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Volume is Xpace Cultural Centre's annual anthology of exhibitions, essays and interviews. These essays demonstrate the breadth of exhibitions, artists and designers that contribute to Xpace's place as a vibrant part of Toronto and OCAD University's arts community. This publication includes programming across all four of our exhibition spaces August 2017 to July 2018.

Xpace Cultural Centre is a not-for-profit artist-run centre dedicated to providing emerging and student artists, designers, curators and writers with opportunities to showcase their work in a professional setting. Xpace is committed to maintaining an anti-oppressive, queer positive environment, welcoming marginalized, racialized and indigenous folks.

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main space



**The main space hosts group
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INTERSECTIONS IN DANCE

CURATED BY VICTORIA MOHR-BLAKENEY

Daria Blum, Ella Cooper, Danièle Dennis, jes sachse, Allannah Vokes

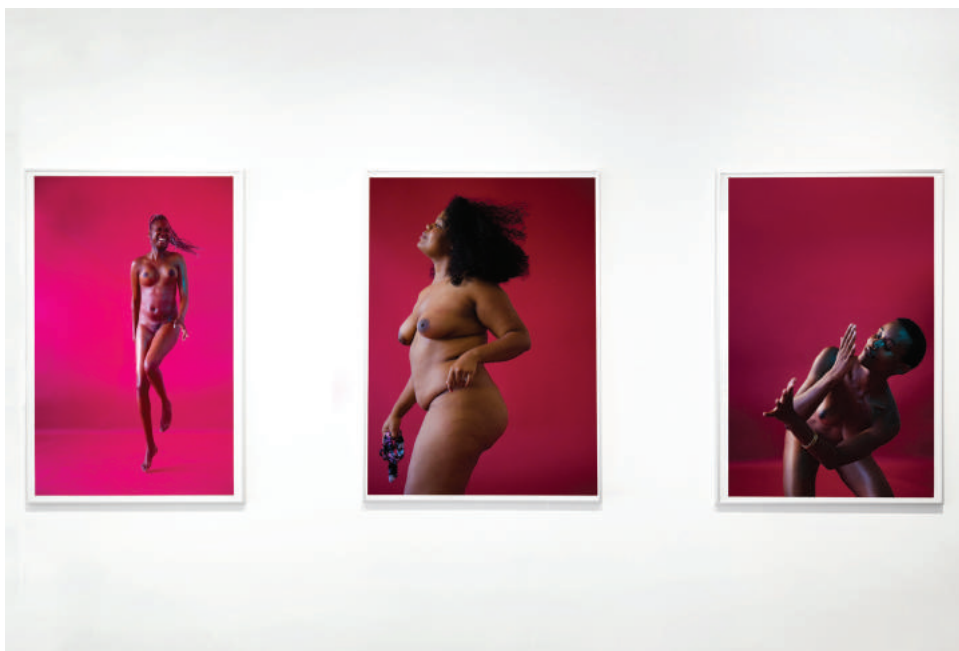
July 28th – August 26th, 2017

In the exhibition *Intersections in Dance*, Canadian and International artists, Daria Blum, Ella Cooper, Danièle Dennis, jes sachse, and Allannah Vokes investigate dance methodologies via contemporary art practices. By way of video, drawing, photography, and social media, each artist positions dance in different ways: as a culturally encoded practice, a source of analysis and notation, an act of embodied self-expression, and as a vehicle of somatic repression. *Intersections in Dance* poses the question: what can we learn from the dancing body through the lens of contemporary art practice?

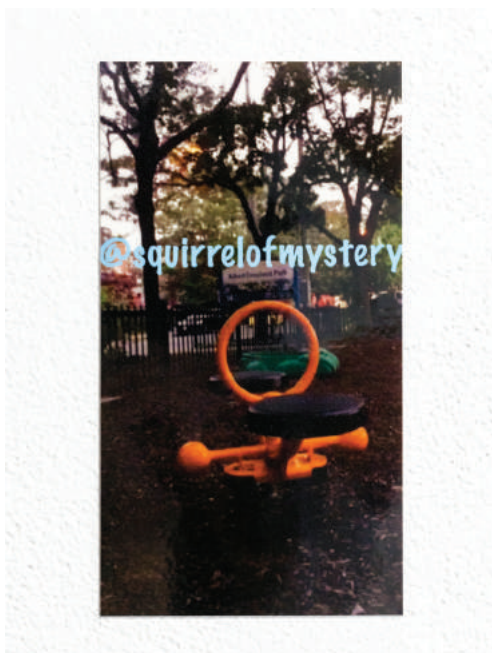
Ella Cooper's photographic series, *Ecstatic Nudes*, offers powerful visual narratives of self-expression via ecstatic movement.¹ Cooper's work shows women twisting, swaying, bending, and leaping, as the artist captures nude bodies in fluid and elated motion. In this series, Cooper draws on the empowering and self-expressive qualities of improvisation and ecstatic movement in her work. Cooper states: "I continue to explore the act of reclaiming the Black female body through my own video performance artworks and the through the creation of 'ecstatic' nudes. Using safe space and embodied inquiry to develop this new photo-video series as a continued exploration of Black Joy, I draw upon

Afro-futurist principles as yet another act of resistance and reclamation."² Cooper's powerful and joyful representations of Black female bodies reverberate on a cellular level through her boldness of colour, harnessing the inherent emotional qualities of self-expressive movement.

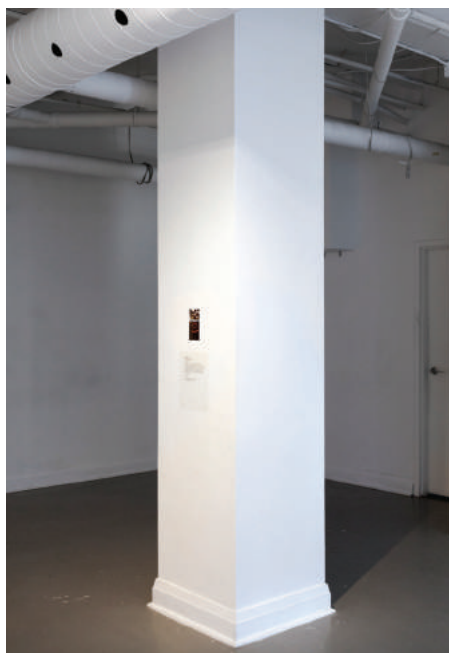
jes sachse is an interdisciplinary artist currently exploring dance and improvisation as a vehicle of self-expression. sachse's work raises the question - whose dancing bodies are allowed to occupy space? Their work investigates what emancipatory spaces for embodied self-expression may exist within their own body. *Find@squirrellofmystery* is a series of Instagram videos filmed and performed by the artist, which occupy an intersectional space between the visible and the invisible. Trained in dance as a child in their mother's dance school, sachse was never encouraged to pursue dance professionally. Dance has, however, persisted as an expressive thread in their life. sachse states: "Movement has been a means of survival, as a young queer person approaching liminal emancipations on dance floors; as a poor disabled person taking out frustrations in back alleys impromptu choreography."³ sachse's work calls for an intimate yet collective participation in the work on the part of viewers. The videos

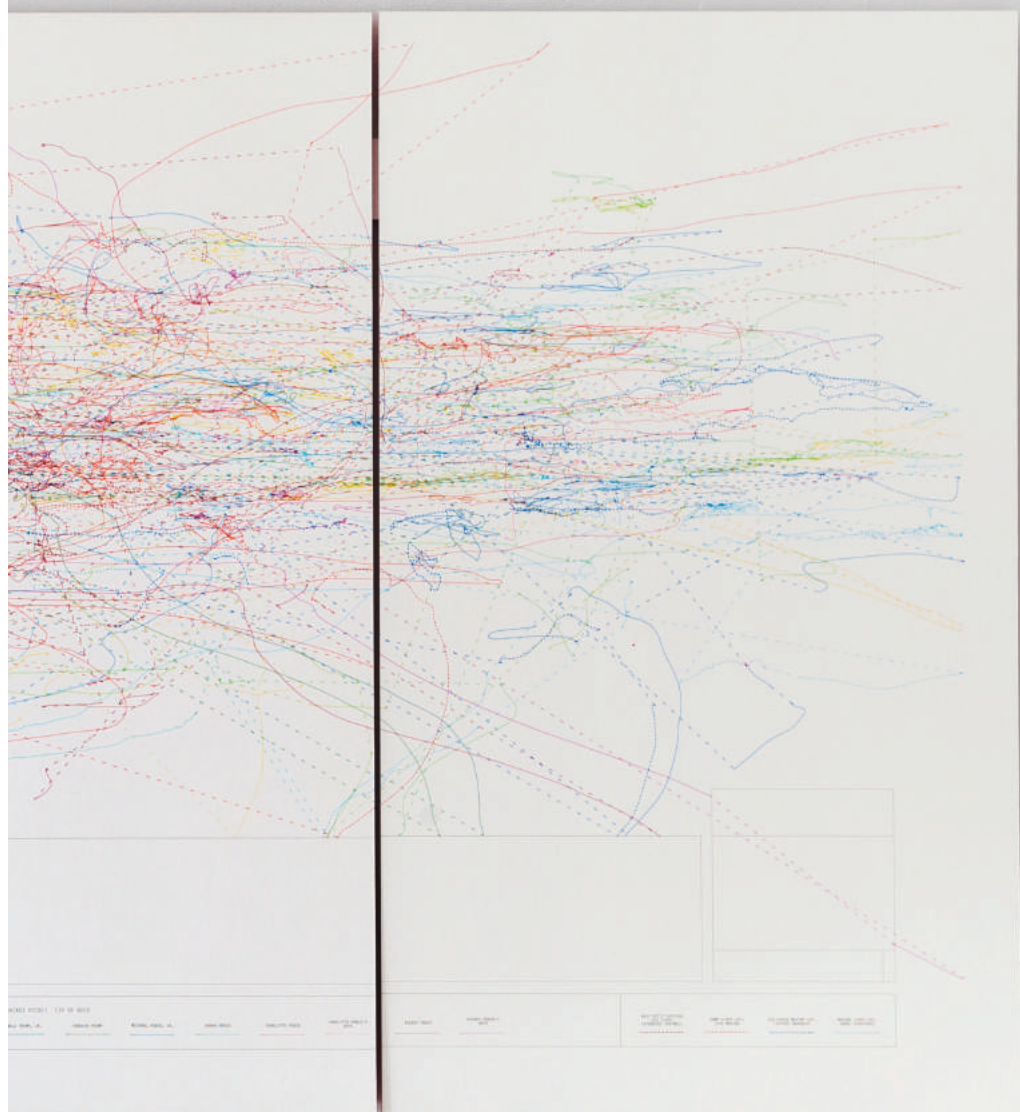


Ella Cooper, *Ecstatic Nudes*



jes sachse, [find@squirrelofmystery](https://www.instagram.com/squirrelofmystery)







Daria Blum, *I am ready*



Allanah Vokes, *Salute To Our Armed Services Ball* (detail)

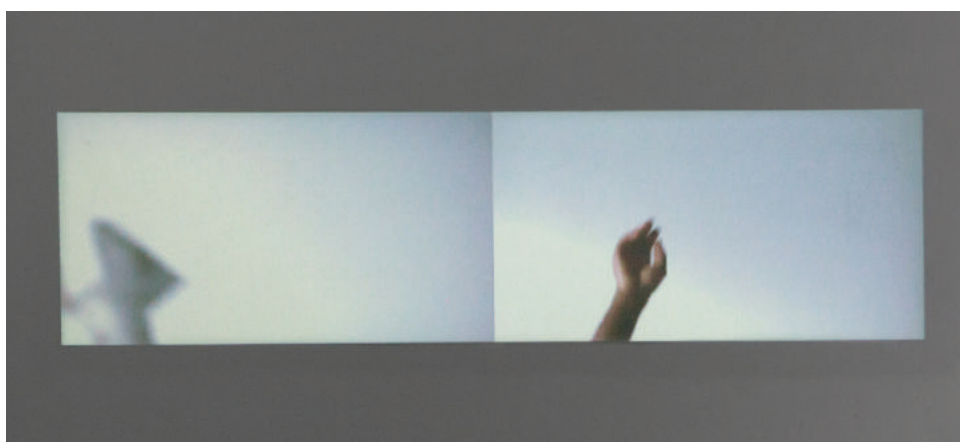
can be publicly accessed online via social media, positioning the work as simultaneously occupying and transgressing the gallery space.

While Cooper and Sachse point to the empowering qualities of self-expressive dance and movement improvisation their work, interdisciplinary artist Daria Blum's single-channel video, *I am ready*, examines the repressive methodologies inherent to rigorous dance training. Blum explores the obsessive qualities of physical training in the context of ballet including repetition, endurance and suffering. In *I am ready*, a ballet dancer's head, and shoulders, performed by Blum, spins continuously, while fighting increasing signs of nausea and discomfort. Here, Blum uses spotting,⁴ a technique common in pirouettes,⁵ while continuously humming *The Dying Swan* by Camille Saint-Saëns. Embodied and imperfect, the vocalization reveals an internal narrative of a body striving in vain for flawlessness. Blum's work exposes somatic suffering as a central tenant to physical achievement. Blum states: "I am interested in the concept of suffering as a motor for creative and generative processes, and especially in the masochism of the performer and their audience—which is experienced individually and collectively."⁶ Blum's work posits suffering as a necessity in the pursuit of perfection, an ideology inherent in many dance practices. *I am ready* also points to the invisible contract between dancers, choreographers, and audiences that collectively serves to perpetuate insurmountable standards of

perfection and execution.

Alternatively, Allanah Vokes' drawing, *Salute To Our Armed Services Ball- The Inauguration of Donald J. Trump, the 45th President of the United States of America*, transforms dance and motion into data, by way of analysis, translation, and notation. In this work, Vokes tracks an 8-minute video of the 2017 Armed Services Ball at a frame rate of 30 frames per second and draws the resulting motion vectors using a pen plotter. In this triptych, the artist tracks the noses of twenty-two dancers, including Donald and Melania Trump, and then plots the movement of each dancer frame by frame. Vokes' work questions the meaning behind these national rituals, in this case traditionally used to signify the peaceful transition of democratic power. In her work, the artist exposes the dancing bodies' ability to defy the apophenic drive, the human compulsion to analyze seemingly random data in an attempt to uncover an underlying logic. Vokes' work also references a long history of dance notation systems, specifically Labanotation,⁷ designed to capture, interpret, codify and/or reproduce dance.

Danièle Dennis' two-channel video, *tek ah jump*, takes a different approach, positing dance as cultural practice. In doing so, Dennis' work examines the idea of exporting embodied cultural practice by enacting a one-woman carnival staged on a December evening on the streets of Philadelphia. Dennis' work opens up questions surrounding the embodied nature of racial and cultural identity. As the



Danièle Dennis, *tek ah jump*

daughter of Jamaican immigrants, her work recalls family gatherings commonly involving dance, Dennis states: "We would wine to the sounds of reggae and soca. A significant portion of my teen and adult years were spent in Toronto where Caribana, Toronto's Caribbean street festival, remains the city's largest if not second largest cultural festival. We would revel together; we mash up di road in all our exuberance, feathers and sparkle."⁸ Dennis' *tek ah jump* explores the notion of temporal suspension in an attempt to question and subvert her surroundings by way of her dancing body. Dennis' dancing body becomes a tool to re-contextualize questions of identity, belonging, and embodied cultural expression.

Employing a variety of media and contemporary art practices, Daria Blum, Ella Cooper, Danièle Dennis, jes sachse, and Allanah Vokes each expose the ability of the dancing body to hold multiple meanings and significations. Vokes' work asks what knowledge can be gained from the dissection and systematic codification of embodied practices. sachse and Cooper position dance and embodiment as a tool of empowerment, intersectionality and self-expression.

Dennis explores dance as cultural practice and the body as the cultural context by which culture is performed. Finally, Blum examines the repressive qualities of dance, specifically rigorous training, positioning it as a vehicle by which the body is both manipulated and subjugated. In *Intersections in Dance*, each artist poses

questions about the dancing body through the lens of contemporary art practice, a process by which new meanings and significations are both revealed and concealed.

Victoria Mohr-Blakeney

NOTES

1 Ecstatic movement/Ecstatic dance is a movement practice centered on self-expression with a focus on free-form movement as opposed to aesthetics. It is often practiced in group settings. **2** Cooper, Ella. *Intersections in Dance* submission. **3** sachse, jes. *Intersections in Dance* submission. **4** Spotting is a technique used by dancers in a variety of dance forms wherein the dancer focuses on a fixed point while spinning, so as to avoid sensations of nausea, dizziness and discomfort. **5** A movement comment in ballet wherein a dancer turns supported on one leg while the second is often in a bent and lifted position. **6** Blum, Daria. *Intersections in Dance* submission. **7** A system of notation designed for analyzing human movement. Derived from the work of Rudolf Laban in the 1920s. **8** Dennis, Danièle. *Intersections in Dance* submission.

SOFT MOODS

CURATED BY EMILY GOVE

Wil Brask, Destiny Grimm, cherry kutti, Lee D'Angelo & Bethany Rose Puttkemery

September 8 – October 14, 2017

"Softness is powerful. It is about healing. It is about inner-strength. And strength means standing up for yourself. It is not about forced passivity."

Lora Mathis, *On Radical Softness* ¹

Soft Moods aims to explore the concept of radical softness through a range of artistic practices and approaches. Through sculpture, installation, painting, drawing, animation, foraging and floral artistry, the artists in the exhibition – Lee D'Angelo & Bethany Rose Puttkemery, Destiny Grimm, Wil Brask, and cherry kutti– though diverse in practice, together generate a space of comfort and soothing.

Lee D'Angelo and Bethany Rose Puttkemery's sculptural fountain combines the practices of each of the artists; D'Angelo is an artist, illustrator and self-taught tattooer, and Puttkemery has worked as a floral artist for the past five years. The sculpture is an interpretation of the Star card, as seen in the Ryder-Waite Tarot Deck (1910). While interpreted in various ways through the many Tarot decks in existence, the card most often features a woman bearing water. Based on a tattoo flash² drawing interpretation of the Star Card by D'Angelo, the three-dimensional sculpture features a life-size plaster cast of a feminine form holding a jug in each hand, from which water (dyed blue with tattoo ink) pours into a pool below. Using plasticine layered on the plaster form, D'Angelo has added organic textures as well

as a figure reminiscent of a Jean Cocteau's illustrations. Plant life, including pampas grass, goldenrod, and other grasses foraged from the neighbourhood around the gallery, surrounds the pool, held in place with rocks and minerals, such as amethyst and calcite, mined by Puttkemery's great-uncle. A painted section of chain link fence, also 'foraged,' hangs behind the figure, and she is supported above the pool by a found crate. The soothing sound of gentle running water fills the gallery space. Traditionally, the Star card indicates generosity of spirit, hope, creativity and inspiration, with the pictured water representing many things, including both the unconscious mind, and universal memory.³ While the work engages with the card's meaning and the history of magic and mysticism, the artists are most interested in highlighting the resilience of the natural world. They communicate this interest by mixing both natural and industrial elements within the piece, and making work that produces as little waste as possible by using primarily found and recycled materials in its creation.⁴

Painter Destiny Grimm's practice also often incorporates natural elements in the juxtaposition of hard and soft elements. In



Lee D'Angelo and Bethany Rose Puttkemery



Lee D'Angelo and Bethany Rose Puttkemery



Destiny Grimm



Destiny Grimm



Wil Brask



Wil Brask

her painting practice, Grimm is interested in how unplanned, intuitive and accidental use of colour, shape and texture can explore the various states of being human. Grimm's process of layering thick sections of both pastel and vibrantly hued oil paint onto a chosen surface using a palette knife generates a tactile, soft and icing-like appearance. Rather than pre-designing each work, Grimm works intuitively, achieving images both abstract and figurative, as they transform to their final form. Included in this exhibition are a number of oil paintings on found river rocks of varying dimensions. These colours and textures are contrasted in these pieces with the rough, hard-edged chunks of rock on which they're arranged. Alongside the smaller works, Grimm has included a larger painting on wood. The image uses cool-toned colours and features a human figure embracing another surrounded by greenery; while ambiguous, Grimm mentions that the image portrays feminine energy embracing and supporting the masculine, two figures finding a moment of peace.⁵

Wil Brask's installation uses animation and sculpture to explore self-care in the face of everyday oppressions. The installation is formed by a series of four .gif animations, drawn and animated by Brask and presented on a series of monitors that the artist has embellished to resemble oversized flowers. Each animation consists of a simple emotive gesture – a romantic sigh, a wistful blush, a swing back and forth under the moonlight, and a celebratory pose inspired by Sailor Moon. The artist has also created life-size papier maché versions of his character

drawings, also painted with vibrant colours and patterns, and dressed with accessories sourced from thrift stores and roommates. Brask constructed the figures with the assistance of a group of friends during a party organized for this purpose. With the aim of decolonizing his creation process and incorporating radical disability practices,⁶ this coming together of friends from different positionalities to work towards a common goal encourages the imagining of an alternative future, free from the systems of oppression known today. While the animations continue to cycle infinitely, referring to the constant cycle of systemic oppression, Brask's use of bright colours and playful patterns in both the .gifs and sculptural figures generates a sense of hopefulness.

cherry kutti's installation explores notions of comfort and home. Splitting her life between Dubai, Colombo and Toronto, kutti's practice includes drawing, painting and installation that often explores the anxiety of living within the diaspora. kutti thinks of her installation in *Soft Moods* as both another way to make a line drawing, and as a consideration of the idea of 'home.'⁷ She has sectioned off a corner of the gallery space using bright yellow wall paint and a sheer yellow curtain printed with a repeating illustration of eyes, lips, noses and spirals. Inside the makeshift room, two paintings and a print hang on the walls, each featuring a more and more developed version of the same image – beginning in the first image with a simple gesture painting of a nude figure, followed by a slightly more detailed painting of the same figure, which then becomes an



cherry kutti



cherry kutti



cherry kutti





Destiny Grimm

artwork hanging on the wall of room behind a seated figure in the final print. In front of the hanging print, kutti has placed a stool, side table with plant, cup and saucer, and a lamp with a yellow bulb. By sitting on the stool, the viewer becomes the 'most detailed' version of the image.⁸ Inside the cup, the artist has placed earplugs which visitors at the opening party are welcome to use, should they need an escape from the crowd and noise. In kutti's installation, one is able to find comfort in a crowded and potentially uncomfortable place.

Soft Moods embraces emotionality and opens up space for vulnerability in the face of discomfort and adversity. Each work, though disparate in medium, is linked through its openness and tenderness. By asking what it means to be soft, each artist depicts alternative approaches to care that can be understood as a means of self-preservation, in various circumstances. Whether physical, emotional or conceptual, radical softness offers both a refuge and an opportunity for folks to navigate a world that is often antagonistic and unsympathetic. *Soft Moods* invites the viewer to embrace these approaches and consider creating their own strategies for developing radical softness on their own terms.

Emily Gove

Wil Brask would like to thank the following for their assistance with this project: Hannah Zbitnew, Leif Gifford, L-FY CA, Petrose Tesfai, Rachel Davis, Rhea Yee, Natalie King, Toni Lomax, Holly Jo, Chandler Fitzpatrick, Knarles, Miranda Tansacha, Kendra Yee, Lucy Marriion Pauker

NOTES

- ¹ LoraMathis, "OnRadicalSoftness," loramathis.com, 2016: <http://loramathis.com/post/140474165618/on-radical-softness>
- ² Flash refers to original drawings created by tattoo artists for the recipient to choose from.
- ³ Michelle Tea, *Modern Tarot*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2017. P 117-118.
- ⁴ E-mail conversation with the artists, September 6, 2017.
- ⁵ Conversation with the artist, September 5, 2017.
- ⁶ See the writing of A. J. Withers, including *Disability Politics & Theory*, Fernwood Publishing, 2012
- ⁷ Conversation with the artist, September 5, 2017.
- ⁸ Ibid.

INSTALLATION AS A SUBVERSIVE ART

CURATED BY KATIE KOTLER

Ray Dark, James Knott, Liana Schmidt, Maddy Mathews and Cotey Pope

November 3rd – December 9th, 2017

"For the cinema is a place of magic where psychological and environmental factors combine to create an openness to wonder and suggestion, and unlocking of the unconscious."¹

Amos Vogel

Cineaste and curator Amos Vogel's seminal 1976 film history book, *Film as a Subversive Art*, examined how cinema's effects on one's physical senses can be used to mesmerize and educate mass audiences. In response, this exhibition, *Installation as a Subversive Art*, examines where films sets and installation art merge. The exhibition's title questions how installation art can translate the fantasy and playfulness that occur within successful films sets into the gallery setting. If installation art's mandate is to fully engage the viewer in a physical space, what can artists learn from film and television sets?

Installation as a Subversive Art seeks to explore how to make the most of experiencing a work of art. The show asks, how can we derive the maximum amount of pleasure from a piece? How is enjoyment quantified?

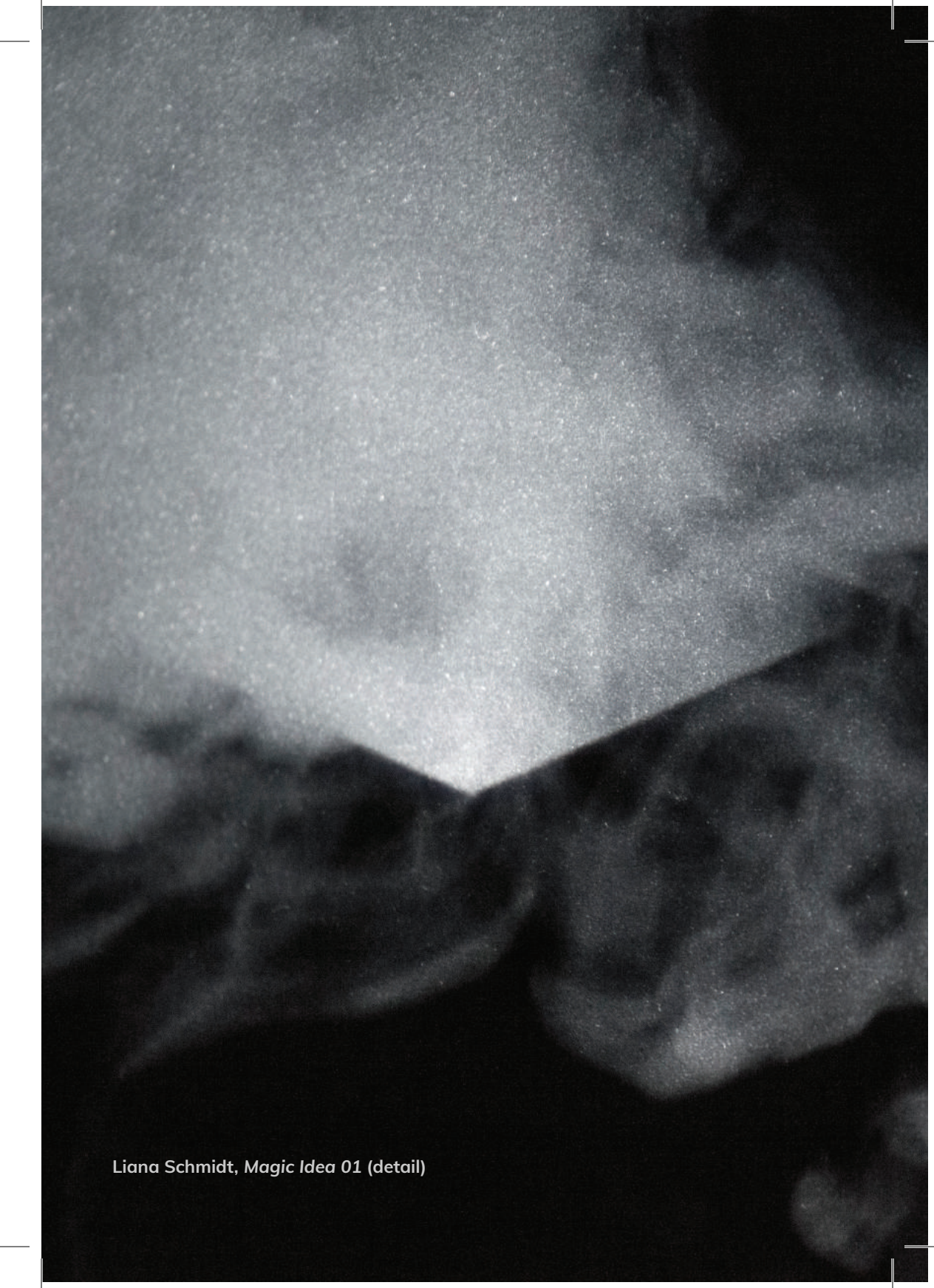
"The film experience requires total darkness; the viewer must not be distracted from the bright rectangle from which huge shapes impinge on him."²

Liana Schmidt draws on 1960s and 1970s film and advertising as inspiration for her video installations, *Magic Idea 01* and *Arrangement*. Schmidt's visual language integrates the philosophy of using special effects

and props from a pre-CGI era. She does this as a way of employing a self-reflexive DIY approach- "what works". Schmidt is specifically fascinated by creating film sets and special effects using the most analog materials possible. In *Magic Idea 01*, a black projector rests on a black platform, projecting a video onto a velvet black box. As fog pours onto the screen, the contour of a rectangle is revealed. Here, fog is used as a sculptural material, serving as a way to reveal another layer of imagery. Schmidt's work plays with the semiotics of advertising; by working with shapes instead of products, the artist parodies tropes of desire. With *Magic idea 01*, the only relationship to desire is its artifice. With *Arrangement*, two pots of flowers rotate while their shadows prominently remain stagnant. Here, the artist once again plays with low-budget and outdated special effects, poking fun at floundered attempts of illusion.

"The viewer 'forgets' where or who he is and is offended by stray light, street or audience noises which destroy the anticipated, accepted illusion."³

Cotey Pope and Maddy Mathews are inspired by naïve theatrical set design,



Liana Schmidt, *Magic Idea 01* (detail)



Liana Schmidt, *Magic Idea 01*



Liana Schmidt, *Arrangement*



Maddy Mathews and Cotey Pope, *Kitchen Set*



Maddy Mathews and Cotey Pope, *Kitchen Set*

children's television programs and their mutual upbringings as child actors. Their installation, *Kitchen Set*, is a bright, cartoonish landscape, inviting viewers to role-play their favourite animated sitcom. For the work, cheaply-purchased materials are used to create and represent objects as opposed to using the actual objects themselves. The work invites a 'meta' suspension-of-disbelief for viewers, playing on how set design attempts and often fails to represent reality. The artists' work references performance and the stage, but also parodies the fabrication of representing reality in film. *Kitchen Set* is disposable in its temporal nature; meant to be constructed quickly, used for a brief amount of time and then destroyed. In film-making, the set is rarely preserved, or displayed as the main event. Often, set design's failed attempts at reality are mitigated by actors, set decoration, lighting and other traditional elements of set design. Here, this failure is highlighted and perhaps even celebrated for its tackiness.

"The many mysteries of film begin at this moment; the acceptance of a flat surface as three-dimensional, of sudden action-, scale or set-changes as ordinary, of a border delimiting this fraudulent universe as normal, of black- and-white as reality. The spectator...experiences no shock at finding a world in which depth perception has been altered, sizes and distances flattened and the sky is the same color as the human face."⁴

James Knott's installation/ performance, *Interrogation (Waiting Room)*, is about the compartmentalization of mental health. The viewer sits in a chair at a table while a

receptionist (Knott), armed with a blank writing pad, computer and four pairs of reading glasses, 'helps' them on the other side of the table. Behind the receptionist is a series of staccato projections of film and Abstract Expressionist paintings from artists Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Music bleeps into the scene as Knott accosts the viewer for not having filled out the required form. Paranoia emerges on set; one receptionist appears to be three. In what might ordinarily be a mundane scene, the artist interjects discomfort onto the viewer through visual and sonic cues. This erraticism causes the viewer to be unclear whether or not the receptionist actually said those things, or anything at all. The artist intends for the viewer to question their own reliability. No matter how the viewer responds, Knott remains evasive and increasingly hostile. The supposed doctor's appointment is a failure.

Knott's *Interrogation (Waiting Room)* serves as a bouncing off point to reflect on the reductive realities of the institutionalization of mental health. By observing the limits of the structures that are supposed to help people, whether they are through pop culture or Western medicine, the compartments between doctors, receptionist, patient, pop culture and lived experience inevitably bleed into one another. *Interrogation (Waiting Room)* explores how this can lead to fragmented experiences that leave an individual feeling as though it is them against the world. For Knott, their piece is their way of explaining to the viewer how they viscerally explore mental states.

"Removed from the real world, isolated



James Knott, *Interrogation (Waiting Room)*



James Knott, *Interrogation (Waiting Room)*

even from fellow-viewers, the spectator falls to dream and reverie in the womb-like darkness of the theatre. Flooded by images, his unconscious is freed from customary constraints and his rational faculties are inhibited.”⁵

Ray Dark’s soundtrack, entitled *Installation as a Subversive Art*, consists of short electronic pieces mixed together in sequence, like a mixtape of computer-generated minimalist music combined with musique concrète, an experimental technique of musical composition using recorded sounds as raw material.⁶ Forty-minutes long, the piece is punctuated by uncontextualized one-note excerpts of familiar dance hits. By alternating different instruments and effects, each piece mutates into a new texture, as if the computer creating the music was actively dreaming, going over different memories, historical entries, creating new connections, insights and eventually moving on.

Installation as a Subversive Art (the soundtrack) falls into two main themes: “hi-NRG accidental copy-paste” and “relaxing psychedelic.”⁷ The former aims to be simultaneously unsettling, frustrating and humorous. Used for this theme are some of the most common, well-known electronic sounds — gated reverb snares, deep sub basses and rhythmic arpeggios — the ones the artist used to dance to and hear on the radio. Here, those familiar elements are repeated, rearranged and misplaced, a bit as if the emojis, buttons, or other common UI elements of Smartphone apps were cut and pasted into a glitchy, pixelated reproduction of one’s vacation pictures by a maniacal, dreaming

CPU. The latter aims to be more soothing and trance-like, creating long pauses. Bright pink cassettes in Walkmans invite the listener to roam around the exhibition, ingesting all of the artworks. In this way, Ray Dark’s piece aspires to ultimately bring the viewer to pay attention to the moving images to their surroundings.

“Thus, during half the time spent at the movies, the viewer sees no picture at all; and at no time is there any movement. Without the viewer’s physiological and psychological complicity, the cinema could not exist.”⁸

Both film set design and installation art are dependent on suspension-of-disbelief. Each of the artists revel in the failed attempts at manufactured illusions. With Schmidt’s work, the viewer is meant to understand the parody, yet remain mesmerized by the aesthetic appeal. With Pope and Mathew’s work, the viewer is intended to laugh and play in the scene. Knott’s piece is meant to incite a sense of malaise that is, while funny, also jarring. Finally, Ray Dark’s piece uses nostalgia to entice, regardless of cliché. What each of these artists convey from the overlapping mediums in *Installation as a Subversive Art* is that illusion and the missteps behind them are often what can create the most enticing alchemy for the viewer.

Katie Kotler

NOTES

1 Vogel, Amos. *Film as a subversive art*. London: CT Editions, 2006, 10. **2** *ibid.* **3** Vogel, 11. **4** *ibid.* **5** Vogel, 6. **6** “Musique concrète.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. December 05, 2007. Accessed November 03, 2017. **7** Conversation with the artist, October 17, 2017. **8** Vogel, 12.



Ray Dark, *Installation as a Subversive Art*



Ray Dark, *Installation as a Subversive Art*

FOR US, BY US

CURATED BY GENEVIÈVE WALLEN

Andre Baynes, Iwrds duniam & Aemilius Milo, Dana Prieto with Chandra Maracle, Rowan Red Sky, Sheila Sampath

January 12th – February 10th, 2018

Two summers ago, I had a visceral desire to not only access more green spaces on a daily basis, but to also cultivate the land-planting my feet in the dirt. I needed to feel grounded in my environment, to feel the soil underneath the pavement- and so I moved into an apartment with a backyard. Gardening allows me to tap into different kinds of self and communal care, and to reconnect with ways of knowing that are deeply buried. Working on this small plot of land nurtures me and gives me hope for a brighter future, one where we are granted more agency.

When equating food and liberation, I see the will and the means to define our own food systems. The exhibition *For Us, By Us* stems from a wish to contemplate decolonial practices via the ways in which we produce, consume and share goods. Each artist and designer who is part of this exhibition was already bridging art and design with decolonial practices and is curious about medicinal plants, gardening and/or food culture. While creating their works - Andre Baynes, Dana Prieto, Chandra Maracle, Iwrdrx duniam, Aemilius Milo, Rowan Red Sky, and Sheila Sampath- were asked to think about where food, agriculture, and decolonial practices collide in accordance to their respective positionalities and geographical contexts.

As the body of works evolved, the following

themes strengthened; plants and food are used as access points to re-imagine reciprocal relationships, cooking as medicine, and cultural sustainability through agriculture.

Interested in biomimetic and speculative designs as well as afrofuturism, Andre Baynes is developing prototypes for urban gardening. For Baynes, growing food at home symbolizes sovereignty, which ultimately equals self-sufficiency. Constantly reminded of our reliance on a flawed food system, the young designer discussed how perversely colonial dynamics are still operating in Canada's agricultural market. He says, "looking specifically at the Island my parents are from, St-Vincent, where their entire economy [when it was colonized] was built on slave labour feeding Western Europe and North America with tropical goods; and instead now Caribbean labourers feed systems such as the Canadian agricultural industry."¹ Since the late 1960s, Canada has been hiring temporary workers from the Caribbean and couple of years later, from Mexico through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SWAP), which turned 50 in 2016. Due to overwhelming factors such as massive rural exodus, drastic cuts in Federal aid for farmers after the Second World War, and international competition, farmers have turned to programs like SWAP and the Low



Andre Baynes



Andre Baynes (detail)

Skilled Workers program as a means of accessing an infinitely replenished pool of employees.² At the end of the harvest season, this system grants more flexibility to the employers as temporary foreign workers do not have the same rights as citizens. Migrant workers are paid lower wages, risk deportation and have no healthcare support; the economy of Ontario region is partly built on modern slavery. After looking into modes of democratizing knowledge and functioning outside of a broken agricultural market, Baynes has developed a prototype of a low-energy growing pod made with affordable materials. This piece of engineering can replicate the same environment conditions of an extracted piece of land. Monitoring humidity, light, and water levels, this small machine is currently growing basil; there is, however, potential for this design to grow in size. Imagining the impact a device like this one can have in sustaining year-long growing cycles is incredible.

In conversation with Baynes' work, Rowan Red Sky highlights the devastating consequences of the continuous colonial laws on the environment. Sky's mural, *Spirit of the Forest* (2018), demonstrates the intricacy between ancestral gardening methods, bodily nourishment as revered acts that simultaneously feed the soul. This installation is a continuation of previous works underlining the sacredness of land and water. As Sky articulates, "I believe land is the richest thing a person or a community can control, because control of land creates food independence from almost nothing. From literal dirt."³ Sky has hybridized traditional Oneida

symbols with pop culture motifs, illustrating their commitment to the right to food, sharing access to resources, and establishing reciprocal relationships with all organisms and spirits. The composition in *Spirit of the Forest* hints to past and present experiences within the natural world, tying their personal growth to newly acquired knowledge. The mural also conveys an active process of reviving practices and know-how that have been interrupted with colonization and displacement of Indigenous nations. The improper use of natural resources and asymmetric relationship with the land that came with the occupation of Turtle Island has deep repercussions on preserving the health of all beings and natural course of caring for this land. In showing the interconnectedness between spirit, body, and land, each segment of the mural becomes a guideline in restoring traditions that have been lost, thereby ensuring a prosper future for Indigenous peoples and the guest on the Dish With One Spoon territory. Looking at the hand planting beans, corn, and squash (the three sisters) indicates a deep understanding of the possibilities that lie within the intricate ecological system of the Great Lakes area. The cartoonish ghost figures appear to be healers ensuring the transition between death and what is to come, echoing a necessary shift from colonial, capitalist systems of extraction to sustainable practices. Tending to the bleak landscape, these spirits work in tandem with the smoke billowing from a Haudenosaunee long house ensuring the continuation of agricultural knowledge transmission.



Rowan Red Sky, *Spirit of the Forest*



Rowan Red Sky, *Spirit of the Forest*





Dana Prieto with Chandra Maracle, *Kernel Footsteps* (detail)





Dana Prieto with Chandra Maracle, *Kernel Footsteps*



Dana Prieto with Chandra Maracle, *Kernel Footsteps* (detail)

Kernel Footsteps (2018) is a multi-textured installation by Dana Prieto and Chandra Maracle. Through working with distinct edible and medicinal plants, Prieto and Maracle reflect on the potential of re-imagining and enacting Indigenous-settler reciprocal relationships. Maracle comments on the collaborative nature of the project as, “being an indication of a larger relationship initiated at contact and that is an ongoing process. We both come with our worldviews and ways of knowing, and how things should be done. If you respect the person, you have to compromise and come to an agreement.”⁴ Heavy stacks of braided blue and white corn hang along a carefully painted blue (with homemade purple corn ink) motif suggesting a Two Row Wampum design. Within the blue-ish lines, we can find delicately aligned rows of threaded corn kernels and dried plantain bunches. These threads refer to Haudenosaunee Invitation Wampums, originally composed of a stringed arrangement of shell or glass beads, are offered to mark a contractual relationship during important ceremonies uniting two entities. Prieto and Maracle’s invitations symbolize the same code of conduct as observed by the Haudenosaunee culture consolidating the respect of the rights and responsibilities endorsed by a particular agreement. The choice of material wasn’t a coincidence. Prieto explains that plantain represents a medicinal support system for throat infections and that it is a powerful medicine to take when encountering arduous or splintering subjects to discuss and communicate with others. Moreover, she mentions that the plant, often growing in tight bare spaces

and bringing nutrients to the soil, has been naturalized anywhere it happens to grow, and has been described by Robin Kimmerer as an “immigrant plant teacher”, by pledging Indigenous laws of reciprocity.⁵ As for Maracle, Alex Jacobs’ poem, *The Law Is In The Seed*, has stayed with her for the last twenty years and has shaped her relationship with Haudenosaunee white corn. This important piece of writing highlights the physical and metaphysical place that this staple ingredient and power-food holds in terms of maintaining cultural sustainability for many Indigenous nations. Yet, rather than trying to cook up an all encompassing recipe for decolonization and risk flattening the complexity of settler-Indigenous relations, their plant offerings intentionally encourage the viewers to participate in the piece. By taking with them a postcard, like the invitation Wampum, they are called to observe and respect the laws of the Dish With One Spoon Treaty.

Also using *llantén* (in English, Broadleaf Plantain), *lwrd*s duniam & Aemilius Milo seek to bridge their knowledge of the land, stories of migration, and histories of colonial encounters between Chinchaysuyo (territory now known as Peru) and Tkaronto. The two-part project, entitled *Palo Santo Con Llantén* (2018), is comprised of a number of sculptural elements and cooking performance. The sculpture’s base, made of steel wire mesh, is used as a vessel to hold loose dried plantain leaves. A few *llantén* bundles sit on a shelf to the left of the sculpture, along with pieces of *Palo Santo*, a clay rendition of a *llantén* leaf and dried seed pods. Clay

replicas of plantain seeds pods sit below on the floor on a bed of more llantén bundles. Easily overlooked, this medicinal and edible plant originates from Europe and Northern/Central Asia, but is also found in the Americas, hence the name, “white-man’s foot.”⁶ Palo Santo and llantén are used in this exhibition context as cleansing materials with the capacity to clear out physical and spiritual blockages. Primarily used by Indigenous communities across the Americas as well as herbalists, one can say that these items may be used with the intention of detoxifying from intergenerational trauma. duniam and Milo agree on the idea that, “llantén is highly symbolic of our experiences with displacement, migration, and cultural hybridity. For us, this plant exemplifies resistance, in using it we’re trying to remember inherited knowledges and connections.”⁷ Although many communities are still foraging llantén, the artists commented on the fraction of knowledge in how the plant can be consumed, which is consequential to scientific and capitalistic division of value. duniam notes that, “llantén has been colonially designated a weed, yet this plant is highly regarded for its healing properties. Part of living decolonially requires us to work at shifting our beliefs about, and our interactions with non-human beings, in order to recognize that everything around us has value.”⁸ Plantain leaves can help with blood disorders, arthritis, skin conditions, and it contains many rich nutrients such as magnesium and zinc. It can be used fresh, blanched, or dried; applied directly to small wounds or insect bites, used for teas, tinctures, soups, stews, salads, and more. On Saturday February 10th, 2018, Milo and

Duniam cooked a dish that includes broad-leaf plantain leaves, shared about the plant, and reimagined ancestral applications.

Similarly to Milo and duniam, Sheila Sampath’s video series, *Vata* (2018), focuses reconnecting with ancestral knowledge and decolonizing one’s body through traditional medicine. Mainly capturing her hands, the forty minutes video-performance features four parts, in each of which Sampath is featured creating the recipe for the first time. Through the captions, the viewer can sense the uncertainty in the gestures and the doubts she encounters throughout the process. In the first segment she is attempting to make clarified butter, ghee, which is an integral part of all of her mother’s cooking and also serves as a restorative massage ointment for hair and skin. The artist has seen her mother making ghee from scratch but has never been shown how to do it herself. The second part of *Vata* documents the artist’s journey in preparing Ayurvedic Medicine.⁹ The artist blends Ashwagandha and Shatavari with honey and turmeric. Ashwagandha is beneficial in managing stress while regulating your cholesterol and sugar levels. Shatavari, also known as asparagus roots, is a reproductive tonic. The third segment of the video records the artist mixing dates, saffron, and ghee. As someone who has been dealing with health problems for the past couple of years, Sampath’s been dedicated to learning ancestral healing traditions that are beneficial to her constitution. The artist’s mother is a gatekeeper of a vast array of medicinal and culinary expertise that she consciously kept from the



Iwrds duniam & Aemilius Milo, *Palo Santo Con Llantén*



Iwrds duniam & Aemilius Milo, *Palo Santo Con Llantén*

artist. Sampath comments, “My mother’s internalized colonization framed these practices as unscientific or “non-sense”. I’ve had to re-learn these practices through friends, South- Asian healers, and the Internet. There is uncertainty and doubt in the practice of making, but my body feels at home.”¹⁰

The fourth segment of *Vata* showcases the artist ingesting the medicine with milk, eating the dates, and finishing with a hand massage. *For Us By Us* is a cross-disciplinary exhibition featuring the works of emerging artists and designers, exploring ideas of decolonial and alternative futures through food. Each artist and designer examines strategies for communal empowerment while engaging with the conditions within which food is grown, produced, consumed and shared. Looking at their ancestral knowledge, positionality and geographical context, the selected practitioners propose to reconsider and deepen our (the viewers) relationship with consumed goods. More specifically, in the context of this exhibition, food becomes an access point to reimagine settler and Indigenous relationships, food as medicine, embodied decolonial practices, emancipation and equitable food systems.

Geneviève Wallen

This exhibition was generously supported by Toronto Arts Council.

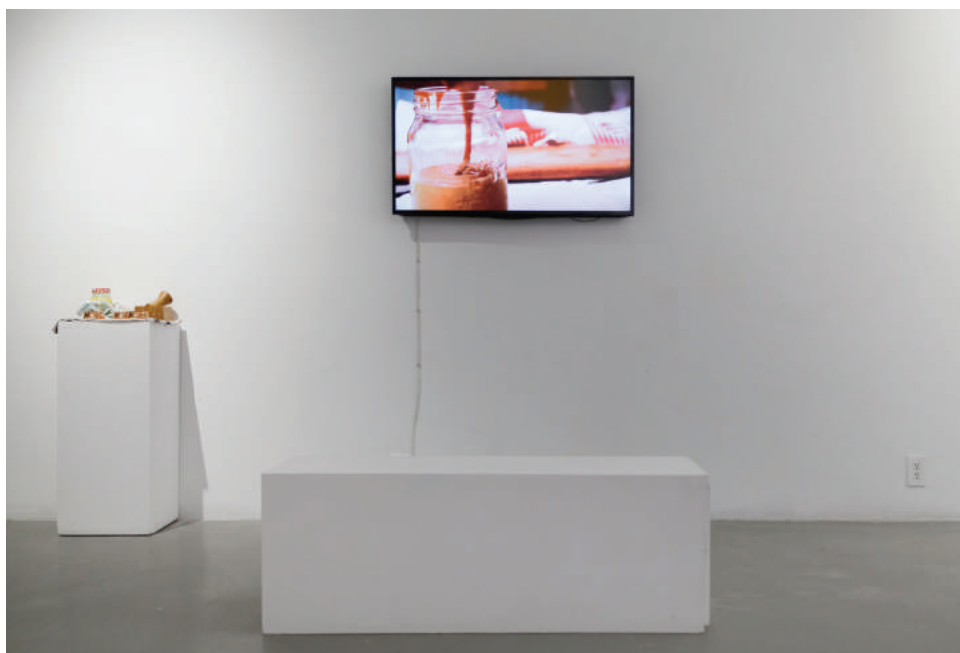
A special thank you to the artists for your valuable input in the formulation of this essay. I am humbled by your generosity in sharing knowledge with me.

NOTES

- 1** Andre Baynes (artist) in discussion with the author, October, 2017. **2** For more in depth details about the works conditions of migrant workers, please visit this website : www.harvestingfreedom.org **3** Rowan Red Silky, Instagram statement dated from September 7, 2017. This excerpt has been revised and approved by the artist. **4** Chandra Maracle (artist) in discussion with the author, January 2018. All citations were taken from recorded sessions in Toronto. This excerpt has been revised and approved by the artist. **5** Dana Prieto (artist) in discussion with the author, December 2017 and January 2018. All citations were taken from recorded sessions in Toronto. This excerpt has been revised and approved by the artist. **6** CAB International. <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/41814> **7** Iwrds Duniam and Aemilius Milo (artists) in discussion with the author, January 2018. All citations were taken from recorded sessions in Toronto. This excerpt has been revised and approved by the artist. **8** *ibid* **9** Ayurvedic Medicine is one of the world’s oldest medicinal systems. It originated in India more than 3,000 years ago, and remains one of the country’s traditional health care system. <https://ncch.nih.gov/health/ayurveda/introduction.htm> **10** Sheila Sampath (artist) in discussion with the author, December 2017 and January 2018. All citations were taken from recorded sessions in Toronto. This excerpt has been revised and approved by the artist.



Sheila Sampath, *Vata*



Sheila Sampath, *Vata*

SANCTUARY INTER/RUPTED

CURATED BY JESSICA KIRK AND MITRA FAKHRASHRAFI

Kaiatanoron Dumoulin Bush with Ryan Rice, Amani Bin Shikhan with Hamda Warsame, sharine taylor, Samira Warsame and Noor Khan,

February 23rd – March 24th, 2018

In 2013, the Toronto City Council passed a motion making Toronto the first “sanctuary city” in Canada. “Sanctuary cities” seek to ensure that all residents access essential social services without regard to “legal” status.¹ Yet in 2015, a press release by No One Is Illegal revealed that through carding, Toronto Police are continuously colluding with the Canadian Border Services Agency² and policing the city. Way Past Kennedy Road’s exhibition *Sanctuary Inter/rupted*, interrogates the possibilities and contradictions of a “sanctuary city” in the context of what we know to be true: that the state always already treats non-white bodies as “illegal”, “whether they possess documents or not.”³ Through photography, sound, mixed media and video installations, the artists consider the complex dynamics that are tied to ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ identities, extending a conversation on understandings of belonging/(un)belonging in Toronto. Each artist’s work is accompanied by a song or soundbite uniquely chosen by them, presenting audiovisual inquiry into questions related to diaspora, migration, colonialism and the histories/futures of racial justice.

Ayesha Siddiqi speaks to the ways that, “every border implies the violence of its maintenance.”⁴ We are interested in extending this understanding in the context

of borderlands, highlighting the ways in which every border also implies the violence of its formation. Through poetry and prose, Gloria Anzaldua’s *La Frontera/Borderlands* describes the border as a dividing line where the “prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”⁵ This deeply spatialized understanding of borders is the starting point from which we trace the patterned and produced nature of illegalizations as “state violence inscribed in landscape”⁶ and mapped onto the body. It is this mapping/(un)mapping that we are interested in addressing, as we highlight the interplay of belonging/(un)belonging and status/statusless-ness in Toronto, particularly in the context of white settler colonial imaginaries that continue to dominate the mainstream.

Kaiatanoron Dumoulin Bush and Ryan Rice’s *Tkaronto vs. Akwe:kon* t-shirt is the Mohawk translation of “Toronto vs. Everyone” a slogan popularized by t-shirts designed and sold by clothing brand Peace Collective. Through the reappropriation and Indigenization of the phrase and design, the artists bring Indigenous language and histories to the forefront, encouraging the viewer to learn the literal meaning of “Tkaronto vs. Akwe:kon” and in turn challenging nationalized myths of relationships with this land and what it means to be ‘Torontonion.’⁷



Kaiatanoron Dumoulin Bush with Ryan Rice, *Tkaronto vs. Akwe:kon*



Kaiatanoron Dumoulin Bush with Ryan Rice, *Tkaronto vs. Akwe:kon*



sharine taylor, *Portraits of Miss Hillory Hylton*



sharine taylor, *Portraits of Miss Hillory Hylton*

Through a diptych of images, sharine taylor invites us to think about land, diaspora and “navigating institutional forces while on this land.”⁸ Created through the lens of an Afro-Jamaican woman, taylor uses her platform to leverage what sanctuaries and borders mean to her grandmother, Miss Hilory Hylton. In tracing her grandmother and many other Caribbean womens’ migrations to Turtle Island as domestic labourers, taylor chronicles imaginings of Canada as “both the promised land and the land of promises”⁹

Noor Khan’s original film and accompanying digitally manipulated photographs also document her relationship with land, race, gender and health as related to building love and community. The interactive piece invites Muslim-identified audiences to take pictures against the backdrop of 9/11, known and felt deeply as the continuation of violence against generations of Muslims “with and in North America.”¹⁰ Khan is thinking through what it means to be #stillhere, building and caring for each other’s physical and mental well-being, despite and/or because of imperial and colonial violences.

Samira Warsame’s photography series, *A Search for Hooyo*, also looks at what it means to take care of each other in ways no one else would or could. Warsame states that, “as children of Somali refugees, our blackness, Muslim-ness, Somali-ness, and Western identities are blended together, misunderstood, ignored and left out of communities and conversations that we are meant to be a part of.”¹¹ Warsame’s multi-scalar work is accompanied by the “smell of uunsi and the sound of qaraami music,”¹²

extending beyond photographs and taking on physical space. By interweaving experiences of displacement and (un)belongings, she recites a love letter to her Somali sisters of Toronto’s diaspora, appreciating the homes they have found in each other.

Amani Bin Shikhan thinks through the foreignness of an ability to fully conceptualize loss, death and spaces through which refuge is found. In Track 6 of Bin Shikhan’s playlist, Naomi Diaz of Ibeyi says, “My blood, my eyes/My guide, my spine.”¹³ Guided by cultures, structures, people of the African diaspora and their/our livelihood, Bin Shikhan thinks through the intricate landscapes of lateral violence toward Black people and “something about cherishing the moments, people and places that build a life; something about better finales to stalled starts.”¹⁴ Accompanied by cassettes illustrated by Mississauga’s Very Own Hamda Warsame (aka @hamwarz), Bin Shikhan’s playlist reflects “the portable refuge”¹⁵ she has built for herself.

Way Past Kennedy Road is a collective of multidisciplinary emerging artists based in Scarborough and other rejected but resilient corners of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). We build spaces for ourselves both online and offline and use art as a means of resisting the borders, boundaries and (un)belongings that define each of our lives and our works in distinct ways. *Sanctuary Inter/rupted* is a continuation of this work. In the timeless classic “Energy”, rapper Aubrey “Drake” Graham reminds us that he has, “real ones livin’ past Kennedy Road.”¹⁶ While Drake may be referring to taking the 401 east past



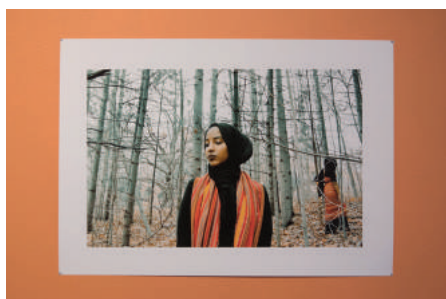
Noor Khan, *East*



Noor Khan, *East*



Noor Khan- before/after, still/here



Samira Warsame, *A Search for Hooyo*



Samira Warsame, *A Search for Hooyo*



Amani Bin Shikhan with Hamda Warsame, *Sanctuary Inter/rupted illustrations*



Amani Bin Shikhan with Hamda Warsame, *Sanctuary Inter/rupted illustrations*



Amani Bin Shikhan with Hamda Warsame, Sanctuary Inter/rupted playlist

Kennedy Road “and exiting at Markham Road in the east end”¹⁷, we are interested in disorienting the idea of any centre¹⁸ and reaffirming the brilliance of discredited communities across the city.

This reaffirmation is also captured in our graphic material, a postcard of a Scarborough plaza in all its full-set-of-stiletto-acrylics nail salon and halal butcher glory. Postcards capture places that are monumental. In playing on a vintage style postcard, Sahar Ullah’s imagery reimagines the monumental, paying tribute to the places (past Kennedy Road) that are monumentally meaningful to our communities¹⁹. By obscuring sanctuary city legislation as related to everyday illegalizations across the city, Sanctuary Interrupted pays tribute to the ways people and places redefine sanctuary. By grounding our conversations in illegalizations and the ways that Black and Indigenous people face distinct forms of violence including, “disproportionate incarceration, susceptibility to police violence, poverty, and targeted child welfare removal”²⁰, we are better equipped to expand the ways racial justice is practiced.

Mitra Fakhrahashraf and Jessica Kirk
of Way Past Kennedy Road

NOTES

- 1** “What is a sanctuary city anyway?” TVO. 2017. **2** “Often Asking, Always Telling: Toronto Police Services and Sanctuary City Policy.” No One Is Illegal. 2015.
- 3** Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987. **4** @AyeshaASiddiqi “every border implies the violence of its maintenance” Twitter, September 2nd 2015. **5** Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987. **6** Walia, Harsha. *Undoing Border Imperialism*. AK Press, 2013. **7** Dumoulin Bush, Kaiatanoron, and Rice, Ryan. *Tkaronto v.s Akwe:kon*. 2017 **8** taylor, sharine. *Miss Hillory Hylton, The First of Her Name*. 2018. **9** Ibid. **10** Khan, Noor. *before/after, still/here*. 2017. **11** Warsame, Samira. *A Search for Hooyo*. 2017 **12** Ibid. **13** Ibeyi. “Waves.” 2017. **14** Bin Shikhan, Amani. *Sanctuary Interrupted Playlist*. 2018. **15** Ibid. **16** Drake. “Energy.” 2015. **17** Drake. “Wu Tang Forever.” 2013. **18** In conversation with Rachel Ngabire, 2017. **19** In conversation with Sefanit Habtemariam and Sahar Ullah, 2018. **20** Maynard, Robyn. *Policing Black Lives*. Fernwood Publishing, 2017.

EXPEDITION: ELSEWHERE

CURATED BY AMANDA LOW & PHILIP OCAMPO

Sonia Beckwith-Cole and Nicole Ji Soo, Dylan Glynn, Amanda Low, Kai Lumbang, Kira Reau.

April 6th – May 5th, 2018

Written Between the Frames as the Screen Becomes a Portal

You are used to the animated worlds that you have seen on the screen, but you have seldomly seen what lies beyond the single channel. So, what of the elsewheres of animation? The road ahead is vast and abundant. Use this field guide as an accompaniment on your journey, and go forth.

1 Traveller, ask yourself: What happens between the keyframes?¹ What of the transitory periods in our own lives? Enter *Tween Place* and see for yourself. Morphed bodies by Nicole Ji Soo hide animations of transforming figures by Sonia Beckwith-Cole. Become an expeditioner as you peer through limbs and tufts of yarn in this childlike landscape. What do you see between the frames? Peek under, over, and backwards. Do not limit yourself to travels where you are only stationary- some of the most interesting worlds require much more action.

2 Beware of the easy ways out; avoid cutting corners. Many cut corners add up into a noticeable lack of effort, when everything is put together. Care for each frame individually, while thinking holistically. Shortcuts on the other hand, are different. It is foolish to put in extra effort when a shortcut can ease your journey. Let this be a caution before you

attempt to climb a mountain, you may discover that it is just a really tall hill.

3 All of the lights turn off, and you, Traveler, are alone with your mind. Before you are reminded of your physical body, Dylan Glynn draws you further into the mental plane. Follow him. His face painted and make-up morphing, his mind conjures sequential masks, and variations of them. *Unmasc/Masc Off* invites you to do the same. Glynn's queer personas remind you that it is time to let go. Time to venture into the vast recesses of the mind. Here your mental terrain is no longer pitch black. Can you feel your imagination blossoming? Let it happen. You will be amazed at what you will find and who you will find.

4 Sometimes, after frame after frame after frame, you enter into a state where time becomes irrelevant. In this trance-like state, your body will work on automatic and the journey is completed much faster. On automatic, your inhibitions begin to fade away too. For some, it is easy to enter into this state. For others, a symphony of white noise is needed as a catalyst.

5 As children, our naivety fuels an ignorant bravery. But as adults, we know the dangers of what lurks behind the dark. Kira Reau asks you to become brave again, so



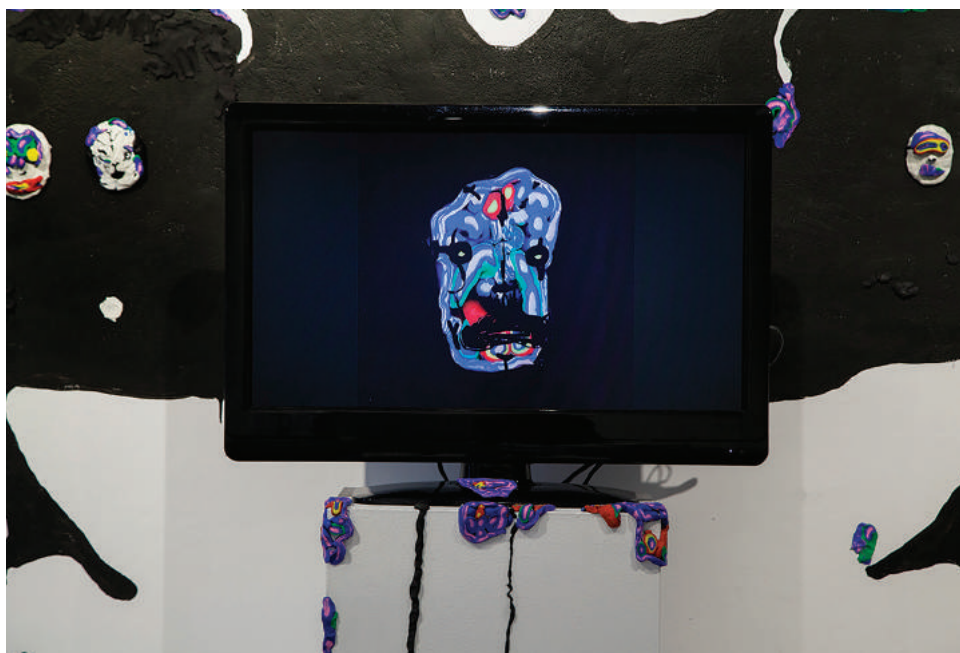
Sonia Beckwith-Cole and Nicole Ji Soo, *Tween Place*



Sonia Beckwith-Cole and Nicole Ji Soo, *Tween Place* (detail)



Dylan Glynn, *Unmasc/Masc Off*



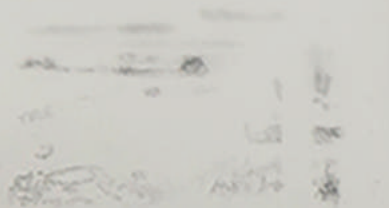
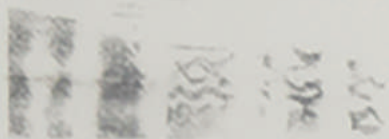
Dylan Glynn, *Unmasc/Masc Off* (detail)



Kira Reau, *Into the Depths*



Kira Reau, *Into the Depths*



Kai Lumbang, Mimingat (detail)





(TO THE TUNE OF
"ENDLESS SUMMER")



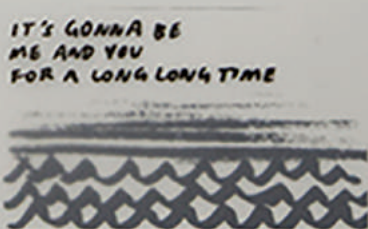
(COAST)



WHAT'S DONE
IS DONE



IT'S GONNA BE
ME AND YOU
FOR A LONG LONG TIME





Kai Lumbang, *Mimingat*



Kai Lumbang, *Mimingat* (detail)

that when you see an abyss, you will peer into the dark with curiosity- like an astronaut exploring the deep void of space, or the deep waters of the ocean. In *Into the Depths*, a single light bulb glows invitingly, beckoning you to come closer and closer. Will you float close enough to see the anglerfish appear? Or will you watch from afar from the realms of safety? I urge you to dive in, and to remember the awe and curiosity that you had as a child.

6 Sometimes you will feel like you have trekked a million miles but have made no progress. You only have so much life force to give, so all actions you take must be considered. Exhaustion is to be expected- this is hard work, after all. If you wander too far and lose steam, do not panic. Fatigue is part of the process, so you must occasionally rest. Be sure to take breaks, drink water and stretch. Wear a warm sweater- preferably over layers so that you can remove it should the temperature become too warm.

7 How is your mind, as you stray so far away from home? Lay out the map of your personal cartography. Pinpoint your familiars. Allow yourself to long for home (or homes, in any way that you wish to define it). It is not the same is it? Your emotions overwhelm, and transform these spaces into a singular place. For reference, see *Mimingat* by Kai Lumbang. Moments of personal experience are layered instead of sequenced. Moments amalgamate. Here, the landscape is nostalgic, and quiet. Sift through the frames of home as they weave your narrative together. Stay here, explore your altered past for as long as you need,

Wanderer, and resume your travels whenever you are ready.

8 This portal that you have opened... from out here it looks just the same but also completely new. This world that you have woven together, it is reminiscent of real life but is also entirely different. The way you observe the world around you through the movements and emotions of others and contextualize it in the creation of new worlds is what makes you an empath. Do you think of the awe of others often when creating your universes? Does it inform your own awe? Real life, reinterpreted, altered through your observations of the real. Your eye is thorough and keen.

9 Voyager, I suggest that you blink; treat this moment as a snapshot. Look down, back up and behind. You have just discovered the timeline, an axis on a physical plane. Now, shoot your head upward and think of a 'Beyond.' The ubiquity of the internet is your way in, so start here: *ORIGINOFTHETHE.NET*. Desktop browser. A succession of code launches you into cyberspace. Amanda Low, as sole Game-maker, outlines linear internet history, and presents it as artifact: Through Hyperlinks, gifs, and jpegs, you can maintain and have free reign over the digiscape. Are you happy that you sought it out? Do you think that you would have noticed that it was all around you if you didn't seek it out? The history of the internet is waiting for you to explore. Now, go!

10 I see that you are confined to your workspace. Animator, you are kind but tired, and your eyes? Focused, but worn. The toggle of the keys, the thousands of frames. The days,



Amanda Low, *ORIGINOFTH.NET*



Amanda Low, *ORIGINOFTH.NET* (detail)

the hours, the minutes, the seconds. The frames per second. Persist, endure. Never let yourself be underestimated. For tenacity is essential to well equipping one for the adventures that await. Your capabilities far exceed the stereotypes and reputation that this medium has set unwillingly upon you.

These worlds, these universes; all that you have seen thus far is only the beginning. Bounteous are the unknowns that lie even further ahead, and equipped you are for the journey.

Welcome, Expeditioner.

Amanda Low & Philip Ocampo

This exhibition was presented in partnership with Images Festival and supported by the Ontario Arts Council.

NOTES

1 In animation, a keyframe is a drawing that defines the starting and ending points of any smooth transition.



Amanda Low, *ORIGINOFTH.NET* (detail)

VEINS OF EXISTENCE: BEYOND SURVIVAL

CURATED BY SEAN SANDUSKY

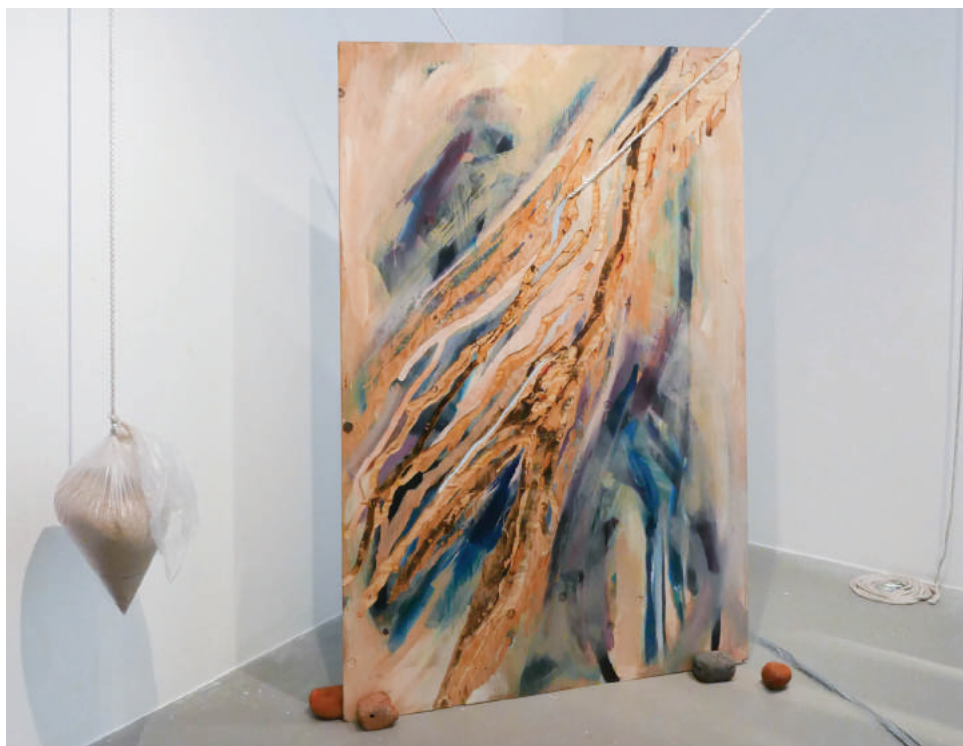
Wil Brask and Natalie King, Justus Buenaflor, Kevin Holliday,
Gabrielle Leighton, and Rowan Red Sky

June 29th – July 28th 2018

While looking at histories of LGBTQIA+ struggle and resistance one can observe long and divergent timelines influenced by geographical and generational contexts. Despite the disparity of lived experiences, there are common threads on which one can reflect. The battle for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals in securing legislative protection and public legitimacy is a precarious journey. Fundamental rights have been haphazardly given and taken away depending on socio-political climates, especially when political majority shifts occur-North American democracy being a great example of this phenomenon. Profoundly affected by legislative instability and straddling the line of self-acceptance and existence, dissociative feelings become a part of the queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals. This order unwillingly forces individuals into existing in a standardized and binary system, which ultimately hurts and simplifies communities living more complex experiences, each with layered political views and personal intersections. What's interesting about the political shifts of the past three to four decades is that currently, more than ever, there is a need for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming folk to be represented as more than just bodies. *Veins of Existence:*

Beyond Survival includes queer, trans, and gender non-conforming artists representing their experience and what community has meant to them. Coming from vastly different backgrounds and artistic approaches, the selected works also extend beyond their just their physicality. Themes in these works range from topics of humour, shame, representation, ego, geographical location, heritage, and celebration. The elemental differences in each work help, foster a deep and inward look at the theology and evolution of LGBTQIA+ culture departing from the discussions that are currently prominent.

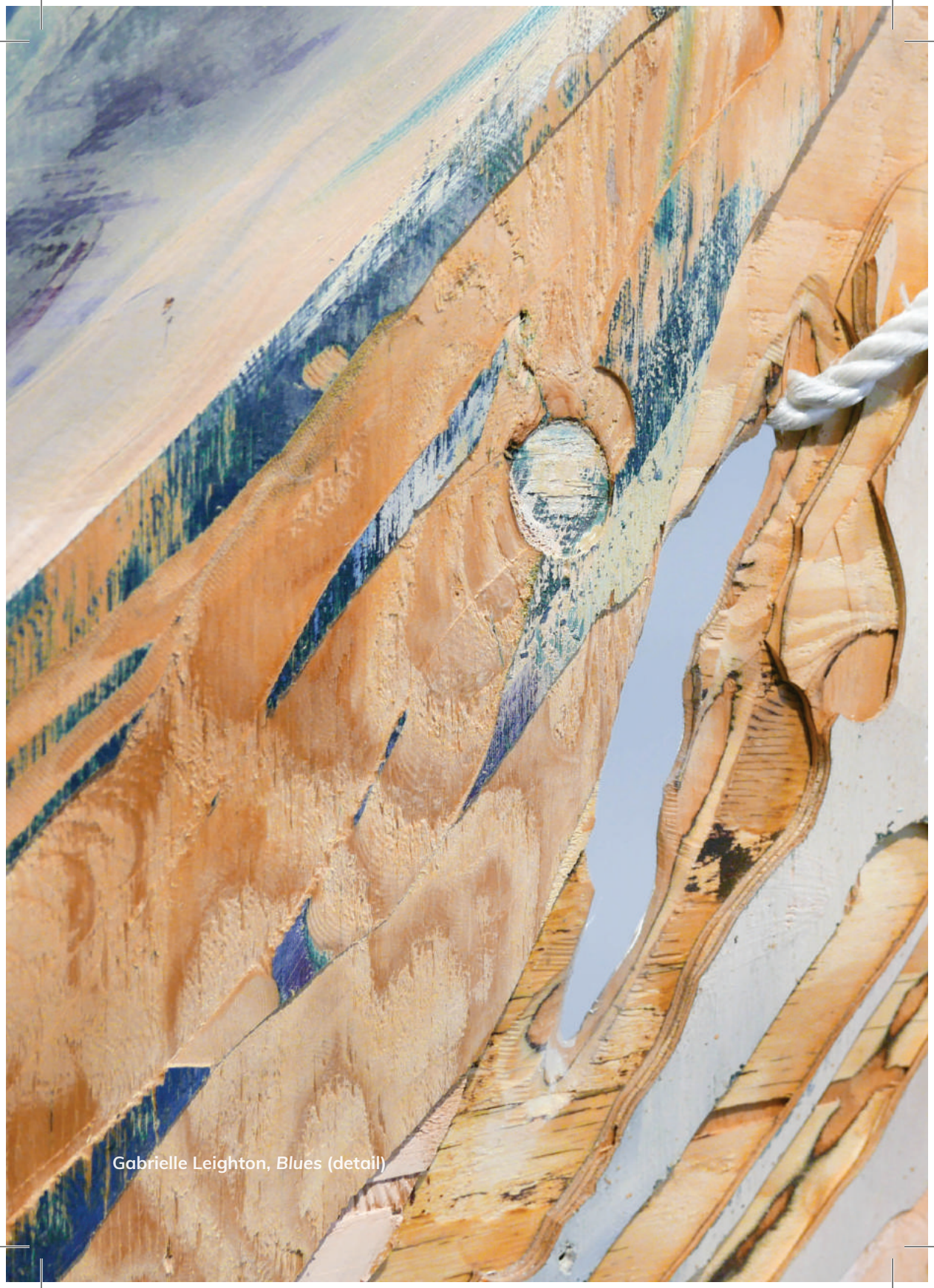
In her work, *Blues*, Gabrielle Leighton uses sculptural painting methods on a wooden panel. The canvas is gashed with an axe representing the emotional wounds Leighton carries as a result of growing up queer in the small, right-wing community of Lincoln, Nebraska. Leighton expresses the challenges of coming out in a less accepting political and social atmosphere through layers of heavy abstractions carved into the plywood. The marks come together as branches of a tree above a background of faint smudged blue and purple shades. Through this imagery, she instills in the material her own queer history like the rings of a tree stump, documenting the time spent existing as openly queer while also displaying the



Gabrielle Leighton, *Blues*



Gabrielle Leighton, *Blues* (detail)

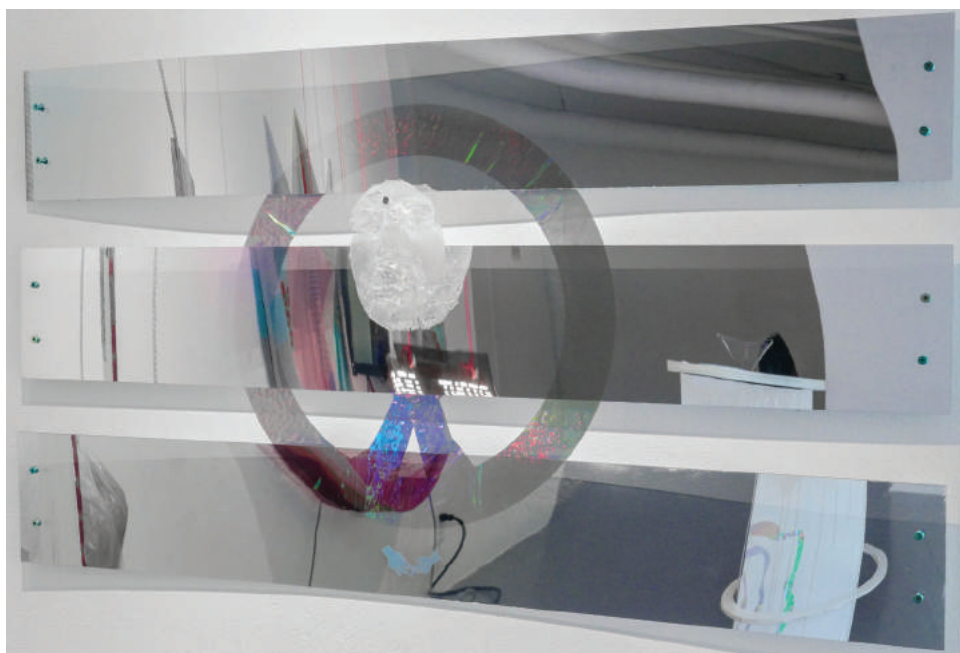


Gabrielle Leighton, *Blues* (detail)





Justus Buenaflor, *undoing the shame to become a better gay* (detail)



Justus Buenaflor, *undoing the shame to become a better gay* (detail)

vulnerability of her personal journey. The work is suspended off the ground, and a three dimensional element is added by attaching a bag of the sawdust generated from the plywood, physically embodying the grinding of both the physicality the wood, and the emotional labour that it represents.

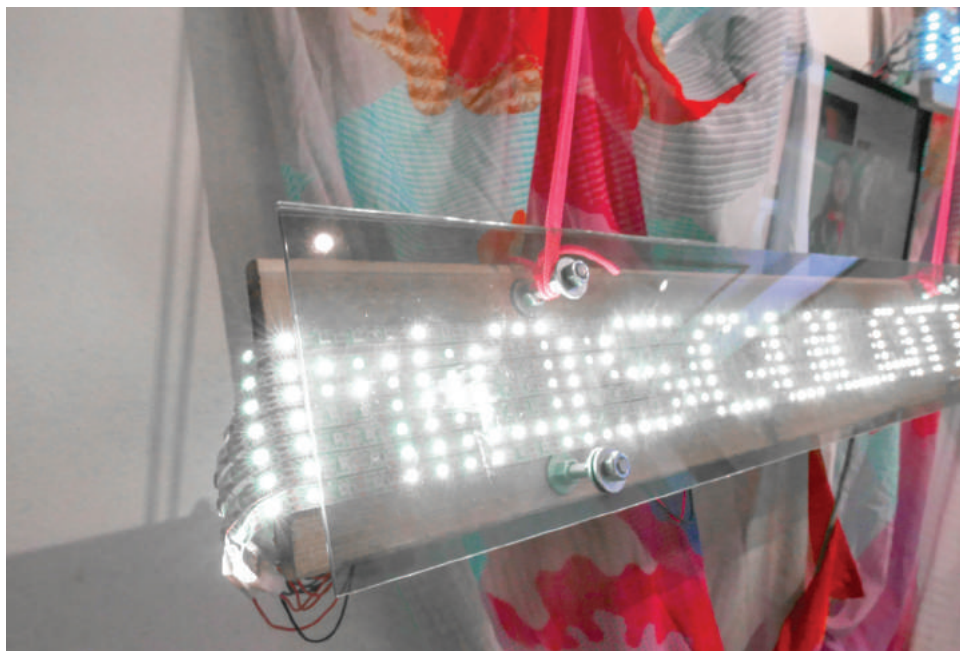
Justus Buenaflor's work, *undoing the shame to become a better gay*, consists of a sculpture and a digital illustration that delve into the conflicts of self-acceptance and homosexual intimacy merging with shame and hindered self-perception. Materially, Buenaflor works with different methods of physical fabrication and digital animation to create a mini installation that inhabits its own universe while reflecting on lived anxieties. The pieces that make up the work include a hand-made plinth adorned by four rubber silicone faces of Buenaflor, with plaster hands reaching out, and a resin pyramid projecting a digital illustration of his face distorted offering both what one can see about someone's physicality, as well as an entry point to the inner turmoil and shame that one may carry.

With Kevin Holliday's work, *Day2Day*, the elements of performativity and sculpture come together to comment on the absurdity of commodifying oneself through the internet and outlets like YouTube vlogging. As a multi-racial, queer and gender non-conforming artist, Holliday comments on the erasure of their communities in a capitalist digital market. By suspending LED screens projecting queer theory texts onto fabric suspended from the ceiling, as well presenting a 'day in the life'-esque YouTube

vlog on a tv screen. Holliday challenges this erasure while lampooning the culture that erases and dually exploits LGBTQIA+ and racialized people.

Rowan Red Sky's *Fire Keeper in The Moon Lodge*, reflects on their lived experience as a two-spirit-identified person of Onyota'a:ka ancestry through a mural that connects the ideas of spirit, body, and land. With their mural Rowan illustrates a commentary on social taboos of women taking on men's roles and stepping outside gendered assignments in some Indigenous communities. The artist's experiences with women's moon ceremonies and participating while menstruating, known as moontime and "sitting in the moon lodge," coupled with a desire to masculinize their community role, lead them to define a third gender space for themselves when attending moon ceremony. Using imagery from lived experiences, Sky challenges that one's biology defines their gender as well the roles that they may play within their respective communities.

Natalie King and Wil Brask's collaborative mural, *do not go forward without my spoken permission*, is an immersive wall piece showcasing the complexities of queer identities through multiple representations, therefore giving visibility to their own individual intersections. Natalie King is an Anishinaabe queer artist that works primarily in mixed-media and painting based work representing queer bodies in an illuminating way. Conversationally, Wil Brask identifies as a disabled queer trans femme artist, and their practice explores how visual language can change perceptions of gender



Kevin Holliday, *Day2Day* (detail)



Kevin Holliday, *Day2Day*



Rowan Red Sky, *Fire Keeper in The Moon Lodge*



Rowan Red Sky, *Fire Keeper in The Moon Lodge*



Natalie King and Wil Brask, *do not go forward without my spoken permission* (detail)



Natalie King and Wil Brask, *do not go forward without my spoken permission*

and disability. Combining their distinctive representational styles of queer, trans, and femme bodies; they created lively large-scale versions of their communities collaged together on the gallery wall. The title of this installation originates from Kai Cheng Thom's novel *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars*, a semi-autobiographical fantastical memoir about the writer's experience of being a trans femme identified woman.¹ The mural mirrors Thom's novel themes via King and Brask's ability to transcend the magical aspects in representing bodies that face and challenge the troubles of queer, trans, and gender non-conforming realities.

With the stories and issues that are erased from mainstream society, much becomes shut out of extremely important conversations about how gigantic and diverse the queer community truly is. This show illuminates the numerous conversations and intersections in the community, showing that

through complexity there is an embrace of the wealth of resources that resonates with the diversity of its members. The selected artworks invite the audience to read each one of them in a different light. The diversity of experiences is a unifying factor, tying the exhibition together. Although surviving I can present as the only embodied option among the queer community, it is important to acknowledge the strength and knowledge that can open to evolve and create more room to be united in understanding, solidarity, and empathy.

Sean Sandusky

This exhibition was generously supported by Ontario Arts Council.

NOTES

¹ Thom, Kai Cheng. *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars: A Dangerous Trans Girls Confabulous Memoir*. Montréal, QC: Metonymy Press, 2017.



Natalie King and Wil Brask, *do not go forward without my spoken permission*



window

**The window space looks out
onto Lansdowne Ave and is
visible 24 hours a day.**

FUWA FUWA: JOIE DE VIVRE

Allison Burda and Cameron Gee

July 28th – August 26th, 2017

When you look at *Fuwa Fuwa*, how do you feel? Don't put this feeling into words, just remember your initial reaction (you may need to revisit it later). When artists Allison Burda and Cam Gee began showing their creation, viewers were sometimes confused about what exactly they were looking at. This mischievous-looking anthropomorphic character has occasionally been mistaken for a chicken, or even an egg yolk. The most frequent response the artists received was excitement, and this inspired them.

Ultimately, however, this installation resists being understood in a singular reading. The idea for *Fuwa Fuwa* came after a trip to Japan, a country renowned for its worldwide cultural influence. While some would categorize Japan as having an austere and work-oriented lifestyle, other visitors experience a dreamlike atmosphere. Allison and Cam were drawn into this contrast as they observed the way people interacted with "yuru- kyara" (Japanese for 'living cartoon designs') in their daily lives. These mascots, adored for their wacky behavior and unassuming nature, often reach celebrity status. You may be familiar with "Domo-kun," a furry rectangular monster with jagged teeth and the official mascot of Japan's public broadcaster NHK, or "Kumamon," a black and white bear, and the official mascot of Kumamoto prefecture.

Allison and Cam were struck by how every-

thing in Japan has a mascot. Westerners who have only ever observed mascots as representatives of a school, sports team, or corporation, might be shocked to see how widespread this international phenomenon of creepy/cute is. Every restaurant, geographical region, sport, and even toilet paper brand seems to have its own unique ambassador. Most significant, perhaps, is that not only does everything seemingly have a mascot, but everyone earnestly embraces this phenomenon without irony, but rather devotion. Allison and Cam observed that the "kawaii," or cute aesthetic does not have an infantilizing stigma. Instead, even straightlaced workers and senior citizens can be seen with mascot-branded merchandise. Again, hard work, silliness, fantasy and reality converge in a world where life may not always be easy, but entertaining mascots can offer a possibility of escape.

With these observations in mind, Allison and Cam invented a mascot of their own: *Fuwa Fuwa*, a mascot for "Joie de Vivre." As collaborators on a variety of light-hearted, yet meaningful illustration, animation and mixed-media projects, they found themselves impulsively drawing this character. For *Fuwa Fuwa: Joie de Vivre*, the design process included cutting and upholstering wooden forms, laser-cutting and sewing acrylic and fabric accessories as facial features, and lastly, combining all of these parts. Additionally, the artists reflected on





what the feeling of “joie de vivre” means to them personally and how to communicate this concept to others through the mascot’s form. The result is a playful and eccentric character, shown here in various moments of daily life.

Wearing expressive clothing and accessories such as a floral swimsuit, boots or sunglasses, Fuwa is the embodiment of care-free confidence. Body language and facial expressions are minimalist, but meaningful. Whether aware of an observer or not, this living cartoon character continues living life in the same joyful way.

The instant appeal of Fuwa is in the aesthetic choices Allison and Cam have made; the ‘universal’ attraction to certain colours, soft shapes, plush textures and anthropomorphic features such as eyes and clothes draw in the viewer. The aim of these creative decisions is to engage the viewer with a shape that is soft, strange, simple and ultimately relatable. The artists muse that this connection is further brought on by Fuwa’s simultaneous appearance of being ‘confidently funny-looking.’

There are many reasons why ‘cuteness’ evokes strong and conflicting reactions, such as the instinct to protect, or the impulse to destroy.¹ Because “yuru-kyara” are instantly recognizable and able to effortlessly communicate a message, they have been representatives of abstract or serious concepts like regional tourism, cultural education, public services, even political ideas and current events. In this way, something that is seemingly cute and simple can in effect become a catalyst for education, social

organizing and positive change. However, a significant portion of Japanese mascots were meant to be taken at face value for their cuteness. When speaking with friends knowledgeable about Japanese culture, Allison and Cam realized that the purpose of most mascots was simply to make people feel happy. When looking for meaning, maybe the viewer only needs to further examine their own initial reactions and accept them at face value.

With Fuwa, Allison and Cam have crafted a mascot that is a reminder of universal feelings of earnestness and innocence. The artists emphasize the importance of “celebrating the moments” when joy is experienced. Furthermore, they ask the viewers to reflect on what makes them happy regardless of what is going on around them. They concede that self-love is aspirational, but possibly unrealistic. Feeling joy all the time is a fantasy, because emotions are not stable like the wooden and plastic elements used to create this installation. Instead, happiness is as unpredictable as the zany character we imagine when we see this art. “Joie de Vivre” is the calm in the storm of daily life.

Remember your initial reaction to seeing Fuwa. Pay attention to this feeling when and wherever you may find it, appreciate it, and remember it for when you need it most!

Rachel Davis

NOTES

1 When seeing Fuwa for the first time, some viewers have told the artists that they are unsure if they want to befriend or punch this creature! Allison Burda, interviewed by Rachel Davis, Toronto ON, July 24th

PANTRY SHELF

Kendra Yee

September 8th – October 21st, 2017

Kendra Yee's mixed-media installation, *Pantry Shelf*, includes a printed mat, a woven blanket, and a small army of ceramic figures lining a set of shelves and the floor. Each piece has been made with an acute attention to detail. They feature intricate faces and designs, balanced with bold colours and intuitive modeling. They espouse craftsmanship: clearly hand made, but also loved. This reveals a lot about Yee's practice; lovingly crafted characters that reveal a deep understanding of what makes a precious object sentimental and important.

Pantry Shelf explores Yee's Chinese heritage. Her great grandfather, Yuk Gip Yee immigrated to Canada during the early 20th century era of the Chinese head tax. The head tax had been started in 1885 as an attempt to discourage Chinese immigration. "Substantial increases of the head tax were implemented from \$50 to \$100 in 1900, then to \$500 in 1903".¹ The head tax wasn't repealed until 1923, when the Canadian government completely stopped allowing Chinese immigrants to enter the country. Yee's great grandfather came to Canada in the 1921, paying the full \$500. Landing in British Columbia, he eventually settled in Moose Jaw Saskatchewan, opening a restaurant with his son that became a family business. He was only ever able to return to China a handful of times to see his wife again before she died in 1942.

As a side effect of the Canadian government's racist handling of Chinese immigrants, few records remain of Yee's great grandfather's travels. Her only line of investigation is built off of anecdotes from her family and a limited supply of documents such as passports. In addition to the scarcity of written records, many of them are written in traditional Chinese calligraphy, which Yee is unable to read. As a result there are many gaps in the narrative that are lost to time. Yee created *Pantry Shelf* as a means of understanding this part of her family history. The tiny figures represent at once knick-knacks at a variety store and characters from her family's story that she will never know or understand. Their small cartoony faces fill in the blanks in her history, replacing the loss and mystery of her family's past with comforting images that inspire happiness instead of dread.

Yee's mat piece exemplifies this narrative strategy. On a black ground, a dragon constructed from floating circles menacingly surrounds a tall figure. Both of these characters are rendered in bright reds and greens, creating a sharp contrast with the background. Detailed patterns and red Chinese calligraphy fill the top left corner. Beside, a copy of a stamp from her grandfather's passport reminds us of the politically and racially motivated burden Canada laid on many of its Chinese immigrants.





Pantry Shelf
Kendra Lee



祈禱 (眾坐)





While the harsh colours and oppressive darkness of the image bear on the viewer, the image is also imbued with playful wonder. The figure's clothing is beautifully detailed, a small light green dragon delicately printed onto their robes. The dragon, while implying a threat or fear, also conveys a sense of fun, through the use of a variety of patterns and tones. Its face appears to be laughing or roaring. The decoration around the edges of the mat is sentimental as well, with detailed linework of flowers, water, and a shooting star.

A printed carpet hangs on the wall at the back of the installation, which uses a blend of history, imagination, and symbolism to communicate the complex narrative of the artist's family. On it, a sleeping figure on a bed floats with the stars above a white tree. The tree is simple in design, a circle with a stick protruding from the base, making it also appear as the silhouette of an oversimplified atomic bomb. Demons float around the tree, appearing to playfully guard it. Like the clay figures surrounding the installation, the demons aren't necessarily good or evil, simply avatars representing the complex tension between family pride from her great grandfather's resilience and sorrow at the torment her family has gone through. In Yee's words, the characters throughout her work are "[h]ow I interpret the journey with my own characters to fill in the gaps I'll never understand."² Beneath the tree, Yee has drawn mountains and a small convenience store behind a railroad track. The roads, mountains and railroads refer to the travel between Vancouver and Saskatchewan, but also serve as a bleak reminder of Canada's cruel use of Asian immigrants to

build the railroads. Yee's family didn't work on the railroad themselves, but the devastating financial and physical torture placed on Asian Canadians as a result of the railroads is a devastating blow and a weighty symbol to draw upon.³

Pantry Shelf was named after Yee's grandfather's convenience store, which he opened shortly after opening the restaurant with his father. Pantry Shelf, the store, was deeply valued in the Moose Jaw area, and in 2004 earned Yee's grandparents a citizenship award for their significant contributions to the community. Because so much of Yee's family history is lost to history, it can be hard to imagine the exact experiences of Yuk Gip Yee and his son. While working on this writing, Yee gave me a detailed timeline of her family's experiences. It was clearly condensed from a large array of sources and documents, outlining her family's movements and the historical framework it happened in. While many years are clearly marked with specific events, decades go by with only a few vague notes to fill them in. This is the root of Yee's work, the unknowable parts, and the sadness that can bring. The works in *Pantry Shelf* recreate what Yee imagines the shop might have been. It is a simulation and a novel. It is a shrine and a diary, and through Yee's careful reimagining of her great grandfather's life, she is able to tell an otherwise incomplete story.

Sam Roberts

NOTES 1 Arlene Chan, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: The Chinese Head Tax and Anti-Chinese Immigration Policies in the Twentieth Century* (Manitoba, Canada: James Lorimer & Company, 2014), 6. 2 Kendra Yee (Artist) in discussion with the author, August 2017 3 Pierre Berton, *The Last Spike: The Great Railway, 1881-1885* (Canada: Anchor Canada, 2001), 205.

UNCERTAIN LANDSCAPES

JG

November 3rd, 2017 – January 5th, 2018

Whether in quick passing, or intentional admiration, the placement of JG's *Uncertain Landscapes* in Xspace's window space allows for any individual to view the colourfully collaged imagery adorning the wall and floor. The imagery featured in this work are analogous to JG's past works within print-making, comic books, and illustrative mediums.

Uncertain Landscapes, however, contains a new medium exploration by JG in the form of hand-cut wood paintings, and references their denouncement of institutionalized standards of art-making through the presentation of various hyper-aesthetic impersonations of nature. These impersonations take the form of florals, plant-life, people and material objects. This mirroring of reality through their illustrations is synonymous with JG's main thematic explorations in this exhibition: the visibility and non-conformity of queerness.

'Queer' is an umbrella term that has been claimed by many individuals living outside of and apart from the binary, heteronormative, cis-gendered world that praises these types of existence as a social 'norm,' and thus inherently desirable. Thus, aesthetics can be a powerful tool of rejection, self-determination, and means of validation for many individuals; including, but never limited to: trans, two-spirit, gender non-conforming, non-binary and androgynous people. These

tools can take the form of clothing, makeup and accessories that allow for expression that does not attempt, as JG describes, to "impress or assimilate to what is already being consistently represented by popular demand."¹ Much like gender and sexuality, the aesthetics of queerness are unfixed and multi-faceted. Fashion is a mechanism of queerness, of which one's aesthetic appearance carries with them an emotive statement to the world.

In order to capture this concept, JG draws from drag culture and science fiction. While at first glance, these two may seem mutually exclusive they are, in fact, relatable in a number of ways. Science fiction is a genre that is celebrated for its separation from and manipulation of perceived reality. The concept of drag exists in the same vein as this as well, where often folks within LGBTQ2S+ communities manipulate, distort, but also reject hetero and cis-normative reality through aesthetic presentation and performance. In the drag queen's case, this frequently takes the form of appearing in highly femme² personas. In *Uncertain Landscapes*, a hint to this aesthetic is visible in the form of a pointed black heel attached to an ambiguous body, glossy, pursed, lips featured on the floor, and the makeup faces of both the human and anthropomorphic floral figures. The drag queen's appearance is a signifier by which the world reads





'feminine' while paradoxically signifying the drag queen's rejection of the expectations of femininity, as well.

The wall and floor frames that separate *Uncertain Landscapes* create a utopic and fairy-tale-like setting. The far wall features a triptych portraying a scene of an ambiguous high-heeled figure being presented a bouquet by a tiger, while a genderless character takes a dip in a swimming pool. As well, various anthropomorphic plant life and fruit are featured across both the wall and floor. Despite the fictional environment created by JG, I chose to liken this presentation in the title of this paper to a 'wilderness' to assert that queer existence is not make-believe, but rather a reality that exists and is untamable within traditional notions of conformity.

To identify as queer and within the LGBTQ2S+ spectrum often involves creating a new space within the world; a space that exists as the individual's own, but is also a space that is communally shared and supported through a connection that JG refers to as "queer mutuality." Queer mutuality takes on many different forms; it can be found in the relationships [queer] individuals make with one another and the support, love, and validation that is received through shared experiences. The bustle of thistles depicted on the wall panel hint to this connection as well. Thistles are a distinct flora identifiable by their bright purple colour, but also feature a sharp, needle-like exterior. The placement of these flowers within the wall frame juxtaposed with the high heel and lips notes the artist's exploration of the perceptive qualities of queer visibility and

how this visibility is often based on an individual's outward presentations to the world. Through this display, JG literally turns to the streets to ask - what does it look like to live and exist within non-conformity?

For those who self-declare their queerness, this work is for you. For those outside of this, consider taking it as an embracing of queer-being and the spectrum of which that statement belongs. As well, take this work as a moment of reflection of the ways in which societal norms and pressures attempt to enact erasure of identities. The uncertainty in the title *Uncertain Landscapes* does not denounce queer existence and presence, but instead reminds everyone that identity, much like art, remains in a non-definite, ever changing, and beautiful flux.

Emily Peltier

NOTES

1 JG, Xpace exhibition proposal, 2017. **2** Much like 'queer', the term 'femme' has been claimed by individuals within queer communities that dress and present themselves in aesthetically feminine ways. This appearance is also not fixed to the binary associated with femininity.

SOFT ARMOUR

Erin Rei

January 12th – February 16th, 2018

Erin Rei is an illustrator living and working in Toronto whose lush creations express intimate narratives through an array of media. As a graduate of the OCADU illustration program, she has held several active roles within local self-publishing and art making. While much of her practice involves the production of small-scale zines, comics, paintings and homemade objects, the exhibition *Soft Armour* typifies a momentum she is pursuing towards the production of sculptures and installation work. *Soft Armour* presents Rei's application of her visual language into a larger, immersive environmental form, a translation process partly-inspired by local artist Ness Lee's practice of repeated self-representation.¹ Similar to Lee, Rei's illustrations link to a deeply personal set of motifs, symbols and elements that are articulated in variations, displaying a subtle range of meaning. In *Soft Armour*, a larger than life character has grown off the pages of Rei's sketchbooks and filled Xpace's window gallery.

The organic, plantlike sculpture presents a three-dimensional actualization of a motif woven through Rei's illustrative works. In pursuit of this theme, this window installation continues her depiction of characters with large plant-like growths sprouting from their bodies. The foregrounded sculpture nestles within an environmental backdrop where the vegetal and the non-vegetal aspects of the mandrake-like figure

embrace ambiguously. Their connection is folded away from public scrutiny, but point to a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship. The liveliness of the leaf-like shapes sprouting around the face of the character is highlighted by the installation's gentle motions, which have been programmed to react in correspondence with the time of day through micro-computing components. This was inspired by the biological activity cycles of plants and Rei's sculpture is similarly receptive to its surroundings. Accordingly, it can be viewed in a more active state during the day, or during a more dormant period after sunset.

The leaves stand as the newest articulation in the visual language of Rei's illustration work. Within her self-referencing visual language, the current plant-based characters have diverged from a past preference for the symbol of a mask. These masks can be seen dotting past work in forms, simplified as a generalized shadow falling across a character's face. While over time this motif has faded from the artist's use, the symbolic similarities they hold with Rei's organic forms offer the leaves as a new link in an iconographical chain. In covering the figure, the leaves evoke the simple comfort that can come with the increased anonymity some may recognize as being offered by long hair or a winter scarf. But Rei's organic forms do not merely block her characters off from the world and hide them from view. A



move has been made towards a soft armour wherein her characters are supplied with insulation in a modality less concerned with obfuscation, and more capable of a responsive adaptability.

Soft armour is a concept made necessary by a context of the artist's pursuit of interaction rooted in empathy. According to the artist, soft armour asserts that "being open, receptive, actively empathetic and performing emotional labour are acts of strength."² Importantly, the concept hinges on an understanding that being openly empathetic is a choice. It accepts vulnerability as a potentially powerful act, even if existing in this way can leave the practitioner open to harm from those existing in other modalities. There is also the danger that using 'armour' within interactions can close off potential connections. Rei's stylized characters exist in a middle space, with their soft armour exemplifying an act of balance between these pitfalls.

This is a deeply personal source of inspiration for the artist, but it is also one with wide implications. Practicing a highly empathic approach to living can allow us to resist experiences of alienation inherent to late capitalist existence. It follows that rather than being celebrated, softness is popularly ridiculed in the society that we inhabit. One of capitalism's self-perpetuating strengths exists in its ability to isolate members of

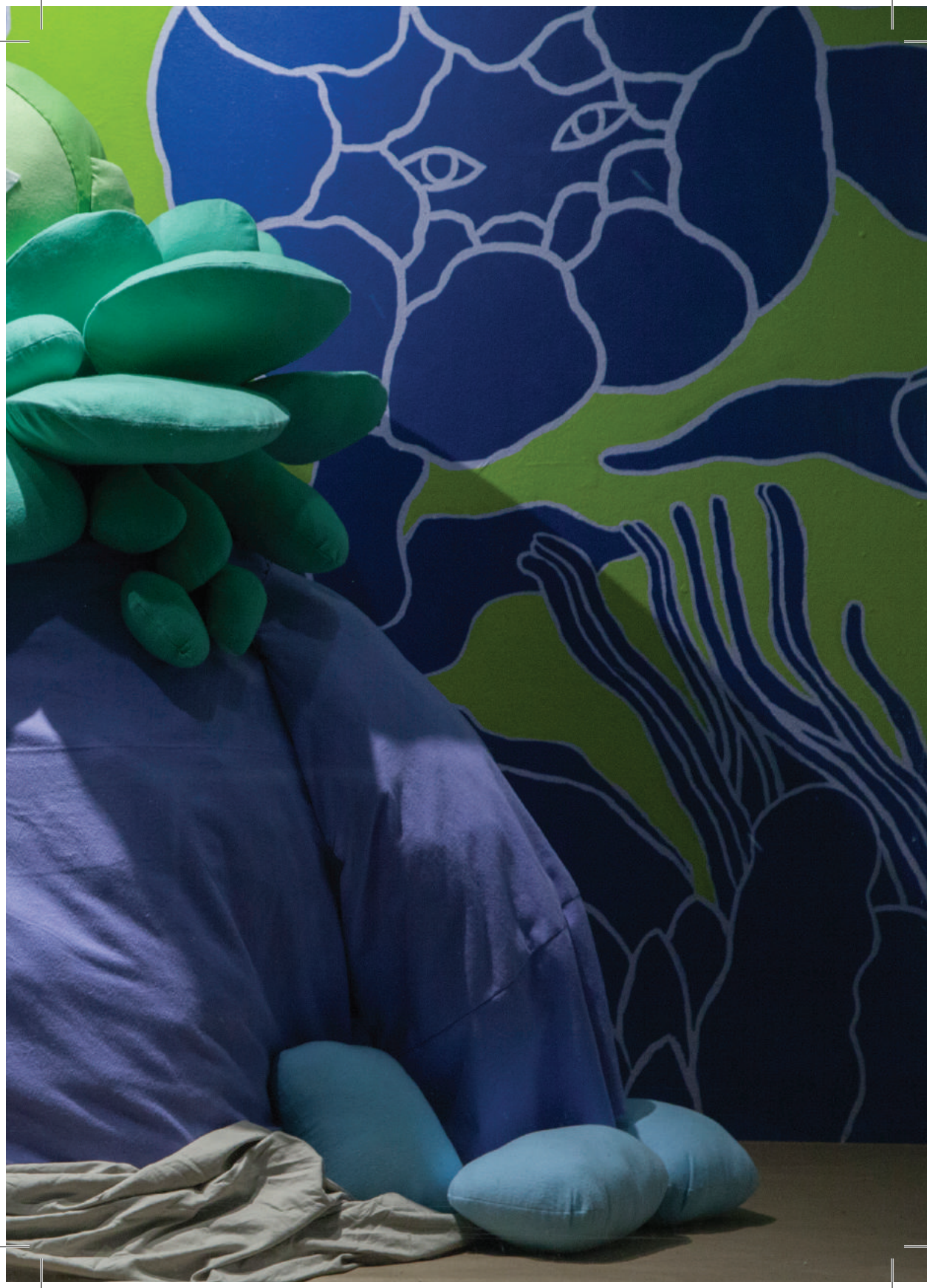
society by limiting our vision - it becomes second nature to approach all through the lens of capital, including our emotions and interpersonal relationships. The revolutionary potential of leaving this line of intimacy open rests in resisting the temptation to reduce and objectify those around you to commodities to be consumed. Under these circumstances, acting within a high register of empathy ultimately produces a revitalizing tension.

Rei's installation displays the notion of soft armour as a platonic approach to navigating under these terms. Notably, the responsiveness of the character as represented by the plant-based iconography is understandable as a sustainable state of being thanks to the acceptance of fluidity and variation in its behaviour. In this way, Rei's installation allows us to recall the great potential in nurturing our vulnerability, while maintaining an advocacy for each of our rights to place our own mutable boundary lines within the world. *Soft Armour* asks us to consider the complex choices we make, the borders we put up and how we prioritize comfort, while reminding us continually of the ethical responsibility necessitated by the feedback between ourselves, our environments and the people they hold.

Rowan Lynch

NOTES 1 Erin Rei, conversation with artist, December 4th, 2017. 2 Erin Rei, Project Proposal, 2017.





NO-FLUKE/NO-FEED/NO-SWIM/NO-PLAY/NO-FUN

Anna Eyler and Nicolas Lapointe

April 6th, 2018 – May 5th, 2018

no-fluke/no-feed/no-swim/no-play/no-fun is a mixed-media installation by Anna Eyler and Nicolas Lapointe, artists whose interests range from the overlap between virtual and physical spaces, the communicative capabilities of low-wattage electronics and digitally-rendered geological forms, as well as the environmental legacy of a technologically-driven anthropocene. While these previous works are primarily sculptural (even the digital works are largely concerned with the location of a body or form in space), this installation is given to us behind glass, emphasizing the separation between this space and that of the viewer. The artists describe their role in this work as “amateur archaeologists from an imagined future,”¹ though the reality they present here is perhaps less removed from the one outside of its enclosure than we might initially think.

Three laser-etched plexiglass forms are arranged along the window, their shapes derived from the Mannerist painter Jacopo Pontormo's 1528 altarpiece *Deposition from the Cross*. Lights are fixed to the backs of these ghostly forms, filling the space with pale-coloured lights that find their way to the foreground and play off the plexiglass surfaces. Two of the three shapes are in perpetual motion, at times almost imperceptibly. Passing pedestrians may fail to notice their tectonic shift only to discover, the next time they happen to glance at the window, that the forms have rearranged themselves.

Key elements of Lapointe's previous work, creating synthetic rock formations and embedding low-power electronics into them, is present in the rock-like markings etched onto the three forms. Eyler's interests in virtual spaces, mediated habitats, and technologically-enhanced landscapes is present in the spatial structure of this surreal enclosure—visually inviting, but ultimately removed from human intervention.

Distilling from Pontormo's work its flatness, colour palette, emotive resonance, and mystical aura, *no-fluke* transposes these visual elements from the painted altarpiece to a kinetic window display; this traditionally commercial context makes literal the increasingly tenuous distinction between viewer and consumer. Careful not to venture into the spectacular, this work seems less to announce its own presence than to suggest it, as though it aims to be seen through the corner of one's eye. Privileging (or perhaps targeting) the passer-by, *no-fluke* employs the familiarity of the window display at the same time that it attempts to subvert and disrupt it; the viewer is here confronted with a scene that resists any singular narrative or call-to-action. The significance of Pontormo's painting as an altarpiece is amplified in this new, traditionally retail space; however, it would be too reductive to conclude that the artists are suggesting the retail space has become, in our contemporary commercial culture, a sacred space. Neither





is it likely that the intention is to announce that the mystical has been displaced by the technological; rather, it is a construction that simply gathers these elements and allows their associations to play out on loop. As such, *no-fluke/no-feed/no-swim/no-play/no-fun* presents a landscape that exists to be noticed—using the commercial window display as a device to disrupt the often passive visual experience of the present urban environment.

The repetition of daily life, at its most banal, sees the majority of us occupying the same spaces and moving through the same paths each day, in cycles determined by days of the week—this is contemporary reality, and one of its consequences is the effect it has on vision; namely, it conjures a film or filter that mediates and limits our visual engagement with our surroundings simply because we are familiar—to modify Frank Stella's famous and oft-quoted aphorism, what you see is what you've seen.² Paradoxically, this repetition in vision results in a lack, a negation of vision—in other words, it is difficult to really see something you are familiar with, and the influence of memory on vision is a powerful mediator.

It is therefore all the more significant when we encounter a scene that does not simply reinforce or align with our expectations. The confusion, or perhaps bewilderment, felt upon seeing something new and not immediately absorbed is in fact the sensation of vision renewed. *no-fluke* rewards extended looking by allowing the passage of time to literally change what we see and how we see it. There is no singular perspective, no

trompe l'oeil, and no climax to the scene before us. So why are we looking?

We might stop to look because we are attracted to the plays of light, or because we have noticed the slow shifting of these forms across the window. But as extended looking unfolds the layers of this landscape, we might also consider the relationships between religious iconography, commercial marketing, geological processes, and the mediation of technology in our daily lives. These lines are never, and can never, be fully resolved; they provide a visual experience no less tangled, constructed, and nebulous as everything else we encounter outside of our own windows. The point, if we are expected to arrive at one, might be to stop, to notice, to consider. *no-fluke* not only invites us to stay because of what it displays within its own confines, but also spills outward so that we may walk away still looking—with a consistent intensity, criticality, and curiosity, to never cease investigating why our world is arranged the way it is.

Calin Stefan

NOTES

- 1 Lapointe, Nicolas "no-fluke/no-feed/no-swim/no-play/no-fun", nicolaslapointe.com, 2017, <https://www.nicolaslapointe.com/no-fluke>
- 2 Foster, Hal, et al. *Art Since 1900: 1945 to the Present* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 447.

HEAL THE WORLD

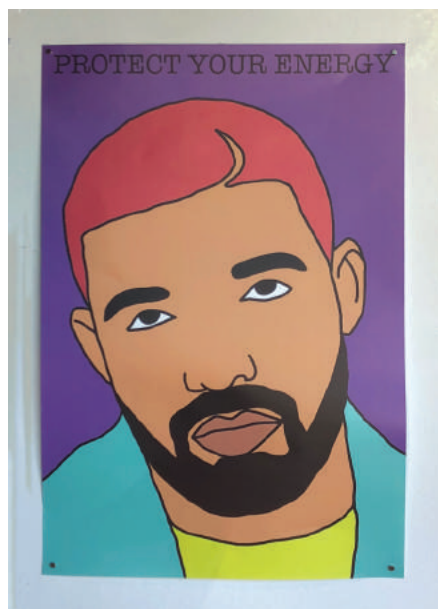
Francesca Nocera (Sun Sun)

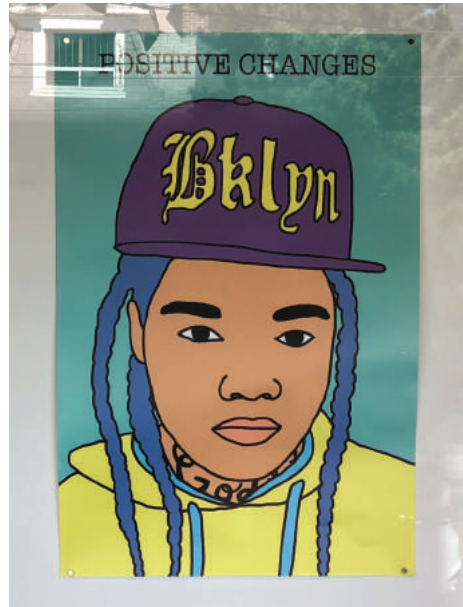
June 8th – 16th, 2018

Xspace's 2018 Fundraiser Exhibition









changing or taking away an object's function is the height of humor

court gee

June 29th – July 28th, 2018

At the turn of the 20th century, a wave of artists began to argue for an art that fought against logic and canonical beauty, instead celebrating irrationality as an expression of contempt towards the war, conformity, and an increasingly capitalist society. Under the label of Dada, Marcel Duchamp upturned a porcelain urinal and gave it a title, thereby subverting its function. A tongue-in-cheek commentary on the state of the art world, the gesture bemused audiences across the European continent. court gee's exhibition, changing or taking away an object's function is the height of humor, draws from this now long-established strategy to create a body of work that likewise mingles comedy and malaise. Infused with the absurdist flavor of Dada, court gee's work speaks to ever-contemporary issues – issues similar to those that gave rise to the 1920s movement – tackling them with the wry humor of her generation.

Last year, in an article published by The Washington Post that immediately went viral, columnist Elizabeth Bruenig declared:

"I am not a nihilist, but a mood of grim, jolly absurdism comes over me often, as it seems to come over many of my young peers. To visit millennial comedy, advertising, and memes is to spend time in a dream world where ideas twist and suddenly vanish; where loops of self-referential quips warp and dis-

tort with each iteration, tweaked [...] until nothing coherent is left".¹

court gee's window installation, filled with items taken from the craft bin, the domestic sphere, or the superstore, displays an array of readymade assemblages with the kind of comical twist described by Bruenig. As the artist states: "People are no longer trying to make things from scratch, instead they are reusing past media content, reworking and analyzing accumulated media material. I see the objects I use as 'stock' objects."² If popular image culture is, in the memescape, endlessly circulated and recycled into witty social commentaries, self-parody, puns, nonsensical narratives, and sometimes pure meaninglessness, mundane objects are treated in a similar fashion by court gee. Behind the glass vitrine, pipe-cleaner flowers sprout from unopened bags of soil, while yellow balloons – like two deflated lungs – seal the ends of a plastic tube, as though naively attempting to contain a volatile breath. Familiar household props are repurposed in various configurations, establishing new delirious relations, until function and meaning become irrelevant.

If Dada annulled the relevance of beauty as a concept, and made a mockery of the materialistic values promulgated by "retinal"³ art, court gee revisits objects and motifs, which through the history of art, have been imbued with aesthetic value and symbolic





capital. A faint allusion to still-life imagery survives – albeit ironically – in her work. For instance, two paintings of floral arrangements in neon and mismatched colors are displayed side by side, and attached to the wall with pieces of orange tape, drawing attention to the ‘de-skilled’ painterly gesture. In its beginnings as a traditional genre, still-life painting consisted of an assemblage of lavish bouquets comprising a variety of geographically incongruous specimens. Artists imported eye-catching botanical rarities from far and wide, and painted them on the canvas as though they had coexisted in time and space. Though not quite recognized as ‘high art,’ these impressive feats of manufactured beauty satisfied the demands of a booming market that sought a skilled, eclectic, yet commodifiable form of representation. Here, in *Size Sevens*, court gee’s metal-wire bouquets reveal the theater of operations – the armature, the gimmick – that underlie art as commodity. In other words, her still-life imagery cheekily highlights the fraught relationship between reality and artifice, and between consumer culture and art.

Some humor also resides in the objects from which court gee’s works are constructed: solar-powered toy flowers, artificial fruit, googly eyes, rubber gloves, popular fashion brands, etc. These are from the very moment of their manufacture already outdated. Despite their newness, their shiny packaging and cheery colors, these consumer items fail to convince us of their seriousness, usefulness and timelessness. Outside of court gee’s work, one could almost feel pity for the

unused Frisbee with a happy-face sticker, which seems to know full well its ultimate destiny: the garage sale or the recycling bin. Nearly self-conscious of their own disposability, these objects embody what theorist Michael Taussig describes as the “pathos of novelty”.⁴ Even new, they tread the thin line of obsolescence. One might say that court gee, through ever-banal mass-produced items and various display tactics, harnesses the giggle-inducing quality of the “recently outmoded”.⁵

“Ultimately, I don’t have the answer”, stated the artist during a recent conversation, vis-à-vis the positioning of her work within both the realms of everyday objects and of fine art. These sculptures are, after all, made of common material goods which can revert back to their function when disassembled. It is perhaps in the face of this absurd and inescapable conundrum that is at the core of most art production today – the perpetual friction between making art, and participating in complex capitalist systems of exchanges – that court gee resorts to humor, or that humor emerges. To put it simply: “DADA DADA DADA, an interlacing of opposites and of contradictions, of grotesques and of inconsistencies.”⁶

Laura Demers

NOTES

¹ Elizabeth Bruenig, *Why is millennial humor so weird?*, The Washington Post. Published August 11, 2017.

² From the writings of the artist, 2017-2018. ³ A term coined by Marcel Duchamp to describe art that pleases the eye, but that is void of political or critical content. ⁴ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity; a particular history of the senses*. Routledge; New York, London, 1993. p. 233 ⁵ Ibid. ⁶ Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto*, 1918.



project

**The project space is intended
for installation based practices.**

HOW TO RELAX

Jennifer Laiwint

July 28th – August 26th, 2017

Tired Models for Self-Improvement

Have you ever felt unsatisfied? In your abilities, your dreams, your achievements? How does that make you feel? Keep this feeling in your head, in your body; allow it to totally and fully permeate from your toes slowly up to your hips, then higher along your spine until it reaches the highest part of your head. Let yourself steep in its intensity, and take a moment to allow it to take priority over everything else.

Breathe in, breathe out.
Again, breathe in, pause,
and breathe out.

Our exhausted existences fuel themselves on common vulnerabilities, each desperate to find the cause for self-doubt. Take time to consider the inconsistencies and faults in your personality. If not, the doctor can do this for you. How does that make you feel?

Breathe in, pause, breathe out.
Again, breathe in, and
breathe out.

This strenuous experience should now remind you of your own worn presence, or maybe it's just the anxiety building up in this moment? Whichever the case, take this

opportunity to metaphorically puncture a hole somewhere on your body, and allow the feelings to slowly seep away, pouring steadily out of the hole, then slowing down until depleted.

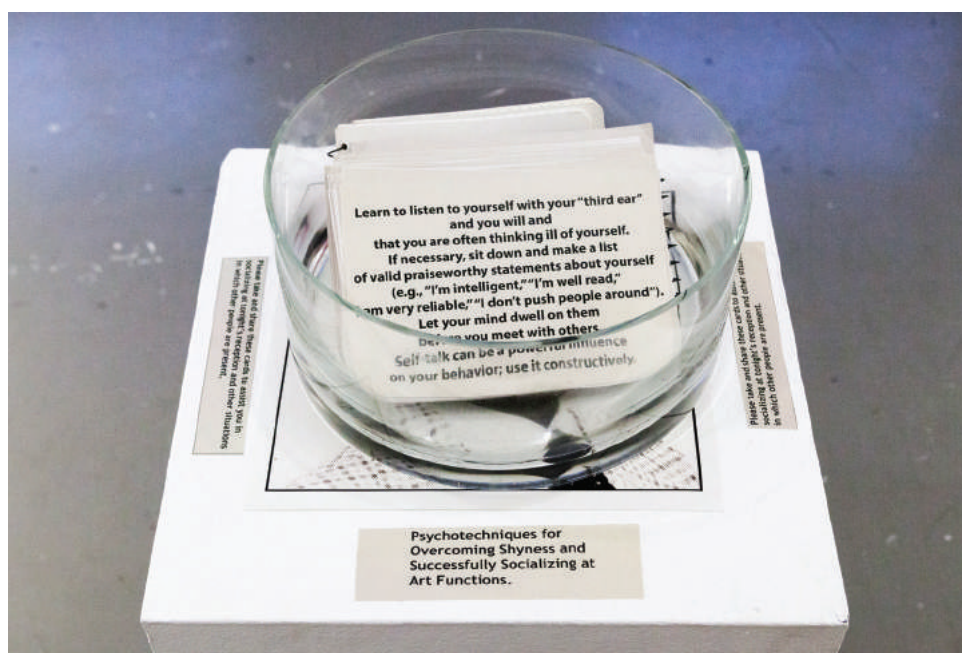
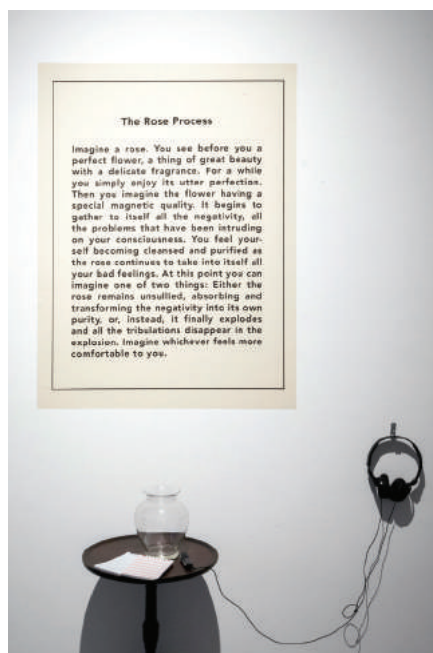
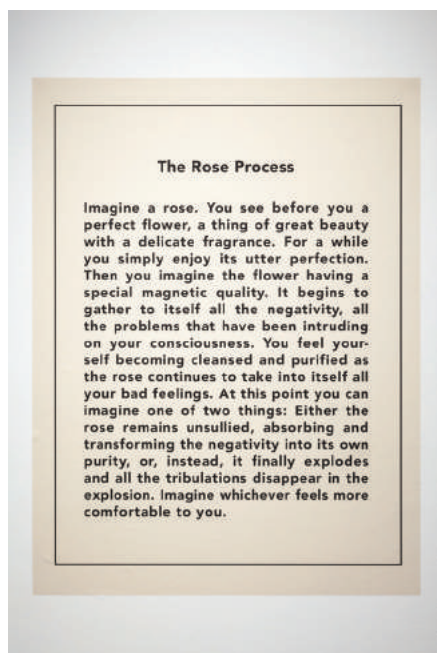
Breathe in, breathe out.
Again, breathe in, pause,
and breathe out.

We are the architects of our own destinies. We make choices and build the scaffolding upon which we can achieve goals and reach milestones. Without discernible markers of self-improvement, can you really be succeeding?

Breathe in, breathe out.
This time pause, breathe in deeply,
then exhale out your nose.

Take in this moment, this feeling—or lack thereof—and consider what is left. This physical index is a marker of your corporeality. Think of your limbs this time, head, neck, arms and fingers, to your thighs, knees, calves and toes. Now move them, one at a time, as slow as possible. Fully engage in each part's individual characteristics and peculiarities. If you could not stand on your feet how would you stand? Move your body to explore this concept.





Now wait a minute.
Okay, breathe in, slowly, deeply.
Hold it, now through your nose.
Exhale.

The answers you are looking for are found within, and even though you seek help elsewhere, the solution resides within the inner chamber of one's own being. As a seeker you will be entangled in an interminable series of self-explorations. This is the beginning, but it may also be the end.

Exhale, but only allow small bits
of air out in bursts.
That's it- continue until it's gone.
Inhale.

You are lying propped up by your right hand and hip, feet raised only so far as to not touch the floor. In this position you feel the full weight of your body shift to this side and the dull ache of your weight grows as time passes. Consider the sensitivity of the bones that are currently touching the floor. After you do this, move it off the floor and shift the weight to another, continuing this process so you are moving in a slow, fluid motion. Don't stop.

Keep breathing in,
keep going for as long as possible,
then hold. Good.
Now, exhale.

Find the method that will give you the most important information and appropriate procedures that suit you, for not just any method can result in the desired behaviour. Keep in mind the urgency needed to enforce this self-direction is entirely your responsibility. I'm only here to remind you about that.

Don't forget to breathe,
keep going.

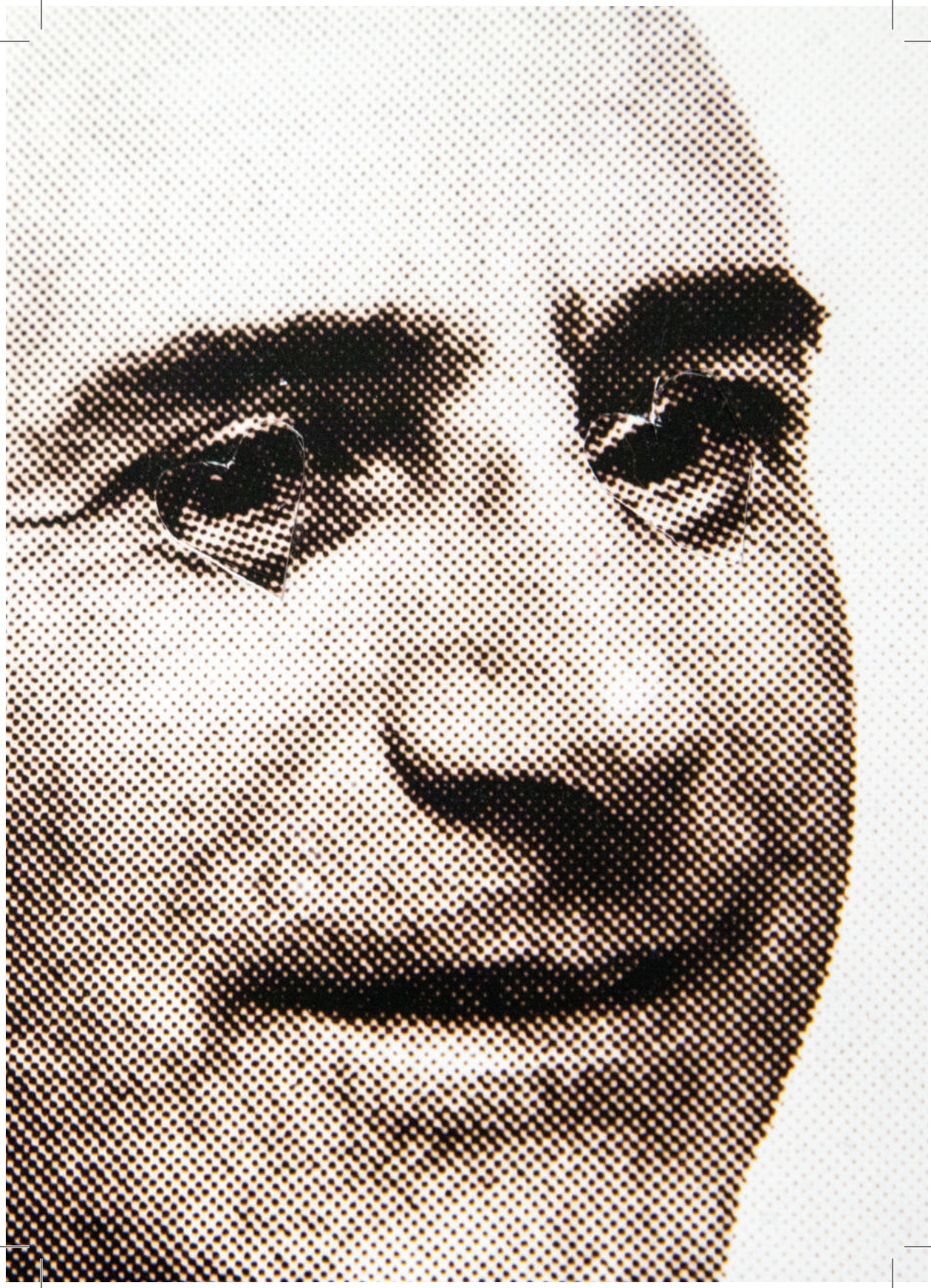
No matter where your body has left off throughout this, stop. Return yourself to a position that's comfortable for you, and enjoy it for a moment. Now look at something blue. Find the deepest, darkest, truest blue you can and stare into for as long as you can without interruption. Lose yourself in this colour. Let your senses be completely enveloped within it. Can you even hear me? If so, keep trying.

In and out,
out and in.

These concerns are primarily caused by thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. Instead of focusing on the negative and non-productive things they are doing, they should imagine themselves in a cycle of endless development, continual advancement.

Keep going.
Continue at your own pace.





Once out of the colour, remind your eyes to see other colours again. This time look for an object that comforts you. The image of the rose over there will do. Stand close to it and take it in, from the colour palette to the tiniest details. Imagine smelling it, touching it, hearing it sway in a gentle summer breeze. Now embody it, you are now within its vegetative confines. Feel the thirst for water on a hot day, while the sunlight soaks into your leaves to be turned into energy for more growth and eventually pollination. Feel yourself, renewed.

You can stop when you like
and return to normal breathing again.

Take a step back, contemplate all that we've experienced here. What is left should now make you feel lighter, a realization that brings you that much closer to finding what you wanted in the first place. Isn't that why you're here?

"Dr. Salvatore, You seem distant right now."

Have you ever had a pen pal? Writing to a person that you know physically exists somewhere in the world—but still don't really know—is for some reason comforting. Is it possible that by eliminating the visual aspect of meeting a person makes it easier for us to be more honest, more vulnerable? In her research and resulting exhibition, artist Jennifer Laiwint acts as the partner to the perfect pen pal: a psychiatrist who may

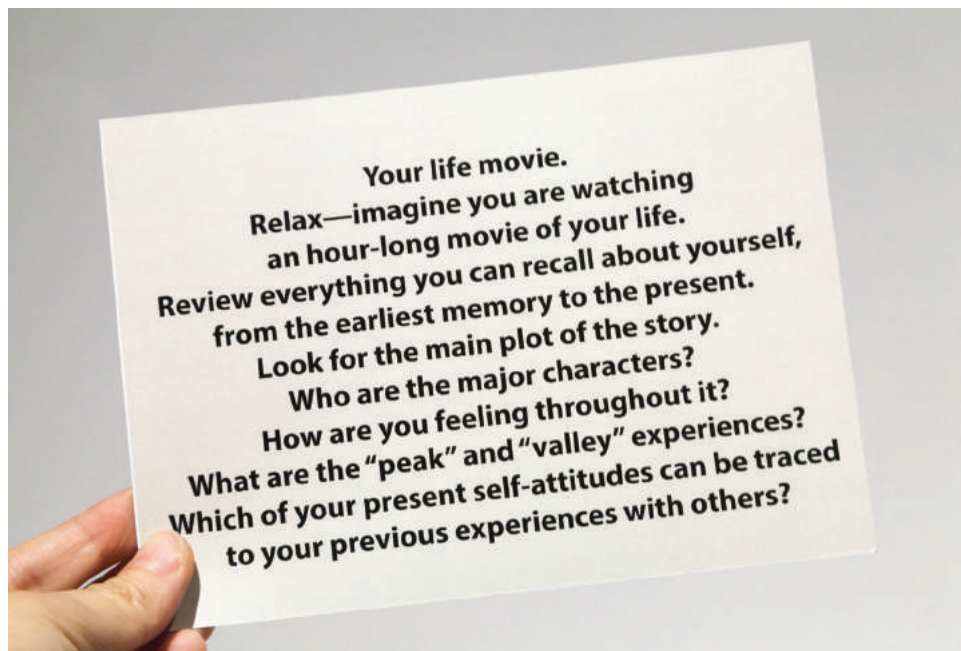
or may not still exist, yet continues to guide her through a prescribed regimen of self-help "psychotechniques", with the promise to alter and restore its reader to a more fulfilled personhood. *How to Help Yourself and Someone You Love Using Psychotechniques* by Dr. Salvatore V. Didato, is the book that spurred Laiwint's investigation into the grey-area of self-help culture and human emotion, an exploration that became a tool not only for creating mindfulness, but also art. As stated by author Sandra K. Dolby in her book, *Self-help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*,¹ there are typically three characteristic methods to self-help culture. The first asks the reader to define their problems or concerns through describing what they may not be able to articulate in an easy to understand, rhetorical style; the second distracts the reader from said worry through guided meditations, while the third projects a feared or unwanted feeling onto a subject which then disappears.

These techniques in mind, the artist's feelings are explicitly vulnerable and exposed throughout the exhibition, from the text-based works created from stream-of-consciousness ramblings to the video of dancers generating choreography in response to the authoritative suggestions of Dr. Sal's techniques, Laiwint bares all, perhaps in hopes that viewers can too somehow relate, even if only through a person who may or may not still exist.

Lauren Lavery

NOTES

¹ Dolby, Sandra K. *Self-help books: Why Americans keep reading them*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008.



QUEERIES INTO HISTORY: THE LOVE OF LORING AND WYLE

Emily Norry

September 8th – October 14th, 2017

Emily Norry's artistic practice focuses on queer histories and how queer narratives and perspectives have often been ignored or hidden. Norry starts a body of work by collecting a body of research around a particular subject. Using photographs and historical records of her subject, she visually reconstructs their life and major moments to highlight the experience of queer women and how important they were to the fabric of their communities.

Frances Loring and Florence Wyle were unique artists in the Toronto scene. The two sculptors had initially met in 1905, forming a close bond. Their relationship wasn't public (and therefore not explicitly documented) for fear of public scrutiny, but for many queer artists, including Emily Norry, feel there isn't much ambiguity. Moving from Chicago to Greenwich village in New York, and later to Toronto, The two artists spent more than 50 years living and working together.

Loring and Wyle flourished in the more conservative Toronto art market, earning a wide array of praise from their contemporaries. The War Museum of Canada's online catalogue states that Group of Seven painter A.Y Jackson had offered to "knock down all the statues in Toronto" in order that they replace them with their own art. While examining their artistic careers, Norry had also a great interest on how history is written, which details are accounted for when writing a biog-

raphy, and what it means in regard to the documenting of queer histories.

They started their art careers in New York, where their more traditional sculptures visually separated them from the modernist impulses of the time, they came to Toronto in 1912, where they opened a studio on Adelaide. They later moved their studio to the corner of Lombard and Church. As post-war artists, many of their sculptures dealt with the strength and resolution of women in the war effort at home. During World War I and II, women filled the vacant spaces in the labour force left by absent soldiers. These jobs were largely in factories, and, after the still-recent industrial revolution, consisted of often dangerous and laborious work. Loring and Wyle's catalogue of works includes *The Furnace Girl* (1918-1919), a bronze sculpture showing a young woman dusting soot off the ground. Her stance is weary, but strong. It is the look of someone who does the same miserable job day in and day out with a sense of determination. At a time when women at home were producing many of the materials used on the domestic and war fronts, *The Furnace Girl* holds an important place as a feminist work finally valuing the contribution that women made to Canadian society.

Norry's biographical monoprints are mainly made from reproducing historical photos of women artists onto plexiglass using





watercolour paint, spraying the resulting image with water, pressing it onto fabric, and peeling it off. This style of printmaking is unique as it generates only a single print, rather than multiple. When printed onto fabric, the images transfer as blurry. They change through the transfer process. If the plate moves, or an extra bead of water is displaced, or the fabric is slightly wrinkled, that becomes weaved into the work, permanently shaping the only copy of the final product.

One of the largest works entitled *In the Studio* (2017) from Norry's series *Queeries Into History: The Love Of Loring and Wyle*, shows Loring and Wyle in the studio together working on sculpted busts. Their studio is filled with other sculptures. A cat rests on a chair. Towards the edges of the print, tables and flowers decorate the room. It is apparent that this is not just a studio, but a home. This is the space that Loring and Wyle would spend much of their life in, living and working together. The print is bordered by a fabric print of roses in white and grey, decorating the pleasant scene. There is a natural warmth to Norry's work; with soft colours and comforting imagery. She displays here the happier side of queer history.

Many of Norry's prints are decorated with pressed flowers. The flowers are scattered around the space, and are used both as a material and a recurring theme in the work. They expand on a similar point that the monoprint makes; the original flowers were bright, vibrant, and three-dimensional, but the act of preservation causes them to change and flatten. The flowers we see

today, like the monoprint in transfer, are different from the original, and allow us to view them in a new light.

In addition to the prints, an antique chair and table, both in pristine condition, sit with the works in the exhibition space. The chair is especially reminiscent of the prints. It is bright green, and decorated with delicate flower embroidery. Similar to the subjects of *In the Studio*, Norry has turned the art-workspace into a home, allowing the historical documentation to enter our own intimate spaces. It reframes the women and their politicized existence not just as artists but as lovers, the home now functioning as an equally political space. The gallery gains a sense of domesticity, and instead of the clinical (and often biased) methods of more a traditionally conservative and heteropatriarchal history, Norry's *The Love of Loring and Wyle* investigates far beneath the surface of events and looks at the complex emotional bond between these two figures.

While Norry's work might originate from a biographic perspective, it quickly acquires an element of poetry. It isn't simply an investigation of the romance between Loring and Wyle, it goes further than that, asking us questions about how we engage with queer histories and perhaps how we can better understand the queer experience through them. As a history that has been routinely ignored or mistreated by traditional academia, Norry's work allows a more thoughtful discussion of what it means to be queer in a historical setting. It challenges us to read between the lines of recorded documents and find something

beyond that presents historicized individuals as people, far more complex and burdened than we might give credit for.

Sam Roberts

NOTES

1 "Search the Collections | Canadian War Art Museum (Sculpture, The Furnace Girl)", Canadian War Art Museum **2** Elspeth Cameron, an excerpt from *And Beauty Answers: The Life of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle* (excerpt) (Cormorant Books, 2007) **3** Gary Fitzgibbon, *Description & Finding Aid: Frances Loring and Florence Wyle* (Toronto: AGO, 2016) **4** Elspeth Cameron, "A Woman's Work: *And Beauty Answers: The Life of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle*" (excerpt) National Post: Book Reviews (Toronto: National Post)





A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Jamiyla Lowe

November 3rd – December 9th, 2017

Jamiyla Lowe is a professional silk screener. Her compositions are polished and complete, but her function as an artist exceeds the craftsmanship of painstaking hours, weeks, and months worth of delicate thin brushstrokes. *A Whole New World* presents origin stories, providing context for a being in the world. These five worlds are comprehensive and multifaceted; a task Lowe is currently working on is to tie these microcosms together by finding unique ways to breach their cosmic borders and boundaries.

The five fictionalized civilizations hypothesize four central themes: sensuality, environmental entanglement, scarcity, and political apathy. Sensuality is examined under the scope of how senses affect the body and further, how the body experiences others.

Through a series of environmental experiments, immersed in a treacherous biosphere, these beings either flounder or flourish. When these sensual bodies combine into groups, they compel governance and politics – here is Lowe's critical commentary.

The Cave's central coral-red figure holds a flower in her mouth as she extends her right leg in a can-can position with sheer drape falling from her hip. The surface of her body is like pleated sausage casing stuffed with pink flesh. Behind her, as a spotlight for her performance, a circular opening with lush greenery contrasts the cave's black stalagmites. To the right, two blue folks sit

with a beer and a face in hand, with love emojis for eyes. Below the central dancer, in monochromatic blue, the raised arms of four audience members with blue worm-like hair splash some beers.

The Cave echoes Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Plato's account is about prisoners in a cave who watch shadows on the wall; the shadows are their reality; one cannot know true reality until their chain bonds are broken. The metaphor Plato employs reveals that the chaining bonds of the human experience serve as the senses' connection to reality. In *The Cave*, Plato's projections encompass the reality of the prisoners. In Lowe's *The Cave*, the reality of a performer is in their flesh.

This focus on sensuality and flesh is also celebrated in *The Beach*. Two figures embrace in a cobra-spooning position on a beach, turquoise water splashing around them. Enveloped in seaweed, their long black dreads form flowing lines, framing pronounced muscular and veiny necks. The distant sea horizon line lie parallel with six volcanoes jutting out of the water with four visible lava explosions. A large moon sits off-centre in the black night sky. *The Beach* is a graphic representation of embodied intersubjectivity – when two become one. This heteronormative display of unity transcends individualism as the figures morphs into one body.

Each world is represented by a graphic silk-





screen emblem which unlocks secrets to the nature of law there within. The Union is the emblem for the world inhabited by the lovers. The crest features an atmospheric space with a wedding scene. On the left, a figure with three long snouts, a muscular chest and defined arms stands beside a drowsy texture body with flesh in excess – the feminine. They stand hand-in-hand, foot-in-foot gazing at each other in union.

The characters in *A Whole New World* are subject to Lowe's environmental experiments wherein the entanglements of the body, their senses and their surroundings are central to the series. *The Garden* juxtaposes an inhospitable lava environment with a fertile field where fantastical plants whose unfolding sheaths expose smooth yellow interiors; six red petaled flowers punctuate the green field of thick grass stems. There is a figure on a swing, entangled with the background's volcanic lava, whose body is coloured by a soft gradient. At their toes, a rusty peach fades into the yellow of the plants. The body's mass is not unlike a skeleton; again, entrails of flesh as skin provide volume and form. Their fleshless mouth smiles. The carefree and frivolous exaggeration of sensuality is implicit. The reference to *The Swing* (1767), the popular rococo masterpiece by Fragonard, is undeniable. This Romantic period painting illustrates an idealized garden setting with a key female figure in lush pink folds, swinging, erotically kicking off her shoe to her lover hidden in the garden below. It is known for its representation of frivolity.

When these sensual bodies combine into

groups, Lowe's attention shifts from the sensual to the political. *The Grain Keepers* Fortress emblem illustrates two figures standing guard of a small bundle of grain on top a fortified landscape. This guardianship represents economic prosperity that demands protection.

The Grain Keepers' composition contains two columns of lush greenery attended by two standing figures that have their backs to the centre of the painting. A wall of bud-topped reeds is pulled open by two eight-fingered black hands; the reeds curve and intersect, creating a vibrant optical illusion. The illustrative black grim reaper behind the grain reveals the figures of these worlds to be shockingly mortal; this unsurprisingly humanizes their monstrosities. The scarcity of grain, representing both as economics and food security, is implied in the emblem by the emphasis on the singular grain bundle. At the same time, the landscape of *The Grain Keepers* is demonstrated to be lush and abundant, with a predominant water source and labourers. These images combine to represent artificial scarcity, an economic product of capitalism. The grain supply of this civilization is treated as a scarce commodity though there is every indication that it is, in fact, abundant.

The *Quicksand Island* emblem shows a crest hung on a doweling, held by a column of three figures perched atop one another's shoulders. The bottom figure, seemingly made of mud, stands in metamorphosis between floor and figure. A leaning castle tower sinks into a black sea with three seagulls glide in the distance. The black inverted







triangular earth seeps with dripping sand. The emblem infers an environment that is not a good selection for settlement. The viewer can envision the ground devouring structures and the labour required to maintain and rebuild the settlement. Nevertheless, the figures themselves are made of the material that is cause for their demise creating a unique expectation that they themselves may sink into the quicksand.

The Procession is a technical showpiece featuring thirty-eight humanoid red dressed figures. Porters carry a litter with a pink fabric cover carrying two ample and cloaked figures. An archive of historic litter images leads one to understand that the litter is inherently a tyrannical vehicle with roots in oppression, jockeyed by the bourgeoisies or ruling class. This understanding is depicted here. A central cluster of participants, lead by two figures with rifles, raise their arms in an exasperated gesture. In front of them, a soon-to-be trampled figure lays on their stomach, inching forward. There is green ooze pouring from the rooftop, dropping into pyramidal heaps. To the far right, this ooze has substantiated itself into four legless standing creatures with beady red eyes. They march two-by-two in single file leading the procession. What strikes Lowe about these characters is the apparent apathy of their participation in the procession. "Everybody has mixed feelings about whoever is in power, you either have complacency, or people that are really into it. Though these people are reluctant and unsure, they carry on with blind loyalty. While everything around them is falling apart,

there is a feeling of denial and obliviousness" states Lowe.¹

The five fictionalized civilizations develop origin stories, from the initial celebration of the flesh and senses, to the reviewing of the hazardous environment that generates these sensations. Lowe's work is humorous, often disarming you from your preconceived notions of what 'hell' would be like. These creatures are thriving while poking fun at the horrors of being human. Lowe's *A Whole New World* is a comprehensive examination, if not a celebration, of flourishing in a world with flesh in an environment that is decrepit.

Theresa Slater

NOTES

¹ Jamiyla Lowe, interview by Theresa Slater, October 15, 2017.

IT IS WHAT IT IS

Laurence Philomène and Starchild Stela

January 12th – February 10th, 2018

Non-binary

Term used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non- binary and/or genderqueer.¹

As I'm filling out my application for graduate school, I come to a box that states, "pick your gender." This sentence reads as an interrogation to me; the demand is so loaded and there isn't a proper option provided.

Gender fluidity, queerness, or flexibility is something that has existed and been recognized in many non-western societies for thousands of years.² However, in parts of westernized culture, the existence of non-binary or genderqueer people is regarded as a new revelation. Only a little over a year ago in June 2016, the Ontario government announced that driver's licenses and health cards would provide the option of 'x' as a gender identifier.³ Following this, on August 31, 2017, the federal government of Canada began allowing an 'x' gender designation on passports and immigration

documents.⁴ In May of 2017, Asia Kate Dillon, the first openly non- binary person to play a non-binary character on a major American television series, presented the first non-gendered acting award at the MTV Movie & TV Awards. In that same year, Dillon received the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Visibility Award, and during their acceptance speech they stated:

Because I was labeled white and assigned female at birth, I am able to wear a suit and it is considered groundbreaking; while my femme friends of colour who were assigned male at birth are ostracized, bullied, and beaten because they wear a skirt or a dress. Because I was labeled white and assigned female at birth, I am praised for declaring that clothing, makeup, and jewelry have no gender; while my femme friends of colour who were assigned male at birth and declare the same are told that there is no safe place for their expression... No one is free until we are all free.⁵

While these steps feel large in recognizing and validating the representation and general understanding of non-binary existence, representation is still missing in pop culture and media. Furthermore, that which is visible is heavily based on aesthetic ideals that do not represent a large portion of non-binary people.



It is what
it is

It
is







Continuously, gender fluidity or non-binary identity is assumed synonymous with androgynous aesthetics. However in this representation, it is not as much about accepting a sliding and continually evolving scale of gender presentation- but more so about accepting a lack of, or opposition to gender as subverting the binary. I believe this ideal stems from a heteronormative anxiety; queerness can be understood as long as there are undertones of heteronormative narratives. Having fluidity in your gender and sexual identity defies heteronormative logic; therefore, it cannot be seen as valid.

In Laurence Philomène and Starchild Stela's exhibition, *it is what it is*, both artists present a refreshingly honest spectrum of non-binary existence. In a celebration of gender expression and fluidity, Starchild and Laurence have produced portraits of their community and the people around them. These works provide space for visibility--these are portraits of non-binary people existing as themselves. The artists have given the subjects full agency in their representations, either through Starchild's method of asking each person to send them a selfie, or through the collaborative process of Laurence's portraits by co styling them with each of the participants. These processes eliminate the possibility of a sense of voyeurism in the images, creating a level of intimacy that I believe can only exist when a person is] truly comfortable in their space.

As a non-binary person who is femme-presenting, this type of representation is crucial to me. I understood androgyny from a young age, but this was heavily tied to aesthetics

which were masculine presenting; short hair, strong jaw lines and thin, long bodies. The majority of the time when I would find clothing labeled as 'gender neutral,' what it really meant was masculine- but giving everyone the permission to wear it.

It is seemingly impossible to de-politicize genderqueer and non-binary bodies, because there is such a lack of representation in popular culture. More often than not, the first step in a conversation is having to unpack a collection of terms. You are instantly expected to perform the labour of unraveling intimate details of your life to people you have met five minutes ago. This act in itself becomes political and exhausting.

The environment Starchild and Philomène have created is comfortable and inviting. It is your bedroom, it is your best friend's basement, presenting these portraits as posters hung on a wall like you would of people you hold close to you. These unapologetic images of non-binary people are what I imagine my teenage room would have been filled with had these types of representation existed for me.

There are aspects of each portrait in which I see a glimpse of myself and it is like a warm hug. It is a nod; a stepping-stone to not having to unpack myself every time I state my pronouns.

It is hard to speak to a universal experience, because everyone's narrative navigating the world as a non-binary person is layered and entirely different. I believe that's why work such as this is so important, to highlight the fiercely different bodies

and beings that identify as non-binary – to dispel the myth that there is one body, one aesthetic and one universal experience.

Maddie Alexander

NOTES

1 "GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender." GLAAD, 19 Apr. 2017, www.glaad.org/reference/transgender. 2 Diavolo, Lucy. "Gender Variance Around the World Over Time." Teen Vogue, TeenVogue.com, 20 June 2017, www.teenvogue.com/story/gender-variance-around-the-world. 3 "Gender on Health Cards and Driver's Licences." News.ontario.ca, news.ontario.ca/mgs/en/2016/06/gender-on-health-cards-and-drivers-licences.html. 4 "Canadians to be able to use 'x' option for gender on passports." The Globe and Mail, 24 Aug. 2017, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/transgender-canadians-to-be-able-to-use-x-option-on-passports/article36087305/. 5 hrmedia. Asia Kate Dillon Receives the HRC Visibility Award, YouTube, 11 Sept. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uULd1OSM6wY





CLOUD HANDS

Jessica Jang

April 6th – May 5th , 2018

Jessica Jang, current MFA candidate at the University of Guelph, makes a departure from her usual drawing and painting practice to explore sculpture in the form of *Cloud Hands*. Loosely borrowing from feng shui (also called Chinese geomancy) principles and rock scholarship, Jang explores her identity and Chinese heritage through traditions reinterpreted within a gallery setting. Marrying different Taoist practices, Jang creates a space that encourages mindful reflection and meditation.

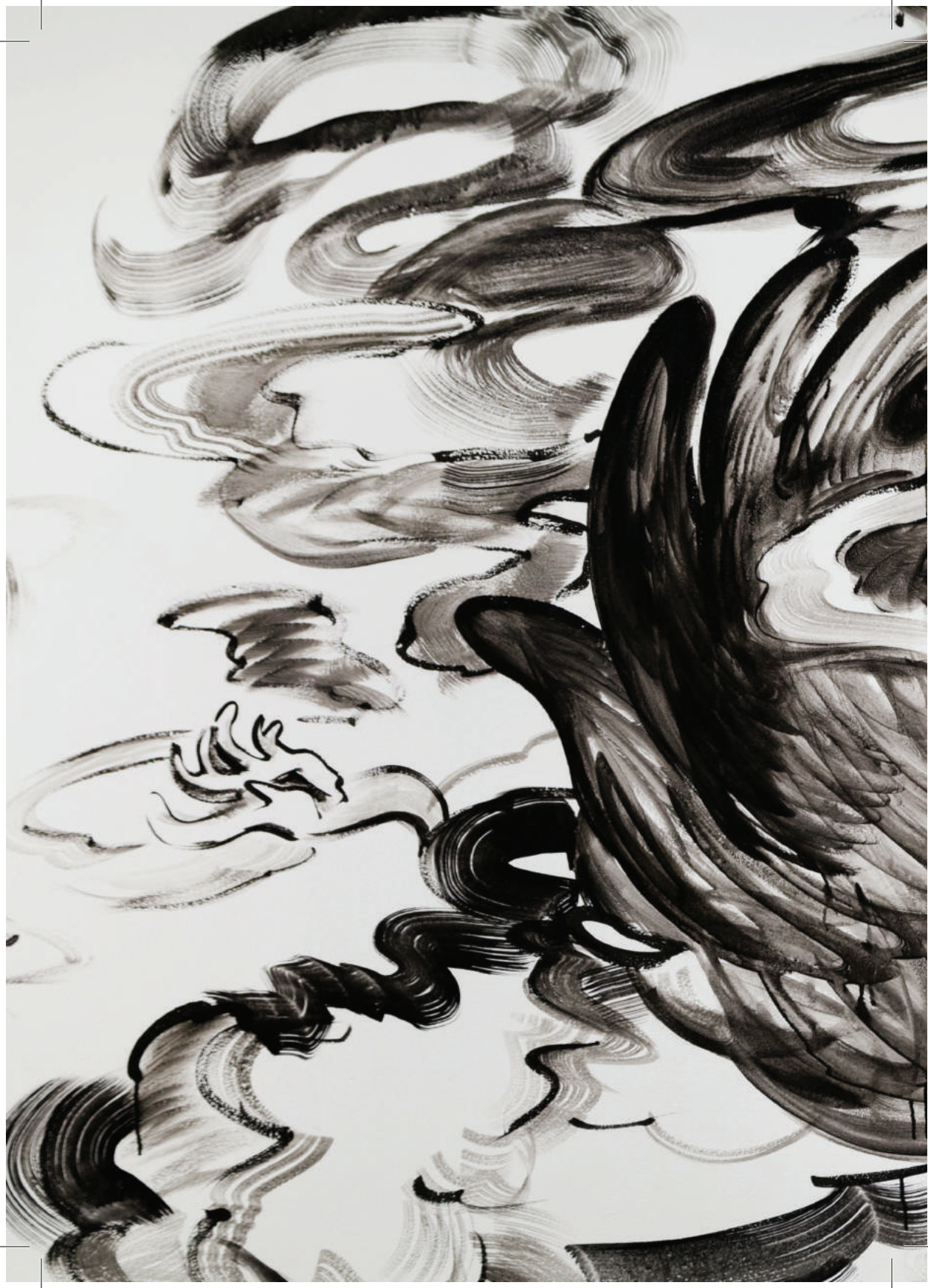
The title *Cloud Hands* is taken from a grappling or defensive Tai Chi movement of the same name.¹ Tai Chi promotes the understanding of the body as separate from the self – an inanimate object that is capable of being transformed by directing and channeling the life force or qi (pronounced ch'i).² The pairing of words "Cloud" and "Hands" conveys the poetics of transformation in this instance, as the relationship between the hands being simultaneously of the body and yet also inanimate objects.³ The theme of transformation is recurrent throughout *Cloud Hands*, from the paintings on the wall, to the presence of floor seating; Jang is encouraging active engagement or an experience rather than passive viewership.

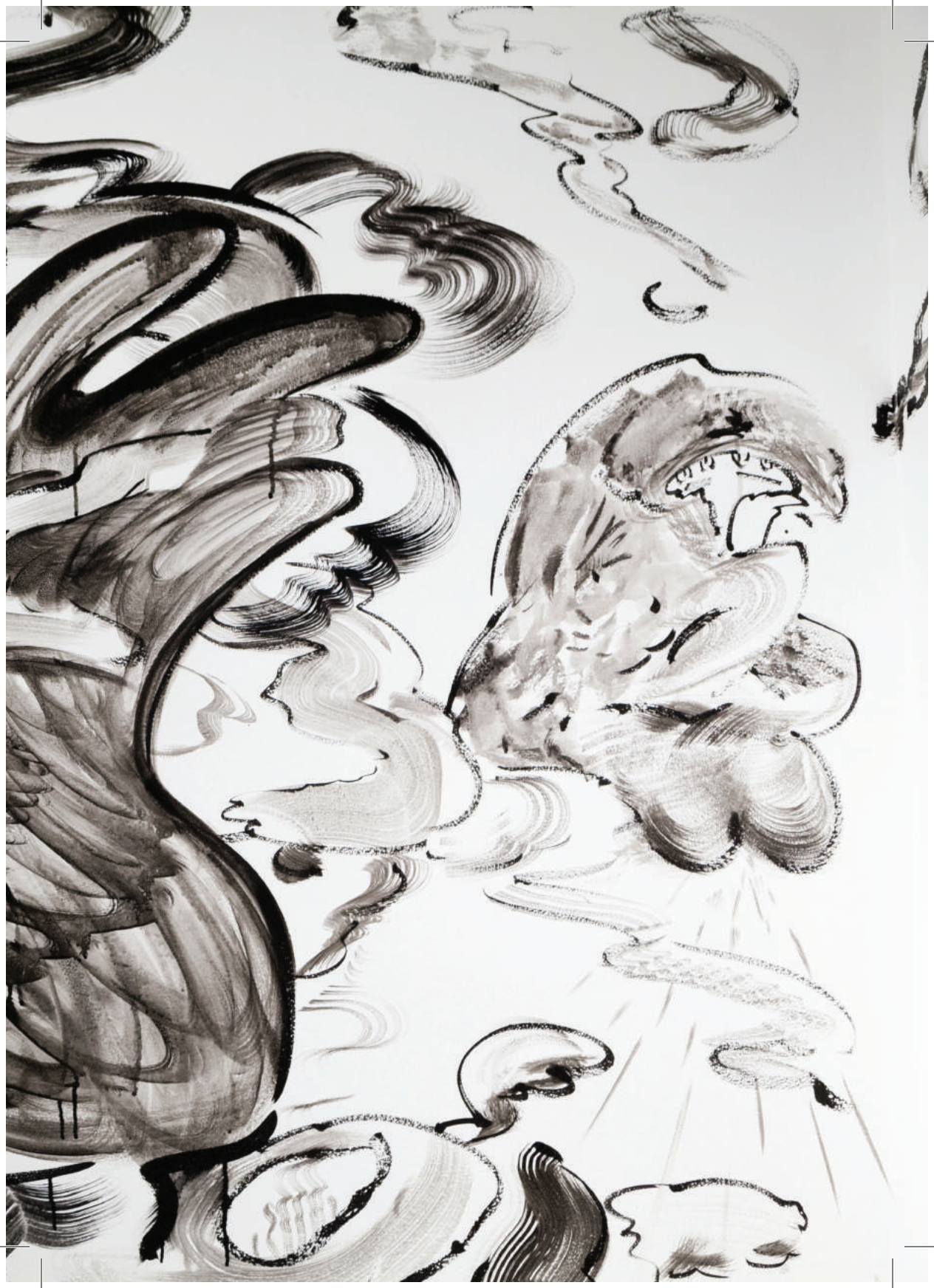
While recognizing that her understanding of feng shui is far from complete, Jang is intrigued by both the idea of energy moving between animate and inanimate objects as

well as the poetic nature of Chinese philosophy. Employing papier-mâché and a muted colour palette, Jang has created a series of objects that represent Chinese scholar's rocks, which are often used in feng shui as a way of manifesting auspicious energies into a space. Complete with small guardians to prevent the blockage of energy associated with corners, Jang's installation attempts to mimic the harmony with natural forms typically found in Chinese geomancy. The paintings on the walls serve to illustrate energetic dynamism, shape shifting and highlight the importance of geology and clouds.⁴

In the complex practice of feng shui, qi is cyclical and the balance of YinYang maintains vital energy. Qi provides life and supports prosperity. It is preserved underground, rises up in the form of wind, descends in the form of rain, flows in the form of rivers and is present in all natural forms.⁵ Caves and crevasses present in mountains act as the channels through which qi flows and these in turn offer a view into the source of nature's life force. Areas that have a complex combination of these elements nearby are considered favourable and are sought after for various purposes, including the building of homes, important buildings and burial sites. However, these conditions can be replicated to invite or maintain fortune in contemporary dwellings and workspaces by bringing in elements, such as scholar's stones, which traditionally represent









mountains. These stones are typically smooth with holes, signifying caves, which invite contemplation on the power of nature and flow of energies.⁶ Collected by those of high status and privilege, they are often small and displayed indoors on wooden bases specifically carved for each unique rock. Larger stones are found lying directly on the ground in harmoniously arranged gardens.

The “rocks” of *Cloud Hands* have been created with pocks and recesses and are much lighter and less precious than their traditional counterparts. By creating these objects out of common craft materials, the artist deconstructs the traditional value structures associated with them. Nonetheless, Jang has stayed true to tradition insofar as the stones are presented with fabric-covered bases. Additionally, the artist’s placement of meditative cushions also invites visitors to view the installation from the ground. A lower vantage point provides the optimal view of the background paintings, scholar’s rocks and guardians, encircling the viewer in a harmonious environment with “quiet” colours.⁷ This change in perspective is an intentional offer of both a literal change in perspective and an exercise in grounded meditation. When sitting, the viewer becomes more closely connected with the source of qi, opening up the possibility of channelling positive and calming vital energy. Similarly, by viewing the work from below, the western idea of the gallery as a liminal space, designed for detached and passive experience, is challenged by the active recognition of the flow of energies between animate and inanimate objects.

Jang invites the viewer to join her in an exploration of challenging western notions of viewership and methods of reading artworks by introducing a setting for a philosophical experience. By combining her understanding of both western and eastern practices, Jang helps to bridge a gap between typical western art subjectivities and Chinese philosophical practices. When viewed from the ground and taking the opportunity to mindfully slow down, the artist anticipates that visitors might experience time differently. Additionally, experiencing the installation may stimulate philosophical and personal questions, leading to a potentially transformative experience.

Vicki Clough

NOTES

¹ Tai Chi, a meditative martial arts practice with slow flowing positions, called movements ² Finlayson, Caitlin C. “Performativity and the Art of Tai Chi: Understanding the Body as Transformative.” *Southeastern Geographer*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2015, pp. 362–376. ³ Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5th, 2018. ⁴ Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5th, 2018. ⁵ Yoon, Hong-Key. “The Image of Nature in Geomancy.” *GeoJournal*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1980, pp. 341–348. The author acknowledges that this is an over-simplified explanation of a highly sophisticated and well-established cultural practice. ⁶ Stomberg, John. “Zhan Wang: Urban Landscape.” *Gastronomica*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2007, pp. 9–11. ⁷ Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5th, 2018.

FESTIVAL DAYS ARE MYTHICAL; ALL OTHER DAYS ARE HISTORICAL

Marina Fathalla and Sandy Saad

February 23 – March 24, 2018

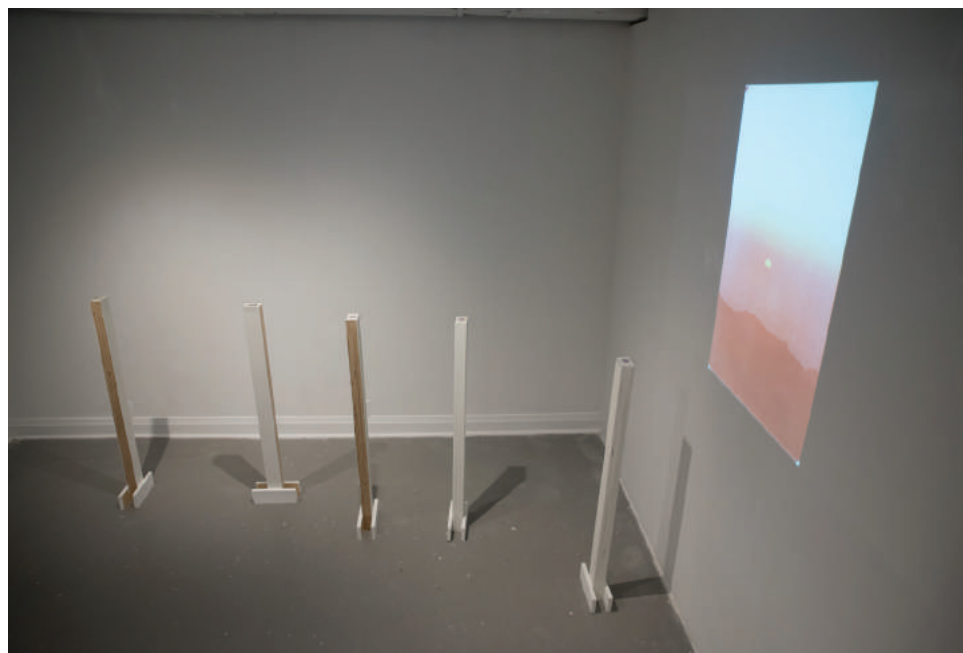
Festival Days are Mythical; All other Days are Historical, is a multi-layered installation project that looks at the ways in which land, landscapes and natural resources are positioned in the context of Egypt's post-colonial independence.

Created by Egyptian-Canadian artist, Marina Fathalla, the project explores the links between nuanced notions of wealth, class and the value of land through various lenses of tourism, elitism, and national pride. At the centre of the installation is a series of stamps from the St. Mark's Coptic Museum collection, displaying Egypt's presentation of itself to its population and to the world. Reflecting the country's changing identity within a particular historical framework, the stamps commemorate Egypt's ancient history, its industrial advances and its natural resources. The carefully composed stamps are contrasted with a rococo furniture set referencing the traditional motif of a salon¹ commonly found in upper class Egyptian homes. The highly decorative furniture is embroidered with images of Europeans enjoying leisurely activities in lush gardens. These gardens starkly contrast Egypt's arid landscape in the desert images taken by Fathalla's father during his domestic travels in the 1970s, where he camped in public beaches, and on the pyramids, places that are now increasingly privatized for tourism. As a diasporic artist, Fathalla straddles a dual relationship to the Egyptian landscape

with her identity closely reliant on the land, while she experiences it as a foreigner. Her museological research, along with her travel experiences, have inspired her engagement in a project that explores the processes of appropriating and commemorating land, with a particular sensitivity to landscape and architecture at the intersection of its poetics and its politics.

In 1957, Egypt issued a stamp in honour of the completion of the Shepherd's Hotel in Garden City, Cairo. Its image comprised of a large modern structure overlooking a sailboat and double-decker yacht cruising along the Nile River in the foreground. The stamp was to commemorate the completion of the modern Shepherd's Hotel, half a mile from the site of its original version, which was established in 1841. The Egyptian General Company for Tourism & Hotels owned the state of the art structure and the land that it occupied. This establishment represented Egyptian modernity, a once colonial site for the leisure and pleasure of the upper class, more specifically for British occupants, was now owned and operated by Egyptians. The original Shepherd's Hotel was named after Samuel Shephard, an Englishman who co-owned it with Mr. Hill, Mohammed Ali Pasha's head coachman. They proved to be successful entrepreneurs as the mid-nineteenth century "Hotel des Anglais" (English Hotel) would become a popular destination in Cairo, and one of the most celebrated in





the world. Shephard's was famed for its grandeur and opulence; stained glass windows, Persian carpets, gardens, terraces, and great granite pillars resembling those of the Ancient Egyptian temples. Its American Bar was frequented by French and British officers along with the world's elite. In the evenings, the hotel would host dances at which men appeared in military uniform and women in evening gowns.² The original Shephard's was a potent symbol of Western influence, British colonial occupation, and the problematic and complicated relationship between the Orient and Occident, as well as the colonized and colonizer.³ This would eventually lead the hotel to be burned down in the Cairo Fire, a series of riots that took place in retaliation to the killing of 50 Egyptian policemen by British occupation troops on January 25, 1952. The event that is often thought to have led to the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, saw the burning and looting of the most opulent places that drew the world's aristocrats; retail shops, cafes, cinemas, hotels, restaurants, theatres, and nightclubs, most notably, the Shephard's Hotel. The new Shephard's Hotel was a response to its colonial predecessor and signaled Egypt's independent engagement with modernism. Its strategic location on the Nile would have the river serve as the foreground to a leisurely life in the lush richness of Egypt's land.

A series of post-revolution stamps celebrating the new Shephard's Hotel, the Aswan Dam and a range of Egypt's modern productions were commissioned alongside images of pharaohs, historical monuments

and flowers commemorating historical feasts. Floral stamps would trace back to the traditions of Ancient Egypt, one of the first countries to recognize 'national' plants. The Nasser government issued stamps of roses, lotuses, and poinsettias amongst others to represent and celebrate feasts related to pharaonic history and commemorate successes of contemporary times. The lush and fertile ground surrounding the Nile offered a bouquet ready to be utilized for the commemoration of Egypt's ancient history and modernity. Post-revolution Egypt would not only bring with it changes in government-produced propaganda when it came to landscape, it would also bring a new approach to land governance. Gamal Abdel Nasser's post-revolution land reform launched an effort to change land ownership practices in Egypt. Prior to the reformation, less than six percent of Egypt's population owned more than 65% of the land, and less than 0.5% of Egyptians owned more than one-third of all fertile land.⁴ These major owners had almost autocratic control over their fields, charging high rents, which led to large amounts of debt carried by farmers and peasants. The 1952 law saw the redistribution of 700,000 feddans⁵ and the reduction of the maximum size of land ownership. This new division of land along with the formation of Cooperatives provided farmers with pesticides, seeds, fertilizers, and marketed their agricultural products. By the 1980s the effects of land reform in Egypt drew to a halt as the country moved its attention away from agriculture and began to use its natural resources to grow other industries. Egypt would see a surge in

the production of cotton and the building of waterside tourist destinations. However, the new distribution of land would be commemorated in a series of flora stamps produced by the Egyptian government, and can be found in Fathalla's installation.

Stamps are evidence that the government actively utilized Egypt's rivers, deserts and flowers to position itself as an attractive modern country with a rich pharaonic history. The post-revolution government would commission stamps commemorating the Cairo Industrial Fair, the International Fair for Egyptian Cotton, the Lion and Nile Hilton Hotel, while an assortment of floral stamps were produced to celebrate feasts and festivals; the rose in arch, the morning glory and the sunflower. Many of them can be found at St. Mark's Coptic Museum in Scarborough, Ontario, where Fathalla, researched and catalogued the collection. Each one carefully designed, acting as exhibitions of reception and representation, presenting ideals of where the country is at as a whole, as a display of national construct. The stamps are installed in ways that mimic the Egyptian landscape; floral stamps are placed on floor displays, while hotel stamps are displayed on tall towers. The wooden structures on which the stamps are arranged are contrasted two highly ornate rococo chairs, embroidered with images of european lovers affectionately embracing in a lush rose filled garden. The furniture style gained popularity during the year 1800, the same period where travel began to be called 'tourism,' and when the original Shephard's Hotel was at its peak in popu-

larity. The traditional home in Egypt would include this furniture salon, an area in which couches and armchairs were decorated in proper rococo fashion and adorned with gold-leafed frames and images of European landscapes. These designs would serve as the backdrops to the most special occasions that take place in an Egyptian household alluding to the colonial influence infiltrating domestic spaces to the present day. The furniture presents a land that is very different from the barren landscape found in Egypt and the scenery produced in post-colonial stamps.

The combination of images of European lovers in lush gardens, large hotels straddling the desert and the Nile, flora stampage to commemorate feasts, and the nostalgic photos taken by Fathalla's father, offer a comparative analysis of the complex ways landscapes are experienced and portrayed from a post-colonial lens. In one, the land is perfectly manicured to offer the ideal setting for leisure and pleasure; in the other, it is used to present a destination for tourism, with the motive of commercial gain; it is also photographed and remembered in an experience, and in another, elements of landscape, such as plants and flowers, showcase an important aspect of daily life. To the ancient Egyptians, plants like lotus and papyrus symbolized the primeval waters of Nun, from which the Egyptians believed life began. Papyrus grew in thickets with considerable fauna along the Nile, becoming a symbol of fertility and life itself. Here there are vastly different approaches to thinking of natural resources - one cyclical and ritu-

al, while the others are idealistic and commercial. Focusing on the commodification and privatization of land due to large hotel chains taking over the Nile coast, Fathalla also produced a repository listing the hotels along the Nile as well as, historical hotels, that were/are located alongside the river, a kind of textual cartography. The list takes the form of a website, which is then mobile for viewers to read it as an accessible set of indexical information that explores the contentions between tourism as leisure vs. tourism as livelihood/ and water as livelihood. The installation brings together a collimation of images of landscapes portrayed in various ways and motives. In her explorations, Fathalla excavates her own identity as an Egyptian, living away from her place of origin. She examines the complex ways she experiences a place that she is intrinsically connected to and inevitably detached from. She considers her position as an emigrant, a tourist, an artist, and a researcher. Her installation highlights the ways in which

Egypt has treated and marketed its land in the wake of post-colonialism, and poses questions about the complex ways we consume our homeland and our negotiated relationship to landscape.

She compels viewers to think about the ways in colonialism, tourism, and history mediate our relationship to land.

Sandy Saad

This exhibition was generously supported by the Ontario Arts Council.

NOTES

1 French for living room **2** Wharton, Annabel Jane, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture*, University of Chicago Press, 2001.

3 Ibrahim, Tarek, "Johann Adam Rennebaum and the Architecture of Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo", *The Myth of the Orient: Architecture and Ornament in the Age of Orientalism*, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2016 **4** Dr. Assem Al-Desoky's *Major Landowners in Egypt: 1914-1952* (in Arabic, Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, 2007. quoted in *Egypt on the Brink* by Tarek Osman, Yale University Press, 2010, p.45 **5** Feddan - A unit of area for land used in some Arab countries, approximately equal to an acre (0.42 hectare).



MAW6INI

Samar Hejazi

June 29th – July 28th, 2018

My homeland, my homeland
Glory and beauty, sublimity and splendor
Are in your hills, are in your hills
Life and deliverance, pleasure and hope
Are in your air, are in your air
Will I see you, will I see you?
Safely comforted and victoriously honored
Safely comforted and victoriously honored
Will I see you in your eminence?
Reaching to the stars, reaching to the stars
My homeland, my homeland

– *Mawtini*, Ibrahim Abd al-Fattah Touqan in 1934, first verse

On a cloudy Wednesday afternoon, I am sitting in the Project Space intrigued by Samar Hejazi's meticulous process of installing her solo exhibition *Maw6ini*. Climbing up and down the ladder, she is hooking strands of fishing line diagonally across the room, and on each, hanging small textile squares. Each fabric piece is composed of fragile, loose, gridded threads. Hejazi mentions during our conversation that the threads represent Palestinian diasporic connections, and the layered embroidery its people. She adds that it is the people who are holding the structure together- carrying with them the memory of a land. The embroideries are all composed of excerpts from a renowned Palestinian poem, entitled *Mawtini*. On the far side of the room, one can observe that

the words are stitched in Arabic characters, and on the opposite side, in its Latin counterpart. However, if the visitor isn't fluent in Arabic, both versions are illegible. The translation into Roman characters is a hybrid form of text, interweaving letters and numbers that are phonetically mimicking Arabic sounds. Between the rows of hung fabric, there is a monitor featuring a video recording of a Skype conversation between the artist and her Taita (grand-mother). Along with the video and textile works, the artist has included a musical version of the poem.

Maw6ini, also known as *My Homeland* in English, was written by Ibrahim Abd al-Fattah Touqan in 1934, during the British occupation of Palestine. The struggle against



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what was called then, the British Mandate for Palestine, was a direct consequence of the fall of the Ottoman Empire as well as diplomatic agreements between the British, French and Jewish communities, all of which also coincided with the end of World War I. Touqan's patriotic poem rallied masses in the attempt to regain territorial and political control, fuelling the Arab revolt of 1936-1939. Recognized as the Palestinian nationalist hymn, *Mawtini* inhabits the diaspora's imaginary through generations, connecting a scattered population with a common historical thread. Interestingly enough, this poem has also been adopted by Iraqis as their National Anthem in 2003, interlocking time, space, and histories while unifying shared socio-political struggles. Although politically engaged and strongly nationalistic, this text is contextualized differently in this exhibition. Here, it does not work as a symbol of patriotism or as a tool to denounce the current Palestinian condition, but rather it functions as one of the main markers of Hejazi's multi-layered identity. This iconic script was taught to Samar by her grand-mother at an early age, thus informing her relationship to the Arabic language as a Canadian-Palestinian.

Taita, or more formally known as Siham Dabbagh, is a community knowledge keeper, residing in Jordan. Dedicated to sustaining the Palestinian culture for future generations, she is to the artist at the root of the story, the one who is passing down important information in her family. Hejazi claims that culturally, knowledge transfer is female. This remark enhances the understanding

of the materiality of the textile components in her installation. Embroidery as a historical symbol of domesticity and femininity expands on the notion of feminine gate-keeping while serving as a powerful mnemonic device.

In conversation with the textile work, the video focuses on the linguistic side of memory and cultural identity. Hejazi believes that language is a window to one's culture. The ways in which language describes an emotion, an action or an object is very telling of the community's state of being and shared values. Therefore, as a person speaking Arabic, English and French, the artist navigates more than one culture, more than one state of self. This concept is reinforced by the recorded conversation with her grand-mother. In the video, Samar is reciting *Mawtini* while simultaneously attempting to translate the verses in English. Both she and her interlocutor are struggling to find the right words to faithfully communicate the sentiments described by Touqan. In this process linguistic nuances appear to be at risk of losing the essence of the text, creating tension. Samar strokes her hair, subconsciously relieving stress when the proper English word is at the tip of her tongue. Sometimes the effort in shifting from one language to another is so exhausting that artist lets a quick, "anyway," slip out, as she feels stuck in finding the perfect word. Moreover, at times, a hand gesture becomes an outlet to uncover the proper term. While watching the video, I can't help but wonder; what is at stake when translating material culture to ensure accessibility and cultural sustainability?

What is erased, what remains, and what is added?

The same line of questioning sticks with me as I try to decipher the verses formed of letters and numbers. Hejazi informed me that this type of communication is specific to the Arabic diaspora when conversing on chat forums or via texting. With the apparition of platforms like ICQ and only having access to English keyboard, certain linguistic sounds can't be replicated with the Roman alphabet. Consequently, the closest shapes to the Arabic version were found in numbers, inventing a new type of written dialect. Although normalized, this method of translation was picked up by the artist as a metaphor for carving one's space between different worlds, whilst embracing this in-between-ness in a fluid and creative way.

Many artworks by diasporic artists are characterized by a perpetual state of longing and a haunting desire to belong some-

where, to fit within a linear-narrative. What is proposed here is an embrace of non-linearity. This notion is not presented as the grief of never finding inner peace, but rather as an owned way of navigating the world. Through this exhibition, Hejazi delineates a personal cultural landscape hinting to abundance instead of absence and lack. Despite the frustrations in navigating her multiple selves and their associated language, she mends with patience each part of her personhood, as she has carefully threaded through the installation *Maw6ini*.

Geneviève Wallen

NOTES

1 Please find the full English translation here. <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/mawtini-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-my-homeland.html> **2** For more information about the British Mandate for Palestine, please read the following. Noah Rayman (September 29, 2014), "Mandatory Palestine: What It Was and Why It Matters". TIME Magazine. etrieved from <http://time.com/3445003/mandatory-palestine/> **3** Interview with the artist Samar Hejazi, Wednesday June 29th, 2018. **4** Ibid **5** Ibid





external

Our external space is located in the OCAD University Learning Zone. The external space offers opportunities for media-based works, with an emphasis on video and animation.

EULOGY FOR A DYING SEA

Polina Teif

September 13th – October 24th, 2017

During a 2016 artist residency in Arad, Israel, Polina Teif came across an abandoned school. On the wall of one of the classrooms, she discovered a painting of the Greek titan, Atlas. Condemned to hold up the sky for eternity, according to Greek mythology, Atlas was said to stand on the Western edge of the Earth. Meeting dancer James Bailey in Tel Aviv around this time, Teif asked Bailey to embody Atlas as she shot his movements on and around abandoned buildings off the Dead Sea. *Eulogy for a Dying Sea* is an ongoing project in poetic, documentary film, as well as an exercise in ongoing and anticipatory grief.

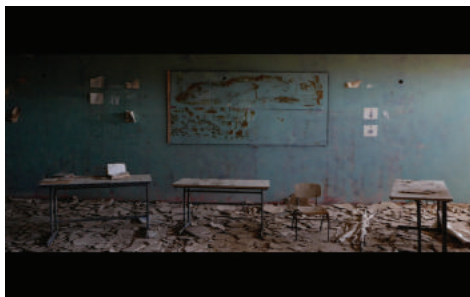
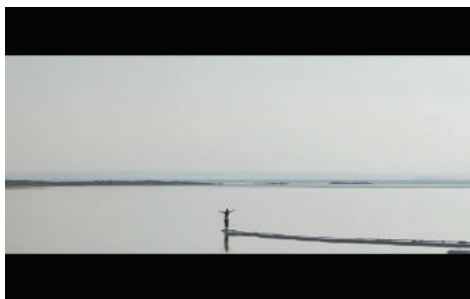
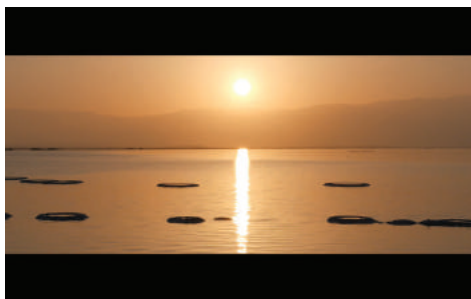
Initially trained as a photographer, Teif began *Eulogy for a Dying Sea* as a series of stills. Switching to film, she establishes dance as a thread between framed shots, using sound toward a sense of melancholy and loss. For much of the film, the landscape appears vacant and still, further illuminated through the contrast of Bailey's movements in space. Teif chooses to title the work, a eulogy, assuming the inevitability of ecological death in an attempt to deepen her understanding and appreciation for a region steeped in a dynamic history of conflict and commerce.

From the film's outset, viewers are brought into the vastness of the sea and surrounding landscape with ambient noise like a wind picking up across the desert. Sparsely

arranged, human beings appear small and shadowed against the twin enormities of sea and sun. As the music mounts as does a feeling of dread, and a person appears in the foreground, his back to us. Teif captures a body mirroring a mountainous backdrop.

Flexing muscle and creasing skin echo cracks and fissures in the earth's surface, while upper limbs roll and reach like waves.

Just over half way through *Eulogy for a Dying Sea*, the beat drops and Teif invites viewers to re-see the landscape through the lens of human activity, both past and present. Alternating between shots of deserted buildings and a peopled shoreline, Teif creates a complex sense of place, changed and changing. People caught in acts of leisure exist uncomfortably in the atmosphere she creates. She expects dance to enliven the desolate structures which stand as markers of time. Viewers see Bailey flip into a handstand on the shoreline, his body stiff and vertical, followed by a shot of a large electrical tower. As with several moments in the film, Teif points to the complex relationship between human beings and ecology in the region, interwoven yet distinct, violent yet intimate. She invites viewers to look through constructed space (and time) at the destruction of an environment, pointing to the expansion of tourism and industries for extracting sodium, magnesium and potash over the course of the twentieth century. Teif



lets the bigness of the desert landscape stand in for the bigness of what is at stake with the rapidly receding shores of the Dead Sea.

In one of Teif's previous films, *HALL*, six sculptural forms, draped in fabric, are arranged in a room. Over the course of ten minutes, the shapes collapse, one by one, into distinct heaps of fabric on the floor. With *HALL* as with *Eulogy for a Dying Sea*, Teif explores the intersections of presence and absence. She is curious for spaces marked with 'what was', both drained of the past and coloured with it. Born in Belarus just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, she grew up as an immigrant in Israel/Palestine, and as an adult, moved to Toronto to study visual art and subsequently film. Committed to a lens-based art practice, Teif draws on the work of late Canadian artist Lynn Cohen, whose stills of "empty" domes-

tic space call on viewers to respond and imagine the content and happenings of the space. Imagining grows in the absence, and in discussing her own work, Teif stresses a process of discovery, built on a philosophy of not-knowing. The land is literally unknowable, rapidly changing and contested.

Atlas was believed to represent the quality of endurance. While a eulogy, *Eulogy or a Dying Sea* is also a warning. Teif invokes and portrays life and movement as an argument for it, both pointing to and questioning the inevitability of environmental destruction in the region. The film asks, is it too late for the Dead Sea? What would it mean if it was? It is easier to harm that which we cannot see the life in. *Eulogy for a Dying Sea* interrupts this process.

Lindsay Miles

MOM AND HER MUSIC

Rajee Paña Jeji Shergill

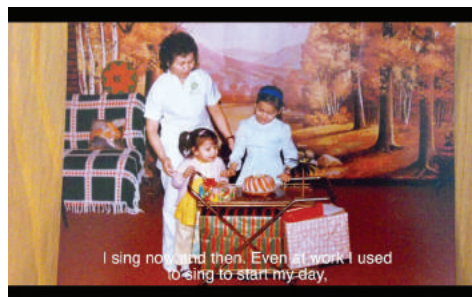
October 25th – December 15th, 2017

Rajee Paña Jeji Shergill's work, *mom and her music*, explores the ways in which personal music and memory can work together to dig into issues that refuse easy resolution: diaspora, nostalgia, and loneliness. About 15 minutes in length, Rajee's video is a montage of various episodes from the life of the Paña Jeji Shergill family. The piece consists of layered homemade video/photographic footage from the last 30 years. There is a phone interview conducted with her mother, Rose Paña Jeji Shergill, as well as a collection of original songs recorded by Rose between 2005 and 2008. The songs in concert with the visual montage facilitate a homework journey for the artist.

The particular assemblage of visual and spoken narratives presented in *mom and her music*, is a common trope in the work of numerous diasporic artists, whose experiences are characterized by plurality, hybridity, and heterogeneity. According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, these songs originate from feelings of alienation and homelessness.¹ Situated in places of discomfort, diasporic bodies only have access to archives that are, by their very nature, fragmentary and fugitive – requiring new dialogic formations to open. Born in an immigrant family to a Filipino mother and a Punjabi father, Rajee is such a diasporic body. The artist, in dialogue with the maternal diasporic subject, cares for feelings of nostalgia and loneliness.

The video opens with a melodic greeting from Rose, who sends her love to her two daughters, Loveleen and Rajee. She gently reminds them, "We are missing you so much, thinking of you all the time."² These feelings of longing are further elaborated in the phone interview, when Rose patiently charts her intuitive song-making practice, from her youth spent in the Philippines and then in Florida, where she used music as a way to cope with her daughters' growing independence, and relocations away from home. Rose wistfully speaks of going to her daughters' empty rooms to sing their bodies back into presence.

In a similar vein, Rajee uses processes of archival rummaging and collaging to make her own way back to her mother and motherland(s). The video is populated by family gatherings, of rose-coloured parties in the basement of her parent's Winnipeg home, which are cut by snapshots of an empty bed, a desolate canopied bench, a lonely view of snow falling in residential Montreal. We catch brief glimpses of the young Rose with her friends and family in the Philippines, to be replaced videos of her walking around a Punjabi veranda getting ready for a wedding, and then some decades later, bouncing lightly in the back of a trekking jeep as her daughter takes over control of the camera. Interestingly, Rajee's use of grainy, and at times blurred, video subtly mimics the



tone of her mother's immigrant accent. This delicate likeness proudly displays both difference and a history of movement. Like her mother, who, despite, not being born with a Canadian mother-tongue sings music comfortably and with joy, the artist centers the only available archive. She constructs a return that is not only compelling but one that is brought to life through its very complexity and fragmentation. In partnering this visual history with her mother's music, Rajee administers a unique collaboration that does not leave behind the struggles of her own mother, similarly stuck between diaspora and homeland. Music and video, accordingly, operate as two languages through which the women negotiate change and feelings of nostalgia.

At one point, Rajee begins a casual splitting of the screen between archival material and

contemporary shots of herself walking towards the camera and at other times, slowly retreating. Dressed in both Western and Indian attire, this act of splitting illustrates a physical separation between the here/now with the there/then, which functions as a warning that the homeward bound body is intimately tied to the effects of diaspora and can never return unscathed. In his discussion of Caribbean cultural identities and the significance of homeward journeys in cultural production, Stuart Hall suggests that there is no simple way of returning home to make sense of our identities and future directions. Rather, these journeys, which are made "necessary for us all," are "necessarily circular," and require us to return by alternative routes.³ Indeed, Jeji Shergill's return to her homeland – located at the meeting place of India and the Philippines – is circuitous because she is detoured by key life moments in

diaspora, materialized in her family's historical ephemera and her mother's music and doubly split by her continued participation in the diasporic culture.

mom and her music illuminates that there is never an easy way to return home and nostalgia is not an end in itself. Instead, through Rajee's eyes and Rose's songs, we can learn to see our past uprootings and consequent movements as points of connection between us and others, giving us strength to move into our futures. As Rose utters her hope that she continues to sing and make new songs in the future, the viewer can only wish that for those bound to their particular homeward journeys, the will to return and the courage to accept change never expires.

Noor Bhangu

NOTES

1 Jan Nederveen Pieterse. "Globalization as Hybridization." In *Media and Cultural Studies*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 567-81. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. p. 574. **2** Rajee Paña Jeji Shergill. *Mom and Her Music*. 2016. 0:32. <http://www.xpace.info/exhibition-event/mom-and-her-music/>

3 Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Theorizing Diaspora*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 233-46. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. p. 242.



THE WALK HOME

Abedar Kamgari

January 9th – February 27th, 2018



In the 30-minute footage of the two-channel long-take performance-for-video, *The Walk Home* (2017), Hamilton-based performance and video artist Abedar Kamgari displays how she navigates the “Canadian” land as a settler/immigrant. As in many of her previous works, Kamgari uses the medium of two-channel presentation to display and explore the ambiguity and uncertainty of her dual identity on Indigenous land as a settler and, also, as a racialized immigrant. *The Walk Home* occupies that limbo space in between the two identities that are represented metaphorically by employing the juxtaposition of the two videos. Like Kamgari, these two videos are very much the exact footage of the same actor, same scenario, same prop and actions. Conversely, each video has its own storyboard - where one's beginning is another one's ending.

The videos begin with Kamgari stepping out of the house and down from the bus respectively onto the same stretch of suburban blocks that are presumably the artist's home neighbourhood. The path is familiar to most Canadians: from the steps of the house to the bus stop or in reserve. However, on the day of the performance, Kamgari carries with her a large, unfamiliar white sculpture, which is used by the artist as a means of destabilizing the audience's sense of familiarity. Assuming the shape of the gigantic spinning top, the sculpture appears significantly heavy as it takes half of the artist's body weight to be carried around. Once on the pavement, Kamgari starts dragging the object, scoring the concrete pavements with chalk-like traces on the land. Kamgari's mirroring set-up of the two videos creates a Möbius¹ strip of a narrative where both sides

of the story are simultaneously played out.

The fluidity and interchangeability of the video content reflect the strife in navigating the ambiguity of dual identity of a racialized settler in Canada. Kamgari intensifies the effect of the narrative by employing long takes, or 'one-scene-one-cut', allowing the viewers to genuinely follow the narrative in its entirety without editorial interferences. The common goal for the 'one-scene-one-cut' technique is to consider the depth and range of the field inside the spectator's visual range constituting a theatrical space allowing the actors to perform in a continuous mode (Nagib, 30). When it was first experimented with by Japanese director Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956), such as in the 1939 film *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, the close resemblance to theatre production's 'long-take technique' was criticized against the heavy 'cut-and-edit' of Western cinema in the neorealist combination of location shooting, non-[theatrical] acting and independent production (30). Neorealist filmmakers like Italian director Roberto Rossellini² were also in favour of quick-fire movements that were reflective of the urban velocity that was highly promoted during the cinema boom from the 1930-50s (Nagib, 28-29). Stretching of the movie beyond 30-minutes allows the eyes to wander within the visual range and to pick up subtle details hidden in the construction of the performance's environment.

In *The Walk Home*, Kamgari synthesizes two types of cinematic movement: the 'objective motion' which refers to the movement of object in front of the camera and

the 'subjective motion' in which the spectator's point of view is aligned with the titling, panning or travelling of the camera, bringing motionless, as well as moving the object to the viewer's attention (Nagib, 27). Every element in the videos is mis-en-scene; the artist is no longer the protagonist but an actor in an ensemble composed of human and non-human characters. As the camera moves forwards following the artist, the back and foreground relationship continuously changes, folding and unfolding new elements of the artist's surroundings: different houses, untrimmed front lawns and bypassing neighbours who give bewildered looks to the performance before making swift contact with the camera.

The contrast between the desolate landscape and Kamgari's determination to transgress through the landscape, creates multiple on-screen places for contemplation and meditation. The format of the long-take allows for prolonged focus on these areas. Kamgari's performance decelerates the viewers, as well as the by-passers seen in the videos. By dragging the large sculpture, Kamgari forcefully rejects the homogenization of the landscape while constantly moving deeper into it. The cinematic dynamic here recalls 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,' (Nagib, 33) "the rejection of realistic mimesis, the use of symbols, the actors' emotional control, the absence of a fourth wall and the construction of the sets before the eyes of the audience (Brecht, 1964: 91 ff.)."

Kamgari's goal of revealing "the construction of the sets" – evident through accidental shadows of the camera operator in



some shots – aims to evoke a double reflexivity within the viewers, in and outside of the screen (Nagib, 36). Kamgari's viewers engage the same durational physical experience as the artist undergoes. They can feel the physical exhaustion that takes over Kamgari's body as friction chips away the exterior of the sculpture. Here, both the artist and the object are slowly altered. The sculpture stands not only for the artist, but also for the burden that she carries constantly. Kamgari visualizes her feeling through an affective visual language, an act that is politically apt to address the complexity of being a racialized settler/ immigrant on Canadian Indigenous land. *The Walk Home* is political not entirely because of Kamgari's artist's statement. It becomes political when it allows the viewers to participate in the on-screen and unedited performance (Nagib, 38). The emotion is raw, and the exhaustion is in real-time. The long take and the reservedly mirrored narratives constitute an ambiguous space for viewers to participate in the artist's complete but irresolute story.

Tak Pham

NOTES

1 Named after the German mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius (1790-1868) in 1858, the Möbius strip is a loop created out of one single strip joined by its two ends with a half-twist. The outcome effect is a twisted cylinder with a closed path surface, one can cover the both the inner and outer sides of the cylinder in one continuous travel. (Weisstein, n.d.) **2** Robert Rossellini (1906-1977) was an Italian filmmaker who pioneered Neo-Realism in the history of world cinema. He was notable for "mixing authentic people and locations in with actors and studio sets", merging fiction and reality "offer[ing] fragments of reality that retain all of its mystery and ambiguity and whose meaning we piece together, much as the characters do" (Dargis, 2006).

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- Edinburgh University Press, 2015. pp. 25-46.

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SPACE SONG

Philip Ocampo

February 28th – April 10th, 2018

The wisdom of the past is the light of the past

The light which is to be is the wisdom of the future

The light of the future casts the shadows of tomorrow

-Sun Ra¹

All is still and silent in a starlit galactic realm. Bursting out of a womblike trance, a foreign object rotates slowly as it is flung through space, gradually picking up speed as it zooms towards Earth.

Uncovered by human life, countless inquisitive pairs of eyes puzzle over the origins of the strange object. A vessel of sorts? Serving what purpose? Emblazoned with otherworldly symbols, the object depicts some kind of ethereal lore, long forgotten by the human race. In all of our institutional retellings of humanity, the narratives depicted on this peculiar object feel obscure and impossible to most.

What is the object? Some kind of repurposed asteroid? A sacred relic from an ancient civilization that existed light years before ours on Earth, whose subsistence ceased upon our discovery of it, like that of a star in the night sky?

Philip Ocampo's 2018 vessel *Space Song* is just that: a physical remnant of queer cultivations of Utopian dreams. The work, a hand-built ceramic urn, painted with queer symbology, appears as though it should be a static object. When it rotates, bringing the

symbols to life, a deeper narrative emerges from the interstellar void. The symbols align the vessel in three rows: twinkling star-like glitter near the top, a solitary figure fiercely voguing through space in the middle, and a single eye opening and closing at the base. The piece exists in its physical form and also as a stop-motion video work, in which the vase rotates, galvanizing the illustrations in their digital realm.

Ocampo will be receiving his BFA in Digital Painting and Expanded Animation from OCADU this year.² Prior to building *Space Song*, he created a body of smaller ceramic works during a residency at Toronto Animated Image Society. These smaller works cultivate the same universe as *Space Song*, but served more for continuity of theme and object. The symbols began as individual digital stop-motion animations, from which each frame was then painted onto the urn. Though they reference Greco-Roman aesthetics and even hieroglyphics, Ocampo feels that the linear symbols are also reminiscent of coding. Such an aesthetic choice offers another channel of connection between the historical and the future, Earth and outer space (which may very well



include cyberspace). The transition from digital to tactile-and back again- speaks greatly to the development of his practice as a whole and to the ways that this work simultaneously embeds its roots in the past and future.

The outward appearance of the urn, and the use of stop motion practices for its moving pictures are Ocampo's nod to Greco-Roman pottery and its widespread depictions of male homosexuality and nudity, as well as historical animation practices such as the Zoetrope. In referencing antiquated relics with his work, Ocampo is forcing the subject matter of the urn itself to exist within the continuity of the past.³ The voguing figure is the most blatant nod to queer history; a reference to the iconic underground Ballroom Scene, which was championed by queer black and Latinx youth and boasts a timeline of over 50 years of queer resistance

and culture. *Space Song* works to reconcile the ways that queerness is erased from our chronology of culture and forced into its own separate dimension. It re-inserts itself into that canon from which queerness has not had the privilege of existing as a 'legitimate' part of history. Its existence as a pseudo-artefact is evidence of that other, queer-er dimension within the world we inhabit, and works to assert the actuality of queerness in the collective knowledge of civilizations ancient to present.

In José Esteban Muñoz's dazzling work *Cruising Utopia*, readers are immediately informed: "Queerness is not yet here."⁴ Furthermore, assuming we are, then, "not yet queer", we can indeed "feel [queerness] as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."⁵ Queerness floats through space- queer people float through space. Within queerness there exists shared

feelings of immateriality because of the lack of collective knowledge and representation of what queerness looks like. Even the possibility of queerness as an expansive identity feels far-fetched at times, especially when the disconnect between academic understandings of queer identity and personal, lived experience compete for some semblance of a concrete truth. *Space Song* might very well be a physical representation of what that floating looks like. It is an exemplification of the intersections between self-examination and exploration of the 'great beyond'- both from an introspective approach and from the aesthetic of outer space as a free, neutral environment for queer futures to manifest. Assigning queerness to 'the void'-in this case, simultaneously outer space and time travel,⁶ gives it a chance to develop more possibilities, what-

ever those may be. In its entirety, *Space Song* exists as an assertion of queers past, with a foretelling of queerness to come.

Alessia Oliva

Space Song is produced by the artist as part of TAIS 2017-18 Microres program. Ocampo's residency was presented in collaboration with Xpace Cultural Centre, and in partnership with OCAD University's Digital Painting & Expanded Animation (DPXA) Program.

NOTES

- 1 Sun Ra, *The Shadows of Tomorrow*, 1974
- 2 <https://www.philipocampo.com/about>
- 3 All conceptual information is gathered from a transcribed conversation with the artist held on February 6th, 2018, where queer futurisms were discussed at length in regard to *Space Song* and beyond.
- 4 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2009
- 5 Ibid., pg.1
- 6 (is queerness not whimsical and incorporeal?)



43.654°N 79.385°W

Yuling Chen

April 11th – September 4th, 2018

Prior to being known as Toronto's City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square, the area that stretched from York and Elizabeth street between Queen and Dundas was considered a slum – a district where refugees, people of colour and other marginalized communities had subsequently lived. Founded in the early 1800s by Thorton Blackburn, a refugee slave from Kentucky who started Toronto's first taxicab company, this area, known as the Ward, became the place where many of Toronto's Chinese community called their home from the 1890s to 1961. In her search for how Toronto's Spadina Chinatown came to be, video artist Yuling Chen was surprised to learn of an earlier Chinatown, and maps out the faded memory of one business' story in her work, 43.654°N 79.385°W.

Due to rampant discrimination, early Chinese settlers were only able to take up occupations in hand laundries, grocery stores and restaurants. At the time, laundries were commonly viewed as women's work and an undesirable task for men. Chinese men and families took on the work because they saw an opportunity where they could make a living and because it was one of the few options available for them at the time.¹ Owning their own business also allowed them to hire their friends and family and avoid the tyranny of working under a potentially racist white employer. Despite this, Torontonians laundries falsely believed that Chinese laun-

dries competed with their business leading to publicly called boycotts and demands for the city government to cancel or withhold business licenses from Chinese operators. In 1894, the Toronto Star published an article (written by a non-Chinese man), that lamented the plight of the men, women and girls whose economic survival was dependent on the laundry industry and the Chinese who were pushing them out. The article, titled, "*The Evil the Chinese do*," argued that Chinese laundries were dirty and an incubator of disease.² In response to this, in 1902, a municipal bylaw imposed a then hefty \$50 on Chinese laundries. Toronto's first African-Canadian politician Alderman William P. Hubbard, advocated on behalf of the Chinese community and the fee was then minimized to a charge between \$5 to \$25.³

In 1945, Toronto's post-war plans to unveil a modern city hall had resulted in the displacement of the Chinese community. At the time, the Chinese community had owned 55% of Chinatown. Two-thirds of the area would be expropriated in the late 1940s and 1950s.⁴ Businesses either closed or moved, though many could not afford to relocate. In 1955, a demolition of many spaces within the first Chinatown took place. Concrete poured over where the Chinese once lived and erased the businesses, signs and homes that stood as evidence of their presence in that area.

2017 43.654°N 79.385°W

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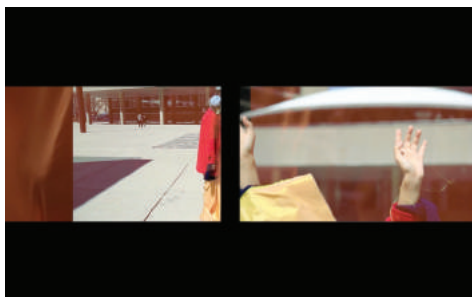
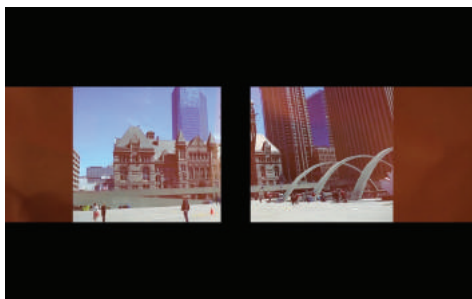
I was here. I have been here. I am here. I am about to leave.
 我来过, 经过, 在这, 即将离去
 20.0560° N. 110.3316° E
 33.8617° N. 104.1934° E
 56.1304° N. 106.3468° W
43.654°N 79.385°W

In my conversations with various members of the Chinese-Canadian community, many of us living in Toronto feel a great sense of responsibility to both pay tribute to our ancestors who have laid the path for us to live here and to make stories of resistance known to the general public. Kristyn Wong-Tam, the now councillor of this district, writes that her office looks over what was once Elizabeth street, where the majority of the Chinese lived, and reflects on how she advocated for this history to be honoured through a commemorative plaque.

One of the last hand laundries in Toronto, Chow Keong Hand Laundry and Cleaners, originally opened on Elizabeth Street but has now moved up University Avenue to Avenue Rd. In her video, draped with a long piece of golden silk around her thigh, Yuling Chen walks from Nathan Phillips Square up

to the doors of Chow Keong Hand Laundry. During her walk, the silk accumulates the dirt and debris of the city. It entangles her legs and is also occasionally stepped on by pedestrians. Upon reaching her destination, she lays the golden silk at their doorstep. The video then cuts to scenes of Yuling performing the three steps of hand laundry at home on this sheet of fabric.

The artist's choice of material highlights the labour and care that early Chinese Laundry workers put into their work. Silk is a delicate fabric that cannot be machine-washed nor spot-treated without it being ruined. Instead, it must be gently hand-washed. Choosing gold, a colour once exclusively reserved for the emperor of Chinatown, implies that this labour is to be respected, noticed and honoured. Although it is unlikely that many Chinese hand laundries were



routinely washing silk, the tenderness of treating silk allows viewers to recognize the act of hand-washing as incomparable to its mechanical counter part.

The location of the former and current Chow Keong Hand Laundry marks a shift from the perception of hand laundry as a lowly and unclean occupation to a now near luxury service that perhaps only few in Yorkville can afford. Hand laundry is now elevated to the status of a service reserved for one's most precious belongings, and with that, a sense of trust is invested to those who wash them.

Chen believes that the most precious thing you can give to someone is labour. In an age and location where laundry machines prevail, the time, sweat and care that hand laundering requires is easily remised. She

describes the process of washing and ironing the silk as unexpectedly tiresome and that performing this task granted her a new level of appreciation for the work that early Chinese laundry owners did sixteen to eighteen hours a day. Draped on a line next to the video with a tag that states the geographical coordinates of the heart of Toronto's first Chinatown, Chen hangs both the cleaned silk and this shameful part of the city's out to dry.

Shellie Zhang

NOTES

1 Arlene Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto*, 40. **2** Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto*, 43. **3** Arlene Chan, *Against All Odds, The Chinese Laundry*, Published in *The Ward*, 39. **4** Kristyn Wong-Tam, *Remembering Toronto's First Chinatown*, Published in *The Ward*, 271.

thank you!