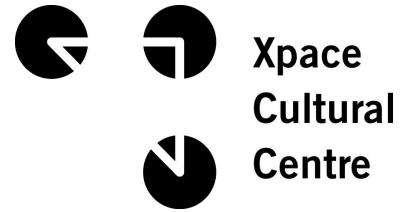


MAIN SPACE



***circling back, (work about working)***

Curated by Casper Sutton-Fosman

Angela Atkinson, Christina Oyawale,  
Camille-Zoé Valcourt-Synnott, and Justine Woods

January 24, 2026 – March 7, 2026

Okay, let's try again.

This is a group exhibition, mounted in the Main Space of Xspace Cultural Centre in Toronto, ON, featuring Angela Atkinson, Christina Oyawale, Camille-Zoé Valcourt-Synnott, and Justine Woods.

This is a gallery show that is trying to critique gallery shows, or really, trying to critique what we don't see in a gallery show. The day job to make ends meet, the endless rotation of proposals and rejections, the grant applications, contracts and invoices, emails, emails, emails.

This is me trying to talk about the same thing again, labour, with a different set of restrictions, a different lens, a different curatorial statement.

No one becomes an artist for the money: this is reflected by the fact that the number of artists who can do art full-time, as their only source of income, is uncomfortably small<sup>1</sup>. Because we are passionate, we care about art-making, we are viewed through a lens of fantasy: *how lucky you are that you get to do what you love.*

Because we love it, we are asked to show our work for free, to pay submission fees, to spend hours on proposals that are never accepted, to do things for exposure and experience. We buy into this fantasy, too: maybe I'll get the next grant, if I have this show on my CV, or if I clean up my website, or if I go to this opening. We don't really have another choice if we want to keep making. It's exhausting.

This is what Camille-Zoé Valcourt-Synott's work attempts to document, to reveal. In *To-do lists*, brightly colored paper tiles the column in the centre of the space, inviting visitors to fill in to-do-lists, forming a collective picture of the work we all do that goes undocumented everywhere except our phones, calendars, planners – and here.

On the east wall, Valcourt-Synott's *10 SIGNS OF BURNOUT* regurgitates text from an article found while googling "burnout", living in the mundanity of overwork. The signs take the form of, well, signs, imprinted on paper through the repetitive process of screenprinting: paper, ink, squeegee, paper, squeegee, paper, ink again.

Valcourt-Synott has made the exhaustion of the process the expression of her process – but she invites us into it, asks us to reflect on our own exhaustion, to witness the exhaustion of others.

Nearby, Justine Woods' works hang on a coat rack as if waiting to be worn. In the form of two garments – *a love that creates land and shapes water*, a pair of bib pants, and *we carry our homeland(s) close to our heart*, a connected pair of gauntlets, both edged with beadwork – Woods reminds us that to put this much effort into something is itself an act of love. The love it takes to learn to make something, to do it over and over

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the year and area, numbers vary, but a high-end estimate from a 2024 Canadian survey puts the number of artists who *don't* work another job at 29%; estimates in the US place it closer to 10%.

again until you understand it, to keep doing it through setbacks and mistakes and frustrations. Woods' workwear guides us back, towards the impetus of making at all: what we do because we care. "The number of beads stitched on each garment is equal to the amount of love that garment holds", writes Woods<sup>2</sup>. In their making, Woods has imbued them with relationality, connecting threads to her family, community, and self.

Complicating a reading of the garments as solely works of art, Woods provides us with images, hung on the wall opposite the coat rack: they show the bib pants and the gauntlets in action, on the artist's body while carrying wood and ice fishing in the snowy winter of Tiny, Ontario, Woods' hometown. She shows us not only the work that went into the creation of the garments, but the work that they were made for; their use facilitating the next part of a cycle of community care.

Christina Oyawale's *Wall Mural Piece (After Lawrence Weiner)* occupies the west wall, facing Woods and Valcourt-Synnott's work. Oyawale reminds us of our own agency; asking what responsibility we have to each other and to ourselves in a moment when art is censored, commodified, trapped within the late-stage-capitalist hellscape we find ourselves living through. *The institution won't save you*, Oyawale maintains: they draw from their own experiences in the cyclical catch-22 of artist run centres, pointing to the failed promise of charity that relies on funding tied to political neutrality<sup>3</sup>.

Further into the gallery, on the north wall, Oyawale's *Work-to-Rule* reproduces found images of protest and labour performed by artists and their allies. Like Weiner, the conceptual artist whose work they invoke in the mural, Oyawale reminds us that "art is made by people and for people"<sup>4</sup>. If Valcourt-Synnott's work reminds us that we are not alone, Oyawale pushes us to *act like it* – to build coalitions, to care for each other, to not only imagine a more equitable world but to work towards it. Oyawale annotates

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<sup>2</sup> *I love you as much as all the beads in the universe*, MDes thesis, April 2021

<sup>3</sup> Oyawale, *The Institution Won't Save You*, presented at UAAC 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Weiner in an interview with Vice Magazine, June 2017.

their own work with musings on labour, funding, and their own to-do-lists, incorporating their research and thought process into their works.

Scattered throughout the gallery is the sometimes-inconspicuous work of Angela Atkinson. Her wooden stools masquerade as ready-mades, belying the effort and precision she puts into shaping each leg, weaving the seats, working with the wood as it dries, warps, cracks. On the south wall, the residue of this labour takes the form of wood-shavings, carefully sorted and salvaged from the floor of Atkinson's workshop.

Towards the center of the room sits the least inconspicuous of Atkinson's works – a pole lathe which she built by hand, used to create all of her other pieces in the exhibition. Atkinson engages with what we take for granted: the chairs we sit on, the unseen studies and unusable prototypes, the waste generated in the practice of making. The lathe is both a tool and a representation of the relationship between maker and practice, a gesture towards Atkinson's own efforts to question a contemporary culture of convenience and disposability. Her process is slow, methodical, at odds with the expectation of artists to consistently produce new work.

These four artists hold different focuses, expressed through varied practices, but echoing a desire to draw attention to labour: what we keep doing because we want to, what we keep doing because we have to. All the spaces in between. This exhibition lives in that *both-and*, finding the love and care inherent in labour alongside the frustration with what goes unacknowledged or undervalued. We keep going, towards something better, while honoring what came before.

And when it doesn't work, try again.

– Casper Sutton-Fosman