

On the Other Side / It's Heaven!

curatorial incubator v. 17



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introduction

THE CALL FOR THIS YEAR'S Curatorial Incubator went out in May 2021. When I first put out the call, I included the image of the familiar Philadelphia Crème Cheese angel, complete with wings, a winning smile and a bagel slathered with the aforementioned product. Cue the legal department at Kraft, parent company to the spreadable delight and Vtape had to cease and desist from the use of the image. Grasping the gravity of the situation, we offered the lovely image from Dennis Day's *Heaven or Montreal* as a replacement and proceeded to continue with our call for submissions.

The four participants in this year's Curatorial Incubator see "the other side" in very different terms. Toronto-based **Crocus Collective** (Karina Iskandarsjah and Dallas Fellini) present *gendertrash from hell: to heaven*, a mini retrospective of the work of Mirha-Soliel Ross, transsexual videographer, performance artist, sex worker

and activist, with a focus on Ross' advocacy and activism. In her program *A world of our own; creating Black queer utopias*, Winnipeg-based **Mahlet Cuff** suggests that Black queer folks are able to make their own spaces that bring their communities together. **Ashley Raghubir's** program *Embodied Intimacies: Gesturing Towards Understanding*, embraces the idea of an earthly paradise that communicates through movement, speech, and Sign language. In *Spirit, Feeding*, **Joy Xiang** considers the materialization of heaven as a more just world through ghosts, desire, wishes, and speculative fiction.

True to form, our submissions outstripped our ability to produce programs so I assembled a jury to assist me in my decisions. **Yaniya Lee** is a writer interested in collective practice and the ethics of aesthetics and a PhD student in Gender Studies at Queen's University. She is the Senior Editor-at-Large for *Canadian Art Magazine*.

Canadian artist **Leslie Peters** worked in video, multi-channel installation, as well as curating exhibitions and coordinating cultural events from the mid '90s until the mid 2000s when she gave up her art practice and became a Buddhist monk. At present Leslie has returned her robes and is now married and living in Wales where she works at a Buddhist Centre in Criccieth, Wales. The jury's choices have resulted in an exceptionally qualified group of young organizers, curators, writers and artists that we, at Vtape, are proud to be associated with.

In the summer of 2021, they began their term as "official Incubatees" with workshops from two curators with deeply engaged curatorial practices. **Lauren Fournier**, artist, writer and theorist, author of the recently published (MIT Press, 2021) *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, offered her strategies for the Vtape on-line presentation from 2018 *autotheory: the screening*. **Warren Crichlow**, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University and associate of the Centre for Humanities Research, presented his research methodologies through a detailed analysis of his article *A Grand Panorama: Isaac Julien, Frederick Douglass,*

and Lessons of the Hour, co-authored with Kass Banning. Warren also very generously met with the Incubatees for a very welcome follow-up session to check-in with their curatorial ideas as the deadline for title submission neared.

Throughout the writing phase of *The Curatorial Incubator* participants were each assigned an editor for their essay. I extend my deepest appreciation to each of these professionals who took time from their already busy schedules to contribute to the advancement of each of their writers' projects. **Moynan King**, performer, director, curator, writer, and scholar, the recipient of a 2020 Canadian Screen Award for her writing on CBC's *Baroness von Sketch Show* on which she also made regular appearances as an actor, worked with Karina Iskandarsjah and Dallas Fellini (Crocus Collective); **Richard Fung**, video artist, educator, curator, and writer, and the recipient of many awards, including Rockefeller and McKnight Foundation fellowships and The Bell Canada award for excellence in media arts, worked with Mahlet Cuff; **Sandra Brewster**, visual artist recognized for her community-based practice that centres a Black presence located in Canada

and recipient of the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Artist Prize (2018) and the Gattuso Prize for Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival (2017), worked with Ashley Rughubir; and **Dot Tuer**, writer, critic and Professor at OCAD University in Visual and Critical Studies, with expertise in contemporary and Latin American art, Decolonial and Cultural Theory, worked with Joy Xiang.

I extend my appreciation to all the staff at Vtape who each contribute their expertise and encouragement: Distribution Director Wanda Vanderstoop, Kim Tomczak, Restoration & Collections Management Director, Distribution Assistant Dustin Lawrence, and Kiera Boulton, Submissions and Communications Coordinator who each work directly with each Incubatee to make sure they have

Lisa Steele

Creative Director, Vtape

access to the titles they want to preview while they are in the research phase of the project. And many thanks to Chris Gehman Director of Administration; and Deirdre Logue, Development Director who make sure all fees are paid in a timely fashion to the Incubatees and to their artists. And many thanks to Philip Jonlin Lee and all at Linseed Projects for giving us this handsome publication.

Finally I thank the four 2021 Curatorial Incubator participants for their focussed research that has examined Vtape titles to find just the right work to speak to their curatorial intention, truly reflecting the depth of our holdings. I hope viewers will join me in looking at heaven through a kaleidoscope and find the multitude of visions that await.

gendertrash from hell: to heaven

A screening of works by Mirha-Soleil Ross

Curated by Crocus Collective (Dallas Fellini and Karina Iskandarsjah)

GENDERTRASH FROM HELL was a zine created and distributed by Mirha-Soleil Ross and her partner Xanthra Phillippa MacKay from 1993 to 1995. Devoted to giving “a voice to gender queers, who’ve been discouraged from speaking out & communicating with each other” (*gendertrash* 2), *gendertrash* featured poetry, artwork, and short stories alongside practical resources, calls to action, and articles about trans activism, sex work decriminalization, trans health advocacy, racism, and transphobia. The title of this program is a direct reference to this zine, which symbolizes Ross’s legacy as an activist who was instrumental in reframing and instigating the contemporary realities and culture of transsexual and transgender people in Canada.

Ross’s legacy is manifold, having founded initiatives like the 519 Community Centre’s Meal Trans program, which continues to provide weekly

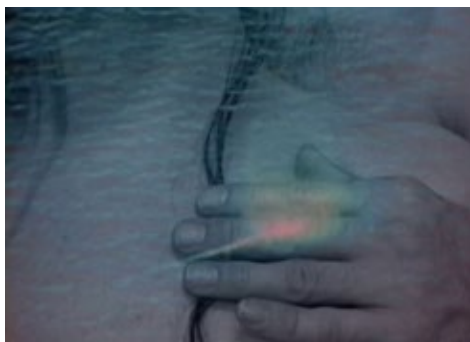
drop-in meals and legal support to trans people, and Counting Past 2 (CP2), a transsexual and transgender film and art festival, which ran from 1997 to 2002. As a Métis, transsexual woman “with a history of prostitution” (Forrester et al. 103), who grew up in a French-Canadian, working-class family, Mirha-Soleil Ross has always fiercely advocated for the most marginalized within her communities—notably for the rights of sex workers and transsexuals.

Ross’s artistic contributions to the Canadian arts scene are intertwined with her work as an activist. *gendertrash from hell: to heaven* screens three of her video and performance works – *Tremblement de Chair* (2001), *Madame Lauraine’s Transsexual Touch* (2001), and *ALLO PERFORMANCE!* (2002). These works exemplify Ross’s use of the poetics of experimental, fictional, and performance-based filmmaking towards a goal of political,

social, and sexual liberation for trans people and sex workers.

The videos in this screening characterize three distinct artistic strategies invested in a safer and more inclusive future: self-representation, community-building, and transcendent depictions of desire, which, together, project fragments of a potential utopia into our contemporary lives. In their zine *gendertrash from hell*,

Ross and MacKay appropriate and taunt conceptions of trans people as deviant, damned, and threatening to (or rejected by) society to playfully insinuate a welcoming idea of hell. This conception of hell paradoxically resonates with Ross's actualization of a potential heaven for trans people and sex workers through her videos, performance art, and activism in the 1990s and 2000s.



Tremblement de Chair, 2001

REPRESENTING SELF

In an age with trans representations abound in books, film, and public discourse, the trans community itself is still far from achieving equal status in social and institutional contexts; the long tradition of harmful representations of trans people is difficult to dislodge from the public psyche. The problem herein lies with an ongoing lack of self-representation of the trans experience. As Ross and McKay state in the opening sequence of their 1997 video *Gendertroublemakers*, “[w]e have our own culture, language, stories, and thus it is time for us and only us to document ourselves.” In 2001, Ross’s video self-portrait, *Tremblement de Chair*, created in collaboration with her partner Mark Kabusicky, is just one of the ways Ross’s body of work takes seriously the directive to represent self “ourselves” at a time when the trans community was still marginalized and maligned in mainstream representation.

Tremblement de Chair portrays the artist’s body in a meditative, sensual, and poetic manner. It begins with a close shot of Ross’s eyes, staring at the lens, confronting the viewer’s presence, returning their gaze, and asserting her self-actualized subjecthood. As her

eyes close, superimposed images of the sky and water render her body in various colours, connoting a vibrant internal aura. Throughout the video, Ross seamlessly fuses parts of her body with sublime natural imagery, implying that the trans body is not only natural, but powerful and radiant.

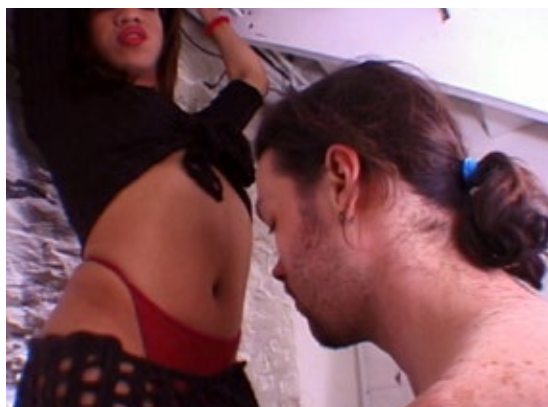
Although the piece exudes sexuality both in its title (“tremor of the flesh”) and subject matter, *Tremblement de Chair* can also be read as a journey of refusal; an invitation to reject preconceived notions about transsexuals and instead engage in a brief intimate encounter with an artist’s individuality. This refusal can also be read in the camera technique and the use of a hand, which traces her contours to guide (and limit) the viewer’s gaze. Ross’s body is never fully exposed in the frame. The camera follows a hand tracing across her breast, down her stomach, over her genitals, and then back up her body. As the hand moves, an ominous glow radiates with it, further obscuring and selecting what can be seen. Ross is in full control of what parts of her body the viewer is permitted to see. Self-representation here is a form of realizing agency, which prompts questions about how trans-

sexual bodies are represented and on whose terms. *Tremblement de Chair* facilitates a performance that enacts the representational liberation Ross desires for herself.

CULTIVATING CARE

Madame Lauraine's Transsexual Touch, also created in 2001 by Ross in collaboration with fellow sex work activists Monica Forrester and Viviane Namaste, moves beyond self-representational activism and toward community engagement as a conduit for actualizing change. The film features explicit and educational vignettes that follow the storylines of four transsexual sex workers. Madame Lauraine, an extravagantly dressed brothel madam, speaks on the phone with prospective clients who are looking to experience “the pleasures of the transsexual world” and introduces the viewer to what she describes as a regular evening for her staff.

Co-written, directed, and starring Ross's community of transsexual sex workers, this film is firmly grounded in Ross's community-oriented practice and directly represents her activist work. A fun and sexy storyline is interspersed with fast-paced,



Madame Lauraine's Transsexual Touch, 2001

deliciously pornographic scenes (a sex worker excitedly takes on a quick gig in a bathroom; a dominatrix ruthlessly punishes a client). Throughout all of this, lessons of sexual health, job safety, safer-sex, and respectful etiquette for tricks are cleverly forwarded, while activist demands like the “decriminalization of prostitution” are addressed. This work delivers an activism that puts the onus to be safe and responsible on Johns; a refreshing perspective that rejects histories of sex workers being cast as scapegoats.

The film culminates with forward-looking updates about each character's life flashing across the screen: “Mercedes is enjoying poetic weekends by the fireplace with her very special driver,” “Lily Champagne was recently nominated as employee of the month at Madame Lauraine's Brothel.” Significantly, this video shows sex workers finding fulfilment in both their professional and personal lives, and emphasizes their roles as working professionals achieving important milestones in their careers while simultaneously prioritizing their own personal lives and relationships. *Madame Lauraine's Transsexual Touch* legitimizes sex work and

positions itself directly in relation to Ross's legacy of advocacy for “prostitution [to be seen] as a valid form of employment and an integral part of many transsexuals' cultural identity” (Forrester et al. 105). *Madame Lauraine's Transsexual Touch* is an activist art project that seeks to project a future that offers a world of potential for the agency, equality, safety, and liberation of trans sex workers.

FINDING HEAVEN

In Canada, childbearing for trans and queer families has become a socially acceptable possibility. However, biotechnological obstacles, economic status, and stigma are still persistent obstacles. While the topic of trans parenting has only recently been engaged by public media, two decades ago, Ross was a trailblazer for the inclusion of transsexuals within discourse around the universal desire of biological parenting.

ALLO PERFORMANCE! (2002) is a video created in collaboration with Mark Karbusicky as part of Ross's durational performance entitled *The Pregnancy Project* (2001-2002). In the hopes of fostering discussion around reproductive rights and technologies for transsexuals, Ross appeared

pregnant every time she went out in public for a period of nine months.

In *ALLO PERFORMANCE!* Ross flaunts a pregnant stomach while strolling and prancing along the shoreline by the Golden Gate Bridge. Her performance insinuates the experience of a woman enjoying the last few months of freedom before having to raise a new-born. Throughout the video, an audio recording plays of Ross's mother recounting her own experiences of being pregnant and raising Ross as a child. As the viewer, we are invited to revel in the excitement of pregnancy cravings, contemplate the challenges of overcoming health issues, and delight in the details of a mother's precise intuition that her trans child is and has always been a girl.

In contrast, the black and white, slow-motion footage of Ross on the shoreline moving in and out of the rising tide, depicts a contemplative tone. "It hurts a little not being a grandmother," her mother sighs over the phone in her thick joul accent, "but destiny is destiny." *The Pregnancy Project* nurtures a type of desire far beyond what society has fathomed for trans individuals, and in her own way, Ross fulfils her mother's



ALLO PERFORMANCE!, 2002

proclamation: "Frankly it's goofy! But you would have been beautiful pregnant!" Through this durational performance, Ross lives out a fantasy, conceiving of and advocating for a future unrestricted by the social, institutional, and biomedical limits of her time and place, realizing a potential heaven.

Ross's extensive body of work, both in community activism and the arts

has left an enormous impact on living conditions for queer, trans, and sex worker communities. Her life, art, and activism are themselves acts of innovation, creativity, and care, forging agency, longevity, and social progress for society's most marginalized. The works in *gendertrash from hell: to heaven* exemplify Ross's use of the poetics of experimental, fictional,

and performance-based filmmaking toward a goal of political, social, and sexual liberation for trans people and sex workers. Although Ross's mother will not claim a grandchild as her successor, the artist's legacy has been propelled into our present, and will undoubtedly live long into the future through the enriched lives of countless people.

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gendertrash from hell: to heaven

A screening of works by Mirha-Soleil Ross

Curated by Crocus Collective (Dallas Fellini and Karina Iskandarsjah)

1. Mirha-Soleil Ross and Mark Karbusicky

***Tremblement de Chair*, 2001, 3:47**

In *Tremblement de Chair*, the camera follows a hand as it traces across Ross's body, superimposed by footage of the natural world which allows for autonomous self-censorship and prompts questions about how trans bodies are represented. In this inwardly-focused work, Ross mediates on her own representation, situating sexuality and beauty within her experience as a transsexual woman.

2. Mirha-Soleil Ross, Viviane Namaste, and Monica Forrester

***Madame Lauraine's Transsexual Touch*, 2001, 33:50**

Madame Lauraine, a flamboyant brothel madam and entrepreneur, introduces us to some of her staff: four transsexual sex workers who find fulfillment in both their professional and personal lives. Steamy sex scenes are interspersed with witty remarks that weave pedagogy and activism into this work, actively educating on safer-sex practices and respectful etiquette for patrons of sex workers.

3. Mirha-Soleil Ross and Mark Karbusicky

***ALLO PERFORMANCE!*, 2002, 13:16**

In this video Ross flaunts a prosthetic pregnant belly as she strolls along the shoreline by the Golden Gate Bridge. The black and white footage is in slow motion and superimposed with images of moving water. Throughout, an audio recording plays of the artist's mother recounting her experiences of having a baby and raising a child.

A world of our own; creating Black queer utopias

Curated by Mahlet Cuff

It's amazing what we can do if we simply refuse to give up.

-Octavia E. Butler, "Bloodchild"

AT 18, I CAME TO terms with being both Black and queer, and exploring these identities has since been an ongoing quest. Living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, finding my community requires effort. It is a friend of a friend telling me about a party or scanning dating apps such as Tinder to find potential relationships. It's sometimes asking folks directly, "Are you queer?" My search has brought both hardship and joy. There are times of complete bliss, such as going out and being in a queer club together, where the night is specifically for BIPOC queer and trans folks. Walking in and seeing my kin, hugging, laughing, complimenting each other's outfits and showing as much love to each other as possible. Moving and dancing to the music while the disco ball above me is reflecting off my skin, filling me with energy. The exhilaration of walk-

ing into an art opening and making eye contact with folks and having that unspoken language of "I see you."

The COVID 19 pandemic has altered the way we interact with one another. Being isolated has shifted our thinking. The ability to recreate, mold and transform how we are with one another is a way toward creating our own utopias, sanctuaries where we can express intimacy and jubilation, care for one another and lift each other up in times of stress, trauma and hardship. Despite the challenges, Black queer communities are thriving and finding solutions for escaping the cis heteronormative culture of the Prairies.

This collection of documentary and experimental films and videos shows how Black queer communities come together to carve out utopian spaces. By exploring contemporary Black queer culture and the themes of affection, resistance and joy, the programs responds to the overarching question:

“How are we creating our own heaven when it isn’t accessible to us?”

Abdi Osman’s *Black Queer Affection* (*Triptych*) is a love letter to Lee and Sileecka. Unfolding in three separate conversations, first with Lee, then Sileecka, and finally both together, the video portrays two people who experience life very differently but have been able to create a lasting bond. Lee arrived from Trinidad in search of safety and community. Sileecka was transitioning and became a guide and mentor to other Black people entering the scene. Finding kin involves risks, and Lee and Sileecka made each other feel welcome and protected. Watching this film, I felt like a fly on the wall and didn’t want the conversations to end. Artist Abdi Osman shows us that as Black queer people it is up to us to

make space for one another and invite each other in. As we create home, we develop the ability to find ourselves and help others find themselves.

In *Red Lips* [*Cages for Black Girls*], kyisha williams opens with a barrage of words thrown onto the screen. Some, like “Black”, “queer”, “lazy”, “slut”, “sex worker” and “bitch”, speak to stereotypes and intersectional identities. Others, like “bars”, “cage”, “criminal” and “sentence”, relate to the prison industrial complex. The word “freedom” appears twice. What follows is a multi layered video essay incorporating interviews, dramatization and performance, often in split screen, and an energetic audio track that mixes poetry with music by the likes of Kelis and Janelle Monáe. Responding to the question “How do you identify?”

four women describe themselves as queer, lesbian, trans, sex positive and sex worker. The conversation about what it means to walk in these bodies quickly moves toward violence, criminalization and incarceration. When Black queer women are locked up, someone is losing their auntie, sister, mother or lover. Who is taking care of their communities? Ultimately, *Red Lips...* looks at paths to pleasure and self-affirmation. The video ends with its subjects coming together in a ritual of resilience and resistance. The word “Blessed” fills the screen.

Natalie Wood’s *Time Will Come* takes its title from the opening line of Derek Walcott’s poem “Love is Love.” With deliberate slowness, the female narrator tells us, “Walcott says, time will come when I would find my heart and

give it back to itself. That I would have to greet myself arriving at my door or in my mirror...” A woman in a white dress looks at herself in a bathroom mirror. She brings her hands to her face and closes her eyes. This moment is interrupted by a loud bang, and she rushes down the stairs with a sense of urgency. She finds another woman lying on the floor dressed in black, her eyes closed. The woman in white touches the woman in black with care and tries to lift her, reaching for her heart. They move together in a slow synchronized choreography, the woman in white literally carrying the other on her back. The scene repeats three times, and with each encounter the task seems easier and the mood lighter. The video closes with the dancing women falling onto a



Black Queer Affection (*Triptych*), 2013



Red Lips [Cages for Black Girls], 2010

couch laughing. They rest there, eyes closed, hands on their hearts. Earlier, the narrator laments, “How painful it has been to be the one who is different.” In the face of constant violence, acts of care are necessities within Black queer communities. This story captures pain, hurt, trauma and stress. It also promises that a time of joy, rest, and bliss will come.

A Kiki with Bobby Bowen by Ayo Tsalithaba features celebrity stylist Bobby

Bowen. Like *Red Lips...*, *A Kiki...* flashes words on screen, but here Bowen runs through a list of terms used *within community*: “ovah”, “read”, “spilling the tea”, “cunt” and “kiki”. The film is a guide to Black queer language and could be used for Black folks unable to access queer spaces; it can also serve others who frequent spaces where that language is used. The film is full of laughter, from Bowen and offscreen from Tsalithaba. This makes me think of the relationship between

filmmaker and subject, and the potential to be vulnerable when interviewed by your own kin. In turn, those experiences are shared through film to other Black queer folks, including myself. Language allows individuals to find others with similar identities and values. Black queer people communicate with one another in a way that has the capability to bring others in. We are having a kiki with Bobby and are taught that creating our own languages is a way of marking oneself and making community.

Each of the films in this program can stand on their own as a marker of what and how Black queer identities manifest by forming community.

It can be through friendship and first impressions as in Abdi Osman’s film. Or via the analysis of Black queer bodies, how they are often put at risk and how they can be there for one another to feel celebrated, as kyisha williams reveals. Natalie Wood shows us through movement and dance, and Ayo Tsalithaba in the power of language. All these films have the common message that, despite the barriers, Black queer people are able to create their own utopias. Black queer people are refusing all the things stacked against them and are not giving up. They are making their own spaces and bringing their own communities together.



Time Will Come, 2018

A world of our own; creating Black queer utopias

Curated by Mahlet Cuff

1. Abdi Osman

Black Queer Affection (Tryptich), 2013, 16:02

This triptych documents the memories of a Black gay man and a Black trans woman. Three videos combined to form a single work. It describes the deep affection they hold for one another.

2. kyisha williams

Red Lips [Cages for Black Girls], 2010, 18:02

This mixed media documentary explores the stories of Black, radicalized, queer, trans, and incarcerated folks, and their relationship to the prison industrial complex. It communicates the hardship amongst these communities, at the same time finding ways in which they are able to thrive.

3. Natalie Wood

Time Will Come, 2018, 06:00

With dance, movement and metaphor, this experimental film shows the ways it can be hard to find joy but throughout the loss, trauma, and pain, the narrator continues to find softness and rest.

4. Ayo Tsalithaba

A Kiki with Bobby Bowen, 2018, 05:54

A young queer man named Bobby Bowen takes the audience on a journey of learning key terms that originated within queer Black and POC communities.

Embodied Intimacies: Gesturing Towards Understanding

Curated by Ashley Raghubir

A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER ARE seated closely in interior space, their gestures in concert, the production of an intergenerational echo. For me, this is heaven. Or more precisely, it is an earthly paradise. I think of what is made possible when we are together: friends in shared laughter, family gathered at home, and the feeling of being understood. Heaven on earth exists in the entangled and full moments of our lives. With this in mind, the quiet intimacy of mother and daughter portraits open and close this program from Vtape's holdings. Framed within are documentary, experimental, and performance-based works that depict relations to place and also between family and friends. All foreground the embodied intimacy within and communicated through gesture in its many forms: movement, speech, and Sign language. Gestures are used across diverse abilities, vary from subtle intimation to clear expression, and inform what cinema and media

theorist Vivian Sobchack describes as our material mattering and meaning making. For Sobchack, understanding is produced within and between our lived bodies to bridge corporeality and consciousness. The selections in this program reveal how the slightest gesture can hold immense meaning and materialize our inner being and becoming.

In Rachel Echenberg's silent video *How to explain performance art to my teenage daughter* the artist and her daughter Clara sit facing one another against a beige background. Mother and daughter collaborators cover each other's heads in honey and then gold leaf. Initially performed in 2015, the video references artist Joseph Beuys' 1965 performance *How to explain pictures to a dead hare*. Arms interweave and heads angle in an intuitive exchange as Echenberg and her daughter apply the materials. Mirrored gestures such as dabbing fingers



How to explain performance art to my teenage daughter, 2018

and softly blowing breath ensue. The work alternates between mother and daughter and text contextualizing Beuys' performance: "In this pivotal performance, the artist, with his head covered in honey and gold leaf, explained his exhibition to a dead hare for three hours. / The audience was locked out of the gallery and could only see the performance through the windows." The video's silence and speechlessness accentuate the pedagogical and communicative aspects of gestural language. As does the text: "No one knows what he whispered to the hare. / No one knows what the hare understood." The work concludes with mother and daughter during a moment of pause, staring into each other's eyes. Like Beuys' audience, we view the exchange from the outside. The understanding transmitted from mother to daughter – teacher to student – is shared through non-verbal



language, embodied experience, and materialities. To be inside this knowing tenderness approximates something like heaven.

Film and video artist Jorge Lozano's documentary video *spatial rhythms* features a group of attendees at the Afro-Columbian Petronio Alvarez Pacific Music Festival in Cali, Colombia, as they sign and gesture to each other from afar. The handheld movement of Lozano's camerawork indexes his presence as a fellow observer producing what theorist and writer Deborah Root describes as an "experiential quality" in the artist's works. The video's sound is defined by loud Afro-Columbian marimba music emanating from the festival stage. Whether Deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, or otherwise, music's sonic vibrations are felt in the lived bodies of the work's subjects; their movements make this

evident. A woman stands left of centre stage on the ground floor of a sparsely populated stadium. She laughs, signs, and gestures – both subtly and expansively – to an audience out of view. The intimacy of this exchange is warming. Friends join the woman in fleeting embrace and dance. They also sign and gesture in the same direction. The camera shifts upwards to a packed section in the festival stands. We are introduced to the woman's audience: a group of four women who similarly oscillate between Sign language, gesture, and dance. Lozano equally documents the moments of pause – the taking in of what is being communicated from those out of frame – with close attention to the interiority of understanding. I am moved and compelled to move by the work's images and sounds. The familiarity between friends in this work is atmospheric. One wishes to be invited in. A study



spatial rhythms, 2010

of language in its myriad form, *spatial rhythms* holds layers of understanding read through the body's knowing and expressive registers.

Artist Donna James' *Maigre Dog* is an experimental video incorporating family photographs, anecdotal video, Jamaican Patois, and Calypso music. An audio recording of James in conversation with her two Aunties – Mrs. Delores Donaldsen and Mrs. Phillis James – plays throughout the work. The video's assemblage of image and text is responsive to the women's speech, laughter, and oral gestures. *Maigre Dog* is both a loving portrait and an oral history of the fulsome lives of two elder Jamaican women. The work pulsates with what Black culture and literature scholar Kevin Quashie calls "Black aliveness," or "a quality of being, a term of habitat, a manner and aesthetic, a feeling." *Maigre Dog's* first visual is a black and white photograph of a wallpapered kitchen, its counters filled with jars and bottles, and a single pot on the stove. Sight conjures smell, sound evokes touch. James' recitation of each proverb acts as a question: what is the meaning? In response, the Aunties offer explanations to James – and at times to each other. Video of a broom sweeping a floor appears as we

read and hear in Jamaican Patois: “new broom sweep clean but old broom knows the corners.” Laughter erupts as the women reflect on the familiar love of a former boyfriend: “cause he knows the corners, he knows your ways and you know his ways.” *Maigre Dog*’s attention to verbal and oral gestures is a celebration of the understanding made possible in the sacred space of a loving kitchen.

Filmmaker, curator, and scholar Karina Griffith’s short film *UNKRAUT* – the German title translates as *weed* – examines diaspora through the metaphor of the unwanted plant. The film quickly alternates between shaky handheld Super-8 film scenes of a cultivated garden and 35mm footage of wild roadside growth. An archival past is evoked through the silence, blur, and accelerated speed of Super-8. The present is elicited by the sound, high resolution,

and real-time speed of standard film. The same weed variety is depicted in both aesthetics signifying multiple and collapsed temporalities. Griffith describes *UNKRAUT* as inspired by the restricted mobility and labour of African refugees in Berlin. The film visualizes how places are historically and contemporarily rendered “inhuman rather than human geographies” in the words of Black geographies and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick. Short text appears briefly throughout the film: “I am your *Urtica dioica*” (*nettle*), “I am your *Taraxacum officinale*” (*dandelion*), and “I am your *Homo sapiens sapiens*” (a sub-species of the *Human*). Gloved hands arrange and hammer hand-cut stone into earth cleared of vegetation. A man, obscured from the waist upwards, repeatedly mows a lawn. Gestures of

containment. Importantly, *UNKRAUT* speaks to the duality of subjugation and resistance. A woman walks barefoot on earth in both the work’s Super-8 and standard documentary footage. In my view, the walking references Black presence in Germany. Life grows from land and a home-place is created. Griffith, however, does not attempt to wholly resolve unbelonging. *UNKRAUT*’s soundtrack of sirens, passing cars, and silence signal that precarity remains ever-present in an earthly realm.

Artist Erika DeFreitas’ *real cadences and a quiet colour* is a performative documentary video featuring the artist and her mother – and frequent collaborator – Cita DeFreitas. The work is a double portrait, a study of mirrored gestures, and entirely focused on their feet. Filmed in a single shot, the video begins with the bare lower shins, ankles, and feet of DeFreitas’ mother as she sits on a floral-patterned couch, her feet resting on dark grey carpet. The artist enters the frame and sits beside her mother, their bare feet side by side. The work’s sound is minimal: the white noise of recording inside a home, padded steps on a plush carpet, a couch’s creak as one sits down, toes moving on textile.

The effect is a work full with quiet. DeFreitas and her mother repetitively curl and stretch toes and feel foot with foot. The shared cadences of their gestures read as mother-daughter echo. Of the video, DeFreitas says, “Is this learnt behaviour, or is this something that is so intrinsic in who we are?” I was immediately drawn to the elegance of this work’s gestural subject matter and method. I remain moved by how this work elucidates so much about the interiority of DeFreitas, her mother, and what is shared between them. For me, the work is heavenly in the vastness of its intimacy.

DeFreitas’ video closes this program, but it is where I began. After over a year apart, nearness with those we cherish has never felt like such a gift. When togetherness is not possible, expressive actions and gestures – like sitting side by side – are newly significant, their meaning altered. I selected these works because of the understanding communicated and perceived by their subjects’ shared presence. In this way, the works use gesture as a means to communicate the ever-shifting ordinariness and exceptionality of our lives.



Maigre Dog, 1990



UNKRAUT, 2014

Embodied Intimacies: Gesturing Towards Understanding

Curated by Ashley Raghubir

1. Rachel Echenberg

How to explain performance art to my teenage daughter, 2018, 05:58

Montreal-based artist Rachel Echenberg's silent video *How to explain performance art to my teenage daughter* features the artist and her daughter Clara as they cover each other's heads in honey and then gold leaf. Initially performed in 2015, the video references artist Joseph Beuys' 1965 performance *How to explain pictures to a dead hare*. Echenberg's video centres the pedagogical and communicative aspects of gesture and understanding between mother and daughter collaborators.

2. Jorge Lozano

spatial rhythms, 2010, 06:46

Toronto-based Colombian film and video artist Jorge Lozano's *spatial rhythms* documents a group of attendees at the Afro-Columbian Petronio Alvarez Pacific Music Festival in Cali, Columbia as they sign and gesture to each other from afar. An Afro-Columbian marimba soundtrack accompanies intimate scenes of friends shifting between Sign language, gesture, and dance. A study of language, *spatial rhythms* holds layers of understanding read through the body.

3. Donna James

Maigre Dog, 1990, 07:50

Jamaican-born multidisciplinary artist Donna James's *Maigre Dog* is an experimental video incorporating family photographs, Jamaican Patois, and Calypso music. The work features an audio recording of James in conversation with two Aunties – Mrs. Delores Donaldsen and Mrs. Phillis James – as image and text respond to the women's exchange of speech, laughter, and oral gesture.

Maigre Dog is a portrait and an oral history of two elder Jamaican women that celebrates the intimacy of familial language and knowledge.

4. Karina Griffith

UNKRAUT, 2014, 02:24

Berlin-based filmmaker, curator, and scholar Karina Griffith's *UNKRAUT* – the title translating to *weed* – examines diaspora through the metaphor of the undesirable plant. The video alternates between Super-8 and contemporary film treatment of documentary footage indexing multiple temporalities and ongoing histories. Contrasting scenes of cultivated private gardens and wild roadside growth reference the restricted mobility and labour of African refugees in Berlin.

5. Erika DeFreitas

real cadences and a quiet colour, 2017, 05:13

Scarborough-based artist Erika DeFreitas' *real cadences and a quiet colour* is a performative documentary video featuring the artist and her mother – and frequent collaborator – Cita DeFreitas as they sit beside one another on a couch. DeFreitas' video is a mother-daughter portrait, a study of mirrored gesture, and entirely focused on their feet. With gesture as subject matter and method, DeFreitas and her mother curl and stretch toes and caress foot with foot to elucidate the intimacy and understanding shared between them.



real cadences and a quiet colour, 2017

Spirit, Feeding

Curated by Joy Xiang

“Ooh, baby, do you know what that’s worth? Ooh, heaven is a place on earth.”

—Belinda Carlisle

“We came to understand exactly where here was, as well as where an elsewhere may be, and how we could get over there, beyond there. We developed relationships with the shapes we made in the world. We decided what could be discarded and what was worth keeping. We questioned what was pre-given and what could be a choice. We created our own tool and instruments, our own rituals. We took (back) time.”

—Adjoa Armah, “Transformative Study: A Syllabus,” 2021

PROMPTED BY VTAPE’S CURATORIAL INCUBATOR to think about heaven(s), I immediately conjured songs: “Heaven or Las Vegas” (Cocoteau Twins), “Heaven is a Place on Earth” (Belinda Carlisle), and “Total Eclipse of the Heart” (Bonnie Tyler). The last two often merge as one in

my mind, making me think of shadows in heaven, or shadows existing at the same time as heaven(s). To locate myself, I didn’t grow up with any spiritual cosmologies, and coming out of an emotionally fraught and isolated Chinese settler-immigrant home life makes it “easy” for me to be godless—or at the very least feel ambivalent about overdetermined ideas of heaven, especially Western ones. But that’s far from believing in nothing. Nothing and everything are two sides of the same matter.

I started to think about material dimensions of heaven(s) in this world, negotiated by desire across the stark realities of this planet and continuing legacies of capitalist-colonial exploitation. Certain projections of “heaven on earth” have been used by colonizers to justify the exotification, erasure, and extermination of the lives already existing and sustained in those real places: like the terra nullius (nobody’s land) applied by European powers to Turtle Island as a sublime wilderness to be claimed and plundered for

resources; or Penglai 蓬莱 in ancient Chinese mythology, a name for the lush home of the immortals that was also applied to the island of Taiwan for its mysterious abundance, sought after in the 17th century by Qing dynasty expansionists.¹

It’s a messy business—there’s no guarantee that our ideas of heaven are the same, even among those who unite in configurations to bring better possibilities into this world. What does it mean to be inside or outside heaven? What if heavens were conceived of as already here on earth, being transformed in perpetuity, collapsing boundaries of heaven/ hell/ projection/ reality, enveloping the dirt, horror, and violent incursions of this material world and its entire history, towards numerous future revolutions? If heaven could be the force of will itself to bring, and keep bringing, *into* possibility, could we cross from this reality into another?

Archivist, anthropologist, and artist Adjoa Armah’s poetically precise words at the beginning of this text

¹ As noted by environmental historian and writer Jessica J. Lee in her book *Two Trees Make a Forest* (Penguin Random House, 2020).

suggest some paths for crossing over. In an article for *e-flux*, she writes about creating a site of “Transformative Study” that is speculative, collaborative, and relational, inspired by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. In 2015, Armah began the Saman Archive, a collection of photographic negatives from across Ghana (saman being an Akan colloquial word for the negative that can be translated as “ghost”), which also informs her method in its generous temporal structure and the national archive not bound to nation-state: “She [the archive] knows some things about the making of history, about how to put oneself in service of what you say you believe. This is who we must become to get to where we say we are going.”²

Following from Armah’s sites of study and archive that combine belief and becoming, *Spirit, Feeding*, marks the edges of desire in bringing worlds into being, the boundary paths compelled into a small experiment on spirit, motivation, and sustenance: spirit “made” real, spirit already real.

² Adjoa Armah, “Transformative Study: A Syllabus,” *e-flux* (2021), <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/survivance/386626/transformational-study-a-syllabus>.

This program explores heavens—in terms of more just worlds—materialized through ghosts, desire, wishes, and speculative fiction, and not separate from current realities. These works conjure cross-pollinations of heaven/hunger/home, propelling away from broken and withering dominant systems that are based on depleting everything in stratified and unequal ways: peoples, resources, time, nature, future. *Spirit, Feeding* plays on the idea of how “to get from this world to the next” in literal, revolutionary terms, which are also about charged quotidian realities.

Yau Ching’s *I’m Starving* begins the program with an intimate narrative of individuals who exist within oppressive material conditions. The piece unfolds as a sapphic, erotic, and melancholy love tale glowingly cast in blue and other colours in a small apartment in Chinatown, New York City, shared by a woman and a ghost, and their refuse of takeout menus and instant noodles. Despite being dead, the ghost’s slow and deliberate voice narrates a crisp sensual longing—for eating as she did in her past life—attached to the woman’s routines, her smell and food. She is a “hungry ghost,” perhaps a riff on the Buddhist

term for beings driven by insatiable needs, which also becomes a container in the piece for the survival of queer life and love. At one point, over a shot of curtains blowing in the empty apartment, the ghost says, “Here I imagine a world which abuses much less / by imagining my attachment to you as my real life.”

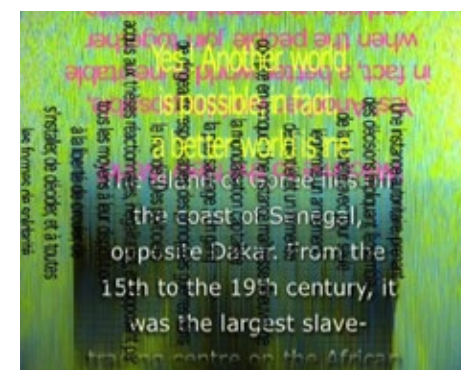
Time lingers within their apartment to an uncertain end, set apart from the few shots of the moving city outside—close views of shoppers’ hands with red grocery bags, a cut to a stock market ticker. Angular close-ups and careful fragments build a stock of sensual images out of the still lives of the woman and ghost, and create a feeling of existential hunger consecrated by the beautifully jangling piano score. The ghost appears to be motivated by the woman to crave lush tactility



I'm Starving, 1999

again—eating, smelling, touching—within this secluded space that provides shelter for a queer-coded existence (and holds the impossibility of life and death at once). Near the end of the video, the two sit across from each other at a table almost wryly piled with fortune cookies. “There must be a reason for living hidden somewhere,” the woman reads, literally ingesting the fortune to actualize the wish in the film’s form. The sudden intrusion of external reality arrives when the landlord comes to demand rent and threaten eviction, but all he finds are fortunes blowing in the wind.

The hard-held belief that another world is possible begins Guy Woueté’s *La Liste est Longue*, another intimate piece, in which revolution exists in both ambiguous and hard, yet unresolved, terms. The camera tightly frames a bed, panning the artist’s static body, face, and closed eyes. While scrolling vertical and horizontal texts are superimposed onto his image, Woueté’s voiceover narrates a dream he had about the future, where children were crying. “I’m always scared.” His words echo, overlap, repeat. I encounter this as an ambivalent incantation, especially the artist’s hushed parting thought, “I don’t



La Liste est Longue, 2007

know, really, what will remain of this world...” that points to both destructive and regenerative paths.

Scrolling English and French texts are pulled from multiple sources, among them: a description of the Island of Gorée, what was the largest human trading-centre for enslaved people on the African coast; a pink text, crossing in the other direction, from a 2003 anti-G8 (currently G7) protest in Lausanne that visions a better world (“Genuine security rooted in sustainable local communities” / “Clean air, water, food, without corporate control”); red and white text of values and principles from the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000), which can be read critically as performative globalization ideals. Grounded in the obscured, vulnerable image of the artist, the stressful cacophony



The Weight of the Sun and Moon, 2001

of the forces of false authority and wealth might, here, meet hope; a nightmare/living nightmare inscribed with frenzied ways out; a traversal line, maybe.

In Yudi Sewraj's *The Weight of the Sun and Moon*, a more anonymous figure contrasts the struggle of physical labour with previous ideals (of expansionist nation-states competing for technological, political, and moral superiority) of landing on the moon. Sewraj's work appears as a cheeky contrast between conceptions

of worshipped bodies, possibly under dominant ideologies, and the reality of earthly matter and labour. The heavy-lifter in *The Weight of the Sun and the Moon* stands semi-comically at the bottom of a crater as rocks cascade down. The figure never stops, day and night, amassing these rocks into a ramshackle altar under a miniature sun and moon. Audio clips of Aldrin and Armstrong during the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing are transposed onto this labour, far removed from it in time, purpose, and distance.

One reading that arises is the false "heaven" of the race for technological salvation and colonial-expansionist motivations of certain space exploration (Gil Scott-Heron said it better, in his words, "no hot water, no toilets, no lights / but Whitey's on the moon").

Conversely, Stephanie Comilang's *Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come To Me, Paradise)* takes the familiar reality and power dynamics of economic migration to speculate technology as a conscious life/ghost and tell of where women create temporary architectures for living. As a science fiction documentary, the reverse exorcism of calling ghost forth into body (in this case, a drone) allows for the imaging of Filipina migrant workers in ways outside of the exploitative dynamics of their labour. Technology as possessed by Paraiso, the ghost, isn't a single point of redemption, but connective meeting place of home(s), messages, and selfies (as in self-imaging). Paraiso isn't imagined as extractive or unfeeling; she becomes a sort of collective consciousness of all the women, becomes herself in and through relation—"The feelings I have are a direct download reaction to the videos the women upload, see?"

The spectral eye of Paraiso who doubles as the transmitter of the women's messages home is able to offer sweeping aerial views of Hong Kong's skyscrapers along with vertical phone and other footage shot by the women themselves—including vlogger Irish May Salinas, Lyra Ancheta Torbela, and Romylyn Presto Sampaga. The city's looming steel buildings constantly contrast and are interrupted by shots of the temporary structures the women raise on their days off, efficient cardboard walls and rooms that carve momentary privacy into public space. These short reprieves from their working environments, where migrant domestic workers must legally live leading to rife potential for harm, visually and physically dominate public places on this day, such as Central, the heart and symbol of the business district. Paraiso becomes a heaven détourned, out of images, desires, boredom, fears, and the women in relation.

Finally, Chooc Ly Tan's *New Materials in the Reading of the World* (2011) irreverently treats, in form and content, physical laws themselves and explodes astrophysics and rational matter into the chaos of the universe—to cathartically travel dimensions beyond what

laws of matter have been instrumentalized for. “The signatories of *Oubliism* have, under the glare of a nuclear starburst / Committed to Shed tears,” so announces the Oubliist text accompanying the piece. I feel joyful when I watch this work, with Tan’s emphatic voice punctuating found and created images, including ethics, science, and culture, some to be overturned: white light splitting through a prism, a black-and-white photo reminiscent of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, the international space station, an indeterminate-context protestor with the sign, “Was Socrates a lousy teacher?”

As a DJ, Tan pays attention to atonality and syncopation as strategy, the beats and uneven yet infectious sonic form that appears and disappears over the moving image collage. The video

declares that this invented movement “align[s] itself not to the symmetry of reason but to possibilities that forms of expression live in physical realities.” *New Materials* calls to mind thinkers like Denise Ferreira da Silva and many others, non-scientists working in a mode away from Euclidean and Newtonian laws towards more quantum, undetermined mechanics (in Ferreira da Silva’s case, specifically tied to states of Blackness).

Like the way Tan’s work dances with physical reality itself, if the form of heaven could be freed according to uncertainty principles, maybe the form of revolution changes as you look upon or live it, like Schrödinger’s cat both dead and alive, existing in a real place between this world to the next.

Spirit, Feeding

Curated by Joy Xiang

1. Yau Ching

I’m Starving, 1999, 13:00

An erotic tale. In a blue-hued apartment in Chinatown, New York, a ghost and a woman attach themselves to each other and languish in small intimacies, biding and binding time for an existence worth living. The ghost misses her past life and the sensation of eating, devours paper menus to echo the woman who subsists on ramen noodles and takeout. The wind blows; they make their own fortunes.

2. Guy Woueté

La liste est longue, 2007, 2:26

The artist lies prone in bed as the camera roves over his figure, voiceover describing an uncertain dream about the future. Multi-coloured texts pulled from various sources, such as protest declarations from anti-G7/G8 actions, obscure and glitch his face and body with scrolling horizontal and vertical overlays. Wishes and fears repeat and echo like a mantra.

3. Yudi Sewraj

The Weight of the Sun and the Moon, 2001, 3:00

A figure piles large rocks at the bottom of a crater, under a pint-sized spinning sun and moon. From day to night, the labourer drags, rolls, and carries these stones to form a makeshift kind of altar. Audio clips from the Apollo 11 moon landing are contrasted by earthly heavy lifting.

4. Stephanie Comilang

Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come To Me, Paradise), 2017, 25:46

Paraiso, a ghost in the form of a drone, flies among the cold sleekness of Hong Kong skyscrapers and finds purpose in being the vessel and transmitter for Filipina migrant workers to send videos and messages home. She finds the women when their signals are strongest, gathered together on Sundays, their day off,

when they occupy and transform swathes of space in the heart of the financial district. The women create temporary structures where they meet, eat, meditate, surf their phones, away from the eye of work (by law, foreign domestic workers in HK must live with their employers). Even when the messages are transmitted, they live on in Paraiso's cache/memory, carving out an in-between in the technological mediation between places, hopes, and desires. A "science fiction documentary."

5. Chooc Ly Tan

New Materials in the Reading of the World, 2011, 5:20

Oublii!! Break the all-too-rational, coded rationality, of a relationship to physical laws which determine an idea of surrounding reality based on unpossibility and dying systems. What if botany was explored for its sonic potential, or words turned into spirited forces? Oubliism embraces cacophony, inverts norms, invents fragile forms. Atonal, with beatific dissonance and a collage of images, the work heralds the arrival of a cosmic and revolutionary vastness.

the artists

Yau Ching is a writer, poet, filmmaker, and video artist who has been making socially engaged work for more than three decades. She has authored more than twelve books, produced and directed more than ten films/videos, and been active in community organizing, such as co-founding a Sex Workers' Film Festival in Hong Kong, the Asian Lesbian Film Festival in Taiwan, and more. She is Honorary Professor in Humanities at the University of Hong Kong and Adjunct Professor at the Center for China Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Stephanie Comilang is an artist living and working between Toronto and Berlin. Her documentary-based works create narratives that look at how our understandings of mobility, capital and labour on a global scale are shaped through various cultural and social factors. Her work has been shown at Transmediale Berlin, Ghost: 2561 Bangkok Video & Performance Triennale, S.A.L.T.S Basel, Tai Kwun Hong Kong, International Film Festival Rotterdam, and Asia Art Archive in America, New York. She was awarded

the 2019 Sobey Art Award, one of Canada's most prestigious art prizes.

Erika DeFreitas is a Scarborough-based multidisciplinary artist working across performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, works on paper, and writing. DeFreitas' practice incorporates gesture, process, documentation, and the paranormal to examine concepts such as loss, memory, inheritance, and objecthood. She was the 2016 recipient of the Toronto Friends of Visual Artists' Finalist Artist Prize, the 2016 John Hartman Award, and long-listed for the 2017 Sobey Art Award. DeFreitas has exhibited, performed, and screened work in Canada and internationally. She holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

Rachel Echenberg is a Montreal-based artist working primarily in performance, video, and photography. Echenberg's practice centres empathy in relation to the complexity and vulnerability of intimate relationships. Drawing on this conceptual focus,

much of Echenberg's recent work features members of her family. Since 1992 her work has been exhibited, performed, and screened in Canada and internationally. Echenberg holds a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Halifax (1993), and an MA in Visual Performance from Dartington College of Arts, Devon, United Kingdom (2004). She teaches at Dawson College in Montreal where she is the Chairperson in the Department of Visual Arts.

Karina Griffith is a Berlin-based filmmaker, curator, and scholar working primarily in film and installation. Her work foregrounds themes of fear and fantasy in relation to belonging to a place. Griffith draws on family practices of Caribbean Patois storytelling to examine Black European histories, creolization, and diaspora. Griffith's work has been exhibited and screened in Canada and internationally. In 2017, she curated the festival Republik Repair: Ten Points, Ten Demands, One Festival of Reparatory Imaginings from Black Berlin. Griffith is a PhD candidate in the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute researching Black authorship in German cinema.

Donna James is a Jamaican-born multidisciplinary artist whose work centres intergenerational memory and oral history as method and subject. James's practice spans several decades with a focus on text-based photography, video, and more recently, film and video installation. James considers the fulsomeness of Black womanhood, the familial, and loss with an emphasis on personal storytelling, oral histories, and inquiry into memory. James has exhibited internationally, including the toured exhibition Magnetic North: Canadian Experimental Video. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Ottawa Art Gallery, and more. James lives and works in Ottawa and summers in Nova Scotia.

Jorge Lozano is a Colombian-born Toronto-based film and video artist with a decades' long practice that includes experimental, documentary, and fictional works. Lozano examines socio-political, cultural, and class intersections with a focus on land, memory, and immigration. Lozano's experimental and fictional works have been exhibited and screened internationally at festivals and galleries. In 2003, he founded the aluCine:

Toronto film + media arts festival. Since 1991, Lozano has mentored emerging artists and conducted youth workshops in Canada and Latin America providing a platform for new voices in experimental video and film.

Abdi Osman is a Somali-Canadian multidisciplinary artist whose work focuses on questions of black masculinity as it intersects with Muslim and queer identities. Osman's video and photography work has been shown in Canada and internationally in both group and solo exhibitions.

Mirha-Soleil Ross is a transsexual videographer, performance artist, sex worker and activist. Her work since the early 1990s in Montreal and Toronto has focused on transsexual rights, access to resources, and advocacy for sex workers. From her own personal body, history, and experience, to the political fields of reproductive technology and animal rights, Ross's art covers a broad landscape of politics and desire.

Born in Guyana, **Yudi Sewraj** is an experimental video artist working in Montreal. His interactive film and video installation work investigates ideas of authenticity that emerge between the camera and the subject.

Sewraj has screened and installed his work both nationally and internationally at venues across Canada, the United States and Europe. His works are included in collections in Canada and Italy. He teaches filmmaking and media studies at John Abbott College in Saint Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

Chooc Ly Tan's practice sets out to create new visions of reality by subverting systems and/or tools we use to understand the world around us—such as concepts and methodologies from physics, politics and music. Her work spans across—and is not limited to—moving image, DJ sets and club nights. Her work has recently been shown at CCA/EdUHK in Hong Kong, Kunsthall Oslo, and in London at Mimosa House gallery and Banner Repeater.

Ayo Tsalithaba is a visual artist originally from Ghana and Lesotho. Their primary mediums include film, photography and illustration. Their work explores questions of home, (in) visibility, liminality and (un)belonging as they relate to Black queer and trans African diasporic subjectivity. Ayo has been featured in *Huffington Post Canada*, *The Fader*, *Flare Magazine*, *Manifesto*, *TFO*, *The Kitm* and *Munch Magazine* and they have made

music videos with Queer Songbook Orchestra, Lydia Persaud, Tika, Bernice, Desiire and Emma Frank. They have screened their films and appeared on panels at the TIFF Bell Lightbox, Free, University of Toronto, George Brown, the Revue Cinema, Xspace Cultural Centre, and more.

kyisha williams is a Toronto-born director, actor and health promoter. kyisha fuses public health (MPH) and digital media to creating socially relevant content that discusses health and promotes healthy sexuality and consent culture. They believe that the screen is a beautiful and engaging teaching tool. kyisha created their first film; *Red Lips [cages for Black girls]* (2010), with the support of the Inside Out Film Festival's New Visions Film Program. In 2016, they completed the Black Women Film! Leadership Program, and in 2017 their team won the BravoFact pitch competition allowing them to create *Queen of Hearts* (2018), now getting International attention. kyisha has acted in over twenty TV episodes, commercials, PSAs, and short films.

Born and raised in Trinidad, **Natalie Wood** obtained her studio training at Ontario College of Art and Design

and went on to complete an MA in Art Education from the University of Toronto in 2000. Her works have been presented nationally and internationally in several group exhibitions (Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art 2007), International Art Fairs (Artist Project Toronto 2010, Nuit Blanche 2007, Toronto Alternative Art Fair International, 2006), and film and video festivals (the New York Mix Film and Video Festival, Inside Out, Images, Pleasure Dome and Mpenzi Film and Video festival where she won the Audience Choice Award in 2006).

Guy Woueté (b. Douala, Cameroon, 1980) graduated from the University of Paris 8 and École de Recherche Graphique in Brussels, where he currently teaches. His work encompasses elements of social criticism, questions surrounding borders, migration, and symbols of domination in an era of globalization. He blends collages, installation, performance, video, photography as well as sculpture, painting, and artist's books. He has exhibited at many museums and festivals, including the University of Fine Arts (Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam), S.M.A.K (Gent, Belgium), the Biennales of Dak'Art (Dakar, Senegal), among others.

the curators

Crocus Collective (previously Riverdale Projects) is a Toronto-based curatorial collective led by **Karina Iskandarsjah** and **Dallas Fellini**. Born in 2020 out of an artistic partnership with Riverdale Hub, our mission is to focus on community-building, explore the function of art in social practice, and support emerging artists.

Mahlet Cuff is an emerging interdisciplinary curator and artist. She is based in Treaty 1 Territory in so-called Winnipeg, Manitoba. Their curatorial practice focuses on satirical humour being a tool as resistance, reimagining Black queer diasporic futures, and archival practices. She has curated work for Window Winnipeg and Take Home BIPOC arts house.

Ashley Raghubir is a Trinidad-born Black Canadian researcher and writer of Trinidadian and English heritage. She lives and works in Tkaronto/Toronto where she is pursuing a PhD in art history at the University of Toronto. In 2021, she completed

a master's in art history at Concordia University, Tiohtià:ke Mooniyang/Montréal. Her academic research and independent art writing centre on Black Canadian contemporary art, Black geographies, and Afrofuturisms. She has contributed writing to *C Magazine*.

Joy Xiang (she/her) is a writer, editor, arts worker, and perpetually bourgeoisie human born in Shanghai and based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Her work engages desire, migration, material flows, and media nostalgia and futurity. She thinks of the place where poetry might meet criticism might meet the charged liberation of dancing in dark rooms. She has edited for *Milkweed erotic zine*, *re:asian*, and *Canadian Art*; written for Mercer Union, Ada X, and Hamilton Artists Inc.; and held positions at Vtape and Blackwood Gallery. She is a member of the intergenerational feminist working group EMILIA-AMALIA.

Published in 2021 by Vtape
401 Richmond Street West, #452
Toronto, ON M5V 3A8
Canada

tel 416 351-1317
fax 416 351-1509
email info@vtape.org

www.vtape.org

ISBN: 978-0-9867810-8-7

Designed by Linseed Projects



Operating as a distributor, a mediatheque and a resource centre with an emphasis on the contemporary media arts, Vtape's mandate is to serve both artists and audiences by assisting and encouraging the appreciation, pedagogy, preservation, restoration and exhibition of media works by artists and independents. Vtape receives operating funds from the Canada Council for the Art through the Media Arts Section, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.

COVER:

How to explain performance art to my teenage daughter, 2018



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