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X P A C E

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.

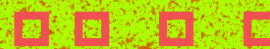
C U L T U R A L C E N T R E

VOLUME

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 September 2018 to July 2019.

X P A C E
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X P A C E



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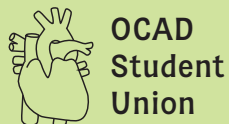
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Productive Discomfort supported by Myseum of Toronto



main



an observable collapse towards another

curated by Rowan Lynch

Benjamin de Boer, Andrew Hoekstra,
Sara Kay Maston, Cadence Planthara

unvanishing traces

curated by Sanjit Dhillon and Vince Rozario

Mikayla de Bruyn, Megan Feheley, Ashley M Freeby,
Aaron Moore, Maanii Oakes, and Ayo Tsalithaba

soft refractions

curated by Theresa Wang and Mary Chen

DeBugReBoot, Jessy Kitchen, HaeAhn Kwon,
IvanovStoeva, Carson Teal, Xuan Ye

productive discomfort

curated by Lauren Cullen

Susan Blight, Heidi Cho, Kaythi, Seiji, Anne Rucchetto,
Jessica Watkin, and James Yeboah

recess

curated by Jaycee Tu

Rowena Katigbak, Eric Oh, Lina Wu, Yuma Yanagisawa,
Cristine Yunyk

the bald eagle's claw

curated by Philip Leonard Ocampo

Yan Wen Chang, Brandon Fujimagari, Andrew Harding
and Josi Smit

Performances by Madelyne Beckles, Dorica Manuel
and Marissa Sean Cruz

Text work by Philippe Pamela Dungao and Ana Morningstar

project

preserving the past

Allana Cooper

sanctuaries

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fortune flavors the bold

Arezu Salamzadeh

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Emily G Harrison

container for a precarious record

Zahra Komeylian

how to fix a broken home

Sangmin Lee

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Natalie King

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Cat Lamora

do i have to lie to my diary?

Maddy Mathews

a facade of flesh, a spirit of skins

Basil AlZeri

love your indigenous food, love your indigenous skin, love your indigenous self

Chief Lady Bird

bai sun

Natalie Mark & Sharon Ma

external

edges

● ● Blackpowerbarbie

● ● wan-ding

● ● Nikole Hidalgo McGregor

● ●

havoc in heaven

Jessie Sheng

though i am silent, i shake

Sophie Sabet

I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS

Marissa Sean Cruz

ME EN

AN OBSERVABLE COLLAPSE TOWARDS ANOTHER

curated by Rowan Lynch

Benjamin de Boer, Andrew Hoekstra, Sara Kay Maston, Cadence Planthara

This exhibition is part of the Xpace Recent Grad Summer Residency program

September 7 – October 13, 2018

Taken and published in 1972, *The Blue Marble* is an image of Earth as seen from the *Apollo* spacecraft; it remains one of the most reproduced images in human history.¹ Viewers who felt themselves summarized within the image took note of the fragility of the depiction. As a result, the first fully illuminated image of Earth from space led to a proliferating concept of earthly sustainability. As a meeting site of visual, scientific, and popular culture, the photograph speaks to the ability of an image to reinforce slow-percolating ideological arguments. As a more contemporary point of reference, the term “Anthropocene” has passed the border between scientific and popular consciousness. As a proposed geological epoch primarily defined by permanent changes recorded in the earth’s geological record as a result of human activity, it provides a vital summary allowing for an understanding of far reaching consequences resulting from humanity’s unsustainable preoccupations

over the course of the last century. The painting, ceramic, and object based works that make up *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* make reference to the deeply interdependent nature of ecology. As a branch of scientific thought, ecology deals with the relations of organisms both to each other and their environment. Coming into use in Germany in the late 1800’s, the word is composed of Greek word *oikos* (house or dwelling) and *logia* (“study of”).² The collective ecological concerns featured in the exhibition investigate topics ranging from the inhuman perspective of echolocation, flora as metaphor within an exploration of identity, and an invocation of Toronto’s historic waterways through the folk practice of dowsing. While they are not overtly concerned with climate change, the overwhelming presence of anthropogenic climate change in relation to these topics stands as an intuitive extrapolation.



■ CADENCE PLANTHARA ■

As a phenomenon expanding past the scale of any one human life, an understanding of climate change calls for consideration of time and place distanced from an individual, anthropomorphic lens. The artworks on view offer representations of the natural world that aim to render visible both subjects and perspectives which humans are typically unable to access. In this manner they are capable of complementing this need, offering opportunities to consider narratives within contexts that are given permission, by the logic of the exhibition form, to remain in complex relation to one another.

The process of vitrification that takes place during the high temperature firing of clay results in a rock-like structure with a potential lifespan spanning thousands of years.³ By virtue of this integrity, the ceramic objects created by Andrew Hoekstra, Sara Kay Maston, and Cadence Planthara produce an emblematic engagement with a deep material timeline. While formally recalling early life forms, the likes of whose fossilized remains can be found at sites like Canada’s Burgess Shale, Hoekstra’s *Feelers From the Grotto* is composed of ceramic complemented by a 3D-printed plastic segment, substances that share significant life spans. The hole-filled segments resting on the gallery floor give the impression that we are in the presence of the unearthed remains of an unknown life form.

Cadence Planthara’s cross-pollinating artistic practice involves a range of processes, including ceramics as both vessel and canvas. In her *Untitled* composition (floral), the object’s three-dimensional possibilities are merged with applications of colourful markings resembling floral patterns, a theme that continues within the artist’s paintings. A floral coaster gifted by a symbol the artist engages to approach ideas of identity and the genre of identity painting itself. Referencing the coaster, which in fact does not arrive from a tradition directly related to Planthara’s ancestry, family member served as the primary reference point for the *Flower Paintings 1-3*, acting as a symbol the artist engages to approach ideas of identity and the genre of identity painting itself.



■ ANDREW HOEKSTRA ■

Referencing the coaster, which in fact does not arrive from a tradition directly related to Planthara’s ancestry, provides an indistinctness that serves as a method of interrogating the genre. The works make reference to far reaching connections not only present within South Asian diasporic experience, but also between the earthly materials of copper, dirt, and ceramic, and astrological forces. Through deliberate choices made in respect to their material composition, a spell has been woven within the paintings with respect to Venus, the planetary ruler of aesthetic attraction. Where compressed dirt collected from a Toronto park is bracketed by Venusian metal, and spanned with coconut fibre, the earthly joins with distant planetary bodies.

X



■ SARA KAY MASTON ■

Sara Kay Maston's paintings present similarly lush imagery. Filled with flowering plants and washes of colour, the hazy spaces aim to embody the speculative viewpoints of their inhuman insect and animal inhabitants. Maston's investment in this theme relates to an interest in challenging the hierarchy of human vision through the production of a sensitivity to the multiple levels in which our environment can be understood and experienced. In her own words, painting "is a way to reinstate my relationship to memory, subjectivity, and a connection to the environment outside of the ubiquitous technological interfaces within our anthropocentric global infrastructure."⁴ This is exemplified within the work *Eyes that See in the Dark*, where Maston has produced a projective sonar-based encounter with a human on an immersive scale. A foggy shape in the center of the composition hints to a redacted human presence that remains compositionally secondary to the translucent elements fluttering within the canvas. Unlike *The Blue Marble* photograph functioning on its intoxicating claim to the real, Maston's paintings are inventive representations untethered from the rules of interaction between light and lens. As an act of storytelling, they prompt an expanded sense of self that seeks to function as a humbling reminder of the individual limits of our perception.

Benjamin de Boer's work articulates another process of reassessment between a human subject and their environment. Dowsing rods constructed from carved pine, brass, and leather, rest near their associated natural resource as it cycles endlessly within Maston's ceramic fountain. As a divinatory folk practice used to seek out various resources including water and mineral deposits, dowsing is a tool that resists an emphasis on efficiency. The rods instead allow their user to meander in connection with the hidden qualities within a landscape. De Boer has used these rods and charted his route along Toronto's Garrison creek on handmade paper, acknowledging the flows of water that exist within and below the city. Their presence in the gallery provides a material connection to natural forces, rendering an encapsulation of systems that predate, underline, and bracket our urban existence.



■ BENJAMIN DE BOER ■

The perspectives and stories we find, absorb, and retell have great influence on the narratives we are able to recognize and construct. Dominant modes of storytelling emphasize individual conscience in place of social fate, but as evidenced by *The Blue Marble*, the stories we tell ourselves have proved capable of shifting. *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* seeks to join this collection of work as an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of social and environmental relations, while at once recognizing environmental collapse as an inevitable presence in our midst. In this case, "another" becomes a reference towards eventual, novel ways of living that are in store for our species. What humans have done to the planet can be summarized as reducing its capacity to host a diverse range of life, to the point where we have worked up towards our own name on an ill-fated list. In the face of such staggering uncertainty, "what is most significant about ecology is its ability to convert this often nihilistic rejection of the status quo into an emphatic affirmation of life."⁵ *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* seeks to reinforce this reconstructive approach, while prompting consideration of humanity's role within cycles we have unquestionably altered.

- Rowan Lynch

1 Al Reinert, *The Blue Marble Shot*, posted April 12 th 2011, accessed August 29th, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/04/the-blue-marble-shot-our-first-completophograph-of-earth/237167/>.

2 Schwarz A., Jax K., *Etymology and Original Sources of the Term "Ecology"*, (Springer, Dordrecht, 2011), 145.

3 Dave Finkelnburg, *Vitrification - Ceramic Arts Network*, posted January 15, 2018, accessed August 29th 2018, <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/ceramic-recipes/reference/vitrification/#>.

4 Sara Kay Maston, Xpace submission, 2018.

5 Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, (Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1986), 92.

UNVANISHING TRACES



curated by Sanjit Dhillon and Vince Rozario

Mikayla de Bruyn, Megan Feheley, Ashley M Freeby, Aaron Moore, Maanii Oakes, and Ayo Tsalithaba
October 26 - December 1, 2018

We live in an age of hypervisible catastrophe. Confronting the hypervisible onslaught of death, trauma and tragedy amidst racialized communities in a rapidly rightwardveering political climate seems to only compound on the injury of catastrophe. The process of assembling *Unvanishing Traces* therefore began with a series of refusals, explicitly acknowledging the failures in creating artwork that addresses the abject nature of sudden and brutal death. There would be no resolution, no closure, no explicit bodily representation of the departed. There would also be an active process of distancing the outside observer from the intimate and necessary process of mourning to those directly affected. These were necessary considerations to not reactivate or mine racialized trauma. But in distancing the aesthetic dimensions of the exhibition from the material reality of these deaths, by inducting them into the realm of 'art' we become complicit in the systemic injustices that compound the death and suffering of precarious and disenfranchised bodies. The past year, in the new cycle in Toronto has seen 65 homicides¹, 239 fatal overdoses², along with around 174 new cases of missing and murdered indigenous women³. The crisis is hypervisible in every form of mass media- but particularly, and quite peculiarly in this age, on social media. We survey the continually unfolding tragedy through the rigid gridlines of our facebook and twitter timelines, the incomprehensible horror of contemporary tragedy is packaged into gruesome still and moving images of violence, readily conveyed and transacted through the 21st century's defining mode of communication.



■ ASHLEY M. FREEBY ■



■ MEGAN FEHELEY ■

HOW DO WE REMEMBER SOMETHING OR SOMEONE WHEN CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF REMEMBERING BETRAY THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD?

The gallery space here is very much a mirror of the digital containers through which we access racialized trauma. The visual logic of a gallery space mirrors that of the grids on our computer screens. Both present themselves as panoptic devices-giving the illusion of omniscience. They can thus reinforce dominant power structures, and the viewer's biases when consuming narratives of racialized trauma. Hence, visibility, representation or education are not the goals here. There is no mimetic representation of the dead, nor are there sensationalized headlines or provocations. As a result, the work can appear cryptic or not explicitly attached to their subject-they indicate deeply contemplative and ongoing processes of dealing with trauma. It's possible to simply 'scroll past' the work in the gallery, much as one would in virtual space since it does not traffic in the rhetoric of sensationalism. At the same time, distancing work about trauma from its subject matter can be similarly fraught, as it mimics the erasure that systemic violence imposes upon its victims. In discussing the work of Doris Salcedo, which commemorates the victims of the Colombian Civil War, Rebecca Comay notes that

"Violence likes to occult itself the apparatus of terror requires this obfuscation-and one of the most systematic mechanisms of disappearance' is that the traces of disappearance are made to disappear." The subject matter of this show thus straddles the the uncomfortable paradox of naming the unnameable, while engaging with the horror of that which is undeniable.

HOW DO WE HOLD SPACE FOR THOSE MOST VULNERABLE TO THE SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION IN WHICH WE ARE COMPLICIT?

Nevertheless, the remnants of systemic atrocities hide in plain sight around us. The places where lives are lost continue to be trodden upon, eulogized, and ultimately coopted into a grander redemption narrative that all too often leaves behind the most afflicted. Hashtags like #TorontoStrong or #UntilWeAreAllSafe lull the general populace into a false sense of discomfort while the violence continues. Even presenting these events as 'tragedies' or 'violence' feels banal and euphemistic. To anyone who is close to these crises, the scope of violence enacted by contemporary systems of oppression are numbing both in their totality and their surgical precision. Deploying the language through which these occurrences are epistemically formulated leaves us in an exhausting cycle of self-fulfilling catastrophe. There is a symbolic obliteration of these lives-they undergo a second death being remembered through the gaze of the oppressor- or at the very least, of those implicated and complicit in these tragedies.

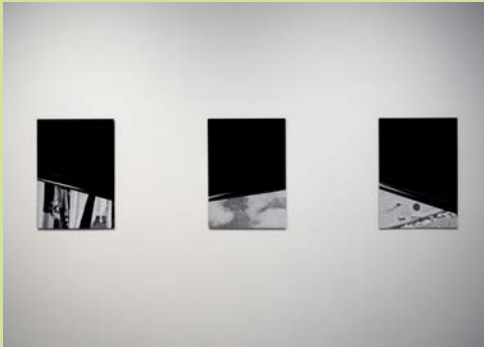
WHAT POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTIONS EXIST OUTSIDE OF PERFORMATIVE DEFAULTS?

Confronting the material remains of state-sanctioned violence, Ashley M. Freeby confronts the section of road on Canfield Drive in Ferguson Missouri where Michael Brown's body lay, for 238 minutes, after he was killed by a police officer. The Brown family petitioned to have this section of road removed and replaced. Freeby contemplates this poetic gesture which renders the site as an unexpected anti monument, and attempts to reconstruct the site in her own medium- 950 lbs of hand-painted gravel. *Remnant no. 1*, the work displayed in the exhibition is the plastic substrate of this gravel surface. It bears an unjustified pattern of black paint, left by contact with the gravel layer. This transference of paint renders this sub-layer the holder of the story, the memory, and the trauma against black and brown bodies in the United States. This intervention thus demarcates the plastic surface as a space between the

"memorial," the artist herself, and the viewer. In bringing this "space of memory" into the gallery, Freeby also examines modes in which gestures of mourning can be communicated, learned and performed- thereby communicated, learned and performed- thereby grafted prosthetically into communal practice. In referencing the process by which it was created- *Remnant no. 1* also presents new modes of imagining complicity. Subsequent installations of the work will be executed from a set of instructions compiled by Freeby, in the absence of the artist. By sifting through trays of gravel and paint, blackening one's hands, by choosing to tread or walk around the gravel surface of the original sculpture, the viewer and those assisting in creating and installing the work are thus invited to viscerally consider their complicity in systems of oppression that disenfranchise and erase Black lives.

HOW DO WE GIVE SPACE TO ARTISTS EXPLORING ART AS A SITE FOR HEALING, AND PROTECT THEM FROM THEIR TRAUMA BEING FETISHIZED BY VOYEURS?

Ayo Tsalithaba and Meghan Feheley contemplate the never-ending cycle of mourning and healing in a context of continuous violence against Black and Indigenous bodies. In deeply personal ways, the artists initiate gestures of mourning, but also resilience and capacity building- alluding to ongoing practices of support, care and fortification. Feheley's *Bundles for Hard Times* is a series of deer hide bundles containing messages and affirmations in the Cree language (both in syllabics and Roman orthography) intended as a message for other dispossessed peoples past/present/future. Bundling these messages offers them as votives which can facilitate understanding and witnessing. The inclusion of Cree is also hopeful, in anticipating that the recipient of the message will be able to read and understand it. The accompanying audio piece ponders how, "our bodies exist in a vacuum of continuous shattering, shame and humiliation,"⁴ and confronts the despair of continually shoring up one's defences against a regime that continually threatens to erase one's existence. Feheley's narration in the audio component of the installation both narrates the continual trauma of existing as an Indigenous



■ AARON MOORE ■

person in a settler state, while offering quiet messages of comfort and reassurance. Similarly, Tsalithaba seeks to create safe digital spaces for contemplation and healing in order to mitigate the harm that racialized and queer people often face in these environments Black, Indigenous, Racialized, Queer and/or Trans people often have their trauma exacerbated by a constant barrage of images of similar bodies being misrepresented, brutalized and even killed. By shifting the narrative of continuous trauma in their work, Tsalithaba is thus able to provide space for people to have alternative representations of marginalized individuals that are not traumatizing and violent.

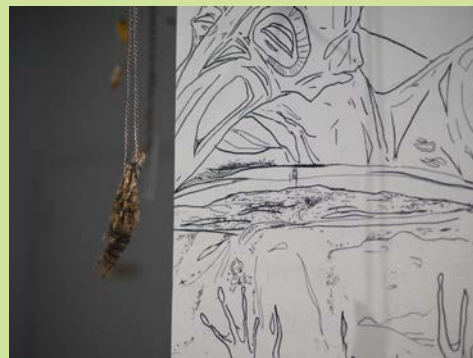
HOW DO YOU ARTICULATE FEELINGS WHEN LANGUAGE, PARTICULARLY THE STRUCTURES OF LANGUAGE FAIL IN DOING SO?

The difficulty of positing art as a meaningful response to the senseless onslaught of violence against racialized bodies, when the art-making and exhibition itself is complicit in inequality, was a core consideration in the creation of *Unvanishing Traces*. As Comay writes, "On the one hand, it is the task of art to commemorate suffering. On the other hand, art, by its very existence—its status as a thing among things—is complicitous in this suffering." Hence, Maanii Oakes and Mikayla de Bruyn take the aesthetic practice of processing trauma outside the walls of the gallery. In fifteen designated sites, related to 15 people the pair have lost in the past year— to economic precarity, mental illness, substance use, and institutional violence, Oakes and de Bruyn collaborate to create provisional memorials— making use of posters and found assemblages. By engaging in interventions that actively circumvent the aesthetic norms of high art, Oakes and de Bruyn open

up new modes of engagement with the memory of the departed. People who may have known them can access these votives as sites of memory and the tactile nature of de Bruyn's assemblages invites participant interaction. Visitors can leave their own mementos of the departed, opening up the possibility for evolving, complex, and integrative gestures of mourning that center the experiences of those who knew these individuals first and foremost. While working from a specific experience, it was important for the artists not to disclose the identities of those being mourned, in respecting the autonomy and self-determination of these individuals. They examine the challenge of naming violence against indigenous, or otherwise racialized bodies, in the collective singular—as iterations of a monolithic neo-colonial system, while exploring the specifics of a particular tragedy.

HOW DO WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE VIOLENCE AGAINST PRECARIOUS BODIES WITHOUT EXPLOITING THEM, AND THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED/SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES?

In contemplating a container that mirrors the mechanics of how racialized trauma is accessed by outside observers, the role of the photographic image in mediating public response to collective trauma was central. Aaron Moore's work applies this reflexivity to images of strife and crisis, mining the archive to deconstruct images to their most basic visual elements— halftone dots and negatives. These are then arranged and rearranged in a seemingly endless array of compositions— as if trying to reconfigure meaning out of visual data that has no context. In this series, Moore references archival images of The Ward, a historically working-class immigrant neighbourhood in Toronto that is now the



■ MAANII OAKES & MIKAYLA DE BRUYN ■

Discovery and Financial Districts. As a new settler on Turtle Island, Moore uses this archive as a departure point for exploring both local history, and his own subjectivity as a new settler, treading in the footsteps of previous generations of working class immigrants. In deciding to obfuscate the indexicality of these archival images, Moore also self-critiques his own subjectivity, which could otherwise easily default to a voyeuristic interpretation of racialized subjects by a white settler gaze. This is the only work in the show that does not explicitly address death, but it resonates in its examination of the socio-economic forces of displacement in dialogue with Ayo Tsalithaba's haunting exploration of urban spaces of trauma. Moore's settler subjectivity also provides a pendant platform for settlers to access this work— much of which centers loss and mourning in Indigenous communities. It invites critical introspection from the viewer in examining how much of ourselves we project onto images of victims when they appear in news or the media. The implication here is that the image itself is an artefact removed from lived reality, that always mediates the experience of its subject through the motivations of its maker and the

HOW DO WE INVOKE/ENGINEER EMPATHY WHEN DISENGAGEMENT IS INCENTIVIZED OR WHEN DETACHMENT BECOMES AN INSTINCTUAL RESPONSE FOR SURVIVAL?



■ AYO TSALITHABA ■

In our positionality as non-Black, non-Indigenous curators, there is a lack of embodied context that prevents us from commenting upon these deaths in a manner that reveals anything that has not been articulated hundreds, if not thousands of times, by those who have lost loved ones. Our cerebral observations on the nature of this trauma can only begin to grasp its scope. Hence it is critical that we examine the constraints of the container that we build, in which these artists may explore modes of mourning, remembrance, and healing. Our act of curation is a reflection on the ways in which our own bodies, and their embodied gazes, are folded into complicity with structures of settler colonialism, anti-indigeneity and anti-blackness which cause the loss of personhood. As members of a 'model minority' we benefit from our proximity to whiteness and the social mobility which this affords. We may be shaken by the sheer brutality of the reality around us, and by the magnitude of grief afflicting our friends and members of our community. It is, however, not up to us to offer redemption, to coddle those least likely to be targets of this violence into a false sense of security and innocence. The limitations of the medium functions in such a way that it cannot overtly, "depict violence, identify victims or perpetrators, supply the forensic details of a crime, elucidate its political and economic context, or providemoral instruction."⁵ We can simply create a context in which the viewer is both hyperaware of their own positionality by disrupting the thrill of voyeuristic affect. The hope is that these gestures and interventions can begin to shake us out of our toxic apathy. Perhaps they can help us unlearn our colonized subjectivities and become aware of the ways in which we enact epistemic violence upon the memories of the precarious dead. In turn, this can begin to initiate a process of affective solidarity that directly counters our complicity in this enduring cycle of loss and injustice.

NOW WHAT?

- Vince Rozario and Sanjit Dhillon



1 TPS Crime Statistics- Homicide." Data.torontopolice.on.ca. Accessed October 25, 2018. <http://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/homicide>.

2 These are figures collected by the between August 3rd, 2017 and October 21, 2018. City of Toronto. "Toronto Overdose Information System." Accessed October 25, 2018. <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-inspections-monitoring/toronto-overdoseinformation-system/>.

3 As of this writing, this is still a very approximate number despite the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, which has still failed to gather accurate statistics on the issue. Wherry, Aaron. "How an 'unflinching Gaze' on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Might Move Canada Forward." CBC, August 4, 2016.

4 Fehleley, Megan. *Bundles for Hard Times*. Mixed-Media Installation (deer hide bundles, beadwork, audio). 2018.

5 Comay, Rebecca. "Material Remains: Doris Salcedo." *Oxford Literary Review* 39, no. 1 (2017): 42-64.

SOFT REFRACTIONS

curated by Mary Chen and Theresa Wang

DeBugReBoot, Jessy Kitchen, HaeAhn Kwon, IvanovStoeva, Carson Teal, and Xuan Ye

January 18-February 16, 2019

The rapid expansion of digital, cyber, and net worlds has created innovative ways of engaging with reality. And yet more often than not, these worlds produce misapprehensions against the basic virtues of how we should function, disseminate information, and generate truths. The works of *Soft Refractions* question the insistence for such absolute value systems in a world that has already detracted visibility, authenticity, and perception into new media. How can we issue a detourn from our existing frameworks of thinking and mine for new capacities?



■ IVANOVSTOEVA ■

Used to characterize an optical phenomenon that traces the speed of light as it traverses material barriers, refraction inherently speaks to rendering the non-material visible through an other way of seeing. Refraction implies rupture, diving into the ravine, and a new angle of experience. It is premised to reside on a slant, the jarred edges of bending lines, but equally refraction functions to blur the boundary as much as to distort. To perceive refraction as soft is to invoke the tenderness within shards askew and to find the spaces of intersection. *Soft Refractions* stages encounters within the interval and opens the potential for the boundary as a place of emergence.

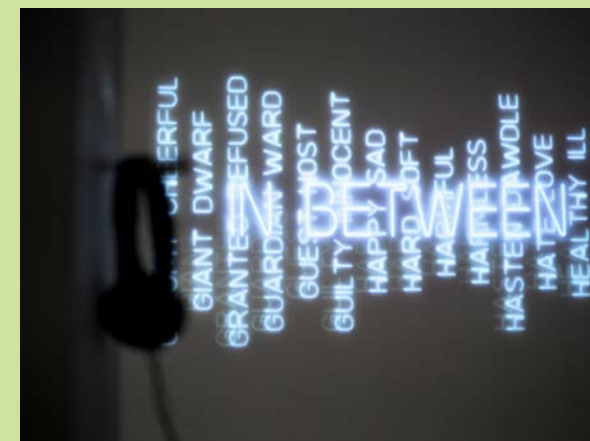
Artist duo IvanovStoeva fixates on the surface as a means to revel in the back-end. Surface encounters is a pair of light boxes containing light gels that produce an abstract light drawing on rear-projection screen. For IvanovStoeva (Dimo Ivanov and Sonia Stoeva), the surface is the boundary at which “interrelation between giver and receiver” occurs.¹ Like dialogue, this “mirroring effect of question and answer, or give and take” can produce more expansive truths than were present before.² The construction and display of the work physically contains the refractive capacity of light as a way to visualize the invisible. It uses the trapping of physical structure to read the screen as a system composed of multiple layers. The result is a sculptural object whose own depth evinces the illusionary body of the screen.



■ JESSY KITCHEN ■

Further entangling bodies of viewers and screen, DeBugReBoot's installation *jāpeg* creates unique composite faces by mediating users into perceivable images and performing algorithms until secondary data is seamlessly patched in.

When DeBugReBoot (Nikole Hidalgo McGregor and Carlos McGregor) extracts the user from a webcam and interprets them against the Google reverse image search database, they display how one might read active bodily intervention within technological infrastructure. Through processes of accretion and willful error, so as in N. Katherine Hayles' words, “data is humanized and subjectivity computerized”.³



■ XUAN YE ■

The data is made flesh by generating information from the user, and in the process it preserves the eyes to keep the user in this transaction. *jāpeg* views the face as a mask through which to conceive a new entity yet it cannot retrieve without the face as query. To interface is to meet at the border and reach mutual recognition.

Similarly, Xuan Ye's *IN BETWEEN () WE OSCILLATE* uses programming language to digitally visualize the boundaries of front and back-end infrastructure. The parenthetical $()$ denotes the self-contained space where function and information can operate dialectically. But this is only conditionally expressed on the stipulation that the brackets are balanced properly. Her web installation presents pairs of English antonyms scrolling across the screen in the form of a spectrogram: good/bad, absence/presence, bend/straight. Each word semantically corrects the imbalance of the other, hoping to equalize polarities to eliminate interference. Language, unfortunately, does not succeed: its impossible desire for absolute polarity vocalizes itself in a piercing metallic hum. Language, no matter verbal or programming, measures importance in the meaning it encodes. In Ye's continuum, one which determines the other can formulate meaning irrelevant even while encoding a valid message. Oscillating between contradictory potentials requires a mediated articulation of the world, holding the “straight” and seeing it “bent”.



■ CARSON TEAL ■



In his practice, Carson Teal employs the same base elements of language, image, sound, and light as Ye but isolates them to separate planes. They are reunited in a meticulously built installation conjoining sculptural terrain with projection that physically actualizes each abstract component into perceptual object.

In *The First Object*, rotoscoped animation circulates the expanse of the wall and folds against an array of grounded objects. A recurring thematic in Teal's multimedia work is the use of pictographic symbols, characters that are at once archaeological and contemporary. By synthesizing this imagery with computer-generated images, Teal opens a circuit: in presenting the languages of yesterday, he seeks to create the histories of tomorrow. If Ye's work sheds doubt to the power dynamics embedded in language, Teal's embeds language in artifacts and images and situates them within narrative. In doing so, *The First Object* stages narrative as a myth awaiting rupture, and truth as simply marginalized fiction. Teal's work is a product of inwardness that excavates the surface of narrative, asking viewers where they fit in this hybrid space.



■ DEBUGREBOOT ■



■ HAEAHN KWON ■

Refraction emerges in HaeAhn Kwon's practice in the form of the makeshift. Responding to a given situation by assembling recombinant fragile pieces, the makeshift redirects attention from the absolute and fumbles towards a state of non-closure. This absurdist strategy is overtly perceptible in *Anti-loneliness*, where a Samsung flat-screen TV is re-assembled into a table top. Upon the table, a phone docking bowl known as the Anti-Loneliness Ramen Bowl props up an iPhone that displays scenes of monkeys bdrinking beer. Anti-loneliness is divined by a missing presence: she who holds the phone, he who consumes the meal, they who consume the image. If Teal's work requires presence, Kwon asks of absence as a "much anticipated presence".⁴ As Kwon's work defers the body awaiting a transaction, suspending proprietorship in equal pose, Jessy Kitchen's industrial by-products are the aftermath. Situated amongst screen-centric works, while bodies become callouses is a jarring contrast. Kitchen's work is a series of steel sheets and hand-cast concrete keychains, some strewn on the floor, others creeping on a column. Their forging hearkens to Fordist commodity making as well as the prevailing industrial economy. In these systems, each element is cast to render unseen human labour seen. Displaced in the form of an informational trace, Kitchen's work reveals the tenderness of disposable bodies and addresses the ways in which embodiment can be complicit in and dependant on acts of transgression. Her work grounds in the face of the uncertain.

In the move toward abstracted digital systems, all still depend on questions of language and representation. The artists in *Soft Refractions* perceive these concerns as a negotiation within an expansive, embodied space whereby the surface can be a chasm, language can be futile, or absence can become a presence. *Soft Refractions* is a manifestation of multiplicity calling for a trajectory of variation, learning from the inbetween to gesture past the surface.

This exhibition was generously supported by the Ontario Arts Council.

1 Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red* (New York: Routledge, 1991): 25.

2 Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism", *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988): 321

3N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 39.

4Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Image and the Void", *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1 (2016): 136.

PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT

curated by Lauren Cullen

Susan Blight, Heidi Cho, Kaythi, Seiji, Anne Rucchetto, Jessica Watkin, and James Yeboah

March 1 – 30, 2019



■ JESSICA WATKIN ■

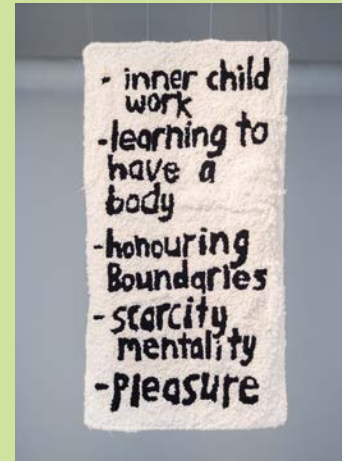
If the function of a welcome mat is to greet guests with niceties, what can an unwelcome mat offer?

Productive Discomfort is a project and group exhibition encompassing seven hooked rugs made by artists, writers and researchers who predominantly work in nonrug hooking mediums. Over a series of 5 workshops, the participating artists learned the technique of rug hooking while discussing the purpose and benefits of productive discomfort. These monthly, collaborative and social workshops took place in a variety of private and public spaces, including the Textile Museum of Canada, artist studios, homes, bars, coffee shops and Ryerson University. With the generous support of Xpace Cultural Centre and Myseum, each artist was commissioned to develop and produce a rug work around the theme of an “unwelcome mat.”

Welcome mats are usually made of coarse material and placed outside of the home, in service for guests to wipe their feet off as they cross a threshold into an interior space. Hooked rugs, however, are made of softer woolen materials and other textiles, and are usually found inside private domestic spaces. In addition to collecting dirt and providing warmth through insulation, hooked welcome mats greet visitors with polite sentiments of cheer and kindness. There is much affective potential buried in the soft pile of a hooked rug – including the ability to mark a space as respectable and as private property.

Ideas about respectability¹ are often rooted in colonialism, whiteness and privilege. In the context of Canadian hooked rugs, a strong relationship exists between this object, domestic dwellings and settler colonialism. The practice of hooking rugs in North America is attributed to the settlement of English and Scottish settlers along the eastern seaboard.² Through the occupying and stealing of land, the development of property laws and domesticated lifestyles emerged. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang crucially note that settler colonial violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation.³ The practice of making hooked rugs by early settlers in need of furnishing their homes provided a tool for such expressions. Canadian hooked mats are often understood as benevolent objects greeting guests with good cheer. However, anti-racist, anti-colonial and feminist queer crip perspectives remind us that objects and spaces are never truly welcoming to all. While a hooked welcome mat might communicate polite servitude, the rugs included in *Productive Discomfort* rub up against this promise and confuse the good feelings attached to these objects. The function of an unwelcome mat helps complicate the respectability politics that are associated with

a hooked rug, revealing those who have been excluded, reminding the viewing public how craft and social aspects of rug hooking serve as a disruptive force.



■ HEIDI CHO ■

The relationship between makers working in the company of one another informs the process of rug hooking. Akin to quilting and knitting groups, rug hooking is a relational mode of making and grounded by social practice. The composition of group membership influences the conversation held over the creative process, and as a result conversations shared over rug work profoundly inform the object. Therefore, in the case of Canadian welcome mats, there is strong possibility of maintaining settler colonial norms and values through casual conversation in the soft space of craft. The artists in *Productive Discomfort* were selected for their ability to mobilize critical conversation in the space of making. The common ideology in our rug hooking workshops was dissent.



In these workshops, basic principles of rug hooking were taught alongside the facilitation of casual discussion and lateral exchanges of knowledge. Music and silence were welcomed, along with podcasts, reality television, Raptors games and pizza. While the artists were only expected to participate in five workshops, many additional gatherings were organized. Through the process of learning how to rug hook, the artists experienced discomfort as they unlearned artistic techniques they usually use. The artists also suggested benefits of unlearning and embracing discomfort in order to make space for new growth in their respective practices.

Heidi Cho hooks an intimate list of personal themes that cultivate internal discomfort. In hooking *Recently*, Cho works to process or welcome this list in her life in order to grow, as an artist and a person. The artist's list of goals and personal challenges are connected to her existing practice, in which she addresses and makes public conversations around mental health, queerness and self care. Cho's unwelcome mat provides a personal example of an artist considering ways to harness productive discomfort through a practice of self reflection and slow growth.

In *Sankofa: The Pursuit of Ancestral Memory II* James Yeboah hooks materials into burlap that speak to his identity as a Black first-generation Canadian. Cutting by hand Kente cloth his aunt brought back from a visit to Ghana, Yeboah hooks the word Akwaaba in a background of black speckled yarn sourced from a craft store where he previously worked at. The rug is exhibited along side *Sankofa: The Pursuit of Ancestral Memory*, a sculptural piece consisting of an heirloom Oware board resting on the same piece of Kente textile used in the rug. 48 black miniature faces speckled with glitter rest in the small pits of the board. Paired together, these works highlight how Yeboah mobilizes objects from his Ghanaian heritage to better understand them, and his identity in relationship to them.



■ SUSAN BLIGHT ■

Jessica Watkin, a blind performance artist, reflected in a workshop how “theater and galleries, like most spaces, are not built for equity.” In *This Rug Was Not Made For Your Visual Pleasure #pleasetouchme* visitors are invited to feel Watkin’s handwork, which rejects visual design to favor embodied process. Instead of visually reading the text on her rug, the statement is brailled and demands to be read in multiple ways. Watkin’s unwelcome rug builds into her larger performance practice, where she works to expose how spaces are built for the comfort and criteria of able-bodied folks.

Kaythi, a textile artist, and Seiji, a bibliographer and trans-cultural worker, place their work in relation to one-another, presenting *Our Lady of Profound Failure* and *Body*². Both rugs feature a female form, where the texts “Dykes Only” and “Where are you standing?” float above the two figures. Seiji’s rug uses slow hooking methodology and the canonical imagery of the female nude to consider the production of the body. Their rug welcomes visitors to feel discomfort as they position themselves both physically and socially in relation to the figure. Kaythi’s rug offers viewers a meditative space to consider both failure in relation to lesbian separatist projects and the possibilities opened up by theoretical model. Together, their work welcomes critical conversations about women-only spaces and the social and physical production of gendered bodies.



■ SEIJI ■



■ JAMES YEBOAH ■

Susan Blight hooks a phrase in Anishinaabemowin and frames the words with three clan symbols; protectors of land, water and kinship, resting beside a riverbed. In *An Unwelcome Mat for these Times, Niwiji Anishinaabeg* the rug is removed from the floor, along with the gesture of welcoming, and repositioned to the wall. The wall mounting is further communicated through Blight’s approach to binding her rug, which includes fringe at the bottom of the rug, adapting a technique used in grass dancing outfits. Blight’s unwelcome mat signals the ability for Indigenous people in Canada to adapt and turn one thing into something new.



■ KAYTHI ■

After examining beautiful hooked rugs in the TMC archive for one of our workshops, the group toured Lisa Myers’ curated exhibition *Beads, they’re sewn so tight*. Standing in front of #35, a piece by artist Olivia Whetung, Blight observed that the materials in rug hooking are akin to those in beading; while appearing the same, each bead is slightly different. You can plan out a project with a specific vision in mind however the beads nature might change the pattern and end result. The materials in rug hooking work a similar way- producing their own will and ways of relating. The rugs in *Productive Discomfort* remind us to acknowledge that while things are not always in our control, we still have the capacity and power to shape them.

- Lauren Cullen

This exhibition was part of Myseum Intersections Festival 2019.

1 In Righteous Discontent: *The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880-1920* (1993) Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham defines respectability as conservative manners that uphold moral behavior, as deemed

2 MacDonald, Sharon M.H. “As the Locusts in Egypt Gathered Crops: Hooked Mat Mania and Cross Border Shopping in the Early Twentieth Century”. *Material History Review* 54 (2001): 58 – 70

3 Tuck, Eve and K.W. Yang. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity*, vol.1, no.1 (2012): 1 – 40.

RECESS

curated by Jaycee Tu

Rowena Katigbak, Eric Oh, Lina Wu, Yuma Yanagisawa, Cristine Yunyk.

April 12 - May 11, 2019



■ YUMA YANAGISAWA ■

Recess is an exhibition that prompts its visitors to play. The word recess comes from the Latin word *recessus*, meaning “a going back, retreat.”¹ What can recessing to a sense of playfulness teach us about community building and our approach to daily life? The exhibition aims to shift the gallery patron’s typical role in the art gallery as they are invited to play in tandem with the featured works and projects. During *Recess*, visitors are encouraged to become collaborators- invited to participate, improvise, deconstruct, reconstruct and, most importantly, play- in an exploration of how play has the potential to strengthen a community.

Eric Oh’s work titled *Comfortecture* encourages collaboration- requiring interaction from visitors in order to be activated. Interested in our relationships with domestic spaces and objects, *Comfortecture* explores Oh’s conceptual interests through fort-building by inviting visitors to build a fort with provided materials, many of which are familiar domestic objects such as blankets, pillows and furniture. Consecutive visitors may choose to simply occupy the existing structure or to demolish it and rebuild. The project aims to activate the participants’ imagination and ingenuity. Through this installation, Oh asks, “How might we bring this thinking of re-use and domestic playfulness into adulthood?”

What lessons can fort-building offer us in our approach to the fixity and static roles of domestic spaces and objects?² A book lays by the fort as well: it prompts participants to choose either to follow diagrams left by others on how to build a fort or design their own. They may choose to either build on the existing fort before them or to tear it down and start over. They may also choose to add instructions and/or diagrams to the ongoing book for future participants. The book becomes a living collaborative document between the artist and gallery participants, reflecting on collaborative processes that open up ideas about how we can build new structures and spaces as a community.

Recess responds to Toronto’s landscape. It is a fast-moving and ever-changing cosmopolitan metropolis- a city that is constantly in development, bearing new structures and spaces whose purpose is more often commercial than not. In planning for cosmopolis, which involves a revival of inquiry about and appreciation for the existence of the city as sites for memory, desire and the spirit or sacred, Sandercock suggests the “need for diversity of spaces and places in the city: places loaded with visual stimulation, but also places of quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce where the [...] noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the ‘noise of the stars’ or the wind or water, and the voice(s) within ourselves.”³ With Eric Oh’s *Comfortecture*, visitors are not only able to build new structures, but they are also able to take shelter within them and share that space with others. This opens up possibilities for chance encounters, conversation and contemplation.

Lina Wu’s *Treasure* also encourages playful interaction and reflection. Wu’s series of shrines comprises of their collection and informed by her obsession with trinkets that relate to her childhood, as well as to her family’s Chinese-Canadian immigration experiences. Playfully handmade interpretations of familiar objects and icons of Wu’s younger self are included in the shrines, they represent the interpretations or misinterpretations caused intergenerationally in families living in the diaspora. Collaging various items such as Hello Kitty stickers, Chinese School exercise books, childhood journals, red pockets and more- the artist turns fleeting memories into a monumentalized shrine to recall her childhood self.⁴ Visitors are invited to interact with the shrines opening and peeking into doors, pockets and holes-leading them through a non-linear narrative about migration, intergenerational relationships and childhood development. *Treasure* unearths complexities about childhood



■ LINA WU ■

memory, joy and the emotional worth of material possessions, through the acts of collection and memorialization. Visitors may also choose to participate in Wu’s workshop, in which she invites the community to bring trinkets from their childhood to make shrines of their own. Through touch and interaction, *Treasure* invites the participants to recall and honour their inner child, generating a platform for social connections through childhood experiences.

Collaboration is the structural foundation of Yuma Yanagisawa’s *Filter Collage*- a work that is interested in biotechnology, defined as a technological application that collaborates with biological systems. Requiring the interaction and collaboration of a given with computer technology,

the participant influences the visual outcome of the artwork.⁵ A webcam captures the participants’ likeness and projects it onto a monitor. The image is then abstracted and manipulated by the code that the artist has written- appearing as a collage of different image filters. The participant is encouraged to move their body in order to activate the work and manipulate its appearance. It is the participant in collaboration with the program that the artist has coded that decides the outcome of the image.

The work operates on a harmonious collaboration between the artist, computer program and the participants, activating *Filter Collage* and rendering it alive. Like Eric Oh’s *Comfortecture*, this installation generates a situation in which the creation of the work is passed on from the artists’ hands to the participants.

It is through play that society collaboratively expresses its interpretation of life and the world.⁶ While Lina Wu

assembles old toys and remnants of the past into shrines, Rowena Katigbak takes old toys apart and pieces them back together in order to make something new. The artist aims to playfully subvert mainstream culture, employing rebellion, play and magic to conjure a work titled *Progress*- a series of kinetic sculptures comprised of found toys and images. Inspired by toy design, Katigbak unravels and reweaves narratives through the act of taking apart, redesigning and repurposing toys and other remnants of the past. The artist invites participants to activate the works through tactile touch. *High Flyer*, for example, is activated via a turning crank. By turning the crank, the viewer moves a witch on a broom who is flying over a stone monument of a male figure.

The figures in the work are fragments of magazine images, pieced together to create the witch and male figures, which are prominent throughout the series. The male figure is representative of patriarchal systems and the witch is navigating these systems of power. The participant plays a significant role in the story as well, activating the movement of the kinetic sculptures and driving the story forward. Katigbak inserts her own likeness into each witch iteration, and through this act, seizes the narrative and centers herself in the story- hoping to inspire gallery visitors to do the same.⁷ For by opening ourselves up to the potentials of play, we are making room for the possibility of stepping sideways into another reality. With *High Flyer*, the artist illustrates a reality which favours magic over patriarchal powers. The *Progress* series asks viewers to believe in magic- more specifically, their own magic- and to acknowledge the power one has to control their own narrative.



■ ROWENA KATIGBAK ■

Cristine Yunyk's series of paintings titled *Cartwheel Arms* is born out of childhood memories and feelings of playfulness. Like Rowena Katigbak's *Progress* series, Yunyk employs play to communicate her interpretation of the world. Yunyk recreates a childlike sense of play through painting by not prioritizing the end result of the image, but rather, by prioritizing the process and leisurely experience of painting itself.⁸ The end result is an amalgamation of images that have the potential to spark our memories- memories of playing board games, hanging out in playgrounds and frolicking in grassy fields.



■ ERIC OH ■

The finished works are sprinkled high, low, and in-between other works throughout the gallery space- the reminiscent snapshots creating a sense of playfulness and movement, choreographing gallery visitors to improvise and move playfully through the gallery space as well. This series of paintings transport gallery visitors to the playscape of their memories, triggering recollections of our pasts and past selves.

As a child in school, a typical day often revolves around recess hour- a time for playing games, sports or make-believe with friends. From a young age, play teaches us the workings of language and of the social game, as well as relationships between players. *Recess* is centred on the notion that play brings individuals together to cooperate and have fun. Prompting playfulness, movement and interaction in the gallery space, this group exhibition highlights the importance of play and the potentialities that playfulness has to offer in our daily lives and interactions. While play is integral to social development and the strengthening of communities, it can also help us to cope with the stresses of daily life. Thus, play not only provides an outlet for entertainment- but also functions as a means of self-care, for creative expression. It can also be used as a tool to examine the world, working through social concerns, and as instruments for conceptual thinking. *Recess* aims to inspire visitors to play more often, and most importantly, to take that feeling of playfulness far outside of the confines of the exhibition.

-Jaycee Tu



■ CRISTINE YUNYK ■

1 "Recess" (n). *Index*, www.etymonline.com/word/recess.

2 Artist Statement, Eric Oh (2019)

3 Leonie Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II: Mangrel Cities of the 21st Century* (Continuum: London, New York, 2003) p.227.

4 Lina Wu, Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.

5 Yuma Yanagisawa Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.5 Yuma Yanagisawa Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions

6 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1955).

7 Rowena Katigbak, Artist Statement, proposal for Call for Submissions Recess, 2018.

8 Cristine Yunyk, Artist Statement, Proposal for Call for Submissions, 2018.

THE BALD EAGLE'S CLAW

curated by Philip Leonard Ocampo

Yan Wen Chang, Brandon Fujimagari, Andrew Harding, and Josi Smit
July 5 – August 3, 2019

Performances by Madelyne Beckles, Dorica Manuel and Marissa Sean Cruz
Text work by Philippe Pamela Dungao and Ana Morningstar

On July 20th, 1969, Apollo 11 commander Neil Armstrong and pilot Buzz Aldrin became the first two humans to ever walk upon the surface of the Moon.¹ Claimed in the name of the United States of America, human-kind's first contact with the celestial was televised to an estimated 650 million people,² demonstrating America's superiority over other nations as the winner of a decade long "Space Race".³ Such a triumph helped to catalyze a national ethos, which became known as the "American Dream". Despite its promise that hard work results in the upward mobility of all citizens, we continually witness the harmful ways in which the "American Dream" marginalizes people within its borders and around the globe. Its prominence in collective conscious is rooted in colonial power, both in the past and in the present. The nation's romantic fascination with space exploration can be seen as an escapist tactic which neglects the realities of its own destructive influence.

The Bald Eagle's Claw calls attention to ideas of false-superiority in the United States of America by way of artworks that present as indulgent, disillusioned representations of American patriotism. By repurposing iconography associated with "Americana" culture, the artists involved in this exhibition use painting, sculpture, text and performance to question the U.S.A as a dominating force while demonstrating a concern for how its ideals have flooded beyond its borders and into global consciousness. Similar to the "American Dream", the works feign this same sense of romantic optimism, gazing forward into the hopeful future, seemingly distracted from the bleak reality of the present.



■ YAN WEN CHANG ■

The futuristic, space-inspired aesthetic of the 1960s was an era of American visual culture that hypothesized a vision of what progress in the U.S.A would look like.⁴ Josi Smit employs materials reminiscent of aspirational possessions relating to the "American Dream" in *It was almost like you were there...*⁵ Her tulle blinds reference prom dresses; vinyl invoking the image of Cadillac upholstery is used to sew a rug. Through her fabricated objects and fusing two replica Barcelona chairs and a 1970s Italian chrome etagere⁶, the space can only suggest multiple interpretations of what it could be. It draws upon the interior design of a living room but it is non-functional and hyper condensed. It could be a public landmark if it looked less like a domestic, private space. Each component is separated from their original function, creating an aggregate, alien form. They cannot fulfill the promise of their respective references and original functionality, and instead, exist together as many things but nothing at the same time. Akin to the unrealized utopian future of the U.S.A, both reside within an in-between state.

Sadie Hawkins, L-280, Prom Night (1980), The Final Girl, Pontiac Fiero, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The collection of paintings and objects included in this exhibition by Brandon Fujimagari are each imbued with nightmarish terror, inspired by visuals from slasher films combined with the passionate spirit of the American West and the commodified circuit in which these spectacular images become produced.

There is a nearly mass-produced craftsmanship in the way that Brandon utilizes contemporary garment processes in fabricating works that suggest a lingering tension in the idealistic American air; a clandestine horror that lurks within a luxurious patriotic atmosphere. Brandon partners with collaborator DJ Stewart to recreate the killer's butcher table (*Canyon Table*), and hangs the victim's cheerleading pom pom on a nearby meat hook (*American Beauty in Silver Foil and*



■ BRANDON FUJIMAGARI ■

Distressed Pig Skin Leather, 2019). He reimagines Joan Parker's Dodge Fever ad campaign and rests it on the table, further pulling you into danger through her persuasive gaze.

It's the Golden Hour along a California Highway. The road, the trees, the neighboring cars: All bathed in glorious sunlight. In *New Horrors*, Brandon interprets this sublime sky, as seen through the dashboard of a car that soars towards it, as apocalyptic. He uses bleach and dye in paintings that depict the sunset as an atomic mushroom cloud and an uncontrollable wildfire. But wryly so, Brandon welcomes the impending doom, and considers it a fine way to die.⁷

In *Safe Travels*, Andrew Harding cruises towards this same sunset, but trades serene indifference for nostalgic optimism. Harding ties together disparate yet familiar imagery of travel that, together, are more able

to cope with the bleakness of reality mediated through American influence. His works include a packaged image, lock and key set on top of an acrylic engraving of similar imagery (save for a spine fragment) that rests on top of a wooden platform. The inclusion of cedar in this work is both culturally and personally significant to Harding's Métis background. With its medicinal qualities, he seeks to imbue the other objects

of his work with its healing properties; steeping a Car Freshener in it as well as dispersing it throughout the assemblage.

Finally, a piece of acrylic laser-cut into the shape of a car hood suspends another image of a sunset as a gold chain dangles from it. Andrew Harding incorporates found objects, images and fabricated items in makeshift sculptures that acknowledge assemblage as an act of making that is futile yet hopeful. *Safe Travels* packs your bags affectionately for the uncertainty that lies

in the journey ahead. The sun sets. Stars emerge as darkness engulfs the night sky, shining distances beyond comprehension. Its symbolism tethered to our sense of wonder and awe, fame and success; the extraordinary amongst the ordinary. Due to their prominence within Americana iconography, the star has grown synonymous with American patriotism and nationalism, boosting the narrative of the nation's purported ability to succeed, accomplish, thrive, and achieve. Yan Wen Chang's works appropriate optimistic phrases and powerful statements, yet obscures them within the compositions of her meticulously crafted paintings. In contrast to the dynamic energy and bold imagery of her paintings - flora indigenous to her home country of Malaysia, Travis Scott lyrics, and majestic animals (among more) -, Chang illustrates a nostalgic loss of picturesque memory through channeling her father's





■ JOSI SMIT ■

struggles throughout his lifetime of moving between Asia and North America. Chang's works demonstrate the complicated relationship between bleak reality and escapist fantasy, channeling diasporic hardship as it ripples through generations.

Malaysian Moon Moth 1 and *Malaysian Moon Moth 2* are two works painted on bleached denim - a fabric considered to be working class - assuming the form of a four-point sparkle and a five-point star. do you remember? a large, vibrantly coloured painting, depicts a blazing horse accompanied by Hibiscus flowers. Chang's visual and material choices present a confident aesthetic in order to combat adversity, encouraging viewers to reflect on an aspect of the "American Dream" that served as solace for the many marginalized people enamoured with it - that one could dream beyond actual circumstances, no matter how difficult they may be.

A large rectangular piece of black velvet hangs in the back of the space. *resident of uncey-le-franc* is reminiscent of a monolith, a geological feature popularized by its feature in Stanley Kubrick's, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Subject to countless interpretations, the monolith exists as an enigma that encompasses space and time.⁸ Its subjective nature ignores our scientific efforts to understand outer space and instead embraces itself as a mystic anomaly. Resembling a starscape, over 200 enamel pins of objects relating to Americana iconography (fast food brands, liquor bottles, and cigarette packs) that Josi Smit has acquired are hand pinned to the textile. Previously belonging to a single, anonymous person, the scattered ephemera embodies a lived experience, focusing on a personal subjectivity instead of the

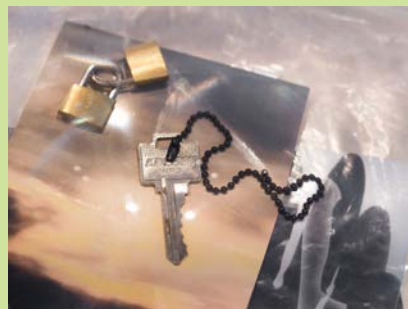
consumerist influence its pictorial symbols usually represent. Their capitalist power is rendered inconsequential as they float throughout a universe.

Housing the remnants of performances from Madelyne Beckles, Dorica Manuel and Marissa Sean Cruz, their traces remain as a sculptural installation once their performances on July 11th, 2019 end. While questioning the realities that surround maintaining appearances of lifestyles that are prominent in American popular culture, each performer accesses performance's subversive potentials in order to illustrate misunderstandings of labour and idealized living; a form of stardom in itself.

The performance evening begins with Madelyne Beckles. *One Light* is a monologue that is made up of half Kanye West lyrics, half Kim Kardashian quotes. Beckles recites it all in a digitally distorted, high pitched tone, akin to the sounds of a child speaking. She performs as North West, the couple's six year old daughter: I've made mistakes in my life for sure / When I gain a pound it's in the headlines / Aspire to inspire before you expire / Can we get much higher? / So high / Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh / Life is a marathon / I'ma shift the paradigm / I'ma turn up everytime.⁹ In this performative reading, Beckles explores stardom, success, cultural capitalist production in the United States of America as built upon the expense of black women through a character that is also commodifiable because of her blackness. She weaves her way through the audience, wearing a pair of pink highheels that are way too big for her feet.

As North West, she represents a hyperbolic amalgamation of her parents superstardom, but also embodies the repercussions of cultural exploitation at a young age: Her shrill reading becomes an uncanny, romanticized look at becoming in its most unsettling form.

As the first note of Christina Aguilera's "Dirty" begins, Marissa Sean Cruz *awakens*. Dressed in both a hot pink and neon yellow latex dress, two matching sets of dish washing gloves, and several sponges glued to the bottom of her homemade slippers, she is prepared to clean up and work out at the same time.



■ ANDREW HARDING ■



■ MADELYNE BECKLES, DORICA MANUEL ■
 & MARISSA SEAN CRUZ

SO Flesh, SO Clean is a three part performance in which Cruz repeatedly cycles through a rigorous workout circuit. Misusing fitness equipment more and more nonsensically each time the song loops, she chugs yellow Gatorade as she cleans and exercises. Mirroring the healthy, active lifestyles of America's brightest stars, Cruz exaggerates the labour behind maintaining the proactive appearances marketed to us by American popular culture in humorous desperation.

In contrast to the boisterousness of Cruz's performance, the evening concludes with Dorica Manuel's *A Recipe for Flies*. The performance conflates two idioms, "Land of milk and honey", and "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" two sayings that share honey in its metaphor through associating it with opportunism in the United States of America, and then describing it as a necessity for success. Vinegar's significance in Filipino culture¹⁰ is met with shame in the context of the latter idiom, and the former champions the United States as its favorable opposite. Surrounded by various containers of milk, honey and vinegar, Manuel patiently transfers the liquids between containers, obscuring the divide that unfairly elevates the U.S.A above other nations.

the former champions the United States as its favorable opposite. Surrounded by various containers of milk, honey and vinegar, Manuel patiently transfers the liquids between containers, obscuring the divide that unfairly elevates the U.S.A above other nations.

On February 1st, 2003, Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon re-entry into earth's atmosphere, killing all seven crew members onboard.¹¹ Distinct in its sociocultural prominence, the iconic footage documenting the crash is horrifying in its aesthetic appeal. The fragments of metal as it broke apart caught fire, making each piece twinkle; cameras interpreted the flashing light as technicolour, resembling a multicoloured shooting star as it fell from the sky. Thirty-four years after the Moon landing, this tragic moment in American history was speculated to be a result of oversights and overconfidence of prior successes in the field of American space exploration.¹² The disaster demonstrated a fault in the country's own self assigned idea of excellence.

The painting, sculpture, text and performance work of *The Bald Eagle's Claw* are brought together through a collective search for belonging amidst being disillusioned by the "American Dream". Just as the nation itself looked to the stars in their quest for global dominance, the artists of this exhibition deliberately set their hopeful gazes outward, but are conscious of the complicated realities that inform such desire. If walking upon the surface of the Moon was our collective understanding of America at its finest, then let outer space take these ideas of excellence and send them crashing down, alongside the dying spacecraft.

- Philip Leonard Ocampo

1 Loff, Sarah. "Apollo 11 Mission Overview." NASA. April 17, 2015. Accessed June 17, 2019. https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/apollo/missions/apollo11.html.

2 Ibid.

3 A competition between the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States (US) from 1955 to 1969 in which the two countries competed for innovation in the realm of space exploration.

4 McCall, Bruce. "What is retro-futurism." Filmed May 2008. TED video, 10:20.

5 The full title of Josi's artwork is *it was almost like you were there. I could hear you, I could see you, smell you. I could hear your voice. Sometimes your voice would wake me up. It would wake me up in the middle of the night, just like you were in the room with me*, a quote from *Paris, Texas* (1984) directed by Wim Wenders.

6 A piece of furniture with a number of open shelves for displaying ornaments.

7 Fujimagari, Brandon, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019.

8 Kubrick, Stanley, and Arthur C. Clarke. 2001: A Space Odyssey. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.

9 Beckles, Madelyne, "One Light", 2019.

10 I'm Gonna Git You Suka (Filipino Vinegar). May 17, 2009. Accessed June 19, 2019. <https://burntumpiablom.com/2009/05/suka-filipino-vinegar.html>.

11 Howell, Elizabeth. "Columbia: First Shuttle in Space." Space.com. November 30, 2017. Accessed June 19, 2019. <https://www.space.com/18008-space-shuttle-columbia.html>.

12 Berger, Brian. "Columbia Report Faults NASA Culture, Government Oversight." Space.com. January 29, 2013. Accessed June 19, 2019. <https://www.space.com/19476-space-shuttle-columbia-disaster-oversight.html>.

PRO

JECT

PRESERVING THE PAST

Allana Cooper
September 7 – October 13, 2018

This exhibition is part of Xpace Recent Grad Summer Residency program



You wake up in a white room without windows. It is bright though, fluorescent almost – what are the first two things you feel? Blink and years go by from then – it's now, now. Did you get to bring the feelings with you? By some stroke of fate or luck or maybe misfortune, you haven't changed at all. Still, you've stayed. But do you remember the feelings – vulnerable? bleak? – or do those get left behind?

I read that last year some scientists found a wasp, a type now extinct. They think that it's around one hundred million years old, but still, to us, now, it was new: the *Archaeoteleia astropulvis*. The name *astropulvis* supposedly came from the Latin for stardust. Stardust, both like the cosmic, ancient source of the atoms that shaped us and the earth, and like Ziggy, David Bowie's alien alter-ego.¹ At once, earthly and alien. Neatly encased in some Burmese amber this little wasp didn't move; still, it made its way through the years – in a blink – then to now. Travelling from somewhere to elsewhere with something to say, a messenger just like Ziggy.

So I feel myself bidding, "Little wasp, you brought nothing! Just yourself! No songs or poems, no feelings? Prophecies or answers?" I know that forever I'll crave more from you and your guileless quietude, but I also know that I know just the fact of you speaks: "don't rely on consistency, don't depend on ends." A terse memorandum from Fortuna concerning her capricious nature.²

Most of us have seen how time flies! It decays, lingers, rots and ripens, heals, hurts, hardens and weakens; it measures, it mystifies, agitates, and aggregates. Time, changes: skin turns to cut turns to scab turns to scar turns to skin. So it's comforting to know you can pervert what's unavoidable; that sometimes you can side-step fate, or bad luck. That, like the wasp, you can encase the absurdity of endings in Burmese amber, or maybe a primary coloured wax.

Over time, time has made itself familiar; boastful by nature it can't help but show us its tricks. And so we can pervert and prevent and preserve it, all in ways that trick time right back. We can build archives, and rooms, capture images and objects, that hold messages to the future. We can decide for ourselves what's worth keeping – yet, sometimes, what is won't do. We may pick and choose our own poetry of things, since to preserve, wittingly, is to first decide our current parameters on living.³ If you are like the surrealist avant garde, you might make objects out of your dreamworks; an action that "thing" theorist Bill Brown says would register your "refusal to occupy the world as it was."⁴

Or, you might choose to enshrine mundane: the protective mesh sleeve of a pear, chicken wire, or bubble wrap – the world as is. To choose, as Allana Cooper has, to build the unwonted archive. Choose to make the world as it is, as it will be. Collecting found objects in various states of functionality and decay, Allana Cooper's *Preserving the Past* engages multi-mediated processes of "preservation" including: digital scans of the



objects, transferring their image, and coating them in wax before revealing it slightly. At once, she preserves and destroys. In the gesture of encasing the objects in primary coloured wax she both removes their functionality while ensuring their longevity; in scanning and painting she maps and remembers their form while de-contextualizing and adapting their image.

Immersing the viewer within the environment of her installations, *Preserving the Past* is filled with paneled images and an assemblage of objects spread across the walls of the space. Here, Cooper generates a space that directly acknowledges time while sitting slightly outside of it. In here, the objects reign, their decay is both concealed and suspended. Preservation is a dance with eros, that amorphous charm wedged between life and death.⁵ The dance can resemble a wrestle, as we try – over, under, again – to imbue our essence in object. Without Ziggy to sing for us, it considers what to say to



those a hundred million years from now – will they even be? To them like they're ourselves – will we even be? I wonder how do we send messages full of dimension, full of feeling, and properly embalm our likely erring, curious nature.

It could be years from now, when material objects of this nature have gone extinct, that they arrive as messengers of some sort. What is the memorandum they issue? Or, what do they reveal about our current parameters for living? Perhaps the materialist nature of the world today is best encapsulated in the once-loved scraps left sitting on the stoop outside our house; placed out in a blind hope that someone will come by, and take them off our hands. We hope for someone to either love these things anew, or otherwise just to shield us from that final act of refusal – the unalloyed disposal. Instead, Cooper dedicates the decaying for those who are to come, who might look with incredulity at how we built and crumbled, preserved and destroyed.

–Kate Kolberg

1 Elijah J. Talamas, Norman F. Johnson, Matthew L. Buffington, Dong Ren. *Archaeoteleia Masner* in the

2 In ancient Roman religion Fortuna was the goddess of fortune, and a personified deity of luck. She has evolved over time to "Lady Justice."

3 Poetry of things and concept of "parameters on living" made in reference to Ettore Sottsass and the Memphis group, see: www.memphis-milano.com/collections/memphis-milano

4 Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry (Things)* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22. Pg. 10 -11.

5 Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki coined the term 'erotos,' as a combination of the Greek 'eros' (love, desire) and 'thantos' (death), as a manner of expressing how the beauty within his photographs were always tinged with their own ephemerality.

S A N C T U A R I E S



Eve Tagny
September 7 – October 13, 2018

There's a scene in the recent remake of *Roots* the miniseries, where Matilda says, "Blessed is this earth, because my people lie beneath it. Blessed is the rain because it moistens their faces. Blessed is the wind because it carries their names back to us."¹

Earth as our planet and as a handful of dirt, as a small amount of soil, and by another name as land, is sacred to Indigenous Peoples including Continental and Diasporic Africans. One of the reasons for this, is that is where our people are buried as a final resting place. In many cultural and spiritual practises across

the African Continent and African Diaspora, the living and the dead co-exist on territories that are ancestral or adopted homelands. The dead return to the land and become it over a period of time. The land sustains the living; they live off of it, make their homes on it, etc. Thus, life, death and renewal are ever-present cycles in the landscape and in our lives. Simply, we are the land.

Loss, absense, grief and mourning, both public and private and in accordance with the cycles of nature, are palpable themes in Eve Tagny's exhibition, *Sanctuaries*. Tagny reflects; "I think my personal aim is to also offer a quiet space of recollectioncontemplation."² In this installation-based work, Tagny presents to the audience natural elements such as a mounds of dirt, a loaded material signifying life and death, cycles of renewal and ultimately fragility. The concept of a sanctuary itself suggests a refuge, a sacred space, a sanctified space or monument, a holy place, a place of reverence, a place of worship, meditation and finally, a place of respite. The themes present in this exhibition are sanctuary and sanctity of nature, of life, of death, of death rites and ceremonies, graves, tombs and memorials as a shared experience, on which one can meditate and reflect upon, both in the gallery space and long after the exhibition run.

Navigating between writing, photography, video and plant-based installations, Tagny explores themes pertaining to body politics and the ever-changing definitions of hybrid identities. Most recently, her practice has focused on mending traumatic disruptions through nature.

Each component forming the installation discloses a tension between a romanced experience of nature in a controled environment, and the instances when nature reclaims space. This tension reveals how life, death, renewal, and preservation, can manifest in one's environment. On the far end of the Project Space, there is a large photograph of a quarry printed on vinyl. The scale of the vinyl renders the sublimity of such human made environment, one that paradoxically grants comfort while demanding humility. Facing the vinyl, there is a large mound of soil, appearing to be a grave site or a sort of natural occurrence that can be found on a construction site or in a garden. The mound is carefully adorned with mementos such as flowers and small rocks. There is also a video entombed in the pile of dirt featuring a montage of different bodies of water that are contrasting one another. Calm streams and rivers overlap with a roaring pool of water flooding a subway station in Berlin. The idealized perception of nature as a refuge is thus contradicted by the unleashing of a forcefull stream disrupting the rigid urban fabric- as a call to remember the intrinsic untamability of natural elements. Furthermore, the inclusion of water sources in this instillation highlights it's role in mourning and reweal rituals as a cleansing agent for the living and the dead.



Within the installation, the visitors become performers, mourners, grieviers and simultaneously collaborators. Interacting with the contained natural elements and created sanctity of the space, they are also witnesses to rites of grief and mourning surrounding them.

The side walls of the space are completely covered with clear plastic curtains, of the type used for painting or gardening. On one side wall there are tiny plastic pockets hooked onto the larger plastic curtain containing dried and fresh flowers and rocks adorned with golden leaves.

Creating a sanctuary and meditative space of sacredness that the spirit and vibration of the space strikes you silent and sombre and quietly powerful which is the charged and calm energy that is felt by devotees in holy spaces.

On another side wall an image titled *Renewal* is projected. *Renewal* consists of a photograph of dirt with plants growing out of it, green, lush and full of life with a sprinkling of fall leaves appearing signifying the start of autumn. The artist says that; "Images are testaments and vestiges of personal and collective memory, thus informing our present and future. By integrating them into nature's fabric, they get reinterpreted, they can dissolve and reintegrate the natural cycle, mend traumatic ruptures and reinstate a sense of normalcy and continuity."³ Death and decay are happening alongside life, the ever present cycle in nature that is a certainty and has a solace to that certainty of impermanent permanence.

Mourning and grief rituals both in public and private spheres, reflect our love for the dead and how we continue to have a relationship with them after they die. In many traditions death doesn't end relationships, it just changes them. Ancestor Reverence is one of the most profound ways we sustain relationships with the dead in many Continental African and across African Diaspora cultures. Memorials and memorializations through monuments or actions are ways in which love is expressed, loss is meditated on and private and shared pain is expressed and witnessed. Leaving space for the the healing process to begin. Healing is an ongoing process where remembering becomes a constant act leaving markings onto the landscapes and oftentimes with monuments.



Memorials and memorialization through monuments are apparent in the cairns that Tagny has stacked on top of one another in front of the west wall of the gallery. In many cultures across the world cairns serve as either tombs or memorials to the dead that often blend in with their natural environments. Interestingly, these cairns also commingle with the vinyl and the projection, mimicking grieving sites found in nature.

In conversation about the intentions behind this piece Tagny states that she wished "to create a site-specific installation at the junction of found natural materials and lensbased expressions, that would form an open sanctuary for these times of upheaval. Taking into account the underlying privileges of being able to inhabit and occupy this specific space, in this temporary sanctuary, nature would act as a guide to counteract oppressive structures and find the bases for new decolonized, intersectional and sustainable futurities."⁴

In *Sanctuaries*, one is invited to remember through a set of rites, and to witness one another. The presence of nature here functions as a continuous cycle in which solace can be found, traumatic interruptions can be healed from and transformed into places where we integrate our lives and deaths. This exhibition generates a sacred and meditative space of prayer, worship, reverence and peace, opening this experience as a collective. One may leave struck by the quiet power of the installation or haunted long after in reflection.

-Bishara Elmi

1 "Part 4," *Roots: Season 1*. Writ Alex Haley, Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal. Dir Bruce Beresford.

2 Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018

3 Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018

4 Tagny, Eve. *Sanctuaries*. Interview by Bishara Elmi. 2018

FORTUNE FLAVORS THE BOLD

Arezu Salamzadeh

January 18 - February 16, 2019



In Arezu Salamzadeh's exhibition, *Fortune Flavors the Bold*, gallery attendees become customers visiting a curio shop for various knick-knacks that promise good luck and prosperity. Welcomed by lucky cats with quirky faces and mischievous grins, visitors are given cause to question why the space feels both familiar yet uncanny. Rather than the usual manufactured objects found in many Chinatown shops, the miniature dragons, ginseng, dried fish, lucky candy in this store are handmade, and painted in sharp, vibrant colours. Challenging what is considered real and superficial, Salamzadeh's work allows for the active recognition of threefold transformations – of the familiar lucky objects, of a traditional gallery space, and the viewers' interacting with the environment as a customer. Underneath the humorous and lighthearted work, this installation reveals the darker edges of nostalgia, allowing visitors to enter the artist's headspace and partake in the sharing of good fortune.

Simply put, visiting *Fortune Flavors the Bold* is similar to the experience of opening a fortune cookie and reading an ironic but relatable, useful quote.

LUCKY CATS AND OTHER MISCHIEVOUS CHARACTERS

"For me growing up, the lucky cats didn't symbolize welcoming fortune or customers; they were ornamentation almost."¹

Walking into the space is surreal; it is a mishmash of attributes from both Chinese public spaces and private dwellings. Pulled from curio shops are the signature lucky cats and symbolic colour choices of red, gold, white, and green. Similar to Chinese medicinal stores, ginseng and ginger are sold by the pound in glass urns and wooden crates. Like certain family homes, shoes must be taken off before entering the (red glitter foam) tiled room.

Throughout the space there are multitudes of objects that bring good fortune:

- Lucky Cats with their right paw up to invite wealth or left paw up to attract customers
- Dragons that symbolize power, strength, wisdom, and good luck
- Ginseng roots prized for their health and longevity properties
- Red Pockets, tokens of giving or receiving good luck for the new year
- Lunar New Year candy, which supposedly, if eaten, will bring an influx of fortune in the coming year.

Within the abundance of sculptures, each ceramic has their quirk that makes them one of a kind. For instance, lucky cats wear a humanoid face that beckon customers to stay awhile in Salamzadeh's fabricated environment. However, when the gaze of the cats become too unsettling, the customer's eyes, averted, will inevitably be drawn to other curiosities featured in the immersive room, including red pocket-lined walls and baskets stuffed with real and artificial candy. Modelled on common items found in her home or seen in her childhood, each piece has been laboriously moulded or cast, painted and fired by the artist. They are not ornamental figures, but neither are they the same symbols that bring wealth to the owner. By recreating commercialized items that have come to represent Chinese culture, the artist reclaims these symbolic objects, questioning what is more authentic, valuable, and lucky.

RECLAMATION AND NOSTALGIA

"I had an immense fear that anything I did would bring me bad luck."²



Salamzadeh recognizes that much of her understanding of Chinese culture stems from observing her mother's practice of using herbal medicine and performing superstitious acts. The fear of unseen consequences occurring due to real-world actions was always present.³ For the artist, these superstitions were both a fundamental connection to her culture and a barrier to understanding what it meant for her to be "Chinese."

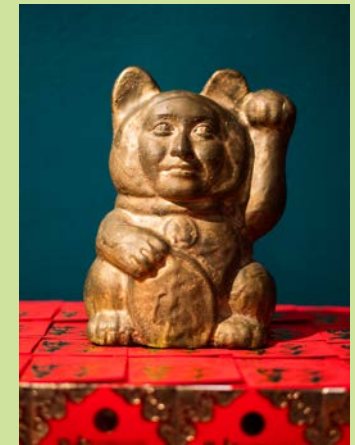
Fortune Flavors the Bold is a personal reconciliation of childhood fears. The ceramics, with their bright colours and familiar forms, are sincere gestures seeking to find answers. What fortune do commercially lucky objects bring? Does an abundance of lucky objects translate to having more luck? What kind of luck do these hand-kneaded pieces give? Lastly, what is the standard of fortune or what is considered luck? These symbolic creatures of the artist's design recontextualize fortune. Through the maker's hand, they allow Salamzadeh to break outside the mould of Chinese superstitious expectations and guidelines, relearning and reshaping what luck is for herself.

ON IDIOMS

"A lot of Chinese superstitions I heard growing up come from idioms and possibly the other way around too... The fact I can't speak the language further removes me from this culture."⁴

The title of the exhibition is a play on the expression, 'fortune favours the bold.' This old Latin proverb was historically used to encourage groups of militia to act fearlessly, as courageous actions attain more success and reward.

With an extra 'L' in the idiomatic title, Salamzadeh points back to the immigrant experience. It recalls how food has always been an access point for understanding intangible familial, cultural practices -- whether that be visits to medicinal shops to buy herbs or consistently having citrus fruits during Lunar New Year. In addition, this idiom is not so unlike many first-generation Asian immigrant mentalities where hard work equals future prosperity. But it does beg the question: if we are consistently working for the future, is this still considered good fortune for the present?



INHERITANCE

"Are these items lucky?"⁵

1 Arezu Salamzadeh, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019.

2 Arezu Salamzadeh, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019.

3 Arezu Salamzadeh, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019.

4 Arezu Salamzadeh, in conversation with the author, January 9th, 2019.

WICKED GAME

Emily G Harrison
March 1 – 30, 2019

Pastiche, Play, Process: Emily Harrison's *Wicked Game*



Upon entering the project space, *Wicked Game* by Emily Harrison confronts the viewer with a gaudy, dramatic landscape, teeming with mysterious creatures reminiscent of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*; lurid gargoyles, mysterious figures and strange animals. Rife with art-historical references mediated by thick Plasticine, Harrison's multi-panel work playfully employs tenets of the Western painting canon as collage materials. Harrison's layered series addresses the status of image-making practices today, while critiquing notions of the "original," the "academic," and the "painterly." The artist's installation does more than contrast a "low-art" medium with "high-art" references; the primacy of the canonical is destabilized in favor of laterality, play and irreverence.

In his essay "The Word Remix is Corny," artist Brad Troemel states that

In his essay "The Word Remix is Corny," artist Brad Troemel states that "Remixing is no longer a stand against normative ideas of authorship; it's the embodiment of it."¹ In our twenty-first century image-economy, where the collision of "high" and "low" culture is the ground-zero of the Internet Age, art historical references are ubiquitous. Many of these kinds of references, while often purely aesthetic, still serve to "embolden the legitimacy of the original"² and thus perpetuate Western art's legacy existing atop the cultural pyramid. Harrison's series of Plasticine paintings, however, present us with a different kind of pastiche, one that Troemel refers to as progressive versioning, which is "not about the valorization of the original but about losing all ties to it, about adding to and switching out variables until none of the results bare any resemblance to where they started."³ The figures in Harrison's work make playful references to popular paintings by artists such as Botticelli, Bosch, and Goya, but as a side-note, instead of being reliant on these canonical references to validate her work. Harrison's figures feel like reproductions of reproductions; she is not bemoaning the loss of the "original" in a sea of clones, but rather reveling in her ability to use all of canonical imagery in conjunction with contemporary motifs, as equal-opportunity materials.

Harrison states that it is not important if the viewer recognizes her nods to art history, as she is against dictating a singular reading to the viewer.⁴ She employs art-historical motifs as materials to address personal, intuitive narratives. Harrison is more interested in these references for their dramatic, night-marish qualities and their relationships to emotional states. The artist cites the first panel of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* as an inspiration; while it is supposed to be the most utopian of the three panels, the scene still hints at the debauchery to come.⁵



That is the realm she is most interested in addressing within her work; the tilting edge of collapse.

Unlike the idealized portrayals of women by male artists throughout art history, Harrison presents the viewer with multi-faceted female figures that complicate the canonical. In the largest, mural-sized panel dominating an entire wall of the project space, mysterious amphibian women composed of blues, greens and purples crawl through a murky foreground. Far in the background, camouflaged against waves and seafoam is a reclining female nude that Harrison refers to as a Botticelli-esque Venus.⁶

Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* from 1486 depicts the highly idealized goddess of love floating atop a shell as the central focus of the composition.⁷ While Botticelli's work is considered by many to be a "shorthand for Western high art,"⁸ she is rendered a side note in Harrison's composition. In this panel, Harrison presents a destabilized art historical reference, where the Venus figure is not upheld as more legitimate than the rest of the composition. Mirroring the Pagan nature of Botticelli's Venus, the women in the foreground morph into the landscape, their limbs interwoven with the boughs of trees. In contrast to one's immediate associations with Venus, goddess of love and beauty, the figures in the foreground feel distinctly other, but simultaneously more complex and human. Perhaps these women house a critique of Western humanist notions of beauty, personifying the complicated reality of the female-identifying body in relation to the idealized, canonical Venus.

For Harrison, these figures also embody the anxiety and suffering that accompany love and romance, presenting the viewer with the less desirable side of Botticelli's immaculate goddess of love.⁹ In contrast to the amphibian women who crawl curiously through the underbrush, another panel features hypersexualized gargoyle figures. Acting as an ornate frame for one of Harrison's panels, these female gargoyles offer yet another playful critique of hyper-masculinity throughout art history. Their rotund buttocks literally pop off the surfaces of their panels, irreverently mocking the male gaze of the Western art canon while proudly reclaiming their fetishized status. The gargoyles frame a massive face enveloped in shadow, tongue hanging out of its mouth garishly, further mirroring the consumption of the female form.

Harrison's use of Plasticine as the primary medium also enters into this conversation of pastiche and mimicry. Plasticine is very much a tool for play, and is marketed primarily towards children and amateurs.

Harrison's rich application of the Plasticine simulates impasto oil painting without valorizing oil as a medium so much as problematizing its primacy. Plasticine's status as a craft material further drives home Harrison's democratic use of historical iconography, decontextualizing its academic status. The bright palette that we associate with both Plasticine and Harrison's practice to date is largely abandoned in favor of a nocturnal chiaroscuro. The resulting synthesis of playful subject matter and playful material is made somber by Harrison's choice of palette, hinting at a more sinister reality beneath this lively landscape: the anxiety that exists alongside love, the inevitable collapse of utopia.

Plasticine's oil-based and non-hardening nature means that this series is in a constant state of metamorphosis. During a studio visit, Harrison showed me the way she will slice off a segment from one



panel and adhere it to another; the affect is a symbiotic churning; figures, plants and animals are all composed of pieces of one-another. The way Harrison works on the whole series at once mirrors the lateral way she deploys imagery, furthering her criticism of a static, finished "original" artwork. Integrated within the work, one can also notice segments of old paintings that Harrison has cut-up and stuck into the Plasticine. This re-use and re-integration of old work seems to be tenet of Harrison's practice, and is very in line with the work's heavy use of pastiche, iconography and symbolic imagery.

The non-archival quality of Plasticine is yet another element of the work that differentiates it from its canonical references; these images will likely soon melt, crumble and find themselves thrown back into the recycled volley of Harrison's invigorated practice. These mural-sized works could not feasibly adorn the walls of a church, or be sold to a museum's permanent collection; they will, like the material composition of the figures they depict, find their way into other bodies and across other surfaces.

- Sophia Opperl

Wicked Game presents a new series of large format paintings embracing the low-art materiality of plasticine, pairing its playful tactility with creatures, figures and motifs that are hyper-saturated and frenzied. Over the last year, Emily Harrison has been researching European art historical movements such as Rococo, Baroque and religious allegorical paintings alongside popular Western fairytales and folklore. Delving into her own thought patterns and anxieties as a starting point for content, *Wicked Game* looks both inward and outward, confronting the psychological and the mythical. Materially, this exhibition exists in a realm between painting and sculpture, with imagery caught between the dream and the disquieted.

1 Troemel, Brad, "The Word 'Remix' is Corny" *Dis Magazine*, 17th Oct, 2012,

2 Troemel, Brad, "The Word 'Remix' is Corny" *Dis Magazine*, 17th Oct, 2012, <http://dismagazine.com/blog/37255/theword-remix-is-corny/>

3 Ibid.

4 Emily G Harrison, in conversation with the Sophia Opperl, February, 2019

5 Ibid.

6 Emily G Harrison, in conversation with the Sophia Opperl, February, 2019

7 Sandro Botticelli *The Birth of Venus*, ca. 1486 Uffizi Gallery, Florence

8 Evans, Mark, and Stefan Weppelmann. *Botticelli Reimagined*. London: V & A, 2016.

9 Ibid.

CONTAINER FOR A PRECARIOUS RECORD

Zahra Komeylian
April 12 - May 11, 2019

Marina Fathalla in conversation with
Zahra Komeylian

Container for a precarious record is a selection of fractured wax impressions resulting from a durational performance to cast postures of artist's arms. In this process, the artist repetitively submerges her arms into molten wax and water. At the point in which the limb enters the water vessel, the wax surrounding it congeals; and the posture of the limb is recorded through the formation of an arbitrary cast. In this tactile process, a fluid exchange occurs. The three materials impress upon the form of the other: water takes heat, wax congeals and body leaves its imprint. Each cast is an imprint of the arm's posture at instances of respite, rest and numbing. Wax was historically used as a material for record keeping. Tablets consisting of two blocks of wax framed in a wooden diptych were used as a writing surface. To reuse the tablet, the wax would be re-melted and the surface smoothened. Of salience here is the material's reusability. It contains the memory of previous inscriptions.

Painted a subtle grey, the project space is conceived as a 'container.' Within the container are iterations of the artist's temporal investigations with wax as a record of the docility of the body and the burden of social institutions on it. Komeylian situates a process-based methodology and materiality to re-think her negotiation with the institution of family. Inviting a meandering through the container, the room houses records of the limbs, as they lie, or rest on materials and on the floor.

As a physical mode for record keeping, the readability of the limbs in wax is purposefully obscure, and details of the postural records are lost during the casting process. In its repetition, the resulting casts become subconscious, distracted, and implicit movements of the body.

One can see the vulnerability of the gendered body and its precarious dependence on social relationships in this work. Familial impositions, expectations and patriarchal structures are deeply rooted and transferred through generations. In the case of the diasporic body, there is a choice to separate from abiding by culturally sanctioned obligation. When social bonds disintegrate, or one disobeys, what happens to the body? What feels at stake in *Container for a precarious record* is, what existential tensions are present in the negotiation of agency? And an intangible fear of loss of self, or disappearing in navigating the parameters of this institution.

Wax casts lay under and atop memory foam, recalling the posturality of docile bodies¹. The docile body becomes malleable and willingly submissive as it succumbs to rest under the force of social institutions and their architectures of power, impressing upon and molding it. The laborious process of casting is an effort to record the body's movement and to reveal in these casts, evidence of the "training" that has been inscribed on the body over time.

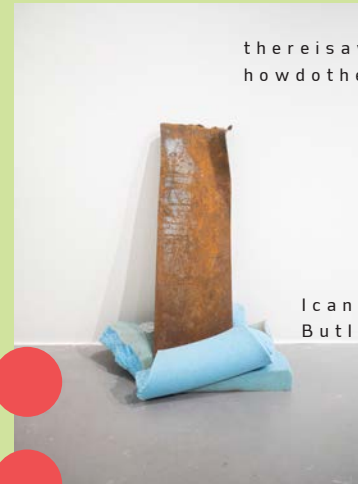


Installation: wax performance ephemera, text imprint, steel, found memory foam, found metal, rust, soil.

In this way, rules are learned, and the body is rendered a vessel where the set of social dictations or prescriptions are inscribed. The arms signify one's connection to the collective. The phrase, at arm's length recalls a certain distance and proximity of the arms to each other and signify an exchange of giving and receiving. The social body is perhaps an internalization of this shared space. The memory foam is reminiscent of domesticity and one's negotiation with the institution of family. Komeylian identifies a paradoxical relationship to the foam, "the foam cloaks, protects, and cushions, but also suffocates in a slow and insidious manner." Laid under the body, memory foam is a place of rest and comfort. The bedding holds the body's fatigue, fragility and subsistence, and in its softness stunts pain. Conversely, the pain is causal of the institution of family as it conditions the body. When the body is in paralysis, and its free movement is prevented, bedsores occur at the surface of the skin. Underneath these institutional pressures, the body succumbs to a paralysis or slow movement. It also negotiates within its internal spaces: within the marrow, within the spine, it contemplates movement against that which is pressing onto it.

Elevated on a hard surface, the slabs placed at hip height demand proximity and a contortion of posture on the part of the viewer, in order to read the texts with some effort. The collapsed casts of the limbs lay on the ground at their most malleable, fragile and vulnerable state placed at the viewer's feet, and flattened underneath found metal objects. The hardness of the steel and the rusted metal are like deboned spines, sometimes pressing against, trapping or enveloping the casts, sedentary and unable to move.

Wax tablets sit on hot-rolled metal shelving at the periphery of the room, comprised of remelted wax detritus from the performative act. As an excess of the material, these pieces call us to consider the embodied conditioning retained in the material memory of the wax over time. The prose stamped onto the wax surface leaves a light trace as a palimpsest, subject to rewriting. The palimpsest is a surface that has been defaced after writing, but traces of the previous marks are still visible on the surface. Making its presence only slightly known, the prose gives semblance of appearing and disappearing. The words are a meditation of simultaneously surfacing and repressed, semi-conscious internal murmurs that emerge from an undefined or subconscious space. They surface and float on the plane of the muted material of the wax slabs.



there is a wall of boxes where I keep my sleeping limbs
how do these containers relate to those containers?

there is a wall of boxes where I keep they cycling,
to the insides of the cardboard.

I can see all the spaces around me.
But I cannot see myself in the space

At once, my postures have become the object of
dripping
buoyancies.
of ocular pressures

Have you ever meditated on a sleeping foot?
When you do not perturb it.
When it hangs suspended,
undragged,

You must wait.
For it acquiesces within itself.

equilibrates.

I stood,

in a place.

I have been dragging them for some time.
the boxes,
and the trophies I'd things.

waiting for the marrow to grow a spine

I suspect I will disappear



This project was made possible by generous support from the Ontario Arts Council and Chalmers Family Fund. The artist would like to thank Max Lester, Nima Esmailpour and Jo Yetter.

HOW TO FIX A BROKEN HOME

Sangmin Lee
July 5 - August 3, 2019

"Home" is an entity that is arduous to define. It is an intricate web made up of tangible and intangible elements; a slow accretion of memories, scents, sights, and sounds. Most importantly, it is a series of patterns, movements and tasks that offer a sense of stability and security.

In his latest work, *How to Fix a Broken Home* (2019), Sangmin Lee builds on previous explorations relating to the idea of the household to deliver an installation that carefully delves into the physical elements that help create an embodiment of home. What seems to be a collection of unrelated objects is revealed to be an intricate collage, where quotidian shapes and their attributes are displayed, repeated, and deconstructed, helping us ponder on the ever-so-important pieces of infrastructure that offer us comfort in our daily lives.



Lee carefully picks out fragments out of everyday items and highlights a sense of romance and beauty. A flower motif found on a large bag of rice is recreated, with the indispensable grain used as the medium to trace and fill new, even more delicate ephemeral flowers. It's a move that isn't done arbitrarily or simply as an aesthetic gesture; the artist recognizes the role of packaging as one of the most powerful tools of visual communication. The design of labels that make the journey along well established trade routes has been instrumental in conceiving, and, most importantly, creating romantic narratives of foreign cultures (an enduring effect of colonialism).

A multitude of objects - found, modified, recreated, or wholly fabricated by the artist - are set up within a large, scaffolding-like structure. Complete with a pitched roof, the overall shape appears like a diorama, inviting us to peer from the outside in. The plan of the installation is further divided into different sections, with spaces geometrically bound by modular elements such as parquet flooring (common in large apartment buildings).

Showcasing a narrative with the help of modular or repeated elements is a characteristic of Lee's larger body of work. This latest installation builds on ongoing fabrication techniques and notions developed in previous projects; however, *How to fix a Broken Home* is not chronologically linked to previous pieces, rather an anthological slice into the artist's study of this subject.

For example, in Lee's 2018 artwork *Untitled (How to Unfold a Home)*, a simple set of wooden frames becomes a three-dimensional cubicle like structure as it is unfolded, reconfigured, and unfolded. The work plays an important role in framing elements of the current installation. Scrutinizing mass produced items by distilling them is central to the artist's practice, and offers a sly commentary on the way in which spatially bound commodities become imperative in confining mundanity.

As empires grew, so did the demand for chinoiserie¹ and other "curiosities" from their distant dominions. Packaging remains a ubiquitous apparatus in creating exoticized images of "far-away" places. Lee recognizes the role of the rose as a marker of orientalist symbolism and adeptly acknowledges the grey areas left by the enduring impact of the West's gaze on the East.

The theme of orientalism plays into one of the most visible components of the current installation, in the form of effigies of both Bart and Marge of the Simpson family.



The two members of one of white Middle-class American television's most iconic nuclear families stand tall within the installation, their idiosyncratic bright yellow skin drawing our attention; a yellow that has become emblematic of American pop culture through its association with the television series. This same yellow is inarguably racist and oppressive in nature and is used as a derogatory slur assigned to East Asian populations. As entire communities became scientifically othered by Europeans in the late nineteenth century, this hierarchy was created and these residual effects are felt to this day. Lee decides to juxtapose these two cultural notions of "yellow" together, a tongue-and-cheek acknowledgment of popular culture as a beacon of familiarity. Lee's intervention disrupts our understanding of these associations.

Yellow is also present in the work manifested in painted stripes and construction tape, playing a role in alluding to the purposefully unfinished quality of the temporary short-lived "home" created by the artist.



Along with this are the heavy use of unfinished concrete and the materiality of the volume that bounds the installation; the artist deliberately alludes to the visual language of construction. There is a will to showcase a structure that is unfolding, morphing as the artist sees fit.

One of the more meticulously constructed elements of the installation is a series of scaled tetrapods, a piece of infrastructure that is now critical in protecting coastal communities around the world (including Korea, where the artist first noticed them) When interlocked, they become a concrete barrier, an effective tool in preventing erosion. Stoic, inanimate, three-legged; they stand defiantly out of context, as a reminder of the precarious conditions that cradle the home. Dwellings have to be carved out, maintained and, in some cases, have their surrounding conditions controlled, so that they stay hospitable. Lee aims to reveal parts of the home and that are peripheral, but play a key role in upholding these lifestyles and cultural practices.

Lee understands modularity and rhythm as important in the creation of spaces that are amniotic or familiar; conversely, he is cognizant of the fact that these prosaic pulses can also be alienating and, at times, uncomfortable. Along with some of his most recent pieces, *How to Fix a Broken Home* chooses to burrow itself quietly into the mind of the viewer, reminding us of the all-encompassing power of the home in defining and unwinding both our personal and collective narratives.

- Francis May

WJN

DDW

COMMUNITY OF CARE

natalie king

September 7 – October 20, 2018



STEP INSIDE

The cut was deep, the pain was almost unbearable, but time has passed and the wound has healed. Now, ready to share your story, you open your mouth. You exhale; this is your moment. However, before your voice can rise to the surface you are told to sit this one out. Your scar is too small, the depth of pain not great enough, not valid. There is a door before you. It matters not how you have come to be in front of this door, only that you make a decision. With shaky hands, you touch the handle. Will you step inside? Your decision is made when you hear an affirmation: "In here there is no competition, scars will not be compared, and voices will not be overcome by to the loudest shout. Your pain will not be discredited. In here you will find a community of care."

natalie king is a Toronto-based artist whose work explores the daily experiences of queer femmes who are tethered to more than one community. king's installation is a visual representation of queer bodies, empowerment, and her Anishinaabe heritage. Through the use of colour, line, shape and form, King examines the complex nature of identity. The figures in community of care challenge traditional Western gender roles by asking:

How fluid is our modern society with regards to gender and alternative lifestyles? Are we accepting or simply tolerant of people who do not fit the traditional narrative? Each stylized figure references a fragment of king's personal experience, and each of her paintings celebrates loved ones, partners, friends, and family, telling a story of love, pain, and loss. community of care is meant to open a conversation for those who identify as queer femme, a dialogue that voices all hardships. The word "community" is defined as a group of people with shared origin and interest. Our origins may differ but adversity, pain, and struggle are part of the human experience and should be respected. king creates a space where voices can be heard, stories shared and trauma validated. king says, "Femme voices, perspectives and stories are not at the forefront of queer discourse¹." The work is symbolic of a possible future with "intersections and multiplicities of identity²," a future with communities open to educating and affirming each other's struggles without animosity.



king's Anishinaabe culture is reflected through her subtle use of imagery. For example, the plants and flowers seen in the work represent the earth's healing and medicinal properties that provide physical care. Using the colours of the rainbow, king has added 3-D foam core components suspended from the ceiling to add to the sense of depth and space. While reflecting on the concept behind the piece king speaks about the "inherent hatred toward femininity³" perpetuated in Western culture, a message that says "[being] feminine is weak, soft, vulnerable and unacceptable⁴." This ideology couldn't be further from the truth. During a discussion regarding her experience as femme, king expressed her belief that to be a femme is a "strong act of courage." In king's words, "to be femme is to have strength in the face of countless adversaries and live in a culture that evaluates your identity as less than."

The figures are monumental characters with a duality that emanates from their poses and gaze. They appear soft in nature but have been painted in such a way that radiates a sense of pride, confidence and resiliency. Each figure brings visibility to the ambiguity and multiplicities of the queer community. Here lies the beauty and complexity of identity. The queer community is vastly diverse; however, not all voices are heard equally. Representation matters and the femme experience is at times overlooked. When asked to further explain the motives behind her body of work king replies, "I make this work to embrace femininity in all forms, and reconcile the trauma, aggressive behaviour and complacency towards femme identities. I want to portray my realities of being a queer woman that is femme identified⁵." king's work aims to provides an in-depth honest representation of the femme experience, to give femme a voice within queer discourse.

The word 'care' is defined as to be concerned, to be fond of another, to show careful attention, to be protective. natalie king's work invites us to come together as a community, united by our struggles and our desire to care in the truest sense of the word. My pain, your pain, it is all valid. Open the door, come inside and explore a possible future where differences are accepted and celebrated, not simply tolerated. Express your experiences and affirm one another. This is *community of care*.

- Alexandria Boyce

This exhibition is part of Xspace Recent Grad Summer Residency program

1 King, Natalie. Community of Care. Interview by Alexandria Boyce. 2018

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

THE ABERRANT

Cat Lamora

January 18 - February 23, 2019

Throughout the last fifteen years, every time that I have asked my parents why we immigrated to Canada they deflected with: "Why, you want to go back?" Most Asian millennials will be familiar with this type of response. No sappy background stories, just unspoken appreciation and subtle affection. We can't force our parents to share their experience of diaspora and displacement, despite how much we long for this connection. Therefore, what we can do is share our own stories and create space for others to do the same.

This is what Cat Lamora accomplishes with her work, *The Aberrant*. Through a surreal and curious installation, she contemplates her experience with alienation and cultural severance. Through the fragility of papercraft and morphing placements, she visually recreates the fragmented identity of the gypo - a term for Koreans living overseas. Employed in different context, this term is often used negatively to describe those who are deemed to be no longer 'culturally Korean', but still identify as being of Korean descent.

Lamora created a visual language which translates this contemplation in a multilayered way. Large, brightly coloured paper eyeballs stare forward, standing out amongst the surrounding flora.

Attached to what resembles a cactus, these eyes both unsettle and captivate. Shrouded in the colourful leaves, this strange organism resists engulfment. It is clear that the organism does not originate from the same family as its surrounding environment. The connection to the Korean diaspora flourishes, despite the struggle between assimilation and cultural maintenance.

Assimilation is a survival tool of the migrant with consequences; a traumatic but necessary social procedure that produces strange creatures like Lamora's quizzical cactus.

Much research has been conducted to study the cultural identity maintenance of Korean immigrants. Results show that loss of cultural identity is linked with anxiety, depression, social alienation, and self-estrangement.¹ In host societies, support for Korean cultural maintenance is actively discouraged



in schools and workplaces. This conflict between Korean and Western values pressures Koreans to renounce their roots, practices, and history in order to successfully function in society. Even when community support exists, it does so in the form of religious institutions, with much less significance placed on secular Korean cultural spaces in favor of religious iconography.² However, even the efforts of

Korean Christian community are often not enough to maintain strong roots, especially for Korean adolescents.

Of course, gypops do not need official studies to tell them about the subtle and overt hostility from host societies. They learned first-hand that kimchi should not be brought to school and names should be made easier to pronounce. Gypops gradually learn how to westernize themselves, carrying with them the trauma and shame from the absence of acceptance and belonging. This is the price of surrendering our culture the price of survival.

Identities are constructed from the clues of the Past, and personal narrative is contextualized from lived experiences. So what happens when we lose the things we relate to? In this way, rootlessness lingers in every Korean-Canadian. For both *The Aberrant* and gypops, however, solace is discovered in the possibility of reconciling this socio-cultural trauma. Here, fragility works both ways. Fragility in the maintenance of Korean identity, but also fragility in the permanence of trauma. In the void of their cultural identity gypops find room for healing. Eyes gather together, collectively absorbing nourishments from the communal cactus. These eyes' multiple perspectives all stem from the same displacement, the same loss and through it, a new kind of richness. Richness of new communities and connections; shared comfort in the unstable nebula. "Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration - how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?"³

Just like the staring cactus, gypops have discovered how to not only survive, but also thrive in a new habitat. They have cultivated their identities in ways that speak to both the present and the past, no matter how little water or how strange the soil. Gypops create their own communities, construct their own hybrid identities, and heal the wounds of their diaspora together.

Singular perspective is just another form of Western dominance.⁴ Of singular linear historiography, this standard helps establish the concept of marking people as 'other' just as much as Korean immigrants are marked as 'other' under the term gypo. Hence, celebrating the multi-eyed focal points of the bright paper eyesstands in direct opposition to this Western dominance as well as the existing connotations of the gypo. If varied, multiple visualities are signs of a new representational freedom⁵, then so too are the web of our fragmented experience: a new socio-cultural freedom. Under the guise of stability and acceptance, gypops fall into the traps of erasure. But like the cactus, they stand resilient despite the opposition.

The Aberrant is not just reconciliation: it is a celebration of the migrant identity. Our stories lay dormant, itching to crawl out of the soil. Layer by layer, Lamora pieces together our intergenerational narrative. This is her contribution to our collective healing process: we witness her sprout, just as it witnesses us back.

- Seo Eun Kim

This exhibition is part of DesignTO 2019.

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DO I HAVE TO LIE TO MY DIARY?

Maddy Mathews

March 1- April 6, 2019

Do I Have to Lie to my Diary?, Maddy Mathews' large format drawing and accompanying sculptural work, on view in Xpace Cultural Centre's Window Space, is at first eye-catching and then jarring. The composition is saturated with morsels of visual information: patterns, shapes, text in all sorts of fonts, miniature scenes, swords, dolphins, chains, houses, and a slew of characters identifiable from memes, comics, and cartoons – all of which expand haphazardly beyond the edges of the page.

Every detail is rendered with care and precision, almost obsessively so, despite its busy surroundings. With no stable sense of foreground or background, no clear focal point, and with so much to look at, the eye leaps restlessly from one spot to the next. We barely have time to react to what we've seen

before we're pulled somewhere else. What's more, there are colours everywhere and they all demand attention: lime greens and brick reds, cough syrup purple, inflamed pink, lemon, salmon, teal, indigo, bright and obtrusive, buzzing with chromatic intensity. The surface finish is waxy, the result of the forceful scrubbing of pencil crayon on paper. Beneath the drawing sits a sculpted papier-mâché figure. She has two faces: one that turns towards the drawing, mirroring our captive gaze, and another that looks out at the viewer askingly. She assumes a childlike, huddled position on the ground. Like us, she is overwhelmed.

This installation is the artist's representation of the contemporary Internet's influence on our psychology: raucous, mesmerizing, and replete with all the interfering emotional ripples of confusion, envy, hypnotic bliss, powerlessness, and the warmth



of social relatability. Mathews wants to air out these feelings while also discussing the often deeply isolating feeling of not knowing how to feel and being unsure about the status of all the information you're presented with online, visual or otherwise. This is suggested by the title of the work and the ambivalent reaction exhibited by the sculpture. The artist is curious about the pressure we may sometimes feel to have a sophisticated, impressive, or even adequate response to current goings-on, where that pressure comes from, and the quiet but nagging sense that we will never know enough.

Mathews conveys this unease by filling her drawing with visual information, reflecting the way our time alone is so often filled by looking at online content, whether it be a newsfeed, meme account, or opinion piece. Horror Vacui – “the fear of empty space”¹ – is a term that's typically used to refer to artworks in which the whole surface is crowded with detail. It is also a useful metaphor for the way we are regularly compelled to inundate our minds with new data, in that this habit might likewise be motivated by some form of fear. Maybe anxieties about social acceptance, personal productivity, or just the vastness of the unknown are part of what drives us to consume more

content, specifically in the hasty and disjointed way we do online. Mathews asks if these fears could be comparable to the fear of empty space; of emptiness in general.

Of course, fear and uncertainty are not the only feelings which characterize the emotional state of someone spending a few hours browsing online. Mathews also finds a sense of comfort in this audio-visual bombardment. She explains that there was always a radio playing in her childhood home and that an abundance of stimuli feels soothing and familiar to her.²

Likewise, she notes, the constant sensory stimulation of a newsfeed can provide relief and distraction from one's thoughts: the ritual repetitive scrolling, meditative like the counting of a rosary. If we were to stare at Mathews' drawing for long enough, perhaps it would put us in a comparable state of calm.

Humour also plays a substantial and distinctive role in both current online vernacular and in *Do I Have to Lie to my Diary?*. We can find it in Mathews' choice of chillike medium, in the incongruity of her familiar imagery, and in the cartoonishness of her befuddled sculpture. Here it's used to connect with her audience through playfulness and to relieve some of the tension created by the chaos. Similarly, online humour functions to help establish communities and, with memes especially, express lighthearted but nihilistic attitudes towards the meaninglessness of the Internet and of contemporary life. It is this anarchic brand of comedy, specific to the Internet but echoing the sensibilities of Dada and Surrealism, that the artist's work borrows from and reflects on.

Nearly all the reference imagery in Mathews' drawing is sourced from the Web and stored in folders on her computer. Through her research, she has accrued a massive archive of memes (old-ish and new), cartoons, strikingly outdated clipart, instructional drawings, graphic design from the 70's through 90's, old-school video game graphics, and bold hard-edge and Colour Field paintings by late modernists like Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, and Mark Rothko.



Her anachronistic pastiche of forms from past eras of the Internet brings to mind how much online visual culture has developed in such a short amount of time and how the prevalence of certain software programs and websites has defined the aesthetics intrinsic to each period.

I consider how these brief but pervasive cultural waves happen as the result of our collective action and yet they tend to feel so outside of our individual control. Maybe the feeling of discord between the Internet as a home and community and the Internet as a great, chaotic, self-evolving entity has had more of an impact on our personal sense of stability than we give it credit for. Portraying this discord, *Do I Have to Lie to My Diary?* challenges us to consider our own emotional relationship with our everyday online experiences, and encourages us to lighten up about not having all the answers.

– Izzy Mink

¹ "Horror Vacui." Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/horror%20vacui.

² Conversation with the artist, (February 6, 2019)

A FAÇADE OF FLESH, A SPIRIT OF SKINS

Basil AlZeri

April 12- May 11, 2019



The image in Figure 1 shows the histories of erosion and weathering marked across dated rocks, and flora thriving within its cracks. Photographed at The Grotto, a blue water cave in the Bruce Peninsula National Park in Ontario, this scene is brought together with AlZeri's installation to further investigate the relationship

between life and death. This tourist attraction park is marketed for various activities that allowing for people of all ages to explore and experience the land. In the background of its scenic Bruce Trail towards the Grotto, traces of human interaction imprint the terrain of trees and rocky cliffs. The visual landmark of this region is layered by its history as the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway First Nations and its present use for outdoor adventures for the general public.

While the rules and regulations of the park provide some actions for sustainability, such as regulating the income of people per hour through parking limitations, the Bruce Peninsula National Park exists in tandem with a culture commodifying its land to serving human interests.

Amongst the bustle of crowds and adventure seekers moving towards The Grotto, interstitial spaces such as the crevices in rocks where fauna seeps through

illustrates the prosperity of the land. These small and discrete areas for life to grow and prevail capture an image of safekeeping. This scene demonstrates an nan unexpected condition of living that has taken root separate from human control. It signals new hope for survival and imagines a positive persistence against destructive conditions.



In a conversation with the artist Basil AlZeri, we questioned spaces of inbetween, and how survival is compromised as an act of resistance against oppressive systems. Under these circumstances, the trajectory for life and death takes new forms. AlZeri take interest in how marginalized spaces allow for new growth, specifically contemplating for instance, how a flower grows in between the cracks of cement.¹ As a continuum of this thought and exchange with the artist, the image in Figure 1 grounds this

query on how to live well despite pressure and violence.

The Xpace Cultural Centre window space presents Basil AlZeri's installation, *A Façade of Flesh, A Spirit of Skins*. Viewed from street level of the gallery, its most prominent feature is a curtain spanning across the vitrine. It seamlessly dangles in the air and shows a gradual blend of beige and brown hues. As the fabric masks the space, there is, however, a quiet lift of the drapery that introduces a small opening for one to look inside.

This inviting gesture unfolds the mystery behind the curtain: a collection of ripped textiles, contorted blobs of newspapers crumbling and held together with produce wrapping, and fragments of a concrete pot. Each of the materials appear to ooze and drip in their place. How they came to being left into fragments is unknown, whereas some of these objects insist to take a new semblance. *A Façade of Flesh, A Spirit of Skin* marks a point of contemplation on concealment and presents some first thoughts on how the dichotomy between life and death can be a fine surface.

Curtains, as used in theatre productions and stage-like settings, draw a line of separation between the audience and the stage. Where on one side of this installation, viewers confront order and familiarity, the small opening of the curtain reveals the falsity in maintaining that disposition. AlZeri brings together these material objects as representations of past and concealed lives. The use of newspapers and bed sheets represents a multiplicity of narratives, and most of which are unclear and deteriorating. News headlines are faded from the paper, and the stories embedded within the textiles are torn apart indicating a lack of care in these histories. These domestic and familiar objects are left in the background to be hidden behind the façade of the curtain.

In comparison to *A Façade of Flesh, A Spirit of Skins*, the photograph in Figure 1 takes a look at a positive happenstance of life within marginalized spaces. However, it further underscores the realities of place making. The flora growing out of the rocks by The Grotto are tucked in secret and away from the frequently used pathway. In the installation, AlZeri zooms in on the spaces that oppose sustainability by using materials to contemplate what is kept from public knowledge or sight and how these concealed narratives inhabit space.



Figure 1. Erica Cristobal, *Where Flowers Grow*, 2018.

His work orchestrates a division using a curtain to expose and simultaneously hide broken objects. Both the photograph and installation present ideas on wellbeing and the autonomy to exist. AlZeri's inquiry on in-between spaces unravels between *A Façade of Flesh, A Spirit of Skins* and Figure 1. The nuances of navigating how to live and living against unseemly conditions becomes an act with complex, imaginative, and leading decisions.

- Erica Cristobal

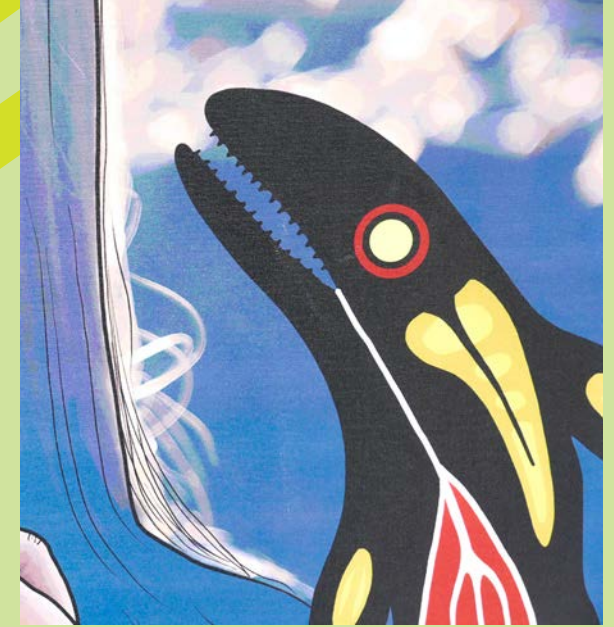
LOVE
LOVE
LOVE

YOUR
YOUR
YOUR

INDIGENOUS
INDIGENOUS
INDIGENOUS

FOODS,
LANDS,
SELF

Chief Lady Bird, with photography by Olivya Leblanc
June 7-15, 2019



BAI SUN

Natalie Mark and Sharon Ma
July 5 - August 3, 2019

Situated in the Chinese-American restaurant are undocumented histories and mythologies that have affected entire generations of immigrants, but are often unacknowledged when one goes in to pick up their orange chicken take-out and fortune cookies. Generations of stories not memorialized in history textbooks reclaim the space, and are embedded everywhere in its atmosphere: in the languages harshly spoken in the kitchen, in the local radio station lightly playing in the background, and in the oil stained pages of a well-used Chinese calendar. The stories of love, loss, trauma, and family that the restaurant space holds are honored through Natalie Mark and Sharon Ma's installation, *Bai Sun*.

Roughly translated from Cantonese, *bai sun* means 'to honour the gods'. The act of honouring happens through an altar, typically flourished with incense and mandarin oranges, used as an offering to the gods and ancestors of one's family for luck, good fortune, and respect. Through handmade modeling clay oranges, baos, eggs, and other foods, their own altar complete with fragrant incense. The illustrated calendar scroll, the main piece in the installation, references the scrolls often seen decorating Chinese-American restaurants. For the artists, the scroll holds plenty of personal meanings, with memorabilia of their family's history of immigration, and of their lives as poor farmers in China and restaurant workers in Canada.



The prevalence of Chinese restaurants in North America stems from a long history of immigration. Though the history of Chinese immigration to Canada can be dated back into the late 1700s, the first major wave of Chinese immigrants came from parts of Southern China to build the Canadian Pacific Railway in the mid-1800s.¹ After the completion of the railway, systemic barriers would later be put in place to discourage Chinese immigration to Canada, which forced poor Chinese labourers into ethnic enclaves (better known as Chinatowns) where they would start their own required a low start-up cost.

Like many other children of immigrant parents, Mark and Ma grew up in a restaurant environment having worked in their uncle's Chinese restaurant as children in Winnipeg. Family is a central part of Chinese culture (a lingering effect of the prevalence of Confucianism in Chinese history²) so as with most Chinese owned small businesses, restaurants are typically family-run. Additionally, with childcare and daycare being expensive this often meant that children would go to work with their parents after school. Working in a Chinese restaurant meant families would spend much time together, furthering its importance.

Filial piety, another concept stemming from Confucianism, is the concept of deep intense respect for one's elders and ancestors. This concept of respect extends into religion and traditions as well. For example, in Chinese folk religion dead ancestors' spirits are considered to still exist in the living world.³

As such, honouring them was still required as part of fulfilling filial piety. For this reason, it was common for houses to have altars, as a reminder of the presence of the deceased's spirits and the duty required to honour them.



But for the artists and many other Asian-Canadian children, family can be a sensitive topic to approach. Perhaps it is the culture clash, or the result of intergenerational trauma with roots in systemic oppression that causes conflict within Asian families, making honouring one's family a difficult task. Indeed, in a cozy tea shop in Toronto's own Chinatown, Natalie and Sharon explain to me that not many people they know *bai sun* anymore, and they believe it is a dying tradition⁴. Yet as a settler in this country, the artists find value in honouring their family and the labour they've worked, as it provides them with a sense of connection to their culture and history- one that isn't remembered in Canadian school curriculums.

It is worth noting that the Chinese restaurant lives as an oxymoron being both inauthentic for serving a mediated version of Chinese culture to non-Chinese people⁵, and completely authentic in its emergence from a long history of collective Chinese immigrant trauma and hardship. Parallels can be drawn to the way 2nd generation immigrant children navigate their identities, being a product of their two cultures. *Bai Sun* is the same: it may be a symbol of traditional Chinese culture, but it was made from the immigrant's perspective, one that is distant from China. It is this perspective who recognizes the importance of honouring the immigrant experience, so that the sacrifices made by the generations before them would be acknowledged and unforgotten, and so that they may hold onto a piece of culture as well.

- Amanda Low

1 Yee, Paul. "History of Canada's Early Chinese Immigrants." *Library and Archives Canada*, April 19, 2017. Accessed June 25, 2019. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/early-chinesecanadians/Pages/history.aspx>.

2 Confucianism is a philosophy that centers on the importance of family and social harmony. Popular in ancient China, Confucianism's influence affected the way many East Asian countries shaped their cultures and traditions.

3 Nadeau, Randall (2010). "Divinity". In Nadeau, Randall L. (ed.). *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*. ISBN 9781444361971.

4 Natalie Mark and Sharon Ma, in conversation with the author, June 21, 2019

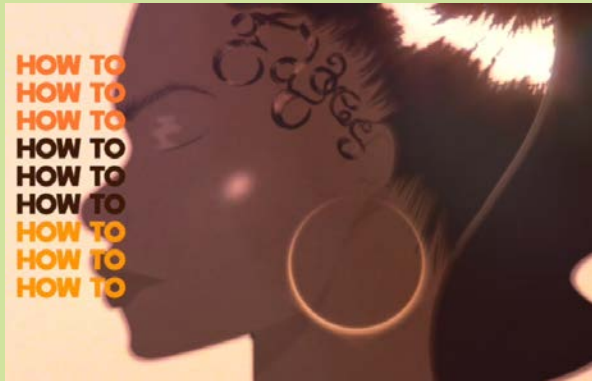
5 Many foods served in Chinese-American restaurants are inspired by Canton Chinese cuisine, but had to be adapted to better suit Western palates. Dishes like fried rice and chop-suey are American inventions, and are not traditional Chinese foods.

ΣΧΤΣ

ΑΝΘΛ

Blackpowerbarbie [aka Amika Cooper]
September 5 – October 9, 2018

The font courier has been specifically chosen as it is reminiscent of surveillance papers written about members of black empowerment movements.



"Edges"

Interview with Lue Boileau, August 20th, 2018.

A group of people stand and observe an object. They agree together that it is art. The minimalist halls and rectangular pedestals, the sterile paint, glass displays and entrance fees; the legitimacy of white art precurses the value of the work.

A group of people stand and observe an object. They agree together that it is art. The minimalist halls and rectangular pedestals, the sterile paint, glass displays and entrance fees; the legitimacy of white art precurses the value of the work.

The sensationalization of the most banal items, for example a singular urinal¹, are elevated to a place of praise. Not because we genuinely believe it is witty, sensitive, or philosophical to ask the question, "can a pipe be considered artwork?" but because they are the product of white imaginations, whose mediocrity we are in agreement to neither mock nor disclose to each other. blackpowerbarbie stands in that space and refuses to participate: "You are not special and your art is not genius," she says.

blackpowerbarbie is an illustrator, animator and digital artist. She describes her work as exploring the beauty and complexity, sensitivity and vulnerability of Black femmes.² Edges is a response to the tradition of modern art, focusing on the mundane, the everyday. She criticizes the gatekeeping and selffulfillment of "high art." The following is a scene-by-scene account of her illustrated work "Edges," based on a conversation between writer and artist.

"Figure 1. Black Genius"

Edges opens with a how-to tutorial, revolving a single tool on display. 'Figure 1,' Toothbrush. We are given three views of 'toothbrush' as it rotates around, spiralling into a 1950s-style ad for hair gel. The artist poses the question: Can a singular item, significant for Black use, be considered artwork?

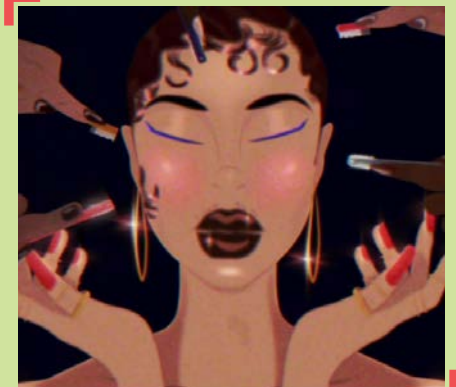
She takes our most common place objects and places them on the pedestal. We stand back and look at them. What happens next is what is most interesting. We find they are in fact an entry point into a tradition of artistic genius that has been considered unnoteworthy. But that in itself, is one of the most exquisite arenas of artwork, found in the intimacy of Black self adornment. Black hair is art.

She milks the artbros' tears, dips her brush in them to lay her edges and we never hear from him again. "Dip, dip, dip, dab, dab, dab."³

"Grain and Glow: 1970's Glam"

blackpowerbarbie shows us a "Diana Ross in a minimalist space."⁴ The womxn depicted is reminiscent of an era defined by Jet Magazine, Afro-Sheen, Marsha 'Pay It No Mind' Johnson, Donna Summer, Pam Grier, Bethann Hardison⁵: 1970s Blackness, beauty and self-defined glamour. Dazzling, gender-nonconforming, soft, queer, iconic, unbothered, dangerous, glamorous Black femmes.

Her eyelids are painted purple, her hair takes up the entire frame.⁶ She is a trans femme. Her opulence is unquestionable. White hands reach out from behind a curtain and seek to service her. They are just hands and arms, with no body visible. Like a toothbrush, or a makeup mirror, they are a utility in the essential work of being a Black femme.



It is a subversion of a relationship - white hands in a black woman's hair, whiteness relating to Black trans womahood. But here they are a means to an end, no more significant than if the toothbrush stood alone, and made only fabulous in their service of the beautiful presence that dominates the room.

"Tek Care, Tek Time"

Those tools that are so mundane and every day are also found making glamour in the beautification that happens alone, in the rituals that are intimate, and self-preserving. blackpowerbarbie next shows us a femme in front of a mirror, knees tucked, in a glittery silver thong. In the quiet of their own presence, they work meticulously laying edges, drawing out and bestowing beauty, with the kind of consideration that is rarely granted to the bodies of Black femmes. There is restfulness and renewal in the hands that make ready a body to be celebrated, to be loved and accepted.



blackpowerbarbie illuminates that these rituals of selfcare are necessitated by the urgent fatigue of oppression.⁷ The cumulative tiredness that stories along the heritage of each Black femme. This self-care is done with elegance and artistry. The fatigue is not what is in focus in Edges, but it is what makes the rituals of self care, beautification and decoration an essential heritage in Black diasporas.

"Art takes a village"

The artist shows us a "circle of black and brown hands engaged in this work. They multiply, layered over and over each other until they are indistinguishable, linked in a continuous community."⁸

In every gendered experience, "at the core of beauty rituals is "community."⁹ The artist describes Black traditions of beauty and grooming as very artistic, and always with the community at the centre.

And it is to this community that blackpowerbarbie addresses her final love note, layed exquisitely on the for head of a fore-bearer:



"For those who exist on the margins Making art out of edges"¹⁰

"Creating on the edges Making space on the margin Solidarity in the struggle"¹¹

To the Black femme, she shows us that our work, our imagination and our realities are genius.

Thank you blackpowerbarbie.

All the best,

lue boileau

1 Fontain, by Marcel Duchamp produced in 1917 is a porcelain urinal, regarded as a major landmark in art history.

2 blackpowerbarbie, Amika Cooper in discussion with the author on August 20th, 2018. All citations were taken from a transcribed discussion with the artist. All excerpts were revised and approved by the artist.

3 Edges, blackpowerbarbie, 00:26

4 blackpowerbarbie, Amika Cooper in discussion with the author on August 20th, 2018. All citations were taken from a transcribed discussion with the artist. All excerpts were revised and approved by the artist.

5Jet Magazine: an influential black press, founded in 1951 in Chicago, Illinois; Afro-Sheen: a black hair company known for embracing black hair and beauty popular throughout the 1970s; Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson: legendary trans activist who catalyzed the StoneWall Riots of 1969 in NYC and worked to create shelters for homeless LGBTQ youth; Donna Summer: singer, songwriter and actress prominent during 1970s disco era; Pam Grier: actress well known for her roles in exploitation films such as Foxy Brown and Coffy; Beth Ann Hardison: Black model and fashion activist.

6 Edges, blackpowerbarbie Amika Cooper, 00:34

7 blackpowerbarbie, Amika Cooper in discussion with the author on August 20th, 2018. All citations were taken from a transcribed discussion with the artist.

All excerpts were revised and approved by the artist.

8 Edges, blackpowerbarbie, 01:08

9 blackpowerbarbie Amika Cooper in discussion with the author on August 20th, 2018. All citations were taken from a transcribed discussion with the artist.

All excerpts were revised and approved by the artist.

10 Edges, blackpowerbarbie, 01:15 to 01:22

W A N D - I N G



Nikole Hidalgo McGregor
October 10- December 22, 2018

Nikole Hidalgo's *Wand-ing* follows a familiar premise. The carefully crafted stop animation short opens to a gorgeously intricate paper-cut title card; a Queen Anne inspired Victorian house that sits atop a lonely hill. Inside, an old crone hovers -- wand in hand -- over her cauldron before being beckoned away by the witching hour. She drops her wand as she is dissolved into the steam of the bubbling stew. A young girl prances into the scene, full of mischievous good nature. After picking up the forgotten wand and flicking it over the cauldron, the girl finds herself alone in the house -- having blown up the world surrounding it accidentally. The entire video is scored to a charming track of lilting harpsichord.

The archetypes of the Western witch tale are all present: The old woman, the young girl, the cauldron, the wand. However, there is one simple deviation that marks *Wand-ing* as a work outside this canon: the characters are not white. Hidalgo has explicitly expressed that as a person of Latin American descent, she feels frustration that her community is not represented in these narratives. She says; "despite European values and ways of life being imposed onto us hundreds of years ago, and that are now integral parts of our own beings and cultures, we lack representation in these very settings"¹. Being denied a place in the canon of story telling also translates to contemporary culture; in a study conducted in 2016 by the University of California, Latinx folks only made up 3% of speaking roles in Hollywood films².



Wand-ing brings attention to this problem by creating recognizably Latinx characters within the rigid archetypes of the fairy tale. Although it may seem like a simple solution, this insertion points to a complex navigation in what post-modern philosopher Gayatri Spivak calls the "double-bind". Introduced as a concept that encourages aesthetic thought without negating ethics, Spivak introduces the double-bind as the "space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable"³. *Wand-ing* calls this theory to mind in its ability to exist in an in-between space within the polarities of "us" and "them". The representation of the self and the other so recently dominated by a hegemonic white supremacist vision and history begins to chip away as a result of an internal force; a powerful statement on where Latinx bodies are allowed to be seen. The insertion of the characters marks *Wand-ing's* difference from the European witch tale, but the conventions of this structure are still evident. Existing within the doublebind of European/ other, *Wand-ing* represents the power in naming oneself as a part of both cultures.

In her essay *Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming black female subjectivity* Lorraine O'Grady speaks to the rigid binary that pervades art history in portraying the "other". She speaks to the blurring of boundaries that dissolve difference into sameness in the productive efforts of a globalized world, a universal "we". O'Grady rallies against this "we", claiming: "we need to dissolve the false 'we' into its real multiplicity. We must be willing to hear each other and to call each other by our 'true-true name'... To name ourselves rather than be named, we must first see ourselves"⁴. Hidalgo works toward a true representation of her experience in *Wand-ing*: a need to see a reflection of herself in popular Western media, the implications of it being denied, and yet still existing as a consumer and creator of culture. This "renaming" continues in the tradition of the double-bind, allowing for a new understanding of subjective multiplicity within the structure of the witch tale.

Hidalgo has stated that Latinx culture is never found in the Hollywood mainstream: "Even though Chiloé has had witches with cauldrons for centuries and colonial Lima had the "tapadas", dressed in lace and silk with some of them practicing witchcraft, we are ignored from movie theaters and tv screens because we are too "exotic", too unbelonging."⁵ In *Wand-ing* she crafts an understanding of the cultural exchange between a dominant colonial vision and the culture and peoples it aims to send to the periphery. The transfer between the two is reminiscent of Fernando Ortiz' theory of transculturation. Ortiz aims to view the exchange between European and Latinx culture as not a system of loss between one dominant culture and one peripheral one, but a system of transference as a result of displacement. In other words, "transculturation stress[es] the cultural contact [as a] two-way, dialectical process".⁶ The give and take process is evident in *Wand-ing* because of its creator; someone who has had equal

cultural experience in both European and Latin American culture. In creating this work, Hidalgo brings her own experience as a person on the periphery into the "mainstream", creating a film that explores both cultures by inserting one beside the other.

Wand-ing presents a new understanding of an old trope. The animated short plays within a familiar structure, productively undoing and redoing expectations of what a classic tale can mean. Utilizing the strategies of inhabiting the double-bind, naming and seeing oneself, and understanding the transference of culture as a two-way process, *Wand-ing* encourages its audience to grapple with the complexities of representation in a world that still faces the "us" and "them" mentality of colonization.

-Dana Snow



1 Email from Nikole September 2018

2 Carroll, Rory. "Hollywood basks in diversity praise but Latinos ask: Are we invisible?" *The Guardian* (London), January 2018.

3 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 2. 2012.

4 O'Grady, Lorraine. "Olympia's Maid" *New Feminist Criticism* (Icon Editions) 154. 2003.

5 Email from Nikole September 2018

6 Davies, Catherine. "Fernando Ortiz's Transculturation" *Postcolonial Perspectives on Latin American and Lusophone Cultures*. (Liverpool, Liverpool Press) 154. 2000.

HAVOC IN HEAVEN

Jessie Sheng

January 9 - February 12, 2019

Have you ever driven through the suburbs? Sprawling box-framed houses and square architectural compounds blur into a grey horizon at the periphery of your vision. Every turn you make, you see the same houses, lawns and cars. The landscape is reduced into a simple image, vibrating deep in your memory -- a blue or white painted house with a well-manicured lawn and a car parked in the garage, surrounded by a white picket fence -- the image of the American Dream, a simulacrum of happiness, the model of a better life.

For her single-channel, *Havoc in Heaven*, Jessie Sheng uses stock images of properties listed on North American real estate websites. Sheng builds her video in layers, cutting and pasting the stock photos to reassemble shifting façades of imagined houses. Between each frame, the artist inserted video clips featuring the well-known Chinese mythological character, the Monkey King. Taken from the opera, *Journey to the West*, the mythic figure dances underneath the animated layers of roofs, windows, and walls. Visibly trapped in the suburban landscape the Monkey King's body fractures and disintegrates, hinting to a larger concern regarding the state of North-American neoliberal condition.

Sheng considers the Monkey King as a seed of fire, which sparks life into the prison of the suburbia, attempting to grow larger than its confinement. He is referenced in an early chapter of the opera as being born out of a stone with great power which could potentially be a threat to the Gods of the Eastern Heaven. In order to contain the Monkey King's powers, the Gods recruit him and provide a minor post in the palace. However, he soon discovers his belittlement, as he is not invited to a prestigious banquet attended by all the other divinities. Flying into a rage, he steals the feast before it begins and destroys the palace. Eventually, Buddha saves the Eastern Heaven by imprisoning the Monkey King under a mountain.

Five hundred years later, a holy monk takes on the task to bring back the sacred scripture from the West to the East. On his journey,

he sets free and controls the Monkey King with the help of the Buddha, travelling with him and other fallen deities towards the West¹

This journey from the East to the West resembles the immigrant experience of seeking a better life in the New World: a fantasy featuring a house with white fences in a rigidly designed suburban landscape. *Havoc in Heaven's* "heaven" invokes this imagery of dense and invariable dwellings. These corporative utopias leave no emotional markings: in order to expand and encourage mass consumption, these houses are designed using a cookie-cutter model. During our conversation, Sheng makes use of the term "McMansion" to describe this phenomenon: a McDonald-like production chain of uniform homes that regulate individual desires and disregard more flamboyant cultural and traditional preferences for self-expression.² Not only does it reduce the immigrant cultural experience to a blend template, as these kind of homes being sold on the market in a cheap and fast chain flow, but it also accommodates more and more people moving from the city centre to suburbs. The city outskirts are aggressively appropriated and reduced to concrete for properties and industrial complexes.

In her video, Sheng employs the strategy of deconstruction to defy the ideology of perfection and control that comes with the materiality of the suburbia, echoing the wrecking of the palace by the Monkey King. In his book *Gestures*, author Vilém Flusser analyzes what the difference is between a gesture of "destruction with intention"³, and a gesture that becomes a radical work of art. The destructive act of the Monkey King in the original opera is a narrative device, which reflects the internal struggle of the Monkey King in addition to also developing the plot. This gesture of destruction is motivated by a desire for self-actualization.

The Monkey King is transformed into an anarchistic radical. However, the work of *Journey to the West* remains separate from his act of subversion. It is not the work which becomes "revolutionary"⁴, but only the character of the Monkey King.

Sheng turns the gesture of destruction into the work itself: deconstructing the houses into fragments reflects what Flusser discusses as the "negation of objects"⁵ with a clear motive. The deconstructed houses are not accidental ruins but intentional symbols of shattered confinement, a portal to a freedom from stereotypes and expectations set by the Capitalist hegemony. By using video as her medium, Sheng also participates in the actions of the Monkey King, battling against "heaven" and eventually escaping. Video production is a process, "produc(ing) an event in which the maker participates, even if he is controlling it."⁶ The shooting and editing screens show immediate changes and responses every time the artist gathers and consciously selects samples of the homes, animating its disintegration through layering techniques in computer graphic software, and pushing the subject to the cumulative escape sequence at the end. Sheng gives agency to the fractured body of the Monkey King, whose imprisonment also refers to the entrapments of her Chinese Canadian identity. Consequently, this video becomes a performance of disappearance: it is a defiant gesture of non-conformity and refusal to engage in a society which attempts to control its citizens' bodies in order to build a conveyor belt of packaged and pre-determined existences.

In the video, the rapid rhythm of operatic accompaniment is digitally manipulated: the rousing procession fades into a glitchy stop. The music contains an urgency and clearly signifies to the listener its cultural and ethnic specificity.

The use of sound reconstructs an imaginary space within the houses: it suggests a torrid internal life besieged by the calm exterior of suburban homes. The tension between the facade's promise of perfect life and the dissatisfied



residents finally exhausts itself at the end in the manner of a distorted musical pause.

Unlike the original opera, in which the Monkey King's rebellion against heaven is shown at the start of a journey, Sheng's video *Havoc in Heaven* is shown as the destination of the migration. It reveals the disillusionment of suburbia and its material ideology, and the improbability of a better life especially if there is no consideration for individual and marginal desires.

-Yuling Chen

1 Anthony C. Yu, translated and edited, *The Journey to the West Volume I* (Chicago: University of Chicago

2 Jessie Sheng in conversation with the author, December 2018.

3 Vilém Flusser and Nancy Ann Roth, *Gestures*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014),59

4 Ibid

5 Vilém Flusser and Nancy Ann Roth, *Gestures*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014),56

6 Vilém Flusser and Nancy Ann Roth, *Gestures*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014),46

THOUGH I AM SILENT, I SHAKE

Sophie Sabet
February 13- April 2nd, 2019

White linens on a clothesline, calmly flowing in the soft breeze: a soothing image of purity and peace. If you listen closely, you begin to hear a conversation between the past and the present, between two generations, between a mother and a daughter. The artist's mother is talking about her upbringing and the challenges she faced in her youth. She speaks of the history of the Islamic Revolution of 1978, a monumental uprising in Iran during which an upsurge of opposition was expressed. She then describes the theme of a group exhibition presented at the Seyhoon Gallery, in Tehran, in the 1990's in which she showcased her paintings. It was a show centered on womanhood and she showcased her musings about motherhood and its role as, "the base of the family." The mother's reminiscence of the past leads to a deeper excavation, remembering her grandmother and other women hanging sheets from a clothesline. This thought was accompanied by sadness, as it acted as a gateway to souvenirs of a harder time, of societal turmoil, loss, and hatred. Sophie Sabet's, *Though I Am Silent, I Shake*, explores notions of collectivity and relationships, tapping into the vivid cord that binds the present with the past. In essence, the dialogue examines generational gaps, and the ways in which they manifest conversationally, in the pauses, the silence, and ultimately, an unanswered question. It also reflects on Iranian cultural perspective relating the interconnectedness of womanhood and motherhood, juxtaposed with a modern-day Western ideology surrounding human connections and familial bonds.

The video begins by depicting a small breeze, on a warm spring or summer afternoon. The grass is of a saturated green, overlaid with the shadows of fresh laundry hung on a line. Sabet's mother is lying on a lawn chair in the backyard of her home. She has her arms crossed and rested on her stomach, in a relaxed position. The white sheets hanging from the clothesline drape gracefully with an uncluttered flow. The video transitions to the next scene, inside the home, showing paintings and sculptural works - all created by Sabet's

mother. Her mother is shown lying on a couch and the frame is focused on her bare neck, showing her pulse. This camera slowly shifts its angle to display her bare arms, as she speaks about relationships, and the restrictions imposed on women during the Revolution. Sabet interrupts her mother's train of thought by saying: "Okay, we're not talking about that right now. What are your paintings about?"

When you ask a person a question and their answer differs from what you want to hear, what are they really telling you? The subtle passive aggression in the narrative provides an asymmetrical balance of emotion and contextualization of what is being narrated and what is being seen. Both the imagery and dialogue attends equally to each character, although differently portrayed. There is a fragile balance between what could be said and what should be said. The palpable tension between the interlocutors creates an unease that highlights their diverging needs. The frame returns to the white linens hung on the clothesline. This time, we are drawn towards the shadow created by the human silhouette behind the sheets; the artist's mother is tending to them. The play of shadows appears like forgotten memories, or haunting thoughts, memories that she may be trying to forget. This soft imagery creates a resonance. While standing behind the sheets, she verbally recalls how women would 'hide' behind these fabrics, which she also refers to as 'obstructions.' Interestingly, as Sophie's mother stands behind them, her shadow becomes invisible as she describes the memory of the women hiding behind the fabrics. There is a contrasting effect that becomes apparent - something about the fact of being invisible versus being visible can resonate with the viewer. Sometimes, the notion of being hidden is more impactful than being seen. This suggests a source of inspiration for Sabet's

mother, the conflict of stressing to be visible.

Perhaps the shadows between the white sheets have encouraged Sabet's mother to create art and generate a space for resistance. As the camera returns to the artworks, it focuses on specific pieces such as white relief sculptures and delicate drawings layered over with text. The consistent imagery of Sabet's mother's work invokes the memories from her past and the tensions related to the depictions of the woman's figure during the late 1970s. Is this what Sophie was trying to understand? The dialogue during the video suggests the emotional strain of her mother's interrupted artistic career, which perhaps has left an imprint on Sabet's artistic language, as she is part of the next generation of artists. The Iranian Revolution of 1978 developed a creative power for Sabet's mother's work but did not come directly in the way of her artistic production it was rather relocation. The works featured in the video were made 10 years after the Revolution and now reside at her home in Canada.

The frame changes, and we see Sabet lying on the couch in place of her mother, borrowing the same cinematographic angle: focusing on her pulse on the side of her bare neck. This scene gives the impression of a déjà vu. This visual dialogue suggests an embodied emotional

anxiety that is transferred from one generation to the next, while opening a space for further investigations.

While Sabet is constantly attempting to pull her mother back to her point of interest--the content in her paintings--there is an irritation hinted at by the mother's tone of voice, but that is steadily buried beneath the calmness of the breeze caressing the hung white sheets. The exposure of the mother's bare neck and arms suggests vulnerability and intimacy, and the captions focusing on her breath, are perhaps just enough to translate what is left unsaid, boiling under the surface. Soon after Sabet's affirmation of discontent regarding their exchange, her mother replies "This is how I feel, you asked me to speak, I'm speaking." *Though I Am Silent, I Shake* is an example of undivided attention equally expressed through image and dialogue, in this case manifests through nostalgic musings and a cultural attitude that pinpoint a generational tension. It highlights themes related to the definitions of femininity with a recurring exploration of womanhood that includes an intersectional lens, while revisiting an important historical event. This re-visit demonstrates a longing of a better now between the windy events of the past. It is a symbolic offering that reveals a poetic movement, expressing the inner truths of the subjective reality. There is certainly a shake in the silence.

- Hibah Mian



I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS

Marissa Sean Cruz
April 3 - September 3, 2019

There is a tendency to think of the Internet as an infinite flow of data that transcends the limits of our individual control. However digital reproduction is always topologically determined. We track our Amazon shipping and Domino's pizza orders with only the partial seamlessness that the machines tracking all of our online content and product consumption can provide. This cyclical interaction between trackable collective desires and algorithm-based provision of consumer choices informs the video work *I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS* by Marissa Sean Cruz.

I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS is a compilation of videos which examines how identity can be shaped by consumer trends in the post-internet age. The work's main subject is a pizza-obsessed young woman, aptly referred to as "Pizza Girl" and played by the artist herself. She is characterized by pepperoni-coloured hair and a longing to consume and embody Domino's pizza. Comprised of prop-comedy performances and multi-layered collage of readily available online footage, *I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS* is a four-part episodic cybernetic reality based on the subconscious of a fictitious identity.

The first episode of the video stages Pizza Girl surfing the web. She watches in awe as the different types of online content related to pizza is screened: people eating it, making it, reviewing it, advertising it, as well as products like bed sheets and eye masks adorned with its cheesy pepperoni aesthetics. Cruz collages video performance with a remix of found images, Youtube footage and pop music to deliver Pizza Girl's narrative in a manner similar to the way we click hyperlinks, open tabs or switch between windows. By presenting web surfing in this way, Cruz reminds us that digital networks are realities that take up space; properties of connectedness and compactness exist, manifesting in widespread subcultures

(in this case, the cult of pizza) and Americanized ubiquity in the form of memes, ultimately driven by machine observations of hyper-individualized consumer patterns.

The artist's fascination with popular culture and online trends stems from the idea that popular things (the biggest movies, TV shows and digital media) are, to a certain extent, a reflection of what we want to see, and through this reflection, we can read insights about our desires and aversions. The universality of pizza as an enticing and accessible American food product has transformed its dimensions as a commodity, popularizing its imagery in media and fashion. In *I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS*, this is used to analyze the excessive, streamlined and instantaneous forms of desire that online consumer culture has made possible, and that identities have become aligned to. Moreover, Cruz utilizes humour not only to draw attention to certain absurdities of online subcultures, but also to present performance art in a more accessible manner while entertaining the average viewer.

In the second and third episodes things take an even stranger turn. Pizza Girl begins to attempt embodying a pizza. We see her deep in thought wearing various pizza costumes as the Domino's jingle plays in the background, she is shaving her legs with marinara sauce, and applying lipstick before using her face to roll out dough and assemble toppings. In her practice, Cruz often mixes typically assumed feminine performance with seemingly random and absurd elements like deli meats, or in this case, pizza. She does this to satirize the representation of fixed identity like gender, race and ethnicity – a recurring theme that is informed by her own experience of cultural fluidity. As a mixed race Filipino woman, much of her work acts as an investigation into the complex intersections and formations of identity as well as a reconciliation of

The title *I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS* refers to a common longing among young women to separate oneself from femininity due to internalized spite and assumptions of being female. In the case of Pizza Girl, she is "not like other girls" because eating junk food is seen as rebellious and unfeminine. However, *I AM NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS* blends femininity into the varieties and vulgarities of pizza-themed online content, actualizing what it means to be a product of a cultural product. From found footage of women eating junk food to performing with makeup and shaving one's body, we watch Pizza Girl attempt to make sense of her own self-obsessive online presence, illustrating the idea of exaggerated self-identification in the age of specific digital desires and affiliation.

- Karina Iskandarsjah



