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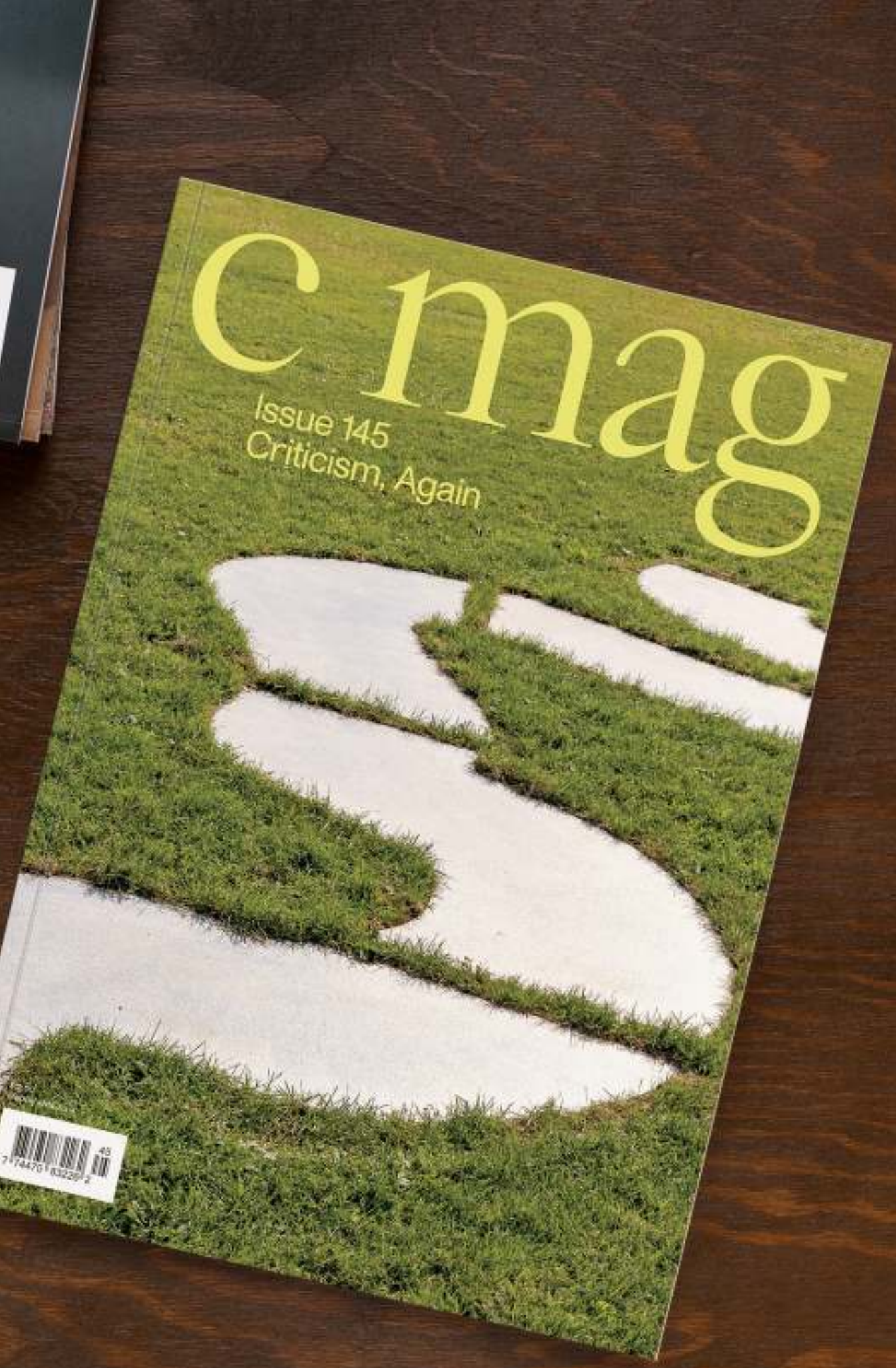
Issue 145
Criticism, Again

Issue 144
Déjà Vu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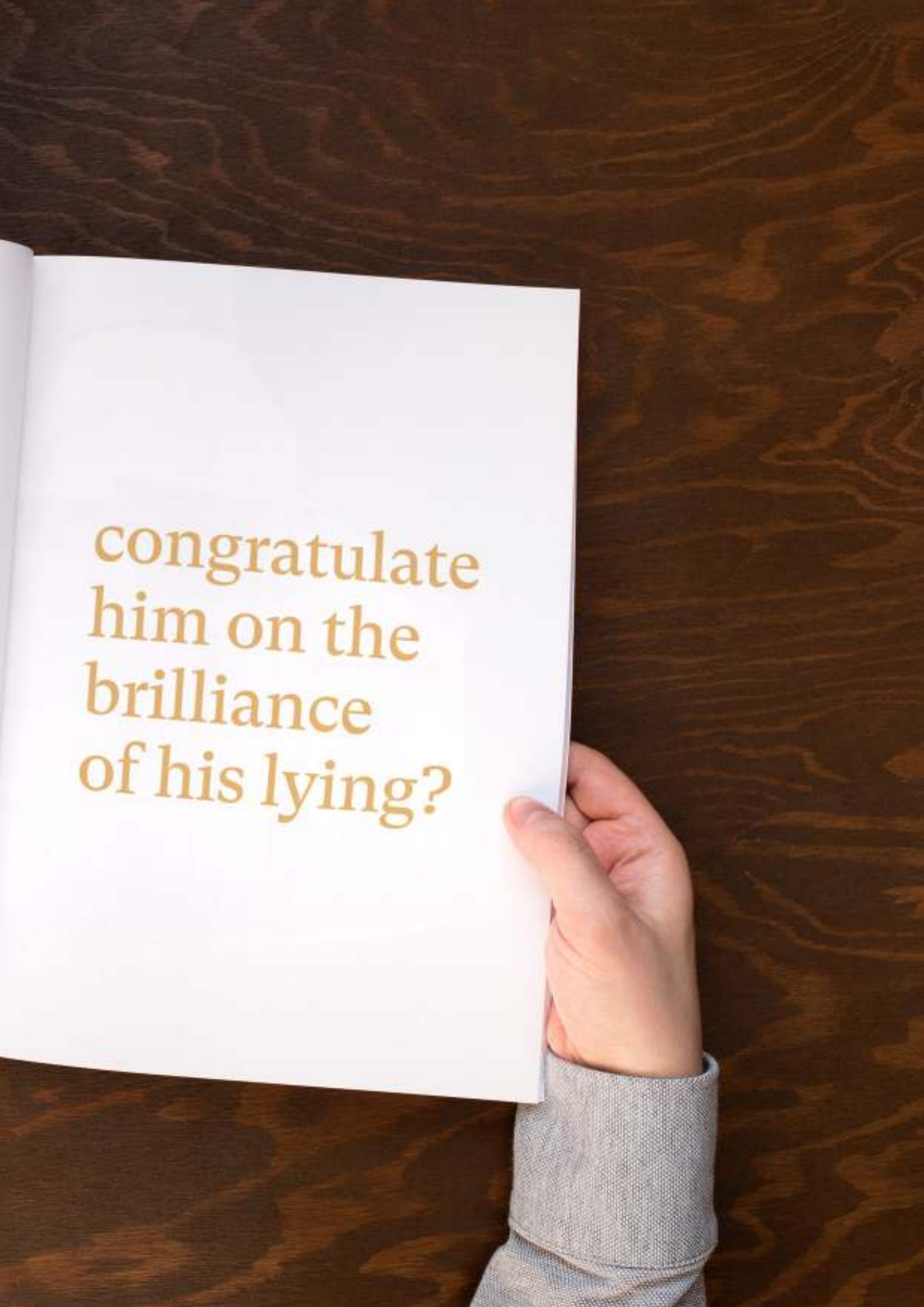
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COVER IMAGE
Maria Thereza Alves, *Phantom Pain*, 2019, steel, 314.96 cm × 645.16 cm; installation view from Riverdale Park West in Toronto as part of *The Shoreline Dilemma*, Toronto Biennial of Art, 2019; co-commissioned by Evergreen's Don River Valley Art Program and the Toronto Biennial of Art
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reviews

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PO Box 5, Station B,
Toronto, ON, Canada,
M5T 2T2
tel (416) 539.9495
cmagazine.com
info@cmagazine.com

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Curator: William Kingfisher

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Location: McMaster Museum of Art
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Red Mangrove, 2014, Anong Migwans Beam | *Touched by the Tears of a Butterfly*, 1995, Mike MacDonald

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Dear C,

I am fascinated by Erika DeFreitas's encounters with Jeanne Duval's spectre in *arriver avant moi devant moi*. How to approach Duval at all, when she is largely canonized as Baudelaire's "Black mistress"? She was also a dancer, an actor and, by way of Haiti, she deeply influenced Baudelaire's writing. DeFreitas is careful not to "recover" or "recuperate" Duval (her marginalia, so caring, rightfully asks: "What does it mean to tell the story (tale?) of someone who hasn't told it themselves?"). Instead, we see DeFreitas inhabiting and dwelling in Duval's few traces. At one point, Duval is superimposed onto the figure of the Black maid from Manet's *Olympia* (the maid, too, offers another Black spectre in the canon). I am compelled by how DeFreitas refuses recuperation, and instead sits with the complicated place of Blackness in art historical canons; consider the translation of her title: come before me before me.

DeFreitas's project immediately brings to mind Charmaine Nelson's writing on histories of Modernist art in Canada—histories that at once disavow and rely on Blackness. Nelson engages the Art Gallery of Toronto's (the precursor to today's Art Gallery of Ontario [AGO]) 1927 censoring of Max Weber's paintings, for referencing the Hottentot Venus in representations of white women, writing: "To acknowledge this censorship as a racially motivated action within a colonial cultural framework calls for an understanding of the conservatism of early-20th-century Canadian figure painting, the simultaneous politics of representation and censorship, and the historical pathologization of Blackness." Nelson's observation on Blackness in Canadian art historical canons resonates. Almost a century after the AGO's censoring of Weber, Andrea Fatona and Liz Ikiriko hold an urgent conversation in "Speaking Ourselves Into Being," on the continued lack of sustained critical engagement with Black art exhibited in institutions like the AGO. And so, I am thankful for interventions like DeFreitas's.

Maandeeq Mohamed

Dear C Magazine,

Lately I have been thinking about listening and the varying ways we listen or do not listen, reflect, remember. For me, much of this thinking swirls around my relationship to depression, which has a bad habit of forgetting: forgetting the good, forgetting the learned, forgetting to remember, forgetting to listen. Sometimes the forgetting gets confused for dreaming and I am left in a state of re-remembering that which did or did not happen in my waking life. Déjà vu is like that too. It's a feeling that, for me, contains a sense of dreamy urgency, a sense of what has been, in dialogue with what is or what might be.

Part of my preoccupation with listening comes from a recent equity training session, during which we practised looping as a technique for active listening. In looping, the speaker speaks, and the active listener listens, responding only to invite and acknowledge information. According to Larissa Crawford, founder of Future Ancestors Services, who facilitated this session: using looping as a listening tool aims to establish trust, encourage the speaker, clarify and reflect key points and feelings, and avoid communication blockers. Looping is both an echoing and an affirmation of the speaker's account. Looping can also act as a tool for remembering, for making and re-making visibilities, for amplifying voices.

Here, I am remembering the oscillating sways of an interview, echoes and amplifications that prioritize speaking for oneself (Andrea Fatona and Liz Ikiriko, "Speaking Ourselves Into Being"). Here, I am remembering how buried histories are resurfaced and their imprints reclaimed, reasserted (Jaclyn Bruneau and Aamna Muzaffar, "Trajet: An Interview with Dean Baldwin and Caroline Monnet"). Here, I am remembering the centrifugal and relational weight of rubble passing from hand to hand to hand (Areum Kim, "We Relate, Therefore We Are: Relation-Making in Jin-me Yoon's Practice"). Here, I am remembering the orthography of writing and its potential for discursively centring voice (Godfre Leung, "Composition: Writing About Douglas Writing About Douglas Writing").

In urging for a more earnest practice of listening through looping in our labour as cultural workers and critics—especially and necessarily for those of us who hold privileges and levels of power in many possible forms—I am dreaming of us, collectively looping a string around the centre of those cycles of amnesia that *C Mag*'s issue 144 recalls, and closing it with a knot. An imaginary lemniscate for resisting forgetting and insisting on remembering.

Ginger Carlson

letters

DEAR C,

I recently read an article about a group of scientists who, in 2014, found 13,000-year-old footprints fossilized on Calvert Island, a small island south-east of Haida Gwaii, west of Penrose Island, south of the Hakai Protected Area and the traditional and unceded territory of the Heiltsuk and the Wuikinuxv First Nations. While these fossils are some of the oldest *known* by science, they're likely not the oldest in North America.

The story starts: "Evidence of what could be the oldest family camping trip in North America has been discovered below the shoreline of a remote British Columbia island," and I can't help but cringe in the face of the misguidance it takes to liken these early resilient traces of first peoples to wonder-bread-white family camping, colonial leisure. The footprints were made in grey clay, covered and preserved by black sand; the charcoal from a nearby fire speaks to a kind of resourcefulness science cannot articulate. The article tells me that the child would have worn a size seven shoe.

I was reminded of these footprints when reading Jaclyn Bruneau and Aamna Muzaffar's interview with Dean Baldwin and Caroline Monnet, whose project *Trajet* is as critical as it is generous. It is devastating but not surprising that the municipality of Toronto would heedlessly destroy these many-millennia-old traces—the project of colonialism has relied perennially on such destruction.

Yet, here is a project wherein the hopeful aspects of history's circular nature are highlighted, for time is a circle, not a line. And when we complete a revolution, perhaps déjà vu is always inevitable. I find solace in the knowledge that footsteps—the ones of those who have descended and thrived from the walkers of time immemorial—will once again grace the shores of what we now call Lake Ontario.

Perhaps they will still be visible upon our arrival at this same place in the next revolution. Perhaps it's more true to say that those who honour the future know that no one can own history.

Natasha Chaykowski

Dear C,

Over the past year I've noted a recurrence of the subject of futurity, re-visitation and archiving in essays, exhibitions and other art programming; I wouldn't call this a trend so much as an effect.

Recently, I was talking to a curator about archiving, and their position was to question the value of archiving anything when climate change is going to realize total planetary destruction in 50 years. In some ways this sentiment has some validity; what is the point of building an archive in the age of the Anthropocene? Why make plans for the future when there may not be one?

When the future feels off limits, I understand the impulse to configure the present as the past's future in creative thought and practice; digging back to project forward. But I wouldn't have thought to articulate this moment as déjà vu. After reading issue 144, I feel differently. The universal déjà vu experience of the mind speaking to itself automatically and unexpectedly singles out the individual—in the sense of both their responsibility, and presence in their own life—and identifies them as the future of their past's present. Here, the phrase déjà vu links the temporal questions of futurity and re-visitation to a time that thinks seriously about the end of time. It's smart in its subtlety, and a rewarding lens through which to read issue 144.

Helen Lee

LETTERS

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Letters may be informal, informative, creative, inquisitive, speculative, critical or any other number of things imaginable in the epistolary form. Letters that engage this issue—its theme, articles, images—and related things beyond the magazine's pages are eligible for publication in the Summer 2020 issue if received by May 1. For more info, visit submissions.cmagazine.com.

Criticism, Again
by Merray Gerges

The stakes of criticism have drastically changed since *C Magazine*'s 2015 issue on the topic. The increased visibility of the output of artists, writers and curators who'd been marginalized by the art world has shifted its cultural landscape in a handful of years. The demographics have evidently changed, but have the power dynamics? And how has the practice of criticism, and publishing as an industry, responded? The 2019 Whitney Biennial featured more BIPOC and womxn than previous iterations, but initial reviews from predominantly white critics dismissed much of the work for its derivative lack of aesthetic "radicality," and evaluated it according to the Euro-American canon. In response, critic and author of *The New Black Vanguard* (2019) Antwaun Sargent tweeted: "The consistent voices at [*The Times*] and everywhere else are entirely white. It's 2019 and we are in the middle of a Renaissance in [B]lack artistic production. And you are telling me the best people to evaluate that are the same ones who basically ignored [B]lack artists for decades?" The incompetence of those white critics to write about work they didn't care to understand prompted a broader dialogue on the hegemony of white critics, "allyship" through criticism, and barriers of access for BIPOC critics. Many of them asked: is visibility directly proportional to power? The conversation went beyond issuing a call for the inclusion of more BIPOC critics and demanded financial and editorial support for their work, as embodied by the widely-circulated July 2019 *New York Times* article "The Dominance of the White Male Critic" (whose calls for established white critics to step aside in order to make room for those voices predictably instigated whitelash). A few months later, a *NYT* piece by a white reporter reiterated age-old stereotypes about Inuk artists working in Cape Dorset. Indigenous artists and journalists called out its peddled trauma-porn tropes, and furthered the dialogue on representation in publishing.

The demographics of criticism and journalism—and who edits it and how—shape the reception and historicization of cultural production. The above are worst-case scenarios of what can go awry when white critics and journalists don't bother to engage with their subjects with care. But is the lesson here that critics should never cross identity lines? When does that turn into an excuse for writers from certain subject positions to avoid developing the necessary literacy to critique work by artists from different subject positions, especially given the tendency to criticize work by such groups in private rather than in public?

Critic and artist David Garneau has discussed how the settler anxiety around critiquing Indigenous art leads to profiling and patronage devoid of true evaluation or analysis. Here, Garneau begins with an unpublishable quip from a Métis curator who calls Kent Monkman "the Norman Rockwell of Native trauma!" when pressed for an opinion of the artist's work. Despite the explosion of writing about Indigenous art in the past handful of years, very little of it is critical, Garneau writes. "Critical art writing is needed if we are to deepen the discourse around Indigenous art beyond private judgement, competent understanding, polite appreciation, the commercial market, grant writing rhetoric, and as illustrations of existing theory," he maintains; for non-Indigenous folks to engage this work, we must configure non-colonial forms of critical art writing. Coincidentally, during the production of this issue, coverage of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's new Monkman commission regurgitated buzzwords around the work. Garneau refuses to follow suit. He questions whose gaze Monkman's work is really for, and demonstrates how Indigenous art should be critiqued: with deep care.

Critiquing with care and consideration is as key to the relationship between critic and artist as it is to that of editor and critic. Differences in subject positions, of course, complicate the power dynamic already inherent to the editor–critic relationship. Because editing involves assessing whether a critic's proposed language accomplishes their intended meaning, it involves "an attempted act of empathy," as *Momus* senior editor Casey Beal writes. But if the editor must impose legibility that may override or undermine the writer's language, "how could we read this as anything other than a decidedly colonial gesture?" Beal questions the limitations of empathy as a tool here, articulating, with vulnerability and honesty, the concealed messiness of editors' work, based on his own experience as a white editor. He asks questions that are pressing even for me, as an editor of colour often tasked with imposing style guides, and asking writers for explication, both in the name of an assumed "general"—i.e. white—reader.

Criticism's complicity in the amnesia of Black Canadian artists was central to a conversation between curators and scholars Liz Ikiriko and Andrea Fatona in C144, themed "Déjà Vu," and here, scholar Joana Joachim furthers their discussion. Joachim reflects on the inaugural Black Curators Forum, an all-too-rare congregation of Black arts professionals from across Canada held in late 2019, which provided space to discuss tactics for professional development and strategies for navigating the difficulties of working in predominantly white institutions. She looks at the structural causes for the dearth of critical engagement with Black Canadian art—which has tended to be shallowly celebratory. She asks: what are the institutional factors (in education, galleries and publications) that limit access for emerging Black culture workers, especially writers? What would it take for us to move beyond celebration towards critique that is generative and constructive?

"The Canadian art world's claustrophobia can sometimes restrict frank public conversations," write

Esmé Hogeveen and Emma Sharpe to introduce "Tell Us What You *Really* Think," the culmination of a survey that asked art writers in Canada to anonymously reflect on how they navigate the social difficulties of their work. Hogeveen and Sharpe ask: how might writers work to transcend differences between theirs and an artist's subject position? One participant wrote, "Identity differences cannot be transcended, only navigated with respect." "Expecting a matchmaking process—i.e. only a Black writer can write about a Black artist—would be too narrow a solution, and would only further encourage marginalization of both critic and artist," offered another. Asked whether personal or professional connections affect how they articulate their true feelings in writing, one respondent wrote: "There definitely have been moments where I stopped and wondered if this would burn some bridges. I burned them anyway."

What criticism looks like is deeply influenced by institutional and commercial interests, and concealing these mechanisms is part of the problem—especially when critics are punished for their criticism. This became incontrovertibly clear to me when I learned of a collector deaccessioning the work of a critic's partner after the critic reported on an altercation between the collector and a gallery director, and even clearer when, in the ensuing months, I received a censorious legal threat from a publication. I asked critic Michael Turner to revisit that collector's retaliation against him to reflect on the social politics of criticism, based on his decades of experience as a critic and publishing a daily blog. His piece dances around the art world's implicit code of conduct for critics, and our punishment when we break it. What does this incident say about the critic–collector relationship, the expectation of critics to serve the art industry, and, more broadly, the Canadian art world's tacit hostility to criticism?

A key thread woven through this issue is that, in overt and covert ways, how we practise criticism still bears traces of colonialism. Art theorist and writer Kim Dhillon cites an anecdote from critic Amy Fung's book of essays, *Before I Was a Critic I Was A Human Being* (2019), where Fung describes the ethnocentric attempts of a white moderator and predominantly white audience to engage with a panel comprised of the BIPOC and/or women finalists of a national art award. This scenario is "characteristic of the still-prevalent colonialism of the discursive formats for engaging with and evaluating art," Dhillon writes, but undoing that requires more than just plugging BIPOC artists into an inherently colonial structure, "for that only reinforces the normative lens through which their work is seen." She directs this crucial question to a roundtable including writers Serena Lukas Bhandar and Tarah Hogue, among others: "If the colonial model for art criticism didn't exist, what else might be possible?"

It would be dishonest and disingenuous to divorce my experience of working as a critic and journalist for the past five years from producing this issue for *C Magazine*. Whom I commissioned, what I asked of them and how I edited them is very much informed by having been one of few BIPOC editors working in publishing institutions in Canada. This issue's task is not to ask, yet *again*, the self-serving question that has very much defined the profession over the past few decades—"But what's *really* the role of the critic??"—which could only go so far at a time when the art and the writing of BIPOC was mostly excluded. Instead, this issue asks: what are criticism's stakes post–Canada 150? What are the social politics influencing this work? And, how do we undo legacies of colonialism that pervade how we interact with each other?

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Wendy Coburn, Fable for Tomorrow, 2008, bisque-fired clay, 7" x 7" x 5.5" each. Courtesy of the Estate of Wendy Coburn and Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto.

Curating, Criticism ar
“Showing Up” as Pra

18

Black Curators Forum, 2019, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto
PHOTO: HENRY CHAN; COURTESY OF THE POWER PLANT CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

nd Care, or, xis

by Joana Joachim

The singularity of an event geared specifically towards Black Canadian curators cannot be overstated. The inaugural Black Curators Forum, held October 25–27, 2019, in Toronto, was one of far-too-rare instances congregating Black arts professionals from across Canada, and aimed to foster networking, support, collaboration and mentorship among us. The three-day event included a reception and dinner at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, a day of workshops at the Art Gallery of Ontario, a private viewing of Denyse Thomasos's paintings at the Olga Korper Gallery, a BIPOC-focused tour of Art Toronto and a talk by scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva. The workshops—which focused on the challenges of institutional access and equity, tools for career progression and strategies to consolidate alliances moving forward—served as a think-tank for peer-to-peer sharing and intergenerational mentorship, and were preceded by a keynote by Courtney J. Martin, senior curator at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven. The forum's organizers were Julie Crooks, associate curator of photography at the Art Gallery of Ontario; Pamela Edmonds, senior curator at the McMaster Museum of Art; Dominique Fontaine, curator and founding director of aPOSteRIORi; and Gaëtane Verna, director of The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery. Their opening remarks asserted the need for more support of Black Canadian cultural workers, which set the tone for the conversations that soon followed.

Martin's keynote presented thought-provoking reflections on her career as a Black female art historian and curator, arguing that curatorial work requires empathy. I understood this to mean two things: first, it is crucial for a curator to understand how an artwork comes to be—this is the first step towards knowing how it ought to be presented in the world. Second, as with art history, curating is about nurturing relationships, both with the artist and with the viewer. I propose to consider how these ideas might be extended to the role of the critic. Jessica Lynne explains: "I write to place care around the practices of [B]lack women artists. Their work. Their archives. Their fullness. Criticism is a way of showing up. It is a way of placing intellectual frameworks around the gestures and processes of artists."[1] Critics, then, just like curators, might be understood as caretakers or custodians of artistic

output. This sentiment became central to conversations throughout the forum and, I would argue, is symptomatic of a continually growing investment in this type of discursive care among Black art professionals in Canada.

The forum's three workshops cultivated open and honest exchange between peers, mentors and colleagues at different levels in their careers on the issues involved in their work within and outside of cultural institutions in relation to Black life in Canada. The day was focused on access and inclusion, and how those barriers may impact the future of Black curating in this country. Echoing Martin's assertion of the need to foster mentorship and learning among younger curators, we engaged in a lively discussion around the types of training available (internships, graduate degrees, the "school of life," etc.) and reflected on the paths that lay before the more emerging practitioners both within and outside the room. The stubbornly small number of Black curators, critics and art historians in permanent positions within Canadian institutions is a constant hindrance to the entry of emerging professionals into those institutions, since they are the very mentors and role models Martin identified as key to ushering in the next generation. Further, the proclivity of institutions to work with Black art professionals on a temporary and event-based basis lends itself to a perpetually superficial and transient engagement with Black Canadian art. This lack of continued and long-term engagement encumbers Black curators, art historians and critics wanting to sink into the deeper layers of the work to move beyond "representation" and "diversity." These terms have come to be regularly mobilized as institutional sleight of hand—that is, in a duplicitous manner whereby they are presented without sincere efforts to implement lasting structural change or provide adequate support for the BIPOC workers tasked with "changing the face of the institution." The perceived dearth of Black art professionals in Canada stems from both the lack of opportunities and the conspicuous absence of dedicated Black Canadian studies programs. Unless one is lucky enough to live and work in the vicinity of the far-too-few established Black arts professionals in Canada, like the organizers and more senior participants of the forum, one is hard-pressed to find guidance and strategies to navigate this country's art institutions and systems as a Black person.

This systemic dearth can be traced all the way back to academia. Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson was the first and remains the only tenured (or tenure-track) Black art history professor at a Canadian university after nearly 20 years. With so few Black art mentors in the academy, emerging Black arts professionals must lucubrate, largely on their own, to piece together the Black Canadian art landscape, which goes back at least as far as the 18th century, but about which there is still a dire need for diligent and nuanced writing. Without the presence and support of Black scholars in academic and cultural spaces to mentor the next generation, how can this work advance? Following Martin's keynote, one of the more established forum attendees remarked that much of the writing on Black Canadian art that does exist tends to be celebratory, often lacking deep analysis and critical reflections on the work itself. This writing, while empowering, misses the opportunity to engage in layered conversations about how the work functions within a broader art historical context, putting Black Canadian art at risk of being left untethered, and further subjected to a long-standing erasure from the country's collective consciousness.

The notion of care, or of "showing up," as articulated by Lynne, can be mobilized as praxis here. As caretakers of art, our work involves not only carving out spaces for Black artists to be visible, but also to challenge, push and pull at the artwork to see what more it may reveal. Critique and, indeed, conflict are generative sites for the creative *épanouissement* of Black Canadian artists, historians and curators, as is critical art writing that contextualizes Black art within Canadian and Black diasporic history. Art criticism needs to be thought of as a key component of developing a written history and articulating an aesthetic of Black curating and art in relation to dominant culture on this land. What might we learn, for example, from a comparative study placing the Harlem Renaissance in conversation with Black Canadian art during the 1920s? Or, how might we grow to understand some of the aesthetics of Black Canadian art by placing them in relation to those of Caribbean or Black British art? There is a growing hunger for lasting engagement with Black Canadian art, which, as noted by Andrea Fatona in an interview with Liz Ikiriko, "requires a deep drilling down in the creation of critical discursive materials that will stand and that will circulate, to allow these works to actually reside within the discussion around Canadian art and Black Canadian art."[2] Critical art writing is thus a means to ensure that the work being done by Black artists and arts professionals is not only documented and preserved for posterity, but also that it speaks to shared and disparate histories within Black Canadian communities over time.

The forum predictably and understandably aimed to cover expansive topics in a very short amount of time. To advance incrementally towards resolving the pressing issues that it brought to light, the combined efforts of systematic institutional change, Black curatorial work and critical writing are crucial. Echoing the theme of curatorial empathy, the issues of burnout, self-care and compassion were broached by a participant inviting us to consider how our roles as art caretakers might go beyond the objects of our study to encompass care for each other as Black individuals engaging in work that can be intellectually and emotionally draining. What might it mean to resist the burden of representation and the pressure to "do it all at once"? I see critical art writing as a means for slow, honest and nuanced conversations to take place, and as the method through which discourses around Black art in Canada can be diligently complicated, by addressing specific formal, aesthetic and thematic issues successively. It's a site for increasingly analytical reflections around what curating and art history mean for Black Canadian contexts and how they inscribe themselves within broader Black diasporic art histories. Such sustained and critical engagement with Black art in Canada would prevent the need for singular events (like the Black Curators Forum), exhibitions or texts to encompass an unduly large swath of concerns. Cumulative and collective efforts might indeed make it possible to deepen our understanding of the kaleidoscopic Blackness that exists in Canada with greater care and at a tenable pace.

Joana Joachim is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Art History and at the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies at McGill University. Her current SSHRC-funded work examines the visual culture of Black women's hair and dress in 17th- and 18th-century prints and paintings, with a focus on forms of resistance and ongoing discrimination through hair politics.

ENDNOTES

1
Jessica Lynne, "Criticism is Not Static: A black feminist perspective," *in other words* (August 29, 2019).

2
Liz Ikiriko, "Speaking Ourselves into Being," *C Magazine* (January 2020), 36–39.

Dinner held at the Black Curators Forum, 2019, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto
PHOTO: HENRY CHAN; COURTESY OF THE POWER PLANT CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

Tell Us What You *Really* Think:

22 A Survey on the Landscape of Canadian Art Criticism

"Do you think anyone will read it?"
"Okay, but did you actually like *the show?"*
"Have you gotten paid yet?"

Like any niche scene, art criticism and critics exist in tangled webs of camaraderie, competition and other contextual factors. Though we deeply value the role of peer-reviewed essays, journalistic exposés and first-person texts in exploring the stakes of art criticism, we also note the ways that the Canadian art world's claustrophobia can sometimes restrict frank public conversations. As such, rather than pontificate ourselves, we wanted to hear from participants in the field: what are their (your!) gushes, gripes, inspirations and frustrations?

Inspired by the vulnerability and tongue-in-cheek tone of *Seventeen* magazine quizzes of yore, we hoped to create a space for honest, informal reflection via an online survey. Invitations were shared with *C Magazine* contributors from the past two years, who were in turn invited to circulate the survey among colleagues and friends. With their anonymity assured, respondents were encouraged to pick and choose questions with which to engage, as well as to note any oversights in the survey's format or purview. The (lightly edited) answers below reflect a cross-section of selected responses.

Acknowledging the inevitable impact of potential biases derived from our own subject positions, as well as the limited network of respondents, we envision this survey only as a catalyst for further conversation rather than an exhaustive inventory. We are immensely grateful to all who shared their joys and trepidations, and posed additional questions, in response to the original survey. We hope that some of these conversations will continue, expand, mutate, self-destruct and evolve on and off the page to include a growing number of voices.

1
WHAT DO YOU SEE HAPPENING IN CANADIAN CRITICISM THAT EXCITES OR INSPIRES YOU?

Tbh, I read Canadian criticism to keep up, not to get inspiration (at least I haven't found much that inspires me lately).

Canadian criticism! I feel that people are attending to Canadian art/film more, especially smaller or independent work... so that's good!

not much

More First Nations curators and writers

more writing "around art" as opposed to contextualizing solely within an art historical legacy.

To a certain extent, I see more diverse voices writing and getting talked about, shifting how the conversation happens, but not as much as I'd like.

Experimental writing that challenges typical writing formulas, or popular opinions and practices.

I am inspired by how seriously Canadian art publications seem to take the push for inclusivity, and how that is being reflected not only in who is being written about but also who is doing the writing. There are potential accompanying side effects of this (such as tokenism) however in general the effort strikes me as thoughtful.

People injecting more humour and social observation into art criticism!

More small publications trying to start up despite austerity—new publications means new voices (I hope!).

Co-created and co-edited by Esmé Hogeveen and Emma Sharpe

Auto-theory (when it's done well)

I appreciate independent publications that are surfacing and the diversity of voices that are being represented … I tend to get the most out of exhibition texts from artist-run centres.

Criticism that engages the fleshy reality of seeing, feeling and sensing artwork that unsettles, decentres and lives inside you

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2
IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO SEE LESS OF?

Less institutional power in the hands of people who have always held the power. Less institutional pressure to pander to "diversity" and "inclusion" without any real action or clear mandate to address these issues, without working with the communities these issues affect the most.

Gatekeeping, inner circle stuff.

Less framing of work within a strictly Western art historical legacy. (snooze)

Reviews that invoke identity politics in under-researched ways, friends writing reviews of friends' shows but not admitting personal connections.

Timidity and complacency. White women in charge.
I think less academic jargon is super important, but I also think super lofty CFPs from publications that then are like "NO ACADEMIC LANGUAGE" is pretty... ironic. Like, if you're an expert, or even a quasi-expert, you're bound to use specific language and vernacular sometimes. So I think it's the editor's job to make sure it's not excessive and well-explained, but I think just saying "no academic language" is kind of lazy and actually doesn't even end up being enforced in the pieces I read in most established art publications.

I find it hard to read myopic art writing, that is, writing that refuses to incorporate a more comprehensive world view and is satisfied with trotting out the same tropes and antecedents.

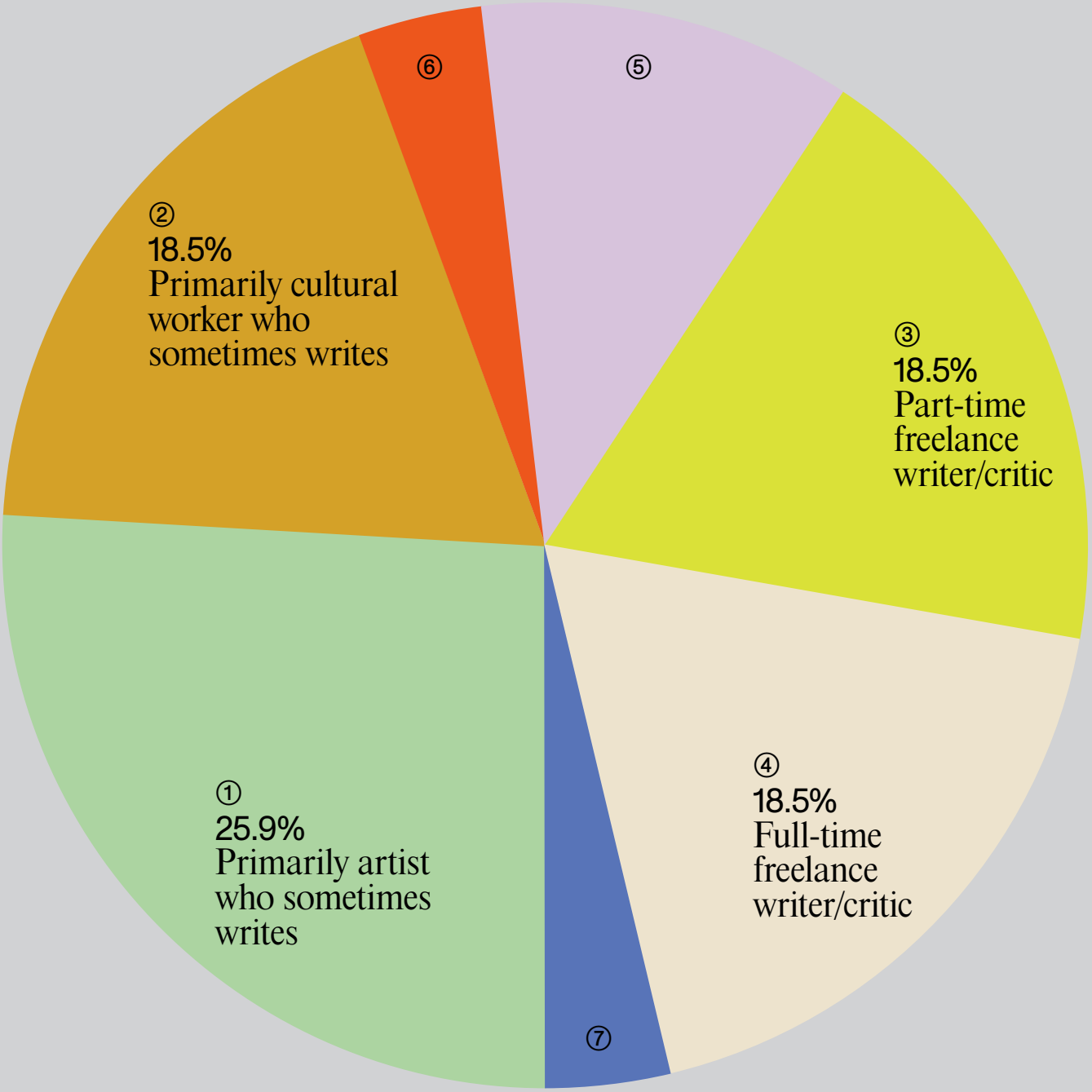
3
WHAT DO YOU PERCEIVE TO BE THE STAKES OF LEVELLING "NEGATIVE" CRITIQUES WITHIN THE INTIMATE CANADIAN ART CONTEXT? IS IT WORTH IT?

I hardly come across any "negative" critiques in the Canadian art community ... I don't think there's a culture of having constructive criticism in Canada. Not really and of course there is a big difference between slamming and posing pertinent questions.

I think people are too scared of this! Both publications and audiences are far more receptive to critical perspectives (in my experience) than conventional wisdom would have us believe. Depends on the publication and the idea, of course.

Leading question. Refuse to answer.

Depending on what part of the country you're in, you sort of end up siloed into a group of individuals all



How do you identify within the Canadian art landscape?

⑤ 11.1% Other	⑥ 3.7% Self-professed hobbyist, dilettante or dabbler	⑦ 3.7% Emerging writer who is trying to get the ball rolling

seeing the same exhibitions or talks, etc.. so it's risky because to "burn a bridge" (so to speak) by being negative about a practice/exhibition, you can't be entirely sure what other bridges you're burning along with it. People talk! It's not really worth it as a freelancer, this could be different if you were employed as a writer for a publication who will back you up and continue to pay you afterwards.

If these "negative" critiques are about the lack of inclusion, diversity or question the authority of voice that is not a bad thing. We need to have these conversations.

Yep worth it. It means we are taking each other seriously. That there are stakes.

I've learned that if you decide to write critically you need to have your facts 100% on point. When folks see things in print, the stakes feel really high for everyone and the likelihood is higher that people are going to be defensive.

4

DO YOU THINK DIFFERENCES IN BACKGROUND OR IDENTITY PRECLUDE A HOLISTIC, RESPECTFUL OR FULLY REALIZED INTERPRETATION OF AN ARTIST'S WORK?

IF SO, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU THINK WRITERS FROM DISSIMILAR SUBJECT POSITIONS CAN DO TO TRY AND TRANSCEND THAT DIFFERENCE?

Yes, I think there is always going to be a gap when you are considering work that is steeped in a different background or identity than yours. But I also think this gap is an opportunity for education and research. It doesn't have to be a gatekeeper issue if approached with sincerity and humility.

I really wish I had an answer to that question! I think this is something that (white) critics are asking themselves a lot, and most have no idea.

Writers need to be open about where they're coming from when reading a work. Identity differences cannot be transcended, only navigated with respect.

I think it depends on the expressed intent of the artist's work. If someone's work is about their lived experience and it is wholly dissimilar to mine, as a critic I don't feel like I'm in a position to analyze their practice ... I'm very much aware when my voice is not useful to add to the conversation.

I think the coding of culturally specific work and programming requires a greater investment in critical education, and a meaningful diversification in art criticism. Publishing standards and professionalization practices need to change in order for more perspectives to be given courage and editorial direction. Simply put, we as a readership need help in parsing the pell of culturally specific and challenging work. Expecting a matchmaking process—i.e. only a Black writer can write about a Black artist—would be too narrow a solution, and would only further encourage marginalization of both critic and artist.

5

IF YOU'RE A WRITER, HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO PITCH OR WRITE ABOUT?

If I feel like I can offer a view different from what's already said in the curatorial statement or exhibition essay.

If it keeps me up at night or slithers into my dreams.

I like to pitch stories that shed light on unknown art or artists in the geographic area in which I reside which is woefully underrepresented in the national conversation.

I consider the mandate of the publication, how much time is necessary to write/research and whether I will be fairly compensated.

I look for work that I respond to on a visceral level

Certainly there needs to be the sense that you will be saying something that hasn't been articulated before ... You want to push back on something, or extend it out. You want to hold the contemporary moment up to the court of history.

I write about work / shows that speak to concerns I have in the world, in particular the underrepresented voices of BIPOC, women and LGBTQ2S+ voices in the arts.

Curiosity

I feel some small responsibility to review (what I consider to be) strong media art shows—to consecrate them in Canadian art history. If no one reviews the show, did it ever happen?

6

WHO DO YOU THINK YOUR WORK IS LEGIBLE TO? ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THIS READERSHIP?

Canadian editors usually miss the boat in understanding readership in art criticism; too many assume it has to be academic or faux-academic (pedantic, labyrinthian and flush with references).

i hope it is accessible to a wide-reaching audience (i think relating art to other disciplines/perspectives within society at large helps with this and opens up the opportunities for connection with those who might not be schooled in artistic discourse)
mostly art folx and activists and that's fine

Ideally, my work is legible to the art-curious at large. I'd want them to be curious about art and its discourse, though not necessarily art-educated. Who knows if they're coming to the writing, yet, or if they ever will. I do worry there isn't enough signage for them to arrive. But carrying an ideal, however hazy, for who your audience might be is so crucial to the writing.

Artist-academics, my friends. Not always satisfied but preferable to trying to artificially generate other forms of readership.

It's always hard to know if anyone actually reads your stuff, unless they really dislike it they'll let you know. I try to write for art-world and academic audiences but mostly it feels like I'm tossing texts into the void.

7
HAVE YOU EVER ALTERED OR EDITED YOUR TRUE OPINION IN ORDER TO ADVANCE A PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL CONNECTION?

Yes. Working institutionally requires that in countless ways, daily.

Nope

There definitely have been moments where I stopped and wondered if this would burn some bridges. I burned them anyway.

Everyone tends to be more generous with their friends and mutuals. Catalogue essays are a great example of a genre of writing in which the writer, the subject and the commissioning body all usually insist that they're not exerting any influence on each other, but the text is still usually understood to be PR ... Many times I have written what I know my editors want even if it deviates from what I really think. Even the required length (i.e. short) of most pieces is a factor that doesn't allow space to flesh out reservations or contradictions.

I'm always nervous about being too critical, and have definitely felt a pressure to champion certain "highbrow" or art-house pieces that an editor/community clearly loves.

When I was really junior, I asked a gallery director for documentation images to supplement an exhibition review I had written. She refused to send them to me unless she could read the review first.

No but, while reviewing, I have tried to focus on the positive aspects and have definitely left out really dire critiques.

Not really.... but I do sometimes think I should write about more popular artists or contentious subjects if I want more people to read my work. Sad, but true?

Yes, sometimes when an editor pushes their opinion of an artwork (even if indirectly), I feel intimidated or like it's hard to push back because receiving writing contracts is so precarious (and again, the time-to-$ ratio makes it hard sometimes to put effort into fighting or negotiating edits you're unsure of).

8
WHEN YOU BREAK IT DOWN, WHAT'S YOUR ESTIMATED HOURLY RATE WHILE WRITING? ...ANY THOUGHTS ON THIS?

LOL!

It's pretty inconsistent—from $0/hour to $40/hr. my thoughts on this are HEAVY SIGHS. It's really messed up. Really, I wish people would be upfront and acknowledge the time it takes to do this kind of work.

I'm scared to even calculate it, because I'm worried that—because I'm paid per piece—it's going to make me too sad to go through the rest of my day.

On average, my rate is about $0.75/word. I'd like it to be more. But I acknowledge the financial precarity and resource scarcity that many publications experience. I'm in a position where I can afford to write for less … Maybe I am a part of the problem…
SOMETHING PATHETIC. I recently turned down a thousand-word piece for $50. It would have involved reading multiple books for research and I was tired and depressed and like... wow, $50 ... I just... no. Not the editor's fault of course, but I think these kind of sad pro bono inner debates are pretty standard for my peers, too.

Pretty much nothing! establishing connections in the art world which leads to $ eventually.

$5 an hour … I sometimes wonder how long I/my friends will keep trying.

We need to ask for what we're worth, and be unremitting and brave in our approach to having these conversations with integrity, transparency and without shame. It all goes to turning the tide for better remuneration standards in art writing and criticism. It's high time.

9

CAN CRITICISM BE TAUGHT? HOW DID YOU LEARN TO WRITE CRITICISM? WHERE WOULD YOU POINT AN EMERGING CRITIC FOR ADVICE ON HOW TO GET STARTED?

I learned by reading history, criticism and theory, and by looking at and thinking about art within its social contexts. Emerging critics should practice by going into art spaces and writing descriptions of what they see (not just the art, but everything else too). Also, remember: just because it's published doesn't make it good or right.

Writing circles, working groups and collectives are important, and often the only source of substantive, critical feedback on your writing.

I think you can teach people to be critical thinkers and strong writers. You can help people learn how and when to pitch. The rest is on them.

I would tell people to read widely, talk to artists, go to events, take whatever (formal or informal) training they can find and practice writing. Start with student publications, if any are accessible.

I attended free workshops through artist-run centres and did a lot of reading on what certain publications look for before I pitched an idea to them. My advice would be a combination of engaging in the arts community in your area, reading a lot of criticism to better understand the form and not letting imposter syndrome get in the way.

work for free for small pubs and hope the larger paid jobs start to roll in.

I would try to direct them to an editor with a publication that specifically supports emerging writers.

mentorship with experienced critics
I think analyzing texts is so valuable, and that it's good to read not only mainstream art criticism. Like, what can we, as art critics, learn from music or lit criticism? Or sports writing? I think it's good to stay broad and find what you love in writing and work those angles into your own lens on art.

The success I've experienced has been obtained through direct field work, asking advice from my peers, cold pitching and calling, failing and trying again. I've had no guidance from peers in the field. It's a small field and while I write continuously, regularly, there are certainly individuals at the helm of publications that are exclusionary. For emerging critics, I would suggest being brave and going for it. You'll know if you're on the right track and your work will improve as you write and read more.

Emerging critics should read EVERYTHING.

10

PAINT A PICTURE OF YOUR IDEAL CANADIAN ART CRITICISM LANDSCAPE; WHAT'S THE UTOPIA WE SHOULD AIM FOR?

Truly diverse representation of voices, with writers from marginalized backgrounds in positions of real power, and the ability to use this power to highlight art that has been ignored or neglected in the past. An understanding by all individuals involved in the arts community about the importance of intersectionality in all the work you do. A community that is a living thing will respond and evolve with its members, rather than become monolithic or institutional. And a real sense of fostering new writers/voices, with the money to back it up. So utopic, I know.

I would love this to be a world that felt less cagey, where I didn't feel so much anxiety reaching out to somebody who has more "social capital" in this world than me.

uHMmmmmm, oh who knows? There is no utopia, that's why we are critics. I would like to see more steady contributing / column writer positions. I think with an increase of these positions some real criticism could start to occur because in late-capitalism, within an intimate market, financial security is really at the core of honest criticism. Can't be comfortable if ya can't afford to eat! Having a reliable, constant voice increases readership also because people get comfortable with their style and feel close to them.

Respect without caution. Generosity without paternalism. Candour without artlessness. Thoughtfulness without pragmatism.

So many voices—diverse, emerging and established—that are championed and well-supported (both financially and editorially) as they sing across the provinces ... A panoply of publications, small and large, across both online platforms and print stands. A brave and unblinking ledger of support from gallerists, patrons and government funding for Canadian criticism that doesn't hew to provincialism or mere promotion.

Esmé Hogeveen and **Emma Sharpe** are writers and editors based between Toronto and Montreal. They co-facilitate a Montreal-based arts writing group, Writing Goop, which proposes experimental protocols and informal prompts for responsive writing in relation to contemporary art.

Writing About Indigenous Art with Critical Care

29

by David Garneau

With arms crossed, a Métis curator contemplates Kent Monkman's *The Scream* (2017) at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. The history painting dramatizes Canada's seizure of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children for incarceration and assimilation in church-run Indian Residential Schools. The tragedy roils in a sunlit yard between a modest rural house and the viewer. Two black-cassocked priests, a pair of wimpled nuns and seven men in scarlet tunics swarm a reserve to separate 10 children from their families, homes, language, spirituality, culture and dignity. One of the Mounties is armed with a rifle. Another, supervising from the porch, gestures to a trio of fleeing teens, but his comrades are preoccupied with easier game, smaller kids who variously run, buck or are paralyzed by terror. A bride of Christ takes possession of a toddler who reaches for a sibling clutched by a cop. An anguished mother, restrained from behind by a Red Coat, clings to her nearly naked offspring whose hand is grabbed by a "sister." A second mother tries to wrest her child from a "father" who has latched onto the child's wrist and ankle. Two Mounties yank a third woman back by her dress and long hair as she reaches out in frantic desperation to rescue her young kin from a Black Robe. The reverend has seized the dissociating child around its chest in an awkward grip that reveals underwear and flesh and foreshadows sinister intent. Two men in moccasins lie unconscious in the lush lawn and August heat. An unleashed police dog menaces the scene—or is it a rez dog barking impotent objection? Sympathetic Nature, represented by a crow and two kestrels, witnesses the apprehensions. A second crow intervenes, attacking an officer. Dark clouds roll in.

A friend, a Cree artist, appears beside the curator, breaking their concentration, and asks, "What do you think?" Startled, the curator blurts, "Kent Monkman is the Norman Rockwell of Native trauma!"

Indigenous evaluation of Native art happens, but rarely in print. It's in the side-eye at an artist talk, joking-but-not-joking at an exhibition opening or a seemingly open but provocative question posted on social media, but which really targets you-know-who and you-know-what. More positively, it takes the form of the presentation of a sash, a star blanket, an eagle feather or other form of community recognition. All express judgment. They display approval or disapproval but do not qualify as art criticism. Art criticism is a sustained examination of a work's meanings, merits and deficits. It is a conclusion supported by reasoning. The Monkman quip is an eyebrow-raiser, a harsh opinion crafted to surprise. It's critical but it is not criticism. You wouldn't publish such a thing. The curator opines orally and privately, believing they have enough in common with the listener that their meaning and intent will be understood in context. Such agreement is less certain in non-Indigenous company, and even less forgivable in an indelible and public medium.

So far, the best Indigenous-authored texts about Indigenous art are not reviews but catalogue- and academic-essays, which are critical in that they explicate the context, intent and meanings of Indigenous artworks, but do not offer evaluations. They do not ask, for instance, if one work is better than other work, nor why considering a work as art is a more productive approach than considering it as a work of culture, an elaborate utility, or a trade good. Academic and curatorial writing assumes but does not prove quality; these sites are not about troubling their subjects. That is the role of the critic. Unlike most academic and curatorial writing, the critic should not be invested in a theory and then look for works of art that illustrate that point of view; they should be humble before the object or performance, take it seriously as a work that can change our thought, feelings and behaviours, and narrate that passage.

A favoured tactic for settler art magazines, galleries and museums responding to the reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization surge is to cede display territory—temporarily. That is, they celebrate

Indigenous resilience, showcase Native pride, display Aboriginal pain and otherwise "hold space" for First Nations, Inuit and Métis whatever. That is, their concern appears to be with filling the space with anything Indigenous, rather than being concerned with the critical quality of the contribution. These actions are designed to momentarily re-present, but not to engage the Indigenous beyond that moment. Making, holding and sharing space reinforces settler ownership of these display territories; critical engagement jeopardizes authority, on both sides. A lack of critical care reifies settler–Indigenous binaries.

The consensus, at least among cultural, intellectual and political elites, is that processes called reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization must be embraced if one is to be on the right side of history. It is as if critical thinkers must display uncritical, or at least silent, agreement with these processes in order to participate in cultural discourse. At universities, the Canada Council for the Arts and innumerable other institutions, reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization are now instituted policy. While there are tactical and analytical aspects to this cultural swell (grant applications, for example), this is primarily a social movement, an affective surge of settler feeling in response to sudden awareness of a personal and collective implication in historic and contemporary injustice toward Indigenous people. It is driven by moral panic in which doing and being seen to be doing, and undoing, is more important than slowing down to consider what is worth doing. Critics caught in this social current try to avoid the rocks as they go with the flow. So occupied, they lack the firm footing required to wonder, publicly, what the desired outcomes of reconciliation, Indigenization and decolonization might even be, and how their products ought to be measured. Non-critical art writing about Indigenous art favours with recognition only those aspects of Indigenous persons that are other to the dominant. It encourages Indigenous folks to occupy the appearance of a position rather than to earn one. The refusal to engage Indigenous art and persons critically positions us as permanently in a representational rather than a dialogic mode, as transmitters rather than generators of knowledge.

Critical art writing is needed if we are to deepen the discourse around Indigenous art beyond private judgement, competent understanding, polite appreciation, the commercial market, grant-writing rhetoric and as illustrations of existing theory. However, if non-Indigenous folks are to do so without instrumentalizing, being patronizing or other flavours of rude, and if Indigenous people are to engage this work at all, we need to develop non-colonial forms of critical art writing. I haven't quite figured this out yet, but I have some inklings.

Criticism may be spurred by intuition, a feeling about some aesthetic thing's rightness or wrongness, but, before it does anything else, the job of criticism is to figure out if this intuition is projected prejudice or an insight arising from our relationship with a special object. The Monkman wisecrack compresses mixed and unresolved feelings into an incendiary device. Its purpose is to release pressure suddenly—an explosion of laughter or an implosive gasp of shock. The joke is designed to ignite a conversation or detonate silent reflection. It only works if its recipient gets the metaphor's gist and some of the critique's implications. A one-liner is a compact intuition that requires expansion and reflection to determine what sense it might make.

Jokes and works of art often express an intuition, which is an understanding arrived at without conscious reasoning. Intuitions are affective solutions; they feel satisfying. Feeling rather than reason is the measure of their truth and value. Gut instincts feel true not because they are "objectively" correct, but because they offer answers we can live with. They are right for us in a particular moment. Most intuitions are sudden recollections masquerading as insight. They are personal preferences, social and experiential learning we naturalize as instinct or spiritualize as intuition. They feel right because they conform to and confirm settled opinion. Racism is an intuition of this sort.

Such intuitions are troubled by deep social attention, including prolonged communion with people whose lives are not reducible to our apprehension. And through introverted attention—which, in the case of critical art writing, is the analytic, empathetic and imaginative consideration through the medium of words of one's own subjective processes when engaging a work of art—this work, consciousness, is exhilarating and exhausting, a luxury and privilege. It requires time, space, quiet and other mental, physical, emotional and psychic resources that few Black, Indigenous and folks of colour have in abundance, and fewer still are willing to squander on such uncertain labour. (This article took 75 of the better hours of my finite life.)

There is another class of intuition. These are true leaps into or from the unknown. Lightning strikes. Sudden illumination is followed by thunderous conclusions and calamitous yet nurturing precipitation. For the receptive, the Dionysian, the romantic, the flash is instantaneous conversion followed by a compulsive drive for disruptive action, intense pleasure and exhaustive regret. For the deliberative, the Apollonian, the classical, such insights are only comprehensible when captured and slowed, shaped by art and craft into beautiful, incandescent forms. Bottled lightning guides our imagination in a considered way, in a manner that hopefully leads to informed opinion, right and constructive action. Intuitions *feel* right, but for the critically minded, testing is required to know if they *are* right—if their rightness extends beyond a single subject and passionate moment.

For the critic, aesthetic unease is sensation seeking sense. The belief is that words can refigure aspects of private feeling into public form that we can consider together. The Monkman crack means to be funny. It means to be true. It does not mean to be mean. Its intentions are critical: to crack, to release through re-cognition, to destabilize habitual perceptions and judgments, and to encourage more interesting, comprehensive, convincing and productive readings. However, it remains a snipe, isn't criticism, until followed by beads of reason strung on the sinew of seductive language. That is, propositions that can be evaluated for logical veracity and poetry that can be sounded for extra-rational, truthful resonance.

The flesh of art writing is *ekphrasis*, the detailed description of a work of art. Because it is a form of storytelling, because it is grounded in experience, because it is humble before its subject, because it implicates the viewing subject, because it is at once truthful and interested, because it is non-adversarial, because it attempts to understand and show understanding, description is an important element in the future of Indigenous critical art writing. Description is a high form of honouring. I am currently working on two public art projects that include consultation

Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 213.4 cm × 320 cm
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; COLLECTION OF THE DENVER ART MUSEUM

with elders. They will not tell me what to paint, even when I ask. Instead, they tell stories that allow me to see content. We co-produce images; their words produce pictures written in the visual vocabulary of my mind. Descriptive critical writing does the same. It is not quite a form of judgment, more a species of world-building.

Our curator hesitates to write about Kent Monkman's paintings because both are bound within the social matrix called the Indigenous. The curator is an interested, not disinterested viewer. Conventional art criticism is said to require critical distance—well, more of an effort in that direction than a real position. Just as white male critics face a conflict of interest when writing about white male art, so too a Métis critic cannot credibly extricate their Indigeneity from their criticism. And why would they? What project would that serve?

Less conventional art writing, recognizing the fiction of objectivity in aesthetics, swims with the current, luxuriates in the writer's fascinating consciousness—so much so that the artwork often becomes a mere stimulus for the narration of a stream of (self) consciousness. Such writerly strategies often claim to decentre cultural hegemony by failing to bolster dominant hierarchies and narratives. However, the practice continues to centre individual sentience, and if that consciousness is tethered to white bodies, then the colonial corpse might be said to have resumed in "woke" form.

A related style is the non-Indigenous writer versed enough in the academic-Indigenous to know which knee to jerk at the appropriate cue. "Yes," our Métis curator exclaims, "that Anishinabeg beaded vest may be 'resistant' and 'resurgent,' but that is true of every Indigenous beaded vest. Because all First Nations people struggle to emerge from genocide, anything they produce is evidence of 'resistance' and 'survival.'" Noting this is not criticism but journalism. While this knowledge is crucial for the critic, their special role is to explain why a particular work of art is worthy of attention beyond how it exemplifies the category to which it belongs. If what you write about a work of art can be said of everything in that work's class, and you can find nothing about its special nature to highlight, you are probably doing anthropology or sociology, not art criticism. Or, the work is not a candidate for criticism. Few critics of Indigenous art are willing to humble themselves before an object. Fewer still are able to evaluate it because they lack a theory of Indigenous art and value.

In short, I differentiate between customary culture, Aboriginal art and Indigenous art. Each operates in its own art and evaluative worlds. Customary creative production follows proscribed codes. While primarily made for internal display, traditional art is often shared beyond the originating community through gifting and trade. While they may incorporate non-local materials, subjects and design elements, these works are said, by traditional makers and knowledge keepers, to lose integrity when these elements become too numerous. Just as non-Native curators determine what enters their spaces as art, what counts as customary can only be regulated by traditional makers and knowledge keepers. While customary art welcomes appreciation from outsiders, what differentiates it from the Aboriginal and Indigenous is its immunity to their criticism. Customary art and sacred art are non-critical subjects.

Aboriginal art, a.k.a. Indian art, is an epiphenomenon of colonialism. When Western art, teachers, agents and markets inform Native creative production to the point that the work, its reproductions and commentary circulate primarily in, and have more meaning for, non-Native consumers than for the artist's own community, it's Aboriginal art. Such art is syncretic, a conceptual, sometimes physical, co-production between First Peoples and settlers. "Indigenous" is the name for contemporary persons, spaces and processes in those moments when they are informed by traditional and Aboriginal aspects but endeavour to operate apart from them. The Indigenous are bodies, places, works of art and ways of being that emerge from customary, Aboriginal and settler cultures but strive to be neither fully traditional nor colonized. Indigenous is a third space—sovereign sites within settler territories. Not places of assimilation, but contingent spaces where the Indigenous is performed, critiqued, produced and reproduced as contemporary phenomena. Discovering how a specific work of art functions among, between or in resistance to these forces is an exciting possibility for future Indigenous criticism. Finding ways to do this without showing off your theory every time might make it a pleasure to read.

The jarring juxtaposition of Rockwell and Monkman offers intuitive shape to what our Métis curator perceives is a shared (Indigenous) discomfort with some *Shame and Prejudice* paintings (the series of which *The Scream* is part). The comparison is, initially, uneven. Rockwell is criticized for sentimentality, for icing over his turbulent times with utopic confections of small-town life. While Rockwell sought refuge in an expurgated America, Monkman, hijacks this aesthetic to recover and display some of what that conservative imaginary edited out. The curator's intuition, however, is that the style itself undermines the content, rendering Native trauma a spectacle for white consumption.

Monkman has made a brilliant career from cannibalizing the Western canon. He subverts, for example, the 19th-century *terra nullius* American landscape tradition by reproducing these paintings with the addition of ribald scenes of prior occupation. The copies display his mastery of dominant cultural forms, while his subversions exhibit what those forms have failed to master. Monkman defies the colonial erasure of queer Native bodies by restoring them into the dominant visual record in a form they can digest. These gestures go beyond correction and recovery, however, and include Indigenous fantasies to compete with Western ones.

The paradox of parody is that it requires competency in the medium you choose to subvert. Irony is one of the few protections preventing the artist from being mastered by mastery. Mastery shifts to servitude, and critique to participation, when the medium becomes transparent. Painting well in the realist Western tradition is not just about veracity, it is about being absorbed by and portraying a way of seeing the world. When parodic, Monkman uses dominant culture's own visual tools to picture that tradition's repressed contents. For example, his reimagining of the American West(ern) tips that genre's homosocial into the homoerotic unmentionable already there. In these works, Monkman is literally both inside and outside the picture: inside through self-portraiture, and outside as the painter. Viewers know that even though he mimics 19th-century Romantic landscape painting, he does not subscribe to that genre's ideologies of *terra nullius*, manifest destiny, homophobia and so on. Quite the opposite. He paints with his tongue firmly in his cheek. However, when Monkman deploys con-

ventional, conservative Western picturing on a sincere subject, as he does in *The Scream*, when he constructs an unironic window on Indigenous experience, the form conquers and contains the painting's possible affective and radical content.

The Scream is rendered in a neoclassical, camera-based, illustrational realism of the sort employed by Rockwell. The painting is neoclassical in that the figures are dramatically arranged in a shallow space between a wall (the house), which is parallel to the picture plane. Following the neoclassical tradition, this is not a picture of how these raids actually went down; not a depiction of a particular place, event or persons. It is true-ish fiction, an exaggeration designed to generate a sympathetic response. The adults are idealized: all are young with a similarly lean and fit body type. The house style and the clothes worn by the Indigenous folks suggest the scene takes place in the mid-20th century. The regalia of the other actors, however, is less certain; they might be from an earlier era. It is conceivable, though impractical and unlikely, that priests of the 1950s would go out on such a call in their dress cassocks and nuns in wimples; but it is a certainty that the RCMP officers would not be there in dress uniform. The priests, nuns and Mounties are less people than they are characters displaying the uniform power of the state and Church.

The Scream is a hyperbolic compression of multiple past horrors into a single, fictional tableau. While aspiring to the visceral operatic violence of a Peter Paul Rubens, or a Théodore Géricault, it lands closer to the sober play-acting of a Jacques-Louis David, or the sentimentality of Richard Redgrave. Unlike its namesake by Edvard Munch, this scream does not try to show how terror feels, only how it may appear. *The Scream* is also Rockwell-like in that it lacks interiority. The figures appear to be models collaged in from photo sessions—as was Rockwell's custom. The painting is generic. It lacks style and character. There are numerous awkward or indifferently painted aspects (especially the faces, and poorly controlled colour and lighting). Any or many hands could have painted it. While some of the figures make a show of passion, the illustrative gaze renders them actors. Picasso's inventive, abstracted and expressive style allowed him to paint the unrepresentable in *Guernica* (1937). Imagine the same subject painted by Rockwell. It would be a travesty. Compare *The Scream* with Robert Houle and Alex Janvier's anxious attempts to capture and convey their experiences at Indian Residential School. Their paintings are ruins, expressive glimpses and partial traces of trauma they dare not fully flesh. Their paintings are rough and incomplete embodiments of the pain they gesture towards rather than summon into being. *The Scream*'s wholeness, brightness and staginess feel awkward, intrusive and superficial. Our Métis curator wonders who and what the painting is meant to satisfy.

David Garneau (Métis) teaches painting and drawing at the University of Regina.

The Limits of Empath
Criticism and

36

As an editor who works primarily with art critics, perhaps this comparison is simply too tempting: a piece of writing will likely never have a closer reader than its most committed editor, just like an artwork will seldom have as close a reader as its sharpest critic.

What drives the comparison for me is a burr that embedded itself when I read this quote from novelist and line editor Jayne Anne Phillips: "[T]he line on the page is the rock solid basis of it all, completely obvious and present, unlike the murk of intention, which is so often only what we think we know about what we're trying to write."[1] Like Phillips, I think it is the job of editors and critics alike to cut through the "murk of intention": first to immerse in this entanglement, to embody the position of one who so hotly wants to convey a thing, and then to show no mercy in comparing intention to its always-imperfect execution.

The editor's inbox overflows perpetually with intent, distilled and concentrated in proposals and article submissions from authors attempting to convince the editor of their fitness to communicate an idea clearly, eloquently, with fresh insight and broad appeal.

In much the same way that the critic's job is to relate to the vocabulary proposed by an artist, the editor must find their way toward understanding the language of an author. For this reason, I've often thought of editing as an attempted act of empathy, which succeeds insofar as both parties are able to inhabit a shared landscape of meaning. My reflex is to say that editing must be rooted in empathy, because in order to work with someone's writing, you must assume what their intentions are in order to point out where they go awry.

But there's something I don't quite trust in the benevolence of this assumption. The self-described "empathic" editor moves in, often reluctantly invited, then commandeers a language that they do not (and perhaps *cannot*) possess, and imposes a stark legibility that was never envisioned or that sometimes even defies the writer's point. How could we read this as anything other than a decidedly colonial gesture? I think about it often as I learn how to align myself with a new writer's voice, while deliberating on how to align their voice with that of a publication's style and

hy: Editing Across Borders

by Casey Beal

mandate. Just how much legibility should an editor try to impose upon a piece that they didn't write? Where does the editor's responsibility lie: with the author's intention, the magazine's voice or the imagined reader? Certainly part of the editor's critical work is to assess the effectiveness of communication, but they should also be able to tell when ambiguity is generative, when what can't be known should be preserved untouched.

This is where the ideal of empathy begins to show its limitations as an editor's tool.

The difficulty is that we are always attempting to relate to each other across the innumerable lines that inform our subjectivities: our race, our class, our gender, our ability and personal history. And the more lines—as readers, editors and critics—that we need to cross to get at the source of the author's intentions, the more likely it is that we might misread and therefore misrepresent them. What gets misplaced has little to do with empathy, or lack thereof, but rather the will to relate non-hierarchically: to take sincere interest in what is outside one's sphere of experience, to listen genuinely and make mistakes, to gradually revise one's assumptions towards establishing an increasingly shared meaning.

For me, the deep problem isn't how scary and challenging it may be for white editors to work with non-white writers, or to work across any other possible variety of identity lines. The central issue is an insidious smugness in thinking that one's willingness to occupy another's shoes might suffice in coaching "proper" communication. This reduces editing to the policing of what is not immediately relatable. It turns my occupation into that of a gatekeeper and bylaw enforcement officer for some fetishized version of "Standard English," uncritical of the way that grammar has long functioned as a quietly effective bolster of the classist, colonial state. Because elitism and whiteness sadly remain the default in criticism (although perhaps there are encouraging signs that this is slowly shifting), the standard of relatability means that most writers, regardless of race, have their creative and critical output pre-emptively shaped and framed by the hypothetical authority of the White Editor.

As critics, we must take seriously the project of undoing this kind of ingrained ideology in our basic models for interacting with one another. As editors, this is a matter of rejecting the notion that our role is that of the benevolent, "empathetic," technocratic and neutral problem-solver. The colonial impulse to *save* the other from themselves is not a feature of human nature, it's symptomatic of the historical and ongoing legacy of Eurocentrism. Since it's such a common term now, the loose popular concept of empathy is perhaps overdue for a critical accounting.

Empathy, like many vague and overused terms, has become a catch-all for things that are difficult to express. Useful shorthand, for sure, but it also works to ossify living language's productive contradictions: clumsy placeholders save us from having to reckon with the fact that language's imprecision, paradox and ambiguity all do important work in representing things that we can't quite resolve. If there's a salvageable core amidst the *mélange* of things that get lumped in with the term, it is perhaps in embracing language's inability to precisely render what we do when we seek to understand one another. Given this messiness, the honest embrace of intention—shared by editors and critics—should serve as a processual guiding light, rather than reified and held aloft as a symbol of virtue.

In 2017, there was a sounding of the depths in the old-world ideologies that inform Canadian magazine publishing. Several key players in the industry loudly proclaimed their support for a hypothetical "cultural appropriation prize," encouraging authors to write stories in voices of other cultures. The fallout was mainly characterized by professionally irritating, well-fed voices whining about perceived threats to their abstract rights to embody whatever subjectivity they might please. It all served as a useful reminder of the limits of "empathy" in its narrow editorial conception. Wounded white feelings signalled a ham-fisted but earnest attempt to *really understand* the so-called other that they were clumsily still othering.

Tucked away within their conviction gleamed a bright-eyed notion that white editors should think of themselves as neutral line judges, capable of laudable feats of positional self-suppression, rather than as active participants in entrenching the divides they imagine themselves closing. Their presumed duty: to hold the line against the terrifying erosion of certainties, moored by the reliable anchor of language's immovable authority. This is the weaponization of empathy: the notion that I can lovingly inhabit your language, your experience and set it straight for you—gussy it up so that the people who matter will take it seriously. And if they're not allowed, it's bemoaned as a threat to the critical impulse. This is not empathy, but entitled violence, unaccustomed to limitation.

In this and similar ways, the Jonathan Kays of the world make it seem as though something in liberals' woeful bleeding hearts simply won't permit anyone to throw punches anymore: that we must all walk on eggshells for fear of offending someone, and that we can therefore barely talk to one another, let alone aspire to the meaningful criticism that fuels great art.

Perhaps it's true that we can barely talk to one another, but I don't think it's because we've become *too* sensitive. Rather, I think what is lacking are the tools to understand one another across vernaculars, in critical, non-defensive dialogue. My worst failed edits have been with white men, like myself, but many years my senior, and at many tax-brackets' remove. We simply couldn't cross the class lines that divided us. Probably neither of us really wanted to. In the end, that (lack of) desire was surely determinative. The critical intent, the will and intention of the editor is as cardinal as the critic's, and positions the editor explicitly, not as an objective party, but as someone who (to a greater or lesser degree) wants to understand what the critic is saying, on their terms.

A good point is often lost in conservative self-pity and over-cautious, cancel-averse semantic shifting that masks intention beneath hedged prose. How can we effectively criticize, or edit, or communicate, or understand one another across an abundance of identity lines? How can we talk at all, at a time when meaningful collective action is clearly of the essence? If we can't criticize, how can we advance together? How do we exit the bitterness of self-righteous solitude—of thinking we know what only we think, while actually thinking and knowing very little at all?

On the other hand, in the midst of ongoing genocide, inequality, imperialism and apartheid, there are questions that white critics and white editors must take seriously: Are there texts, voices and experiences that, from my position, should be off-limits? Can this be squared with a critical viewpoint? Is the ability to accurately locate the limits of one's capacity for empathy key to what makes a good critic and editor?

I think the process of the editor's productive misunderstandings is the substance of what we mean when we talk about empathy, not our claimed proximity to the experience of another. It is in the former sense that empathy is a vital tool of this occupation. I don't pretend to apply a universal standard to each text that I edit. Each author occasions a conversation with its own rhythm and rules; each text is a living thing that comes from a different place, where I've likely never been. Sometimes I am less effective because of my position or my desire. Sometimes I need to ask for help.

When the issue of empathy's limits isn't treated thoughtfully, it is treated loudly and ideologically: used defensively and bitterly to claim that censorship is on the rise, and that the white man just can't get a fair shake these days.

Ultimately, rather than answers, I can offer only a disposition toward the continued work of understanding. Risking triteness: it's a process, wherein we must start from scratch, with no rules, each time. Neither editing nor criticism should aim strictly for correction or correctness: repairing what was unruly and mislaid by someone who didn't possess the proper words. Colonialism lingers in the assumption that from a position of authority, rather than humility, we can offer a fix for the perpetual murk of intention.

Casey Beal is a freelance editor and critic who lives with his wife and cats in Vancouver Island's Lighthouse Country. He is Senior Editor of *Momus* and a frequent editor of *BESIDE Magazine*.

ENDNOTES

1
Quoted in Nick Ripatrazone, "Is Line Editing a Lost Art?," *Literary Hub* (February 6, 2019); lithub.com/is-line-editing-a-lost-art/

What Else Might Be Possible? Towards a Decolonial Criticism

In her 2019 book of essays, *Before I Was a Critic I Was A Human Being*, Amy Fung explores the uncomfortable space between settler colonialism and art criticism. The art critic, who was born in Kowloon, Hong Kong and raised in the Treaty 6 area of Edmonton, calls into question the myth of multiculturalism that underpins Canada's national identity and its pervasiveness in contemporary art. At one point, Fung writes about attempting to ask a question when she sat in the audience of a Q&A panel consisting of the finalists for a Canadian art award. Though Fung doesn't name the specific prize, it becomes clear from the names of the finalists that she's referring to the 2017 edition of the Sobey Art Award, Canada's largest monetary art prize for an artist under 40. The artists included Raymond Boisjoly, Jacynthe Carrier, Divya Mehra, Bridget Moser and the prize's winner, Ursula Johnson. The panel moderator at the award's press event represented what Fung called an "authoritative" voice of the Canadian art world.[1] Fung felt that he "did not connect with or understand" the finalist artists, which, for the first time in the award's history were entirely either BIPOC and/or women.[2] Because the moderator initiated the conversation with a Northrop Frye quote, the panel conversation stayed rooted in what Fung calls "outdated inklings."[3] The questions from the moderator and the audience expressed frustration with the artists' "audacity" to make work that was illegible to them, which implied that whiteness was their default framework for perceiving the work.[4] In attempting to align those artists with it, they were unable to imagine possibilities for discussing the artists' work beyond that framework. "Did [the artists] feel there were layers of missing knowledge between them and the dominant culture, who know little or nothing about Other histories, cultures, and experiences?" Fung reflects.[5]

"The question I wanted to ask, but never got to, was about legibility ... I wanted to know if their work felt visible here, in this context, and what were their strategies and coping mechanisms?"[6] What Fung highlights here, in my mind, is characteristic of the still-prevalent colonialism of the discursive formats for engaging with and evaluating art. Undoing that is not simply a matter of plugging BIPOC artists into a structure that is inherently colonial, for that only reinforces the normative lens through which their work is seen, as Fung

by Kim Dhillon,
with contributions
from
Serena Lukas
Bhandar, Tarah
Hogue, Kemi Craig
and Lindsay
Katsitsakatste
Delaronde

demonstrates. But if art criticism remains rooted within a colonial framework, how can it adequately engage with artists whose work or worldview does not yield or subscribe to that framework? How can we circumnavigate it, to produce meaning in a way that questions the format's own biases? What is required to be legible in "Canada" for an artist who is of a visible or invisible minority? Is the legibility of that artist's subject position necessary to understand and respectfully critique their work? What about the critic's subject position, especially if they're BIPOC, in relation to colonial modes of criticism?

This roundtable crystalizes the discussions of Feedback Feedforward, two discussion groups on decolonization and art criticism held in summer 2019.[7] To extend the discussion group from a public conversation into a published roundtable, I've drawn from Fung's unasked question on legibility and directed it to four artists of wide-ranging practices and identities. We discussed: if the colonial model for art criticism—developing from a Eurocentric tradition, in English, in print, following agreed-upon discourses on art, within a capitalist infrastructure—didn't exist, what else might be possible?

SERENA LUKAS BHANDAR

Criticism, as a word and as a model, has always rung hollow for me. What I connect with, instead, is storytelling. Rather than attempting to objectively "evaluate" art based on arbitrary standards, I invite you to ask yourself: "What stories do I tell about the art that I experience?"

Perhaps unsurprisingly, storytelling and writing are my main creative modes. I'm currently at work on a hybrid essay/poetry collection called *The Tale of the Snake Woman*, which tracks my intersecting experiences of being both racialized and transgender. The collection arises from a Punjabi folktale I once read, in which a shapeshifting trickster woman seduces a king and then is burned alive by him when he discovers her true nature. Similarly, the violence that I experience daily as a transgender woman of colour often derives from societal ideas that I am attempting to "trick" the world, that I am not actually who I say I am.

When we move beyond attempting to approach art objectively, when we consider the intersections of the artist's identity and the systems of violence under which they create, then the whole Eurocentric model of criticism begins to collapse. I don't want audiences to support my art because they can relate to it, or because it speaks to a universal truth; I want people to see me and see my experience and say, "I don't know what it means to be trans, to be racialized, but I still understand and will love and celebrate you. Your life and what you create with it has inordinate value and worth." I want audiences, and critics in particular, to embrace the disconnection they may feel when exposed to art that doesn't speak to their experiences. I want you to be comfortable with not having every word translated into your worldview.

For the longest time, it has been standard practice, or "house style," for publishers to italicize non-English words, and, especially in prose and academic texts, to offer a translation in a footnote. However, lately more and more publishers and curators have bucked that practice, making non-English words part of the text itself rather than othering them through italicization, not even requiring a footnote to say what the words mean. The words just are. If audiences want to know what they mean, they can Google them. That absence of translation—of performing the emotional labour of making art accessible and legible to all audiences—extends to concepts as well. There are so many concepts that only make sense within the context of the cultures that created them, and they should not require translation into dominant forms of discourse and language in order to have value.

What stories do we tell about the art we experience? I think, crucially, that depends on who we tell those stories to. The act of storytelling relies on relationships and community. When we take the people behind the art into consideration, and when we recognize the stories and narratives we create about the world around us, then criticism becomes an attempt to exist in community with one another. Storytelling is the only way that criticism of any form can configure into my worldview.

TARAH HOGUE

In searching for "a new framework for [B]lack diasporic artistic production," the artist Martine Syms created "The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto," an adaptation of the literary rules of Mundane Science Fiction. In it, Syms argues for a future imaginary without "fantasy bolt-holes"—common sci-fi tropes like interstellar space travel—that instead centres on humans and the future of planet Earth (as the only realistic option). She writes that "dream[s] of utopia can encourage us to forget that outer space will not save us from injustice and that cyberspace was prefigured upon a 'master/slave' relationship ... post-[B]lack is a misnomer, post-colonialism is too." Perhaps I find her invitation or challenge to be compelling because I cannot imagine a timeline without the history of colonization. My inherent multiplicity as the daughter of a Métis father and Dutch immigrant mother obfuscates this possibility. Just think of the generations of kinship relations, the confluences of historical events and the agency of individuals that overwhelm these designations of "Métis father," "Dutch immigrant mother," which might otherwise be read as political positionings or genealogies (although they are also these things). Pushing against "hard-and-fast racial designations," Adam Gaudry articulates that a failing of historical determinism is its lack of addressing Métis' agency in their construction of a "political and social entity on their own accord," across their culture, language, songs and lives.

What I am trying to articulate is an approach that confounds the naturalization of whiteness as an invisible ground (or "absent centre," as Sara Ahmed names it) against which otherness is articulated and becomes legible. How can we relate to one another, and to the world with which we are enmeshed, using terms that do not capture and close, but rather open up to radical possibilities?

Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin are performance artists and best friends, and their collaborative practice considers the moment of encounter in which "Every contact is potentially the first one, given due consideration for the constant of change." In their work, friendship and the care it engenders enters into the formalized space of performance just as the considerations informing and arising from performance leak back into the world. This process includes attending to individual and collective histories, trauma, racism, families, genders, languages, cultural knowledge and production, lands and nations; it is both an everyday practice of 合作 (gassaku)—of building something together—as well as a vision of a world otherwise. They ask, "How does this

meeting inform your experience? And how does your experience inform this meeting?" of themselves, each other and their audience, implicating all in a relational articulation of self and other.

Syms's manifesto claims the mundane—as in, of the Earth rather than of the supernatural—as the site of future world-building while Goto and Morin's everyday is a continuum of past, present and future that is equally inhabited by ancestors and persons (both human and non-human). They nevertheless meet at the limits of how difference is articulated, both inscribing forms of difference and togetherness that destabilize the very notion of cultural (or ethnic or racial) otherness by refusing fixed frames of reference and institutional cooption.

KEMI CRAIG

The accepted understanding of criticism is embedded within capitalism and colonialism. What I would like to offer, instead, is a notion of critique that centres on locations: on being able to locate ourselves in terms of our identities, the territories we are living on and the time context we exist in, in order to speak alongside makers, artists and other folks who are bearing witness to creation. Our locations inform form, and the way we read, thus informing what is legible and where opacity exists. For me, legibility is possible on the basis of familiarity, and allows me a greater opportunity to participate in collaboration with the artist as a creator myself. I am able to imagine alongside, in response to an artist's work. My reading becomes less fixed, less static and more open to possibility. My responsibility as a witness is more active in this space of critic as co-creator.

Opacity protects vulnerability, whereas legibility allows connection. As an artist, who am I asking to create with and who am I trying to connect with? The legibility of my work places Black women at the centre of knowing/experiencing. When my work is illegible, it is purposely so in order to activate the space of critical thinking and accountability for folks beyond the location I am speaking to. I think opacity and legibility can be used as devices for viewers to interrogate their locations of identity and how identity relates to discourse, systems and experiences.

I also want to be careful to not place these frameworks and possibilities as something only in the future. This work has already been done, and is already being done. This work exists in Indigeneity. It exists in the voices that make up equity-seeking communities. It exists in the communities that were able to operate within models—before capitalism, before colonialism—that honoured fluidity rather than privileging categories, that honoured decentring authority over hierarchical structures. For me, criticism is ultimately about amplifying worldviews founded in Indigeneity, Afrofuturism, feminism, queerness and accessibility.

LINDSAY KATSITSAKATSTE DELARONDE

Exploring dance, movement and storytelling through our bodies to heal our bodies, minds and spirits is the purpose of my creative practice. My practice is rooted in Indigenous epistemologies. Indigenous art is created from the land and returned to the land as an offering and acknowledgement of all its gifts and beauty. Mother Earth is present in the artworks of many Indigenous art practices in a literal sense but also metaphorically and symbolically.

Resurrecting ancient knowledge is the journey of transformation and evolution of Indigenous art in Canada. With the attempt to eradicate and erase Indigenous peoples for the purpose of Canada's mission to exploit the land, we persist to be visible in all aspects of human existence, including the arts.

As an Iroquois woman, my philosophical understanding of creation is embedded in every aspect of my culture, including our creation story of Sky Woman falling onto the back of the turtle. There, she grew Earth out of dirt while dancing the shuffle dance on the turtle's back. I honour our stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. We remember and re-tell these stories—they change and shift and continue to live inside our bodies and blood.

Creating from an Indigenous-centred worldview, with a focus on social justice, land-based and cultural knowledge, I work collaboratively and most often with a council of Indigenous women, gathering stories and igniting the fire of truths to be embodied. We gather to heal our intergenerational and historical traumas from the impacts of colonization. Confronting injustices of violence and social issues is at the heart of the work. We are invested in mending past, present and future, weaving story and rhythm using our natural abilities to orate our experiences. Embracing the complexities of our Indigeneity is a core value in creating safe space for marginalized women of colour, who have been subjected to the violence and genocide of patriarchy and colonization throughout history.

I honour and recognize the experiences shared among Indigenous women, POC and the LGBTQ2S community. My intention is to create action of resurgence and gain our rightful power and positions in our societies by embracing dance and movement. I embark on a journey of rediscovery grounded in ancient knowledge and sacred movement. Through my body I seek to liberate, restore, reclaim and resist the perpetuation of violence against Indigenous women. Criticism of our work needs to come from a place that seeks to understand the worldview from which our work comes, or it perpetuates the violence that I am actively working against.

Serena Lukas Bhandar is a Punjabi Sikh/Welsh transfemme writer and witch based on unceded Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories. Her poetry, essays and stories are featured in publications across Turtle Island and beyond, and she sits on the editorial boards of *The Malahat Review* and *Room Magazine*.

Kemi Craig is an interdisciplinary artist of African descent based in the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories. Working through analogue film, video and projections, Craig explores devices of looking to interrogate the simultaneous experiences of past, present and future.

Kim Dhillon is an art theorist and writer. She is working on a book on language, its power and artists who challenge it in contemporary art forthcoming with Reaktion Books.

Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde is a Kaniekehaka multidisciplinary artist from Kahnawake with a community land-based arts practice centred in an Indigenous worldview.

Tarah Hogue is a curator and writer based on unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territories/Vancouver, BC. *Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: how do you carry the land?* (2018) was her first exhibition as the Vancouver Art Gallery's inaugural Senior Curatorial Fellow, Indigenous Art. She is a citizen of the Métis Nation with French Canadian and Dutch ancestry.

ENDNOTES

1
Amy Fung, *Before I Was a Critic I Was a Human Being* (Toronto: Book*hug and Artspeak Gallery, 2019), 143.

2
Fung, 143.

3
Fung, 143.

4
Fung, 144.

5
Fung, 145.

6
Fung, 145.

7
In August and September 2019, the Integrate Art Society, an arts programming and advocacy organization located on the traditional and unceded Coast Salish territories, specifically of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, held two public, facilitated conversations titled Feedback Feedforward. Seven artists/writers/curators gathered to publicly discuss and explore the Eurocentric model of art criticism from the perspective of artists who are BIPOC.

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Pastoral Fail: Reflections on an Art World Call-Out

by Michael Turner

Tamsin and I are sitting on a log at Third Beach. It is a clear, crisp November afternoon and we are looking west. I ask her what she sees and she says, "This fiction." I ask if she can describe it and she says, "Rather than describe it, I will offer a critique."

Without calling them freighters, Tamsin talks of "steel hollow-bodies" backed by "enormous sums" that have come here to "demonstrate and extend the wealth of their directors." These bodies "are real," she adds, "like the robots reading our computers are real, whether we believe it or not." It was Tamsin who first introduced me to the Thomas theorem: "When people define situations as real they become real in their consequences."

"And the people who operate these freighters?"

"Drudges," she says. "Drudges and parasites."

I had asked Tamsin to join me on a walk around the seawall because I am preparing a piece of writing and she is generous with her feedback.

"Doesn't it bother you?" she asks.

"The freighters?" I ask.

"The way they stare at us like that."

"*Us?* You mean *you*."

Tamsin turns to me. "You're here too, aren't you?"

Yes, I think. *I am*. And with that, she disappears.

Merray says, "Criticism, Again," and it's the "Again" part that won't go away. Like how critics once talked about painting forever dying—until the internet smudged History into a sooty haze that, like the rebus, is no longer read and imagined but seen as standing in for something, and therefore in the way.

But "Again"—that's History's word, if it can be said that History repeats itself. Or Sociology's word. (Sociology: the study of patterned and recurring behaviour.)

Merray asked me about my October 11, 2012 blog post,[1] and if, for this issue, I would reflect on its context then and its consequences now. The post concerns an event, an incident, and to say anything more is narrative. Tamsin says I should be careful how I begin this piece, and I tell her thanks—"I will leave it to you."

●●

Third Beach is called Third Beach because it is north of Second Beach, which is north of English Bay. No one calls English Bay First Beach, in the same way no one calls the bridge west of the Second Narrows Bridge (the Iron Workers Memorial Bridge) the First Narrows Bridge (the Lions Gate Bridge), even though it is. I make this point because, as someone who lives in Vancouver, I live on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, who have their own names for the First and Second Narrows, the Lions and the beaches at the south end of the West End and Stanley Park.

The words we choose to tell of who and what and where we are have bearing on how we are seen. Presently, I see myself not as something written (to be read) but as something smudged and in the way; partly because of the words I have chosen to tell my stories, partly because... I have no idea.

The words I chose in 2012 to describe the event that Merray asked me to revisit are not those used by the 20th-century art critic, but by someone trying to convey what was told to him by those who were present there. To say that I attempted neutrality in my re-telling implies that my privilege is such that a neutral voice will absolve me of my bias.

I am biased. I harbour prejudice.

●●

"Again, from the beginning," says Tamsin.

I begin. Again.

"A man confronts a woman."

"A man confronts a woman on his property."

"A man confronts a woman who was invited onto his property to dine with a party that includes another man who, at a fundraiser, successfully bid on a catered dinner donated by the man who owns the property."

"The man who confronts the woman tells the woman she is not welcome on his property and that she is a 'cunt.'"

Tamsin asks me to put the woman first this time. But instead of writing "woman," to identify her by her title, and to do the same for the man who confronted her.

"The director of Vancouver's leading public art gallery is confronted by that city's leading real estate agent and collector of contemporary art."

"The director is confronted by the agent-collector in his private gallery, where she was invited by a member of her board to attend a dinner that this member successfully bid on, and to which the agent-collector was also invited but declined because he was invited that day onto the yacht of British Columbia's wealthiest man—a yacht that had, only moments before, returned to port."

"Why was the director confronted? And is 'confronted' the best word to describe what happened?" Tamsin asks me.

"The agent-collector was once on the board of the director's gallery, but the two fell out. There are different versions of what happened.

"Confrontation: 'a hostile or argumentative meeting or situation between opposing parties,' according to the first thing that comes up in a Google search. I think that's fair to say, given that the two parties have 'opposing' views, and that the agent-collector proceeded in a 'hostile' manner. Some have used harsher words to describe what happened that night, while others have softened their language based on the director going somewhere where 'she should have known she was not welcome.'"

"Why did you post about this?"

"I posted about it because the stories people were telling me were similar enough and unsettling enough that I felt I had a responsibility to share them with the larger cultural community—not just as someone who writes about art, but as a human being.

"Like many who participate in the visual arts, I have grown weary of the Wizard of Oz's (or is it Roland Barthes'?) 'pay no attention to that man behind the curtain' directive, just as I have grown wary of the sanctity of the autonomous art object. Same applies to our historic modernisms, which I have come to see less as a symbolic operation than a public relations venture with the objective to rationalize Modernity's colonial modernization project at a time of environmental crisis.

"In sharing this story, my desire was not simply to call out the agent-collector, but to shed light on the financially arrogant aspect of our cultural ecology, the effect money has on art (turning ambiguity into certainty), but also the effect it has on the soul.

"What you said earlier, about those freighters. I think of them as dinner guests, without a table; their degrees of angularity (relative to each other) standing in for their differences—but in their similarity to each other, as freighters, standing in for wealth and privilege."

"Did your post have consequences?"

"Vancouver's older wealth prefers indirect communication: if you have a problem with someone, you don't tell the person, you tell someone who will. That's how I was told about what happened at the agent/collector's *palais* that night, and how I heard about my own '*déclassé*' actions. But there were positive consequences, notably from an art critic who posted a supportive note on her blog[2]—'There is an unspoken ethics to airing out these stories that greatly affect professional and personal connections that imbue the very core of our communities,' she wrote—after 'Canada's National Newspaper' referred to my post in its October 13, 2012 issue."[3]

"Did it have personal consequences?"

"The agent-collector deaccessioned the work of someone close to me, someone I have lived with for the past 25 years.[4] He has said more than once that if someone hurts his family, he will hurt theirs."

"What are those freighters up to now?"

"Blocking our view of that cruise ship."

"You gave a talk once where you suggested that the shift from object production to performative gesture in the visual arts paralleled the province's shift from resource extraction to tertiary industries like tourism, real estate, money laundering and information technologies. Where is this proposition in your recent writing?"

"It's here, steering clear of those freighters. But if you're wondering about its elaboration, I don't know; I'm not sure if I still have it in me."

Michael Turner's most recent book, *9×11* and other poems like *Bird*, *Nine*, *x* and *Eleven* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2018), was a finalist for the Fred Cogswell Award for Excellence in Poetry.

ENDNOTES

1
Michael Turner, "Bartels to Wing Sang," *Websit* (October 11, 2012); http://mtwebsit.blogspot.com/2012/10/bartels-to-wing-sang.html

2
Amy Fung, Untitled, *POST specific POST* (2013); https://postspecificpost.tumblr.com/page/58

3
Marsha Lederman, "Big-name artists square off over the Vancouver Art Gallery," *The Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2012.

4
Kate Brown, "How 'Condo King' Bob Rennie Became the Most Controversial Man in Canada's Art World," *artnet news*, October 5, 2017.

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Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs, *X6*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

reviews

***Truth to Material*: Krista Belle Stewart**
Nanaimo Art Gallery
September 20 – November 10, 2019

by Hamish Hardie

The walls of the Nanaimo Art Gallery's exhibition space were left bare during Krista Belle Stewart's recent solo show, *Truth to Material*. The viewer's attention was drawn instead to the large photographs that completely covered the gallery floor. Printed on vinyl, these images coated the concrete so tightly that many of its minute cracks and indents remained visible up close, evidence of an imperfect foundation below the flat representations on the surface. Two objects, an engraved silver arm band and a decorated deerskin dress, were displayed in glass vitrines. Along with a short video playing in a separate room, these components comprise an exhibition that portrays and explores the vexed relationships surrounding objects of cultural study, attraction and appropriation.

Truth to Material documents Stewart's encounter with a European subculture, known in Germany as *Indianer*, of recreational enthusiasts of a mythologized, hyper-essentialist version of North American Indigenous cultures. Earnestly recreating the customs and costumes of particular tribes (as depicted in Western literary and anthropological accounts from decades past), they dress up as "Indigenous people" at large outdoor gatherings that last for days at a time, finding pleasure and escape in pre-modern roleplay. Many of Stewart's floor-bound photographs show *Indianers* dressed in regalia and among tipis, though a stray T-shirt or electronic device often disrupts the attempted verisimilitude of the scene.

The hobby's survival in Germany is partly due to the enduring popularity of German writer Karl May, whose 19th-century adventure novels set in the American West invigorated countless German childhoods and shaped perceptions of North American Indigenous peoples. Stewart's interdisciplinary practice often considers how archives and their materials inform historical narratives. Photos from her visit to the Karl May Museum in Radebeul, Germany, show ghoulish mannequins in faux tribal garb and a stony, ghostlike bust of Winnetou, the Apache hero of May's fiction. In *Truth to Material*, these lifeless avatars of the museum appear alongside the images of white hobbyists in costume, both functioning as emblems of the shallow and reductive ways in which Indigenous cultures have been represented, their complexities smoothed over and histories of colonial displacement erased or depoliticized.

The individual motivations behind the *Indianer* hobby appear as an indistinct morass of social, cultural and libidinal desires, though such a description runs the risk of depicting them as overly mysterious. Indeed, it should be acknowledged that in some ways the *Indianer* performances are familiar iterations, part of a long history, of racial costuming for the purpose of white enjoyment. But it is worth exploring, as the artist does, what is particular about this German hobby, how the attachments that sustain it exceed the fleeting pleasures of a costume party. The two objects, displayed and rarified in vitrines, are suggestive starting points. The title of the engraved silver arm band, *Give'r Indianer* (2019), resembles both an expression of hearty encouragement and the imperative phrase "give her." Spontaneously gifted to Stewart in a bizarre interaction captured by the video, the band is

Krista Belle Stewart, *The Gift*, 2019, Nez Perce regalia style dress and belt made for the artist by Johannes in 2007, gifted to the artist in 2019, deer hide, deer tails, glass beads, seed beads, cowry shells, sinew, acrylic paint; installation view from *Truth to Material*, 2019, Nanaimo Art Gallery
PHOTO: SEAN FENZL; COURTESY OF NANAIMO ART GALLERY

visibly smeared with the reddish body paint used by its previous owner to darken his skin. It thus epitomizes the way in which hobbyists' recreational commitment to detail and immersion—perhaps endearingly eccentric in the context of something like cosplay—becomes sinister when incited by racial fantasies. To its wearer, the physicality of the body paint may reflect the desire for a sensuous and liberated "noble savage" subjectivity, but the pathos of that figure, derived from the tragic state of being oppressed or out of place in modernity, is arguably the even more sinister aspect of this multifarious attraction to Indigeneity. A view of Indigenous peoples as terminally victimized and relegated to the past, as representable by time-frozen mannequins in a museum, proves to be a necessary condition of *Indianer* identification.

The intricate deerskin dress, titled *The Gift* (2019), decorated with beads, shells, deer tails and acrylic paint, was handmade for Stewart specifically by an *Indianer* friend she made during her early encounters with the group around 2007. The giving of a gift, far from being a one-sided expression of generosity, calls up the web of relations between the giver and the recipient in the same moment that it produces new ones. The experience can be an uneasy one, bearing the traces of past, present and future attachments and obligations. It is easy to see why, when history, violence and the politics of representation enter into the exchange, a gift could be a source of pain and confusion. As the literary critic J. Hillis Miller once noted, *gift* in German translates to "poison." By titling the garment this way, calling it what it is, Stewart invites the viewer to stay with ambivalence and mine the connotations of the word.

The museological display of the two objects invites a reading of the exhibition as a kind of anthropological exhibit. In this figuration, Stewart, a member of the Syilx/Okanagan Nation, would be the intrigued ethnographer, bringing home the results of her study of a niche subculture, the arm band and dress the "authentic" artifacts called upon to metonymically represent the milieu to which they belong: in this case, a community founded on imitation. In the video titled *Nine* ∞ (2019), Stewart moves through an *Indianer* gathering, holding the camera at a low, arguably furtive angle. She does not appear in the footage, but her voice is heard in conversation with participants, asking how they came to be involved with the hobby and, in one instance, if they had ever considered the effect that their re-enactments might have on the people whose cultures and appearances they imitate. The video invites the viewer to experience Stewart's difficult object of study from her point of view, with her personal concerns, productively disrupting any pose of objectivity that the exhibition might otherwise have assumed. In a similar disorientation of the ethnographic gaze, the photo-covered floor is given the emotional German title *Die Angst (2019)*, which translates to "the fear," and immerses the viewer in its milieu just as it destabilizes them. Navigating it forces you to move shiftily around, lifting your feet and contorting your body in order to see more clearly what your own position obscures. The top-down power dynamic implied by having the photos under one's feet, where the figures depicted are stepped on and demeaned, is undercut by one's eyes needing to be downcast in what, to an onlooker, might resemble a state of gloom.

Truth to Material is only one iteration in what Stewart anticipates will be an ongoing engagement with the *Indianers* and the questions raised by their activities. Their community, like any other, is no inert object of study but a lively group of subjects that powerfully affect those who set out to understand or represent them. The exhibition does not stage an exposé, and any didacticism that the viewer identifies must be tempered at least partly by the artist's closeness to her subject: why spend time cultivating a relationship with this group—over a period of about 12 years—if one only intended to condemn them? *Truth to Material* refuses an easy dismissal of the phenomenon, preferring to investigate the questions and contradictions of cultural, artistic and anthropological representation that it raises, even if it means drawing the viewer uncomfortably close to these dark and intolerable fantasies.

Hamish Hardie is a writer currently studying English at the University of Victoria.

On Venus: Patrick Staff
Serpentine Galleries, London, UK
November 8, 2019 – February 9, 2020

by Alex Quicho

Heading to *On Venus,* Patrick Staff's exhibition at London's Serpentine Sackler Gallery, I crossed Hyde Park on foot. Rain poured from an open, sunlit sky. A real rainbow arched over Winter Wonderland, the holiday-themed amusement park that occupies the royal lands over December, where empty rollercoasters rattled along and strains of Frank Sinatra drifted across the grass, serenading no one. Birds swarmed overhead; the river teemed with animal life; and I entered the Serpentine via automatic doors that may as well have been an airlock, sealing off the arid, burning hostility of *On Venus* from the wet and fertile Earth. Staff had transformed the ordinarily picturesque building with a number of architectural interventions that made up the site-specific work *Acid Rain* (2019)—first, transparent coloured panels arranged over the building's generous skylights, turning the gallery's vessels of sunlight into urine-hued vats. Throughout, the floors were coated in gleaming chrome, and a system of thin pipes laced across the ceiling, intermittently dripping a mysterious liquid into rusting oil drums below. A lone jellied print of an acid-eaten gargoyle, *Gargoyle (the throat)* (2019), guarded the building's entrance, cueing me into absorbing the building's new atmosphere as one that was intentionally poisoned, potentially dangerous to forms of life.

From time to time, an industrial clamour filled the gallery, superseding the slow percussion of drips and drops. Curious, I went straight to its source: *On Venus* (2019), a single-channel snuff film projected onto a Perspex® screen in one of the gallery's two central rooms. The clang of metal gates; rotors whirring; blades being sharpened or cleaving down into flesh: it became evident that I was hearing the sounds of

Patrick Staff, *On Venus*, 2019; installation view from *On Venus*, 2019–20, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London
PHOTO: HUGO GLENDINNING; COURTESY OF SERPENTINE GALLERIES

a slaughterhouse, scrubbed of the squeals of animal death. In the few minutes that I could stand to watch, a cow gazes into the camera as it is being killed; its face is caught in a lag of time, still alive as its body dies, looking surprised as blood cascades abruptly from its mouth. Another beast is yanked up to the slaughterhouse ceiling and split down the middle, spilling its guts. The found footage is treated so that its colours are inverted into biting pinks, blues and yellows, mercifully estranging the scenes from pure gore. They look like afterimages—the way that too-bright objects sear into our closed eyelids, our eyes' response to visual overstimulation, bringing to mind how a traumatic event can linger with us long after its occurrence.

Here, I thought of how Whitney Claflin, reviewing Juliana Huxtable's *Interfertility Industrial Complex* (2019), wrote: "PTSD may be the main ingredient in most of our food," a claim that I would extend to everything that is industrially produced. The slaughterhouse is the genesis of the assembly line, as Nicole Shukin writes in *Animal Capital* (2009). The blood and guts processed by the phalanxes of stationary workers, each responsible for a single repetitive task, inspired Henry Ford's lust for mass production, bringing the logic of the abattoir to the factory floor. So goes the history of the terrible conditions that now beget what we eat, wear and enjoy. Even film is made from gelatin, derived from the boiled bodies of the animals depicted—a materiality we're coaxed into considering as Staff scratches and corrodes individual film frames. These abstract marks dance across the thrumming accumulation of death, mingling between the bodies of the factory worker and the animal, each subjected to the meat grinder of capital.

The adjacent chamber houses *On Living* (2019), an arrangement of metal cubes etched with reproductions of articles from British tabloids: *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*, publications notorious for their extreme conservatism and wide readership. All feature variations on the same theme: an entirely false story about murderer Ian Huntley, circulated between 2017 and 2018, claiming that he wished to undergo a gender transition while in prison. Huntley himself is not really the subject here; rather, it's the machinery of the press and how harmful myths take mass root. In the original articles, transphobic "experts" chime in to fabricate the link between murderousness with transgenderism, eager to legitimize bigotry. All slick surface and dim, unmoving presence, the blocks are eloquent on the subject of conservative social norms: how stubbornly they root, and how frictionlessly they circulate. In contrast to the gruelling task of resistance, where tireless investment seems to yield only nominal advancements of safety or freedom, marginalizing forces spread rampantly like contagions.

Staff has long been interested in how surviving violence also requires violence — by no means at equivalent scales. Their previous video installation, *Weed Killer* (2017), cast trans-identifying actors to perform sections of Catherine Lord's cancer memoir *The Summer of Her Baldness* (2004), where Lord refers to chemotherapy as "mainlining weedkiller." Hormonal therapies, too, carry a risk of bodily destruction, with one understudied effect being a heightened risk of cancer. Conflating the two treatments, Staff taps the well of violence that feeds modern medicine: chemo was accidentally discovered during research into using mustard gas as a weapon; hormone pills are still derived from the urine of mares trapped in interminable breeding cycles. Still, *Weed Killer* ends with an irradiated ode to contamination—embracing the implied toxicity of "lovesickness," with its blurred boundaries, the intermingling that togetherness demands. It pushed back, cautiously, against the quarantine, segregation, erasure and disposability that come as off-label uses of the medical institution.

On Venus possesses no such final optimism. The show's reigning planetary metaphor expresses, not the uninhabitability of another world, but that of our own. A poem written by Staff flickers in slanted subtitles across blank, damaged film, transmitting a story of sickliness inside and out. It describes a world rubbed raw by its own harsh climate, populated by creatures eaten away by acid and medicine: "dogs with guts / full of — something / like wailing / _ and sobbing / like buildings." This is no sci-fi: as Staff says in an interview with *TANK Magazine*'s Lydia Figes, "I'm ambivalent about talking about the future; hell is now." Later, I learned that the entire gallery was once an arms cache for the ruling classes of London, who wanted weapons

close to hand in the event of a people's uprising. On Venus, the planet named for the Roman goddess of love and beauty, as on Earth, all suffering is entangled; the weight of oppression may be distributed multiply, unevenly, but its source is the same.

Leaving the central room that contained *On Venus* (2019), I felt newly sensitive to the subtext of the exhibition and beyond. The reflective floors were those of the slaughterhouse, perpetually rinsed of blood. The leaky circulatory system of *Acid Rain* (2019) turned the building into a sick body labouring, like all of us, towards an impossible equilibrium: that of desire sated, of a system in perfect balance, begging the question: what must die in order for us to stay alive? And more importantly, what constitutes "us"? Disconcerted, I left the way I came, skirting the theme park and its rollercoasters, whose mechanical sounds and juddering tracks now resembled the meat-packing plant, the swinging cars like carcasses on their hooks. I sat alone in a restaurant and stared at the shining, stainless-steel surfaces of the open kitchen, the knives and cleavers on the wall. I felt more than a little sick, thinking of the ways that we fail to live without cruelty.

Alex Quicho is the author of *Small Gods* (Zero Books, 2020), a book on drones in contemporary art.

The Shoreline Dilemma
Toronto Biennial of Art
September 21 – December 1, 2019

by Valérie Frappier

How can we think about place more expansively, and against behaviours like imposition, dispossession and extraction? The guiding question that curators Candice Hopkins and Tairone Bastien posed in response resonated throughout the Toronto Biennial of Art's 72-day inaugural exhibition: "What does it mean to be in relation?" Indigenous, Canadian and transnational artists took up this question in pluralistic ways across the multi-venue exhibition focused on Lake Ontario's watershed. Rather than perpetuate an anthropocentric, grid-like understanding of the city, a constellation of sites anchored by the lake spanned westward from Etobicoke Creek, eastward to the Port Lands and all the way north to where Black Creek flows past the Art Gallery of York University. What surfaced in response was an unearthing of knowledges that have been submerged through colonial-capitalist expansion.

In thinking of what it means to be in meaningful relation to Toronto's territory, an excavation of its histories must take place. The Jumblies Theatre & Arts with Ange Loft animated this history; *By These Presents: "Purchasing" Toronto* (2019), an iteration of their *Talking Treaties* (2017–ongoing) project, manifested as a multifaceted installation with weekly workshops at Mississauga's Small Arms Inspection Building, informing audience members of Toronto's Indigenous history and treaties, and asking participants to consider what treaty-making means to them. In the installation, a textile map of the city's river network was surrounded by piles of various objects representing goods that were given by the British to the Mississaugas of the Credit in the alleged 1787 trade for Toronto, including kettles, glass jugs wrapped in fabric, mirrors and bags inscribed with a pound sign. In the group's work, the much earlier land agreement of the Dish With One Spoon, made among the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous nations to peaceably share the region's land, is also recalled, evidencing an altogether different understanding of this land and the beings that cohabitate it. These differences bring to mind what Hayden King—the writer and educator who recently announced that he "regrets" having written Ryerson University's land acknowledgment, upon which so many others have been based—voiced: that treaties are not metaphors, and that the acknowledgement of these treaties today necessitates an ongoing commitment and obligation to action.

Loft is also author of the Biennial's *Toronto Indigenous Context Brief*, an inexhaustive working document she was commissioned to create by the Biennial to impart Indigenous histories of the region—many of which are complex and overlapping, and interrupt any prevailing, singular colonial narrative of Toronto—which the exhibition's team and invited artists in turn used as a framework in their site-specific responses to place. Reflecting on this, Loft noted that, in Toronto, "Every time a condo goes up, they have to dig down. Exploring the changes in our city means we must also examine our foundations." Such a literal unearthing materialized in Maria Thereza Alves's *Garrison Creek* (2019) at the 259 Lake Shore headquarters, an installation featuring a pile of jute bags filled with excavated soil from Bickford Park where the creek used to flow. Hung overtop the bags, a semi-transparent archival photograph of the Harbord Street Bridge showed the body of water before it was buried in the early 1900s. In Riverdale Park, a parallel sculpture titled *Phantom Pain* (2019) consisted of five flat, curved steel markers, subtly embedded in the grass to outline the original route of the Don River prior to its straightening in the 1880s (an undertaking aimed at improving the movement of polluted waters, which only left the Don more susceptible to flooding). Together, Alves's works conjured the memories of both waterways' original routes, and displaced human-centred notions of time.

Waterways and lands bear the weight of extractive behaviour, but intimate knowledge of and connections with these entities are a counterpoint to these abusive relationships, as evidenced in Caroline Monnet's *The Flow Between Hard Places* (2019). Made of Ductal® concrete, the sculpture depicted the sound waves produced when pronouncing *Pasapkedjinawong*, which means "the river that passes between the rocks" in Anishinaabemowin, creating a monument to the embodied knowledge contained within this word and the foundational connections to land embodied by those who speak it. The work's sinuosity also made reference to other flows of resistance, such as when Chief Pakinawatik and 60 Algonquins of Kitigan Zibi—located in Quebec's Outaouais region—made their way to Toronto in canoes to demand from the Governor General's Office that sections of their traditional lands be restored to them.

Flows contesting colonial boundaries were also mapped in Fernando Palma Rodríguez's installation

Jumblies Theatre & Arts with Ange Loft, *Talking Treaties*, 2019, multi-media installation; installation view from Small Arms Inspection Building as part of the Toronto Biennial of Art, 2019
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHEID; COURTESY OF TORONTO BIENNIAL OF ART

Cihuapapalutzin (2019)—*Tocihuapaplutzin* meaning "our revered lady butterfly" in Nahuatl—featuring 104 robotic monarch butterflies made from recycled cans in an ode to the sole species that migrates between Mexico and Canada. The monarchs' flapping was fuelled by power boxes on which Palma Rodríguez had handwritten in Spanish and English *Sí a la vida, no a la minería* and "Yes to life, no to mining"—referencing the mining activity in his home country of Mexico, which is overwhelmingly undertaken by Canadian corporations. Canadian mining companies account for roughly three-quarters of mining activity worldwide and many of which are headquartered in Toronto's Financial District. In their video work *Pleasure Prospects* (2019), the New Mineral Collective brought attention to Toronto as a nexus of extractive capital by showcasing scenes from the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada's mineral exploration and mining convention hosted annually in the city. Through their proposed strategy of "counter prospecting," the collective gestured to the possibility of relating with land otherwise, asking: "How to pierce the violence, not the surface?"

Aspects of the mining industry were further contextualized in a Financial District walking tour titled *The Bank, The Mine, The Colony, The Crime* (2019). As part of its extensive community programming, the Biennial partnered with WalkingLab and ReImagining Value Action Lab to invite activist and artist groups to participate in the tour, which brought to light the underlying implications of the sources of finance that feed the Toronto Stock Exchange. One such activist group was the Toronto-based Mining Injustice Solidarity Network (MISN), which works to resist and educate about the harmful practices of Canadian mining corporations in direct solidarity with affected communities. MISN addressed the lack of legal supervision holding Canadian mining companies liable for their operations abroad due to Canadian courts deeming these actions outside their jurisdiction, resulting in corporations' abusive actions often going unchallenged. The group exemplified this phenomenon by discussing human rights and environmental abuses initiated by Canadian companies—including Yamana Gold in Argentina, Hudbay Minerals in Guatemala and Barrick Gold in Papua New Guinea—as well as highlighting how affected communities resist these violations, with some cases having successfully entered the legal system.

The Biennial itself was not immune to such flows of capital, with several mining companies providing noteworthy funding to the event. What is to be said of the Biennial's decision to support knowledge production against extraction with backing directly from these funders, using its platform to commission artists and highlight activists challenging the extractive status quo? While ideally this money would be used to support communities experiencing the effects of these industries first-hand, such a flow of money is highly unlikely given that it would register as the companies' admission of wrongdoing, and secondly, that such a degree of social service is rarely the domain of art—despite art's earnest activist intentions. The question of this paradoxical income source of course concerns not just the Biennial but the wider Canadian art system as a whole, significantly steeped in questionable sources of capital. We are all entangled to various degrees and, as MISN reminds us, Canadians—whether consciously or not—hugely benefit from extractive investment, whether through our banks, pension plans and the economy more broadly. Ultimately, the Biennial's use of such funds both epitomizes and attempts to navigate the contradictions of our economic present.

Overall, the Biennial brought up complex questions around land and justice, providing space for meaningful knowledge-sharing and acts of repair to take place, the most potent strategy for which was that of relation. In the words of Loft: "Being in relation takes time, energy, and investment to learn what is in between—what holds us up and what keeps us together." With this commitment to each other, to the non-human and to thoroughly examining our foundations' flows—both material and immaterial—the groundwork for repair can continue to be sowed, watered and hopefully extended to more long-term justice initiatives as the Biennial readies its next iterations.

Valérie Frappier is a writer and curator of French settler ancestry from Aurora, Ont., currently based in what is now known as Toronto.

Civilization #1
Edited by Richard Turley, Lucas Mascatello and Mia Kerin
Self-published, 2018

by Michael Pace

Reading the first issue of *Civilization* (2018), I felt something like relief after telling myself it didn't want to be read. Newspaper is already uncomfortable—an extreme medium, with its walls of text on pages proportionate to none. It is impossible to hold, let alone finish: a confusion of stories, recklessly arranged, with a 24-hour shelf life. Filled to the margins with interviews, infographics, listicles, statistics, cartoons and more, *Civilization*'s 16 broadsheet pages are too much, though I suspect it loves its impossibility as the joke of its soul. Co-editor Richard Turley, a New York City-based designer, says the impetus to start *Civilization* came from "looking at the few [print] magazines and newspapers that remain," and concluding that they all "look the same." He expressed wanting *Civilization* to give its readers a total experience of New York City—"scattered moments in the city, what people are talking about, what they experience"—but the end result is a publication that seems more intent on winning circulation as a fashion object than as a text. Its impossible readability lies less in its unruly form or ambitious scope than in its insularity and self-commodification.

Visually, *Civilization* is as strong as it is exhausting: a black, white and yellow cacophony of content. The issue is a marvel for its sheer abundance, beautiful in its oppression. Its pages are so filled with variably arranged text and illustration as to intimidate the reader. The totality feels cynical, as if rendering the absurdity of a newspaper's mission to represent a defined local, national or global moment, day after day. How could any cipher honour the indecipherable muchness of the world? *Civilization* exhausts its own resources in trying. In places, the borders around articles break apart and the text overflows, as though *Civilization* cannot contain its own ambition while sustaining coherence. The sole relief from the paper's visual assault is in its centrefold: an advertisement for NYC-based fashion brand Telfar, the only time I have ever experienced advertising as a space to breathe. On all other pages, "information," such as a count of someone's macronutrient intake on a given day, a list of "Types of Hats on the M Train 11.25 AM Friday," or in one case, just "Human-/itarian/Crisis" in a large font, splashed across the page, fill any and all space between meatier articles, like interviews with NYC professionals or friends of the editors and long-form prose contributions. These spontaneous parts subvert the medium's established seriousness and, in their sheer volume, are endowed with uncanny authority.

Newspaper is an appropriately capacious choice for a publication wanting to communicate a city's myriad subjectivities, and *Civilization* is in a position to showcase its expressive potential as a collaborative medium. Yet it is impossible to finish without feeling like, in all its maximalism, and for all its stated aims of multiplicity, an editorial voice has keenly gathered contributions that support its own hypothesis. In an interview between "Civilization" and "Psychologist," the former wants to ascertain "whether or not living in New York makes people crazy." This question answers why the visions of the city appear so consistent across so many contributions; pieces of data about the city and its "Drinking Water Contaminants," "Crime Statistics" and "Hygiene, Vermin, & Filth" assert a coolly nihilistic picture of NYC, as if the only thing that can be quantified is the city's depravity, its psychic burden. These are stories of dissatisfied consumerism, "Adrenal Exhaustion," good pills at bad parties, shoplifting at Dean & DeLuca. The struggles of the creative class to survive in an impossibly expensive city are painted with the greyscale of hip apathy. Here, there is only one New York City, with little room for contradiction.

Cover illustration: Kurt Woerpel

The effect is a sort of filibuster—too ironic to be polemic, but wearying in its insistent detachment and unrelenting ennui. In this sense, the newspaper feels closer in spirit to a newsletter, a dispatch from an echo chamber, intended for circulation only among a particular set of New Yorkers who love to hate their city. I am often left wondering what is meant to be of interest in *Civilization* to anyone but them.

So, I am suspicious when *Civilization* reminds me on every page that I can pay to have any crop of it printed on a premium cotton T-shirt for $50. The paper is keen to circulate beyond the social network generating it, but as what? The designers behind the publication seem as (if not more) invested in it being seen as being read, in it achieving a status closer to the *New Yorker* tote bag than the magazine. The first issue's rapid endorsement from the fashion industry (the cover page was a featured print in Junya Watanabe's Spring/Summer 2020 menswear show) deepens my suspicion, as though the publication could be a status symbol from its debut, as though it was already a "cool" commodity before its contents had ever been read. Interesting, then, that its most lucid (and entertaining) contributions are its more explicit engagements with consumer experience: reviews of a Zara, spa or supermarket that approach facets of capitalism as aesthetic objects. These seem to be flickers of *Civilization*'s self-reflexivity with regards to its own consumerist entanglements, but ultimately, in exploiting its circulation to achieve commodity power as an object, *Civilization* diminishes the effect, neutralizing the contributions under its own will for marketability. If its status is ultimately its success, then the inherent joke of *Civilization* is on me, for trying to read something with no text.

Michael Pace is working in Toronto.

***La douche écossaise*: Katie Bethune-Leamen**
Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
November 28, 2019 – January 25, 2020

by John Nyman

Things—whether extracted, manufactured or discarded—are a defining part of modern life. They are also a defining problem for modern art, one which Katie Bethune-Leamen's most recent show at Susan Hobbs Gallery addresses with generous helpings of drollery, pleasure and play. Her approach is exemplified by her cornucopian list of works, in which the exhibition's series of formally similar porcelain, bronze and mother-of-pearl sculptures are titled with reference to an evocative array of objects—an Aztec knife, a teething clamp, a honeydew Melona bar—as well as to their real or imagined relationships with human subjects, as in the group of 2019 works collectively titled *Sculptures people might want to be friends with or put in their butts*. As an artist, Bethune-Leamen uses her impressions of things—what they look like, how they feel, how they make her feel—as prompts to make new things that remind her of them, or of other things. You might say she has a thing for things, with both the sensual connotations and the ironic redundancy of that phrasing very much intended. Where too many artists have sought to rescue modern objects from a world they believe merely consumes them, Bethune-Leamen finds new pleasures in that consumption, further enfolding it in the flow of *stuff* and *us* that makes up an embodied modernity.

Figuratively, the French expression *la douche écossaise* refers to a rapid alternation of contrasting behaviours or tones, much like the homonymous mixed programs of comedy, romance and horror that played at Paris's Théâtre du Grand-Guignol during the first half of the 1900s. In this sense, it offers an ingenious lens through which to encounter Bethune-Leamen's artworks, which often pull their viewers through ambivalent pairings of familiar and outlandish, placid and discomfiting, or charming and grotesque. Surprisingly, though, the show seems even more indebted to its title's literal meaning of "the Scottish shower," a 19th-century process of bathing limbs in hot and then suddenly cold water that was said to have originated in Scotland. Many of Bethune-Leamen's sculptural objects are perched on pastel- and skin-coloured rods anchored by slabs of smooth, veiny marble, reproducing the distinct look of a bathroom countertop or spa. This ambience is reinforced by gallery-spanning installations of grooved porcelain tiles—burgundy on the first floor and viridian on the second—that segment the space's walls into soft-cornered rectangles, narrow channels and arched niches in the exact manner of decorative architectural moulding.

But all of this is only set-up for an exhibition that makes a point of being bodily, even a little gross. On the whole, *La douche écossaise* cultivates an exceptional kind of ickiness, one just un-cloying enough to take pleasure in—but where does it come from? Sure, the show's ubiquitous bronze sculptures—shiny spud- and sausage-shaped lumps with palpably kneaded rumples—look a little like turds (with beautifully crunchy bits of mother of pearl sticking out for extra cringe). And okay, the close-up photographs of delicate, dewy pink flowers on the second floor suggest something from one's nether regions—an association further corroborated by the images' title: *The accumulation of pictures of your tattered asshole on your phone 01, 02, 03* (2019). But the thing is, even these pieces would just look like more modern art if not for their being situated in a space that borrows its predominant aesthetic from a Victorian lavatory. The result is a viscerality that is neither representational nor expressive, but euphemistic: objects that might be gross in surroundings meant to distract from our bodies' inherent grossness by being as polite as possible.

Euphemism, humour and irony are often seen as means of keeping one's distance. Yet Bethune-Leamen's insistence on folding the ends of such distances together, and dwelling in their kinks and crinkles, evokes an intimacy with modern life. I'm reminded of a musing from Karl Ove Knausgaard's *Winter* (2015): "[W]hat is the pipe that leads to the water tap other than an extension of the gullet, the pipe that leads out from the toilet bowl an extension of the colon and the urethra ... ?" But where Knausgaard speaks of human extension—the way we send our insides out, like satellites into orbit—Bethune-Leamen illustrates how we bring our outsides in. The print of a trampled and then pearl-and-tassel-spangled can of Crush titled *Shrimp study—squished cream soda can 02: Billboard* (2019)—a kind of cryptic centrepiece of the exhibition—phases

Katie Bethune-Leamen, *The accumulation of pictures of your tattered asshole on your phone 01, 02, 03*, 2019, iPhone photographs printed on cotton rag paper, artist frames, edition of 3, 190.5 cm × 256.5 cm × 6.4 cm; installation view from *La douche écossaise*, 2019–20, Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHEID; COURTESY OF SUSAN HOBBS GALLERY

between imagination and trash. Even the grid-folded paper it rests on evokes both cheap advertising material and a plush, quilted mattress. In bizarrely analogous fashion, the face-like, partially pearl-studded wads of white clay pictured in *Pearl blob face / Green Man 01 (no pearls) x mascarpone*, *02 (2 pearls) x gardenia* and *03 (lotsa pearls) x frostine* (all 2019) also push out and in, bubbling recognizable forms out of their bulbous masses while simultaneously absorbing us in the false interiority of the face.

Just below the surface, almost everything in *La douche écossaise* bears reference to water; like in Knausgaard's vision, it's water in the pipes behind the walls, water under the skin. The pearls invoke a direct connection to water, while the porcelain tiles dialogue with water by demarcating and enclosing its proper space. Water is in full bloom in the dewdrops of *The accumulation of pictures...*, but only behind thick, fleshy frames, which make it seem as if the flowers are being viewed through the portholes of a submarine.

Much lip service is paid to the idea of sidestepping the linear (read: capitalistic, imperialistic, environmentally destructive) notion of progress implied by modernity's objects and aesthetics, but embodying its alternatives is both a more difficult and a subtler affair. In fact, easy contrasts between the modern technologies of hierarchization and a supposedly ancient feeling of oneness have been around since modernity's beginnings. For those more deeply concerned with the problem, Bethune-Leamen addresses it on a level that is not dismissive but integrative; her modernity is both spiritually embodied and viscerally dismembered, refreshingly novel and *same old, same old* at once.

John Nyman is a poet, critic and scholar from Toronto.

***Transits and Returns*: Edith Amituanai, Christopher Ando, Natalie Ball, BC Collective with Louisa Afoa, Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick with Nāpali Aluli Souza, Hannah Brontë, Elisa Jane Carmichael, Bracken Hanuse Corlett, Mariquita Davis, Chantal Fraser, Maureen Gruben, Taloi Havini, Lisa Hilli, Carol McGregor, Marianne Nicolson, Ahilapalapa Rands, Debra Sparrow and T'uy't'tanat Cease Wyss**

Vancouver Art Gallery
September 28, 2019 – February 23, 2020

by Julia Lum

Post-it notes left by gallery-goers blanket a corner of the Vancouver Art Gallery's third floor, enclosed by a modular office cubicle. One of them reads in a hesitant pencil scrawl: "I want to be the Ocean." It's part of an interactive component of an installation by Lisa Hilli called *Sisterhood Lifeline* (2018) that makes visible the subtle acts of protest and resistance by First Nations *vahine* ("women" in Tinata Tuna, the language of the Gunantuna) who have found themselves hemmed in by stultifying Eurocentric corporate work cultures. A series of voice-recorded testimonies and large-scale photographs of *vahine* in poses of protection and solidarity exceed the boundaries of the cubicle, which by contrast stands as a homogenous container of bodies, identities and ways of being. But what would it mean to be the Ocean in a white cube?

Just as thousands of Pacific Islands have disappeared into the colour-field blue of Western Mercator projection maps, artists who trace their heritage to Indigenous Oceania and the Pacific Islands have remained largely outside the focal range of Canadian art institutions. This geographic myopia is the result of economic agendas that have historically favoured

art of the Pacific *Rim* rather than the Pacific as a vast and diverse region, for one. The Canadian art system's politesse of "recognition"—a kind of asymmetrical *misrecognition* borne of settler colonial state structures, as scholar Glen Coulthard argues—has resulted in numerous exhibitions featuring Indigenous artists, but within a liberal exhibitionary model that often tethers Indigeneity to certain fixed and preconceived territorial and culture-area categories. Art institutions—even ones so close to the water's edge—have often lost sight of the ocean's reach. And, with it, have neglected to bring into vision the movements, voyages and migrations that have long carried Indigenous peoples and their belongings across waters.

For these reasons, *Transits and Returns* marks an important intervention. Spanning an entire floor, the exhibition features the work of 21 Indigenous artists from local First Nations and from communities throughout (and beyond) the Great Ocean, which is one of the terms for the Pacific referenced in the exhibition. *Transits and Returns* is the third in a series of exhibitions co-curated by Tarah Hogue, Sarah Biscarra Dilley, Freja Carmichael, Léuli Eshrāghi and Lana Lopesi (the previous iterations were hosted at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane and Artspace Aotearoa in Auckland, respectively). The voices of participating artists and curators, as well as their families and community elders, guide the viewer via an accompanying audio program. This dialogic, rather than closed, interpretive model manifested by the project's sizeable curatorial team suggests a number of ongoing and evolving conversations. Emblematic of this approach is a 12-seat dining table installation by members of BC Collective (Cora-Allan Wickliffe and Daniel Twiss) titled *Hākari as guests* (2019)—*hākari* meaning "to feast" in the Māori language—which features Niuean hiapo (bark cloth) placemats, Lakota ceramics and a wallpaper by contributing artist Louisa Afoa that serves up images of Samoan foods. Think of this dining room as a stage—in 19th-century Aotearoa (New Zealand), hākari feasting was quite literally staged on gigantic platforms as a type of competitive hospitality—for the kinds of reciprocal trans-Pacific conversations the artists and curators invite us to absorb. Many of these conversations seem to stem from the question: how can global Indigenous art networks highlight contexts of movement and migration while also taking care not to elide ancestral connections to place and the local?

Such a question has prompted the arrangement of works into porous themes like "Roots and Routes," "(Re)turning" and "Representation." The implicit themes of material memory and material intelligence equally wend their way through each gallery. The rotunda, which connects two halves of the exhibition, also unites the ancestral Sḵwx̱wú7mesh and Kānaka Maoli heritage of artist T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss; among the many lines Wyss follows are paths back to Hawai'i and to Kanaka Ranch (Coal Harbour) where her maternal ancestors made a home. Included in the display there is a ceremonial cape created for the artist's daughter that carries the name *Shḵwen' Wew'shḵem Nexw7iy'ay'ulh (To Explore, To Travel by Canoe)* (2018). Its warp of red cedar bark and its weft of twined coconut hull fibre, wool and pandanus leaf gather together plants from across the ocean.

In fact, some of the most powerful moments in the exhibition overlay multiple experiences of place. Carol McGregor's masterful *Skin Country* (2018) revitalizes the possum-skin cloak technology used by her Wathaurung ancestors in what is now Victoria, Australia. Bound together with kangaroo sinew, historic possum pelts traced the stories of their owner's clan and territory in ochre. Made in consultation with local elders, McGregor's *Skin Country* maps the collective knowledge of plants native to the Maiwar (Brisbane) River area in Queensland with a visual and mnemonic inventory. The monumental painted cloak faces Inuvialuit artist Maureen Gruben's quietly devastating *We all have to go someday. Do the best you can. Love one another.* (2019). With ancestral territory bordering the Arctic Ocean, Gruben—like Wyss—follows intergenerational pathways using material metaphors. Against a canvas of stretched deer hide are tracks of paint, steel grommets and precisely cut holes charting both caribou migrations and the angiogram blood vessel patterns of her late father, the hunter, trapper and transport entrepreneur Eddie Gruben. The work is mounted to cast a shadow on the wall behind it, pierc-

Carol McGregor, *Skin Country*, 2018, possum skins, charcoal, ochre, binder medium, waxed thread; installation view from *Transits and Returns*, 2019–20, Vancouver Art Gallery
PHOTO: CARL WARNER; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

ing a doubled pathway with negative trails of light.

Several of the artists chart a course into ancestral futures: *Magellan Doesn't Live Here* (2012–17), a film by Mariquita "Micki" Davis, for example, seeks to dislodge narratives of Western maritime "discovery," following the passage of a replica of an 18th-century-style Chamoru outrigger canoe (called by its makers the *Sakman Chamorro*) on its journey to Guåhan (Guam) from San Diego. Davis follows the Chamoru diasporic communities in California who crafted and dispatched the vessel to Guåhan as a gesture of return: to language, to ceremony and to ancient systems of star navigation. The canoe makes its trans-Pacific voyage via freighter due to seasonal storms, and Davis's final scene is a double-exposed footage of a plane's arrival into Guam's airport and the Sakman's welcome into harbourage. This scene parallels the disjuncture of travel itself, which produces in the traveller a longing to align temporal and positional coordinates that are simultaneous yet out of joint. Lingering over this moment of the film is the question carver and historian Mario Borja asks of his Chamoru relations in Guåhan: "I brought this for you and can you accept me?"

Transits and Returns asks us to look beyond certain institutional frameworks that fix Indigenous art, toward the moving points on the ocean's horizon. The exhibition's collaborative incubation in Brisbane (notably also the home of the Asia Pacific Triennial) and its subsequent iteration in Vancouver point the way toward multiple hemispheric reorientations.

Julia Lum is an art historian who writes about landscape, empire and visual cultures of colonialism. Raised in Vancouver, she is currently based in Los Angeles, where she is Assistant Professor of Art History at Scripps College.

***Sontag: Her Life and Work*: Benjamin Moser**
Harper Collins, 2019

by David Balzer

The gist of Benjamin Moser's recent 800-page biography of Susan Sontag is that there were two of her: the "Susan" and the "Sontag." If this has been a common dilemma of the celebrity who is now anyone with access to a camera phone—the projected persona and the private, vulnerable person, guarded close—it has also been a queer passing thing. Traits are turned on and off according to when and where it feels most safe to do so. The hand on the switch is generally thought to be the brain, the conscious mind. And so, another dilemma of Susan Sontag's in this very queer biography by a queer author: disembodiment, and the question, if I don't have my brain, what do I have?

In this way, *Sontag* makes a paradox of its subject's lifelong critical analysis of how thinking in metaphors can be vulgar, reductive, violent, unsatisfactory. Why not, Sontag asked in works such as "Against Interpretation" (1966) and *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), focus on what *is* rather than what *is like*? Sontag's closeted desire for women scrambled this conviction (she never wrote about being gay, and was terrified of being outed by the media). So did her self-awareness as a public intellectual, a girl of the zeitgeist dependent on what she published to represent her, only to dismiss it months or years later like last season's slacks. (In 1973, *The Harvard Crimson* wrote of Sontag, "When the cultural wind shifts, she rustles in the breeze.") What Sontag eventually demanded of her life, Moser suggests, became the opposite of what she demanded in her criticism: take me for what I am like, for what I aspire to, for whatever I choose to give you. Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. Consequently, a reader splashes through *Sontag*'s first half and feels cold, creeping shadows in its second. The utopia of queer ambition; the apocalypse of its praxis.

It is indeed thrilling to read a biography that focuses so vibrantly on the formative development of a queer intellect. At *Sontag*'s start, nothing feels tragic even when it should. Susan's remote alcoholic mother, Mildred ("the queen of denial"), sips vodka on ice from a tall glass while asking guests if they'd also like some water. (Moser compares her, and later Susan, to Joan Crawford.) When Susan's family moves to Tucson, Susan is so pleased with the minimalist desert landscape that she hugs a cactus. Susan is desperate to become popular, and succeeds. (Of the bunk beds she shares with her sister Judith: "Susan inevitably was on top.") Moser's description of Susan's high school years in Sherman Oaks, California—"bleak and intellectually starved"—recalls Rosalind Russell's Auntie Mame, who dictates flamboyantly to her memoirist, "how bleak was my puberty."

Sontag's queerness is Moser's chief fixation. She wanted to abolish "distinction[s]," he writes, "not because she was Jewish. Because she was gay." In a chapter entitled "The Color of Shame," Moser includes the key, queer lines from *Reborn* (2008), the first published volume of Sontag's journals: "the incipient guilt I have always felt about my lesbianism—making me ugly to myself," and, from a later entry, Sontag's resolve to use writing as a weapon, because "my desire to write is connected with my homosexuality." Moser stresses Sontag's reading of Djuna Barnes's cult-classic lesbian novel *Nightwood* (1936), whose decadent characters blur what is and what is like. Sontag's first girlfriend, Harriet Sohmers, would use "Have you read *Nightwood*?" as a pickup line. (Hot.) Sontag slept with 36 people in her second year at Berkeley, the lovers' names listed in her journal under the title "The Bi's Progress."

When Moser tells of 17-year-old Sontag marrying 27-year-old academic Philip Rieff after knowing him for a week, things take a turn. What is like becomes horrific: Sontag reads *Middlemarch* (1872) during this time and realizes she is exactly like George Eliot's heroine, Dorothea Brooke, who marries the feckless, musty intellectual Edward Casaubon. What is becomes unfathomable: Sontag gets pregnant but ignores her body, thinking, when her water breaks, that she has peed the bed. Sontag's intellectual identity is severed: she ghostwrites the book still attributed to Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (1959). Few Sontag studies dwell on this book as Sontag's official first, and Moser's use of the phrase "she writes" while quoting from it feels defiant.

Among the subsequent stories about post-divorce, Bright Young Thing Sontag, the queer encounters stand out: playwright María Irene Fornés (she "could make a rock come," says Sohmers), the duchess Carlotta del Pezzo (Garbo-esque in her druggy indolence), Cocteau star Nicole Stéphane (she and

COVER PHOTO: Richard Avedon, *Susan Sontag, April 10, 1978, New York City*, 1978
PHOTO © THE RICHARD AVEDON FOUNDATION; COVER IMAGE COURTESY OF HARPER COLLINS

Carlotta were two of the "four hundred lesbians in Europe," according to Sontag), Camille Paglia (who did not fuck Sontag but named her as rival, trying unsuccessfully to start a "trashy literary [feud]"). Sontag had passionless sex with Warren Beatty and Robert Kennedy, and her first male-induced orgasm with John F. Kennedy aide Dick Goodwin (yes, his real name). "Oh shit," Sontag recalled of the orgasm. "Now I'm just like everybody else."

She most certainly was not. In fact, it's always been a sport to try to cut Sontag down to size, and though Moser acknowledges this, he does it too, in passages that can feel extraneous, competitive and bitchy. (One rarely goes to a biography for in-depth negative criticism of the subject's body of work.) Sontag's musings on the Cuban revolution are, Moser writes, "fuzzy, unsubstantiated." Like a bad editor, Moser chastises Sontag for what makes her herself—her shoot-from-the-hip, epigrammatic style. Sontag may have been a dilettante in Vietnam, but at least she had the courage to go, and to write, in 1967's "What's Happening in America," that "the white race *is*"—italics hers—"the cancer of human history." (As a cancer survivor, Sontag would later apologize for the metaphor, nothing else.) Moser also jabs at Sontag's body and its functions, recalling David Plante's pseudo-misogynist characterization of Germaine Greer in *Difficult Women* (1983). Sontag loved "excremental food," such as chicken feet (she'd chase down the dim sum cart for them), and had difficulty bathing regularly (probably due to her lifelong struggle with depression, a connection Moser doesn't make).

Sontag's exceptionalism was her own undoing. In no uncertain terms, her later-in-life relationship with photographer Annie Leibovitz was abusive, and though Leibovitz would take Sontag's merciless criticisms about not being smart enough in valiant stride, Moser makes them painful to visit. "They were the worst couple I've ever seen in terms of unkindness, inability to be nice, held resentments," Sontag's son, David Rieff, is quoted as saying. "I said to [Susan] more than once, 'Look, either be nicer to her or leave her.'" When Sontag had her last, fatal bout with cancer, Rieff would, at times, refuse to come to her bedside. After her negative prognosis, Sontag would claim to a doctor's assistant to have "no spiritual values" and "no friends." (On her deathbed, she preferred watching Old Hollywood musicals to Bergman films.)

Terry Castle's 2005 *London Review of Books* essay "Desperately Seeking Susan" is a loving lampoon of a sometime lover. Castle writes of how Sontag told her about being in Sarajevo, where Sontag put on a production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* during the Bosnian War. In Palo Alto, Sontag conveys to Castle what it's like to dodge sniper fire, ducking in and around Restoration Hardware in her drapey "intellectual diva outfit." But Moser's depiction of what Sontag did in Sarajevo is not funny, not camp. In Sarajevo, the distinction between what is and what is like had to dissolve for Sontag, not only because of the brutality of war, but also because of the imperative to relate. Risking one's life to uphold the humanizing aspects of art and culture, seeing art and culture as sustenance itself when everything else falls away—that is a queer thing, too.

David Balzer is a writer, editor and educator living in Tkaronto/Toronto. He is the author of the short-fiction collection *Contrivances* and the nonfiction study *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*.

ᐃ: Joi T. Arcand, George Arlook, Pierre Aupilardjuk, Esaias Beardy, Nick Beardy, Elizabeth Flett, Philip Hakuluk, Jeremiah Harper, Stanley Houle, Peter Inukshuk, Toona Iquliq, Octave Tigumiak Kappi, David Keno, Dwight Keno, Jacob Keno, Nelson Keno, Saunders Keno, Jonas Little, Anthony Manernaluk, Paul McKay, John Pangnark, Yvo Samgushak, Robert Tatty and unidentified artists
Winnipeg Art Gallery
November 8, 2019 – ongoing

by Noor Bhangu

The first time I learned about linguistic empathy—the practice of listening to someone else in the absence of a shared language—I was attending Winnipeg-based artist Hassaan Ashraf's presentation at the 2018 Conference of the Universities Art Association of Canada, held at the University of Waterloo, and Ashok Mathur was reflecting. Ashraf was sharing his recent body of work, *Saadi Saqafat (Our Culture)*, in which he produced Urdu transliterations of English texts addressing epistemic and systemic violence, in the attempt to illustrate the paradox of experiencing racism in the settler colonial state of Canada, while being complicit in it. From where I stood, I saw in this work a slow cancellation of both English and Urdu readers and everyone else as aimless recruits in the decolonial project. However, Mathur articulated a profound extension of Ashraf's work and an exit out of this bind; here, I'm paraphrasing, and adding my own inflection: "If linguistic difference can be used to alienate groups from each other, then it could also be re-mediated to bring them closer to the surface, to empathize." I have since wondered what forms such surfacing might take, especially if it was activated between groups that have been simultaneously marginalized by the colonial state, and find myself looking to Indigenous artists and curators to understand the ways in which they have negotiated enforced linguistic suppression within and amongst their communities.

This search eventually brought me to a collection-based group exhibition, ᐃ, curated by Jaimie Isaac and Jocelyn Piirainen, which brings together sculptural works by First Nations and Inuit artists. This exhibition was exciting, not least because it was one of the few in Canada to explicitly curate under the banner of 2019 as the United Nations' designated International Year of Indigenous Languages. Naming the research and exhibition project ᐃ is significant in that it is a symbol that translates to "I," in both Inuktitut and Anishininiwak syllabics, thus appropriate for negotiating the ways in which both linguistic groups have endeavoured to practice self-determination for themselves and in solidarity.

ᐃ is presented in the vestibule of the Muriel Richardson Auditorium at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG). Bringing event attendees and gallerygoers alike through its neon hail is ᓂᓄᐦᑌ ᓀᐦᐃᔭᐚᐣ *(ninohtē-nēhiyawān)* (2017) by Joi T. Arcand, produced for the landmark *Insurgence/Resurgence* exhibition, curated by Julie Nagam and Jaimie Isaac in 2017, and recently acquired for the WAG's permanent collection. Translating to "I want to speak Cree," Arcand's is the only contemporary work in the exhibition and quite literally sheds light on the selection of historical stone carvings produced by The Ministic Sculpture Co-operative in Garden Hill First Nation, Manitoba, and clay sculptures from the Rankin Inlet Co-operative in Nunavut.

While the didactics for this exhibition are brief, thus pointing to the amount of scholarly work still needed to be done on these two Indigenous art collectives, they still provide some historical insight on their artistic and educational overlaps. The Ministic Sculpture Co-op travelled to Rankin Inlet in 1968 to learn about Inuit stone carving and also to understand the ways in which Arctic arts co-ops organized themselves and advocated for their practices. Unbeknownst to the Ministic group, it was also at this time that a ceramics program was introduced to the Rankin Inlet

Installation view from ᐃ, 2019-20, Winnipeg Art Gallery
PHOTO: SERGE SAURETTE; COURTESY OF WINNIPEG ART GALLERY

artists by the federal government's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Through the use of textbooks and samples, artists were educated about the methods, forms and aesthetics of Indigenous pottery from southern Canada. The result of this confluence between the two groups at this particular time was an ambitious production of stone and clay sculptures, only a small grouping displayed here, drifting between Abstraction, Surrealism and Zoomorphism.

Walking through the curators' imaginative reconstruction of this period of high artistic experimentation and exchange, it becomes difficult to discern what might be attributed to artists from the North, and what might characterize the stamp of the South. Experimental in their own right, the curators brought together such diversity not by isolating or providing verbose descriptions, but by creating aesthetic or affective overlaps between the two collections. For example, in one vitrine, a natural affinity is drawn between four arthropodal sculptures produced by Dwight Keno, Peter Inukshuk, Nick Beardy and George Arlook. The creatures are sculpted in the round and in semi-relief, their shared playfulness moving beyond the surface of representation to animate the joys of their makers, breaking rules of both form and material previously fixed upon them. Because, according to Isaac and Piirainen, there is little archival evidence of these groups' activities both together and apart, we are left to imagine what Beardy, from Manitoba, would have seen in the work of Arlook, from Nunavut, or if their simultaneous attempts to borrow from each other's methods would have given them a common visual language with which to speak to one another, and be understood. The joy of this exhibition comes from revelling in this cross-pollination, and speculating about its effects on the parties involved.

The Ministic sculptures have been in the WAG's custody since the 1960s, whereas the Inuit clay sculptures entered the collection in 2016 as a result of a long-term loan from the Government of Nunavut to support the gallery's ongoing curation of Inuit art. In creating this seemingly unprecedented encounter, the curators join a global discussion on the responsibility to indigenize and decolonize Western museum collections, and share a unique historical exchange. In re-positioning the work of First Nations and Inuit artists around Arcand's contemporary plea, "I want to speak Cree," the curators tug at a collective desire to use language as a means to transcend limitations placed on Indigenous culture, historically, and build cross-cultural empathies. *Δ* brings me to the surface and holds me there, as if to spell out the vastness of this decolonial universe.

Noor Bhangu is an emerging curator and scholar of South Asian descent, currently based between Winnipeg, Treaty 1 and Tkaronto/Toronto.

***Solitaire*: Julian Hou and Anne Bourse**
Cassandra Cassandra, Toronto
September 7 – 29, 2019

by Kate Kolberg

The Jekyll and Hyde relationship between solitude and loneliness is a known feeling to most. There is Solitude, she who is comfortably alone, and then there is Loneliness, she who is sad because she is alone—distinct but yoked states of being. Recently, however, within this prolonged state of hyperconnectivity—where the opportunity for both physical and psychical aloneness is minimal—it seems that solitude is increasingly mistaken for loneliness, or, if not that, some apathetic intervening feeling. Standing in the empty corridor between the personal, handmade contributions of Anne Bourse and Julian Hou in the two-person exhibition *Solitaire* at Cassandra Cassandra, I wonder: within this condition of ready connection and constant pseudo-companionship, is solitude something that needs to be practised, manifested, displayed? After all, Solitaire is a game intended for one.

It is as if the small, square-shaped gallery has an invisible line drawn diagonally across the room, so that Bourse's work sits across from Hou's, like opponents in a boxing match. But their works do not mingle physically, making *Solitaire* more like two isolated tableaux or single-player games—not one, but two solitudes that have been decisively exhibited together. In Bourse's corner, on the ground beneath an arrangement of automatic drawings on the wall sits a book of similar drawings with the words HIDDEN THOUGHTS (also the name of the work, 2018) in block letters on the cover. The drawings are somewhat frenetic and child-like, ranging from representational to more symbolic, and, as the title suggests, they allow for a jumbled insight into Bourse's own psychic topography. Throughout, we are invited into her illustrated waggish imaginings of "H Club," a henhouse-cum-dance club that a friend started when he was 12 years old. Over in Hou's corner sits a neatly patched stitched quilt, *Untitled* (2019), folded into a square so that only a fraction is entirely visible, forming an easy relationship with the so-called hidden thoughts of Bourse's book, together opting for a level of concealment within the exhibition's call to externalize interiority—mirroring the need to ration ourselves out in today's culture of online sharing.

Not only is each artist's work suggestive of personal disclosures, but they are both based in craft of sorts, constructed through a thoughtful engagement between the artist and the material. To me, this signals a potential pleasure, one found with the self through an activation of the body, engaged in time spent alone, making. Bourse's *Two or three pillows for Marge getting high on episode 559 and one that I stole from the homeless along the ring road with both pleasure and guilt* (2018–19)—a gathering of pillows on the floor, all hand-sewn from dainty silk crepe satin and illustrated with pen and marker in a manner alike to her book—demonstrate not only material but also conceptual comfort, literally cushioning her navigation of solitude in an aesthetic that represents its unstraightforward, unique tangle. For Hou, these ideas come to life in *Body truce* (2019), a silk, patchworked robe constructed from an assembly of rectangular, coloured fabrics. Some patches feature text divined from an adaptive reading of a Thoth tarot deck written for a play, *Cloudcuckooville* (2017–ongoing), he is co-creating with his partner, artist Tiziana La Melia. What materializes is a personal object made by and for the body, in a practice of slow engagement with the self and its needs. Hou described to me how, in both the robe and quilt, the fabric pieces conduct a type of healing in part through their "function as con-

Anne Bourse, *Two or three pillows for Marge getting high on episode 559 and one that I stole from the homeless along the ring road with both pleasure and guilt*, 2018–19, pen and markers on silk crepe satin, cotton dyed with acrylic ink, various textiles, found cushion, kapok filling; installation view from *Solitaire*, 2019, Cassandra Cassandra, Toronto
IMAGE: COURTESY OF CASSANDRA CASSANDRA

tainers of energy and history." These objects are intentionally dear, grounding Hou as he moves through new spaces, and appealing to his expressed interest in bringing the personal into the public setting of the gallery.

In a sense, *Solitaire* is a presentation of mindfulness. Over the past decade or so, there has been an observed rise in mindfulness practices—exercises of thoughtful engagement with one's physical, emotional, mental awareness that include craft, yoga, meditation or forms of alternative healthcare, to name a few. (Coincidentally, as I wrote the pitch for this piece, I received a rather felicitous newsletter from the Gardiner Museum, for which the subject line read: "Clay and mindfulness: Find your centre this fall." Inside, it quoted an article from *The Guardian* titled "Throws of passion: how pottery became a refuge from our hyperconnected times," which reads: "It is literally impossible to look at your phone while you are making a pot.") It would seem the incitement behind such a rise is clear: How do we temporarily allay the virtually inescapable compression of this networked landscape? Or, more simply, *for-the-love-of-god*, how can we stop our hands from robotically picking up our phones like clockwork? It strikes me as baleful that our last hope for refuge from hyperconnectivity is a literal physical impossibility from participating, and that *this* is why you should try clay-making. Though this desire for refuge has begun to represent itself in our appetite for art, too, through a growing resurgence of interest in the one-off, the hand-worked and process-based mediums—a hypothesis *Solitaire* confirms. To witness the diligent, effortful practices of Bourse and Hou exhibited as two exercises in solitude, aligns well with this somatically inclined zeitgeist.

Sitting side-by-side but nowhere infringing or overlapping—like lovers silently reading across the room from one another—this pairing of artists puts emphasis on the individual journey of practising and formulating a happy aloneness, together. Their work demonstrates hours of artisan labour, which seems to imply that Bourse and Hou not only accept the joys of being alone, but also relish the opportunity to materialize this sensation, each intelligently attuning the messiness of sentiment for public display. All seen, *Solitaire* is indicative of a push-back, a type of resistance to the eradication of a contented aloneness, and begins to characterize new ways of observing and honouring states of aloneness in and amongst others.

Kate Kolberg is based in Toronto, and is the co-owner of Sibling.

#GetMad: Rendezvous with Madness Festival
Workman Arts, Toronto
October 10 – 20, 2019

by Justice Walz

My experience with Workman Arts's annual festival, Rendezvous with Madness (RWM), began at the opening reception. I arrived anxious, on account of anticipation and a generalized anxiety disorder, still shaking with palms sweating from the panic attack I'd experienced on the way over. Upon entering, I stole a nervous glance at my phone to see if my eyes were still puffy from the involuntary tears that had fallen mid-panic. I cringed at the incongruity of hiding evidence of my mental illness while attending the world's largest, longest-running mad-positive arts festival—and yet, I took a minute to compose myself before joining the crowd. Shirking potential social interaction, I made my way down a quieter hallway. Here, I came across Alison Crouse's *Devastation Portraits* (2019) and realized I was exactly where I needed to be. Each portrait featured the same subject, lying face down, in an overt display of grief amidst a backdrop of bystanders unfazed by her public collapse—their apathy humorously juxtaposing the clear distress and vulnerability of her position. I couldn't help but empathize with these images. Crouse's performance portraits candidly capture

the prevailing attitude toward mental illness from the public sphere—chary of engaging with madness, the bystanders lean away from the situation.

In capitalist society, where one's success or failure is deemed the onus of the individual, precarity is often seen as a personal failing and is thus met with disdain. Dominant discourse pathologizes madness as a dysfunction within the individual, conveniently dismissing the overarching social, political and economic issues that marginalize the affected. Mainstream coverage of mental illness, such as the trending commoditization of self-care and brand-first corporate activism of campaigns like #BellLetsTalk, remains deluged by liberal empathy and void of any actual social or systemic change. In contrast to these surface-level discussions, RWM delivered refreshing narratives divergent from the stigma-based tropes and clinical textbook definitions that litter our collective understanding of madness. Comprised of films, artworks and live performances, the festival created a space for validation and communal healing through intersectional works that effectively inform and humanize perceptions of mental illness and addiction.

The spotlight film of RWM, *Bedlam* (2019), challenges the institutional systemization of mental illness by examining the effects of deinstitutionalization in America. Directed by psychiatrist Kenneth Paul Rosenberg, the documentary follows a group of individuals living with chronic mental illness as they navigate the lacunae of resources and accessible long-term aid that vanished alongside their in-patient care. Rosenberg casts a light on vastly under-resourced psychiatric emergency rooms—where overwhelmed staff are only able to provide quick-fix care to those in need of lifelong treatment—and jails, packed with prisoners who should be patients. Through intimate insights spanning five years of each subject's life, *Bedlam* humanizes madness, and breaks down a faulty, sanist system that continues to discriminate against and oppress those who never chose to be ill.

Trista Suke's quirky part-fiction, part-autobiography, part-documentary *Foxy* (2018) addressed another facet of the vulnerability attached to being othered, and expressed the strength that comes from reclaiming one's narrative. Suke, who wrote, directed and starred in the film, effectively uses *Foxy* as a way to publicly come out with her alopecia, and explores the impact of chronic illness on mental health. After years of hiding her hair loss from the world, Suke flaunts her story with this original, whimsical piece while also making room for others to share experiences of living with baldness through direct-to-camera interviews. In doing so, Suke enacts community support as an empowering and healing force for a group of people who have experience with baldness and its associated social stigma.

By showcasing stories that come from such diverse communities and lived perspectives, this festival controverts the stigma-generated alienation and anxiety that isolates those in need of human connection. But the true success of RWM might be measured by Workman Arts's equal commitment to the diverse needs of their audience as to their programming. Attending the events, it was clear inclusivity and accessibility were at the forefront of each decision. Despite my debilitating anxiety, I felt safe in a space that recognized and validated my existence; not only could I view relatable works from mad makers with intersectional identities, I was able to do so within an environment that encouraged my being there. Alongside accessibility measures such as pay-what-you-wish tickets, open captions and ASL interpreters, each event had a relaxed viewing policy that allowed audience members to leave the theatres as needed. Further, RWM provided a Held Space at each location, which functioned as a quiet refuge outside the event with an active listener and material for stimming.

By creating a safe space to meet with madness and precarity head on, RWM allowed for a larger, more rounded discussion of the entanglement of these issues. Each artwork and Q&A panel was an expression of vulnerability, which innately provoked that of myself and others; after screenings and performances, I found myself speaking candidly about my own experiences with mental illness. Within the 10-day span of the festival, I felt able to disclose my social anxiety in conversations and let go of my incessant need to appear neurotypical in public spaces. With an awareness that stigma leads to discrimination, which begets further systemic oppression, RWM productively challenges the pervasive ableism of mainstream narratives with trauma-informed lived experiences.

Justice Walz is an interdisciplinary artist based in Toronto whose work explores notions of self-care, identity and intersectional feminism. She uses her artistic practice as a way to both articulate and make peace with her experience as a queer, mad and chronically ill woman of colour.

Alison Crouse, *Devastation Portrait No. 114*, 2018-19, inkjet print, 27.94 cm × 27.94 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WORKMAN ARTS, TORONTO

A SPACE GALLERY/ACCESS GALLERY/AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE/AIDS ACTIVIST HISTORY PROJECT/AKA ARTIST-RUN/ALUCINE LATIN FILM+MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL/ANNA LEONOWENS GALLERY/APTN/ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA/ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA/ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA/ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO/ART GALLERY OF PETERBOROUGH/ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY/ART MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO/ASINABKA FILM&MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL/AUDAIN ART MUSEUM/BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY/BLACKWOOD GALLERY BRANDON UNIVERSITY/CAMBRIDGE ART GALLERIES/CARIBBEAN TALES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL/CARLETON UNIVERSITY/CENTRE[3] FOR ARTISTIC AND SOCIAL PRACTICE/CENTRE FOR ART TAPES/CENTRE FOR WOMEN AND TRANS PEOPLE/CINEFEST SUDBURY/CINÉMATHÈQUE QUÉBÉCOISE/CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY/CONTEMPORARY ART FORUM, KITCHENER+AREA DAZIBAO/DORIS MCCARTHY GALLERY/DOXA DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL/DREAMSPEAKERS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL/DUNLOP ART GALLERY/EASTERN EDGE GALLERY/ED VIDEO EMMEDIA/EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART+DESIGN/ESKER FOUNDATION/FABULOUS FESTIVAL OF FRINGE FILM/FEMINIST ART GALLERY/FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM SUR L'ART FIRST NATIONS UNIVERSITY OF CANADA/GALERIE SAW GALLERY/GALLERY 44/GLENBOW MUSEUM HAIDA GWAII FILM FESTIVAL/IMAGES FESTIVAL/IMAGINENATIVE FILM+MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL KAMLOOPS ART GALLERY/KITCHENER-WATERLOO ART GALLERY/KLONDIKE INSTITUTE OF ART&CULTURE/LE LABO/LONDON ONTARIO MEDIA ARTS ASSOCIATION/MACLAREN ART CENTRE MCINTOSH GALLERY/MCMASTER MUSEUM OF ART/MENDEL ART GALLERY/MORRIS AND HELEN BELKIN ART GALLERY/MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY/MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART TORONTO CANADA/NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA/NEAR NORTH MOBILE MEDIA LAB/NIPISSING UNIVERSITY NUNAVUT ARCTIC COLLEGE/OAKVILLE GALLERIES/OCAD UNIVERSITY/OJIBWAY&CREE CULTURAL CENTRE/OPEN SPACE ARTS SOCIETY/PACIFIC CINEMATHEQUE/PLATFORM CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC+DIGITAL ARTS/QUEER CITY CINEMA/QUEER MEDIA DATABASE/REELOUT ARTS PROJECT INC./REGENT PARK FILM FESTIVAL/RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES DU DOCUMENTAIRE DE MONTRÉAL/RENDEZVOUS WITH MADNESS FESTIVAL/RYERSON IMAGE CENTRE/SOUTH ASIAN VISUAL ARTS CENTRE/SENECA COLLEGE/SHERIDAN COLLEGE/SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY STRUTS GALLERY&FAUCET MEDIA ARTS CENTRE/TORONTO ANIMATED IMAGE SOCIETY TANGLED ART+DISABILITY/THAMES ART GALLERY/THE POWER PLANT CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY/THUNDER BAY ART GALLERY/TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL/TORONTO QUEER FILM FESTIVAL/TORONTO REEL ASIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL/TRENT UNIVERSITY TRINITY SQUARE VIDEO/TRUCK CONTEMPORARY ART/UNIVERSITÉ DE MONCTON/UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL/UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA LIBRARY/UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE ART GALLERY/UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK/UNIVERSITY OF REGINA/UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN/UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA/URBAN SHAMAN CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL ART VANCOUVER ART GALLERY/VANCOUVER INDIGENOUS MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL/VECTOR FESTIVAL VIDÉOGRAPHE/WALTER PHILLIPS GALLERY/WESTERN FRONT/WHIPPERSNAPPER GALLERY WINNIPEG ART GALLERY/WNDX FESTIVAL OF MOVING IMAGE THANK YOU !

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From top: Aaron Jones, *Waves (a portrait of Mother)*, 2017-2018 / Ebti Nabag, *Nawal- Girl in the Red Dress*, 2018

Carol Sawyer: *The Natalie Brettschneider Archive*

April 23 – June 7, 2020 | Curator: Mona Filip

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Carol Sawyer, *The Natalie Brettschneider Archive*, 2000-ongoing (Natalie Brettschneider performs Profile Mask, Around 1952). Archival ink jet print from original negative, acquired with the assistance of Kathleen Taylor, 2015.

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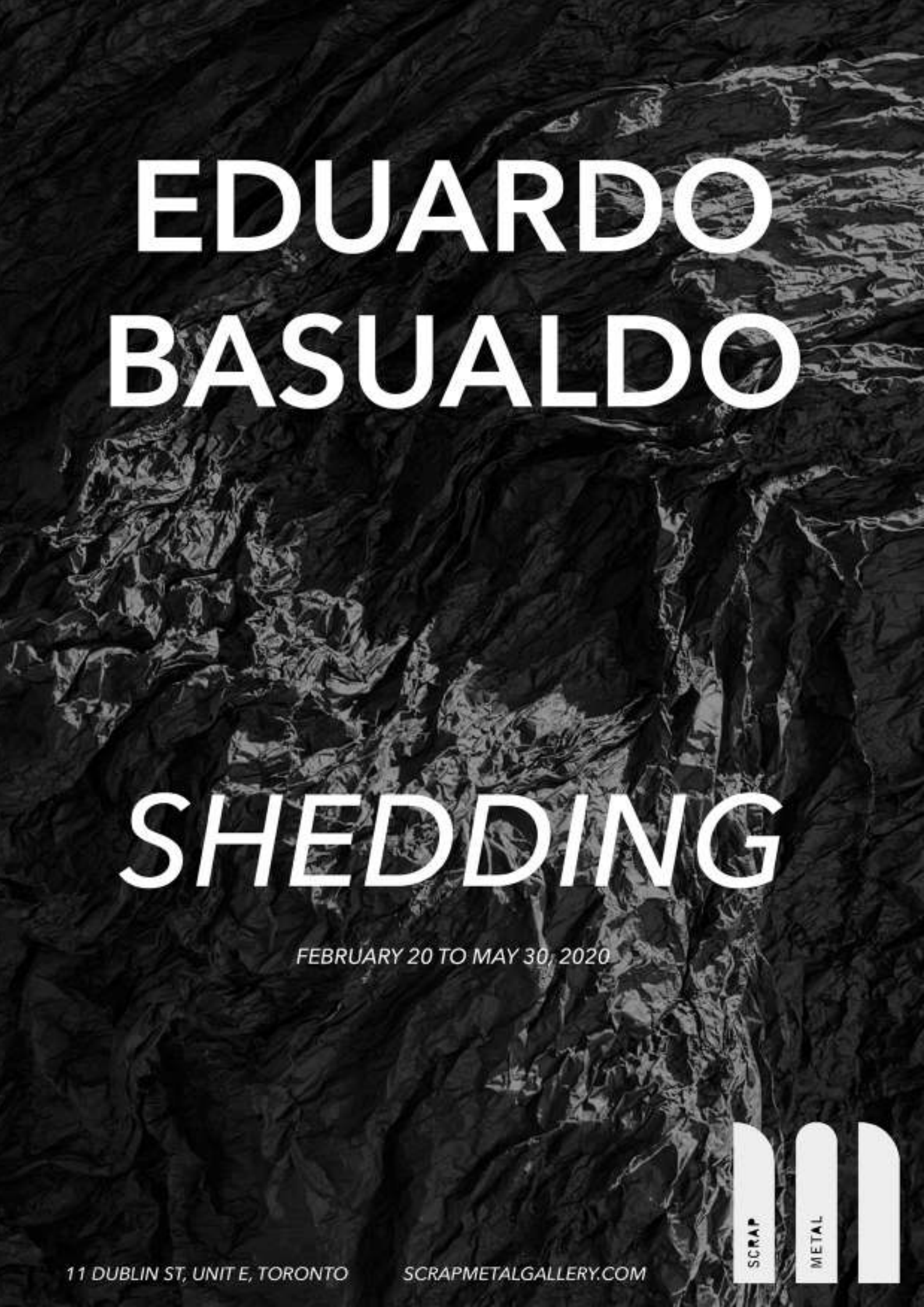

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Demagogues: 4
by Erdem Taşdelen
Text by Allison Collins

Erdem Taşdelen's work here draws on a line of thinking he began about the veracity of images during several recent public installations of *Demagogues* in Vienna, Istanbul and Saskatoon. This hand-held version reframes the project and extends its questions about the fragility of truths and processes of coming to recognize what's real, in both visual and verbal languages. The single question at the core of the work comes from an essay written in 1958 by British theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, which was part of a debate about whether theatre ought to deal with daily political events or concern itself with the larger questions in life.[1] As Taşdelen explains, "Tynan was of the belief that to have a social purpose, theatre should engage with and respond to the political realities of the moment."[2] As his own entry into this debate about art's entanglement with politics, and in light of some of today's most pressing political quandaries, Taşdelen inserted Tynan's statement into public spaces as a fraudulent document of itself, and made it look as if it had been there before, a fake copy of a non-existent past event.

Using careful framing, he creates a successful artifice, with an image that effectively refers inward, to itself. Each time *Demagogues* is installed, it seeks a relevance to its location, not only in the sentence's necessary translation into local languages, but also through placement and sensitivity to context. In Turkey, for example, where voicing questions about the nature of truth in public is subject to the social codes of a nation under authoritarian rule, the work was placed inside a gallery, rather than in the street. Instead of challenging the forces behind supposed truths himself, Taşdelen's methods are oriented toward the spectator, imploring them to remain attentive to facades and their complex, largely unseen compositions. *Demagogues* forces me to consider on what grounds I might find to interrogate lies now that my belief in common truth has failed. Fakery, subterfuge and clever trickery have a strong hold, with a separation between real and unreal that cannot be adequately revealed by interrogating an image itself. What is left is to tackle the conditions of power exercised around it.

Placed here in *C Magazine*, the conversation about truth in imagery is tucked away from a direct connection to false claims and prejudices of the contemporary political demagogue evoked by the title. Instead, the art world, the magazine itself and the issue's theme, "Criticism, Again," become the contexts in which to consider demagoguery. While the work elicits a question of its own, it also comes into relation with the questions raised by *C Magazine* editors, who ask (among many things) whether power dynamics in the art world are truly shifting as new voices emerge to challenge existing structures. Taşdelen's efforts, grounded his own critical interrogations, likewise address who is holding the context around Tynan's words: the artist, the editor, the designer, the reader. This reorientation away from demagoguery and toward a multiplicity of shared perspectives, hands on pages, offers optimistic potential.

Allison Collins is a Vancouver-based curator, writer and researcher. From 2015–2020 she worked as Curator of Media Arts at Western Front, where she facilitated the production of new artistic projects. She is co-curator (with Patrick Cruz and Su-Ying Lee) of the 3rd Kamias Triennial, Sawsawan: *Conversations in the Dirty Kitchen* (2020), an exhibition, residency and event series in Quezon City, Philippines. She holds a BFA in Visual Art from the University of Ottawa and an MA in Critical and Curatorial Studies from the University of British Columbia.

Erdem Taşdelen is a Turkish-Canadian artist who lives and works in Toronto. His practice is rooted in conceptualism and involves a range of media, including installation, video, sculpture, sound and artist books. His diverse projects bring structures of power into question within the context of culturally learned behaviours, where he often draws from unique historical narratives to address the complexities of current socio-political issues. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions internationally and across Canada, and he was long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2019.

ENDNOTES

1
Erdem Tasdelen, *Demagogues*, http://www.erdemtasdelen.com/demagogues.html

2
Ibid.

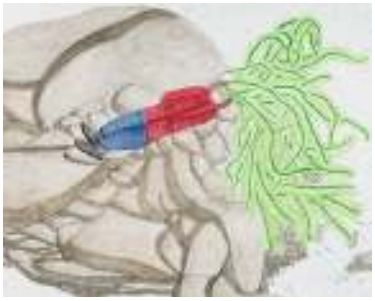
artist project

NSCAD Lithography Workshop
Contemporary Editions
Shuvinai Ashoona
Jordan Bennett
Shary Boyle
Brendan Fernandes
Amy Malbeuf
Ed Pien
Derek Sullivan
Ericka Walker
Shuvinai Ashoona
Jordan Bennett
Shary Boyle
Cephalophoric Saint, 2018
Brendan Fernandes
Amy Malbeuf
Ed Pien
The Hungry Sea
Derek Sullivan
A Piece of Glass Hanging in the Window, 2018
Ericka Walker
From Time to Time, 2019
In 1969, the NSCAD Lithography Workshop was established, earning international recognition and redefining the artistic potential of print in the 20th century. Fifty years later, its legacy continues with new limited-edition lithographs by eight celebrated Canadian artists created in the NSCAD University printshop in collaboration with Master Printer, Jill Graham.
For more information, including print details, artist bios and purchase information, visit litho.nscad.ca or email annaleonowens@nscad.ca

NSCAD Lithography Workshop

Contemporary Editions

Shuvinai Ashoona
Jordan Bennett
Shary Boyle
Brendan Fernandes
Amy Malbeuf
Ed Pien
Derek Sullivan
Ericka Walker



Shuvinai Ashoona
Halipaligazuk Nuzakutaling Kuaniqnii (A sea person wearing an amautie with long seaweed hair), 2019

Jordan Bennett
iljo'qwa'sik, 2019

Shary Boyle
Cephalophoric Saint, 2018

Brendan Fernandes
In Pose, 2019

Amy Malbeuf
tuft life, 2018

Ed Pien
The Hungry Sea, 2018

Derek Sullivan
A Piece of Glass Hanging in the Window, 2018

Ericka Walker
From Time to Time, 2019

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