to create new shapes and forms, always reaching towards new configurations.

This collaboration has allowed me to begin my reconnection to local ecology. Local ecology being where we sourced our material. For me, what is important to understand is that the local ecology of T'karonto has invasive species; plastics and other travelers are also threads in this web. Their presence in Woven is an acknowledgement to the travelers in T'karonto. For me acknowledging them is to recognize that I too come from a family of travelers, immigrations supervised by, and compelled by colonial structures. For my family it was leaving Sri Lanka, colonized by Portugal, Netherlands and Great Britain, and coming to Canada with the prospect of financial prosperity and stability. Even before my parents and grandparents were born, it was already robbed from the island and its people, and finally when the colonists left, internal war began. For travellers, some shops here supply goods that can allow them to connect to a far but familiar land or that some of the recipes have changed to acknowledge the land we/they stand on and the resources it provides.



Work by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.

By sharing stories with each other during the collaboration, Kristi, Leeay and I became implicated to each other's practices, techniques, and lineages. How we carry our-



Work by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.

selves in our independent practices were informed by our life experiences, personal philosophies, and interests. Our independence was the compost for nourishing kinship/ collaboration/sisterhood.

I re-learned how to work more intuitively with material, even materials that I have worked with for many projects and had built strong relationships with. At times, it was like dancing with someone new, and other times an old friend with new music, and having my sisters, Kristi and Leeay, help me when I stepped on someone's toes. Often when using wool roving, I try wet felting it into a solid piece of felt, dense and opaque, to then manipulate that sheet. In *Black Pond* I used the wool roving without wet felting it, rather using it as loose hair only needle felting it to the circle to attach it, allowing the hairs to react to those around it. This was inspired by Leeay's way of working with materials' innate characteristics which can be seen in *Dog Hair Day*, a collage of found and foraged objects that interact with one another and balance without changing each other's physical form. Kristi's basket work inspired my exploration with creating a net with rope, which has been a partner in my making for 5 years and continues to be a symbolic material in my practice. Yet this time I played with the idea of transparency as I often weave the rope into dense fabric not leaving open space to see through the material. Kinship, sisterhood, relationing is bumpy yet we still keep

reaching towards, a mutual caring for one another. Weaving as acts of crafting and interlaying ideas, materials and bodies becomes the metaphor in which I describe this ecology of kinship that I participated in during this collaboration. Materials, techniques, stories told, meals shared, hugs, phone calls, all individual threads woven into the fabric of ecology. All working together to make a physical and mental time-space that sustains one another. Cloth is a powerful hybrid creature, it is the intersection of many tiny threads living symbiotically together to make one.

Kristi, Leeay and I, bodies that share both immigration (me a child of immigrants) and settler contexts, local ecology still reach towards us, to continue their teachings. It is the question of how we reach back towards it, towards T'karonto, and how we come into ourselves by reaching towards each other, that we developed WOVEN - OBJECTS, MATERIALS, AND SPACE(S) BEYOND MEASURE.

-AKASH INBAKUMAR

1. <https://circlesforreconciliation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Respect-Trust-Treaties-Reconciliation.pdf> <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/a-dish-with-one-spoon> 2. Worlding - The concept of Worlding was introduced to me in Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Worlding to me is about creating imaginative worlds that can be tools to understanding our present reality.



Work in view by Leeay Aikawa, Kristi Chen, and Akash Inbakumar.

*curated by
Bunker 2*

Indelible Discards



Aileen Bahmanipour, Lauren Prousky,
Darian Razdar, Maria Simmons, Lingxiang Wu

Essay by
Megan MacLaurin, Talia Golland, and Sophia Oppel



Main Space: February 1st - 26th, 2022



Lauren Prousky, Big Bags.

Maria Simmons, Purity Factories.

WASTE (VERB): A CONTINUAL PROCESS OF MOVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION, OF OBLIGATORY CONCEALMENT, PRODUCING BOUNDARIES THROUGH THEIR TRANSGRESSION AND CATEGORIZING THE UNCATEGORIZABLE.

WASTE (NOUN): A CONGLOMERATE HEAP THAT'S INFINITELY EXPANDING, A MUDDLED MASS OF SIGNIFIERS THAT STILL CASTS SHADOWS WHEN PUSHED TO THE PERIPHERIES OF SPACE AND OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

Scholarship in the field of discard studies frames waste as an ontological necessity, inextricably connected to systems of categorization, logics of exclusion/ inclusion, and the passage of time. At the same time, waste is a complex construct necessarily contingent upon shifting notions of cleanliness, utility, and value. Waste is the inevitable and perpetual consequence of production and consumption of every kind and on every scale. As John Scanlan suggests in *On Garbage* (2005), waste tends to elude fixed definition – "The act of conceptualizing garbage actually transforms it into something else".¹

As a broad category containing a vastly heterogeneous range of materials, waste can be considered that which we seek to exclude and obscure.² This urge to invisibilize characterizes our individual, collective, historical, and systemic relationships with garbage – an ultimately futile effort. Just as defining as our desire to be rid of it is waste's adamant refusal to truly disappear. Whether swept under a rug, flushed into a septic tank, relegated to a hard drive's metadata, or accumulated in a landfill, discards still exist, just elsewhere.

Featuring works by Aileen Bahmanipour, Lauren Prousky, Darian Razdar, Maria Simmons, and Lingxiang Wu, *Indelible Discards* is a group exhibition exploring the affective registers of consumer waste. Residual by-products of industrial, domestic, and digital cycles are accumulated and transformed beyond their intended lifespans and designated uses. Through aesthetic observation and extensions of meaning, these works probe structural and personal ascriptions of value, and the limits between our bodies and the matter that surrounds us.

Lingxiang Wu's *Digital Landfill* is an ongoing interactive web project composed of visual detritus (images of home furnishings, aquatic creatures, word art, and cartoons, among other disparate materials) scraped from the corners of the internet. The accumulated image-junk is configured into a navigable landfill, a greyscale assemblage that appears to float in an endless expanse of digital space. Uncategorized fragments of images and text are scattered and merged in this abstracted landscape. In this new iteration of the project, titled *Retreat into Digital Landfill*, Wu has recorded a single-channel exploration

of this environment, paired with a pop-up window containing the first-person musings of a digital wanderer. This scrolling text acts as an intimate narration, considering the performativity and exhaustion of digital subjecthood.

The work meditates on algorithmic modalities that sort virtual content, processes which, like physical waste management, seek to invisibilize undesirable media. Like its physical analog, digital waste is persistent – deleting rarely destroys, but merely displaces.³ Wu's spatialized mass of digital fragments also reminds us of the physical infrastructures that enable the dissemination and storage of data and the looming materiality of the e-waste generated within contemporary technocapitalism.

Lauren Prousky's *Big Bags* series consists of painted works on paper individually stored in the largest Ziploc bags commercially available. Clipped to clothes hangers – another mainstay of domestic organization – the bags are stored on a spiral metal rack that is more of a storage device than a functional display. More bags, suspended from the ceiling by colorful zip-tie chains, are dispersed throughout the space, free to sway and flutter in overlapping clusters. These absurdly oversized plastic bags contain comparably small collages, illustrations, and vibrant abstract compositions. Through this discrepancy of scale, the Ziplocs establish a conspicuous presence, further emphasized by their



Foreground: Lauren Prousky, Lintball.
Background: Lingxiang Wu, Digital Landfill.

brand logos, ruled measurements, and multilingual safety warnings.

In her 2000 essay, Zoe Sofia argues that "container technologies" are continually overlooked due to the auxiliary nature of their functionality: they facilitate, employing a "technics of the unobtrusive".⁴ Prousky's *Big Bags* are anything but unobtrusive, overperforming their function to become perhaps even more visible than the art objects they contain. Consequently, our attention is also drawn to the material qualities of the Ziplocs – their sheen, their transparency, and what this plasticity signifies. As observed by environmental scholar Gay Hawkins, plastic is a material defined by its inherent contradictions – by design, both durable and disposable, ephemeral and enduring.⁵ The archival function of Prousky's *Big Bags* engages in these ever-present tensions, playfully subverting normative hierarchies of plastic's value.



Lauren Prousky, *Big Bags*.

As a technology, containers simultaneously foreground the desire for both preservation and hygiene, isolating things from potential contaminants to extend their lifespans. Hygienicism as tied to morality has long been a political framework leveraged in the service of settler-colonialism, a linkage culturally perpetuated today to obscure the extraction, colonial violence, and environmental degradation that capitalist production necessitates.

Maria Simmon's *Purity Factories* deconstructs late-capitalist hygienic tendencies by creating a microcosmic assemblage of objects that cohabit and co-contaminate. These sculptural vessels, formed to mimic the shapes of yeast clusters under a micro-

scope, contain amalgamations of domestic objects that will continue to ferment over time. One of these ceramics contains a piece of homemade bread that Simmons covered with Purity® facial cleanser from Sephora before vacuum sealing it in plastic.

Left to bob in the liquid which fills the vessel, these two seemingly opposing materials – an active bacterial culture and a cleanser advertised to remove bacteria, oils, and dirt from the skin – grow together to create alternative material possibilities. In another vessel, the artist's hair, wrapped in a plastic produce bag, has been submerged in water, slowly leaching blue dye. The smallest vessel combines expired film developer, Fuzzy Peaches, and Grand River mud, while the final vessel holds



Maria Simmons, *The Urge to Suspend What Isn't Kept*.

fermented garbage and plant matter floating in dirty mop water. Processes of fermentation, like container technologies, serve to preserve their constituent parts, but through amalgamation and collective transformation, rather than separation and isolation.

Similar to *Purity Factories*, Simmon's *The Urge to Suspend What Isn't Kept* meditates on mutual transformation as a kind of preservation. The work is composed of old studio experiments, including lichen, mycelium, efflorescence, mold, honeycomb, and oyster mushrooms, deconstructed and suspended in resin. Mixed with this organic matter are scraps of plastic garbage and other assorted debris. In the process of hardening, the biological materials stained the resin casts in the colours of their constituent parts. Arranged like treasured artifacts on a shelf and illuminated from below, each small vessel is a pocket of uncategorized matter, an archive of accumulative experimentation and temporal existence. Garbage is both enduring and ephemeral - the traces and residues of past experiences continue to live on elsewhere, even after being disposed from view. Simmons' conscious preservation of debris imbues it with an affective power, the beauty and melancholy of an insect trapped in amber.

Lintball is a sculptural excerpt from *Collecting Dust*, a larger body of work by Prousky which engages Mary Douglas'

definition of dirt as "matter out of place".⁶ In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas applies this concept to analysis of culturally and systemically contingent notions of order, purity, ritual, and taboo. Prousky's *Lintball* amasses vast quantities of dryer lint into a solid lump, mixed with sponges, and held together with liquid rubber. The individual pieces of lint vary in shades of grayish brown, a tonal archive of innumerable laundry cycles, and closer observation reveals dirt and hair within the hybrid medley.

Dirt and hair are amongst the most primary and visible materials in Aileen Bahmanipour's *Manuals for Waste*. This series of handmade papers incorporate vacuum cleaner dust from both domestic and industrial sources. In place of the text and diagrams typical of instructional manuals, these pages contain only the traces of these materials. Installed in a tonal grid, the pages form a gradient that corresponds to the methodical blending of the dust into the pulp. Scraps of receipts can be seen in the darker papers, made primarily from industrial waste sourced from the vacuum cleaner of an HVAC technician, while the lighter papers made from domestic waste are woven with tangled hair. The abject quality of this matter troubles the aesthetic pleasure that this orderly composition provides, while also lending an embodied intimacy to this ambiguous archive. Together, both industrial and domestic acts of maintenance point

to the habitual, rhythmic, and interminable necessity of cleaning that structures daily life: dust accumulates, and must be gathered to be removed. As Douglas writes, "Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained."⁷

But in Bahmanipour's *Manuals for Waste*, dirt is preserved within an archeological index, creating a visually ordered system which elevates the aesthetic qualities of commingled and deteriorated matter.

Waste is contingent, a material record of other, more favorable items and activities. In *The Ethics of Waste* (2006), Hawkins describes containers and packaging as "transitional objects": even before their singular purpose is fulfilled, they already look like the garbage they will inevitably become, occupying a liminal category of soon-to-be waste.⁸ The value of packing materials is dependent on their function that preserves the utility of the items they enclose. In the multimedia print series *Enmeshed*, Darian Razdar reconsiders the temporality of cardboard packing mesh. With a sheet of this honeycomb-patterned material salvaged from a roadside trash pile, the artist created multichromatic impressions of its texture on fabric and paper. In its first pressing, the ink is highly saturated, while in subsequent pressings the ink becomes increasingly faint. Razdar layered dozens of pressings using this mesh until it eventually deteriorated. This process



Maria Simmons, *Purity Factories*.

reveals the ephemerality of this 'disposable' material, while the resultant prints create an enduring archive of its likeness. In the creation of this work, the cardboard packing mesh undergoes a transference from the actual to the representational, an aesthetic afterlife suggesting both transience and permanence.

Materials associated with the abject – bodily waste, ambiguous and slimy masses of garbage no longer differentiable – demand to be purged from sight and mind. The obligation to similarly displace plastic and packaging waste emerges from its planned obsolescence, and perhaps its connection to our uncomfortable implication within structures of capitalist excess and its sociopolitical and environmental consequences. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett writes that "the sheer volume of commodities, and the hyper-consumptive necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, conceals the vitality of matter."⁹



Aileen Bahmanipour, *Manuals for Waste*.

She employs the concept of assemblage to consider the persistent power of organic and inorganic materials and their interdependent and mutual agencies.¹⁰

Indelible Discards gestures to the parallel and correlative relationship between industrial, domestic, bodily, and digital cycles of production, consumption, accumulation, and attempted disposal. Waste is both heterogeneous and amorphous, a locus of differentiation, ambiguities, and potentials. The oft-overlooked detritus of sanitation, storage, object, and image economies contain revealing traces of our activities and attachments, allowing undesirables to become archives of desire.

- MEGAN MACLAURIN,
TALIA GOLLAND, AND
SOPHIA OPPEL OF BUNKER 2

1. Scanlan, John. *On Garbage*. London: Reaktion Books (2005), 15 2. See: Thompson, Michael. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*. London: Pluto Press (1979, 2017) 3. See: Volkart, Yvonne. "Aesthetic Strategies in the Wasteocene". *Datami: Resonances* (2018) <https://resonances.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/aesthetic-strategies-wasteocene> 4. Sofia, 188 5. Hawkins, Gay. *Accumulation - The Material Politics of Plastic*, Jennifer Gabrys, Gay Hawkins, & Mike Michael (eds). New York: Routledge (2013), 57 6. Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. London, New York: Routledge (1966, 2002), 55 7. Douglas, 60 8. Hawkins, Gay. *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*. Oxford: Roman & Littlefield (2006), 50 9. Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (2010), 29 10. Bennett, 302

slowlivingcookbook.com

Slow Living Cookbook



**Meech Boakye, Evelyn Austin,
and contributing artist
Collin Alexander**



Main Space: *March 15, 2022 - April 23, 2022*

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What feels clear about this work is that it constantly evolves alongside our understanding of it. In the middle of writing the Cookbook, we invited a friend to add their thoughts, and it formed an entirely new perspective to things we had been writing about for months. After the Cookbook was published, we hosted a virtual bioplastics workshop and commissioned an intervention by a sound artist who wove their work into the existing code. As the domain's expiration looms, we consider the Cookbook's afterlives—a series of screenshots and screen recordings, documented biomaterials that are now compost, and the continuation of our friendship—as foundations of new assemblages in our collaborative practice.

-EVELYN AUSTIN & MEECH BOAKYE

E Evelyn Austin
Apr 20, 2021
love mothers, fermentation and sourdough

Assemblages are performances of livability.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing,
The Mushroom at the End of the World

Slow Living Cookbook began as a paratext. In October of 2020, our last semester of university, we prompted our peers to respond to a call for sick speech in an anonymous essay in Queer.Archive.Work.'s *Urgency Reader 2* (2020). We wrote about the adjustment to virtual learning during a pandemic, wondering how as students, in solidarity with university staff, we might advocate for more care and material support from administrative bodies. We graduated, and the pandemic continued, and this call for sick speech echoed back as a call for remedy. We began to write recipes as a resource to share with others, but eventually the writing became a way for us to keep in touch. Slowly, a collection of asynchronously written thoughts, tangential comments, and recipes formed, interrupting each other and weaving together.



Slow Living Cookbook

Meech Boakye and Evelyn Austin



Slow Living Cookbook, 2021. Installation View.
Work by Meech Boakye, Evelyn Austin, and contributing artist Collin Alexander.

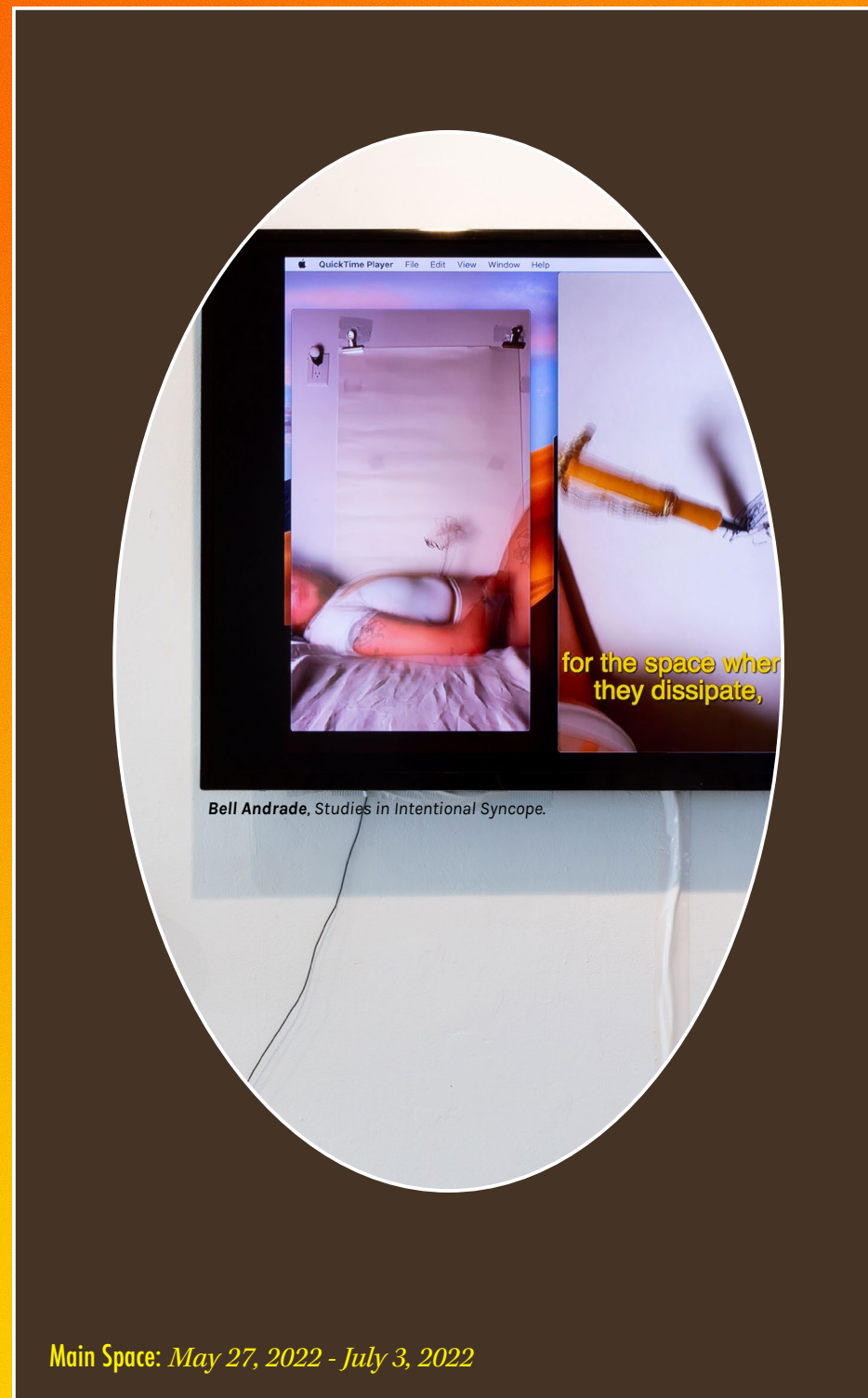
curated by Christina Oyawale

As I Live and Breathe



Emkay Adjei-Manu, Bel Andrade, Atanas Bozdarov,
Hannah Bullock, Breanne Jeethan, Tee Kundu

Essay by
Christina Oyawale





Hannah Bullock, a low hum, a strong gale.



As I Live & Breathe, 2022. Installation View.
Work by Atanas Bozdarov in view.

Who is allowed access to the public sphere and how can bodies traditionally deemed apolitical operate politically within private space?

How do we as disabled, neurodivergent and Mad individuals create space where the non-visible can be visible?

How do we approach the act of documenting our physical limitations by taking hold of our body-mind autonomy?

We have been let down by the structural systems upheld by ableism, which prevent us from accessing adequate health care, schooling, and communal spaces. As disabled artists, in order to imagine new worlds where our body-minds are celebrated, we have come to explore these topics through imaging futures for ourselves. How are we challenging a neurotypical and ableist world? By existing. And by existing we take hold of our narratives and stories, which can then be passed down to our kin as a means of reminding them that disability is not a dirty word but something that should be celebrated.

Disability has always been seen as taboo or something to fear in the eyes of our ableist and capitalist world. I wanted to curate [As I Live & Breathe](#) to showcase the complexities of occupying space as disabled person. Disabled people are not a monolith, narratives about our lives have

been created without our consent by able-bodied people. This is why it is important for us to continue to create art that speaks to our realities as disabled, neurodivergent, Mad, d/Deaf and visually impaired individuals. As a curator and artist committed to representation and interdependence as a means of strengthening the arts community, I find myself constantly inspired by my artistic peers and elders. The words of activists and artists such as Mia Mingus, Alice Wong, Gloria Swain and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha are instrumental in the conception of the exhibition. They remind me of the complexities of disability narratives and how the general population of able-bodied people in power continuously make decisions that directly impact our qualities of life; specifically whether we live or die. Due to this, it has forced us to create safe spaces and communities that center care, bodily agency and support. This becomes even more urgent when considering the sociopolitical conditions created by neoliberalism and how they interact with disability; immigration status, race, gender and sexuality. In a blog post from her website *Changing the Framework: Disability Justice*, Mia Mingus stated: that we must be "engaged in building an understanding of disability that is more complex, whole and interconnected than what we have previously found. We are disabled people who are people of color; women, gender-queer and transgender; poor and working class; youth; immigrants;

lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer; and more" ¹. This best represents all the artists involved in *As I Live & Breathe*. In the exhibit, they have vulnerably shared pieces of themselves as a political and communal act. By bringing these artists together, we are sharing our stories as a community that is forgotten and silenced.

These things inevitably impact how we see ourselves represented in the world. For instance, when examining the experiences of each artist in the exhibition, I found how vastly different but how similar many of their experiences were. Emkay Adjei-Manu's *bricks in my living room* demonstrates the effects of disability and mental health on non-binary/transgender Black people and women, particularly the lack of care and autonomy that is afforded to them due to institutional racism and the health industrial complex. I find myself struck by the importance of showcasing narratives and experiences that differ in relation to disability and access because the idea of access has been lost in the idea that there is a one-size-fit-all solution. While interacting with Adjei-Manu's work, I was brought back to the words of Black disabled artist Gloria Swain from her text *The Healing Power of Art in Intergenerational Trauma: Race, Sex, Age and Disability*: "[applying a] political and activist lens to think about disability arts and its potential role [opens up] a necessary conversation around how madness is produced by experiences of



Emkay Adjei-Manu, *bricks in my living room*.



Breanne Jeethan, *Women's Health*.



As I Live & Breathe, 2022. Installation View.
Work by Tee Kundu in view.

racism, poverty, sexism, and intergenerational trauma within the Black community."²

Adjei-Manu's collages illustrate "relationships to intimate spaces while living through experiences of Madness."³ They question "What stories of madness do our interior spaces hold? and how much life is actually held in our living rooms?"⁴ in order to come to an understanding of what disability looks like from their perspective. In the meanwhile, artists' Bell Andrade's *Studies in Intentional Syncope*, Hannah Bullock's *a low hum, a strong gale* and Breanne Jeethan's *Women's Health* actively investigate the health industrial complex, gender identity and invisible disabilities. Throughout *As I Live & Breathe*, the artists perform for the camera, they perform for society and for a better understanding in which the circumstances they live. The artists' works do not seek to exist as a transaction with the viewer but rather invites further dialogue surrounding ableism and human existence. Audiences are tasked with questioning how the conditions of ableism affect us all.

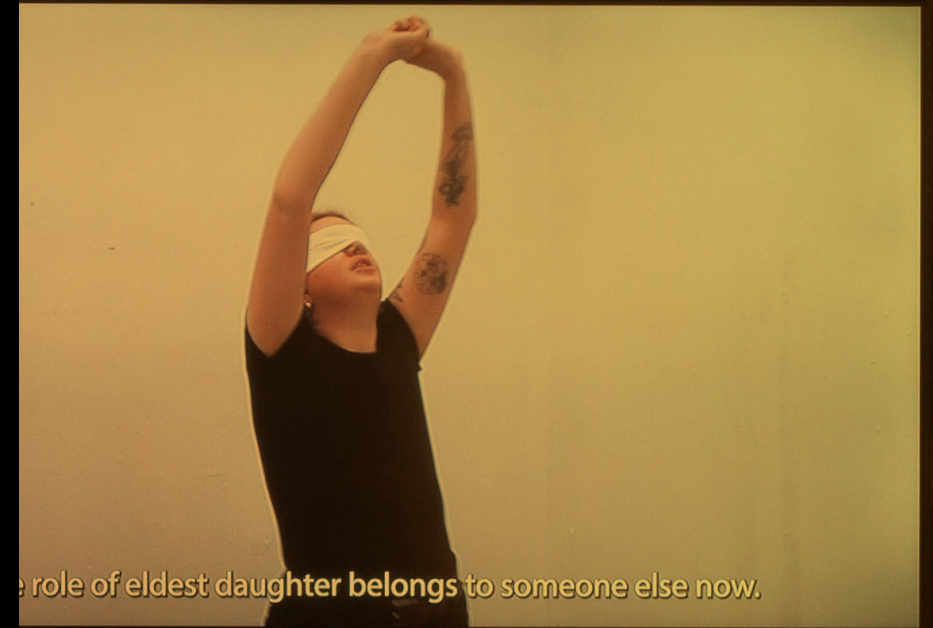
When it comes down to the idea of access and representation, I believe it is more important to bring experiences and stories that focus on dismantling everything we have come to know that actively perpetuates harm to marginalized communities. By dismantling the "limited-and-limiting mentality that just showing the work of a disabled artist is 'enough', space

is created for disabled artists to expand upon their practices and the complexities they choose to explore in their practices⁵. The wider art communities at large fail to acknowledge the necessity of disability narratives from an artistic perspective and not a passive audience perspective. Access on its own should exist as the idea of liberation of disabled people, [not] through logistical [means], but through justice, interdependence and collective care⁶.

- CHRISTINA OYAWALE

1. Mia Mingus, "How our communities can move beyond access to wholeness", Changing the Framework: Disability Justice, February 12, 2011, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>.
2. Gloria Swain, "The Healing Power of Art in Intergenerational Trauma." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8, no.1 (2019): 15-31. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v8i1.469>.
3. Emkay Adjei-Manu, in conversation with artist.
4. Emkay Adjei-Manu, in conversation with artist.
5. 6. Mia Mingus, "How our communities can move beyond access to wholeness", Changing the Framework: Disability Justice, February 12, 2011, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>.

Bell Andrade, *Studies in Intentional Syncope*.



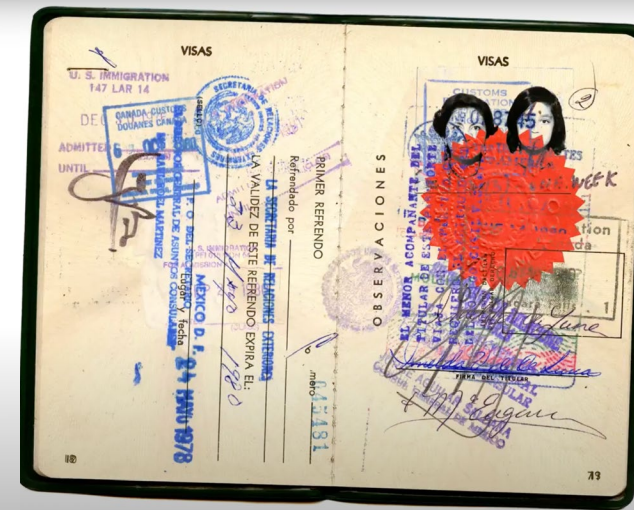
External Space

(A FALTA) DE PAN, TORTILLAS:



AN ANALYSIS OF DECOLONIZATION AND IMMIGRATION

Ernesto Cabral De Luna



The saying "a falta de pan, tortillas" roughly translates to "if there's no bread, have tortillas" — an encouragement to make due with what we've got, to settle for what's possible despite our wishes. This idea pervades the pieces that make up Ernesto Cabral de Luna's "*(A Falta) de Pan, Tortillas: An Analysis of Decolonization and Immigration*," a video piece currently showing in Xspace Cultural Centre's External Space. According to Ernesto, the idea behind the title permeates the mindset that his family acquired throughout their experience as migrants, starting from Mexico and finally settling in Canada.

Immediately upon looking at the work, we notice a series of flickering family photographs. Colours, faces, surfaces disappear momentarily to reveal a bleak, solid white surface, and then reappear.

Occasionally, we catch a glimpse of the complete image, but only briefly. Children posing outside in costumes, a corkboard enveloped in memories, and an intimate domestic scene blink erratically. The overarching questions and themes of this work are introduced by this oscillation between completeness and incompleteness, between feelings of fidelity and forgetfulness. Those feelings often converge when we have to decide what a family photograph stands for, when we look at it hoping it'll help us better define or understand who we are. In this case, the information (and its absence) in these photographs also reminds us of the psychological toll that physical and cultural migration can take on a person. The complexities of this toll are deep and varied, and as the work goes on, we get an opportunity to explore them with more depth and nuance.



A passport spreads open, and all sorts of overlapping stamps quickly overpopulate its pages. Soon after, more passports join the frame, along with ever-flickering stamps that overwrite and obscure each other. We might mostly think of leisure travel when we remember passports exist, but this swarm of labels and seals and dates remind us that they also facilitate the enforcement of labyrinthine and convoluted policies. Many of these are entangled within questions of identity, belonging and self-determination that this work explores, and allows us to glimpse just how triggering and how profoundly complex identity documents and family photographs can be in the context of migration.

These themes echo together from the photographs that follow, which show Ernesto's parents. Similarly to the first set of photographs, some surfaces appear and disappear, faces separate and move away from their respective

heads. Resembling photographs from government-issued identification, their composition and angle evoke the formality of passports, but their subjects call back to the first set of family photos we saw. The resonance between the form and the subjects begins to more clearly illustrate the inner psychological aspects of Ernesto's parents' experience, and its ties to the policies that have shaped and regulated it.

Ernesto himself is not exempt from this resonance, this interaction between an unstable, impatient, split sense of identity and an outside world that's constantly classifying and systematizing it. The following set of images, a snapshot of Ernesto's cardholder, approaches those themes from yet another angle. We see his London, Ontario transit ID which reads "Ernesto Cabral", his first name and paternal surname, and then his Mexican elementary school ID below it showing an added "De Luna" at the end, his maternal

surname. The seeming loss of his maternal surname, given they aren't commonly used in Canada, embodies that dual sense of identity, a torn double-consciousness that he shares with his parents. Ernesto's photo is then isolated and duplicated, tiresomely falling towards the bottom of the frame.

More recent black and white ID photos of Ernesto begin to rapidly blink on screen. They're violently ripped, burnt, scratched, painted on. In some of them the ink has partly dissolved from the paper, in others a fingerprint masks his face. There's a sense of frustrated, self-reflexive privacy that's suddenly broken by brightly coloured stickers that begin to cover the photos, now in a grid. Fruit stickers, price tags in Canadian dollars, "used" tags, barcodes begin to replace the tears and scratches. Like an echo of his parents' experience, Ernesto shows himself going through a complex psychological and cultural process, and also shows us a gaze which obstructs

and further complicates it. This work has shown us the different layers that make up the experience of permanently relocating to a different country, and into a vastly different culture. Most of us aren't completely alien to these ideas and feelings, despite not having gone through experiences as marking and radical as the ones Ernesto shares with us. Yet this work plunges into these feelings and emerges from them with themes so intertwined and sharp that it's hard not to learn something new as a viewer, not to get a new insight into just how fundamentally a generation can be shaken by the experience of migration.

**-SEBASTIÁN RODRÍGUEZ
Y VASTI**



El dicho "a falta de pan, tortillas" llama a hacer lo que se puede con lo que se tiene, a conformarnos por lo posible a pesar de nuestras ambiciones. La misma idea permea las piezas de la obra "*A falta de Pan, Tortillas: An Analysis of Decolonization and Immigration*" de Ernesto Cabral, que se exhibe en el External Space de Xpace Cultural Centre. Según Ernesto, la idea tras el título es parte fundamental de la mentalidad que su familia adquirió a través de su experiencia migratoria, que los llevó de México a Canadá.

A primera vista de la obra, se nos presenta una serie de retratos familiares titilantes. Colores, caras

y superficies desaparecen momentáneamente y revelan un árido y sólido fondo blanco, para luego reaparecer. Ocasionalmente vislumbramos una imagen completa. Niños posando sobre una acera, un corcho lleno de recuerdos y una escena doméstica íntima parpadean rápidamente. Son así presentadas las preguntas y los temas fundamentales de la obra, a través de la oscilación entre lo completo y lo incompleto, entre sentimientos de fidelidad y olvido. Tales sentimientos convergen frecuentemente cuando tenemos que decidir qué representa una foto familiar, cuando la vemos esperando que nos ayude a definir o entender mejor quién somos. Tanto la información como su ausencia, en el caso de estas fotos, nos recuerdan la carga psicológica que puede implicar la migración cultural y física. Las complejidades de dicha carga son profundas y multiformes y, a

medida que el trabajo se desarrolla, se nos da la oportunidad de explorar sus honduras y matices con más detalle.

Un pasaporte se despliega y todo tipo de sellos se superponen sobre sí mismos, sobrepoblando las páginas. Poco después, más pasaportes se unen al encuadre, junto con los sellos titilantes que se sobrescriben y obstruyen. Tal vez fantaseamos con irnos de vacaciones cuando recordamos que los pasaportes existen, pero este enjambre de etiquetas, sellos y fechas nos recuerda que también facilitan la ejecución de todo tipo de políticas laberínticas. Muchas de ellas se enredan dentro de las cuestiones de identidad, pertenencia y autodeterminación que esta obra explora, y nos dejan vislumbrar lo emocionalmente cargados y complejos que pueden llegar a ser los documentos identitarios en un contexto migratorio.

Estos temas resuenan juntos desde las fotografías que siguen, que muestran a los padres de Ernesto.

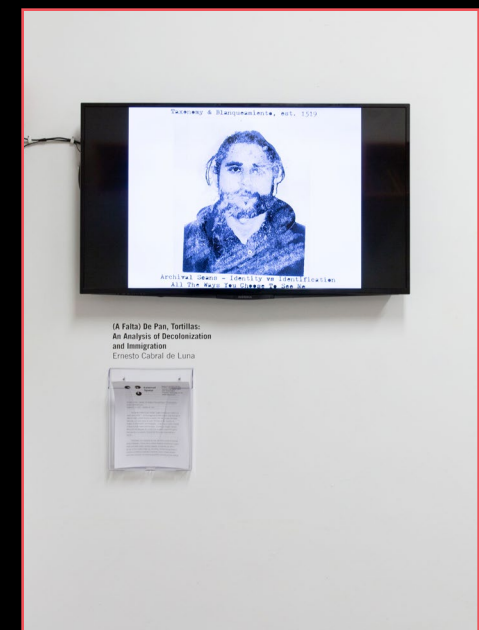
Así como en el primer conjunto de fotos, hay superficies que aparecen y desaparecen, y caras se separan y alejan de sus respectivas cabezas. Como fotografías para documentos identitarios gubernamentales, su composición y ángulo evocan la formalidad de un pasaporte, pero sus sujetos nos recuerdan al primer grupo de fotos familiares que vimos. La resonancia entre la forma y los sujetos comienza a ilustrar con más claridad los aspectos psicológicos de la experiencia de los padres de Ernesto, y sus lazos con las políticas que la han regulado y moldeado.

El mismo Ernesto no está exento de esta resonancia, esta interacción entre un inestable, impaciente y dividido sentido de identidad y un mundo externo que constantemente lo sistematiza y clasifica. El próximo conjunto de imágenes muestra el tarjetero de Ernesto, y se aproxima a estas ideas desde otro punto de vista. Vemos su identificación de tránsito de London, Ontario que dice "Ernesto Cabral", primer nombre y apellido paterno, y luego su carnet escolar Mexicano donde se lee también "De Luna" su apellido materno. La aparente pérdida de este apellido, dado que están en desuso en Canadá, encarna este sentido dual de identidad, una doble consciencia quebrantada que comparte con sus padres. La foto de Ernesto lu-

ego se duplica y va cayendo hacia el fondo del encuadre.

Fotos de identificación más recientes de Ernesto pronto parpadean en la pantalla. Están desgarradas, quemadas, rayadas, pintadas. En algunas la tinta se diluyó parcialmente del papel, en otras una huella dactilar lo enmascara. Un aire de privacidad frustrada y auto-reflexiva es interrumpido por etiquetas y adhesivos de colores que cubren las fotos, ya organizadas en una cuadrícula. Calcomanías para frutas y objetos usados, precios en dólares Canadienses y códigos de barra. Como un eco de la experiencia de sus padres, Ernesto se presenta atravesando una ráfaga de procesos psicológicos y culturales, y también nos muestra la sombra de una mano que los obstruye y complica. Este trabajo nos ha mostrado las diversas capas que componen la experiencia de reubicarse permanentemente a otro país con una cultura vastamente distinta. La mayoría de nosotros no es completamente ajena a estas ideas y emociones, a pesar de no haber vivido experiencias tan cortantes y radicales como las que Ernesto nos comparte. Aún así, la obra se sumerge en estos sentires y emerge con temas tan entrelazados y agudos que es difícil no aprender algo nuevo como espectador, no concebir más claramente cómo una experiencia migratoria puede dejar huella en una generación entera.

**-SEBASTIÁN RODRÍGUEZ
Y VASTI**



SOIL, SAND,



SALT

Elham Fatapour

Before I began writing this exhibition essay I wrote down some words after my first viewing of Elham Fatapour's video *soil, sand, salt*.

They are as follows:

Symbolism

Concealment

Ritual

Escape

Abandonment

Connection

Solitude

Disconnect

Ephemeral

Struggle

Unearthing

Marking

Balance

Symmetry

Temporary



The three videos (*soil, sand and salt*) were made by Elham Fatapour during her visit to Iran in 2019, and have been compiled here in a single channel video. In each video we are presented with a vast, open and barren landscape. We see the artist as the only figure. The lens is never stationary throughout the works, and thus the viewer may assume this lens to be their own, for each of us viewing this work will inevitably project our own biases through our own lens.

The artwork starts off with *soil* (2019), in which we see the artist in a desert landscape, an area that was once a part of the Tethys ocean millions of years ago. The artist is drawing in the sand, a theme that we will see throughout the three videos. Upon completion the artist is out of view of the camera, searching for the next location. Elham has brought a satellite dish with her, as a symbolic gesture to communication. As she settles on a small single room earthen structure, chunks of mud

and clay are broken off from the walls and mixed with water. This mixture is then used to cover the entire satellite dish, camouflaging it, and installing it on the roof of the same earthen structure. The concealment of the dish may be a metaphor for the difficulties of communicating or perhaps a form of self-censorship, as well a direct reference to the regime's TV signal jamming that have occurred in the past in Iran. The way I read this is to recall that although the artist is back in place of origin, she may no longer feel like she belongs there anymore, nor does she feel like she belongs in her current place of residency (Canada). Like the satellite dish, she may not fit in her surroundings, therefore she will attempt to blend in.

In *sand* (2019) we continue in a similar landscape, the artist is the only figure we see. The performance we witness is the act of drawing in the sand, a temporary creation that evokes feelings of melancholia. My first instinct is to consider the briefness of our

time in life. My other instinct is the traces that we leave behind for others to find, and whether or not those traces will last long enough to be found. A desert beetle is seen struggling to make its path through the sand, and for a moment its uphill journey seems impossible. Yet the beetle perseveres, giving us hope in our own journeys.

In *salt* (2019) the artist is now in an area known as salt lake, located east of the city of Qom. The lake is a remnant of the Paratethys sea, which started to dry from the Pleistocene epoch, leaving Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea and other bodies of water. Similarly to the performance in 'Sand,' the artist creates a drawing in the salted earth, knowing it will eventually be reclaimed by nature and will cease to exist. Although salt is used to preserve and prolong, we know this drawing will not last. The drawing itself has characteristics of Islamic design, seen especially in architecture. During the Abbasid Period (circa 750 - 1258

CE), Islamic artists moved toward unique imagery and developed a complex form known as the arabesque. This style of decoration is characterized by intertwining plants and abstract curvilinear motifs. The circular center in the design may allude to the satellite dish seen in 'soil' as well as the circular dome seen in mosques.

In *soil, sand, salt*, Elham's performance is layered with references to the connection with the land, physically and metaphorically. Fatapour uses the land as a canvas, medium and a stage. The artist is able to reach the viewer in a surreal manner, perhaps giving them a glimpse into her identity and lived experiences.

As mentioned earlier, I can resonate with this artwork as I'm sure many viewers who are part of a diaspora may also connect with it. It has made me imagine how I would connect with the land if given the opportunity to visit Palestine.



How would I visually convey and express my thoughts to a viewer that has a different lens than mine?

We witness lightning in the distance at the end of the final chapter in Elham's work, an unexpected act of nature when we consider a desert climate.

This visual conclusion appears as a reminder of the serendipitous moments we encounter on our journeys.

-IBRAHIM ABUSITTA

MY



CHEONGSAM

Amanda Kung



Amanda Kung tells me when we meet that she was expecting the dim sum restaurant to be more bustling—however, in both channels of her video, she mirrors being mostly alone, except for occasional family members or staff strolling by. There's a freeing sense in the matter-of-fact way Kung appears on screen, casually munching on food in spots where her family has gathered for meals together, as if re-enacting those experiences without apology or romance is its own defiance as a diasporic person, just existing. Can it be so simple?

(This is both a wish and a proposal.)

I often want a sharper language than "diaspora" to describe these multitudes of experiences, but maybe that's what has to be done each time, to recall the word and then conjure its specificities in each instance. Diasporic people know about commonality and specificity. Can we ever stop thinking about what we don't have or might have lost? That can also be a sarcastic tease. For some, the loss is clear and traumatic. Maybe

in the vein of useful irreverence, I'm tired of feeling like I'm missing something and don't desire to mythologize my own culture. Maybe the truth is somewhere different from missing.

In Kung's video, as she sits in her grandmother's kitchen, I immediately recognize achingly familiar hallmarks of growing up in a Chinese household. The red wall calendar (probably the free one from a supermarket), the artist wearing plastic-y soft house slippers in purple. In a way, as Kung expresses, it worked out that the dim sum restaurant was empty, for symmetry of her enactment. To see her at the table alone is amusingly intentional because, at dim sum, you're usually meant to be with people, sharing the small plates of food. The dual screen echoes Kung's claiming of a dual identity while placing herself where she's felt the most connected to Chinese culture—through food. In private and public, she wears a cheongsam hand-constructed out of fabrics from her childhood clothing, a deeply personal overturning of traditional materials of the dress and its confines.

Kung and I do that diasporic thing of exchanging our specificities in relation.

A position, a patchwork; a position is a patchwork.

Take these markers and make them your own:



The patchwork blocks of bright colour and playful patterns on Kung's cheongsam are decidedly unlike the typical sleek and tight-fitting style associated with the dress. I'm allured by the cheongsam (or qipao in Mandarin, often used to describe the same garment), despite its tendency to be appropriated or eroticized by othering gazes. As if it could ever stand on its own, un-projected upon. The contemporary cheongsam originates from 1920s modernity, colonialism, and European influence in Shanghai and Hong Kong, out of which its confining shape adhered to patriarchal ideas of beauty.¹ At the same time, the garment—popularized by singers, actresses, and upper class women—meant to suggest an independence of the modernizing Chinese woman through fashion.

The cheongsam is far from the only clothing object to exist in these relations (of woman's freedom tied to also performing for a gaze). I have a blue-and-white flowered one hanging in my closet, which I can only imagine comfortably wearing at family occasions or intra-community settings. I like it, still, because it makes me feel femme and "connected to my people," even if that includes being connected to the messiness internal to a culture, like costuming a type of femininity my family wants to enforce and I resolutely reject. Can it mean something different when I, an imperfect subject, wear it? A patchwork of ambivalence. Leave the subject alone.

Kung didn't want to make a fashion object. Her handmade cheongsam is looser and very soft, like pajamas, as she describes. In the video, she seems to wear more than just the garment; the remaking process gives an element of adorning herself in her own belonging and an intimate language of chosen fragments, one not as intelligible to the usual story of those parts or outsider gaze. This cheongsam is for eating takeout at home or a communal meal alone.

Lately, I have been thinking about adornment power. Decoration can often be disparaged as surface-level, and as much as it is about being seen, it seems to me equally about obfuscation and refusal, what is not seen. It's about spiritually connecting to materials and signs to survive, like diasporic people often do to connect to their origins. There's an irony in the way that cultures can be exotified "deco-

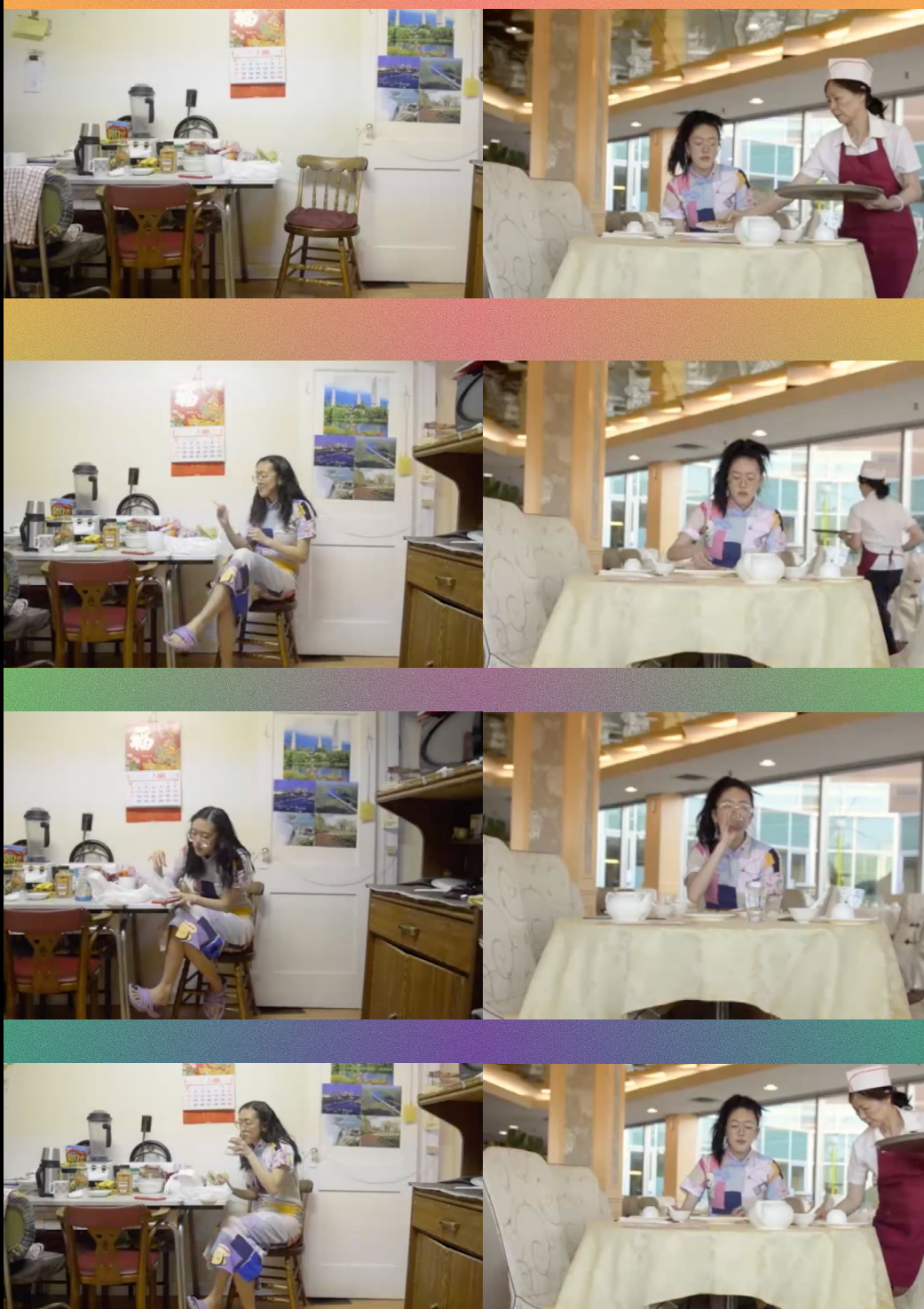


rations" for some people woe-fully only performing pastiches of meaning that will stay elusive to them. We ornament ourselves with much in this world. To paraphrase the artist Jaakko Pallasvuo (known by his Instagram handle *avocado_ibuprofen*), language is a decoration to ward off evil.² This applies to those who grew up not fluently learning their parents' language—the pieces of it you pick up along the way: adorn yourself. Call the evil whatever you like, alienation or distance? (Don't say loss.)

Does decoration protect us?

I have adorned my own body, in permanent and changeable ways, to become a vessel of symbols in this life amongst other vessels. The symbols are a private gathering, all the agencies moving through us; your confidence, and mine. How are we to define ourselves except by what we witness of each other?

Witnessing Kung on video loop eating feels both determined and nonchalant. There's a sense of dry humour in her continual eating; at her grandmother's house, she throws out the takeout container only to begin again; restaurant staff keep taking her order and bringing out plates. Consuming, while representing a material connection to culture through food



for Kung, also fits as a metaphor for inventing one's own identity, like: I'm going to keep eating and eating until I feel full in every sense of the word. No leaks, no gaps, no open seams.

Kung knew she wanted to make a cheongsam before the video. She says it's incredibly comfortable to wear. I ask her about the patchwork and sewing process, because I've thought of making my own garments.

"It got very thick—I broke many needles."

- JOY XIANG

1. Khanh Tran, "The Cheongsam and Ao Dai - from Eurasian constraint to nationalist icon," *Honi Soit*, September 16, 2021, <https://honi soit.com/2021/09/the-cheongsam-and-ao-dai-from- Eurasian-constraint- to-nationalist-icon>; and Kai Cheng Thom, "How the Cheongsam helped me find my trans womanhood," *Xtra*, October 10, 2017, <https://xtramagazine.com/power/how-the-cheongsam-helped-me-find-my-trans- womanhood-80071>. 2. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZzw_SEs-JR, Slide 9.

STRADA STATALE 696



Dallas Fellini

CREDITS:

ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED BY Trinity Square Video

TRANSLATION ASSISTANCE Francesco D'Andrea

PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE Holly Chang, Karina Iskandarsjah

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE Andrew Cromey

1.

As a starting place for *Strada Statale 696*, Dallas Fellini takes inspiration from family trips to Celano, their grandparents' home town in Italy. Embedded in those childhood memories is the profound sense of comfort of being surrounded by one's closest kin. To Italians, family is the most important thing, and among one's own family, there is a sense of unquestioned belonging. No matter who you are, a relative distant or near, if you are family you belong.

Fellini juxtaposes the memory of comfort and safety with its antithesis: the paranoia and fear of navigating the public domain, a social and cultural epicentre, the Italian piazza.

2.

*There are no women in the
square*

*The men wear ironed shirts
Their hands are behind their
backs*

Who irons their shirts

The piazza is an open space, usually at the helm of a church or important historical building. Often it is centered on a fountain or bronze statue. Cafes surround the open-air centre, and their bistro tables intermingle with parked vespas and bicycles. During the day, men sit together sipping espressos from little porcelain cups at one cafe which is more popular than the rest. Women pass through the piazza on foot carrying shopping bags. In the early evening, the men move to another cafe, the one with a TV that faces the street, to watch football and smoke cigars. At this same time, the wives are making dinner, and the kids are playing in the garden or the street.

Just after dinner is when the piazza comes into full bloom. It is where you go to see and be seen. Families traipse through the centre, usually dressed-up, eating ice cream from cups with little plastic spoons. Once again, the men find some way of breaking off into groups. There are always groups of men.

3.

The piazza is a stage. The actors know their parts so well that they perform automatically. The performance is the same every night. One night, a new actor appears. They don't know their lines or their blocking. Their presence alone is a disruption. The piazza is alert.

*A cross to bear
There are one million eyes
I am their enemy*

4.

I return to my laptop after filling a cup with coffee from my Bialetti, adding hot water and oat milk. Dallas Fellini's VR work has been playing on a loop all morning:

The artist's body moves awkwardly, rigidly—dancing as if fitting themselves into narrow

passages, avoiding invisible obstacles—in the foreground of a Google Maps Street View of a piazza in Celano, Italy. In the background, there are some benches and well-manicured trees, to the left there is a stage, and to the right there is a church. Some men sit around a table.

Playing over the video is a soundscape, generated through AI by using the Street View image of the piazza. Coupled with the ambient noise is a spoken poem made up of two voices: The first voice is the rather monotonous voice of the Duolingo Italian language learning app. The digital voice first says the phrase, then the artist repeats it, mimicking the process of learning the Italian language through the app.

I minimize this tab and open the meeting link, and Fellini's smiling face replaces the body on my screen. I silently observe how different their voice sounds from when they made this work in 2020.

When I first took in *Strada Statale* 696, I was struck by the parallels between the challenges that I have faced and the experience the work depicts. Fellini admits that they wanted this essay to be written by someone who understands the feeling of being dissected by others in public space. No one understands that subjectivity the way a trans person does.

We talk about our mutual understanding, and the crossovers of our experiences, and quickly realize that we have many more questions than we have answers.

5.

The layers of Italian masculinity are at odds with each other. While in North America, and most of the West, Italian men are allowed to behave in ways that would elsewhere be deemed as too feminine. They kiss on the cheek (and sometimes even the lips), wear perfume, coif their hair, accessorize excessively, wear bikini briefs to

the beach, and unbuttoned blouses and tight jeans in the evenings. Yet, they are in ways more hyper masculine than men in North America. Fellini admits that they do not understand Italian masculinity, but knows with certainty that they do not fit within it. Italian masculinity is like the droning voice of the Duolingo app. It is the Rule, demanding imitation, and though Fellini strains to pronounce the words correctly, their version will never be exact.

*He walks in a circle I am
standing still*

7.

Italians get a bad rep for being intolerant, but what's really at the heart of that reputation is complicated. At first glance, Italy might seem like a country where homogeneity thrives. The peninsular nature of the landscape demands isolation, as it blocks Italians from cultural exposure to neighbouring countries. Yet, historically, Italy has been a site where cultures from afar have come to mix (the



May what you eat become poison

I am standing still

I am their enemy

A cross to bear

Romans, Ottomans, etc). That intermingling has sewn diversity into the fabric of Italian DNA.

Now, after centuries of cultural preservation, each region is known and celebrated for what makes them unique: the best olive oil, mozzarella di buffala, or wine. Every village has a dialect. Three villages, one by the sea, another in the mountains, and the last in the valley, all within thirty kilometres of each other, might use a different word to say the same thing.

These markers of individuality are important to Italians. Which is why any deviation from "the way of things" is perceived as a threat. Consequently, many are perceived as outsiders.

8.

Dallas Fellini's *Strada Statale 696* tells the story of an outsider. To me, the greatest tragedy in this story is that amongst their family, and in their childhood memories, the outsider remembers at one time belonging.

The outsider is not the artist alone, but is also the trans(gender) and queer Celanese of the past, whose oral history Fellini discovers from their Nonna.

Separating the artist from this history is a language barrier, made all the more complicated by the

nearly-lost Celanese dialect which their Nonna speaks, as well as her worsening memory loss. If given the chance to travel back in time to 1940s Celano, the artist would surely have many questions for the people who their Nonna described as trans and queer. One question I would ask is this: How does one survive as an outsider in their own homeland? *Strada Statale 696* is like an answer to that question. Satellite imagery, language learning tools, and virtual reality create a world which is tenuous and fragmented; Each element is untethered, like the history Fellini has learned from their Nonna. Unimaginable though it may seem that anyone could belong in such an environment, we witness the artist's body, strikingly disjointed, straining to fit within "the way of things." We hear their voice repeating the foreign language effortfully.

*You can't run fast enough
You can't pray hard enough
I have to go home
Me and you, we are not safe here*

9.

When disappearing or not existing are the only ways to ensure your survival, you leave no legacy.

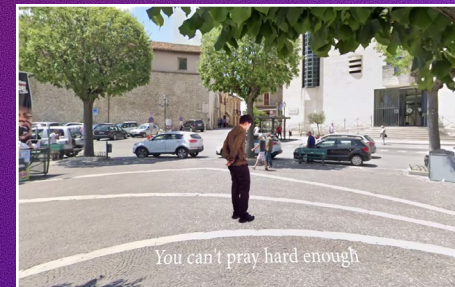
Dallas Fellini's work restores a legacy to those who had to decide

between disappearing and not existing. The trans people of Celano's past are some of those who had to choose, but all outsiders, anyone whose identity is at odds with culture, must make a similar decision.

But aren't disappearing and not existing the same thing?

Fellini's VR work seems to present a third option. *Strada Statale 696* is a window into the experiences of trans people, past and present, struggling to belong. We witness on video loop their Sisyphean struggle, the strange dance, fitting and dodging, crawling and contorting, imitating, emulating, and scratching their existence into history. I don't know how else to put into words this third option, but I know it is the one we outsiders must choose, lest we survive only through fragmented memories, lost in translation, and swallowed by the earth.

- ANNA DALIZA



Window Space

Recalling

Amina Boufennara

WINDOW SPACE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2021 – NOVEMBER 6, 2021





Amina Boufennara was born on a mountain-top called "The Mountain of the Beast" in Algeria. I form a vivid visual in my mind's eye, naturally recalling narrative connections to the infamous mythological origin stories of ancient deities.

Amina Boufennara and I connected on a humid August day in High Park. She tells me that her ancestor led her to the bus stop, guiding her to our meeting place.

Amina sprawled out her colourful and hypnotizing canvases out on the lush green grass. When I gazed, the repetitive eye motifs gazed back at me. They looked familiar, like the nazar' I had so often adorned myself with to protect against a malevolent and intrusive

gaze. Boufennara's use of Amazigh motifs enchanted me, not because they were familiar, but wholly unfamiliar and personal.

Observable from the street, the spectator is invited to gaze at her soul, which is materially conjured as a work of art in Xpace' window space where Boufennara's work is exhibited. The sun naturally livens Boufennara's work throughout the day due to direct exposure, highlighting certain hues while subsequently fading them out as time passes.

Boufennara also incorporates reflective eyes through the use of paillettes, which is traditionally meant to reflect energy through mirror-work - even reflecting sun rays back to the spectator.

*When I look at all these eyes,
I don't feel they are negatively
gazing*

Boufennara states. She also paints and dyes some of her fabric with henna, and uses fabrics found from around the world - naturally fusing disparate cultural influences as a diasporic citizen of the world. Understanding and honouring the cultural traditions that permeate her practice, Boufennara attempts to visually restore and disrupt her relationship to these cultural influences.

Boufennara's work is multidimensional, in the sense that it keeps unfolding - recalling stories, memories, dimensions through its

depth and range. Using a combination of different materials and mediums in her mixed media works, such as dying fabrics with the spices sumac and turmeric, sewing them together with thread, and painting over sewn patches with henna, ink or acrylic, Boufennara's process unfolds to reveal deeper layers and allows the spectator to glean her multidimensional perspective. But just as we are able to perceive a continuation, the patterns change course, primary colours are combined to create new hues, and materials are in a state of flux. Fragments of canvas are torn apart, and woven together again - conveying the artworks' transient and evolving nature. This body of work feels otherworldly, but human in its nuance and materiality.

*I'm representing the in between
says Boufennara,
I'm finding the space in myself*

Due to her unclear cultural origins, she feels hesitant to fully claim her Amazigh ancestry because of her multi-ethnic background - even feeling she may have other Indigenous origins due to the colonial history in Algeria. It is clear that she does not want to feel boxed in by a single identifier, but would prefer to emphasize the complexity of her identity. Boufennara alludes to her ancestral memory throughout her art, while simultaneously illustrating the tensions that can arise in mending and defining ancestral connections with-

in self. In this sense, Boufennara's art is not necessarily intended for ancestral reclamation because she already claims it. Instead, her art recalls ancestral memories in order to co-create as well self-actualize. Just as she incorporates ancient Amazigh symbols of life like The Yaz (or "The Free Man") in her art, Boufennara, too, is reclaiming her sovereignty, and determining her connection to her own cultural roots. Amina's art is therefore referential in the way she incorporates the visual motifs of Amazigh culture, ultimately channeled through embodied knowledge. Body memory can be activated when we return to our ancestral lands. When recalling her experience returning to Algeria, Boufennara expressed: "I felt I could breathe again". This embodied relationship with her motherland has a strong connection to the way she practices art because as she was sensing her way through these familiar environments, she came across patterns, colours, motifs that instantly moved something in her. Not consciously, but a visceral reaction to sensory experiences she knows deep in her bones - not informational, but an embodied knowing. Boufennara talks about the process of creating as a force moving through her, something she does not necessarily have control over. Rather than





pre-emptively choosing to include certain colours, shapes or motifs that connect to her cultural lineage, Boufennara instead creates work in an almost meditative state. Unconscious in her channeling, but conscious of its source. For this reason, Boufennara finds healing through her practice. "We are displaced", she says, when articulating the experience of the many Indigenous communities in Algeria, but more broadly North Africa. Indigenous people globally are displaced and forgotten. Just as our connection to cultural aesthetics can be a body memory, so is our relationship to imperial violence and cultural genocide. As settlers to Turtle Island, we both expressed the necessity of respecting how we carry legacies of colonization as displaced persons also living on stolen land.

The recent string of tragedies sweeping South West Asia and North Africa, and the continuing displacement of our communities reminds us why the practice of recalling is necessary for psychic survival. While our ancestral lands continue to be exploited, and our people continue to be displaced and erased, it is our responsibility to remember, to strengthen connections and to embody our ancestral knowledge in order to self-actualize and confidently and clearly embody our wholeness. "When I see butterflies, I know my ancestors are with me", Boufennara exclaimed while gazing around the park. In this sense, she creates a home within herself,

and re-imagines her relationship to her environment – including the fauna. Through divine guidance and cosmic protection, she forges future pathways while honouring the guidance of her ancestors, thus emerging Whole from her chrysalis.

As I walk back home, a monarch butterfly dances around me.

-ÖZGE DILAN ARSLAN

1. The nazar is an eye-shaped amulet that protects against the evil eye. 2. Amazigh are an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa.
3. Boufennara, Amina. Interview by Özge Dilan Arslan. August 18, 2021. 4. In the Amazigh language, "Amazigh" means "free man". The Yaz is a symbol representing freedom in Amazigh, and also represents the last letter 'Z' of the Tifinagh Alphabet. 5. 2020 Beirut, Lebanon Explosion, 2021 Israeli occupation of Palestine, 2021 Taliban gain control of Afghanistan, etc. All of these national crises will result in further displacement and forced migration.

The Duality of Life and Death

Ehiko Odeh

WINDOW SPACE: NOVEMBER 19, 2021 – FEBRUARY 26, 2022





It all started with a mask.

Ehiko Odeh, fresh from graduation, is a multidisciplinary artist born in Lagos, Nigeria. Odeh now resides in Toronto and has finally had time to decompress after four years at OCAD University. Upon further reflection, one of Odeh's biggest goals was reading up on the history of her people, the Idoma people, which is when she came upon the mask: a Janus headdress.

These masks, also called *ungula-li*, are traditionally carved from wood, and sometimes combined with other materials to create two-headed faces that represent both the masculine and feminine. Their faces are carved around their features, darkened so that the outlines of eyes, lips, and other unique detailing stick out against the paler faces. Every mask is adorned with its own set of scarifications, growths and/or other details that line their cheeks

or stretch out from the top of the mask.

When Odeh first saw this Janus headdress, it intrigued her, not only due to its look but its use that particularly compelled her. These masks were a critical part of the Idoma peoples' festivals and funerals, a way for the living to practice their spirituality no matter the occasion.

At first look, Odeh's *The Duality of Life and Death* is simply commemorating a snapshot into the past, but it's more than that. Centring a piece around a Janus headdress seems more than fitting for the time we're in, a time of death, of sickness, and of isolation — *The Duality of Life and Death* is a reminder for us that through community we can connect to our loved ones, especially those in the beyond.

Odeh had never really investigated the history of her people or their practices until she found herself as a first year in OCADU, finally claiming the label of artist and stepping into her own. Those same years she spent expanding her artistic profile and adjusting to postsecondary life, Odeh grew more and more interested in the

home she had left behind and the people whose land her family called their own.

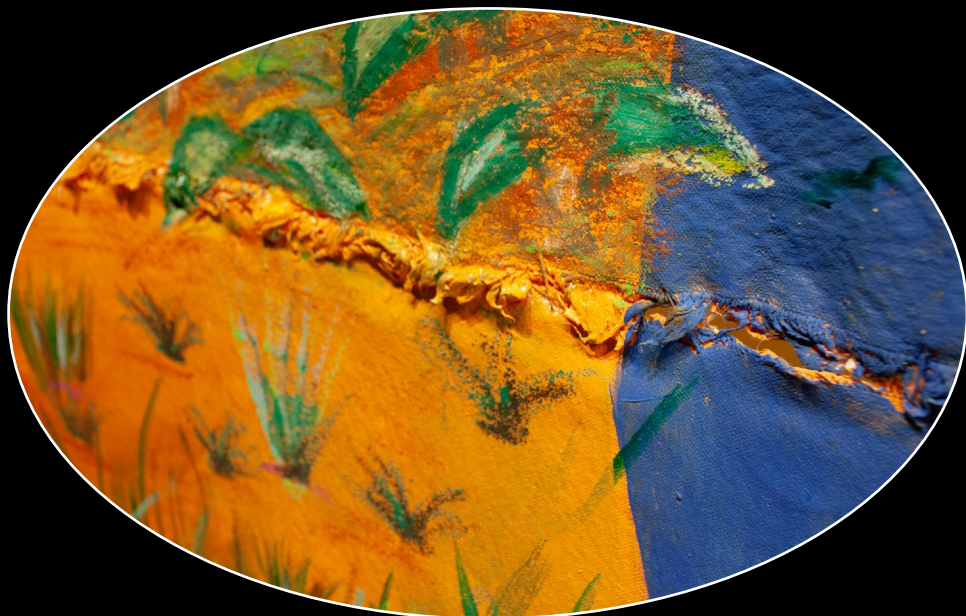
It was through seeing a Janus headdress in a book gifted by her father, *The Spirit's Image*¹, that she felt the urge to depict this mask.

Unlike the projects she'd done in school, *The Duality of Life and Death* was created on a whim, without the use of the professional tools she had spent years mastering. She took instead to various paints — acrylics, interior paint, and gouache — to build the background and with the help of oil pastels helped bring a distinct and warm portrait of communion, celebration, and ritual amongst the Idoma.

Upon two large canvases stapled together, various strokes of greens, pinks, yellows, oranges, and browns make up the Benue River, which Benue Sate — the land of the Idoma people — is named after. Framing painting and peeking out under the waves of the river are the agriculture the Benue is known for, with the various green and yellow hues of grass, trees, and leaves.

Lying at the center of *The Duality of Life and Death* is a blue sphere that calls back to Odeh's past painting transcending blue. It is on this spot where the ancestors, Odeh's ancestors, the Janus headdress, and the living meet. Smoking firewood sits in front of the living as they commune by the mask, with the dead lining up to the other side of the mask. The Janus headdress, the link between life and death, is the biggest figure of the painting, with feathery strokes the same brown, black, and white of the mask making up the tail end of the mask into a skirt of sorts. The mask's face is lined with white, with intricate lines mimicking the carvings of a traditional Janus headdress, with a visible set of eyes and mouths for each side of the face, as well as various traditional motifs and matching sets of growths protruding from its head.

On the surface, The Duality of Life and Death is simply a look at the past — but for Odeh, it's also a reminder of her present life, and her continuation.



The Idoma, like various other people across the continent of Africa, now finds itself majorly subscribing to Christianity, and Odeh is no exception, as she was raised a Catholic Christian. But after her move to Toronto, the rigidity of Christianity didn't connect to her as it had before, so through her readings into her ancestry, Odeh opened herself to the values and practices her people practiced pre-colonization.

Although she's an hours-long plane trip away from her home, she's never felt more connected to her ancestors and their practices, being so far from home has also inspired her to plant roots within this new, unfamiliar soil. It's only within the past year or so that she's found community with like-minded artists and people, as well as delved into a spiritual practice that is beyond what she was taught growing up. This support, care, and love Odeh has found with friends have also helped shape *The Duality of Life and Death* and encapsulates the warmth she finds in her community.

It's both an ode to the past, to those who created the masks Odeh has read about in history books gifted by her father, as well as an embodiment of what she believes today. *The Duality of Life and Death* is inspired by the Aje Alekwu festival², a yearly event (the date depending on the region) where the Idoma come together to celebrate, worship, and offer sacrifices in the names of their ancestors.

In this context, the Janus head-dress is used as ancestors' veneration. They serve as a link between the ancestors, the divine, and humanity. As Odeh leans more into her spirituality, away from what was taught initially, and further into what the people long before her practiced, it only seemed natural to explore this festival through art.

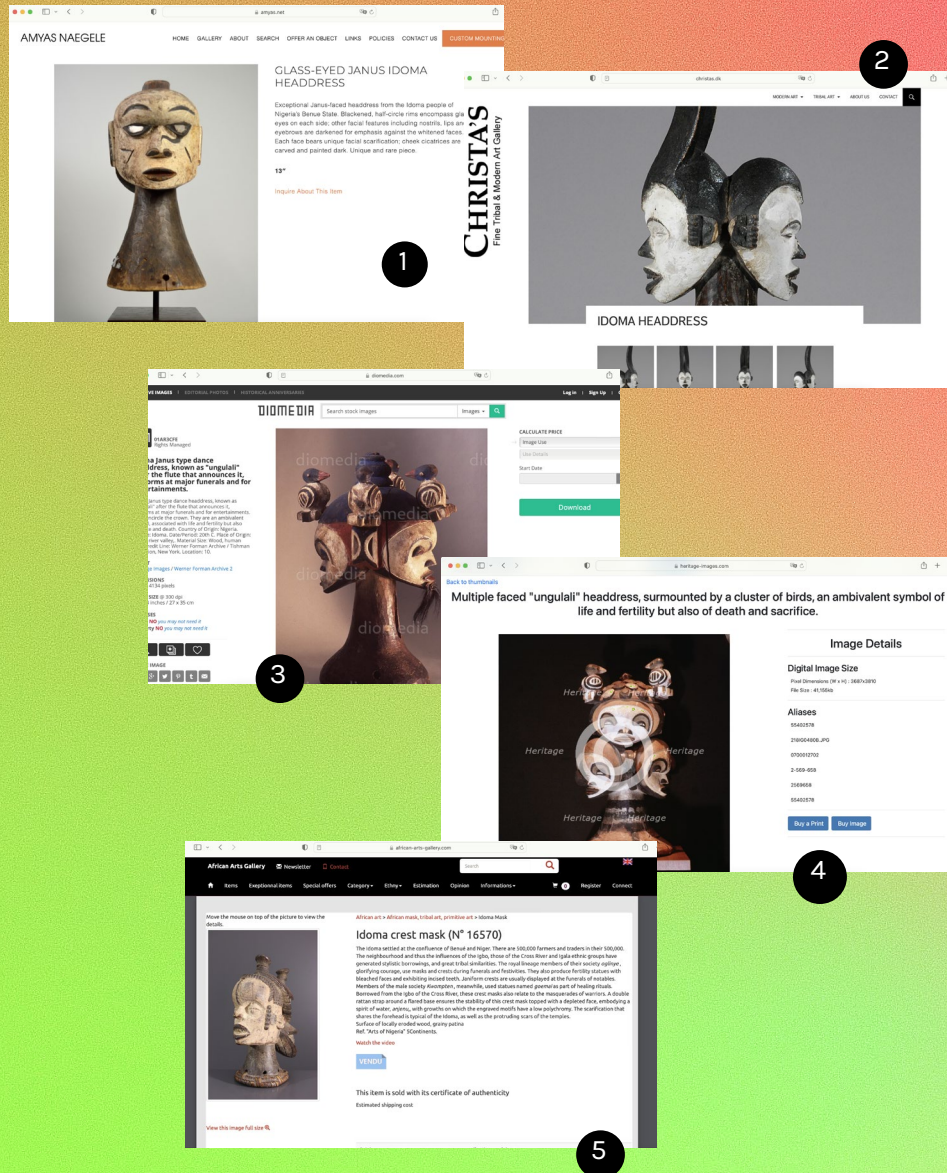
The Duality of Life and Death serves both as an idea, a reality, and a reminder of what community can be, of what honouring the dead and connecting the living can mean. It can mean warm golden yellow skies, huddling around a specially carved mask, and an ode to the past, but it can also mean looking at this painting in person, or sharing it with friends via text, and musing what can community, what can honouring your relationships with loved ones both alive and not, what we can carry from the past to help make our present better.

-ADELE LUKUSA

1. *The Spirit's Image: The African Masking Tradition - Evolving Continuity* is a 1992 book by Esther A. Dagan. This book documents the various ways African ethnic and Indigenous groups craft masks and their significance.
2. "Benue Cultural Festivals." I Am Benue. <http://www.iambenue.com/benue-state/culture/benue-cultural-festivals/>.

RESOURCES ON JANUS MASKS & HEADDRESSES

There are very few direct sources that speak about the Idoma peoples' Janus headdress unless they were previously selling them or showcasing them, but here are a few listings I used to better visualize, describe, and understand the Janus headdress:



For the links to these sources please view the essay on xpace.info

1. AMYAS NAEGLER, GLASS-EYED JANUS IDOMA HEADDRESS

a. "Exceptional Janus-faced headdress from the Idoma people of Nigeria's Benue State. Blackened, half-circle rims encompass glass eyes on each side; other facial features including nostrils, lips and eyebrows are darkened for emphasis against the whitened faces. Each face bears unique facial scarification; cheek cicatrices are carved and painted dark. Unique and rare piece."

2. CHRISTA'S, IDOMA HEADDRESS

a. This beautiful headdress shaped like a 'Janus Figure' with two opposite faces comes from the Cross River Region Culture Idoma in Nigeria. The term simulates ambivalent symbols of life and fertility and also of death and sacrifice. Janus or multi-headed headdresses like this are used during entertainment festivities and funerals by the Oglinye society of the Idoma people. In Africa janus (two-faced) masks express male / female duality and the "two as one" idea.

3. DIOMEDIA, IDOMA JANUS TYPE...

a. Idoma Janus type dance headdress, known as "ungulali" after the flute that announces it, performs at major funerals and for entertainments. Birds encircle the crown. They are an ambivalent symbol, associated with life and fertility but also sacrifice and death. Country of Origin: Nigeria. Culture: Idoma. Date/Period: 20th C. Place of Origin: Benue river valley,. Material Size: Wood, human hair.

4. HERITAGE IMAGES, UNGULALI HEADDRESS

a. Multiple faced "ungulali" headdress, surmounted by a cluster of birds, an ambivalent symbol of life and fertility but also of death and sacrifice. Carved by the great sculptor Ochai of Otobi, who died in 1949. Country of Origin: Nigeria. Culture: Idoma. Date/Period: 20th C. Place of Origin: Niger / Benue confluence. Material Size: Wood.

5. AFRICAN ARTS GALLERY, IDOMA MASK

a. The Idoma settled at the confluence of Benué and Niger. There are 500,000 farmers and traders in their 500,000. The neighbourhood and thus the influences of the Igbo, those of the Cross River and gala ethnic groups have generated stylistic borrowings and great tribal similarities. The royal lineage members of their society *Oglinye*, glorifying *cadrage*, use masks and crests during funerals and Festivities. They also produce fertility statues with bleached faces and exhibiting incised teeth. Janiform crests are usually displayed at the funerals of notables. Members of the male asociety Kwompten, meanwhile, used statues named *goemai* as part of healing rituals. Borrowed from the Igbo of the Cross River, these crest masks also relate to the masquerades of warriors. A double rattan strap around a flared base ensures the stability of this crest mask topped with a depleted face, embodying a spirit of water, *anjenu*, with growths on which the engraved motifs have a low polychromy. The scarification that shares the forehead is typical of the Idoma, as well as the protruding scars of the temples.

We Have Food at Home

Madison Rudin

WINDOW SPACE: MARCH 15, 2022 – APRIL 23, 2022





Desire, Rebellion, & Lucky Charms:
Madison Rudin's *We Have Food At Home*

Decadence comes in many, individualized forms. For artist and sculptor Madison Rudin, these forms cost anywhere between two and seven dollars and can be found at most gas stations - mass produced "junk" food. Rudin grew up in a hyper health conscious family, spearheaded mostly by her mother, who would often employ the age old adage *we have food at home*. As children are wont to do, this parental deterrent only created a further insatiability for the sugary, salty, and processed, culminating in the sprawling, technicolor fever dream that is Rudin's Window Space exhibition, *We Have Food At Home*.

Rudin's exhibition is a dizzying 40 sculpture "pantry" of technicolor scale model junk foods, built from painted liquid plaster bandages, form molds and small amounts of clay - all adorned with rhinestones. Aside from her own life experiences, Rudin was inspired by the 1998 film *Pleasantville*, a coming of age fantasy comedy depicting teen siblings David and Jennifer who are thrust into a 1950s black

and white television world. The unique cinematography of the film which features oversaturated objects and actors in a black and white world, served as an influence for Rudin's addition of black and white "healthy" foods, such as whole grain cheerios or sugar free gummy snacks. A feast for the eyes, they're sprinkled throughout the installation as a reminder, in the artist's own words, of "the dichotomy between the pantry I had growing up filled with healthy, but bland foods and the pantry that I desperately wanted and often saw at friends homes: filled with junk food, sweets, and chips."

Hiding under the sugary sweet surface of this pop art¹ exhibition lies a much deeper commentary. Rudin, who identifies as a bigger bodied artist, has experienced her fair share of fatphobia and diet culture - myself included. When we sat down to speak about her piece, the conversation quickly turned to swapping tales of such in our upbringing, and we found a worrying amount of similarities: one of the most impactful being the perceived and constructed morality of food. Rudin spoke about times when she was allowed junk food in childhood, and a specific life experience called "no rules weekend". Her mom used to travel occasionally, and Rudin's father would host a "no rules weekend", in which the children of the household could go grocery shopping and purchase (and eat) whatever they

wanted. I recalled a similar experience of "summer cereal", where my sister and I were both allowed a tiny, individually portioned box of froot loops or frosted flakes on summer vacation at my cousin's place.

The glaring (and unfortunately incredibly widespread) issue with these childhood activities is it, as Rudin pointed out, creates a deprivation mindset with so-called "bad" foods. This experience particularly affects those who have experienced girl-hood, and is somewhat of an epidemic in the western world. Rudin speaks of how that deprivation has only enhanced her desire for junk food into her adulthood, and led to complicated relations with snacks and nutrition. She recalls a Weight Watchers program she once participated in, describing it as the "ultimate deprivation" - and she's right, any system that literally assigns a value to food and has its patrons "spend" their limited points throughout the day is a direct, nasty byproduct of diet culture. Rudin and I even both shared the sensation of guilt, and proclivity to "sneak" junk food into our adult lives, as if food had the power to fundamentally change our morality as people. This of course, is not the case, but deconstructing that concept can prove... sticky. As Madison said, everything has its place - including Oreos. "If something makes you happy, how bad is it, really?"² Therein lies the beating heart of *We Have Food at Home*. Sometimes, when society has made food shameful, the great-



est rebellion of all is an unadulterated celebration of taste and decadence.

When asked if she felt comfortable making a piece this personal, Rudin was of two minds. On one hand, she at one point shied away from it, settling on making more broad work about consumerism. As a fat artist, she was concerned with stereotypes and pigeonholing her work. However, nowadays she feels confident and empowered telling her story through dreamscapes such as this. I asked her what she wanted to stir up in people, and she had an immediate answer: she wanted to evoke happiness, and a giddy kid-in-a-candy-store feeling. With a setup swirling with life and color, Rudin achieves her goal and then some. Ultimately, this is an exhibition about joy, childhood, and railing against a culture that would have one eat their junk food in secret shame. In Rudin's words: "As a bigger bodied person, I've been sad enough about food in my life - f-k that."

I couldn't agree more.

-OLIVER PITSCHNER

1. A western movement from the late 1950s, based in brightly coloured and easily commercialized work. Famous artists from the movement include Andy Warhol and Keith Haring.
2. Quote from Madison Rudin, during our interview



How to Find a Palm Tree

Jasmine Gui & Justine Wong

WINDOW SPACE: MAY 27, 2022 – JULY 16, 2022





1.

A poem can only be answered
with a poem. A world can only
be entered by worlding.

2.

*Even so, you are afraid that
the place you've left won't be
forgiving. Even so, you want to
turn around. Even so, you won't
return.*

—Jasmine Gui,
How to Find A Palm Tree

Even the sea needs slits for the
wind to get through. Call it
waves, so the morning can get in.
The morning is another word for
new day, for time. The seascape
like space, like the crushed and
colossal arrangement of stars.
You are and I am and we were,
disappearing. Are. You, afraid of
the next step but unable to stop
moving. That the night is a long
sorrow is not new to you. Place
your hand in mine. You've nothing
to lose but embarrassment.
Leave, leaving, left is our direc-
tion. Wandering is not aimless.
Shed doubt, fracture knowing.
We won't lose conviction except
to say that the hallmarks of hes-
itancy won't be compelling. For-
giving. A circle. An end. One wet
body ties another to this place.
Even so, desolation is a silence.
Sit with me. Plant a seed, the

heart of a palm. It is bigger on
the inside because it grows. Lis-
ten to the xylophone of our be-
coming, imprinted on this sand,
every tree ungrown. You and the
endless day. The music of shore-
lines. Distance. Everything I want
is a window. An hourglass look-
ing for an echo. Turn back to me,
timeless one. Turn away from the
faith of faces. Follow the edge un-
til it folds. Around nothing there
is something that scares us, more
than what we want. Forgiveness,
forevering. I have never felt closer
or farther away from a now. Look
away. Don't return. Remember.

3.

I first encounter Jasmine Gui and
Justine Wong's *How To Find a
Palm Tree* in the open air of Jas-
mine's studio. Jasmine, who I've
known for years but never met
in person, is welcoming me so
warmly into the space, with tea
and slippers and coconut biscuits.
By the left window, which is her
corner of the space—Justine is
a secret fifth member of the stu-
dio, she tells me—are the portals,
gently whispering in the air. The
seeds and bones of the installation
are in a box by the window. She
shows me the stones pressed with
gingko leaves, says we made this
because of you, the first draft of
what you're now reading. That's
the kind of attentive collabora-
tion at work here, that's how alive
this exhibit is, how ready to meet
the world. The window looks out
onto Dundas street, onto a sum-

mer storm that is blistering and
brewing. Jasmine tells me about a
stubborn mama pigeon, roosting
in the crevice without eggs. There
is tape on the floor to mark the size
of the space the display that Palm
Tree will mold into. Site specific
means a practice of feeling. An
honoring of transience. First we
start by emptying everything out,
she says and I remember being a
child. A box of toys, a friend, play.
Jasmine tells me how she thinks of
the portals like spokes of a wheel,
how she and Justine move togeth-
er and know something about the
other that they can't name but
feel. Maybe this work is born of
that. The wind whistles and we all
spin inside it.

4.

*But beautiful things, as Matisse
shows, always carry greetings
from other worlds within them...
The requirement for plenitude is
built-in. The palm will always
be found.*

— Elaine Scarry,
On Beauty and Being Just

*When I roll a dice, what am I let-
ting go? What am I letting into the
air?*

This is the question that appears
to me when I read Jasmine and
Justine's artist statement and when
I see their work for the first time
on my computer. In pixels, Justine
and Jasmine's arrangement, there
is a sense of falling. Not just into
place but away. The category of

chance, its cultivation. The ecology is palpable. Coastal terrain. Left ashore, we wander. I wonder, Why am I brought to the water again?

What do our remnants need? This collaboration exists in the pendulum of collection and debris, spillage and storage. Everything ripples, restless, hungry, following a feeling until we are submerged in our smallness. Revive the gift of focus, the choice and river of what we see or for how long. And in this many-ed smallness, our ability to feel heightens. We are part of a gathering, in a community of thing. To feel, to see, to move, together.

This art is alive. This art comes up to meet you. This art knocks on your door, the limits of language and imagination. This art gathers all its friends, stones, sculpture and story. This art hands you instructions, a quote on beauty.

This art says, I see you and disappears. This art says, I'm leaving you and stays.

5.

While beginning this essay, I learned that in the evolutionary ancestry of trees, the ginkgo sits completely on its own. Unlike most trees, the ginkgo is in a species, a class and genus of its own. Most of its ancestors lived 40 some million years ago. Only the ginkgo we know survives today.

I remember the ginkgo when I sit down with the palm because, in this collaboration between Jasmine and Justine, in my opportunity to write this piece altogether, is relationship. In relation is life. And it is when the relation accumulates affect, or is layered with bodies in time, that we open ourselves to receive experiences too big for words. We break barriers of space and time. We make portals.

That is one of the things Jasmine tells me too, that, as a poet, she needed to go beyond words. She needed the materiality, the tangibility, of the thing in the world—in a body—to do the kind of alchemy she is trying to do with art.

In the spirit of this embodiment, as my body meets this page meets this art meets this friendship, the collision and constellation of energy, I end this essay by asking what the ginkgo might ask the palm tree. This is an awareness of time. I imagine their conversation is a lot like mine and Jasmine's, where she laughs, pulls up her sleeve, shows

me her ginkgo tattoos. A familiarity, a shared joy, connection, alignment. If it is the story of the sojourner we embarking on—the protagonist of this world/story Jasmine and Justine are building—then perhaps I remember the ginkgo, as a companion to the palm, because of the profound loneliness of their survival. It reminds me of the sojourner. Loneliness of time, of continuing on in other bodies even as you fold back into the nothingness we were born of. *What is that like?* The palm tree who is not born yet asks the ginkgo. *I want to see a tree at the shoreline again,* says the Sojourner to the palm. *What will I do without you?* says the ginkgo a million years ago and today, who is not yet alone and already is.

6.

Call the keepers of silence with their feet in the river. Call the river that used to spill over the rocks.

—Édouard Glissant,
Poetics of Relation

Here is my hand, another frond. Open my palm. I have kept this seed, just for you. Come plant it with me. I'm not sure if it will grow. Mourn and celebrate with me under a silent sun. Come see what was, never will be, is. I am waiting for you. I always will be. I have been here, all this time.

- SANNA WANI





Thank You !

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