



# BlackFlash

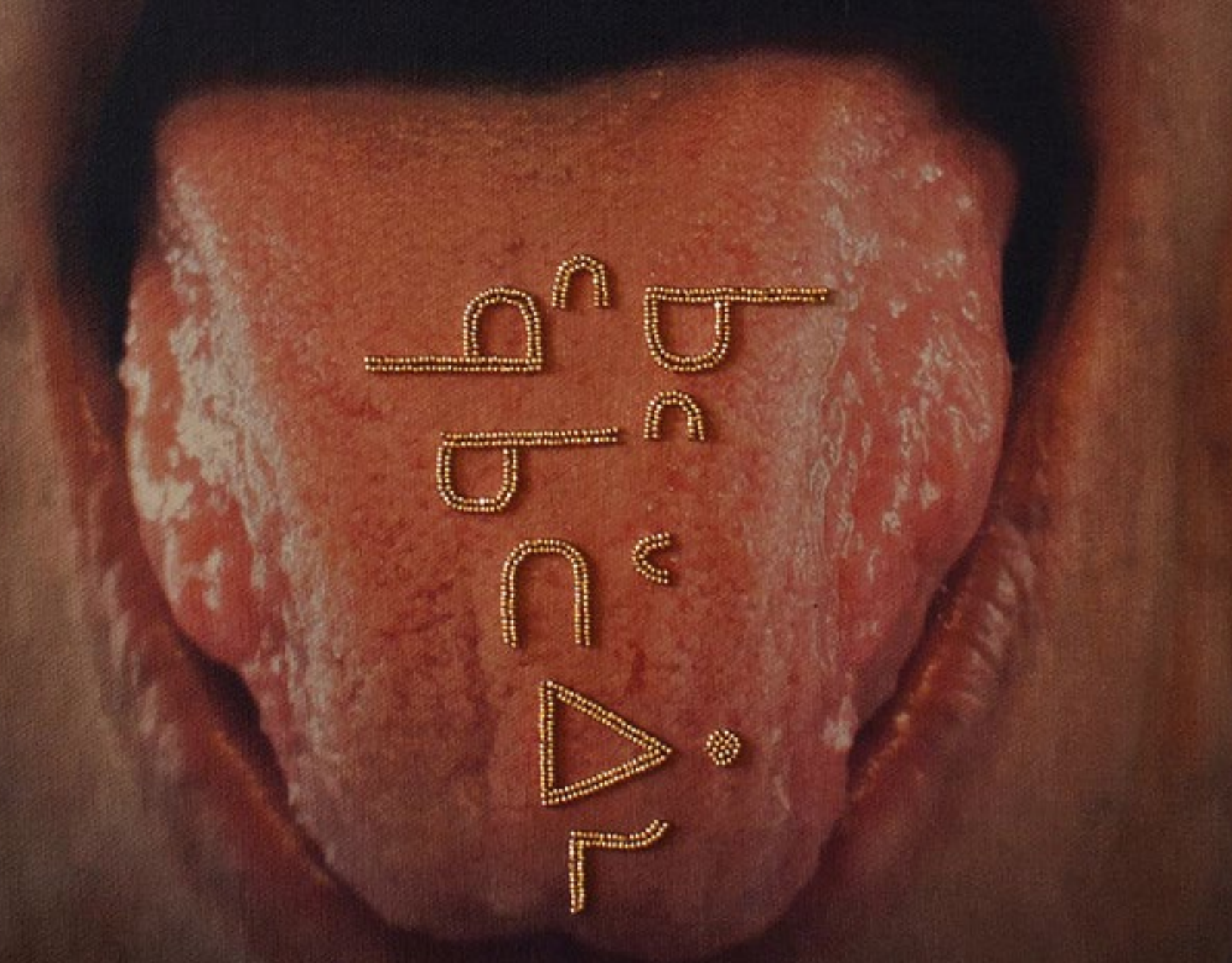


Image: Catherine Blackburn, *Us* (detail), 2017, beads, pins, gel photo transfer, 24 kt gold-plated beads, seed beads. Collection of Dunlop Art Gallery.

# CATHERINE BLACKBURN

*with these hands, from this land*

KENDERDINE ART GALLERY  
FEBRUARY 7 - APRIL 18, 2020

curator, Leah Taylor  
exhibition essay by Lindsay Nixon



KENDERDINE ART GALLERY  
COLLEGE ART GALLERIES



*Editorial Note*

Maxine Proctor, Managing Editor/ 2

*Artist Project*

Luther Konadu, *Gestures on Portrayal*, 2019

Introduction by David LaRiviere

*Online Exhibitions and the Long Game of History*

sophia bartholomew/ 4

*Family Photos: Notes on Zinnia Naqvi's Dear Nani and Yours to Discover*

Noa Bronstein/ 10

*Spectres of Loss: Diaspora and Yearning in the Work of Hagere Selam shimby Zegeye-Gebrehiwot*

Hannah Godfrey/ 16

*Hiba Abdallah: Declarations for a Different Future*

Introduction by Alyssa Fearon/ 26

*The Walls Have Ears: Judy Radul's Lasting Phenomenology*

Mitch Speed/ 38

*Partial Accountings of Photography*

Sheilah ReStack/ 44

*Bathed in Rays of Dying Light*

Sandee Moore/ 58

Above: Camila Salcedo, *Frutas*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

Cover: Arielle Twist, *ASTAM*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

# Editorial Note

By Maxine Proctor, Managing Editor

During the final stages of editing this issue, I had the incredible experience of bringing BlackFlash Magazine to Mexico City's Index Art Book Fair. It was invigorating to spend the weekend at an event rooted in the belief that print remains a valuable vehicle for the dissemination of ideas as well as for a critical engagement with history. I often found myself overwhelmed by the presence of so many innovative and exceptional international artists, editors, and publishers. This feeling was accelerated during a key-note by the formidable Donna Haraway, where she discussed Ursula K. Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory*. Le Guin disputes the idea that the first tool was a weapon, stating instead that it was in fact a carrier bag.<sup>1</sup> This theory shifts the human foundation from dominion to gathering and sharing medicine, knowledge, and sacred items.

Within these pages, artists and writers have collected and shared personal stories and imaginary narratives in an attempt to unfurl our complicated and ever-changing relationships with one another and the world that surrounds us. Hannah Godfrey reviews *yaya/ayat* by Hagere Selam Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, a short film that presents the artist's journey meeting her Ethiopian grandmother, an experience shaped by distance, time, and identity. Writer and curator Noa Bronstein unravels the personal exploration found within two bodies of work by Zinnia Naqvi. Naqvi utilizes ephemera to better understand her family's journey to Canada. Mitch Speed reviews the phenomenological attributes of Judy Radul's theatrical environments. Radul creates immersive installations that play with our senses and as Speed aptly states, "the relationship through which the performing of life itself occurs."

Sandee Moore and Sheilah ReStack want us to think about photography's troubled history and how artists, educators, and critics have sought to revise our relationship with it. ReStack urges us to reconsider the canon and offers five exceptional and peer-reviewed

additions to the syllabus. Moore looks to the work of Nicole Kelly Westman and how she abandons traditional use of photography to create environments of light and shadow that better articulate the world she wants to live in. Vancouver-based writer sophia bartholomew also rejects photography's traditional viewing apparatuses and explores a desire to develop online exhibitions. Within their writing, bartholomew reflects on the hours spent in online spaces—interacting, growing, and creating something new for a re-imagined world.

Lastly, BlackFlash is thrilled to be publishing two incredible artist projects within this issue. Hiba Abdallah is a Toronto-based artist whose text-based installations have been commissioned for public presentations such as Nuit Blanche Toronto 2018 and Hamilton's Supercrawl 2019. *Declarations for a Different Future* (2019) was developed to be removed from the magazine, copied, shared, reprinted, and posted in public and private spaces. Winnipeg-based artist Luther Konadu's editioned print *Gestures on Portrayal* (2020) was created during his fall residency at Saskatoon's PAVED Arts production studio. As Konadu himself states, this photographic work "highlights a community of friends within activities of self-narration." The production of this edition is a lovely ode to the long shared history and partnership between PAVED Arts and BlackFlash Magazine. Thank you to Alyssa Fearon and David LaRiviere for writing such beautiful introductions to these projects.

Buffalo Berry Press is situated on Treaty 6 Territory and the Traditional Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respects to First Nations and Métis ancestors and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Notes:

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction: with Introduction by Donna Haraway* (Ignota Books, 2020).

---

## Luther Konadu, *Gestures On Portrayal*, 2020

Limited-edition print produced by PAVED Arts and BlackFlash Magazine. Edition of 700.

BlackFlash Magazine and PAVED Arts are proud to collaborate on the production of this limited-edition print by Winnipeg-based artist Luther Konadu. Following his solo exhibition "Gestures on Portrayal" in the PAVED Arts Main Gallery space (October 28 to November 7, 2019), all concerned took note of the convergence of interest in Konadu's practice as reflected by multiple projects to have transpired in our immediate community. In part, the idea of co-producing this project followed from the time that Konadu spent in the PAVED Arts production centre, working with the large format digital printing facility to produce new work for his exhibition. These developments were taken in tandem with Konadu's ongoing relationship to BlackFlash, given that the artist was also, coincidentally, named as the 2018 Optic Nerve Image Contest winner.

It is easy to understand the relevance and wider success of Konadu's work given the nature of his inquiry into portraiture. With an implicit critical attitude directed towards historical traditions of portraiture and the attendant problematics of capturing the so-called "other," Konadu's subjects remain intimate yet entirely elusive and thereby porous to interpretation. The artist explores the constructive nature of photography and collage by exposing all manner of its mechanical apparatus, including, but not limited to, eye contact, framing devices, physical display, reproduction, and the camera itself. Tacitly resistant to the general contemporary condition of the ubiquitous, narcissistic selfie, Konadu's practice invites a contemplation of the conceits of digital photography that is indeed countervailing in its force.

David LaRiviere, Artistic Director, PAVED Arts

**BlackFlash**  
magazine





# MACKENZIE ART GALLERY MUSÉE D'ART MACKENZIE

## CHRISTI BELCOURT A RETROSPECTIVE WITH ISAAC MURDOCH

*Uprising: The Power of Mother Earth*

ON VIEW TO 22 MARCH 2020

ORGANIZED BY THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY AND  
CARLETON UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY  
CURATED BY NADIA KURD

## THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

*Walking with Saskatchewan*

ON VIEW TO 19 APRIL 2020

ORGANIZED BY THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY  
CURATED BY BRUCE HUGH RUSSELL

## ERIN GEE

*To the Sooe*

23 JANUARY – 19 APRIL 2020

ORGANIZED BY THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY  
CURATED BY TAK PHAM

## DIVYA MEHRA

*From India to Canada and back to India  
(There is nothing I can possess which  
you can not take away)*

19 MARCH – 18 MAY 2020

A SPECIAL PROJECT CURATED BY JOHN G HAMPTON PRESENTED IN  
CONJUNCTION WITH *VISION EXCHANGE: PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIA  
TO CANADA* ORGANIZED BY THE ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA AND THE  
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA



Erin Gee, *Swarming Emotional Pianos* (detail), 2012-2020. Photo: Erin Gee.

[mackenzie.art](http://mackenzie.art)

REGINA SASKATCHEWAN CANADA



Canada Council  
for the Arts  
Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



SPONSORED BY  
LOTTERIES 30/30

City of Regina



cultivating  
the arts

# Online Exhibitions and the Long Game of History

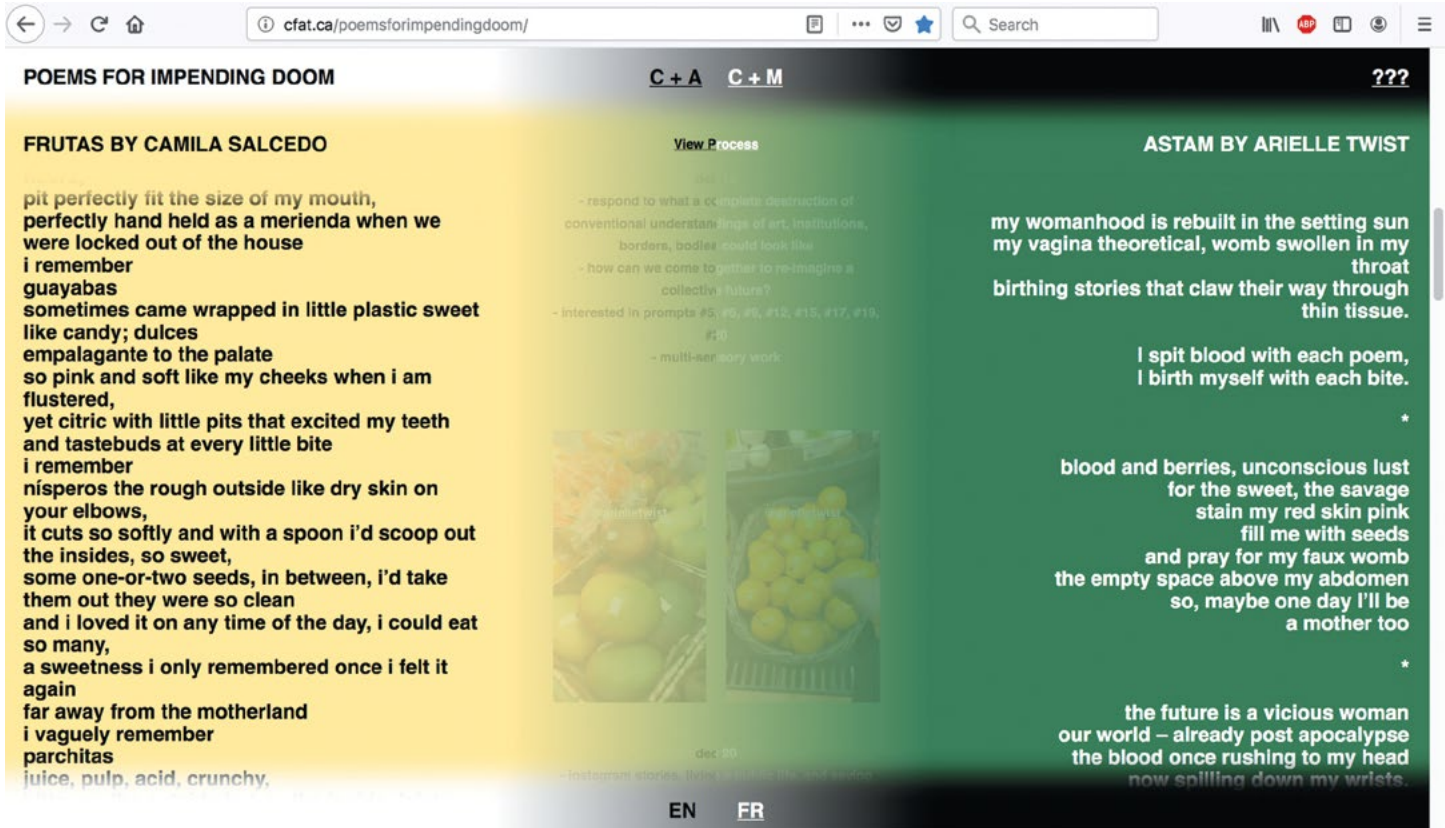
By sophia bartholomew

Some late night in my friend's living room. We're in a small city, so the streets are dead quiet. It's dark and wintertime, and he's playing me these Terrence McKenna lectures he watches every night before bed. There's snow drifted up around the house, and the heat from the small wood stove fights with the draft pressing in from the bay window. These lectures have a distinct sense of mania—travelling over many topics at great speed. For the most part McKenna is touting the transformative effects of plant-based psychedelics, their capacity to alter human behaviour and create social and environmental change. And while I'm not exactly buying into it, there's something he says that sticks with me, such that I still can't shake it, even now. Something about how digital technologies may not be as single-minded or subservient as we imagine. After all, in their physical structure, they are literally built with minerals from the earth. He suggests that in this earth-based material structure, we may encounter a re-assertion, a re-articulation of the intelligence and agency of the larger earth-system. It is this far-out thought that is in the back of my mind as I consider social media and other online platforms—trying to parse

through the ways they have transformed my life and my self, and the selves and lives of people around me.

Honestly, I spend so many hours every week in these online spaces: interacting with the thoughts and observations of others, but ostensibly alone. And while I worry that this allocation of time and energy might take away from my ability to be present in physical space, I also feel that there's a meaningful connectivity that accumulates here over time, or at the very least, there are ways we might grow and learn from each other. Also, if I'm not *here*, I wonder—where am I? It's become harder to communicate without this web. As Donna Haraway anticipated, “communications technologies and biotechnologies [have become] the crucial tools re-crafting our bodies.”<sup>1</sup> The information may be fleeting and splintered, but it builds up in layers, “interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality, and complexity.”<sup>2</sup>

In their *Xenofeminism (XF) Manifesto*, which articulates a queer and techno-materialist, anti-naturalist, gender-abolitionist feminism, the transnational collective Laboria Cuboniks describes their long-term strategy, saying: “XF is not a bid for revolution,



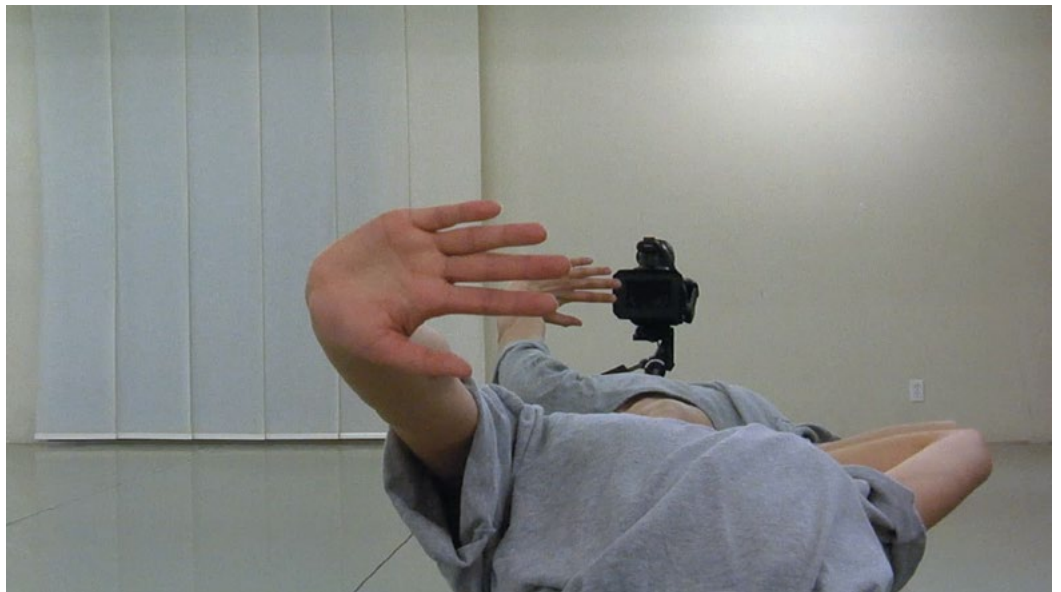
but a wager on the long game of history, demanding imagination, dexterity and persistence.”<sup>3</sup> For me, it’s this articulation of “the long game of history” that clarifies both the importance and the relative insignificance of every small act—every artwork—when understood within a much larger and longer continuum; remembering that each of our shared acts of community and imagination are something that both precede us and exceed us. For me this feels hopeful, and now more than ever, hope feels like a powerful thing.<sup>4</sup>

The Centre for Art Tapes’ online exhibition *Poems for Impending Doom*<sup>5</sup> is one of many recent projects engaging with this long sense of history—contributing to an imagination-continuum, over generations. However, in reading co-curators Lucy Pauker and Alessia Oliva’s curatorial statement, it becomes clear that the exhibition didn’t exactly start out that way. While the original premise had been to poetically re-imagine the world by doing away with its existing structures and starting anew, the exhibition’s four artists questioned this curatorial prompt. Each artist was in their own way wary of the desire to start over, to

be born again, overhauled. They connected this drive towards newness with the ideological legacy of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, echoing critiques made by many colleagues and forebears, including in *A Cyborg Manifesto* from 1985, and the *XF Manifesto* from 2016, mentioned above.

When I first encounter *Poems for Impending Doom*, Camila Salcedo’s work *Frutas* (2019) is on my left, and opposite that is *ASTAM* (2019) by Arielle Twist. Between the two is a veiled space—a curtain to be pulled back—revealing fragments of their process and leaving me with a sense of their conversation. Through this correspondence they’re saying things like: *multi-sensory work—homelands—where those places might be—larger context of Turtle Island—I want it to be messy—messy foods—fruits*; and in the works themselves, it is the artists and their siblings whose presence is communicated—alternately by their voices, their images or their self-describing words. Juices from the fruits are dripping down through their fingers, over faces, down their arms. They share with us this act of tasting fruits, both real and imagined.

Scrolling down, I find Camille Rojas’ *Apparatus* (2019) on







the left and Madeleine Scott's *Flat Circle* (2019) on the right. The rhythm of their shared process is markedly different, but it remains woven in between them, revealing more fragments of conversation. Here, Camille is saying, "I can't dismiss the things that people have fought for already, you know what I mean?" and Madeleine replies, "I know what you mean... with any 'utopia' you just have new and different problems." In *Apparatus*, Rojas dances with and around a static body—a digital camera, perched on three legs—while in Scott's work her hand appears to reveal small, glass sculptures, narrated by snippets of conversation and nearly camouflaged against the winter ice.

Sitting here searching for words, I'm startled by gaps in my own understanding when trying to describe an online exhibition. Sure, I could imagine it as a room, or as something sequential like a book or a film, but this seems anachronistic—like how early photography was always understood in relationship to painting. Instinctively, I want to differentiate the exhibition from the other webpages I visit on any given day, but in many ways it's not actually that different. As with many current platforms, it's primarily one page. It can be skimmed over by scrolling up and down. There is depth added to the content by clicking on various links—expanding and contracting elements of image and text—playing and pausing video. The colours, fonts, and size of the columns may be different, but the site's baseline structure is so familiar as to almost be invisible.

Ultimately, Pauker and Oliva conclude that, "in order to build a future we need a foundation to refer back to," and as "we build

on the worlds that have been constantly built on and on and on... we arm ourselves with our precious histories, so that we may dance wildly into the jaws of the future..."<sup>6</sup> While each artist has differing interests, the overall project of *Poems for Impending Doom* connects them with histories of experimental practice and digital art—something Western Front's online exhibition collection describes as "a long tradition of utilizing new and networked technologies."<sup>7</sup>

In Western Front's archive, the titles of selected online exhibitions read like poems in their own right: *Postcards from the Feminist Utopia*<sup>8</sup> from 1996, realized in collaboration with MAWA; *The World's Women On-Line*<sup>9</sup> also from the 1990s; and *A Small Gathering for the Healing of Our Aboriginal Languages*<sup>10</sup> from 2012, curated by Tahltan artist and curator Peter Morin, to name a few. Comparatively, the structures of these sites are stranger to navigate—reflecting other architectural conventions perhaps, or relics of the recent past. In *Postcards from a Feminist Utopia*, I travel through layers of pages, each tiled with a different wallpaper pattern, while in *A Small Gathering for the Healing of Our Aboriginal Languages*, the site gently shifts its centre when I reach out to touch the image of a stone.

It is strange to conceive of these online spaces existing *in perpetuity*. This cannot actually mean *forever*, but it still exists a little bit out-of-time. It is a period of time that has yet to be known. I imagine all the different spaces of the internet, blinking open and shut over years, months, decades; rooms full and then emptied of people—subject to movement and decay, just like everything else.



In direct contradiction of the *XF Manifesto*'s embrace of alienation, I'm also recalling Susan Buck-Morss' suggestion that the challenges of the present moment are "demanding of art a task far more difficult—that is, to undo the alienation of the corporeal sensorium... not by avoiding the new technologies, but by *passing through them*,"<sup>11</sup> and I wonder if this is part of the work undertaken by projects that are both deeply embodied and available online. After all, "it is no accident that the symbolic system of the family of man... breaks up at the same moment that networks of connection among people on the planet are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, and complex."<sup>12</sup>

*sophia bartholomew (they/them) is a trans non-binary femme and interdisciplinary artist currently based in Vancouver. They recently launched Screen Ecologies, a risograph zine co-written with Emma Hicks and collaboratively published by Moniker Press.*

#### Notes:

1. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," originally published in the *Socialist Review* in 1985.
2. aboriacuboniks.net, *Xenofeminism Manifesto*, also published by Verso Books in 2018.
3. laboriacuboniks.net, *Xenofeminism Manifesto*.
4. As Audre Lorde writes in her book *The Cancer Journals* (1980): "It means, for me, recognizing the enemy outside, and the enemy within, and knowing that my work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and

knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death."

5. [www.cfat.ca/poemsforimpendingdoom](http://www.cfat.ca/poemsforimpendingdoom)

6. [www.cfat.ca/poemsforimpendingdoom](http://www.cfat.ca/poemsforimpendingdoom)

7. [front.bc.ca/wwwf-collection/online-exhibitions/](http://front.bc.ca/wwwf-collection/online-exhibitions/)

8. [frontprojects.nfshost.com/1996/postcards/](http://frontprojects.nfshost.com/1996/postcards/)

9. [wwol.inre.asu.edu/artist\\_index.htm](http://wwol.inre.asu.edu/artist_index.htm)

10. [front.nfshost.com/gatheringlanguage/](http://front.nfshost.com/gatheringlanguage/)

11. Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" in *October* magazine vol. 62, Autumn 1992.

12. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" originally published in the *Socialist Review* in 1985.

#### Images:

Page 5: Camila Salcedo, *Frutas*, 2019 and Arielle Twist, *ASTAM*, 2019 (screenshot), "Poems for Imending Doom", curators Lucy Pauker and Alessia Oliva, Centre for Art Tapes, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2019. Online.

Page 6: Camille Rojas, *Apparatus*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

Page 7: Madeleine Scott, *Flat Circle*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

Page 8: Camila Salcedo, *Frutas*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

Page 9: Arielle Twist, *ASTAM*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

# Family Photos:

## Notes on Zinnia Naqvi's

### *Dear Nani* and *Yours to Discover*

By Noa Bronstein

Family photo albums have an unusual way of finding their way into unexpected public spaces: galleries, libraries, garage sales, auctions. When untethered from private custody, albums seem to lose some of their personal attachments, becoming instead something to be collected and viewed, handled and looked at by strangers. We see this in Victorian-era album displays in museums or in various artist projects, like *Max Dean: Album*, in which Toronto-based artist Max Dean showcased his collection of over 400 albums in an attempt to repatriate them to new or original owners. Albums shift within these contexts from living documents to detached artifacts and objects. But some albums take another route altogether, remaining simultaneously private and public.

Zinnia Naqvi's *Dear Nani* (2017) and *Yours to Discover* (2019) offer intimate and challenging instances of how the family album can remain firmly planted in the realm of the personal while taking up meaningful space in public. Turning to her own family albums, Naqvi's works comb through layered narratives that engage with themes of authenticity, cultural translation, language, and gender. Her practice combines photography, video, writing, archival footage, and installation as a means to foreground weighty subjects ranging from migration and memory to colonialism. She further addresses ideas pertaining to identity construction and the ways in which photography in particular can be a useful device in generating counter viewpoints to historical and contemporary notions of place, nation, and self. Although Naqvi does not show the album as such—as a bound collection of snapshots—she does in a sense turn it inside out, dispersing its contents with care and thoughtful intention.

*Dear Nani* (2017) centers around photographs of Naqvi's maternal grandmother, Rhubab Tapal. The images were taken in 1948 by Rhubab's husband, Gulam Abbas Tapal, while the two were on their honeymoon in Quetta and Karachi, Pakistan. In each image Rhubab faces the camera smiling, seemingly happy, playful, and at ease. Rhubab's contented demeanor immediately establishes a way into the images. Her friendly and comfortable

appearance suggests that she is happy to be photographed and to have these moments documented and shared. The same can be said of her chosen attire. The photographs show Rhubab dressed in her husband's suits, tunics, ties, and hats, in what at the time would have been considered almost exclusively "men's clothing." The clothes are a little too big on Rhubab, subtly suggesting they may not be hers.

Interspersed within the black and white photographs of Rhubab are colour images of the artist responding to her family archive. In one image, a photo of Rhubab standing in a backyard and dressed in a suit floats atop a larger image of a lushly green garden with the artist sitting in the background, out of focus. The texture of the photograph of Rhubab—the slight discolouration, frayed edges and minor folds—contrasts effectively with the newness of the artist's more recent medium-format self-portrait, highlighting the time lapse between the two images. In another particularly captivating work, a grainy photograph of a lone dangling leg is overlaid with an image of Naqvi sitting in a wooden chair with her legs similarly positioned. Faces and full figures are absent in both images, though we do see glimpses of the artist: her green nail polish, her white tank top. There is a likeness, vulnerability, and tenderness to the pairing. This tenderness extends in the project's textual element in which Naqvi carries out a fictional conversation with her Nani. Through this brief back and forth, she is able to collapse inter-generational distance, working to better understand these images. One part of the exchange, for example, proceeds as follows:

It looks like a proper photo shoot. All the pictures are very posed with props and different outfits.

Well, his clothes felt like costumes to me so it started to feel like a movie set. I started to pose with props like the heroes or villains in films. We came up with different scenes based on the outfits. Each had a very different look.







Placing herself in the images and in dialogue with her grandmother creates a space to attempt to ascribe her own political reading to the work.<sup>1</sup> Naqvi explains that the project is not just about attempting to parse out meaning lost to time. The family does not know much about the photos and why Rhubab is dressed as she is. The images were not a secret but were not explained either.<sup>2</sup> Is Rhubab challenging gender norms and expectations? Is she intending her portraits to carry a political charge? Was this simply dress-up? Naqvi is not sure, but the project articulates to the viewer that there are multiple personal and political meanings folded into the images.

Several different performances are discernible within *Dear Nani*. Naqvi performs a close reading of the images and re-enacting her grandmother's gender performance. We have less knowledge of Rhubab's intentions: is the performance the cross-dressing, or outside of it? Is it neither, something in-between, or both simultaneously? Rhubab is also performing, as Naqvi notes, "colonial mimicry." When writing about the project, Naqvi quotes Homi K. Bhabha

who states in his essay *Of Mimicry and Man* that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." She explains that in one image Nani holds a *Children's Encyclopaedia*, produced as an edifying tool for subjects of the British colonies, and in so doing "she is performing not only the role of man, but also an Indian man performing the role of a British man." Perhaps Naqvi's grandfather, who took the pictures, and whose clothes she is wearing, is similarly performing gender and race roles by helping to stage these images and their complex depictions. We may be left to speculate on the encyclopedia's meaning, but given that these images were taken in Pakistan in 1948, the year after the nation achieved independence from the British Raj, it seems unlikely that this object is merely a prop.

Photography has historically been practiced at establishing and re-entrenching violent separations by documenting and visualizing binaries of man/woman, ruler/subject and colonizer/colonized,



to name but a few. The performative gestures in *Dear Nani* seem to complicate these binaries by foregrounding contradictions, ambiguities, and uncertainties. Naqvi's use of intertextuality and double meanings invokes a kind of productive confusion whereby images can be seen through a de-stabilized and de-naturalized lens. Images are always read through the positionality of the viewer, even though so much photography claims otherwise. This project leaves plenty of room to try to read the images by way of our own individual mediations and questions. In this way, Naqvi asks the medium itself to function differently and more openly, asking that it retain some of the emotional residue and unexplainable qualities of the personal archive and family album.

Found photos also appear in Naqvi's most recent three-image project, *Yours to Discover* (2019). The project is still in progress, and Naqvi plans to add more images to the work, which focuses on a family trip taken to Canada in 1988. Naqvi describes the images as part of a kind of reconnaissance mission in which her family visited several iconic Ontario sites, including the CN Tower, Niagara Falls, and Cullen Gardens, in order to consider the prospect of immigrating to Canada from Karachi, Pakistan. The project is titled after Ontario's licence plate slogan, which was adopted in 1982 but has since been amended by Doug Ford's Conservative government to *Open For Business*. Resembling still lifes, the works combine family snapshots with board games, VHS tapes of Disney movies, books, and other objects. The props and primary colour palette speak to the era in which the family photos were taken. On first glance the images have a

distinctly nostalgic 80s look. Upon closer inspection, however, the performance of nationalism, capitalism, and citizenship and the relationship between them informs the visual traces Naqvi leaves for us to unpack.

In *Keep Off the Grass - Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village, 1988*, an image of Naqvi's family gathered around model suburban homes is presented alongside a Monopoly board and stacks of rainbow-coloured paper money. On the face of things, Cullen Gardens<sup>3</sup> and Monopoly are amusing takes on North American modes of living. On a much deeper level, however, these images present cultural expectations that assume Canadians will subscribe to property ownership, wealth accumulation and a devotion to capital. Similarly, *The Wanderers - Niagara Falls, 1988* combines the board game Settlers of Catan with a VHS of *Pocahontas*, a copy of the book *Cultivating Canada* and photos of the artist's family visiting Niagara Falls. The colonial references to forced displacement, land grabs and Canadian history as settler history are made apparent through Naqvi's careful selection and arrangement of objects. During the period in which Naqvi's family made their trip and documented their travels, Canada would have been heavily invested in multiculturalist rhetoric. *Yours to Discover* decodes Canadian mythmaking of togetherness and pluralism. Instead, I see a counterview that accounts for Canada's ongoing denial of Indigenous sovereignty, full equality, and alternative economic systems committed to sharing and reciprocity. By bringing together many different visual elements, Naqvi appears to be pointing to, on the one hand, nationalist fantasies enacted through grand landscapes and architecture, and on the other,



the granularities and realities of daily life. The sites that Naqvi's family visits are heavily invested in rendering a specific value and power system that maintains certain ways of being Canadian while excluding others. As with *Dear Nani*, we are encouraged to conduct our own analyses of the works and consider to what extent Naqvi's family is performing Canadianess in these images. What instances of refusal might be quietly revealed here? And how is each family member negotiating their own national identities on and off camera?

A question I keep returning to with this work, one that I have posed directly to Naqvi, is: does showing personal snapshots within a gallery context alter the images by turning them into artworks, or does bringing the family archive into the gallery shift the space itself, changing how it operates and for whom? What changes—the images or the space? Ultimately, this is a question that is concerned with how images circulate and the impacts they have once they leave the privacy of the family archive and take up residency in public space. After spending time in the company of Naqvi's works, I am convinced that the images remain personal and act on the gallery to shift the kind of narratives and subjectivities that are foregrounded within institutional spaces. *Dear Nani* and *Yours to Discover* bring self-selective and self-representative archives rooted in family, relationships, questions, and uncertainties into public view. Maybe we can say, then, that Naqvi's practice allows the family album to, in a sense, stay within the family even while being shared far beyond it, and that this sharing helps bend the gallery

into a more generous and vulnerable space.

---

Noa Bronstein is a writer and curator based in Toronto.

---

#### Notes:

1. Phone call with artist, August 9, 2019.
2. Phone call with artist.
3. Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village in Whitby, Ontario was a popular tourist site of 160 miniature buildings, cottages and homes. The site was operational from 1980 through 2006.

---

#### Images:

- Page 11: Zinnia Naqvi, *Nani in Garden*, 1948. (Reproduction 2017). Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 12 left: Zinnia Naqvi, *Nani in Safari Hat*, 1948. (Reproduction 2017). Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist; right: Zinnia Naqvi, *Self-portrait in the Garden*, 2017, and *Nani in the Garden (2)*, 1948. (Reproduction 2017). Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 13: Zinnia Naqvi, *Keep Off the Grass – Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village*, 1988, 2019. Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 14: Zinnia Naqvi, *The Wanderers - Niagara Falls*, 1988, 2019. Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 15: Zinnia Naqvi, *A Whole New World – CN Tower*, 1988, 2019. Inkjet Print. Image courtesy of the artist.

# Spectres of Loss: Diaspora and Yearning in the Work of Hager Selam shimby Zegeye-Gebrehiwot

By Hannah Godfrey



Origins configure and prefigure the possibility of narratives of the present.

—Kathryn Yusoff

At my back:  
The years ahead, strangely lit.

—Jenny Xie

Naming, however kind, is always an act of estrangement. To put into language that which can't be put) and someone who does not love you cannot name you right, and even "moon" can't carry the moon.

—Aracelis Girmay

There are bonds of blood and bonds that are formed over time. In families these bonds are often woven into one another: mothers, fathers, children, siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces, nephews—their bonds to each other are effected (affected) by presence. The amount of face-to-face time; how much a faraway relative is talked about; phone calls, letters, even how many photos of people are around the home: these all nurture feelings for them. Bonds of blood cannot be severed, but blood does not necessitate a relationship. Contact over time is required.

Hagere Selam Zegeye-Gebrehiwot and I have known each other since 2009. They<sup>1</sup> participated in a partnership between the artist-run centre I worked at, aceartinc., and a queer youth group run by the Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg. They made their first film during a workshop run by Peter Kingstone. Since then I have followed their work and supported her practice through my job but also outside this role. Our relationship has travelled through artist/arts administrator, mentor/mentee, artist/artist, younger friend/older friend, friend/friend, artist/writer, and through all their intersections. We are part of each other's queer family. But queer family is very different from blood family. I am a white English person who eventually applied for, and was granted, citizenship in Canada in her thirties. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot self-identifies as a transnational diasporic dyke born and predominantly based in Treaty One Territory (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada). Zegeye-Gebrehiwot has spoken of "having a base within relationships" as much as geographic location.<sup>2</sup>

Diaspora disperses the locations of dwellings into an interstitial habitus.<sup>3</sup>

Although this is likely common amongst those who have strong connections to the place of their birth (as well as the place of their ancestors), these relationships are perhaps a counterweight to not *being* of a place while at the same time *feeling* one is of a place. It could be that the feeling of multiple homes makes one more certain of who one is, since you are the constant. "I am my own place."<sup>4</sup>

Queer people often talk about "chosen family," those friends who love each other unconditionally, who can be relied upon to help, support, and sustain one's emotional and physical life. These groups are a bulwark if one has been dispossessed by blood family. As real as the love is, the ties to one's closest blood relatives and place(s) of origin still retain a powerful influence that never fully disappears.<sup>5</sup>

Loving or unloving, families contain complex emotional structures that are informed by blood ties, love ties, like ties, amalgamation, and separation. They are subject to forces of love, ambition, adventure, restlessness, fear, commitment, and escape. These forces within one generation shape the lives of their progeny.

Any kind of seeking carries within it the possibility of not finding what is sought. This binary (either the thing is found or it is not)

contains real stakes.<sup>6</sup> However, homophobia creates a specific set of tensions: the threat of it destroying the chance for relationships; the risk of being rejected; the fear of violence; finding a relative only to lose them (and the pain and trauma of this). These are spectres of loss. This concept is different from Avery Gordon's theory of haunting, which posits past trauma and loss as things that gum up the present, preventing it from streaming into the future, and that creates a "something must be done" impulse.<sup>7</sup> It does cross over with Gordon's idea in that both the spectre and the haunting contain the overwhelming feeling of "there being no time to waste at all and the necessity of taking your time"<sup>8</sup> and that they are "emergent rather than fatalistic."<sup>9</sup> The spectre of loss is emergent but is based in the future. It is derived from the expectation of personal or social trauma and loss experienced because of one's queerness (or other fraught identity). The spectre is partly what queer utopic drives respond to<sup>10</sup> and what much activism struggles against, both of which advocate social policies to protect against loss of rights and opportunities afforded to a heteronormative, white population. To re-tense Heather Love's take on Walter Benjamin: "taking the future seriously means being hurt by it."<sup>11</sup> However, the potential for loss can be subverted into a site of power and courage by rejecting it as negative.

We may want to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place; not the place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the new begins afresh, unfettered by memory, tradition, and visible pasts.<sup>12</sup>

But what if you do not have clear memories, traditions, or visible signs of a past to forget? What if you have shadows of these that are fading and taking with them a sense of self? Is it heteronormative for a queer person to seek biological family?

[Diaspora] can designate the root and the rhizome; a persistence in time and space as well as the emergence of new forms of time and space ... the world to come.<sup>13</sup>

Familial time is a thick, complex, and densely textured multidimensional web. This temporality can provide members with a powerful sense of their place in the world, of lineage and futurity. It is also a sphere where erasure of blood relations is impossible but where denial can maim and poison. It is the latter that many queer people experience and are fearful of. The exile or incomplete acceptance by blood family, as well as from the broader community the family lives within, has been a powerful factor in queer family formation.

Delinking the process of generation from the force of historical process is a queer kind of project: queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance.<sup>14</sup>

*yaya/ayat* (Super 8mm, 5 minutes 25; 2010) is centred around Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's journey to see her Ethiopian grandmother in Greece. Her grandmother is not only diasporic in relation to Zegeye-Gebrehiwot; she has been part of the Ethiopian diaspora in Greece for roughly thirty years before returning to Ethiopia. The film tells us that their relationship has been shaped by the vast geographic space separating them. They are bonded by blood, and Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is compelled by an overwhelming yearning to form bonds forged in sharing time and space, that is, to get to know their grandmother and also to be known. The longing is for a home within their grandmother, a person they are unfamiliar with and a person with whom they share blood but not companionship. The film is in some ways a document of hiraeth, of yearning for something that one may not even have experienced firsthand, such as a homeland or relationship; hiraeth can

When the grandmother looks directly into the camera and thence out at us, she is uncompromising. She is not issuing a challenge or showing defiance. She communicates, "I am here. You are there. This is life."

be the call to one's spiritual home.<sup>15</sup> The word implies an imaginative engagement with the past and one's place in it that has been conjured from stories, photos, and one's own hopes. "Hearing the call," as Bruce Chatwin describes it, a feeling that also seems well suited to the idea of wayfaring, which I'll go into later.<sup>16</sup>

Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's yearning is haunted by a spectre of loss: "And I'm scared and I'm nervous that you won't like me because of aspects of my identity that I wonder if I'll even tell you about."<sup>17</sup> Her and her grandmother already have a deficit of time spent together and there looms the future years that Zegeye-Gebrehiwot will likely have without her grandmother.

At my back:  
The years ahead, strangely lit.<sup>18</sup>

The deficit contains time that might have provided them with shared experiences that lessen the chances of estrangement, or which might make estrangement far more painful. The "association between homosexual love and loss"<sup>19</sup> extends beyond the loss of a subject of romantic desire or of human rights, to a loss of family and the particular sense of self that a family gives. However, Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's film is not an account of fear or sadness, but of other things that come from seeking and returning.

The film's chronology seems to be linear, starting with urban power lines and silhouetted against the sky, passed by at a speed that suggests we are looking at them through a car window. This view fades into an aeroplane window, and then a street where we see other trees and a bird flying from them: we must be at her destination. It is a neat sequence with satisfying rhymes amongst the images (branches and wires; flight in a plane and the flight of a bird; one window clean, another slightly opaque; branches filmed from a vehicle, others filmed from the street), and this amplifies a feeling of familiarity. A journey, an A to B, has been established, but the window in the plane foreshadows the themes of the film—looking through it we can see the wing and some clouds, but the scratchy ice crystals obscure those large worldly things; they catch the light, and they bring the surface of the window into play, the surface of the thing that allows us to see outside (or inside) but which is itself determining what can be seen and how clearly. The disappearance of the window informs us, "The world as such has no surface for the wayfarer,"<sup>20</sup> that is, for the person who is seeking by being in the place of their seeking, being guided by this experience rather than chronology.

In the next scene we see cobbles and paving slabs, the bounce of them telling us the filmmaker is shooting whilst walking. The rough texture of dirty, melting ice is seen now and then: surely this is a Canadian street (although it is actually Berlin). It's a clever visual pun on the iced plane window—the switch from a body flying (dreaming) to a body walking (grounded) again sets up an oppositional rhyme, and again Zegeye-Gebrehiwot extends it beyond a couplet (a binary). In the next scene, where she is behind a figure on a vehicle that reads as a moped or motorbike, the driver wears a small hat, buildings and scenery pass quickly, and are not observed through a window. The camera is then on Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, hair blowing, confident, perhaps proud, happy: at home. It is a key scene in the film. It's the first and only time we see Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, and the first time there is so much colour (up until now it has been uncertain whether the film is black and white, or sepia). The colour, coupled with the speed and seeing Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's happiness and determination, is overlaid with narration that describes the imperfect communication that has been available to her and her grandmother up to now.

So I long for you, but I can't talk to you, unless my mom or uncle Milto translates our phone conversations which is far more distancing for the two of us than the distance itself.<sup>21</sup>

As the scene flicks into a shot of a church dome dark against a blue-white sky, they say,

So I'm going to go and find you.<sup>22</sup>

The present tense indicates to us it is going to happen, but the film tells us the travel has happened. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's use of the present tense throughout their narration puts the film, the action, hopes and fears, into a continual state of becoming, of aliveness and presentness. These things have not and will not only be in the past; the tugs and pushes of this love will always be at play. The present tense queerly unravels and tangles this film as a love story and a story of diaspora.

*yaya/ayat* is a document of seeking, a message from the past, perhaps even proof of it.

Grown up as I may be, you're still my grandmother and the last connection I have to that past of mine. The last of a line of grandparents generation.<sup>23</sup>

The grandmother is Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's link to bodies, places, and time that has preceded them: she is a net of memory, a powerful site of lineage.

Earlier forms of feeling, imagination, and community may offer crucial resources in the present.<sup>24</sup>

Because you and I have been separated by more than distance, because you and I did not choose this.<sup>25</sup>

They do not share everyday space, and they share fragments of two languages, but yearning is beyond these things despite being born of them. It is situated in the body, in bringing something into the body that is desperately absent. Her grandmother embodies some of Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's familial geography: distance within distance. Yearning is a bedfellow of unattainability, a trope of homosexual experience: the unattainable object of desire, the unattainability of normalcy. A queer approach is to reject normalcy and reject loss, subvert their monumentalism, relocate power into intersectionality, repurpose failure as productive. *yaya/ayat* focuses on yearning as productive and emboldening; the desire for love and recognition along with the acceptance of fear of loss can lead to action and engagement. Yearning is an affective condition. A person changes as they pass through different places and acquire experiences.

There are also stakes for the grandmother, for a future carried in her grandchild.

[Y]ou say shame on my parents for not teaching me my language ... You were just, are just upset at the potential for a lost generation of your blood.<sup>46</sup>

Yearning is a condition that drives people to shape their future. It is polyamorous, relating to hope, despair, delusion, courage, helplessness, and superactivity. But perhaps its most frightening partner is grief. It is a blessing to yearn for something possible, someone possible, even if there are no guarantees. The urgency of yearning is rooted in the possibility of loss—if I do not have you now, perhaps I never will, and perhaps you will die, or I will be replaced or fade from your life and memory; one of us will be effaced, or perhaps both of us will. Effacement might look like assimilation, a circumstance faced by diasporic people and those who are not heterosexual or heteronormative. However, when something has been withheld to protect what is hoped for, that is not self-effacement necessarily. It might merely be a matter of timing.

[Y]ou are still a person with your own reservations. So I need to make sure that when I tell you certain things that it is *me* who will be the one telling *you*.<sup>27</sup>

Bodies together in time and space; not theoretical ones, not nuanced discoveries in an archive. A diasporic body and an origin body that is also diasporic; an act of return. The grandparent of a grandchild born and raised in another country may see as many losses as gains.

The movement of the handheld camera, the first minute of travel through sparse scenery, the disembodied voice: these communicate geographic and emotional distance. The material of Super 8mm carries the association of home movies. These things give us the feeling we have been invited into a private sphere and that we are the recipients of hospitality. However, the guardedness of the grandmother stands in for Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's own wariness of sharing the privacy of their journey and relationships; "What is shown is what is not shown."<sup>28</sup> Zegeye-Gebrehiwot talks of laughter, misunderstandings, and church excursions, but does not show us any of this. Instead, we follow behind her grandmother or are shown interiors and objects. It is perhaps a tactic to preserve their intimacy, as well as showing the everyday things of a loved one's life that become precious once known.

Halfway through the film, coffee is made, and the drink becomes an image of diaspora. Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee and has a distinct relationship to hospitality and conversation. The beans and drink have travelled to and been adopted into many other countries' identities and customs, so much so that the origins are obscured. When we see Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's grandmother stirring sugar into the small cups (the one in front of Zegeye-Gebrehiwot half full, perhaps an indication of the grandmother not viewing her granddaughter as old enough to have a full cup of the strong drink), we are in the latter part of the ceremony. The viewer is invited to watch the stirring, to notice all the small gestures of a body within a room familiar to her; it is a "choreography of intimacy,"<sup>29</sup> but the hospitality has only been extended so much to us, the viewers, the outsiders. The other parts of the ceremony have been withheld (the roasting of the beans, the sharing of their fragrance, the incense), and this might be read as protecting the intimacy that was extended to Zegeye-Gebrehiwot—we know of it but do not witness its entirety; it is for her alone. We see their grandmother's skill at pouring the coffee, the discrepancy in the volume of liquid in the two cups, the graceful stirring, the tradition. Perhaps this is shared with us to show what Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is heir to but also what they must contend with. Traditions are at once a bridge and a gulf, depending on who and what one is. Yet by filming it, Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is making a claim on it. They have abstracted (removed) a part of the ceremony. The film is a series of such abstractions, which provide the:

[P]ossibility of creating a distinction between the emotions that are designed for us by a world of power and domination, and new feelings that can be built independently.<sup>30</sup>

As well,

[A]n unstable identification outside of the accepted norms of human experience could be inclusive and enfolding.<sup>31</sup>

The aesthetics and storyline of *yaya/ayat* draw on tropes of familial nostalgia by using Super 8mm film, the material of home movies and family memory—documentation that fixes collective memory and is shared over and over again. People who were not present can still participate in it by watching and joining in the reminiscences of what happens and their reactions to it; the images become part of their memories in a real way. The film itself does not record sound, and this provides the opportunity for stories to flow onto the story in the film. In a family setting, this often takes the form of members describing

to one another what is happening, why, where, when, who was there but not seen in the film. There are disagreements and revelations. Children ask, “Who is that?” or will be moved at their parents’ youth and at themselves being so young. A child watching a home movie of parents and grandparents forms memories of these bodies in younger forms, that is, in forms closer to their own, and therefore see them as persons other than parents, which is both fascinating and incredible. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot disjoints the experience of the home movie and also draws on Super 8mm’s other strong association, amateur travel documentation, where authoritative narration would be expected to accompany the screening and explain or embellish the images. However, as I have noted, home and family for Zegeye-Gebrehiwot are not just situated within a familial setting. One makes a home, even fleetingly, with other people by sharing. They describe in an artist talk how screening the film one-on-one or in someone’s home or even sharing a password-protected link through email—the intimacy of sharing space and hospitality—has been very important to her.<sup>32</sup> Tenderness is an element of the home movie that they emphasize as much as the subject matter.

Without the narration we deduce a journey, a young woman and old woman; we see one or more churches, domestic scenes. The older woman is the main subject of the film, as it is her actions the camera primarily records; it is a sort of portrait of the grandmother, recording how she moves and some of the everyday things she does. Movement is, of course, the primary distinguishing feature between a still portrait and one made in film—knowing how the people we love move, their gait, how they stir sugar into their coffee, these are intimacies that bind us. If we have not been a party to them before, they become precious. When we recognize a gesture as belonging to a body that means something to us, it is proof that we know something about that person. If it is a gesture in a private space, it is proof of our intimacy.

Portraits are a means to fix someone’s image in time and space (this is her, here.) and are a means of resisting being lost to time and space, not only through the ravages of mortality but through separation (“You and I did not choose this”).<sup>33</sup> Filming her grandmother is a challenge to a spectre of loss.

Language and communication are integral to *yaya/ayat*. The narration describes the motivation for the journey, the apprehensions, some interactions. At one point it slips into a poetic refrain that rocks between binaries, then lands into a rejection of them and a new understanding of her grandmother.

This divided culture, this wonder, this wanting and untranslatable identity.

This diaspora’s diaspora, this self assimilation self appropriation and appropriating one’s own identity. This broken language, this reflection, this revival, to reconnect and connections.

These empty silences and off coloured comments, my autonomy, this anonymity.

Isolation’s isolation and this track, right track, which path? Off the beaten path. My cross culture, this feminist ... this distance and I’m distant.

An absence, the way these intersect, my queerness, my questions, my growth, growing, regressing, exploring ... your familiarity.<sup>34</sup>

It is personal; the openness is calm, self-assured. The present tense collapses time, the journey, the yearning that preceded it, the journey of her parents, the life of her grandmother and her journey from Ethiopia to Greece, the time they spent together. Their presence is preserved in the present tense, a tense that testifies to the ongoingness of diaspora, the ongoingness and aliveness of one’s experiences and emotions and thoughts. Past, present, and future comprise an indistinguishable flock.

There is a scene in which pigeons fly down to a large feeder on the ground from above the camera. The feeder is in a narrow alley

between a small corrugated shed and a couple of walls. The flurry of wings and descending bodies are complicated by the jumpiness of the film, which gives a flickering kaleidoscope effect and multiplies the flapping. The pigeons are a mix of grey, white, black, and brown. Those who have landed peck at the round trough full of seed. The jumpy film muddles some of the landed birds with the descending ones; there are instants where flying and landed birds are inextricable. There is a freedom from simplicity in this indivisibility. The area the birds occupy is busy with things: the shapes of the corrugated metal roof, a wall’s bricks, a sloppy rope or hose, a shelf holding plants and more pigeons, the bushy canopies of trees, the ground crowded with a couple of feeders and their guests. The birds’ natural movements and the unnatural movement of the film participate in an unruly hospitality. Pigeons are creatures who live in the sky and upon the earth, who can thrive in cities as well as the countryside, and inhabit most countries in the world. Pigeons do not migrate but are able to find their way home from many miles away. Their homing instinct has assisted humans for thousands of years, often being utilised for carrying messages.<sup>35</sup> Thinking about this in the context of *yaya/ayat* transforms the pigeons who gather in what is perhaps part of the grandmother’s garden into a symbol for the narrator’s return to the home held within her grandma, the number of pigeons speaking to the multiplicity of identity each woman brings to the meeting.

[The] cycle of life is confirmed within each generation, inheritance crosses from one generation to the next.<sup>36</sup>

The migration of birds is a useful way to think about diaspora in this film. An important difference between the two terms is their relationship to return. Migration is a cyclical journey, a regular to and fro. Diasporic bodies may never return to the place of their own or their ancestors’ birth. If they do, it may be a type of homing.<sup>37 38</sup> The narrator tells us it has taken nineteen years for her to reach the point where her desire to be with her grandmother has exceeded its containment, where the return must be undertaken, and such things involve disappearing from one place to appear in another. This brings to mind folklore that tried to explain where birds went when the seasons changed: they turned into barnacles, buried themselves in pond mud, or hibernated in unreachable cliffs. In Ancient Greece one theory explained that the birds turned into fish and took to a life in the sea for a while.<sup>39</sup> The latter is my favourite explanation of a phenomenon that is still not fully understood. There’s something about the transformation that speaks to the effect of serious journeys. Many migratory birds undergo profound physical changes before and during migration: internal organs such as the liver and reproductive organs shrink, the volume of body fat increases, and they moult. The moulting prompts thoughts of the child shedding their dependence to grow autonomous, shedding reliance on family members to translate her and her grandmother’s conversations, letting go of fear, defying the spectre, flying through it.

I’m tired of that and I’m better than that.<sup>40</sup>

Although birds may have some kind of endogenous programming, such as an internal compass that gets them to an origin point, the map is not genetic; it is acquired through experience.<sup>41</sup> The Ancient Greek explanation speaks not to the learning of a map but of becoming another thing, of extending what one is. A map is not internalized—rather, a body transforms through absorbing the route as it is taken.

The film’s collection of clips and images is like a collection of impressions, a kind of route. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is seeking to be impressed upon, to be imprinted by the experiences she has sought. The surfaces that their body comes into contact with—the church, the coffee cups, the walls and furniture—she presses into the celluloid. Movement is pressed into the material of the film and is then seen via its movement through a projector and its transformation into

light. The buildings familiar to her grandmother and the pathways between them are now familiar to Zegeye-Gebrehiwot. The hue that is particular to Super 8mm film, its dusty warm yellow, is reminiscent of flowers placed between the pages of books many years ago. Collections of pressed plants served as a means of learning the names and characteristics of flowers and leaves, as well as a reference from which drawings and paintings could be made.<sup>42</sup>

Named things are fixed points, aligned or compared, which allow the speaker to plot the next move.<sup>43</sup>

Along with the ability to recognize what something is because it has been named, and the name shared with you, is the need to be selective about whom one shares those words with, so that the thing and its spirit are protected, kept private, kept sacred.<sup>44</sup> With this in mind, the remarkable generosity of this film and its equally remarkable integrity is visible. The preservation of flowers is an ancient practice: Ancient Egyptian tombs placed dried flowers and herbs to accompany the deceased to the afterworld; in Medieval Europe, posies of plants were used to repel disease. The attributes of comfort and protection might also be applied to film: preserving something that will accompany our lives, extend beyond our deaths, and so protect against our being forgotten or forgetting others.

The narrative text names and explains Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's feelings; it feels open and personal, but they withhold most of her grandmother's words as well as her voice. Those are her grandmother's, and she gave them to her granddaughter, not to us. Viewers are always at a distance from this older woman—she is not an everyman's grandmother; she seems serious, independent, and wary. Nevertheless, she has extended a kind of hospitality to us, which is represented by her permission for the camera's use. This sort of protection and generosity occur when something of personal and spiritual value is at stake. The revelations of the narration coupled with the carefulness of what is recorded and made public assert a kind of sacredness. The withholding and the abstraction are queer moves and diasporic moves to protect and exist on one's own terms.

From the beginning of the film there is religious singing. It is from a field recording made by Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, and the occasional tap and click emphasise the presence of a body apart from the singing bodies (the singing is at a distance from the close tapping sounds): immersed, attentive, but separate. The choral singing situates the film in ritual and community, but the dynamics of the field recording and the description of her waking to her grandmother's prayers, rather than participating in them, make her separateness clear. However, the singing and chanting are not alienating, they are of a place, a marker of the distance between the women but also of a shared experience. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot's voice overtop the singing make her part of it while also marking her separateness, but this is complementary—her words could be considered a sacrament accompanied by the choir, or vice versa.

The narrator mentions church excursions and waking to hear her grandmother's prayers. One shot lingers on a hardback Amharic Orthodox Bible, on its cover a gold cross characteristic of this church, the intertwined latticework representing everlasting life.<sup>45</sup> Again, it is interesting to note this lattice in a secular context, working as it does to represent the mesh of blood family and history, as well as queer family and history. Here, it also presages the continuity of the grandmother's line, something of great importance to her:

[Y]ou were just, are just upset at the potential for a lost generation of your blood.

The first "just" could be read as indicating the justness of her fear of the terrible ease of erasure. The slow shot of a church dome with pigeons perched about it, a cross silhouetted against dark, blue sky. We follow the grandmother through archways and courtyards

The grandmother is not a relic or a site of holiness (something different from sacredness), and Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is not a devotee; she is creating the circumstances for a certain kind of self-knowing attained through wayfaring with another body.



that have the ring of ecclesiastical architecture. These places are obviously familiar to her, and she is guiding her granddaughter—who follows at a respectful distance—through them. The film is steeped in her grandmother’s Christian faith, which Zegeye-Gebrehiwot preserves and honours while bringing her own sense of sacredness expressed in cherishing, honesty, hiding, naming, not knowing, not showing. Their journey is a kind of ritual that hopes to realize a connection as well as joy in understanding and deepening love, respecting her grandmother’s beliefs, recording who she is, and their relationship. This isn’t to say Zegeye-Gebrehiwot has produced a hagiography of her grandmother, but the sacred and its rituals are very much a part of this film.<sup>47</sup> We do not know if Zegeye-Gebrehiwot revealed all that she herself wondered about, and this might signify the sacredness of their private relationship with her grandmother. The skills of timing, observation, and judging what is respectful to oneself and to others may safeguard identity as well as relationships. The invisible forces within the relationship are preserved.

Lately, I have been struck by the similarities between film and scrolls. Each have a physical beginning and end but offer a multidimensional experience that can change, to a greater or lesser degree, according to the body that engages with it. Each deal in surfaces that require being seen and experienced to have an effect. They also reach within their surfaces into the mind of the viewer or reader. “[S]urfaces are regions to be inhabited, not spaces to be surveyed.”<sup>48</sup> Scrolls are an ancient way of recording text and images, and film, though not ancient, functions via analogue magic. As I was thinking through sacredness in the preceding paragraph, I wondered what sacredness does, what it serves. Partly it has the potential to relieve pain and transform uncertainty into certainty; it protects special knowledge and facilitates it being passed along. Sacred scrolls participate in this; they are beyond the body but also tethered to it or to a place.

Up until the late 1970s, healing scrolls were common in Ethiopia and were used by Christians, Jews, and Muslims. They are an ancient practice, probably originating sometime within the Aksumite Empire (first to eighth centuries, a period in which Christianity also arrived in the land, which was around the sixth century). “While plant and animal medicines alleviate physical symptoms, the medicinal scrolls alleviate spiritual symptoms.”<sup>49</sup> The scroll is made from animal skin and is created as part of a ritual through which “the finished scroll substitutes for [the afflicted’s] skin.”<sup>50</sup>

Images on scrolls are non-representational talismanic designs that reveal mysteries and enhance the effectiveness of written prayers.<sup>51</sup>

As well as celluloid being thought of in terms of skin itself, it might also be thought of as substituting for the mind, its connections, its saturation in experience, its ability to function non-chronologically and to contain many places and times all at once.<sup>52</sup>

Zegeye-Gebrehiwot’s narration carries overtones of incantation. It names what she is seeking, what has been lost, the complexity of a relationship with someone in a different place. It is not a prayer they offer; they are situating the power in their own body and that of their grandmother. The narration is at once an account of accessing this power, as well as calling on it.

To work, talismans exploit the eye’s power to cause good and evil. In Ethiopian talismanic art, the eyes are the conduits through which illness-causing demons leave the body. ... The eyes ... reflect the gazer of the afflicted until the demon flees.<sup>53</sup>

When the grandmother looks directly into the camera and thence out at us, she is uncompromising. She is not issuing a challenge or showing defiance. She communicates, “I am here. You are there. This is life.” She is answering the gaze trained upon her that she can and

cannot see. The grandmother is formidable in her own watching.

This act of reciprocal viewing is key to the healing act, as invoking the names of god alone will not cause the retreat of demons.<sup>54</sup>

Language is not enough by itself.<sup>55</sup>

The eye you see is not  
An eye because you see it;  
It is an eye because it sees you.<sup>56</sup>

Both scroll and film rely on being looked at in order to work, and the looking involves being carried along and carrying.

[We] get to know by moving around, not via a totalizing gaze.<sup>57</sup>

Tim Ingold made the above observation while writing about medieval readers. He proposed a parallel between the experience of reading and the activity of wayfaring. Medieval readers mouthed the words on the page to both comprehend and fix them within their memory in order that they might carry the text in themselves and thereby continually engage with it, deepening their understanding and relationship with it as they put it into practice.<sup>58</sup> This active and multifaceted method of reading is more akin to following a trail, rather than navigating a route. Wayfaring involves looking as one goes, allowing oneself to be guided by happenstance as well as direction, spiritually or emotionally recognizing places along paths, dwelling in them, refusing the spurious gains of an efficient A to B. The wayfarer is her movement, and the movement is responsive to the surroundings.<sup>59 60</sup> Like migratory birds, old paths are followed in a general direction, but experience shapes the actual trajectory. As Zegeye-Gebrehiwot says, “Which path? Off the beaten path.”<sup>61</sup> Although pilgrimage might cross one’s mind here, it does not ring true. The grandmother is not a relic or a site of holiness (something different from sacredness), and Zegeye-Gebrehiwot is not a devotee; she is creating the circumstances for a certain kind of self-knowing attained through wayfaring with another body.

Audre Lorde situates the erotic within black women’s bodies and the power of knowing and feeling: “those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us ... the passions of love in its deepest meanings ... the self-connection shared.”<sup>62</sup> Her grandmother’s body is an erotic site, that is, it is a site of female power. The film portrays this in the silent gaze of the grandmother. However, near the end of the film we meet her gaze more directly as she lies tucked under a white blanket on her wooden-framed sofa. The grandmother watches her granddaughter slowly pass the camera along the length of her body. It is such an exposed moment for both of them as they watch each other watching. The film cuts to a head and shoulder shot of her on the sofa, now on her side, turned away a little. This frank engagement with her grandmother’s body, the hint at death that comes from the white blanket (a glancing reference to a shroud?), and the permission the older woman has given for this gaze reveals and safeguards their intimacy and perhaps some of the peril involved in it.

A few moments before this scene, there is a lift of joy in the narrator’s voice as she describes time spent together.

So, I found you.  
And you found me too and communication was hard but bonding through food and singing, church excursions and laughter over losing ourselves in translation was so great! It was wonderful!  
And your early morning prayers that I woke to day after day provided me with comfort.<sup>63</sup>

As the film ends, over the image of her grandmother, we hear Zegeye-Gebrehiwot speak four words:

Eshi?  
Miakous?  
Teseminyalish?  
Yaya.

Perhaps they refer to specific moments they shared, perhaps they name feelings, perhaps they name their relationship. Her voice is tender, as if giving a gift only the recipient will understand.

## Distance within Distance

What do you feel in your body right now?

Uh\_\_\_\_\_

Describe anything you feel.

There are so many memories in me

How do you feel about that?

I thought you’d know.

You don’t remember me do you?

Not when I’m not here, no.

Mm.

But I like you.

Mm\_\_\_\_\_ you remember where to come.

Yes. It’s not far really.

Are you telling me where you live?

No.

Good, good.

Uh\_\_\_\_\_

Yes.

Did you know me before?

Huh.

?

What do you feel right now?

Here and there and whowho

And what does that feel like?

Like an owl with jack rabbit legs.

---

*hannah\_g* is a writer, artist, and community radio producer from Winnipeg, Treaty One Territory. Her work is informed by queer echo-locating, contemporary art, and recollection. She is the former director of the artist-run centre aceartinc., and the editor of the gallery's in-house annual publication, *PaperWait*. Here, she co-founded Flux Gallery, The Cartae Open School, and the gallery's first Indigenous Curatorial Residency. *hannah* is a member of the Cartae Committee, a member of the Architecture & Design Film Festival programming committee, and a board member of Cluster: new music + integrated arts festival.

---

I would like to thank Courtney R. Thompson, Colin Smith, Maxine Proctor, and Emma Sharpe for their help with this writing. Special thanks to shimby for everything.

---

*Spectres of Loss: Diaspora and Yearning in the Work of Hagere Selam "shimby" Zegeye-Gebrehiwot* is part of a larger project titled *Critical Fictions*, an experimental writing project about contemporary art, will also feature monographs and fictions about Derek Dunlop, Kristin Nelson, Andrea Oliver Roberts, and Logan MacDonald. The project is funded through generous support from The Canada Council For The Arts.

---

#### Epigraphs:

Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018): 25.  
Xie, Jenny. "Lunar New Year, 1988," *Eye Level: Poems*, (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2018): 33.  
Girmay, Aracelis. "The Black Maria." *The Black Maria*, (Rochester: BOA Editions, 2016): 74.

---

#### Images:

Hagere Selam Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, *yaya/ayat* (film still), 2010.

---

#### Notes:

1. Hagere Selam shimby Zegeye-Gebrehiwot uses the pronouns 'they' and 'she'.
2. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot quoted in an interview with Hannah Godfrey, 9 August 2019.
3. Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 1996), 141.
4. Godfrey interview with Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, 2019.
5. Stéphane Dufoix, trans. by William Rodarmor, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 108.
6. Although one may hear "It's not the destination, it's the journey," this maxim is so boringly dismissive, it begs to be dismissed itself.
7. Avery F. Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," *Borderlands* 10:2, 2011:2, [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no2\\_2011/gordon\\_thoughts.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no2_2011/gordon_thoughts.htm).
8. Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," 8.
9. Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," 5.
10. "Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. ... the queer aesthetic frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-thinking futurity. ... Queerness is essentially a rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world." José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York U P, 2009), 1.
11. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2002), 148.
12. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011), 70.
13. Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 108.

14. Halberstam, 70.

15. "Hiraeth is a Welsh concept of longing for home. 'Hiraeth' is a word which cannot be completely translated, meaning more than solely 'missing something' or 'missing home.' It implies the meaning of missing a time, an era, or a person—including homesickness for what may not exist any longer. It is associated with the bittersweet memory of missing something or someone, while being grateful of that/their existence. It can also be used to describe a longing for a homeland, potentially of your ancestors, where you may have never been." "Hiraeth," *Wikipedia*, accessed 28 September 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiraeth>. Emphasis mine. See also "Hiraeth," *Word of the Week*, <https://sites.psu.edu/kielarpassionblog2/2016/04/02/hiraeth/>.

16. For fascinating observations of Welsh hiraeth, see Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*, (London: Vintage, 2011).

17. *yaya/ayat*, 1 minute 47 seconds.

18. Jenny Xie, "Lunar New Year, 1988," *Eye Level: Poems*, (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2018), 33.

19. Love, 23.

20. Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2007), 79.

21. *yaya/ayat*, 1 minute 15. All quotes from the narration are copied directly from the written script.

22. *yaya/ayat*, 1 minute 28.

23. *yaya/ayat*, 1 minute 31.

24. Love, 30.

25. *yaya/ayat*, 0 minute 19.

26. *yaya/ayat*, 3 minutes 53.

27. *yaya/ayat*, 2 minutes 20.

28. John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (London: Penguin, 2013), 112.

29. Leo Bersani, *New Books in Psychoanalysis* podcast: Leo Bersani and Adam Philips' "Intimacies", 19 March 2012.

30. Doug Ashford, "Empathy and Abstraction (Excerpts)," published in conjunction with the exhibition *Tradition* at Marres, Centre for Contemporary Culture, 16 March 2013 - May 19, 2013, and Grazer Kunstverein, 7 June 2013 - 11 August 11 2013 (Maastricht: Marres/Centrum voor Contemporaine Cultuur, 2013), 3.

31. Ashford, 4.

32. Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, "Hagere Selam / Artist Talk," *aceartinc.*, 3 November 2012, accessed 29 September 2019, <https://www.aceart.org/hagere-salem-artist-talk>.

33. *yaya/ayat*, 0 minute 19.

34. *yaya/ayat*, 2 minutes 41, quoted from script.

35. Not all pigeons require a homing instinct to be cultivated by handlers. The American radio astronomer and Nobel Prize Winner (Robert Wilson and his team) described hearing "hissing noises from their antenna that would later prove to be signals from the Big Bang. But when they first heard the sound, they thought it might be, among other things, the poop of two pigeons that were living in the antenna. "We took the pigeons, put them in a box, and mailed them as far away as we could in the company mail to a guy who fancied pigeons," one of the scientists later recalled. "He looked at them and said these are junk pigeons and let them go and before long they were right back." But the scientists were able to clean out the antenna and determine that they had not been the cause of the noise. Cosmic microwave background radiation left behind by the Big Bang was. Mark Mancini, "15 Incredible Facts About Pigeons," *Mental Floss*, April 19, 2018, accessed 23 September 2019, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/535506/facts-about-pigeons..> "The Pigeon, the antenna and me," *AEON*, 19 January 2016, accessed 23 September 2019, <https://aeon.co/videos/how-pigeon-droppings-nearly-derailed-a-massive-discovery-in-cosmology..>

36. Ingold, 115.

37. "Homing is the inherent ability of an animal to navigate

- towards an original location through unfamiliar areas,” “Homing (biology),” *Wikipedia*, accessed 23 September 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homing\\_\(biology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homing_(biology)).
38. “[P]lace is also a mobile imaginary, a form of desire.” Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, *Queer Diasporas* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2000), 4.
39. Melvyn Bragg, “Bird Migration,” *In Our Time* BBC radio broadcast, 6 July 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08wmk5j>.
40. *yaya/ayat*, 3 minutes 44.
41. “It is all very well to offer proof of becoming a self-recognizing self in certain kinds of setups, but it is surely as critical to be able to recognize one another and other beings in ways that make sense to the sorts of lives the critters will lead,” indeed, the lives we all have and will lead. Donna Haraway provides a rabble of a case study of pigeons to illuminate her theory of trouble and interspecies worlding. Highly recommended. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2016), 19.
42. For the root of this train of thought, I must acknowledge Eleanor Eliza (Cripps) Kennedy’s sketch book of botanical watercolours and drawings. I offer my gratitude to Willow Rector for the generous invitation she extended to me to look at this book with her in the archives of the Manitoba Museum. It was retrieved for us by Dr. Roland Sawatzky, curator of history. As we leafed through the pages, I was struck by the maker’s melancholy courage to find home in a strange land. That the land was stolen from the Indigenous inhabitants deepens dreadfully the book’s well of pathos.
43. Chatwin, 175.
44. The small creature who made the smeuse might rather a fox did not know the name of it.
45. “Ethiopian cross,” *Wikipedia*, accessed 26 September 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_cross).
46. *yaya/ayat*, 3 minutes 59.
47. There is a fascinating essay by Wendy Lauren Belcker, “Same-Sex Intimacies in the Early African Text Gädlä Wälättä Petros (1672): Queer Reading an Ethiopian Woman Saint” (*Research in African Literatures*, vol. 47, no. 2, ‘Queer Valences in African Literatures and Film’ (Summer 2016), pp. 20–45). Belcker considers the life of Gädlä Wälättä Petros, which involved an intense and nearly lifelong relationship with another woman. The writers of the sacred text eschew but, Belcker argues, strongly imply the queerness of the intimacy. Belcker is at pains not to insert contemporary Western queerness, but according to her and her co-translator, the writers of this hagiography clearly felt something was going on. All this aside, I was reminded of this text whilst thinking about Zegeye-Gebrehiwot’s meeting with her grandmother, specifically the description of when the two holy women met. It was love at first sight, a spiritual meeting, a recognition between two kindred spirits. Isn’t this what one seeks when meeting an important figure in one’s life, a person we have been seeking? And isn’t this what a spectre of loss nauseates us with: that is, its opposite, or—as bad—a tepid encounter?
48. Ingold, 16.
49. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, “Ethiopian Healing Scrolls,” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), April 2015, accessed 26 September 2019, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/heal/hd\\_heal.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/heal/hd_heal.htm), 54.
50. Windmuller-Luna, “Ethiopian Healing Scrolls,” 54.
51. Windmuller-Luna, “Ethiopian Healing Scrolls,” 55.
52. I am indebted to Colin Smith for this insight. For a detailed analysis of how film relates to embodied experience, see *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* by Laura U. Marks (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2000).
53. Windmuller-Luna, “Ethiopian Healing Scrolls,” 55.
54. Windmuller-Luna, “Ethiopian Healing Scrolls,” 55.
55. One might argue the film itself demonstrates the paralinguistics involved in talking. It also highlights the issues of language and diaspora that are raised in the narration itself. But like all metacommunication, there may be some difficulty making a definitive location of meaning.
56. Antonio Machao, *Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, trans. Robert Bly (Wesleyan U P, 1983), cited by Jenny Xie in *Eye Level: Poems* (epigraph).
57. Ingold, 16.
58. Ingold, 16.
59. Ingold, 16.
60. This also brings to mind something Bruce Chatwin writes about language in *In Patagonia*: “[Language] proceeds as a system of navigation.”
61. *yaya/ayat*, 3 minutes 14.
62. Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984), 56.
63. *yaya/ayat*, 1 minute 55.

# Hiba Abdallah

## Declarations for a Different Future

### Introduction by Alyssa Fearon

Writer and filmmaker Toni Cade Bambara notably declared that the task of a cultural worker from an oppressed community is to make “revolution irresistible.”<sup>1</sup> This is a weighty responsibility for artists, but art offers us ways to imagine new possibilities once the existing systems have been dismantled. Hiba Abdallah’s new project *Declarations for a Different Future* takes on this responsibility. Abdallah offers a series of her own declarations that urge the reader to consider their role in dismantling the systems that were never designed for marginalized communities.

Hiba and I met about two years ago when I commissioned her to develop a project for the inaugural Scarborough zone of Nuit Blanche Toronto. Hiba hails from Windsor, Ontario, but it was clear she was committed to engaging the Scarborough community and working in an authentic way to centre their perspectives. After a weekend-long series of workshops with an intergenerational group of artists and cultural producers identifying as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour, Hiba collected over 200 statements that reflected the anxieties, sentiments, and hopes of Scarborough’s residents. For her latest project, Hiba has taken a more introspective approach, choosing to reflect on her personal observations and demands rather than on the sentiments of others. The project is a series of concise and unambiguous phrases written in the active voice, with each statement inciting action, large or small, and calling for a change of course.

In this age rife with callouts and online expressions of groupthink, making bold assertions is a risky endeavor. Going against the pack could result in reprisal, so why chance saying anything of substance at all? On one end of the spectrum, online platforms have facilitated the spread of bigoted attitudes, but on the other end, platforms have enabled disingenuous and opportunistic behaviour under the guise of socially progressive

views. This behaviour has the effect of policing the opinions of those who are considered to be part of the group, and it has fostered the conditions for an increased hesitation in expressing divergent and nuanced views, or any views whatsoever. Yet with Hiba’s project, her demand for justice doesn’t come quietly or cautiously; there is an urgency in the emphatic block letters and black-and-red markings of the text. The statements interrupt the status quo, put us on high alert and call us to action. However, as much as the statements are directed towards the reader, it’s just as plausible that the instructions could be interpreted as a series of the artist’s notes-to-self, important reminders to stay focused on the work she needs to do to make a difference.

What are the steps we must take to collectively bring about change? What are the steps I must take to change my own world and the one around me? There are barriers to our revolution, but the root of Hiba’s project asks us to believe that a different future is possible, and, going back to Bambara, it begins with the self.<sup>2</sup>

---

*Alyssa Fearon is a curator, educator and arts manager who currently holds the position of Curator at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba and teaches in the Visual and Aboriginal Art department at Brandon University.*

---

#### Notes:

1. Toni Cade Bambara and Thabiti Lewis, “An Interview with Toni Cade Bambara: Kay Bonetti,” *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara*, edited by Thabiti Lewis (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 35.

2. Toni Cade Bambara, “On the Issue of Roles” *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara (Washington Square Press, 2005), 101.

ASKING FOR THINGS  
TO BE DIFFERENT IS  
NOT ENOUGH. START  
A COALITION AND  
MAKE THINGS  
HAPPEN.





**INTENTIONAL  
BARRICADES ARE  
EMBEDDED IN  
EVERYDAY SYSTEMS.**

**RECOGNIZE AND  
DISMANTLE THEM.**





REFUSE TO  
BELIEVE IT'S TOO  
LATE TO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE. FOSTER  
MICRO PROTESTS  
WHEREVER YOU GO.





REMAIN STEADFAST  
AND HOPEFUL FOR  
THE FUTURE. THE  
FORCE OF POSITIVE  
ENERGY HAS  
AFFECTING RESULTS.





**TRUST IN THE POWER  
OF COLLABORATION.  
WINNING TOGETHER  
IS MUCH BETTER  
THAN WINNING  
ALONE.**





**CHOOSE TO NEVER  
GIVE UP ON YOUR  
COMMUNITY. IT'S OUR  
CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY  
TO TAKE CARE OF  
EACH OTHER.**



# The Walls Have Ears: Judy Radul's Lasting Phenomenology

By Mitch Speed



Looking back over Judy Radul's work has felt like re-reading a favourite book. Familiar passages deepen, and the parts that were missed by a wandering or distracted mind suddenly pop out. I started following her work in 2009 as a student in Vancouver. At UBC's Belkin Art Gallery, she had installed "World Rehearsal Court," a sprawling reflection of the theatrical and filmic nature of juridical processes, made from an installation of sculpture, surveillance apparatuses, photographs, theatre props, books, and more. Bewildered, I asked for an interview. The conversation that followed set a model for how art's effect can extend and evolve far past museum walls.

Words brought Judy into art. While working as art handlers around 2013, my colleagues and I were sorting the collection of a client who had been involved in Vancouver's punk scene. In a stack of prints, we found a poster for a concert from the punk group Pointed Sticks. Its margin contained an announcement for a spoken word performance that Judy would put on the same night. Those early language-based works soon brought her into contact with the Kootenay School of Writing, a self-organized institution of poets, which in 1984 took form in Vancouver after the closure of their previous home, Nelson's David Thomas University Centre. Subsequently, she developed a mode of performance that focused not on the direct conveyance of language, but—in an oddball structuralist sense—the relationships through which the performing of life itself occurs.

To make the multi-channel video work *In Relation to Objects* (1999), Judy sat four actors, one after another, at a table. Each was given an object—a bar of soap, a coin, a hand towel, a glass bottle—and asked to spend a few minutes interacting with it. The resultant improvisations played out within four small projector screens, placed on the gallery floor at staggered angles. Each unlikely performance became a downtempo weave of slapstick, made from the twitches and fidgets, caresses and squeezes, that comprise the bulk of our haptic experience. *In Relation to Objects* elaborated a mysterious sub-dimension of latent movement: one that plays out beneath life's more 'purposeful' activities. Combing your hair, say, or buttering toast.

A few years later, in *And So Departed (Again)* (2003), dark anxieties boiled within absurd horror. This piece was a study of the relationship between performing and directing bodies, as they are structured in cinema; and also, by implication, in our imaginations, as they are in turn structured by cinematic input. Viewed with attention to the subconscious, though, this piece emitted mortal apprehensions. On three projection screens, showing a living room set shot at close, medium, and long range, directors and actors collaborated to produce scenes of sudden death. Gasping and thrashing, falling and stiffening, the actors repeatedly expired at the hands of some invisible culprit: heart attack, poison, demon... At the same time, the directors became agents of death. The banality of their lethal instruction only made the situation, and their elusive desire to kill, more sinister.

Judy's own statements stay clear of deathly gravitas. Her artistic thinking was formed in a time and a place—1990s Vancouver, and later, New York State's Bard College—where theory's power in art was at its apex. Analytical and structural, albeit in a freewheeling kind of way, her words circumscribe the psychological, perceptual

and social relationship between director, actor, spectator, screen, camera, theatre. Yet, so much of her content exceeds these technical concerns. And so, I've come to understand the technical nature of these descriptions as a necessary parameter. Within her plotted conceptual and technical structures, unwieldy meanings lurk, like silhouettes on an illuminated sheet.

After *And So Departed (Again)*, spirits of law and order seem to have taken hold of the work. They were especially palpable in *Set Room 302*, a 2005 collaboration with Geoffrey Farmer, which delivered viewers into a realm between cinema and life. Now the work's catalyzing tension took form between the material reality of a place and the real artificiality of all places. In the Vancouver Art Gallery, a former courthouse, there remains one room that maintains its juridical appearance and is often rented out as a film set. Therein, Judy and Geoffrey installed a polyphonic echo of the room's former and lasting function. A video projection played scripted legal proceedings in which characters cycled positions, becoming thespian shapeshifters. The video's audio emitted from surround sound speakers; it seemed that the walls, which must have seen so much, really could talk. Scattered props, stacked pieces, and false courtroom architecture awaited their own dramatic reanimation. For their part, Judy and Geoffrey operated like human amplifiers of this space's nested simulacral character; an art gallery, which is a house of aesthetic judgement, within the edifice of a court, which is a house of legal judgements, both drawing their power from imposing architecture, itself as theatrical as anything.

Sometimes, because Judy's works seem almost anthropological or forensic, I've found myself waiting for clear meaning—a verdict. It is a misguided expectation. What her work really does, is cast re-enactment and re-creation into expanded sculpture. This form's effect is to produce a relationship of many conversant facets, interlocking elements of fragmented literary information, surface, and kinetic mechanisms. Skillfully executed, this mode of sculpture sends a viewer's combined physical and cerebral attention into novel, elliptical pathways. This effect makes the work into a living allegory, for the chronically under-examined strangeness of our perceptual and cognitive relation to the world. This is an effect not endemic to Judy's work. But her particular technique produces the feeling of being prodded here and there by an invisible, cheeky puppeteer.

Restlessly, she has sought out new methods and technologies. "World Rehearsal Court" signified a bold gambit into a type of phenomenological sculpture that was at once unwieldy and weightlessly precise; unwieldy in its variety of objects, signifiers, technologies, and image types, with multi-channel video screens showing courtroom re-enactments, endless props both sculpted and found, books, and photographs; precise in the placement of these things, which ushered but never pushed a viewer's body and gaze, and in the finely-tuned surveillance apparatus that transmitted mise-en-scène into a bank of screens. It was like walking through a multiplex consciousness.

In 2017, this consciousness showed up in Rotterdam at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. In "the king, the door, the thief, the window, the stranger, the camera", Judy's language of props and technological systems took a more fantastical form.



The installation was an uncanny, fragmented entity. You couldn't always find the work's titular characters in the installation. Instead, evidence of their presence emanated from a choreography of static and animatronic objects; here, a flock of white china birds atop black poles; there, a book splayed open and encased within an orange apparatus, shaped like an amber cast rainbow. There were doors and quasi-architectural screens. Sometimes, these divisions were interrupted by a disembodied hand, or butterfly. A broad face smeared on glass looked like the shroud of Turin or a clumsy cat-burglar's calling card. Pink window blinds rolled up and down, their ghostly movement counterpointed by a mechanical page-turning device, which read a magazine, clunky but autonomous. All of these things and more converged within real-time surveillance footage, channeled into many screens.

Owing to the phenomenological gestalt of Judy's installations and exhibitions—their mimicry of perceptions divided and braided between sensuality, language, space, sound, narrative—there is significance in the density with which the phenomena within them cycle through a viewer's own perception. Finely tuned resonances and counterpoints activate that flow, give it form, voice. In the absence of embodied viewers, her video documentation transmits all of this. Watching a video of "the king, the door, the thief, the window, the stranger, the camera" on Judy's website, I felt the images twitch to life. This strange pleasure contrasted the deadness of so many video documents, produced to archival ends, or as whimsical promo pieces. Its transitions between silence and sound were nimble and droll. You could sense the art itself, negotiating jarring psychological transitions. When us humans are looking, it's all warm and fuzzy. When we leave, the objects wait out long silences.

This video may not have been the art, exactly. But it wasn't not

the art, either. Judy's work has always opened gaps like that—slippages that receive much lip service in art writing but rarely take believable form. Inside of them, odd, colourful, unexpected things unfold. The point has never been to debunk authenticity or perception. That drama lost its charge long ago. Now, it's all about tinkering and playing with reality's unending productions and re-productions.

---

*Mitch Speed is an artist and writer based in Berlin. His book Mark Leckey: Fiorruci Made Me Hardcore, about Leckey's 1999 work of that title, was published by Afterall Books in Autumn 2019. In September 2019, his solo exhibition 'Permanent Head' was presented at Wil Aballe Art Projects, in Vancouver. He contributes to several publications, including Frieze, Mousse, Momus, and Camera Austria.*

---

Images:

Page 38: Judy Radul, *In Relation to Objects*, 1999, 4 channel video installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

Page 40 top: Judy Radul, *And So Departed (Again)* (still), 2003, 3 channel projection, dvd, 1 hour, 46 minutes. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; bottom: Judy Radul and Geoffrey Farmer, *Room 302*, 2005, courtroom furnishings and dvd projection. Installation view, Set: Room 302, Artspeak, Vancouver, Canada, 2005. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

Page 41: Judy Radul, *World Rehearsal Court*, 2009, 7 monitor video installation and various sculptural components, dimensions variable. Installation view, World Rehearsal Court, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway, 2011. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.





# LOCALS ONLY

Publication with  
contributions by:

Art mark Justin Langlois  
Cate Francis Lisa and Sam Mark  
Curtis Peeteetuce Meagan Hong  
Derya Akay Modern Fuel  
Hamilton Artists Inc. open Space  
Holly Schmidt Dr. Priscilla Settee  
Kevin Wesaquate Salem Sharp  
Kurtis Wilson Sylvia Biron  
Jenni Schrenk this town is small  
Jireh Wong UAS  
Jordan Schwab Vanessa Kwan  
Julia Feyrer Vivienne Bessette

aka  
artist-run

[akaartistrun.com/localsonly](http://akaartistrun.com/localsonly)

chepe  
good food inc.

SASKATCHEWAN  
ARTS BOARD

Sask Culture  
LIVING WITH ART

City of  
Saskatoon

New  
Chapter  
2017 and Beyond



# Lands to Travel Through

---

An artist-run gathering in Mohkinstsis/Calgary

---

August 5 - 8 . 2020

---



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



Patrimoine  
canadien

Canadian  
Heritage

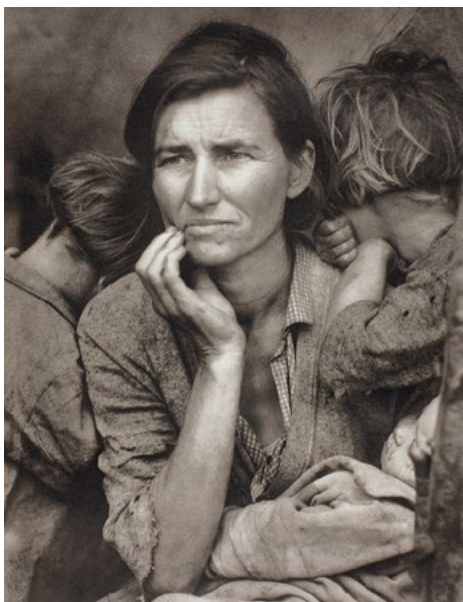




the gaze

is a hold

Florence Owens Thompson Florence Owens Thompson Florence Owens Thompson



# Partial Accountings of Photography

What does a photographic history consist of? How do we trace historical lineage through photography? Recently, there is a more urgent conversation around the canon, about how it should be more reflective of the voices of many, less a “body of rules, principles, or standards accepted as axiomatic and universally binding.”<sup>1</sup> The question that arises, for me as an educator, is how to *do* this teaching. How to better reflect the medium, history, and context of photography more accurately, as violence, exploitation, homage, document, struggle—its power to represent, to hold.

I think back to my own photographic training. I remember the default: to show work from the codified (largely white male) art world. I ask myself, does repairing the unequal representation I received resolve itself with showing a greater diversity of artists to my students? Would that repair adequately elucidate photography as part of the bloodstream of our judicial, penal, advertising, educational, and familial histories? This question, how to teach photography in a way that can make the static image vibrate with its multiple possibilities, was the impetus for this project.

These words here are the admitting of the struggle to you, the reader. I want you to be implicated now in this question—because just like a photograph needs an audience to establish existence, so these questions need engagement in order to yield conversation.

To begin.

*What is the punctum of photography upon the shape of our seeing?*

I have asked artists, historians, educators to respond to the question of how we engage with the medium in order to unhinge

it, to pull it from its implied truth, and find a way to feel into new relations. I asked them, how do you teach this vast photographic story caught in colonial power? Where do you feel something from a photograph? How does tracing photography’s past become a place to acknowledge instability as a productive force of learning? I was not looking for answers, per se; rather, some paths that may allow for students (and ourselves) to shake the latent photo with its gazes of power and control,<sup>2</sup> and find a way to make a mark, a puncture of meaning, of emotion.<sup>3</sup>

The artists and historians whose writing is contained in these pages offer reflections on, and ideas for, an unmoored photographic history. American artist and educator Luke Stettner reproduced, through drawing, a photograph he took of graffiti on a storefront. Stettner’s drawing underlines the index of the body as the apparatus of labour in the struggle for meaning in and through the photograph. American artist and professor Em Rooney shared a recent syllabus from her *Critical Issues in Contemporary Photography* class. Rooney abandons formal syllabus language in order to present students with a manifesto that invokes, demands, and implores engagement with our mediated-by-photography world. Rooney states that the photograph is in our body; it will not leave when you exit the classroom.

American artist and professor Jared Thorne wrote of the first image he remembers deeply affecting him. The image he responded to is from his youth, found in popular culture, and is felt by him to be a reminder of the reality of a lived past. Thorne wants students to find this kind of engagement—a conscious desire for productive wounding through images. Canadian artist Maria Hupfield shared an image, *Resistance on All Fronts*, a singular photograph that depicts herself held and obscured by felt. We are allowed to see

her, as a viewer, *partially*. Hupfield makes a barrier, a protection for her subject, through physical intervention onto the image.

Lastly, Canadian writer and professor Namiko Kunimoto writes of the intent in her *Photography East and West* class at Ohio State University to shed the linear march of photographic time, particularly the narrative of technological improvement of camera machinery and image making. Kunimoto speaks to the necessity of engaging students with questions, a strategy of implication. No matter how difficult, we must be in pursuit of the unseen legacies, and potential, of the photograph. Precisely because of its most disturbing and vexing role in internalizing systems of power, it merits our attention. Ariella Azoulay states, "...despite the fact that photography speaks falsely, it *also* speaks the truth."<sup>4</sup>

*But what if the studium becomes a second punctum?*

Roland Barthes famously characterized the punctum of a photograph as an intensity of emotion, unavoidably subjective in its power. His view reinforced the validity of the personal and subjective response to image. Barthes described the studium as being that where, "Thousands of photographs consist of this field [studium]... What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training." This *certain training* is an unquestioned, oft colonial, heteronormative and patriarchal, gaze. For instance, Barthes describes an image by James Van der Zee, writing, "Here is a family of American blacks, photographed in 1926 by James Van der Zee. The studium is clear: I am sympathetically interested, as a docile cultural subject, in what the photograph has to say, for it speaks (it is a 'good' photograph)."<sup>5</sup> Barthes holds the studium, or the content of the image, to a place of (so called) objective facts of understanding. It is clear, as a reader and viewer, that this characterization of 'general understanding' is problematic.<sup>6</sup>

The passivity of the studium needs to be shed. I would like to propose a second punctum as an engagement in active relation between viewer, and the social and lived experience in which they see the photograph embedded. Second punctum is not a solid

state; it does not lie docile as a complacent and unique 'aboutness'. Second punctum is a place of stimulation, a personal, changing, drawing of relationship. It is an attempt to recognize the codes of power and possibility within the photographic image. I have used the word punctum because, in this relation, it is *also* a felt response. The first punctum, as originally described by Barthes<sup>7</sup>, is the moment of feeling and intensity that connects specifically the viewer. The second punctum, I propose, asks that the viewer *continue* to feel and this time notice the relationship that the photograph holds with history.

Yet, the second punctum is not secondary; it is simultaneous. I feel this detail, *and* I feel this relationship to its social, cultural, historical context. Two punctums are the doubled inhabitation of the image—between its private and public layers of contact and its personal and social implications. Perhaps through this commitment and engagement with double feeling, the photograph and its context can be alive, again and again.<sup>8</sup> This double punctum is the way we make connection—from our own experience, knowledge, class, race, and historical moment, to the image held within the web of history, power, authority, and revolt.

The control we try to wield by photographing can be terrifying, can be liberating. It will be neither if we do not provide ourselves and our students with the language to question and pull image and order apart, to have the courage to feel a relation to history. I want students to be aware of the potential power and responsibility of the viewer to re-activate the photograph, to make it a question, a wound, a gift. What we are taught to learn, to love, to desire, to condemn, is captured and passed through the machine of the camera eye.

the touch, the wound, the question, the anger

What I am reminded of, by each of these artist, historian, educator responses to the questions of *Partial Accountings* is that our felt response to the personal and the larger social context is part of our doubled responsibility to see.

---

Sheilah ReStack is from Caribou River, Nova Scotia, and is currently Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Art at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. She is a recipient of the Howard Foundation Photography Fellowship (2017) and Canada Council Project grants (2016, 2014). Her solo work explores embodied use of photography, and will be part of an upcoming residency at Eastern Edge. Her collaborative practice, with Dani ReStack, uses video to both document and create new narrative proposals.

---

Notes:

1. Merriam Webster dictionary, June 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/canon>.
2. Edward Said states, "...the act of representing others almost always involves violence to the subject of representation." Edward Said, *The Shadow of the West* (Virginia: Landmark Films, 1985).
3. This question became ever more apparent to me through the process of preparing a gallery talk at the Wexner Center for the Arts on my experience with Cindy Sherman's *Imitation of Life* exhibition.
4. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (London: Zone Books, 2012), 116.
5. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 28.
6. Further articulated in Shawn Michelle Smith's *Race and Reproduction in Camera Lucida* where they state, "He calls upon the studium as if it is apparent, transparent, as if this lovely formal portrait could not be read in any other way, as if all readers would share his bemused reaction to the image and its subjects. While Barthes' reading might certainly be attributed to a particular set of European cultural codes, readers are not asked to "see" those codes as part and parcel of the studium, but instead to see through them to the meaning Barthes presumes. In other words, *Camera Lucida* asks readers to view a race based paternalism as natural, or beside the point, rather than as a culturally codified part of the studium to be put under examination." Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 24-25.
7. "This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole- also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that

accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me.)" Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

8. As Ariella Azoulay states, "The limits of their interpretation are not determined in advance and are always open to negotiation. They are not restricted to the intentions of those who would claim to be their authors or of those who participate in their production." Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 129.

---

Images:

Page 44 top: Florence Owens Thompson. *Interview with Florence Owens Thompson, the Mona Lisa of the Dust Bowl*. Interviewed by Bob Datson, NBC Today Show. NBC, October 30, 1979;

bottom: Dortha Lange (1895-1965), *Migrant Mother*; *Nipoma California*, 1936, photogravure, edition 79/300, 30.4 x 23.5 cm. Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, NY.

Page 47: Luke Stettner, *PICTURE*, 2019, typewriter on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm.

Page 48: Luke Stettner, *last days*, 2019, graphite on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm.

---

Page 48 and 49: Luke Stettner lives with his family Carmen, Carlo and Rafa in Columbus, Ohio. Since moving to Ohio in 2015, he's taught undergraduate and graduate courses at Ohio State University, Ohio University and Denison University. His recent book *Carrels* was written in collaboration with Max Stolkin & Ofer Wolberger and published by Flatfix.biz.

---

Page 52: Em Rooney's work encompasses photography, sculpture, video, and writing—often using sculptural forms and materials to encase or frame photographs. Her specific materials, choices, and methods combine to work against the ubiquity of the photograph through their dedicational and allegorical qualities. Rooney is Assistant Professor Photography at Bard College at Simon's Rock.

---

Page 53: Maria Hupfield is an Anishinaabe citizen of Wasauksing First Nation and Canadian Research Chair of Transdisciplinary Indigenous Arts, University of Toronto. She is a recipient of the Canadian mid-career artist Hnatyshyn Foundation (2018), Lucas Artists Fellowship (2019-2020), and inaugural resident Surf Point Foundation Residency (2020), with a solo show at The Heard Museum (2019-2020).

STAS  
STAS

PICTURE in the eye

Passed out of PICTURE

a problem PICTURE

living PICTURE

PICTURE out

out of the PICTURE

the PICTURE of

PICTURE mind

to come into the PICTURE

mirror PICTURE

to see the PICTURE whole

PICTURE face

PICTURE plane

PICTURE window

PICTURE mold

get the PICTURE

in the PICTURE

be in (out of) the PICTURE

not in the PICTURE

make a PICTURE

put one in the PICTURE

PICTURE palace

emotion PICTURE

PICTURE wise

PICTURE show

sick PICTURE

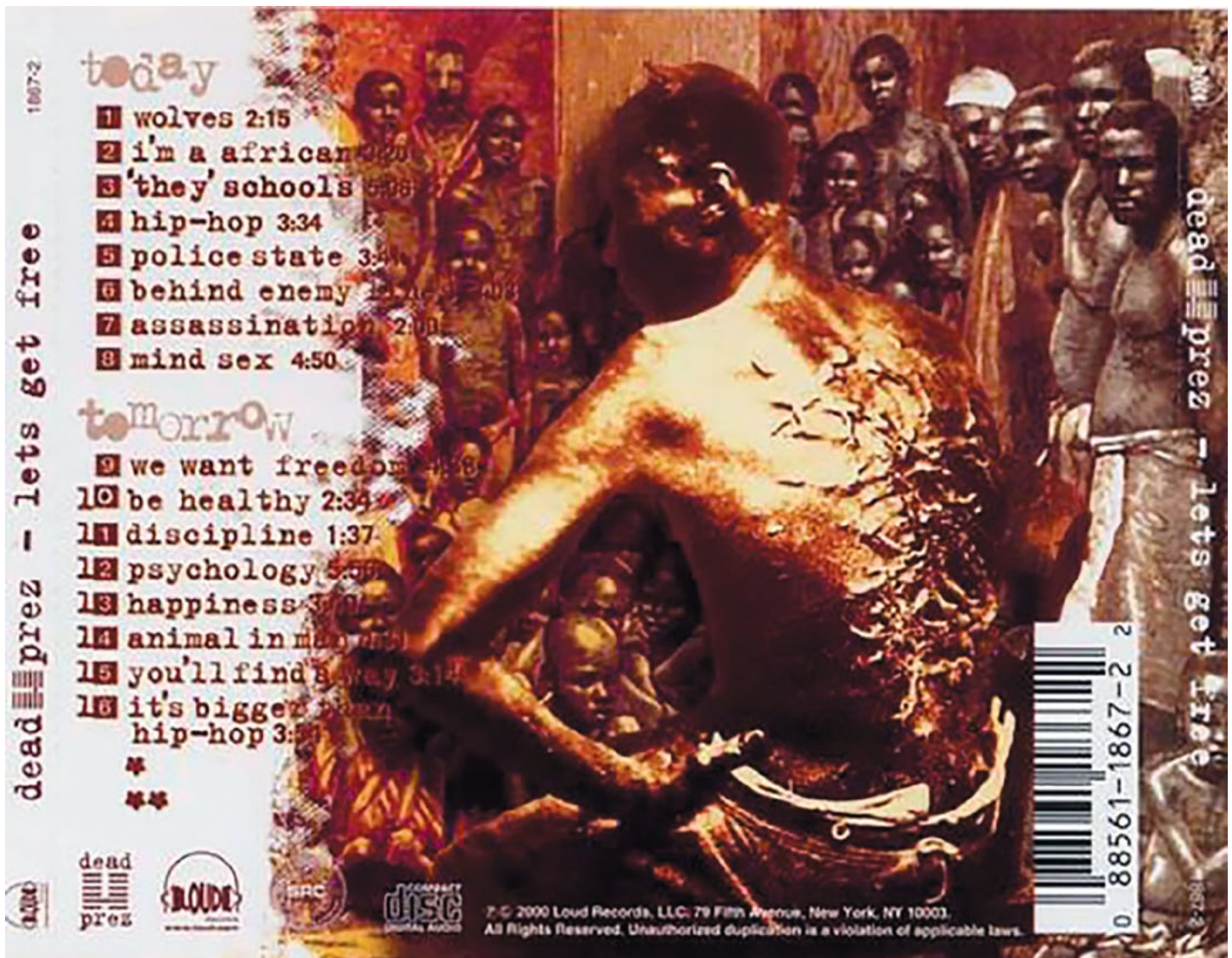
commotion PICTURE

PICTURE frame

mental PICTURE

to put someone in the PICTURE

vanishing PICTURE



*"For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about."*

*On Photography*, Susan Sontag, 19

For me, it was a daguerreotype on the back album cover of the hip-hop group dead prez's *lets get free*. I was raised by Po-Black, educated, middle-class parents who made my sister and I read and watch everything related to Black American identity. It felt at times like *Eyes on the Prize* was playing on a continuous loop in our household. I also devoured readings in my A.P. U.S. History class. I remember writing an essay about how Booker T. Washington was essentially a sellout compared to W.E.B. DuBois. Still, with all of these ideas floating around my head, when my eyes examined the actual image of the scourged back of an anonymous Black slave, it crystalized everything. All the pain and anguish that I had either experienced, read about, or heard stories about from my parents and grandparents about growing up disadvantaged and Black in the 20th Century was reflected in the lacerations of that unnamed man's disfigured back. The physicality of the images cut into my psyche and, like Sontag, it now seems plausible to divide my life into a before seeing, and after.

I yearn to see and create images that cut sharply, deeply, and instantaneously.

*Jared Thorne holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Dartmouth College and a Master in Fine Arts from Columbia University. His work speaks to issues of identity and subjectivity as it relates to class and race in America and abroad. Thorne is an Assistant Professor in the Art Department at The Ohio State University and is the Head of the Photography Area. Before joining OSU, Thorne taught at the collegiate level in South Africa from 2010 to 2015.*

Image:

dead prez, *Let's Get Free*, composed of stic.man and M-1, produced by dead prez, Hedrush, Lord Jamar and Kanye West, 1998-2000, Loud, 2000, compact disc.

I hate cameras. They are so much more sure than I am about everything.

~John Steinbeck

Recently, scholars and photographers have cast a critical eye on the histories of photography by pointing out how textbooks and syllabi on the topic have, with some notable exceptions, relied on presumptions about history and its writers that require reconsideration in a contemporary context. As theorist Liz Wells has pointed out, the majority of photography textbooks assert their own singular importance in their titling, such as Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography*, Helmut Gernsheim's *A Concise History of Photography*, and Naomi Rosenblum's *The World History of Photography*.<sup>1</sup> Yet, what does that powerful term "history" refer to? What does it exclude? Does the term refer to social histories of photography? Does it value aesthetic histories of photography?

Despite the totality of knowledge that the titles of these textbooks imply, a closer analysis reveals they are almost exclusively and narrowly focused on the history of *technology* and the inventors who copyrighted them. They ignore the fact that numerous photographers participated in the series of events that lead to each technological advancement in an iterative and contingent fashion. Wells calls this tendency to narrate the history of the medium as a sequence of triumphant inventions "The Priority Debate," thereby helping us understand the implicit limitations of this kind of historiography, where history is written by great individuals accomplishing great technological deeds.

Indeed, most students who enroll in my undergraduate photography class anticipate learning about a series of inventions that will culminate in the digital age, even though the class is titled *Photography East and West*, not *The History of Photography*. In other words, students have often been prepared for, and desire, a teleological history of photography that displays advancement, most often under the direction of white, male, colonial (and, later, capitalist) enterprise. From the first day of class, I invite my students to reconsider how photography's history has been made and by whom. Students are asked to read a text by Liz Wells and Derek Price titled "Histories of Photography" that documents but also critiques what the authors call the "Founding Fathers" of photography and pluralizes the notion of a single history.<sup>2</sup> In class we work in small groups and then as a whole to consider how typical photography textbooks construct a chronological victory story and what the weaknesses in that narrative might be. For example, I might ask: how have past exhibitions and texts on photography shaped our expectations for the field? What is

canonization, and what are its implications? How has photography been shaped by institutions?

Throughout the course, I remind students that we are investigating another version of the history of photography which, again, cannot be categorical or comprehensive. We consider how colonialism and photography developed together, and how photography was often a tool—if not a weapon—of the colonial era. My course begins with the emergence of photography and examines the medium's pivotal role in shaping relations between Asia and the West. It introduces East Asian photographers and movements such as the Real Photo movement in Japan alongside the Pictorialist and Straight Photography movements, and suggests points of connection as well as points of friction and disconnection across borders. The syllabus relies on essays rather than a textbook, as a selection of essays often offers a greater variety of voices and sources. My goal is to train students to gain a critical understanding of the histories of photography and to discern the uneven power dynamics behind modernism. I also aim to expose students to new aesthetics and theoretical approaches to photography. We explore early portraiture, architectural sites, colonial tourism, popular culture, family photographs, and contemporary art photography. Students compose written responses to assigned texts with guiding questions such as: how has the history of photography been written? How has canonization affected what we know about photography? How did photography frame relations between Japan and the United States? How are colonialism and photography related? How is modernity defined by photography? How does it complicate ideas of modernity? Yet, the syllabus has many of its own shortcomings: perhaps most obviously, it relies on an East-West binary in the title. It also "covers" only a fraction of the globe.

Nonetheless, it disrupts the idea that the history of photography is totalizing and unbiased. It allows students to witness how institutions create canons and allows them to consider the consequences of this in terms of gender, race, class, and the persistent emphasis on Western photography and inventors. They are left with the central concept that the power of images is fraught territory, and that photography is never neutral.

---

*Namiko Kunimoto is an Associate Professor at Ohio State University and author of The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar Japanese Art.*

---

Notes:

1. Ed. Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 49.

2. Wells, 49-64.

## Course Description: Critical Issues in Contemporary Photography

This course was originally taught using two books. I ordered them both to check them out discovered that they were the type of books that get tossed at the end of library sales. One person's generic & categorical ideas about photography as an art form. Four stars on goodreads.com. You could, and maybe you will read the books and access an overwhelming breadth of knowledge about what "art" photographers are doing today, but you will not get a sense of what makes photography—or even more broadly pixelated images—critical to speak about today. What is contemporarily critical—indeed crucial, integral, perilous even—about photography? As I read this to you now there are drones with facial recognition software flying over our heads. A.I. camera drones. How might these toys/machines impact war? Or Domestic Policing? There are thousands of images circulating on Twitter, on Instagram on Facebook, whose truths are uncertain. These images that fuel fires, fan flames, perpetuate and generate stereotypes are at our fingertips constantly. I've heard the average person spends 22 years of their lives looking at screens. How does this inundation of images affect our behavior, our thoughts, our feelings about ourselves? Our Feelings towards our environment, towards our neighbors, towards our loved ones, towards "the other"—whoever they may be? What in the stew of advanced global capitalism does it mean for us to/for others to hold cameras in their hands? To approach another body (flesh and blood), or space (almost always holding histories of other earlier inhabitants) and to say: "I will capture you." Or; "You have been captured." Or "I can help you." Or "I can't but someone else may," or "You are mine." or "This is for posterity," or "This is poetry?" What does it mean to consume these images and what might their existence mean for the survival of our planet? Can they work towards social justice, or even social empathy? Towards art? How is the production of art all wrapped up in these questions? It doesn't make sense any longer to think of photography in a bubble. Everything is an image. Most art now is photographed and is seen by most as pixel images that circulate on the web, these images are tossed and scrambled in with advertisements for real estate hunting apps, and meal delivery services, and new, over-the-counter birth control.

GET IT WHILE YOU CAN  
P E O P L E .

They are mixed in with  
screenshots of  
videos of chil-  
dren being

separated from their  
parents and held against

their will. They are mixed in with

GIFs of Ellen Degeneres dancing, and  
Melania pulling her hand out of Donald's grip.

Images (photographs) are used in and with sculpture. In and  
with video. They are your favorite personal branding tool. They  
are owned by Instagram. How did we get here? Less than 100 years ago  
photographs were considered parochial, barely allowed in institutions as art.

They were the stuff wild of experimental artists in Europe: taking photographs  
from the newspaper and cutting them up to make collages. They were the stuff of  
Dada. Either complete utility, or complete nonsense. 100 years before that they didn't exist.

Consider the exponential growth of this medium in relationship to painting. The first  
painting happened tens plus tens of thousands of years ago and yet there is no such thing as  
viral painting, for instance. Photographs are they are the stuff of life, and as such, their existence  
as art must be considered in relationship to their ontology more generally. They are. Everywhere.

Try to not look at your phone for the entire 3 hours of this class. Try to close your eyes on I87, or on  
the subway. We are swimming in them. We are breathing in them. So how can we answer the question:

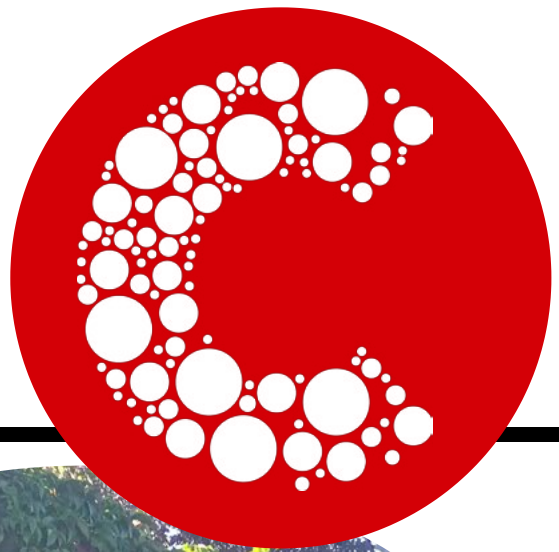
What are the critical issues in photography today? We will only be able to skim the surface. A survey  
if you will. But hopefully less of a straight line: less "The Photograph as Contemporary Art" and more a  
diffuse and in turn dense undulating ripple. Instead of starting in the '70s and moving directly forward  
in time our class will create an hourglass shape. First, we will look out, or around, or above. We're the  
mini-fairy people on the top of the drone. Our first set of readings will address some of the consequences  
of our image and technology dependency. We will slowly travel backward in time towards the beginnings

of what the former teacher of this class might have called "the current moment in photographic history" and look at  
the politics of representation from the 1970's onward. We will talk about appropriation—as an art form and as a weapon of  
power, as well as personal and public archives. The class will end (THE CLASS ACTUALLY NEVER ENDS) with a look at artists  
and specifically artists, using photographs now—how, why, for what? Maybe the persistence of physical photography is a protest  
against the corporately funded cloud, maybe it's useless nostalgia. Maybe its 500 things in between. You will be the judge. So,  
in this class, we're going to read. A lot. Photography IS (and will forever more be) history. You've gotta know about it.



Maria Hupfield, *Resistance on All Fronts*, 2007-2018, C-print and industrial felt, 124.5 x 94 cm.

# YOUR MENTOR AWAITS!



**SASKATCHEWAN  
ARTISTS:**  
apply today to  
our 2020-21  
Foundational  
Mentorship  
Program!



**APPLY BY  
JUNE 15**

**MORE  
INFO**

[programs.sask@carfac.ca](mailto:programs.sask@carfac.ca)  
[carfac.sk.ca/mentorship](http://carfac.sk.ca/mentorship)  
306-522-9788

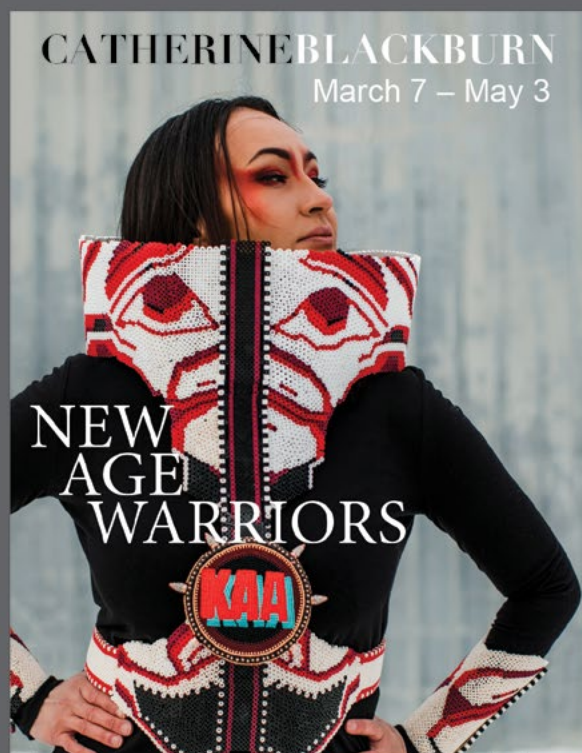
Sask *Culture*  
Funding  
provided by  
Saskatchewan  
Lotteries



KC Adams, *Untitled (detail)*, works on paper, 2017.

## KC ADAMS OPENS APRIL 9

**Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba** 710 Rosser Ave, Unit 2, Brandon, MB | [agsm.ca](http://agsm.ca)



Catherine Blackburn, *The Churchill Challenger*, 2018, photograph, detail



Lyle XOX, *Pet Therapy*, 2019, photograph, detail



SCOTIABANK  
**CONTACT**  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
FESTIVAL

TORONTO  
MAY 2020



# BLACKFLASH FLASHDANCE

MAY 2, 2020

PAVED ARTS EVENT SPACE  
19+

7 PHOTOBOOTHS / 5 DJS

\$12 ADVANCE TICKETS AVAILABLE APRIL 1  
AT [BLACKFLASH.CA](http://BLACKFLASH.CA) + HAZLEWOOD

**BlackFlash**



## **CFCR** SPOKEN WORD PROGRAMMING

SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES,  
LOCAL ARTS & CULTURE, AND MORE!

**MONDAYS 6-7PM**  
**TUESDAYS-FRIDAYS**  
**6-7:30PM**  
**COMMUNITY VOICES**  
**ON-THE-AIR**

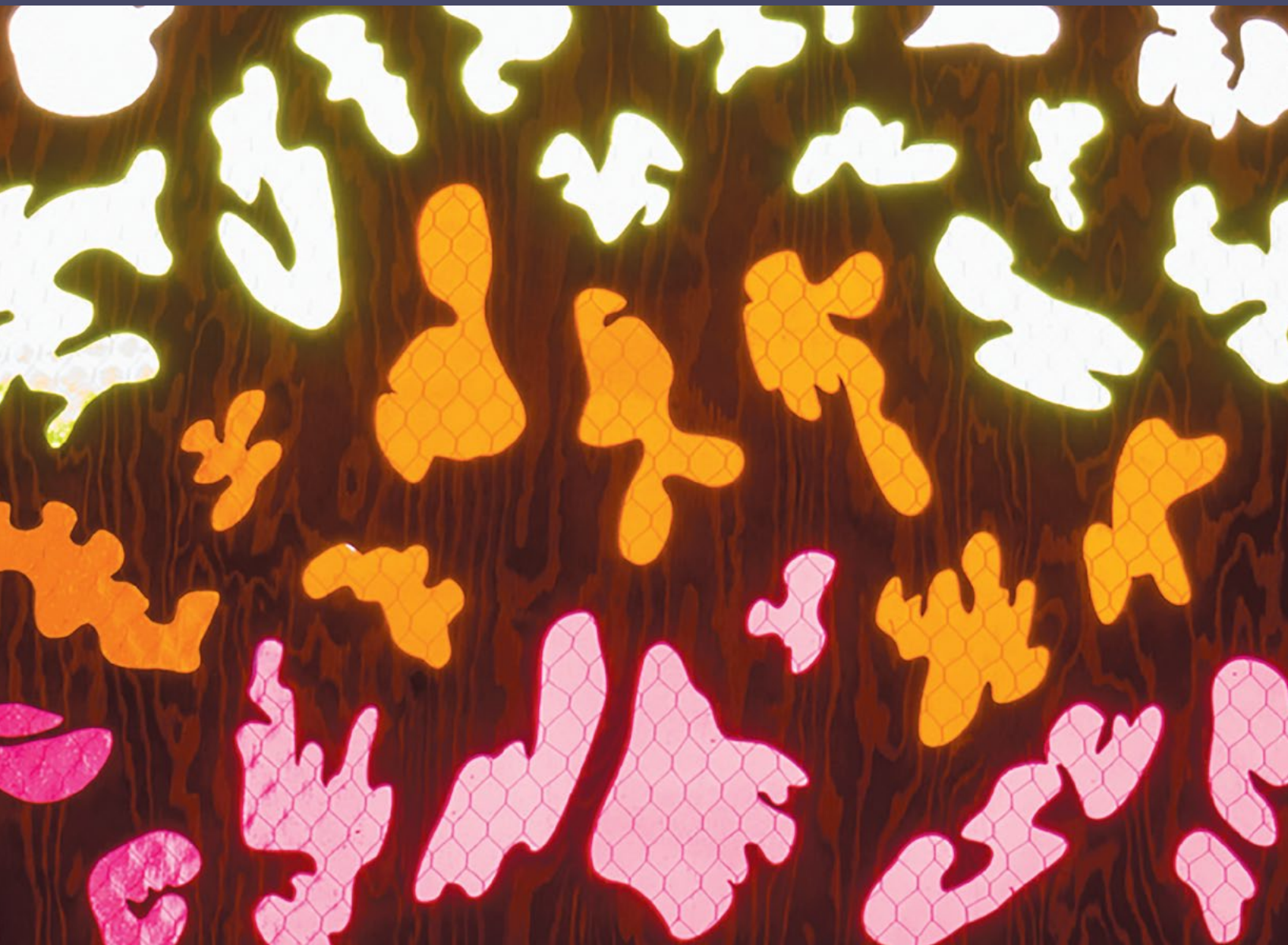
**SASKATOON  
COMMUNITY  
RADIO**



**LISTEN LIVE  
OR GET  
INVOLVED &  
APPLY FOR A SHOW**  
[CFCR.CA](http://CFCR.CA)

# Bathed in Rays of Dying Light

By Sandee Moore



Sunlight is the enemy of art. The sun is a nuclear furnace blasting the earth with beams of radiation: mortifying the fragile works of humans, causing disintegration of delicate fibres and pigments.

And yet, sunlight, in photographer Nicole Kelly Westman's mind, is a collaborator. After all, she muses, "All an image is, is light and not light."<sup>1</sup>

Early photographers such as Louis Daguerre sought to invert the destructive action of the sun's rays on their images. They dreamed of enslaving the sun, forcing fingers of light to draw their pictures in emulsions of precious metal painted on glass. Troubled by the metaphorical and ideological violence of photography—taking, capturing, and shooting an image—Westman's search for an equitable photography led her away from pictures. In my discussions with the artist, she noted the exploitative history of photography as well as "a myth of objective documentation," or, as phrased so grandly by French philosopher Roland Barthes, as "authentication itself."<sup>2</sup>

Westman's work is tinged with dying light and sadness,

perhaps because photography is a perpetually backward-looking medium, or maybe because she has had to part with a beloved pastime. "I had a love for photography since I was quite young," Westman recalls, speaking about her enigmatic position as a photographer who doesn't make photographs. "You have to have a lot of love for something to really thoroughly critique it." Hastening to soften her statement, she adds, "Gently."

The artist seeks to re-enchant fleeting experiences with the poetics of light and the unveiled artifice of the low-tech tools of photographic special effects and movie magic. She employs thin sheets of coloured plastic to tint the light from windows and artificial sources in sumptuous amber, golden, or rosy tones. Both the *cucoloris*, a device used in film to break up artificial light by casting naturalistic shadows, and the shadows it creates are essential elements in her installations; as are curtains, whose ritual parting reveals a cinematic spectacle, but are repurposed by Westman as a projection screen. Mirrors, a necessary piece of camera mechanics for focusing light, offer a counterpoint to fixed photographic image in many of her artworks.

Rather than embalming moments in the narrow coffin of photographic emulsion, she enlivens unremarkable bits of light and life, allowing an experience to unfold in the present of her multi-sensory installations.

The sun's rays, normally unwelcome intruders in a gallery, were invited to animate her work *cuculoris, a time machine for shadows* (2019) at Vancouver's Western Front. Westman opened a gallery wall to expose a window that had been covered for thirty-four years, only to cover it again immediately with a translucent skin banded in violet, crimson and yellow, and a screen fashioned from puzzle piece-shaped bark scavenged from a fallen Ponderosa Pine. Light, natural and artificial alike, was transformed into a perpetual sunset illuminating the gallery's white walls, wooden plank floor, a jug of spring water transported by the artist from Harvey Heights Secret Spring in the Rocky Mountains, and two sets of curtains.

The fresh spring water is a typical gesture of care-taking by the artist, offering her audience a cold drink in the heat of summer. But it is also sensual—slipping between lips, caressing the tongue and being absorbed into the body to become blood and tears.

A tumbling collage of tree branches and fields—drenched in tawny summer light or blanketed in the lavender gloom in winter—is cast upon a large, white curtain. The score's dark chords and foreboding drones are peppered with clanks, sputters, and crashes. Amongst the inkblot shapes of *cuculoris* and tree canopies silhouetted against the sky, the image of an airplane carving a path through the air is startlingly modern. It makes me feel wistful; I wish that I could be going somewhere.

*cuculoris, a time machine for shadows*, with its aesthetic of sunset memories, caused me to recall a day, undocumented and virtually forgotten, when forest fires burned close to my hometown. I lay in the grass of my former elementary school sports field alongside my best friend. We gazed at the dull pink disc of the sun, barely visible through thick smoke. White flakes of ash rained down on us. It felt like the end of the world, terrifyingly atemporal, and incomparably beautiful.

*faux light falling on drawn drapes and so shallow that you tend to be lonely*, both from 2018, illustrate Westman's careful process of sentimental observation and flaunting of artifice. The artist recreated the comfortingly banal yet beautiful blue-tinged winter light filtering through trees and falling onto her bedroom curtains, mediated through many steps. She began by altering the hue of 12,000-watt film studio lamps, turning their blazing bulbs into weak winter light by affixing theatre gels. Then, she photographed the shadows cast by this light as it passed through a bespoke *cuculoris* that precisely recreated the pattern of shadows she so often glimpsed from her bed. The resulting image, glowing and dappled with olive, saffron and tangerine, was printed onto a translucent curtain.

This fragile membrane, hovering between representation and object, divides the gallery space. Passing through the sliver of an opening causes one's body to brush against the silken folds, disturbing the balance of knowing and not knowing.

A companion work, *so shallow that you tend to be lonely*, is built upon the spooky spacial technology of the mirror. Everything glimpsed within the mirror's frame is reddened by a film of plastic. An image of the *cuculoris* used to create the shadows on the curtain—rectangular, wood-grained, riddled with snaking holes—is pasted onto the centre of the mirror, disrupting the illusion of depth behind the frame with this second layer of artifice.

As I attempt to write about Westman's practice, I struggle with the unwieldy burden of prose. Rather than heft words around the page, I long to let the artwork wash me in ambient sounds and bathe me in warm light. I want to rest in its embrace.

Words, as immaterial as light beams or sound waves, sometimes take the shape of the inexpressible. In Westman's

work, they are embroidered by Jolie Bird onto a faux sunset in a facsimile of the artist's hand. Handwriting is so personal as to have forensic worth; fingers brush paper as gently as they brush skin. Confounded by the impossible task of memorializing a visit to the mineral springs with a friend, Westman wondered, "Maybe a poem could."

one  
season  
past run  
off  
you sway  
into my  
body on  
the edge  
of an  
echoing  
glacial  
river

my body  
buoyant  
submerged in warmth  
your arms  
resting below  
cloaked in the  
murky shadow  
of my hair

Grief is a language inaccessible to those who haven't experienced it. Although Westman's artworks deal with the sharp pain of trauma and the suffocating weight of grief, she is careful not to arouse trauma in others or force viewers to become her therapist.

There are times you want to give up and feel someone's arms catch you. Rather than opening raw wounds, Westman's works make it possible to be vulnerable.

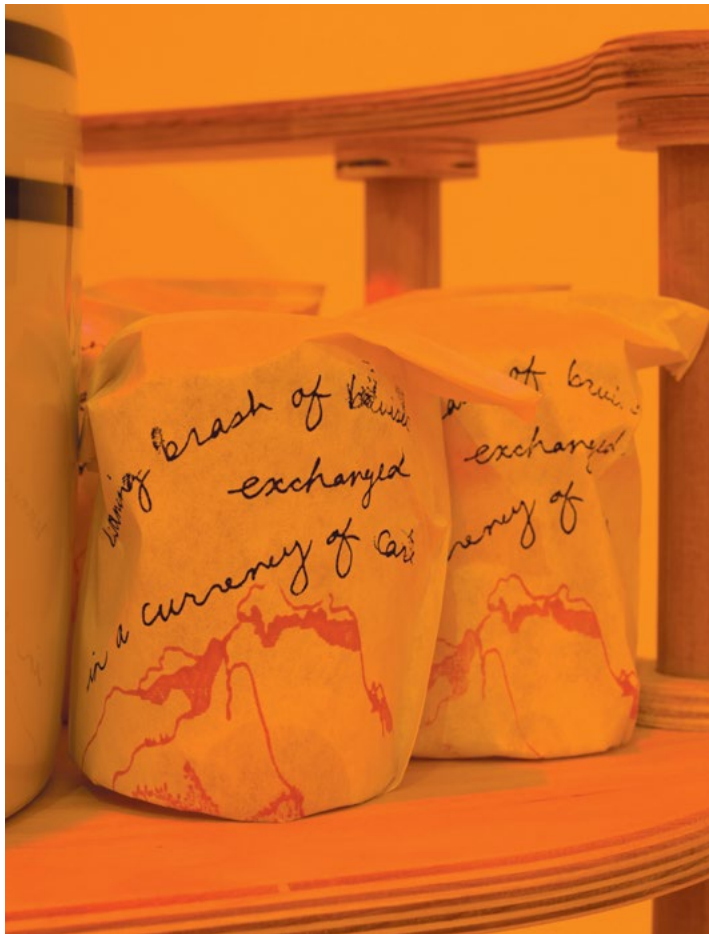
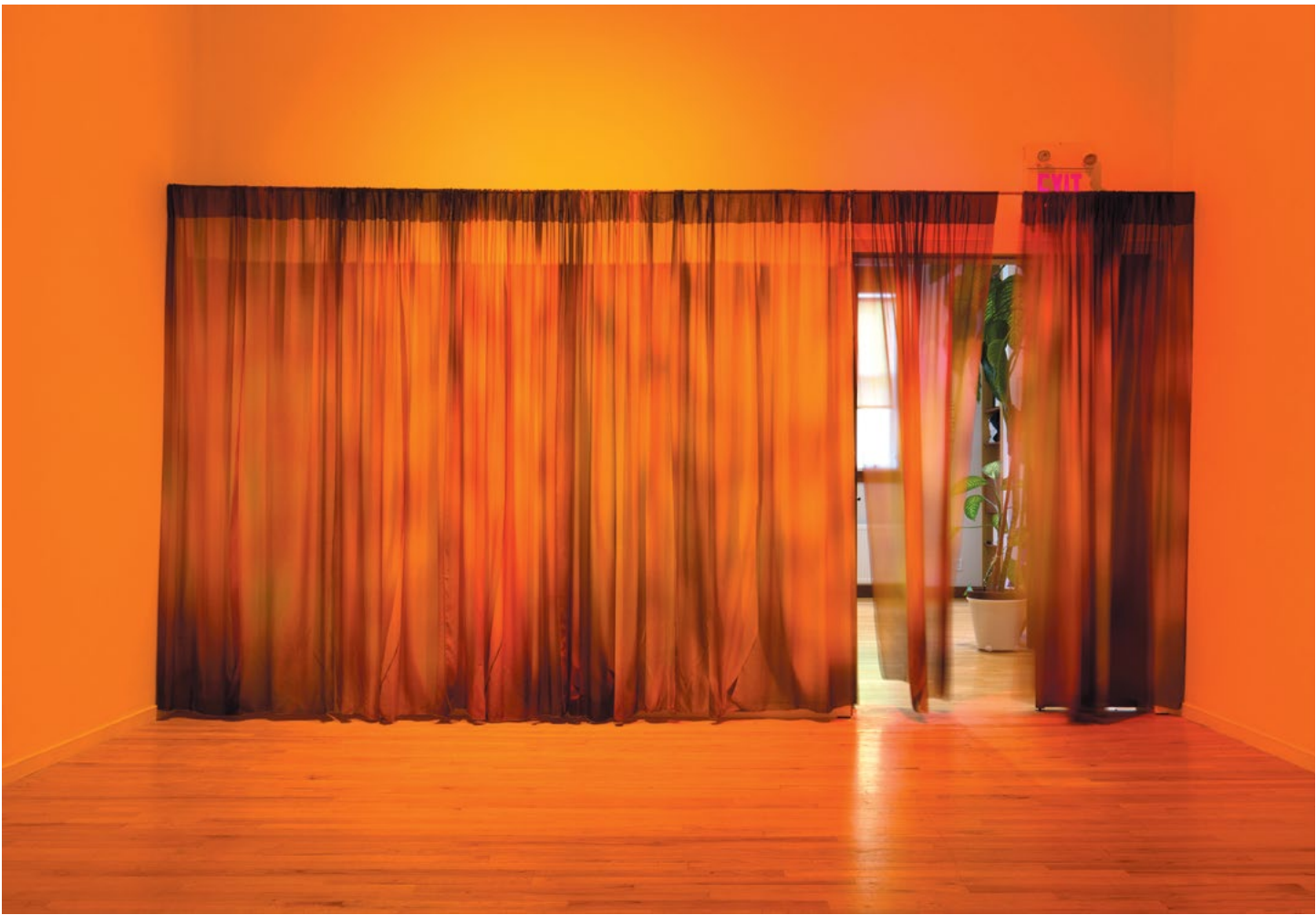
Westman's work reminds me of my own experiences of physical and emotional pain, so sharp it eclipsed all else. The times I have lain on the bathroom floor, barely noticing the chill of the tiles cooling my scalding tears. From the snug bubble of awareness that extends no further than my exhaled breath, I followed the minute fluttering of the jagged edge of a leaf etched by the sun as a shadow upon the floor. This distraction allows me to move through time, minute by minute. I recognized this moment as analogous to those that Westman crafts from sound waves, light beams, and memories.

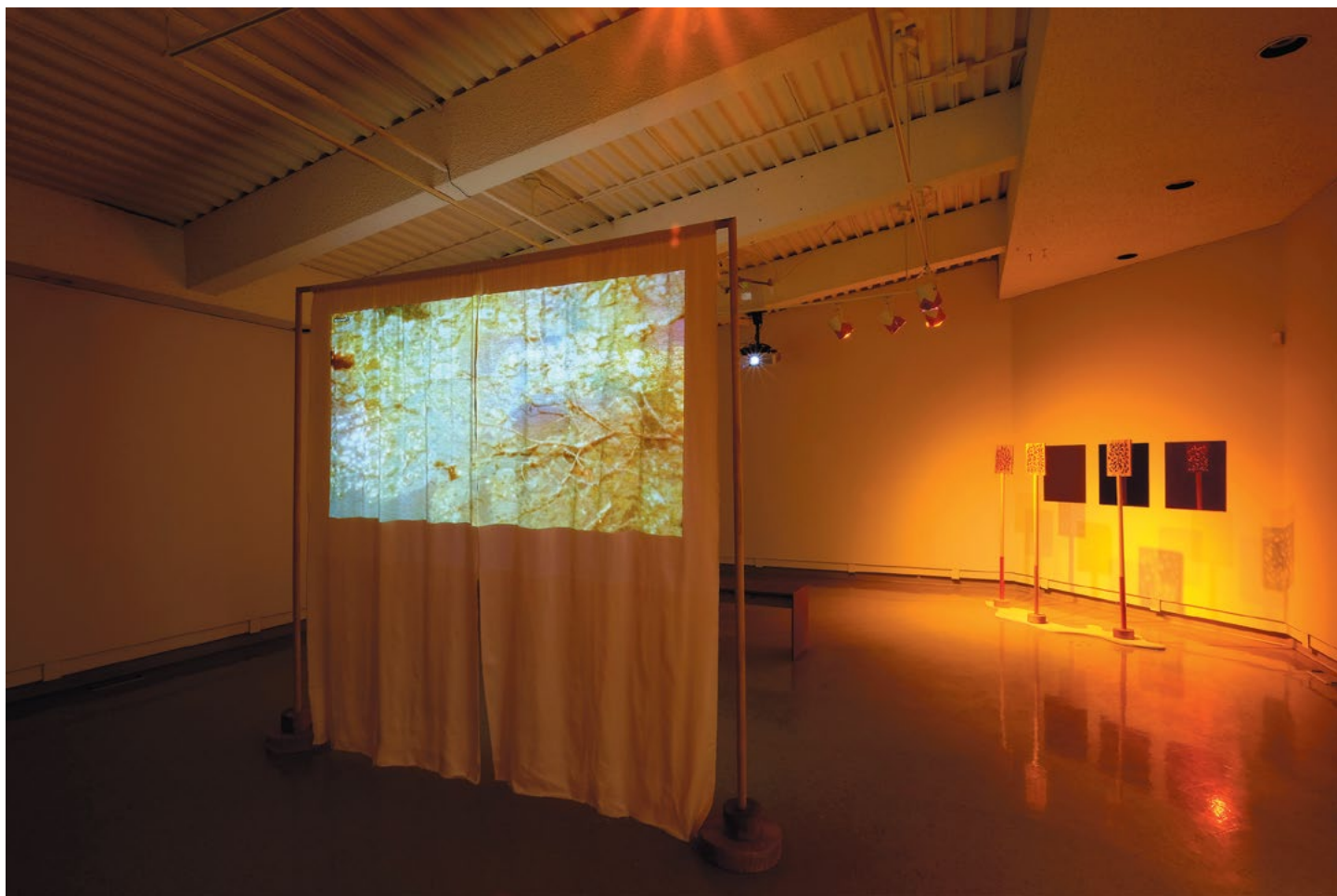
The artist ventures bravely into the unspeakable and unknowable quality of overwhelming physical or emotional pain and cocoons viewers in a gentle poetics of loss in her 2019 installation *for every sunset we haven't seen*, presented at the Dunlop Art Gallery's Sherwood Gallery.

"Grief steals language," she states flatly. Working with collaborator Kurtis Denne, Westman created a sound map of regret. Rustling, chiming waves of sound, punctuated with the mournful call of a train's horn ripple throughout this tiny gallery space in suburban Regina, filling it with melancholy and burnished light.

Westman has cannily exploited the well-understood signs of nostalgia and truth to insulate viewers from the unspeakable. Papering the gallery lights, a narrow window and even glass doors that separate the gallery from the library in theatre lighting gels, she transforms the objective gallery architecture into a golden mausoleum of remembrance. Everything appears yellowed with age, as if viewed from a distance of many decades.

A film is projected onto the gossamer folds of twin curtains. Its jerkiness, golden hue and blooms of light forge an immediate visual connection to home movies from eras past. Like memories rising





unbidden and disorganized, the film flicks through an inventory of images—the shadows of branches fall across softly waving blinds; sunlight glints through a canopy of leaves; spangles of light bounce off the rushing water of a stream, and the setting sun makes an orange stain.

A bench fashioned from three slabs of richly grained hardwood is positioned behind the curtain-cum-screen, a clear invitation to sit while the film unfolds as reddened and hazy as a summer afternoon glimpsed through closed eyes. Within this space, the passage of time is unmarred by the tyranny of the clock, marked instead by the sway of tree limbs and the slant of sunbeams. Westman, who is of mixed Icelandic and Métis heritage, observes that “sunlight is non-colonial time.”

Turning away from the film, I see in the angle of a corner three small mirrors. Each fiery shade is quantified by the string of numbers and letters along the edge, a key to the precision manufacturing behind the thin sheets of coloured film and the fleeting moments of sunset that they seek to replicate. Through the mirror, I see my reflection as one with the film world.

Each mirror also reflects a cuculoris constructed of unusually fine, exotic wood. This care suggests that Westman aims to simulate the way that light filters through certain, very special trees, illuminating a treasured time, place or memory.

Photography, according to Barthes, is a melancholy medium, proving what once was, not what is. It’s nearly impossible to separate memories from photos. Westman’s photography without photographs creates a space for us to live and dream in the present with wonder and artifice.

---

*Sandee Moore is an artist whose art criticism and scholarly texts have been published in various books and periodicals. Moore is Curator of Exhibitions and Programming at the Art Gallery of*

*Regina and a sessional lecturer at the University of Regina; she also produces a bi-weekly visual arts program for CJTR 91.3 FM Regina Community Radio.*

---

#### Works Cited:

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. 1st American pbk. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982. Print.

---

#### Notes:

1. Nicole Kelly Westman, personal interview by Sandee Moore, August 8, 2019.
2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 87.
3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*, 79.

---

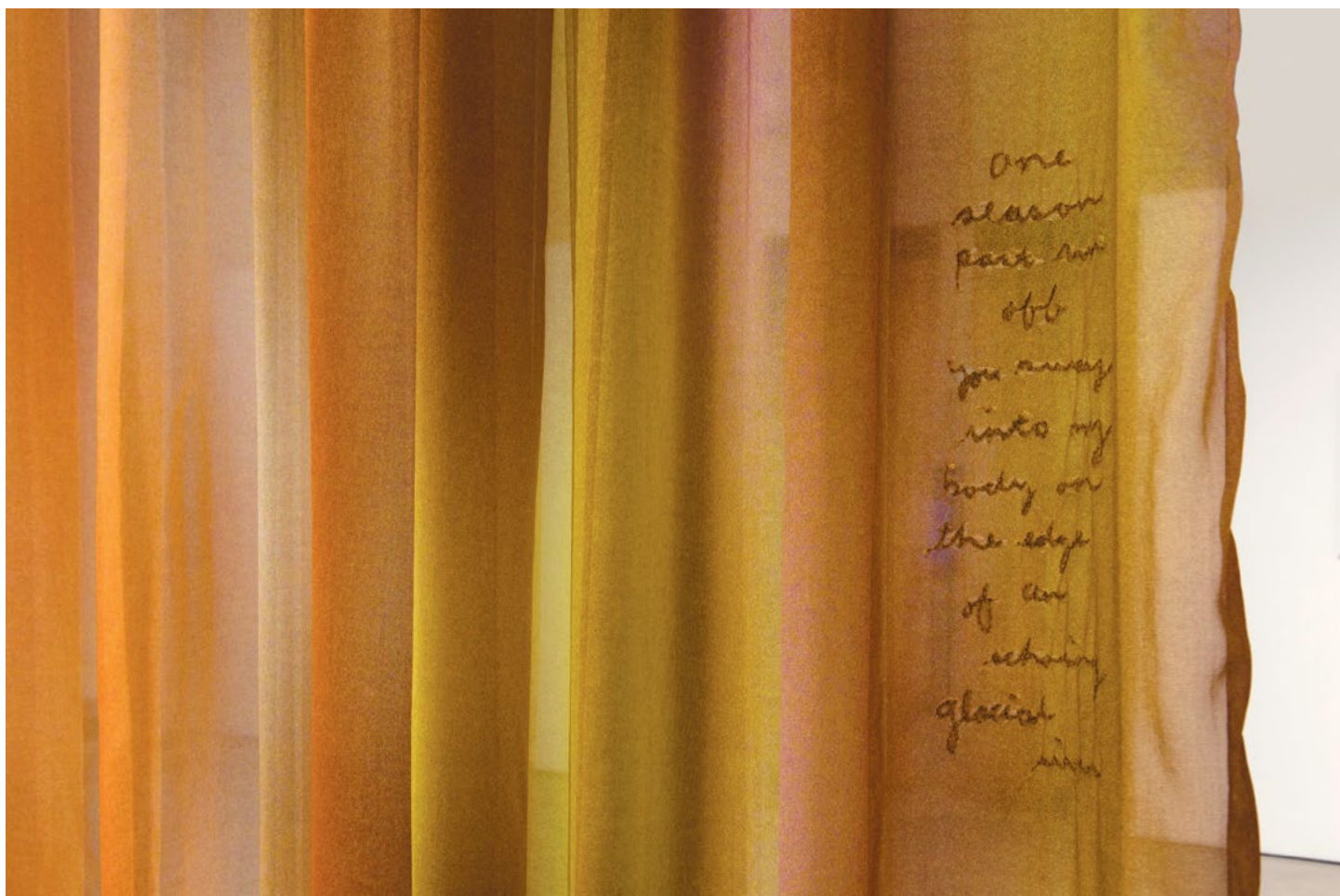
#### Images:

Page 56: Nicole Kelly Westman, “cuculoris, a time machine for shadows,” 2019. Installation view from Western Front (May 31 - July 13, 2019). Image courtesy the artist. Photograph by Dennis Ha.

Page 61: Nicole Kelly Westman, “cuculoris, a time machine for shadows,” 2019. Installation view from Western Front (May 31 - July 13, 2019). Image courtesy the artist. Photograph by Dennis Ha.

Page 62: Nicole Kelly Westman, *for every sunset we haven’t seen*, 2019. Installation view from “For Every Sunset We Haven’t Seen” at the Dunlop Art Gallery, Sherwood Gallery (March 9 - April 24, 2019). Image courtesy of the artist.

Page 63: Nicole Kelly Westman, *so shallow that you tend to be lonely*, 2018. Installation from “Fulhame’s Map” at the Namaimo Art Gallery (April 7 - June 3, 2019). Image courtesy of the artist.



# 15TH INTERNATIONAL FRANCOPHONE FILM FESTIVAL

ENGLISH SUBTITLES

ROXY THEATRE  
320 - 20 ST W  
SASKATOON



MAY 1-10

CINERGIE  
FESTIVAL - SASKATOON

    
CINERGIESK.CA

Managing Editor:  
Maxine Proctor  
editor@blackflash.ca

Buffalo Berry Press  
Board of Directors:  
Troy Gronsdahl, Tak Pham,  
Andy Sargent, Colin Skrapek,  
Dean Summach, Carey Shaw,  
Leah Taylor, Cole Thompson,  
Brianna Whitmore

Editorial Committee:  
Jean-Philippe Deneault,  
Alyssa Fearon, Felicia Gay,  
Troy Gronsdahl, Liz Ikiriko,  
Nadia Kurd, Haema Sivanesan,  
Leah Taylor

Advisory Committee:  
Travis Cole, Tarin Dehod,  
Blair Fornwald, Jenifer Papararo,  
Shauna Thompson

Designer: John Shelling

Proofreader: Carmelle Pretzlaw

Copy Editor: Emma Sharpe

Bookkeeper: Trista Dick

Printed In Canada By  
Tint Marketing

Editorial Policy  
*BlackFlash* is published  
by Buffalo Berry Press Inc.  
Copyright is retained by  
contributors. Contents may  
not be reproduced without  
permission. Letters to  
*BlackFlash* become the property  
of the magazine and may be  
printed in whole or in part.

Return All Undeliverable  
Canadian Addresses to  
BlackFlash Magazine  
P.O. Box 7381 Stn. Main  
Saskatoon, SK  
Canada S7K 4J3

*BlackFlash* Volume 37 Issue 1  
March – June 2020

Postage paid at Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan, Canada

Privacy Policy  
From time to time we make our  
subscribers' names available to  
organizations whose products  
or services we feel may be  
of interest to them. To be  
excluded from these mailings,  
please send your request, along  
with a copy of your subscription  
information to the mailing  
address shown.

Subscription price  
\$22 / 1 year  
\$40 / 2 years  
Cover price: \$8  
ISSN 0826-3922  
Canadian Publication Mail  
Product Agreement  
No.40029877

Correspondence  
BlackFlash  
P.O.  
Box 7381 Stn. Main  
Saskatoon, SK, Canada S7K 4J3

37.1 /  
Medium Spring Bud /  
Deep Koamaru

*BlackFlash* gratefully  
acknowledges the support of  
the Saskatchewan Arts Board,  
the Canada Council for the Arts,  
our many generous volunteers,  
and our donors.



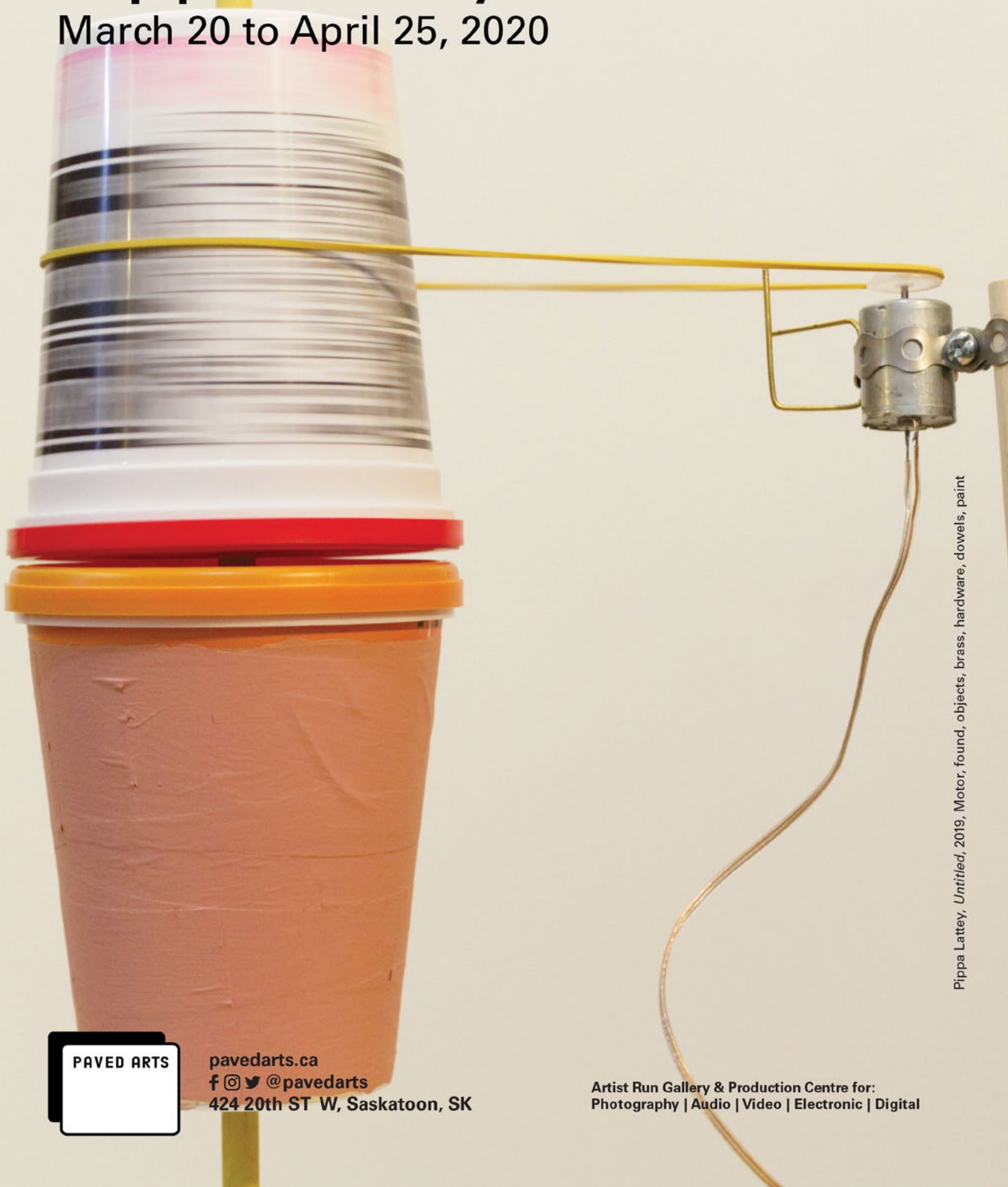
Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada



# Pippa Lattey / Into Orbit

March 20 to April 25, 2020



Pippa Lattey, *Untitled*, 2019, Motor, found, objects, brass, hardware, dowels, paint

PAVED ARTS

pavedarts.ca  
f @pavedarts  
424 20th ST W, Saskatoon, SK

Artist Run Gallery & Production Centre for:  
Photography | Audio | Video | Electronic | Digital

# **NEXT YEAR'S COUNTRY**

## Imagining the Prairies



Dana Claxton, *Momma's Got a Pony Girl... (Named History and Sets Her Free)*, 2008, Light Jet C-print, 156 x 126 cm. The Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern. Gift of the artist, 2019.

Curated by Sandra Fraser

February 1–October 12, 2020

[remaimodern.org](http://remaimodern.org)

# **rRemai mModern**