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**HISTORY**

The Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History (CUJAH) is a student-run association that aims to showcase the talents of Concordia University's undergraduate Art History and Fine Arts students.

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# TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to begin by acknowledging that CUJAH operates on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

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# RECONNAISSANCE TERRITORIALE

Nous aimerions commencer par reconnaître que CUJAH opère en territoire autochtone, lequel n'a jamais été cédé. Je reconnais/Nous reconnaissons la nation Kanien'kehá: ka comme gardienne des terres et des eaux sur lesquelles nous nous réunissons aujourd'hui. Tiohtiá:ke / Montréal est historiquement connu comme un lieu de rassemblement pour de nombreuses Premières Nations, et aujourd'hui, une population autochtone diversifiée, ainsi que d'autres peuples, y résident. C'est dans le respect des liens avec le passé, le présent et l'avenir que nous reconnaissons les relations continues entre les Peuples Autochtones et autres personnes de la communauté montréalaise.

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# THE MANDATE

The Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History (CUJAH) is a student-run association that aims to showcase the talents of Concordia University's undergraduate Art History and Fine Arts students. CUJAH strives to provide students with academic and professional opportunities through workshops, events, and online resources. CUJAH is composed of an executive team, an editorial team, a design team and is assisted by faculty members in the Department of Art History.

As a journal, we strive for academic excellence. Through a blind-review process, CUJAH selects essays for our published volumes which best exemplify the diversity of talents within the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Concordia community at large. We encourage submissions of not only academic papers, but experimental writing, reflective essays, and critical reviews to broaden the realm of what is considered research in academic institutions. We have been publishing undergraduate research since 2004-2005 and have released sixteenth volumes, the present volume being the seventeenth.



CUJAH — VOLUME XVIII

In addition to our annual journal, CUJAH hosted, in collaboration with the Fine Arts Student Alliance, Concordia's Eleventh Undergraduate Art History Conference, Land BIPOC. We were honoured to have Suzanna Kite, Ester Calixte-Bea, Shaya Ishaq, and Annie TongZhou Lafrance as our keynote speakers.

Despite enduring a global pandemic, CUJAH was able to continue its mission of supporting students in their professional and academic development while also improving our organization as a whole. In September 2020, we established our first-ever Board of Directors to ensure better accountability and transparency within our student group.

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the second volume of CUJAH being published amidst a global pandemic, and whilst our optimism expected for the world to release its hitched and exasperated breath with a sweet sigh of relief, the collective sound we heard was more of a panicked scream served with a side of constant anxiety-inducing uncertainties that saw us in class one day, and bound us to our chairs under new regulations and curfews with ever-changing and often incomprehensible pandemic-related laws, the next.

This time around though, we did not grip the edges of our seats with the dread of being unsure about whether or not we could do it. We knew we could. We had. It might have been a miracle last year, but a miracle many other publishing houses also managed to achieve. This time, we started our work on the journal with the full awareness that regardless of our operations being run on campus, we could still do it. No one really thought of the long-term effects of COVID-19 on our physical, mental, and emotional well-being, however. The entire world, it suffices to say, believed the pandemic jitters to be a result of social isolation. So very few of us actually considered the emotional toll of living in a state of constant fight or flight for over two years, and even fewer took the outcome of this stress on our creative process and academic work, into consideration. It is hence, not just with honour, but an immense amount of pride in my team's resilience, and strength of character, that I present to you all, CUJAH's eighteenth volume.

This volume is built on our mandates, and does not only achieve the promise of showcasing the best undergraduate essays in our prominent Fine Arts department, but it also surpasses expectations with a unique and emotionally impactful annual conference that focused on underrepresented and marginalized artists who are fighting the status quo, promoting the dismantling of the heteropatriarchy, and amplifying voices that have long since been written out of art history's westernized white canon.

We have worked tirelessly to bring this volume into life, and it is with a great deal of excitement that we present these unique and thought-provoking essays. Thanks to our talented authors for sharing their research and analysis with us, we have a diverse set of articles this year that range between period-based analysis to critical reviews of contemporary phenomena. The essays explore various themes such as but not limited to feminism, imperialism, and decolonization using different methodologies. We have expanded our academic journal – as was the case with our seventeenth edition - to include creative writings, and personal narratives which with their unique style offer us engaging new takes on art history, and our overall visual and media comprehension. These essays are distinctive and exhibit fierce researching skills. Thank you our amazing authors for sharing your work with us, and congratulations on all your great accomplishments.



I would like to also thank the kind members of our Art History Department, in particular the new chair John Potvin, not only for lending his editing expertise to our editorial team this year but also for his generosity to open the meeting to the public for many students interested in publishing to benefit from his experience. We also thank John Potvin for always being available to us and guiding us when we most needed it; Seven Stowell for his continued involvement with CUJAH and his assistance in our student workshops and conference; and Tricia Middleton for helping us in event promotion. We are also grateful to the Fine Arts Student Alliance for their support and new initiatives which have made Student clubs, and affiliates much safer. We thank the Jarislowsky Institute for Canadian Art for their support, and lending us a space for our Conference. We also thank 4TH SPACE, the Concordia Student Union and the Concordia Council on Student Life. Lastly, I would like to thank my resilient CUJAH team, without whose dedication and flexibility this volume could not see the light of day. I am eternally grateful to my Managing Editor, Meghan Leech, whose diligent work has been an incredible support for me. It is with the greatest faith in her abilities that I pass on the torch to her and congratulate her on becoming our new Editor-In-Chief. Thank you, Taylor Telford, our Conference Coordinator, for a conference we are not likely to forget soon, and for your perseverance in our most challenging and difficult times. Thank you Laura Bartlett for your enthusiasm and the positive energy you have brought to CUJAH, and for coordinating events that aimed to push the limits of our imaginations. Thank you Sophia DePaoli for another year of leading our communications and marketing strategies. Thank you Elizabeth Hosson for managing our French communications, and French translations. Thank you to our Conference Graphic Designer, Zi Di Zhu, for designing our conference material, and website, and thank you to our Journal designer Emma Garon for a beautiful journal that is a true achievement. Thank you to our English, French, and Copy Editors, for their attention to detail, it is largely due to their work that this journal is before us now. Finally, thank you our readers for allowing us to push the boundaries and publish essays that best reflect our feelings and ambitions of the year. It is with utmost respect and joy that I present this volume to you now.

Editor-In-Chief  
Paris Esmaeilpour

# EXECUTIVE BIOGRAPHIES

## **PARIS ESMAEILPOUR** **Editor-In-Chief**

Paris is an international student majoring in Film Studies. Her work focuses on the immigrant experience, and explores themes of identity, womanhood, and isolation. She has worked as a programmer and Co-director for the Concordia Film Festival respectively, and has used the opportunity to showcase underrepresented voices. In recent years, her interests have shifted towards women's position in publishing and media. As such, she is interested in papers that showcase a strong female voice and offer radical critiques of the status quo.

## **MEGHAN LEECH** **Managing Editor**

Meghan Leech is a Tiohtiá:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal based writer finishing her third year in Art History and Philosophy at Concordia. In her personal work she enjoys studying artists who are addressing Canadian Colonial ideologies and history in their practice. She also enjoys studying intervention art as an act of resistance against the harmful dominant ideologies, her favourite being the defacement of statues of colonial figures. Previously she worked as editor for the Journal of Visual and Critical Studies during her time at OCAD University in Toronto. After transferring to Concordia she accepted the role Managing Editor with CUJAH. She is also a contributing writer for the Undergraduate Student Exhibition 2022 catalogue.

## **SOPHIA DEPAOLI** **Communications Coordinator**

Sophia DePaoli is a fourth-year Fine Arts student majoring in Studio Arts and minoring in Art History at Concordia University. Her art history practice is primarily focused on feminist surrealism—particularly the life and work of Kay Sage—as well as The Arts and Crafts movement. Her studio practice includes drawing, painting and bronze casting, and is thematically linked to narration, exploration and the grotesque. DePaoli has been working as CUJAH's communication coordinator for two years, and hopes to use the knowledge she gained during this time and implement it into her own art career.

## **LIZ HOSSON**

### **Associate French Editor**

Liz Hosson is a French-Canadian nonbinary artist and student at Concordia University based in Montreal, Quebec. They are currently majoring in Art History with a minor in First Peoples Studies. Driven by a need to understand the impact of art on its surrounding society, their academic interests are primarily focused on global intertwined histories, post-colonial theory, decolonial strategies, intersectionality, and gender issues in art history. They prioritize the study of contemporary BIPOC and queer artists working in Canada. As an artist, their practice centers around questions of identity and gender.

## **TAYLOR TELFORD**

### **Conference Coordinator**

Taylor is a fourth year Studio Arts & Art History student from Southern Ontario and now based in Montreal. She is an active member of her community as an artist, and volunteered in various art and sustainability initiatives. Her previous studies in sociology, with a focus on post-colonial theory and quantitative statistics, influence her art practices.

## **EMMA GARON**

### **Journal Graphic Designer**

Emma is a French-Canadian Illustrator and Graphic Designer from Quebec City now based in Montreal. She is currently completing her Major in Art History at Concordia University. Her practice researches the credibility given to arts and crafts matters and the many ways art and design can work together. The CUJAH Volume XVIII marks her debut in magazine design. She has a cat named Camembert.

## **ZI DI**

### **Conference Graphic Designer**

Zi Di is a second year Computation Art student, her practice focuses on digital medium. Prior to starting her degree she worked as a freelance artist where she worked on a variety of projects from book illustrations, graffiti, and designing websites. Her work "A Collection of Small Games" was exhibited at Space-Between and won the Experimental Design Award.



# EDITOR BIOGRAPHIES

## CHRISTINA MARANDO

Christina Marando is a student currently completing her final year of a bachelor's degree in English literature with a minor in professional writing at Concordia University. She has also acquired a DEC in Social Sciences from Vanier College. She works as a part time freelance writer and editor, and she has multiple articles published online. She specializes in writing and editing pieces about the arts and culture. Christina was born and raised in Laval, Quebec, and she currently resides there.

## COLIN COURTNEY

Colin Courtney is an artist working painting, drawing, sculpture and new media. He currently lives, works, and plays on the island of Tioh-tià:ke/Montreal. Through observation and research-based curiosity, his approach is that of a collaborator with objects' inherent properties. Site-based learning blends into studio-lab experiments. Tests, creative play, and durational observation assist curious inquiries into the agency of existent or human-made matter. With an oppositional stance to the colonial ideas that nature is a thing to be controlled or dominated, the inherent activities of objects or organisms are observed within creative parameters. His work has been exhibited within Canada and the United States at venues such as The Grand Rapids Public Museum Planetarium (MI), UBC (Vancouver), and Art Mur (Montreal), with an upcoming

## SOFIA LOPEZ-ASSELIN

Sofia Lopez-Asselin is a first year scenography student at Concordia, through her studies she strives to become a set designer for the theatre. Previously, she studied literature and creative writing at the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, and her work as a French editor for CUJAH has allowed her to keep working on her writing practice and become closer to the artistic community. In her free time, she enjoys discovering new music with Shazam being her best ally during her constant hunt.

## **RHYS BUHL**

Montreal/Calgary-based artist Rhys Buhl uses video, performance and installation techniques to investigate the role of spirituality in a secular-settler society. Ever experimental, her artistic and curatorial practice encompasses ritual-making and the veneration of icons in terms of their potential for healing. Her work also involves community driven activities, holding space for eclectic approaches to processing grief, along with empathetic approaches to navigating trauma. As an artist and writer, Buhl is constantly evolving and wants to help others do the same. Eventually, she hopes to create spaces for education, discussion and healing by leading youth education programs founded in the arts.

## **ANNA TCHERNIKOV**

Anna Tchernikov is a first year Performance Creation student, with a focus on magic realism on the stage, playwriting, and directing. She writes poetry and short fiction, and works on projects to ensure arts accessibility for youth. Enjoying novels, documentary theatre, memory plays, and the surreal, she is interested in playing with genre and recollection. With great interest in art history and multimedia, being able to partake in CUJAH's process is a task she greatly enjoys. Through her passion for the arts community as a whole, she hopes to further partake in projects

# Suffering, Primitivism, and the Cultural Legacy of the Soapstone

Elliot Mann

Elliot Mann is a Tiohtià:ke/Montréal-based writer and art history undergraduate whose research and texts are often oriented around modernity and cultural exchange. His work delineates issues facing identity, post-structuralist theory, and marginalised communities within Montreal. Mann has previously studied Quebec theatre and literature during his DEC, and his poetry has been selected for a previous iteration of the Montreal 'Festival de la Poésie'. More recently, Elliot Mann edits for *Laine Impure*, a grass-roots magazine focused on local creatives that's printed in monthly issues.

## Soapstone: How We Arrived

“We would like to know if The Museum wants to receive such Bagatelles...” (A soapstone spinning whorl, sent to the University Museum of Bergen in 1949)

“...science is built upon Bagatelles... so nothing is too small... However, some things, such as this spindlewhorl, can nevertheless be too small to be stored in a museum... So we hereby return your find...” (The polite answer from the curator at the University Museum of Bergen in 1949)<sup>1</sup>

History is ripe with soapstone usage, spanning multiple cultures and continents. Identifiable soapstone sculptures, distinctly artistic endeavors, can be dated to more than 3000 years ago. The oldest of these findings are Chinese, and thus China has gained the reputation of being the earliest known culture to participate in the carving of soapstone.<sup>2</sup> The lack of data correlating to these initial usages of soapstone are due to the nature of soapstone extraction: new quarries destroy traces of the old quarries. That being said, it's arguable whether these original sculptures could even be considered the first pieces of soapstone art, as Prehistoric Mesopotamian cultures used soapstone as a material for vessels, which often demonstrated elaborate mythological motifs.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not these objects are tangibly art in the traditional nomenclature, as opposed to artifact or historical remain, is subject of much debate.

Long-distance exportation was a large contributor to the widespread universality of soapstone. Of course, this universality is also caused by the sheer quantity of historical quarries that existed across various traditions. There were hundreds of old quarries in ancient Egypt's Eastern Desert, across the Roman Empire, North-American territories, and the Middle East. The Romans, in particular, brought «[a]lpine soapstone vessels to their Northie limes, not far from where soapstone from the North ended up in the Viking Age. (North Germany/Friesland).»<sup>5</sup> In Europe, original Palaeolithic usage of soapstone involved the carving of many Venus figurines, before it eventually became a mainly decorative architectural material during the stone age.

While the historical usage of soapstone is enormously extensive, as is the case for many common rocks, the utilization of Steatite seems to follow a rather immovable pattern. This pattern persists, despite the rock being historically cultivated across various continents and territories. The pattern in question begins with the creation of purely artistic pieces with soapstone (such as figurines and sculptures) during prehistory, the use of steatite then relegated to vessels and architectural

procurement as the stone loses perceived artistic value. Such became the case in China, when the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AC) extensively used the stone for dishes, utensils, plates, teapots, boxes, and seals. Soapstone is arguably unsuitable for intricate artistic<sup>6</sup> pieces, as the rock itself can be carved by pretty much anything due to its low standing on the MoH scale, leading to a lack of longevity and a far too generous malleability. Some of the softer breeds of steatite can even be carved by the human fingernail, not to mention the historically cheap pricing of the rock. It simply is not a historically luxurious material, and eventually becomes relegated to the decorative and the utilitarian amongst various cultures. Despite this “utilitarian” use of soapstone, intricate cultural motifs can nevertheless be observed from these artifacts, often precisely because of this cheap commonality.

Such is the case for Greenlandic soapstone usage. “Here, decoration is meant in the broadest possible sense, including both loosely scratched ‘graffiti’ and more formal decorations.”<sup>7</sup> The Greenlandic carvers in question are the ancient Norse settlers, who arrived to a new land distinctly lacking in trade with the prior-mentioned expansive networks, as opposed to other Norse territories such as Iceland. With a largely diminished amount of ceramic imports, cultural expression was embedded into day-to-day items: mainly components of vessels and ships, such as Spindle Whorls, distinctly inscribed with Norse runes and, very rarely, latin writings. Also found amongst the decorations are simply carved human figures, as well as a carving that resembles a hammer. These motifs evoke a kind of cultural heritage—such is the interpretation of Mogens Skaaning Hoegsberg, who writes, “[m]y interpretation of the apparent tendency to use known motifs but with a high frequency leads me to suggest that it was employed by Norse Greenlanders as a part of their identity construction and maintenance.”<sup>8</sup> What is observed here is a bolstering of cultural identity through known motifs, especially within a foreign and hostile land.

Entering the modern period, the primary purpose of soapstone was industrial. Industrial kilns and talcum powder were the main contributions of Steatite, solidifying its usage as a utility-based material.<sup>9</sup> It is during this very century that a large development in the artistic purpose of soapstone occurred, as colonial settlers began to ramp up trade with the Inuit populations of Canada. “The 18th century in Labrador was

the period in which permanent European settlement began and intensifying Inuit-European and inter-Inuit trade networks developed.”<sup>10</sup> Prior to this occurrence, soapstone creations amongst the Inuit populations were, while plentiful, hardly the commodity that they became in the contemporary era. Soapstone was often reserved for lamps and cooking pots, and most historians assure us that the main material for important cultural carvings were animal bones. These historians, such as anthropologist Edward Moffat Weyer, even wrote about a reduction in Inuit stylization within art as time passed on. The cause, while theorized by Weyer to be due to the harsh struggle caused by a continually unforgiving climate and lack of leisure time, is ultimately unknown.<sup>11</sup> Since the mid-1880s, the market of Inuit sculptures was aimed at a tourist-based, often white-settler, audience. Thus, the cultural study of soapstone is plagued by a centuries-long hypocrisy of a country that venerates the art of the very same culture it actively oppresses. Scholar Heather Igloliorte writes that “while all around them [the Inuit] culture was being debased, devalued, and actively oppressed by the dual forces of colonialism and Christianity, these same values were revered, celebrated and voraciously collected in their arts.”<sup>12</sup>

## Soapstone: for the Noble Savage

“Civilization from which you suffer, barbarism which has been rejuvenation before me” (Writings of Paul Gauguin in a letter directed to Symbolist writer Auguste Strindberg, 1895).<sup>13</sup>

Artistic retrospection amongst settler historians on the subject of the marginalized, or the decidedly non-European, can often showcase a deep underlying prejudice. Nowhere is this more apparent than during the cultural zeitgeist of the 19th century, beset by an industrial revolution and an accelerating lunge towards globalization. Small-scale non-industrial societies were quickly losing their right to isolation, and trade with settlers meant an exchange value being bestowed by Europeans upon this newly “discovered” art,

such as Inuit carvings. Curiosity for the art of the non-industrial was caused by, at least for renowned French artist Paul Gauguin, a “tendency to seek to represent, and to idealise, a supposedly uncivilised culture.”<sup>14</sup> While Gauguin’s infatuation was never precisely about Inuit sculpting, his yearning for a more “savage” imagery was “rooted in contemporary assumptions about the avant-garde artist’s role as a rediscovered or prophet of some more direct, ‘primitive’ style.”<sup>15</sup> The artist “rediscovering” a far more “innocent” and “natural” image presumes the role of mediator in between the “savage” cultures and the European “civilised” ones. The search is one for the universality of the image, necessarily void of any European convention that may plague one’s artistic expression. Important to note is the consequential use of foreign motifs within European art, often being juxtaposed with European convention in order to satirize or commentate. Gauguin himself re-appropriated conventional European motifs, such as in his work, *The Loss of Virginity* (1890/1891), where “symbolic references, such as the fox (a traditional symbol of cunning and perversity, and possibly an ironic self-portrait), and the drooping cut flower (a symbol of lost virginity), could only be interpreted through access to a sophisticated literary culture. Perhaps, Gauguin was recognizing the appeal of his work to a Symbolist audience, and reshaping his Primitivism to broaden its potential market.”<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the intentionality of artists such as Gauguin, who embodied a search for a pure art-form unburdened by “high society,” the result was a revitalization of European avant-garde culture in the form of the Primitivist art movement. Primitivism, a term framed through the Eurocentric perspectives of the artists that spearheaded it, revealed an intensely colonial hypocrisy. These motifs borrowed from non-industrial society were necessarily returned to a European market, a direct act of artistic exploitation for the needs and desires of the settler cultures.

The assimilation of Inuit sculptures into contemporary artistic domains may give off the illusion of a universal inclusiveness, but we must remember that this means Inuit sculpture is wrestled away from its original context. Arising in full force following the industrial revolution, the Western mode of classifying art is necessarily through transactional value. Art must present itself not only as art, but as commodity. It must fetch a price. It is within this context that settler cultures assimilate Inuit sculpture, and the constraints of our system

necessarily reshape the Inuit art that we expressly seek to buy, sell, and trade. What grants Inuit sculpture its transactional appeal to a western audience is precisely the consequence of Primitivist ideals, a continuation of the “Noble Savage” construct that considers Inuit art unburdened by industrial and settler-colonial ideologies. Cited directly from art historical sources taken from the Concordia University Library, we see declarations such as “[t]he most skillful carvers possess a bold confidence, a direct approach to their art that has a special freedom unsullied by any kind of formalised training.”<sup>17</sup> Or, “[i]t is the universality of the ideas within Eskimo art which makes it acceptable to folk of other cultures. We find similar themes about man and nature preserved in ancient fairy tales and legends which were once stories of the gods.”<sup>18</sup> What these historians view in Inuit sculpture, is a pre-industrial natural utopia, distinctly divorced from a modern industrial culture. These historians echo Primitivist dreams of “going away”, -escaping industrial society through the third world and finding a pure artistic expression amongst the “unsullied.” The facade of Primitivism, justified and elaborated within art historical accounts, is exalting the settler’s role as a mediator and ignoring the underlying distortion of its core subject. Through Primitivism, Inuit carvings are arbitrarily and often non-consensually validated by the settler-colonial chroniclers of history.

A tangible example of this occurring comes to us from Ontario where, less than a century ago, indigent individuals plagued by tuberculosis were forcefully brought to the Hamilton Mountain Sanatorium for treatment. “Staff (...) divided them into groups based on age and gender, -an especially traumatic process for mothers forced to separate from their children. (...) Some children forgot their mother tongues, and scant communication between the North and South meant that some adults were not able to let their loved ones know whether or not they were still alive or dead.”<sup>19</sup> The conclusion to this story is one familiar to any many historically literate Canadian citizens, one we continually see emerge in our news cycles. Those that succumbed to tuberculosis in this case of forced displacement, numbering 37, were left in unmarked graves. Those that lived remained traumatized by the experience. At the time, in order to maintain the morale of the patients, the occupational therapy program began to include soapstone carving for men, and the ensuing artworks are included in the Art Gallery of Hamilton’s exhibition “Carving

Home: The Cherokee Collection of Inuit Art.” Despite the eventual creation of the exhibition, artworks created by patients were, at the time, being sold for meager earnings by the custodial staff.<sup>20</sup> The attempt was a top-down initiative for maintaining Inuit culture, while the policy of the Sanatorium meant the destruction of its participants’ heritage through a mandated lack of connection with their home tribes and relatives.

Currently, the Open Door homeless shelter provides a carving room for its indigenous population. Intervention team member John, through his connections to the North, successfully imports the material and has himself stated that, “[n]othing makes [the guests] happier.”<sup>21</sup> While this initiative is admirable, and results in beautiful pieces of artistic expression, it is sinisterly juxtaposed with Montreal’s policies concerning the indigenous homeless population as a whole. One in every fifteen indigenous individuals in Montreal is currently homeless<sup>22</sup>, and the city’s infrastructure simply isn’t sufficient to accommodate them. Granting soapstone carving materials to the marginalised is an attempt to maintain the cultural legacy of its carvers, but the foundation for the practice is deeply embedded within a settler market and formed through Primitivist theory. The cultural legacy of soapstone, within our country, is convoluted and insidiously deceitful about its colonial roots.

## Untangling the Authenticity of Soapstone

“Ayii, ayii

I walked on the Ice of the sea,  
And wondering I heard the song of the sea,  
The great sighting of new-formed ice.  
Go then go, strength of soul  
Bring health to the place of feasting.”  
(Inuit song)<sup>23</sup>

In 1896, distinguished Swedish archaeologist and anthropologist Hjalmar Stolpe lamented what he believed to be “difficulties” surrounding his work on a Native American collection, stating that “[i]t so often bears obvious traces of the influence of the white man’s industry. The furniture nails driven into clubs or pipe stems, the garniture of glass beads on all sorts of articles,

prove that the style is no longer genuine, but spoiled by European importations.”<sup>24</sup> Stolpe was not alone in this belief, as Victorian attitudes of the time propagated an artistic want for the “artifact” above the lesser “tourist art” created for an expressly settler audience.<sup>25</sup> The argument for an “authenticity” within indigenous art, made by Dr Stolpe and his fellow scholars of the Primitive, is often hypocritical and built on regressive ideals. By omitting artworks “spoiled” by modern material and connections, the prioritisation of “authenticity” undermines the capabilities of non-industrial societies to ever artistically participate in the contemporary art market. Crucially, art historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists alike often made egregious errors in their attempts to qualify the “authenticity” of a piece. Stolpe himself, despite his exaltation of the “artifact” and the direct artistic expression of a culture untouched by industry, was often mistaken in his appraisal. “He praised, for example, the sculptural qualities of Haida argillite carving, an art form invented during the first half of the nineteenth century exclusively for trade to Westerners, under the mistaken impression that it was an ancient art form.”<sup>26</sup> The conflation of artifact and commodity is inherently imbued within soapstone carving, present in the very historical texts that appraise its authentic nature as unburdened cultural expression. Were the creations of the patients of the Hamilton Mountain Sanatorium merely commodities, or were they distinctly representative of a rich cultural legacy? The Inuit soapstone carvings mass-sold across Montreal galleries, auctions, and shops are certainly created with a mostly settler market in mind, and yet the residents of the Open Door homeless shelter seem to regain a sense of community through their sculpture station. The distinction between artifact and commodity is convoluted and, oftentimes, founded on a reactionary ideal that condemns Inuit participation within modernity. The prioritization of “the artifact” itself is, ironically, necessarily framed through Western market desires. As sociocultural anthropologist Nelson H. H. Graburn astutely puts it, “[t]he commercial fine arts are generally those demanded -more as status objects than as memorabilia- by people who wish to get ‘close to the native’ spirit (not body of course) by having ‘genuine’ ‘authentic’ artifacts to show.”<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, artifact and commodity have become practically indistinguishable within contemporary arts, the commodity being conflated with the artifact and the artifact being reduced to commodity.

# 1000 Ways to See a Stone

**“To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”  
(Theodore W. Adorno)**

**“Movies too beautiful to be true. Oppression.  
Injustice. Cruelty. Solitude. Love songs. Unforgivable  
mistakes. Babies that were never born.”  
(Translated from Kuessipan, a poetic novel by  
Naomi Fontaine)<sup>28</sup>**

There exists a theological principle, one long argued by Canadian philosopher Bernard Lonergan, that it is on the symbolic level that we live.<sup>29</sup> It is through symbols, most of all, that we filter our thoughts and experiences. The world is as it appears to us, resolutely beset by our memories and societal influences. “When does ethnic art become the much disdained ‘souvenir?’ (...) Back home, a cheap blue and white Moroccan plate, even though it was one of hundreds on the market stall, will continue to give the same thrill that made your heart beat faster when you first saw it on the streets of Marrakech. The expensive panic-buy at the airport, however, will always be a souvenir in the worst sense.”<sup>30</sup> What is observed throughout the legacy of soapstone carvings is a precise argument against formalism. Even the Primitivist scholars emphasized a sufficient need for context, their fatal ignorance, however, remains in where exactly they draw the line of validity within this context. For the Primitivist scholar, the prime example of artistic expression is completely separate from industry and European convention. The soapstone vestiges of the Greenland Norse settlers may come close to this ideal, but even their creations were inherently caused by a lack of access to European trade networks. The market (or lack there-of) was the dominant factor to the very creation of the artifacts. Suffice it to say, the cultural legacy of a creation is not, and should not be determined by archaic qualifications separating the artifact from the art.

Culture deciphered from Soapstone pieces are contingent on the perceived coalesced memories that they contain. A block of soapstone becomes rich in culture and memory when there is a shared perception of its tangible history, when we acknowledge the context and heritage that arrived at a carving. Embracing Inuit soapstone carvings within modernity means embracing all the strife and suffering that it evokes, including the

industrial ramifications that “plague” it. Inuit soapstone creations can’t be divorced from the Hamilton Mountain Sanatorium, just as paint can’t be divorced from the pigments of its creation. The cultural legacy of soapstone, if there indeed is one, is not to be found in a mythical construction of a non-industrial people long

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# Triste mais authentique: Richard nous fait voyager aux Tristes Trop

Le printemps dernier, l'espace blanc et minimaliste de la galerie Jack Shainman de New York fut animé par un corpus d'œuvres photographiques aux couleurs vives et captivantes pour les amateurs et amatrices d'art contemporain (fig. 1). L'exposition *Tristes tropiques*, présentée du 8 Avril au 15 Mai 2021, rend compte du travail réalisé par le photographe irlandais Richard Mosse lors d'un voyage au Brésil.<sup>1</sup> Cette exposition se traduit par une série de photographies aériennes en grand format, présentant des paysages aux couleurs vives, tel que des plans d'eau turquoise traversant des territoires rouge écarlate.

Afin de créer ces œuvres, l'artiste s'est astucieusement outillé d'un drone et de la technologie de système d'information géographique.<sup>2</sup> Il en résulte alors des images exprimées en couleur multispectrales qui, en quelque sorte, brouillent la frontière entre la visibilité et l'invisibilité. Plus précisément, cette technologie s'exécute en capturant des rayons ultraviolets et infrarouges ce qui permet, entre autres, d'identifier les concentrations de CO<sub>2</sub> et de pollution sur les territoires.<sup>3</sup> En effet, chacune de ses créations présente un caractère unique. Par exemple, l'œuvre intitulée *Juvencio's mine* (fig. 2), présente une vue aérienne d'une exploitation minière sur territoire autochtone. Les plans d'eau violets représentent la contamination et la toxicité du mercure accumulée dans les sédiments.<sup>4</sup> Ensuite, l'impression pigmentaire intitulée *Burnt panthanal II*, illustre en bleu et mauve un sol majoritairement aride. Hélas, cette région était décrite comme un paradis de biodiversité, mais aujourd'hui 25% de sa superficie a été détruite dû aux nombreux incendies.<sup>5</sup>

Cette exposition s'inscrit en continuité avec son ouvrage de 2012 intitulé *The enclave* dépeignant les conflits armés en cours dans la République démocratique du Congo, qui depuis 1998, ont causé la mort de plus de 5.4 millions de personnes.<sup>6</sup> Ce chef d'œuvre documentaire fut réalisé grâce à l'utilisation de la pellicule Kodak Aerochrome, une ancienne technologie militaire conçue pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale utilisée pour des missions de reconnaissance.<sup>7</sup> C'est en capturant la chlorophylle de la végétation puis en la traduisant de couleur rose fuchsia que l'armée déjouait les techniques de camouflage des groupes ennemis.<sup>8</sup> Ainsi, Richard Mosse nous confronte avec une tout autre interprétation de la couleur rose, souvent attribuée inconsciemment à la joie et à la légèreté, dans la photographie intitulée *Colonel Soleil's boys*. Bien que le projet d'exposition

Marie-Andrée Mallette (b.1988) est depuis toute petite attirée par l'image et la cinématographie. À trente-trois ans seulement qu'elle a retrouvé l'artiste en elle en se découvrant un talent particulier en peinture à l'huile et vidéographie. De nature curieuse, elle décida d'entamer un bachelors en Beaux-Arts à l'université Concordia, ayant comme discipline principale l'Histoire de l'Art. En pleine construction de son identité créative, elle explore différents médiums, dont l'écriture, la peinture et la cinématographie. Reconnue en 2021 en tant qu'artiste en début de carrière par le Conseil des Arts du Canada, elle a pour mission d'utiliser son talent afin de promouvoir toute forme d'art, d'artiste ou sujets inspirants.

# Mosse iques.

*The enclave* ne montre aucun acte de violence sordide, les armes et les individus de l'armée juxtaposés aux paysages rose bonbon en font des photographies attrayantes et à la fois déstabilisantes. Entre utopie et dystopie, Richard Mosse engage notre réflexion sur cette situation de violence perpétuelle et systémique en République démocratique du Congo. Ainsi, c'est dans le même esprit qu'il exhibe *Tristes tropiques*; par des couleurs et paysages aux allures fantasmagoriques.

En réponse aux critiques qui laisse sous-entendre que les œuvres de Richard Mosse découlent d'une manipulation numérique, l'auteur Anne Immelé mentionne dans son article intitulé *Richard Mosse : La beauté avant tout*, que les photographies sont « produites avec des moyens argentiques et qu'il y a une part d'intuition dans la mesure de l'exposition aux rayons infrarouges. »<sup>9</sup> Cela dit, il serait juste d'affirmer que cette exposition présente un art authentique dont l'acte de manipuler se produit principalement par la beauté. D'ailleurs, cet argument s'appuie sur un commentaire de Richard Mosse dans une entrevue pour le magazine *Another*. Celui-ci affirme que « [s]i vous voulez que les gens ressentent quelque chose, je dis toujours que la beauté est l'outil le plus pointu de la boîte. »<sup>10</sup>

Serait-ce justifié de ressentir un certain malaise face à une photographie d'une crise humanitaire représentée simultanément avec des couleurs associées

Triste mais authentique: Richard Mosse nous fait voyager aux Tristes Tropiques



© Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

inconsciemment à la joie et la beauté? Plus loin dans l'article de Another, Richard Mosse explique que : « [c]ela pose un problème éthique quand on a une belle photographie qui essaie de communiquer la souffrance humaine, alors les photojournalistes ont souvent peur d'aller trop loin dans ce registre, vers le beau. Esthétiser la souffrance humaine est toujours perçu comme insipide ou grossier ou moralement répréhensible, mais mon point de vue est que le pouvoir de l'esthétique de communiquer doit être exploité plutôt que supprimé. »<sup>11</sup> Certes, les photographies de Richard Mosse sont destinées à provoquer une réaction chez le spectateur. C'est par le sublime et la représentation antagoniste de deux concepts (la beauté et la destruction) que l'artiste pique notre curiosité envers sa démarche créative, afin de saisir toute la teneur de ses œuvres.

Ainsi, c'est à mi-chemin entre le photojournalisme et l'art contemporain que Richard Mosse a transformé l'espace de la galerie Shainman en un lieu de témoignage des manipulations dévastatrices de l'homme sur un vaste écosystème fragile et irremplaçable. Il nous raconte une histoire d'actualité tristement vraie en plaçant la criminalité environnementale au cœur du récit. Son travail est sans aucun doute une réflexion sur la façon dont notre esprit associe automatiquement les couleurs à certaines émotions ou sujets, et nous encourage à dépasser notre jugement dans l'interprétation de tout ce qui nous entoure. Revenant sur le même article du magazine Another, l'auteure Georgia Illingworth écrit que « [l]e travail de Mosse démystifie avec force la notion de « l'art pour l'art », nous rappelant le potentiel de l'art non seulement pour ouvrir les yeux, mais aussi pour défendre de nouvelles façons de regarder. »<sup>12</sup> En effet, de manière subversive, le travail de Richard Mosse souligne l'importance de regarder les images géographiques sous un autre angle et d'aller au-delà de notre première interprétation. En plus de sensibiliser les gens face aux problèmes environnementaux, son travail permet de garder les discours ouverts sur les enjeux socio-politiques ainsi que les crimes contre l'humanité. Somme toute, grâce à cette révélation transmise par le spectre des couleurs, l'exposition Tristes tropiques nous invite à prendre conscience que parfois la vérité se trouve dans l'invisibilité qui nous entoure.

## Notes

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# Politics of Spectatorsh

In 1863, Charles Baudelaire wrote an essay entitled “The painter of modern life,” a text in which he describes the flâneur as the ideal artist; lover of crowds and a man of the world, who saw the city streets as a playground for spectatorship. At the time, the outdoors were considered a masculine milieu,<sup>1</sup> while the domestic space was seen as belonging to women. Since the flâneur (or dandy) was defined as a passionate observer strolling about the city, the figure was inevitably male, and followed a particular masculine sartorial code.<sup>2</sup> Certain upper-class white women in the late 19th and early 20th century adopted a similar fashion code in order to wander the streets freely as active observers, like that of the Amazon (fashionable horse woman).

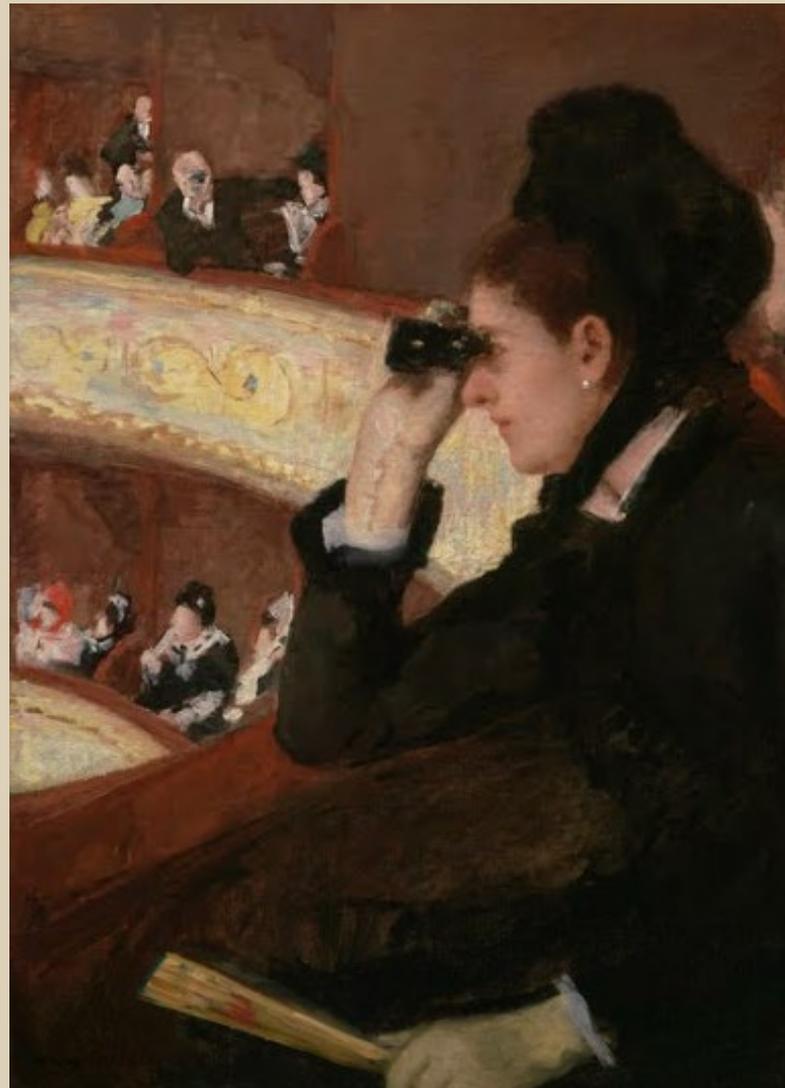


Figure 1: Cassatt, Mary. “In the Lodge,” oil on canvas, 1879, The Hayden Collection – Museum of Fine Arts Boston. 660.4 mm x 812.8 mm.

*Mary Cassatt's In the loge* (1879) and *Romaine Brooks's Self-Portrait* (1923) were two very important artworks that boldly highlighted a woman's right to be herself in the public sphere. I will be demonstrating how Cassatt used the sartorial code of the Amazon, while Brooks appropriated the style of the dandy, to assert a woman's right to see and be seen.

Mary Cassatt's *In the Loge*, depicts an older woman dressed in black attire from head to toe, like a fashionable horse woman, occupying a seat in a theater box and looking through binoculars. Her style is similar to the woman depicted in Edward Manet's *The Amazon*.

Sandra Lamy

Sandra Lamy (she/her) is a Montreal-based artist working mainly in painting, drawing, and photography. Her background in Criminology and psychology, along with her work with psychiatric patients have informed her work through the application of Jungian symbols and archetypes, present in recurring themes of the unconscious, dreams, and melancholy in her art.

Lamy will be graduating from Concordia in the Spring of 2022 with a BFA in Studio Arts. She has participated in various online exhibitions, and her work has been shown in *Yiara* magazine, art exhibits organized by the VAV and FASA, as well as the Jano Lapin Gallery within the context of the Art Matters Festival in 2022. She was also awarded the Elspeth McConnell grant for her work with Centre d'Art et de Diffusion CLARK.

In following the female subject's gaze, we notice a man in the background staring directly at her through his own opera glasses.<sup>3</sup> If we look closely, we notice that the woman's stare is at the level of the balcony as opposed to looking down toward the stage, suggesting she is observing a fellow spectator.

In *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, Griselda Pollock reminds us that women at the time could not enjoy the freedom of being incognito among the crowd: "They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch."<sup>4</sup> This painting is remarkable because it speaks to the idea of female spectatorship. By taking on the appearance of the Amazon, a figure defined by its ability to participate among the crowd without being seen as sexually available, the female subject in the painting is afforded the luxury of actively observing the scene. I believe that in adopting this particular outfit, certain women felt they could participate confidently in the social sphere, instead of being vulnerable to compromising male stares.

A phenomenal aspect of Cassatt's work is the cleverness with which she mirrors spectatorship: "The witty pun on the spectator outside the painting being matched by that within should not disguise the serious meaning of the fact that social spaces are policed by men's watching women and the positioning of the spectator outside the painting in relation to the man within it serves to indicate that the spectator participates in that game as well."<sup>5</sup> Through her use of a socially accepted sartorial code, Cassatt was able to comment on a woman's right to see, whereas Romaine Brooks' famous Self-Portrait reflected on her right to be seen. The painting is of Brooks dressed in black masculine attire, like a flâneur or a dandy, sporting a top hat that shades her direct gaze, hinting at the idea that her true self is hidden. Her stance is confident and empowered. Brooks employed various shades of grey, creating a solemn visual language in line with the decadent aesthetic. By the time Brooks had painted her Self-Portrait, the dandy as a figure had become associated with homosexuality following Oscar Wilde's public trial. Consciously fashioning herself out of this particular dress code permitted Brooks

to make her own lesbianism visible through "literary and visual conventions which were already coded 'homosexual.'"<sup>6</sup>

In her text *Women artists and writers: Modernist (Im)positionings*, Bridget Elliott speaks of the reality that lesbian women have historically been persecuted for their sexual activity, especially if they cross-dressed as men: "She notes that the cross-dressing lesbian created more confusion about gendered roles, claimed male social privileges, and demonstrated her transgression publicly and deliberately in a manner that made her reform and return to conventional



Figure 2: Brooks, Romaine. "Self Portrait", 1923, SAAM, <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/self-portrait-2916>

heterosexuality seem impossible. In other words, cross-dressing took the ‘private’ realm of the sexual into the ‘public’ sphere.”<sup>7</sup> In adopting the costume of the decadent dandy, Brooks deliberately provoked social standards of feminine sexuality and asked to be publicly recognized as a lesbian. Brooks and fellow artists of the early 20th century (i.e. Gluck) shrewdly used this cultural stereotype to actively play the game as participants of the public sphere, “while simultaneously criticizing the limited rules of the game. One has to admire their logic: if viewers appreciated their performance, it was evident that women could also play the artistic game, and if viewers were irritated, the game was exposed as hardly worth playing in the first place.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that an upper class status and caucasian race were instrumental in a woman’s acceptance in the public space. I doubt that a woman of colour or of modest means would have ever had the opportunity to be unapologetically herself in a crowd in the late 19th century. That being said, Cassatt and Brooks were nonetheless pioneers in allowing agency to shine when portraying women in paintings. Their clever use of a culturally accepted sartorial code permitted them to comment on a woman’s right to see the world and be seen in it. They interact (directly or not) with the gaze of the viewer while remaining active participants of the world they have chosen for themselves. Given there are forty years separating the two paintings, each artist responds to two different stifling ideologies of their times. Cassatt affirmed a woman’s right to be out in public, while Brooks used a more performative approach to assert her sexuality confidently and be recognized by her peers. From a space of self-awareness, these two influential artists commanded respect as women artists and astutely rewired the spectator’s relation to the female subject.

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## Endnotes

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2 *Ibid.*, 97.

3 Julia Skelly and Concordia University “ARTH 381 Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt”, (*Art History and Feminism*, Montreal: Concordia University, 2020)

4 Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, (London and New York; Routledge, 1988), 100.

5 *Ibid.*, 109.

6 Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings*, New York and London, 1994, 39.

7 *Ibid.*, 49.

8 Bridget Elliott, “Performing the Picture or Painting the Other,” in *Women artists and modernism*, edited by Katy Deepwell (Manchester University Press, 1998), 78-80.

# The Girlbossification of Frida Kahlo: Neoliberal feminist approaches to and relational affective politics in Frida Kahlo's Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird

When you type 'Frida Kahlo' into Google, some of the first results to come up are tote bags, socks, posters, and other commodity items with Kahlo's face on them. Similarly, a 2015 article published in *Vogue Magazine* aims to teach its readers how to dress themselves with inspiration from Kahlo's work.<sup>1</sup> A Spring 2013 runway show for a collection by Maya Hansen titled "Skully Tulum" gave models a unibrow to go along with the Kahlo-inspired collection.

"Fridamania"—as the phenomenon of Kahlo as a cult icon has often been called—has only grown since its beginning in the 1980s, and along with that, Kahlo and her image have been turned into a commodity. Since the 1970s and 80s, when first instances of feminist scholarship on Kahlo emerged, the self-portraits of Frida Kahlo have been an illustration of the feminist concept where "the personal is political." However, I argue that in recent years and decades, the personal within Kahlo's work and her biography, which is marked by personal tragedy, have been utilized by neoliberal post-feminism to sanctify Kahlo into the "girl boss" canon. Her image has been used alongside other important and powerful women throughout history, a form of worship that oftentimes stems from the concept of power feminism. An ideology that sees individual women move up the ranks as the ultimate poster image of feminism, but that does not substantially do much to address the oppressive systems themselves and work to change these.

Kahlo's biography has been used in ways that glorify her pain and the personal aspects of her work, while at the same time not acknowledging the collective politics embedded within it and the way she portrayed said pain. Though the concept of empowerment exists in girl boss appropriations of neoliberal feminism, looking in specific at Kahlo's 1940 *Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, I argue that this oftentimes individualistic approach to Kahlo and

Hannah Jamet-Lange (they/she) is a French-German student living, working, and studying in Tiotiá:ke (Montréal) where they are finishing their undergraduate degree in Communication Studies at Concordia University. Their writing (both academic and creative) revolves around topics of affect, the politics of emotion, mental health, care, and community building from an anti-capitalist queer feminist perspective, and has appeared in publications such as *The Medium*, *Subversions*, and *Between Arts and Science*. A co-founder of local community art initiative Collective 4891, Hannah believes in the power of art as a form of community-building, creating connections, and caring for each other. Motivated by this belief, she will be starting her master's degree in Media Studies at Concordia in Fall 2022.

Hannah Jamet

her work frequently neglects deeper collective politics seen in Kahlo's own beliefs, work, as well as the relational affective experiences that her works provoke.

I want to begin this analysis with a deeper look at the phrase “the personal is political” and its relation to Kahlo and her work. Often traced back to second-wave feminism, in particular to a 1969 article of the same name by Carol Hanisch, the phrase is rooted in an understanding that “personal problems are political problems” and that “there are no personal solutions at this time [...] there is only collective action for a collective solution”<sup>2</sup>. Issues like sexual and domestic violence, reproductive rights, and gendered divisions of labour are what is most often brought in relation with the phrase, issues that are seen as ‘personal’ until we see how widely they affect almost all women. Though the phrase “the personal is political” only emerged after Kahlo's death, much of her work can be viewed through its lens. Kahlo's work—by representing herself, her pain, her complicated relationship to desiring motherhood, her clothing choices—is simultaneously deeply personal and political.

*In Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, Kahlo's representation of herself stares directly at the viewer. She is centered in the middle of the frame, in a classic portrait pose, wearing a white shirt. Her face appears solemn, calm, almost emotionless. Yet, around her neck, she wears a necklace made of thorns that are piercing her skin, which bears open wounds and bleeding. On her left shoulder, a monkey plays with the thorn necklace which seems to be causing further injury, while on her right shoulder, a black cat is staring pryingly at the black hummingbird on Kahlo's chest, suspended from the thorn necklace. Kahlo's hair is made up nicely, two butterflies sitting on the cloth woven into her hair. The background features bright green and yellow leaves.

Upon first impression, the bright colors and the nature imagery creates a deceptively inviting atmosphere. Upon closer examination, it quickly becomes clear that the scene depicted is marked by pain, danger, and threat more than it is by natural harmony. In fact, this painting has often been seen as an example of Kahlo portraying her personal pain, particularly illustrated by the thorn necklace causing her skin to tear and bleed. According to Herrera<sup>3</sup>, it symbolizes Kahlo's suffering over her divorce from Rivera, arguing she is a “victim of the sexual exploits of her husband and suffers the social

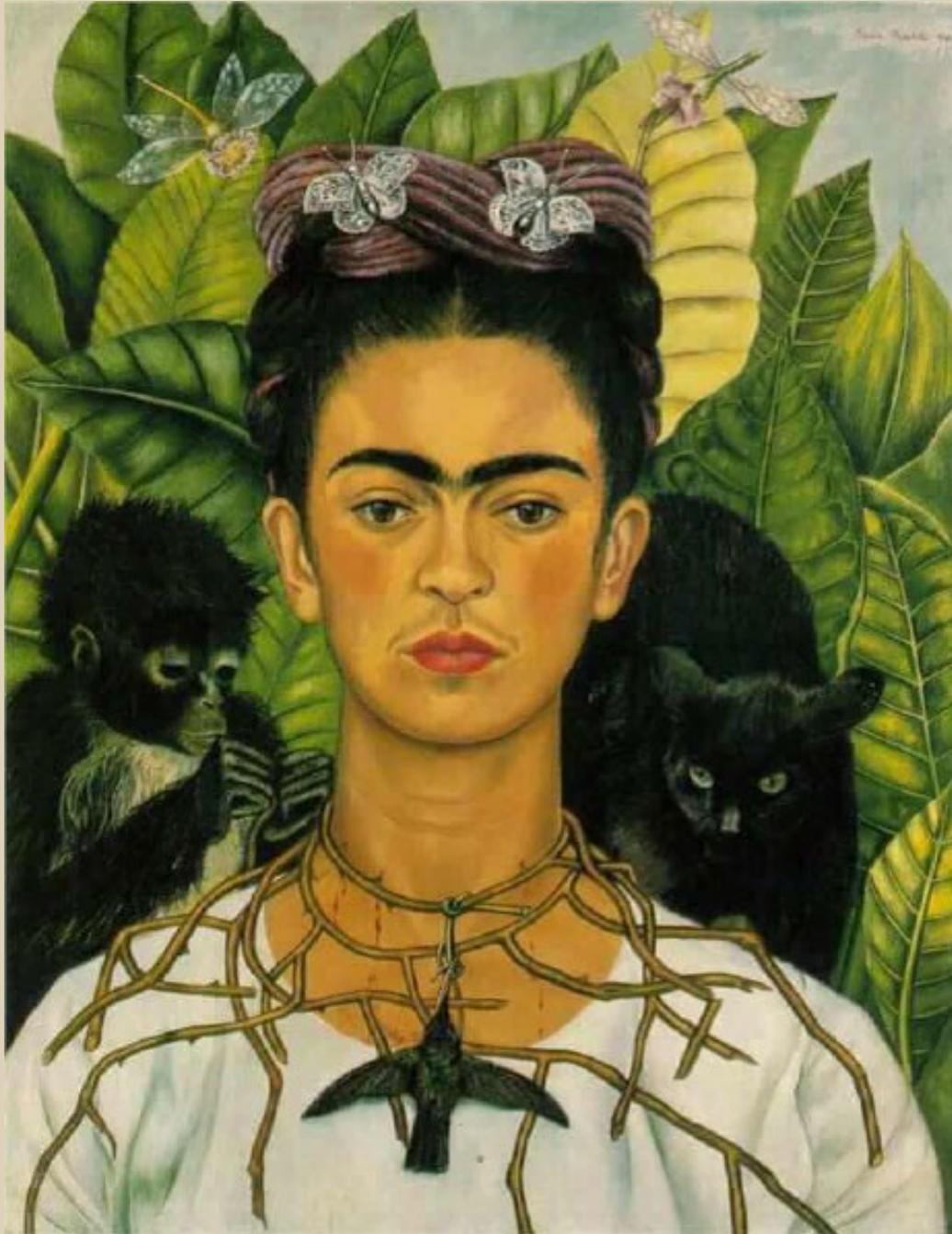
stigma of not sufficiently fulfilling her ‘wifely’ role.”<sup>4</sup> While birds are often regarded as a symbol of freedom, the hummingbird around Kahlo's neck does not show any sign of life and instead seems to symbolize the death of freedom, a feeling of being restricted within her life and her relationships. In this interpretation, we can see a clear relation to the phrase “the personal is political.” Kahlo's pain is deeply personal (her divorce), but at the same time, it is also political as it is further affected by external factors of the social stigma attached to divorce at the time that are rooted in sexism. Additionally, the thorn necklace can also be interpreted as the pain imposed by beauty standards existing for women, another seemingly personal aspect that is equally political as Kahlo experiences societal pressures to look and dress a certain way - to make herself beautiful.

Though the pain and danger are clear, Kahlo's face remains almost devoid of emotion, she is bearing the pain, unimpressed by the pain or the looming danger. Thus, she shows a certain strength. In Aztec symbolism, the animals in the painting, the bird, the butterflies, the monkey, the cat, can represent the souls of warriors, thus implying Kahlo is a combative force.<sup>5</sup> She is at once weak and strong, clearly hurt but taking on her pain. In certain interpretations, the pain is that of others, as symbolized by the thorns which can be viewed as a reference to Christ's crown of thorns, portraying Kahlo as a martyr.<sup>6</sup> As such, “she painted the kinds of agonies women, in particular, suffer, and she had the capacity both to be feminine and to function with an iron will that we associate with masculinity.”<sup>7</sup> *Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* provides us with an example of the personal as political. It goes beyond simple personal content and is “both of herself and of her own reality,”<sup>8</sup> depicting her reality as it has been marked by the political and social structures she lives within. “During a period in history when the accepted modes of truth were truth seen through men's eyes, she gave us truth seen through the eyes of a woman.”<sup>9</sup> Kahlo moves between the two—personal and political—representing each through the other, instead of only channeling the personal into the political in one direction.

This approach of seeing the personal as political, however, has also been utilized in different ways. In many cases today, it has come to mean the “personal,” as in the individual instead of the “personal” that

illustrates the general, with the “political” only containing a mere shadow of the phrase’s origins of being rooted in the collective. We can see this happening within power feminisms, ideologies that claim feminist ties are “about individual women gaining as much power as possible. The idea is that as individual women move up in roles of economic influence, they will bring other women up the ranks with them, ultimately shifting gendered power relations in major industries.”<sup>10</sup> This form of feminism hence describes a woman who takes charge and is successful in a traditionally

male-dominated field, a woman who becomes a “girl boss.” As Majerczik writes: “Girl boss culture [places] the (often monetary) advancement of individual women as the key way to achieve equality between the genders (with key consideration placed on their notion of binary genders). This idea reflects the values of neoliberal capitalism, where the career and monetary advancement of individuals are seen as a reflection of their worth in society.”<sup>11</sup> In an economy marked by “ideal of individualization, where individuals are self-reliant, engaged in continuous reflexive self-assessment and



Kahlo, Frida. Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird. Oil on canvas, 24.11 by 18.5 in. FridaKahlo.org, 1940. Harry Ransom Center. Austin, TX.

self-marketing,”<sup>12</sup> the girl boss is a figure that succeeds in self-optimization, in breaking through glass ceilings. But because of the focus on individualization and the neglect of collectivity, she does not carry others with her or destroy the oppressive systems in place that kept her away from power in the first place.

In recent years, Kahlo has become sanctified into this canon of the girl boss. By placing emphasis on the strength she displayed and on the fact that she, and particularly her image, posthumously became arguably one of the most recognizable female artists, Kahlo has been “girlbossified,” represented as a girl boss who takes charge and gains power. In a time where the odds were stacked against her, she was able to work in a male-dominated field. However, this portrayal of Kahlo does not place much emphasis on her art or even on the persona she created for herself, but rather purely on her image itself, or really the idea of her. This is exemplified by the number of products with Kahlo’s face on them that are available to buy without context of her artwork or her life. Oftentimes, these images on the products are not even based on a specific self-portrait of hers, but simply aim to emulate her likeness as a symbol, and aesthetic. Similarly, the Vogue article mentioned at the beginning, “Why Frida Kahlo’s Art Is the Perfect Canvas for Summer Style,”<sup>13</sup> illustrates well the capitalization of Frida Kahlo’s work and her life, as well as the creation of her as an icon, the symbol of a “girl boss.” Her pain and pleasures in life are reduced to a background on which to base a “summer style” wardrobe; her life and work are condensed to sell expensive luxury clothing, going against the content of many of her paintings which are informed by and reflect her radical politics.

By positioning her as an individualist ideal of neoliberal feminism where, within “the guise of empowerment, the ‘girl entrepreneur’ is the ultimate self-inventing young woman who represents a fantasy of achievement accomplished by good ideas, hard work, and self-confidence,”<sup>14</sup> Kahlo’s image itself has become even more profitable through mass reproductions. As Genz writes: “Consumption thus becomes a vehicle for authenticating the self and/as a product in a cyclical process that, once constructed, is used to validate its own manifestations.”<sup>15</sup> By creating a market filled with consumer products depicting Kahlo, this image of her comes to be seen as an authentic image, with any form

of former authenticity being lost. When talking of authenticity in regard to Kahlo however, one could argue that Kahlo lost said authenticity long ago, leaving the question of what is seen as the meaning of “authenticity.” She was known for creating a persona for herself, beginning with the story of her birth year which she declared as 1910 so as to claim herself as a child of the Mexican Revolution which began that year. “Kahlo deliberately constructed her artistic identity as material culture” in “dynamic and unique ways,”<sup>16</sup> blurring the lines between that which is her reality and that which is her creation. But how is it that, posthumously, Kahlo—no matter her authenticity—and her work can create such strong attachments for consumers and audiences today that lead to such idolization and girlbossification, particularly among women? Why is it that the political comes to be dismissed through this process? I believe that Kahlo’s work, through its personal-political contents, appeals on multiple levels, particularly to what Lauren Berlant describes as “intimate publics,” defined as “a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what’s salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection.”<sup>17</sup> This concept is rooted in affect, in the “expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience.”<sup>18</sup> Transposing this concept on women’s reception of Kahlo’s work, we can assert the existence of an intimate public in which there exists a common understanding of the “personal problems” that mark the existence as a woman in this world. Thus, Kahlo’s work becomes relatable to many women and people who can empathize with her pain, with the personal she presents. As Berlant writes: “The works of ‘women’s culture’ enact a fantasy that my life is not just mine, but an experience understood by other women, even when it is not shared by many or any.”<sup>19</sup> At the same time, these intimate publics are what Berlant terms juxtapolitical. They are in immediate “proximity to the political,” “occasionally crossing over in political alliance” —as I have shown in the visual analysis of *Self-portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* above in relation to Kahlo’s work— “even more occasionally doing some politics, but most often not, acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough.”<sup>20</sup> I argue that the intimate public from which Kahlo is posited as a “girl boss” acknowledges a certain

political, but does not see the political as necessitating broader criticism of societal structures. Instead, the individual achievement of overcoming, and with that the “expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration” are seen as enough.<sup>21</sup> Politics become privatized in this context.<sup>22</sup> While there exists a collective identity, a collective sentiment, this collectivity does not turn into collective radical politics because “politics requires active antagonism”<sup>23</sup> which would threaten consensus within the public and thus threaten the feelings of belonging.<sup>24</sup> The idea of belonging is put above achieving justice and equality for all, thus, “embedded in the often sweetly motivated and solidaristic activity of the intimate public of femininity is a white universalist paternalism, sometimes dressed as maternalism.”<sup>25</sup> A phenomenon that we can see in the figure of the girl boss, which acts more as an aesthetic in themselves instead of a belief leading to action.

Having spent the last pages analyzing how a certain reception of Kahlo’s work has been marked by girl boss culture, I now want to turn back to the work itself, as well as to the relational affective experiences that her works provoke. Following Sara Ahmed’s work on emotions, the personal within Kahlo’s work is not emotional in and of itself. Rather, the emotions evoked in the viewer “are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such object.”<sup>26</sup> What we see from Kahlo’s paintings is not caused exclusively by the paintings, but by our relations to them, even though intimate publics tacitly assume a certain shared understanding, the reality of said understandings will differ.

Though I argued that audiences constituted as intimate publics oftentimes neglect the political in favor of the personal—because of these differences in understanding that exist when putting aside what is presupposed, —it is also important to consider the actual political potential these publics contained when not guided by consumer culture and capitalism, when engaging and conversing about that which has come to be seen as self-evidently applicable. After all, “for almost two decades, Frida’s self-portraits have provided numerous individuals, both male and female, with models to challenge and redefine prevailing gender stereotypes and give a visual voice to emerging expressions of gender, racial, and ethnic variance.”<sup>27</sup>

Her work and life thus, to this day, can provide space for self-exploration and inspire politics that question current systems and that work towards change.

In conclusion, Herrera asserts that “the problem was that her paintings remained too self-referential to function as political rhetoric,”<sup>28</sup> which falls in line with the ways Kahlo has been welcomed into girl boss culture. Rather I have demonstrated that, in line with feminist ideas of the personal as political, the self-referential aspects of Kahlo’s work function as an affective expression of revolutionary politics rooted in the collective that recognizes the personal inherently as political and that Kahlo’s painting *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* provides a particularly interesting example of this.

## Endnotes

- 1 Lynn Yaegar, "Why Frida Kahlo's Art Is the Perfect Canvas for Summer Style," *Vogue*, May 14, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/article/frida-kahlo-art-summer-style-inspiration>.
- 2 Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political," *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, 1969.
- 3 Cited in Margaret A. Lindauer and Frida Kahlo, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 164.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, 165.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Joanna Latimer, "Unsettling Bodies: Frida Kahlo's Portraits and In/Dividuality," *The Sociological Review* 56 (October 1, 2008): 46.
- 9 Margaret A. Lindauer and Frida Kahlo, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 165.
- 10 Aviva Majerczyk, "A Critique of Girlboss Culture Through the Lens of Market and Power Feminisms" (Communication Studies Undergraduate Academic Conference, Montreal, QC, Canada, 2020).
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Tara J. Fenwick, "Transgressive Desires: New Enterprising Selves in the New Capitalism," *Work, Employment and Society* 16, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 704.
- 13 Lynn Yaegar, "Why Frida Kahlo's Art Is the Perfect Canvas for Summer Style," *Vogue*, May 14, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/article/frida-kahlo-art-summer-style-inspiration>.
- 14 Sarah Banet-Weiser, *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 56.
- 15 Stéphanie Genz, "My Job Is Me," *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 4 (July 4, 2015): 548.
- 16 Lisa Pankl and Kevin Blake, "Made in Her Image: Frida Kahlo as Material Culture," *Material Culture* 44, no. 2 (2012): 10.
- 17 Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), viii.
- 18 *Ibid.*, viii.
- 19 *Ibid.*, x.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, xii.
- 22 *Ibid.*, xii.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 26 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Second edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8.
- 27 Liza Bakewell, "Frida Kahlo: A Contemporary Feminist Reading," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13, no. 3 (1993): 181.
- 28 Hayden Herrera, "Beauty to His Beast: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera," in *Significant Others*, ed. Whitner Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (Thames and Hudson, 1993), 126.

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# Présage de 1995 de Maryse Goudreau, ou l'anthropocène dans l'œil du béluga

Née et établie à Tiohtiá:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal, Laurence Williams termine sa troisième année au programme d'histoire de l'art et d'études cinématographiques à l'Université Concordia. Elle porte un intérêt particulier pour les œuvres multisensorielles, les documentaires expérimentaux, la poésie et la philosophie contemporaine. Comme en témoigne sa participation au catalogue d'exposition USE de la Galerie FOFA en 2020 et à la dix-septième édition du CUJAH, elle souhaite mettre en valeur des artistes qui suscitent des réflexions sur des enjeux actuels. De ce fait, elle compte œuvrer à titre de commissaire d'exposition pour davantage démocratiser et féminiser les institutions muséales.

Laurence Williams



Que savons-nous des bélugas ? Nous savons qu'une population de cette espèce de baleine blanche vit dans l'eau glacée de l'estuaire du fleuve St-Laurent—une eau qui se trouve à des centaines de kilomètres de Tiohtià:ke / Mooniyang / Montréal. Ce n'est pas une espèce que je côtoie. Loin de la vue, loin des pensées, je ne savais pas qu'elle était en voie d'extinction, ni moins que la présence humaine était responsable de sa disparition avant de découvrir l'œuvre de Maryse Goudreau, intitulée *Présage de 1995* (2021). En ce sens, ce filtre de réalité augmentée est une œuvre activiste qui nous confronte à l'ère anthropocène en nous conscientisant quant aux conditions des bélugas. Effectivement, l'œuvre nous interpelle émotivement pour nous amener à évaluer les conséquences de nos actions sur l'environnement. L'endroit et le médium choisis par Goudreau contribuent de surcroît à rendre visible à la fois notre position dans l'espace et l'imminente disparition de l'espèce marine. Enfin, le filtre souligne avec force l'inaction du gouvernement en se basant sur le discours tenu en 1995 par Daphne Jennings, une membre de la Chambre des communes du Canada, ce qui réitère que l'hégémonie que nous pensons détenir sur la planète n'agit pas comme une force géologique, mais plutôt comme un danger pour l'écosystème.

Si la définition d'art activiste est ambiguë, persiste que les œuvres qualifiées comme tel sont destinées à un large public et présentées en dehors du contexte strictement muséal pour produire un réel changement social. Elles sont aussi généralement motivées par la volonté de trouver des solutions alternatives à des enjeux sociopolitiques et communautaires afin de rendre le monde meilleur.<sup>1</sup> À cet effet, *Présage de 1995* emploie des tactiques visuelles et textuelles accrocheuses pour nous émouvoir, en plus de nous encourager davantage à penser aux répercussions environnementales des gestes que nous posons quotidiennement. Téléchargeable sur Instagram et Facebook uniquement pour la durée de la 17e édition de la biennale de l'image MOMENTA, le filtre de réalité augmentée déstabilise les sens. En plus d'altérer la vue, il nous invite à avancer dans l'espace, le mouvement faisant défiler un texte

au rythme de nos pas, et éveille l'ouïe grâce à la musique d'Adam O'Callaghan. Si nous franchissons le pas, il est possible de lire: « Qu'en est-il de ce béluga qui a laissé son bébé près d'un bateau pour que les scientifiques puissent voir ses plaies ? » D'entrée de jeu, les mots liés à la maternité (bébé) et à la douleur (plaies) humanisent les animaux, ce qui invite certainement et instinctivement l'empathie. Nous introduisant aux conditions abominables des bélugas, l'affirmation agit comme un choc: elle est affective et pressent ainsi une réponse effective.<sup>2</sup> Puis, une image apparaît devant nous (fig.1.). Il s'agit de l'œil d'un béluga en plan très rapproché pris à l'aide d'un appareil argentique. Propre à la pratique de l'artiste, cette méthode poétique capte un instant précis des animaux en mouvement, mais aussi une émotion rehaussée par le grain de la photo. À cet effet, l'œil paraît à la fois fatigué et méfiant. Poignant et strident, il contraste avec la peau blanche immaculée l'englobant. Nous n'avons pas d'autres choix que de constater sa présence. L'image nous plonge au cœur de la dualité entre le sujet et l'objet, et déstabilise la relation de regard que le spectateur a habituellement sur l'objet d'art. Ici, le béluga brise le quatrième mur pour scruter nos prochains mouvements, encourageant d'autant plus une réaction de notre part. Puis, un autre énoncé : « Les animaux savent-ils ce que nous faisons ? » En plus de nous interpeller par l'utilisation du pronom « nous », la construction interrogative de la phrase nous pousse à questionner notre devoir de citoyen et notre responsabilité environnementale: que faisons-nous? Des gestes qui, si petits soient-ils, ont un impact sur la qualité de l'air et la pollution dans l'eau, si bien que nous influençons directement la survie de l'espèce marine en voie d'extinction. Nous tentons de l'oublier, certes, mais nos activités ont de si grandes répercussions sur l'environnement que l'ère géologique dans laquelle nous vivons est anthropocène, désormais influencée davantage par l'Homme que par la nature.<sup>3</sup> Or, si nous avons collectivement endommagé notre écosystème en agissant sans se soucier des conséquences à long terme, ce n'est pas en nous incitant à prendre action urgemment, sans d'abord réfléchir, que le sort de la planète s'améliorera. Le filtre nous pousse donc à user de la tactique la plus efficace qui soit pour adresser l'anthropocène: la réflexion critique de nos actions passées, présentes et futures.<sup>4</sup> Dans cet ordre d'idée, adoptant une pensée utopique comme plusieurs autres œuvres activistes, le parcours de réalité augmentée se conclut par un message d'espoir : apparaît une photo de deux

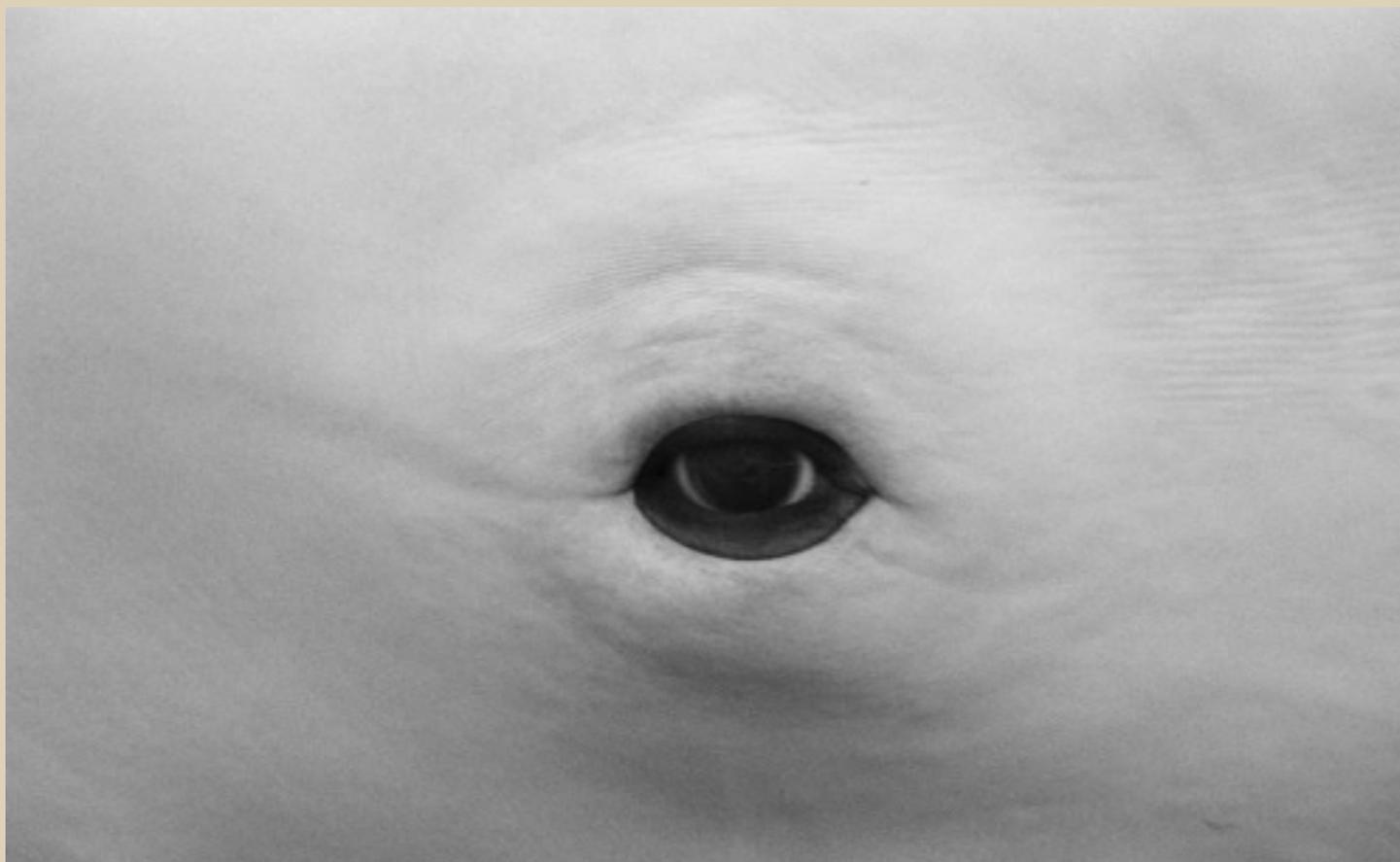


Figure 1. Maryse Goudreau. *La Permission*. 2016. Photographie argentique. 20 x 28 ¾. Composante de *Présage de 1995*

bélugas nageant paisiblement dans une eau cristalline (fig. 2.). L'air joueur, ils se délectent de baigner dans un environnement viable. Aucune présence humaine n'est détectée, comme si la photo évoquait la possibilité d'un futur alternatif. Fondamentalement, elle présage que ces animaux marins survivront à notre chaos si nous pensons davantage à la manière dont nous vivons dans l'ère anthropocène.

Pour ce faire, l'œuvre, qui par sa nature se trouve à la fois dans les rues et en ligne, nous immerge dans l'espace. En fait, si le filtre peut être essayé partout à condition que la lumière du jour soit suffisante et que les surfaces à l'écran soient assez définies pour que le texte puisse apparaître, il est certainement conçu pour être vécu au Vieux-Port de Montréal. Quartier incontournable lors d'une première visite dans la métropole, l'espace est souvent préconisé pour des rendez-vous romantiques, des escapades familiales ou des sorties entre amis.<sup>5/6</sup>

Il est donc idéal pour une œuvre activiste. De plus, situé au cœur de la ville mouvementée plutôt que dans une galerie où règne la loi non écrite du silence, l'environnement est propice aux conversations engagées qui s'intègrent à la fois à la vie courante des citoyens et de ceux qui viennent spécifiquement pour l'installation. Suffit qu'une personne télécharge le filtre et se mette à marcher vers l'avant lentement, presque d'un pas hésitant tout en regardant son téléphone le bras tendu, pour éveiller la curiosité de son prochain. Grâce à l'emplacement de l'œuvre, l'expérience de celle-ci s'ancre dès lors non seulement dans notre mémoire individuelle, mais aussi dans notre identité sociale.<sup>6</sup> Parallèlement, puisque *Présage de 1995* se vit sur un réseau social, ce qui consolide d'ailleurs sa nature collective, le partage d'une photo ou d'une vidéo utilisant le filtre permet de transporter l'expérience à l'espace web, pour que d'autres à travers le monde le récupèrent et se le réapproprient dans l'espace réel.<sup>7</sup> La double forme du médium permet alors de transformer la réalité pour lui donner une nouvelle signification: celle de dévoiler



une facette de notre existence qui serait autrement invisible.<sup>8</sup> L'écran agissant tel un miroir, nous sommes d'abord amenés à observer la réalité déplorable des bélugas, puis la nôtre en second plan. Précisément, derrière le texte et les images implantées par Goudreau pour augmenter la réalité, nous pouvons apercevoir près de la tour de l'Horloge une importante concentration de bateaux de croisière et de plaisance privés, nous rappelant par le fait même que nos envies polluantes importent davantage que la survie de certaines espèces animales. Ainsi, si le Vieux-Port contribue à nourrir notre réflexion sur nos caprices et les effets qui en découlent sur l'environnement, il invoque aussi la société de consommation et de divertissement qui règne au sein de la conscience collective. Dans le même ordre d'idées, Goudreau n'est pas sans savoir qu'en 2020, une baleine a traversé le fleuve Saint-Laurent jusqu'à se retrouver sous le pont Jacques-Cartier à Tiohtià:ke / Mooniyang / Montréal. Pour l'occasion, émerveillés s'étaient rassemblés au Vieux-Port pour observer l'animal,<sup>9</sup> pour observer, la tête cachée dans le sable, ce phénomène lié aux changements climatiques et propre à l'anthropocène. Au final, incarnés dans cet espace à la fois social et commercial, nous sommes forcés de constater la réalité que nous avons longtemps niée: celle de l'hégémonie de pouvoir que nous prétendons détenir sur les autres mammifères et qui cause à petit feu la perte des bélugas.

Ce faisant, l'œuvre a certainement une dimension politique. Le gouvernement détenant les rênes de notre nation, il contribue à conserver ce pouvoir au détriment des autres espèces. C'est d'ailleurs ce que met explicitement en lumière Goudreau avec le roman archiviste théâtral *La conquête du béluga*, qui regroupe toutes les mentions du mot « béluga » dans les échanges de la Chambre des Communes canadienne entre 1876 et 2019, et duquel est né *Présage de 1995*. En effet, la phrase que l'on peut lire dans le filtre est en réalité tirée d'un discours prononcé lors d'une assemblée législative par la membre Daphne Jennings en 1995: Avons-nous protégé le majestueux Saint-Laurent de la pollution? Les bélugas ne sont-ils pas lentement empoisonnés? Qu'en est-il de ce béluga qui a laissé son bébé près d'un bateau pour que les scientifiques puissent voir ses plaies? Dans ce documentaire, les scientifiques croyaient honnêtement que le béluga voulait vraiment qu'ils voient les plaies de son petit. Les animaux savent-ils ce que nous faisons?<sup>10</sup>

Par ce passage qui témoigne certainement de notre hégémonie présumée, Goudreau met en évidence les préoccupations des politiciens, basées sur le profit économique plutôt que sur des enjeux environnementaux. Historiquement, les bélugas ont longtemps été vus comme une commodité dont les Canadiens voulaient s'emparer pour conserver leur dominance face aux autres pays nordiques.<sup>11</sup> Dans l'imaginaire collectif, leur existence est perçue comme une ressource à extraire à un point tel que s'est développé,



Figure 2. Maryse Goudreau. *Le Présage*. 2016. Photographie argentique.

au cours des années 1940, un projet de margarine fait à partir de l'huile de béluga.<sup>12</sup> Près d'une quarantaine d'années plus tard, après d'autres propositions loufoques de la sorte, un moratoire interdisant la pêche au béluga est enfin adopté. Or, si le commerce ne menace plus l'espèce animale, la pollution devient un enjeu important pour leur survie—celle des eaux,

causée en partie par le déversement des déchets industriels des sociétés nord-américaines dans les lacs, mais aussi celle qui est sonore, causée par la grande affluence de bateaux, empêchant dès lors les bélugas d'avoir des repères communicationnels dans leur habitat naturel.<sup>13</sup> Ces conditions sont textuellement relevées par des politiciens, mais ceux-ci semblent être dans l'incapacité, par manque d'intérêt comme le suggère implicitement la pièce, d'agir en conséquence. La situation actuelle des bélugas était alors déjà présagée en 1995. Nous en



antique. Dimensions variables. Composante de Présage de 1995

venons à nous demander si le « nous » prononcé par Jennings ne réfère pas plutôt à l'assemblée politique, comme si elle demandait : Les animaux savent-ils que nous ne faisons rien pour améliorer leur sort? Tel qu'il l'a déjà été établi, le « nous » dans le filtre implique la collectivité, mais, en recyclant le discours de la politicienne dans son art, Goudreau pointe aussi un groupe

d'individus partiellement responsable de la dégradation du milieu de vie marin, soit les politiciens canadiens. Elle révèle que les conditions des bélugas n'étaient pas destinées naturellement à se dégrader, mais que c'est notre aveuglement volontaire, particulièrement celui du gouvernement, qui a causé le phénomène d'anthropocène à notre époque. Par le fait même, la situation déplorable des cétacés au Québec reflète directement la dégradation de notre milieu de vie.<sup>14</sup> Il est évident que Présage de 1995 nous met sur le même pied d'égalité, bélugas et humains, pour nous faire réaliser que si les mammifères marins meurent à cause de l'environnement toxique dans lequel ils sont forcés de nager, le même sort nous est potentiellement réservé à moins que nous assumions enfin nos responsabilités face à la crise environnementale.

Présage de 1995 contribue au développement d'un jugement critique envers les pratiques individuelles qui sont néfastes à la fois pour les cétacés et la survie humaine, mais aussi envers les gouvernements qui nous représentent. Pour ce faire, Goudreau emploie des tactiques qui nous engagent émotionnellement au filtre de réalité augmentée, et exploite un espace social et commercial pour faciliter les discussions sur les impacts de nos actions sur l'environnement. Fondamentalement, comme œuvre activiste, le parcours interactif se base sur des mots du passé pour nous faire réfléchir activement au présent et ainsi nous faire envisager un futur meilleur. À cet effet, si pour définir sa pratique, Goudreau affirme qu'en « évoquant le passé pour aborder des problématiques reliées au présent, [elle] positionne la mémoire comme une arme, »<sup>15</sup> il est incontestable que l'artiste réussit ici à positionner notre mémoire comme arme pour prendre compte de l'anthropocène.



## Notes de fin de texte

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# Muses of Modernity: German Negrophilia, 'Die Bakerin,' and African-American Women of the Weimar Cabaret

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Faith Paré

In 1927, at the height of popularity of the African-American cabaret, a contemporary white critic wrote of white audiences transfixed by a Black stage artist that was transforming the status of racial hegemony in the United States: "We talk in his dialect, we sing his songs, we dance his dances [...] In the hum of the machinery that surrounds us, the click of the car rails, the rattle of typewriters, the rataplan of riveters, we are becoming increasingly conscious of that surging syn-copation with which the Negro, our former slave, has enslaved us."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, African-American women performers who "touched down" on German soil seemingly "reversed" the historical trajectory of colonialism, with the conquered becoming the conquering through Black cultural production's à la mode in music, dance, fashion, and art. Yet Germans certainly were not slaves, but consumers. Furthermore, African-American women performers struggled in the Weimar cabaret circuit, and elsewhere in Western Europe, to find economic, artistic, and personal freedom.

This essay tracks how African American women performers, particularly focusing on Josephine Baker and the lesser-known Ruth Virginia Bayton, cultivated a densely intertextual visual and performance culture by using intracultural mimicry and emerging mass media that persisted individual and collective Black artistic survival. As performers, they utilized insider knowledge to elude to white appropriation and enact "multi-signifying practices of dissemblance [...] exploiting the spurious racialisms of their time as well as enabling a space for satirical comment on the absurdity of such depictions."<sup>2</sup> Blackness was simultaneously grotesque and desirable to white audiences, and served to allegorize the "growing pains" Germany experienced moving into modernity after World War I.<sup>3</sup> African-American women performers learned to parodize, elude, and confound white audiences to safeguard their signature artistry and their shared culture from subsumption. Though the European literati viewed this "breath from the jungle"<sup>4</sup> to be novel, Afro-diasporic presence was by no means new in the Weimar period.

A white fixation on Blackness as representative of national and cultural crises surfaced as a steady influx of arrivals, from German Cameroon and colonies across central and southwest Africa, streamed into the metropolises of Berlin and Hamburg during the fin-de-siècle. Most of the first immigrants were Black men looking for work, but further into the Imperial era families began to settle in hopes of escaping unbridled violence and economic dearth inflicted on Indigenous Africans in the colonies.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, a burgeoning mass advertising culture began to “package the primitive” on goods exported from colonized Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean, circulating images correlating exotic cargo with Black people “to emphasize these products’ difference and their newness to the European palette.”<sup>6</sup> The exported ‘commodities’ also included human subjects. The Völkerschau, the German reinvention of the human zoo, moved the ethnographic museum into the city, in the so-called interest of “public education.” Scholar Nancy Nenno argues that, between the African woman entrapped in the Völkerschau in the 19th century and the African-American woman cabaret performer in the 1910s–20s, “emerges a discourse about the place and function of the primitive in modern urban space [...] as Other and mirror.”<sup>7</sup> This constructed otherness provided a space for the projection of internal anxieties about nationhood.

The Treaty of Versailles, the loss of Germany’s African colonies, and imposition of French military units in the nation, with French soldiers from Senegal to Algeria settling in the Rhineland region, entangled German state insecurities with Africanness. The schwarze Schmach (‘Black Horror’) campaign portrayed an “oversexed and predatory Black man” preying upon the white German woman to explain intermarriage and biracial children in the Rhineland, portraying Black sexuality as a gateway to cultural collapse.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, this portrayal has previously been put forward as a reason for African-American women’s unique financial successes in Germany. They were not attributed the same level of sexual menace, seeing as their female bodies “successfully mitigated the German popular fear of primitive sexuality associated with the ‘Black Horror.’”<sup>9</sup> The issue of their sexuality was nevertheless politically explosive: “Between 1925 and 1933 no year passed without manifested nationalist opposition to African-American performers.”<sup>10</sup>

To control anxieties around potential cultural disorder the “Black” could unleash, art historian Petrine Archer-Straw explains that the primitive was conceived “in an act of self-definition [...] created to be oppositional or compliment the Western rational ‘I.’”

When Weimar currency finally stabilized in the mid-1920s, African-American artists pooled in to supply European demand for ‘real’ American jazz to supplement the “pseudo-jazz [that] had been heard in dance halls and on records since the end of the war.”<sup>11</sup> African-Americans gravitated towards Berlin as much as they did Paris and London, where they were paid three to four times more, had significantly lower cost of living, and found more sexual, gender, and—critically—racial tolerance than in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Historian Peter Jelavich theorizes that Weimar revues oriented toward international casts because Germany no longer symbolized a prosperous modernity.<sup>13</sup> In their fragile post war state, receptive Europeans saw America as a perfected bridge between old and new world: its “modernity was embodied in its technology [and] primitiveness was incorporated in its Black population”; the latter attribute they considered complementary, a missing element which could bring a “vital energy lacking in decadent and war-weary Europeans.”<sup>14</sup>

Working while Black, let alone success as a Black woman in the cabaret circuit, “depended on exploiting the things that made them different from other Germans.”<sup>15</sup> Black women’s bodies on the stage were a critical commodity for the German nation-building project, one held between admiration and terror. Marked by her past of *partus sequitur ventrem*, the legal doctrine that dispossessed mothers of parental rights and claimed their children as enslaved property, her body becomes a site that brings forth the ‘new,’ the modern. However, her Blackness, which signified the formation of Africa as eternal past and no-future, also invoked the collapse of progress and, thus, civilization. In theorist Saidiya Hartman’s words, her “reproduction does not ensure any future other than that of dispossession.”<sup>16</sup> European critics frequently illustrated the craze for African-American cultural production as a “conquering,” and often in support of such.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than being a currency and instrument of imperial power, Black women’s bodies themselves transform into the conquering force.

Jonathan Wiplinger suggests that Black revues were “an important means of negotiating newness of modern urban space,” and that the levity and humor incorporated into vaudeville and cabaret performance were critical components “to offer a means to laugh off fear of modernity.”<sup>18</sup> As well, the physical relationship of the stage, with viewer and object divided, “offered a controlled space for ritual forms of racial contact, while the cabaret offered a closer, yet still contained, proximity.”<sup>19</sup> African-American women performers found themselves in the role of mediators of this complicated anxiety, and thus their performance practices “cannot be recovered as moments of pure resistance to oppression, but rather as a complex of often-times bald commercialism and a resilient striving for the body’s creative autonomy.”<sup>20</sup>

Josephine Baker, nameless for years in American choruses, transcended into la Venus noire when she touched onto another continent.<sup>21</sup> La Revue Nègre, which featured Baker in her first starring role, toured to Berlin in 1925. Germans were just as transfixed with “Die Bakerin” as the French. Baker was received so well in Germany’s capital that she nearly selected it as her headquarters instead of Paris, pointing toward Berlin’s immense reputation.<sup>22</sup> Baker maintained her cross-continental fan base by utilizing an emerging mass media of the early 20th century, a tangled web of film, print, audio recording, and advertising. It resulted in a unique interdisciplinary performance practice and indisputably contributed to her modern appeal and international recognition. Cultural theorist Sianne Ngai argues that she was seen “as a figure for intermediality itself—mixing American music and minstrel comedy, African sculpture, and French poetry”<sup>23</sup>; a clashing of geographies, cultures, and historical periods representative of modernist amalgamation. This explains why Baker’s numerous copycats, white and Black, saw her as such a generative blueprint. For white German women artists, the performed Blackness in Baker’s routines provided a racial masquerade to contend with their desires for shifting, modern gender roles. For Black women artists trying to make a living in Europe, performative Blackness was a vehicle toward collective survival, a way to “reclaim their bodies in, as well as from, the world of work [...] [by] the very act of making money through the beauty, grace, and comedy of their bodies’ talents.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite having been born in St. Louis, Missouri, Baker partially played into fantasies of Africanness in her performance that Germans admired more than the actual African culture of Afro-Germans. She was portrayed as split “between the jungle and the skyscraper.”<sup>25</sup> As Nancy Nenno argues, “her skin signalled her status as the primitive Other [...] but her identity as an African-American marked her as (partially) assimilated and assimilable.”<sup>26</sup> Except in the case of the growing far-right, Americanness also somewhat shielded her and other African-American women performers from white Germans’ racial resentment about thwarted imperial prospects and the Rhineland occupation. In the United States, fear of Black female sexuality was more explicit. Performers could manoeuvre carefully around erotic fascination with the Black woman’s body in Europe to make a wage. Similarly to how Afro-Germans adopted African-American personas for jazz gigs, African-American artists adopted cultural and temporal fluidity between Africa and America. Nenno describes La Revue Nègre’s structure, and how its sketches oriented around this perceived fluidity:

**The narrative ‘regressed’ back to the African jungle. Baker began with “Yes sir, that’s my baby” in black-face, performing grotesque gestures and crossing her eyes. Singing “I Want to Yodel,” she played the urban American, and Charlestoned in front of a backdrop of a skyscraper [...] In the revue’s final sketch [the notorious “Danse Sauvage”], she portrayed the dead prey of a hunter played by an African native, Joe Alex. Both appeared on stage naked except for strategically placed beads and feathers, Baker draped across his shoulders. As the tempo of the drumbeats increased, the prey came to life, sliding down and around the hunter’s naked body.**<sup>27</sup>

Baker’s journey ‘backwards’ is a ‘return’ to a so-called natural state of African culture, untarnished by modernity, and a rupture of Euro-colonial historiographic notions of civilization’s eternal linear progress. In a 1926 photograph (fig. 1), likely promoting a revue at Nelson-Theater in Berlin, Baker’s drab clothes and uneven overalls indicate impoverished agricultural life, which was the fate of most African-Americans in the early 20th century. Behind Baker, a painted stage backdrop features a city sign reading “Memphis” and

architecture of the American South. Her crossed-eyes and goofy smile nod to a legacy of outlandish black-face performance, matching the sketch's setting, yet it also serves to signal Black women's 'madness' from her displacement in modern culture. In a photograph from two years later, Baker performs in the revue *Bitte Eins-teigen* ("All Aboard"), specifically written for German audiences, at Berlin's Theater des Westens. Baker wears her iconic banana girdle, which originally debuted a year into La Revue *Nègre's run*, causing a stir across Europe. She is also decked out in gold bangles, huge hoop earrings, feather anklets, and strings upon strings of beaded necklaces. Her make-up and hair are carefully applied, but her breasts are bare—primitive sexuality exposed. A cartoonish portrait of Baker looms over her in a giant backdrop (fig. 2). With a searing white and wide smile, huge eyes, and a gigantic backside, the illustration borrows from American minstrel posters and the racist advertising of colonial goods, another allusion to worlds both old and new. The illustration is dressed in the same way as Baker, except singing birds are perched on the hoop earrings. This signals a pre-civilization intimacy with nature. In contact with the stage, the controlled primitive sphere, Baker was, to André Levinson, "no longer a grotesque dancing girl [...] but the Black Venus that haunted Baudelaire."<sup>28</sup>

In her study of European negrophilia, Archer-Straw asserts Baker as unfeeling toward her people with her ceaseless ambition; "happy to sing 'Bake that Chicken Pie' despite its racial slurs; to accept a gift of a monkey and later a leopard as her pet companions; and to present herself as Tahitian, if that was what her public desired."<sup>29</sup> This is too firm a disavowal; Archer-Straw's claim counters biographical evidence of Baker's commitment to anti-racist and anti-fascist causes. She was a member of the French Resistance and the subject of a file by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for her vocal opposition to global racial imperialism, and was famous enough to demand desegregated audiences as a condition to her performances.<sup>30</sup> I would argue that her seeming indifference to European objectification better demonstrates disinterest in white reception of her artistic intentions and practice. African-American performers, trapped in a global anti-Black regime, could not fully reject these stereotypes if they meant to survive in the entertainment industry. Instead, they "smuggled [Black satire] behind the white wide mouth [...]"

revealing the ways hierarchies breed their own instabilities [...] acts signify[ing] on multiple levels to different audiences at the same time."<sup>31</sup> Jelavich considers the famous banana dance Baker's "most obvious send-up of African clichés,"<sup>32</sup> and even Baker's contemporary Yvan Goll thought a Southern city girl prancing in feathers to be "intentionally ludicrous."<sup>33</sup> Racial parody by Black performers was only truly transparent to other Black people, who would know that the white intelligentsia's belief of Baker's, and others', dances as authentically African is absurd.

What also made Baker's practice notable was that her performance did not finish when the curtains closed. Her leveraging and remixing of wide-circulation media as performative pastiche and montage is a practice that has crystalized her legacy as quintessentially modernist. During her tours, portraits of Baker across genres exploded, and her image appeared in "films, photographs, paintings, essays, sculpture, poetry, advertising [...] and even recipes for food."<sup>34</sup> When she reached Germany in 1926, "her influence was already being felt in Paris, where fashionable women now sported arms covered in bracelets and wore turbans."<sup>35</sup> Baker's liaisons, gushed over in the tabloids, served to reaffirm her brand as sexually voracious and uninhibited.<sup>36</sup> She expanded into merchandising, with a trademarked Baker doll and a hair pomade to replicate her signature look. She shared beauty secrets in German magazines, "replicat[ing] stereotypes of the primitive [like] 'rubbing herself with the juice of bananas that have been soaked in alcohol.'"<sup>37</sup> It was never easier to market oneself—or replicate, or parody the image of another for your own gain.

It would be reductive to claim that Baker doppelgängers were solely trying to benefit from her reputation. In fact, the role of the Black primitive spirit in the big city associated with Baker was not unique, and had been played with by countless Black revue stars and chorus girls even before the 1920s. Revues such as Sam Wooding and the Chocolate Kiddies, which toured Germany before La Revue *Nègre* in 1924, were also structured around sketches including cotton picking, banjo-plucking plantation scenes, steamboat and skyscraper numbers, and feathered jungle dances. To claim a chicken or an egg is untrue to how "popular expressive forms resist purity [...] [and]"

are inherently promiscuous.”<sup>38</sup> That being said, women performers of all race<sup>s</sup> also supplied the demand for the primitive. The performer Ruth Bayton became known as ‘the Josephine Baker of Berlin’ for the reputation she cultivated in the city.<sup>39</sup> What is striking about Bayton is that, according to the records I had access to in English and German, she may have grown to be as popular as Baker locally within the Weimar Republic. Bayton was profiled as a “well-known American theatrical girl” in the Pittsburgh Courier the same year Baker’s *La Revue Nègre* debuted in Germany. Bayton’s three month-long revue at the Theater des Westens was longer than any of Baker’s runs in Germany. Two years later, *the Courier* also reported that Bayton earned a \$200,000 salary for a nineteen-month German run (approximately \$3,018,888.89 USD in 2020)<sup>40</sup>.

Bayton also donned the famous banana skirt (fig. 3), certainly to capitalize on the Baker craze. However, the banana skirt was another icon of a nuanced negotiation of self-fashioning for Black women performers. They recognized trends that would appeal to white audiences, but most critically “looked at each other, performed for each other, and were looking at themselves always in the many mirrors they dressed themselves in [...] look[ing] with glee at their ingenious forms of bodily malapropism and disguise.”<sup>41</sup> In comparison, the white gaze denies Black people agency, attributing their artistic choices to a natural primitive disposition. This is just one reason why no record of Bayton’s distinct artistry survives: she is conflated with the most prominent Black woman artist at the time. Despite this, evidence shows that Bayton created plenty of her own buzz, mentioned in the Dresden Nachrichten in Dresden, Baltimore’s Afro-American, in Paris’s *Cyrano: satirique hebdomadaire*, and in poet Countee Cullen’s “Dark Tower” column in *Opportunity* as a “coloured comedienne [...] teaching the Berliners a few racial steps.”<sup>42</sup> White women performers either reviled the Black women of the cabaret, or wished to emulate their artistic motifs. German women of the avant-garde were particularly interested in appropriating these aspects of the Black female form into their own personas to subvert white women’s gender performance; especially to move away from the “Gretchen,” a cultural archetype increasingly associated with the failed colonial era. The Gretchen was “not only the young naive German girl with braids and a knitting-needle horizon, [but]

also the heroic and militaristic fascist woman,”<sup>43</sup> whose feminine passivity was reminiscent, even representative of, an old, expired, and imperial Germany. German women artists were in search of new gender potentialities because they also recognized the culture was leaving behind a cult of the lily-white innocent.

In France, the ingénue actress Mistinguett was once the public’s darling and the highest paid performer in the world. Archer-Straw describes the media rivalry when Baker emerged onto the Parisian cabaret scene:

**Within a year of Josephine’s debut, Vogue featured a picture, not unlike Manet’s Olympia, of Mistinguett attended by her black servant, with a caption that questioned who was indeed the true empress of the music hall. The question clearly alluded to Mistinguett’s rival, who was fondly referred to as the ‘Impératrice’ [...] Baker’s Christian name, combined with her creole background, led to her being compared to Napoleon Bonaparte’s first wife Joséphine, whose image also experienced something of a fashionable revival in the 1920s. The combined identity of the two ‘Joséphines’ created serious competition.**<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, Baker’s spellbinding modern-meets-primordial image won over sentimentality of the past. Troublingly, how white German women engaged with the bodies of Black women can be compared to how they, in the decades before, sought a liberating transformation of gender role by participating in the African colonial effort: “Africa’s natural environment—untainted as it seemed by civilization—would offer [...] a less constrained life, and [the ability] to transcend or redefine the boundaries set, internally and externally, by bourgeois ideals of femininity.”<sup>45</sup> Those mesmerized by Black women’s cabaret culture absorbed it without any care to attribution. Jayna Brown persuasively argues that the “New Women’ embraced Black expressive forms, adopting racialized gestural vocabularies to shape and redefine their own bodies as modern. Yet Black women performers are seldom recognized as agents of these new physical vocabularies.”<sup>46</sup> Artists like Anita Berber have been celebrated for their early contributions toward performance art for tabloid antics,<sup>47</sup> but Baker and other Black women performers, despite similarly recorded rendez-vous, are not ascribed the same agency.

Another infamous 'repackaging' is white German actress Marlene Dietrich's starring in the film *Blonde Venus* (1932). Critics have called it a portrait-of-the-artist film that closely attends to details of Baker's own life, so much so that Baker cursed her afterward, saying "that German cow has copied me all my life,"<sup>48</sup> yet it inverts Baker's Blackness and retraces her movement from the old world, Germany, to new, America.<sup>49</sup> Dietrich stars as Helen, a German immigrant who becomes a famous cabaret star in America under the stage name *Blonde Venus*. Sianne Ngai claims the "Hot Voodoo" sequence of the film is critical to Helen's transformation into a star through its self-reflexive recognition of the plot's Baker mimicry: "She undergoes metamorphosis, after entering on stage in a literally 'apish' fashion (wearing a gorilla costume), into a persona with a blonde afro who sings a song about how a particular genre of music ('the African tempo') produces a metamorphosis in her persona or character."<sup>50</sup> The ape costume in Ngai's reading is not only racist mocking, but is a metaphor of "the very imitativeness of which Baker accused Dietrich [...] The white woman's aping seems to ridicule or criticize is not 'Blackness' [...] but a kind of white mimicry."<sup>51</sup> We can perhaps argue, then, though anti-Blackness and misogynoir does not allow for the agential artistry of Black women, that there is a layer of white supremacy's hypocrisies. Blatant racist mocking, however, was also prominent. White women performers leapt onto Baker as a notable figure to parody, with Ilse Bois doing "grotesque dances and [making] ironic comments on the jazz craze and its wild children" while appearing "'Afro'-hairstyled and banana-girded at the *Kabarett der Komiker*,"<sup>52</sup> and dancer Jenny Steiner launching a 'Die Bakerin' routine.<sup>53</sup> There is archival evidence of Steiner doing blackface routines previously, and she likely employed similar performance motifs in her take on Baker.

It has been argued previously that African-American women performers were granted tremendous opportunity in the Weimar Republic, and Western Europe at-large. This was because of Europe's reputation of supposed liberal views toward race and their easy leveraging of sexualized exoticism for negrophile audiences, as captivation with the primitive swept across the continent; they shared a "deviance like black male sexuality, but one that listeners instead found

unthreatening."<sup>54</sup> I have demonstrated that African-American women performers in Germany contended with a dual adoration and repulsion toward the Black female form, their bodies read as a metaphor for the ushering in of modernity and the threat of cultural collapse. African-American women artists of the stage had to learn to steer and capitalize on their supposed difference against encroaching cultural subsumption in a foreign land, while also innovating parody and pastiche across visual, choreographic, and musical forms for their own intracultural dialogue and identity construction.

These women were the vanguard among the vanguard, and fascism responded accordingly. Jazz and other Black cultural forms were labelled by the Nazis as cultural degeneration, part of the eugenicist, anti-Semitic, and anti-modern agenda of the party. Black culture serves as a helpful allegory for terror of miscegenation, desegregation, and barbarism. In 1930, "the first time a Nazi was appointed to a state cabinet [,] he promulgated a law entitled 'Against Negro Culture,' which was used to suppress all forms of avant-garde art. Likewise, when the Nazis mounted a 'Degenerate Music' exhibition in 1938, the poster featured a caricature of a Black saxophonist sporting a star of David."<sup>55</sup> After Josephine Baker's *Bitte Einsteinen* revue tour was frequently interrupted by the right-wing, with Nazis throwing "rotten eggs and spoiled vegetables" from the crowd and "in Vienna, right-wing students, supported by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, protested her performance as 'pornographic,'"<sup>56</sup> her deliberation on a move to Berlin was foiled. She was forced to tone down her dress and flee the city: Josephine, l'Impératrice, had fallen. Fascism annihilated not only Black people in Germany, but almost successfully erased how African-American women revitalized a fragile German culture. Like Ngai says of *Blonde Venus*, the Weimar period "could be described as haunted not just by a single Black female performer, but by many."<sup>57</sup>



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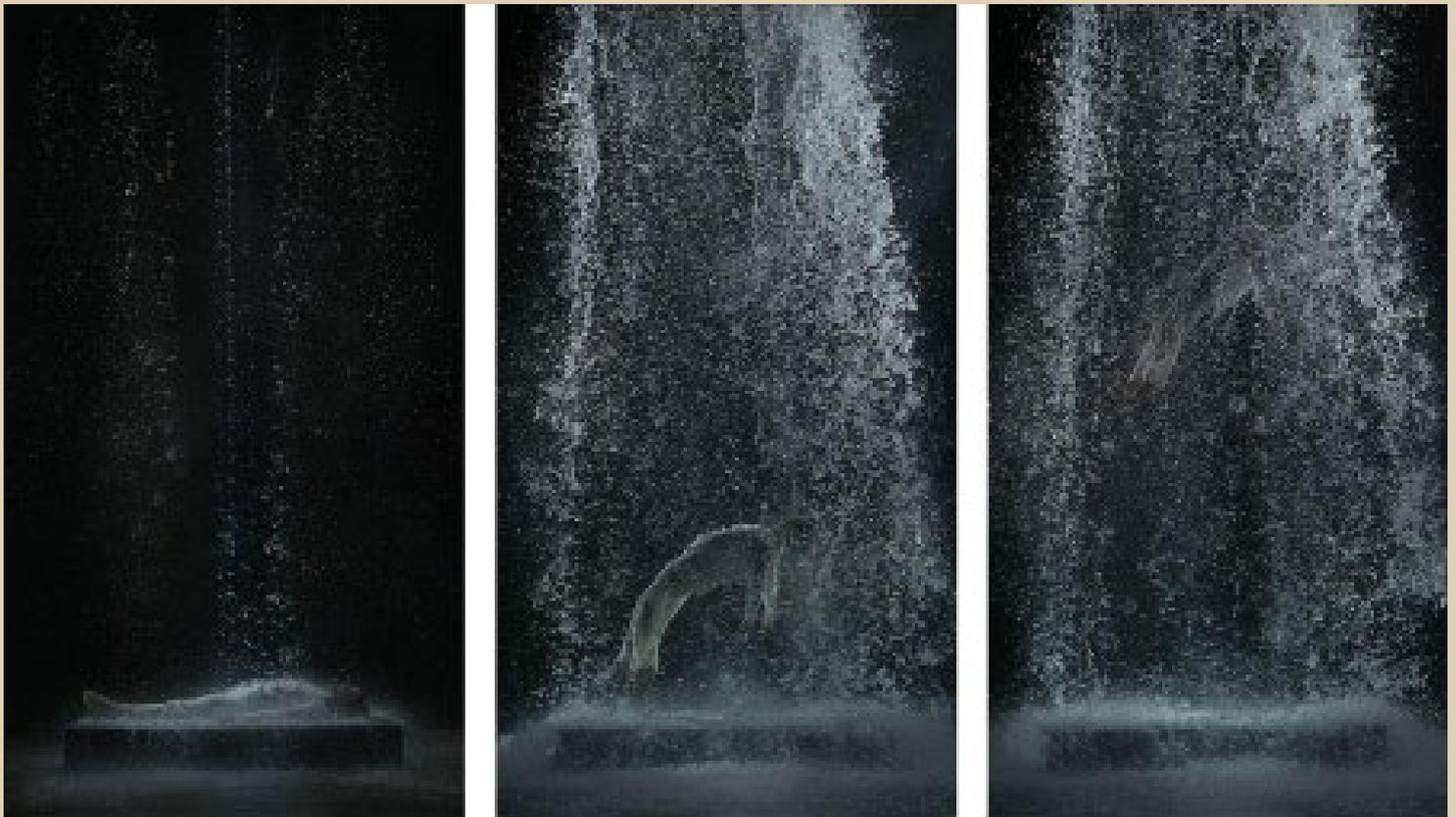


# Technology at Peace

Anastasia Koutsogiannis is a Montreal-based Art History and Film Studies student at Concordia University. Interested in both art history and film dialogue, she often approaches film/video as a traditional fine art practice. With a background in video production training, she has also made work preoccupied with ephemerality, memory, and mortality. These concepts guide her writing, as she explores art making as a tool for both remembering and being remembered. Koutsogiannis maintains that writing about art/film encourages discussion and contributes to vital movements within our cultural landscape. Koutsogiannis' writing has been featured in FOFA Gallery's USE catalogues in 2021 and 2022. She is also one of the winners of Concordia Film Festival's 2021 Emerging Voices section.

Anastasia Koutsogiannis

Figure 1. Bill Viola, *Tristan's Ascension* (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall), 2005, video-sound installation, 335 x 251 cm. Copyright: Kira Perov, courtesy of Bill Viola Studio.



Bill Viola is a multi-disciplinary artist with a long and successful career in video installation. Often considered a pioneer of the medium, he has explored many themes in his work, including the human relationship with religion, spirituality, rebirth, life, and the afterlife. His work is inspired by both Eastern and Western spirituality and often employs the elements of matter (i.e. fire, water, earth, and wind).<sup>1</sup> In a 2005 piece, *Tristan's Ascension* (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall) (fig.1), Viola presents one's journey to the afterlife. The large (335 x 251 cm) and immersive video-sound installation is often played on a loop, showing a man rising from the ground in slow-motion. Violent waters ascend with him, as he travels upward through a dark and unidentifiable space. All the while, the rushing sound of the water grows louder and louder, until it is almost unsettling. When the man in the installation is no longer visible in the frame, the waterfall finishes its movement and allows for a moment of contemplation. As it violently moves upward, it almost feels never-ending; as though one can stand there and watch it forever. After some time, its volume becomes smaller and smaller and finally trickles to a stop. Blackness floods the screen and the space goes completely silent. The viewer must leave the room and go on with their lives, waiting for that passage to perhaps reach them one day. When exhibited, the work can either stand alone or be paired with some of the artist's other installations. Whether alone or complemented, the video is presented in a pitch black room, creating a one-on-one experience with the viewer. This essay will contextualize Viola's work through Jacob Peter Gowry's *The Fall of Icarus* (1635-7) (fig.2), Sally Mann's *One Big Snake* (1991) (fig.3), and Sylvia Plath's *Crossing the Water* (1971) (fig.4) in order to identify the use of technology in art as a key component to connect with and grasp the transition from life to the afterlife, and consequently, the spiritual unknown.

Jacob Peter Gowry's oil painting, *The Fall of Icarus*, offers insight into Viola's use of ancient spiritual traditions and in this case, Greek mythology. Gowry was a Flemish painter of the 17th century and a student of renowned artist Pieter Paul Rubens.<sup>2</sup> Western art history shows a long and repeated pattern of returning to Western classical art traditions and mythology. Both Gowry and Viola, despite being artists from different centuries, reinterpret these values and aesthetics according

to their contemporary concerns. In Gowry's painting, the artist illustrates the tragic Greek myth of Daedalus and his son Icarus. The painting depicts Icarus falling from the sky, taking up most of the right half of the frame. His father, on the left, flies beside him as he looks at his son's fall. Below them, mountains and the sea await Icarus. The Ancient Greeks believed that Daedalus, a technological innovator, built wings for his son. As they were sealed with wax, he advised Icarus to fly carefully; not too close to the sea and not too close to the sun. Icarus, too thrilled to listen, ignored his father's warning. Wanting to reach great heights, the wax on his wings melted, sending Icarus falling into the sea where he drowned.<sup>3</sup> Although the story warns against temptation and its risks, the actual fall from life into death is also something worth exploring. Accordingly, Gowry chose to paint a very specific moment in Icarus's downfall. The viewer is not faced with the exact moment his wings fail him, but a few seconds after. Indeed, this is understood through the placement of the sun, which is already falling behind the figure (fig. 2). The composition can be looked at vertically, in three parts: the sky, symbolizing life, Icarus and his father on the transition from life to the afterlife, and the sea, representing death. All three realms are crushed together, suggesting that the human experience is in constant communication with all three.

Furthermore, the iconographical choice of wax is pertinent to the work's meaning. As a substance or tool, it presents many limitations as a delicate medium. In a study on the use of wax, Julius von Schlosser suggested that "wax is ultimately a delicate organic medium, transitory and caught between formation and disappearance."<sup>4</sup> Like human life, wax is sensitive and can undergo permanent changes in a few seconds. Wax, as a technology, contains symbolism relevant to the work. Unlike plastic, for example, it is much more ephemeral, only retaining its form for a fleeting moment. It comes with the risk of disappearing if not cared for. Although Icarus was excessively self-confident, the space was technically not free for him to roam, as explained by his father. A more rational flier would have been bound by the constant fear of losing the wax and by extension, reminded of their own mortality. Death and mortality are also universal certainties, and yet many have trouble facing it. Our lives are just as finite as substances such as wax.

Like Gow, Viola uses informed technical choices to present the absolute truth of death and the afterlife. Viola's piece may be interpreted as the after-effect of Icarus' fall. The figure in *Tristan's Ascension* is rising toward the afterlife; a brief moment between death and a new spiritual realm. To create the illusion of ascension in the video installation, this motion was accomplished by lowering the performer carefully towards the ground while a specially built waterfall collapsed onto him. In editing, the shot was reversed to create the illusion that he was being lifted by the water.<sup>5</sup> Even in the real world, Viola's actor had to fall in order to rise; just as Icarus would have. This technical manipulation allowed Viola to express a visual understanding of what a posthumous journey would look like.

The Baroque style of Gow's *Icarus* emphasizes drama in its composition, an element of theatricality that will be mirrored in Viola's work. Baroque painters often preferred intense shadows and highlights, as though their subject was lit on a stage. High-contrast lighting also creates deep focus and careful attention to anatomy and gesture. Like a performer, the subject painted uses exaggerated poses to tell a story. His muscles are rigid, outlined by the intensely sharp shadows. His hands are also open, reaching out as though to grip onto something that would save him. In addition, his facial expression reveals pure terror and helplessness as

he plummets to his death. Although Viola's figure is also in mid-air, there is an element of surrender and acceptance. The man's limbs fall behind him in a vulnerable position, as he simply gives into the ascension to peace. In Viola's work, the closed, vertical frame works similarly to the wax in Icarus' story. Firstly, up and down are the only directions available for the figure. Like Icarus, the man's destination is predetermined by the technical aspects of his environment. The limitation of space re-

reflects the work's narrative and symbolic elements. In this way, technology communicates the limits from one spiritual realm to another. There is no escaping the journey because the axis and the path are set. Secondly, like the ephemerality of the wax, the body will also disappear out of the frame, out of the viewer's visual field, and out of existence.



Figure 2: Jacob Peter Gow, *The Fall of Icarus*, 1636-38, Oil on canvas, 180 x 195 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, [www.museodelprado.es](http://www.museodelprado.es)

Sally Mann's photography can be used to contextualize Viola's piece. Mann is known for capturing the raw realities of everyday life, including the more challenging parts: death and decay. Her textured images have even gone as far as to present real corpses, forcing the viewer to come face-to-face with death. One of her less graphic photographs, *One Big Snake*, features her son holding up a long snakeskin across his eyes (see fig. 3). The boy stretches his arms out as far as he can, past the frame, creating the illusion that the snakeskin stretches out infinitely. The boy's

position is also reminiscent of the iconic Christian imagery of Jesus Christ dying on the cross. Such an obvious gesture guides one's mind immediately to the idea of a brutal death and ultimately, rebirth. Indeed, in the Christian faith, it is believed that Jesus Christ was resurrected three days after his death. Meaning, he was reborn and joined his father in the afterlife. The idea of rebirth is also present within the snakeskin. One cannot know if that snake died or if it is still slithering around, but there is a certainty that its skin has been shed. The young boy is holding a token of the snake's past life, while the viewer can appreciate this temporal symbol through the photograph.

One can suggest that Mann uses the photographic medium as a tool to bridge the living to the dead, or the present to the past. Similarly, Indigenous artist Jackson 2Bears has investigated this connection extensively. 2Bears believes that it is possible to capture traces of the dead through technology, what he calls "the dark side of technicity: the spectral, phantomological, and hauntological traces of ghosts in our machines."<sup>6</sup> This "dark side" is mainly based on a feeling, like the discomfort one may experience walking into a deceased person's bedroom, for example. There is an unreachable presence that lingers; some believe it may be the person's soul, or perhaps it is the sight of what they have left behind and knowing it was once used. Mann's photograph allows its viewer to tap into that haunted feeling that 2Bears describes. What the naked eye cannot see, technology makes up for in other ways. 2Bears has experienced this on a more personal level as well. After some traumatic experiences related to the racist song "Ten Little Indians," he undergoes "visceral sensations" that he believes are ghostly presences.<sup>7</sup> Although one cannot know for sure, it is fair to speculate that the young boy in the photograph may feel similarly. Perhaps revisiting the image would incite different sensations, a connection to the snakeskin he once had in his hands, but also, the feeling of the snake's absence. Only this photograph remains to link him with that brief moment in his childhood.

To further clarify, both Viola and Mann use the camera as a tool to immortalize a moment of transition. Without photography or video, one could not concretize ephemerality. The artists offer proof that change exists, whether it be physical (the snakeskin) or imaginative (the man rising in water). The difference between the photograph and the video is that Viola's may be more



Figure 3. Sally Mann, *One Big Snake*, 1991, gelatin silver print, 7 11/16 in x 9 11/16 in.

convincing. His use of slow-motion makes those moments more believable; there is no denying that this man is in a transitory state. With Mann, one did not see the process, only the results: the remaining skin. When it comes to *Tristan's Ascension*, "slow-motion images here serve the purpose of intensifying the viewer's viewing, not simply in the sense of sharpening our awareness for things normally left unnoticed, but of allowing us to explore the indeterminate space between represented time and the real-time of our viewing."<sup>8</sup> As a result, the audience can reflect on these temporal distinctions. The viewer takes in the scene during the present; they can be certain of this. When they look ahead of them though, this "represented time" appears to be otherworldly. This is not just a result of the unnatural pace, but because of the spatial confusion. Where is this man? Where is he going? When did this passage occur? These questions are welcome of course, because there isn't a definite answer. If Viola had worked with virtual reality, then perhaps these questions would be futile.

The viewer's reality would become the same as that of the rising man. Indeed, Viola's piece is immersive through its overall experience: the loud sound, the darkness, and the striking size of the installation. Yet, he creates a barrier between the viewer and the piece. The audience knows that their physical selves and their viewing time are separate from the ascension that unfolds. *Tristan's Ascension* is not meant to be reached

or understood as a living reality. Markedly, it is an intangible, spiritual event that can only be understood to a certain extent. If the audience were to say, watch a video of the installation being made, this insight to the technical work may skew the viewer's relationship with mysticism. One can compare this to a magic trick; although the spectator knows the magician does not have magical powers, the trick is still hidden. This gives us a moment, even if it is brief, to get lost in the idea that we've entered an otherworldly place or moment. Most of us choose to forget that knowledge and immerse ourselves in the "magic."

Although Viola creates a space between the viewer and the screen, this is not what one could call a complete, all-around technical awareness. True technical participation has been explored by philosopher Gilbert Simondon: "All the prestigious color photographs of sparks, of fumes, all the recordings of noise, sounds, or images, generally remain a use [exploitation] of technical reality and not a revelation of this reality. Technical reality must be thought, and even be known through participation in its schemas of action; aesthetic feeling can emerge, but only after this intervention of real intuition and participation and not as a fruit of a mere spectacle."<sup>9</sup> Pointedly, *Tristan's Ascension* is meant to be immersive in some ways, without necessarily reminding the viewer of a "technical reality."<sup>10</sup> The piece calls for mental participation that is more spiritual rather than technical. The large screen creates a "spectacle" in order to connect its audience through an intangible journey. Indeed, Simondon would refer to this as an exploitative usage of video installation. The medium is used as a tool without the intention of engaging the viewer in its technical aspects. If this were the case, perhaps Viola would have added glitches or exposed one of the cameras or microphones within the frame, revealing the technical construction of the scene; alas, this was not the goal. Rather, everything is hidden with the dark background, as though this imaginary world is a given, natural process. Admittedly, the afterlife could be considered as a natural continuation of life, but this is not one that one can understand without technology.

Sylvia Plath's poetry also showed profound interest in the afterlife and the process of dying. Her posthumously published poetry book *Crossing the Water* (1971) has been described as "a book of perpetual motion."<sup>11</sup> Decidedly, Plath's words articulate personal

feelings of transformation, whether they be mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual. Her poem, also titled *Crossing the Water*, skillfully uses literary devices and writing techniques to emphasize a passage from one place to another:

**Black lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people.  
Where do the black trees go that drink here?  
Their shadows must cover Canada.  
A little light is filtering from the water flowers.  
Their leaves do not wish us to hurry:  
They are round and flat and full of dark advice.  
Cold worlds shake from the oar.  
The spirit of blackness is in us, it is in the fishes.  
A snag is lifting a valedictory, pale hand;  
Stars open among the lilies.  
Are you not blinded by such expressionless sirens?  
This is the silence of astounded souls.**

This is not a literal, physical passage across a body of water; like *Tristan's Ascension*, it is a divine, intangible one. The poem begins in a state of unequivocal darkness. Plath employs alliteration, defined as "multiple repetitions of identical sounds."<sup>12</sup> For instance, the very first stanza includes "black boat", followed by the third stanza's "cover Canada," and the fourth's "little light." The first letters of each word match up, allowing the reader to form subconscious connections between the words. A mental flow is created in conjunction with the imaginary flow of the "water." One word cannot exist without the other; the boat was surely black, the light was strikingly little, and Canada would be completely covered in shadows. In addition, Plath applies repetition to further emphasize her confusing, obscure environment.<sup>13</sup> The poet includes the word "black" four times in the first two stanzas alone: "Black lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people. Where do the black trees go that drink here?"<sup>14</sup> This deliberate choice hints at a certain exhaustion of seeing the same dark things around her. The reader can expect everything to be black; it is not worth describing in various ways because the poet is displeased with her surroundings.

Additionally, Plath relies on imagery to engage the reader and provide a vivid mental picture of this passage. More precisely, there is a focus on natural visualizations. In the second and third verses, the journey is unwelcomed even in her natural environment, where the atmosphere is traditionally pleasant. It seems like



the end is never near, and the slow pace is also set with the words: “their leaves do not wish us to hurry.”<sup>15</sup> Here, it is clear that this natural environment is holding her back. Furthermore, the author employs hostile adjectives to evoke a struggle. The third verse is particularly gloomy: “cold worlds shake” and “pale hand” remove all warmth from this place. The second stanza also builds upon this tone: “The spirit of blackness is in us, it is in the fishes.”<sup>16</sup> This “blackness” that Plath refers to has become so intense that it seeps into the souls of the seemingly soulless (i.e. the fishes). Finally, the fourth verse takes a turn for the better, and Plath has reached the light at the end of the tunnel. Here, the poet moves away from imagery to add compelling symbolism and metaphors. Her path has now reached a peaceful place where lilies can be found, a sign of hope that has been absent throughout the poem. There is also a contrast between the words “silence” and “sirens” in the last two stanzas. A “siren” is a dangerous, Greek mythological water creature that sings beautifully to attract sailors to their death, often by shipwreck. In Plath’s poem, once she has finally reached peace, even the sirens are quiet. They did not guide her to her death; she made the journey on her own.

Crossing the Water and Tristan’s Ascension create a very similar image for the reader. Like Viola, Plath describes an inexplicable transition to the afterlife. Some interpretations even acknowledge a specific mystical aspect to the poem: “Kendall emphasizes the blackness of this poem, reading it as a journey into the dark underworld, as the mythical passage across the River Styx to Hades: ‘past the ‘astounded souls’ of the dead.’”<sup>17</sup> This analysis could very well stand, as Plath does, in fact, reference Greek mythology, as previously mentioned (i.e. “sirens”). Arguably, such a specific breakdown is not necessarily crucial to understanding the poem. Plath aims to construct a universal human feeling, regardless of the exact location. The afterlife can be anywhere or with anyone, with the only indication being that the reader will arrive in a space that is occupied by other souls. Upon arrival, there is a sense of relief because, like Viola’s depiction, Plath’s passage was turbulent and solemn. Through alliteration, repetition, and imagery, Plath engrosses the reader in a vividly dark place. Viola creates a similar effect but uses a large installation size, slow-motion, and a black background to entrap the viewer into a transitory state. In writing, the reader only has the words to guide them in a technical

direction. Letter patterns and literary devices lead the eyes to form mental connections and images. Viola, on the other hand, already offers these images. A space separate from the living offers the viewer a moment of self-reflection; one may ask, is this what the afterlife will feel like?

Lastly, the use of water is a glaring parallel between Viola and Plath’s works. In many ways, the water conducts the body from one place to another. It is the guiding force that propels the figure in Tristan’s *Ascension* and Plath’s *narrator toward the afterlife*. Symbolically, this can be compared to the womb; therefore, a rebirth. Fluctuating motions occur as one makes their way into a new world rather than facing a finite ending. The cycle of life never really ends even when the body is no longer alive. In Viola’s piece, this is not only accomplished through visual cues but with an intense soundscape. As Paul Hegarty has written on Viola’s work: Water is transition, and endless movement. In this it is no different to any chemical phenomenon, but what it carries for humans is the possibility or rendering this movement visible and audible, as Viola does it does not just mark transition, but also dwelling, because of its volume and the way it fills screens and speakers with such a wide range of sounds.<sup>18</sup>

This “dwelling” that Hegarty describes is concerned with the viewer’s experience of the installation. The sound of the waterfall is loud, aggressively erratic, and evocative. Such an invasive technical addition can truly centre or ground the viewer. Its presence is so explicit that it anchors the viewer into the moment, allowing them to dwell on the piece. Whereas one can look away from the visuals, one cannot simply tune out the water. In fact, the volume is so high that it causes reverberations throughout the body. By extension, the moment becomes intensely visceral, as the audience is now a part of Tristan’s passage.

Tristan’s Ascension offers the viewer a moment away from life so that they can take the time to contemplate a universal human experience. Rather than inciting a feeling of dread or fear, the installation envelops the audience into a spiritual experience where vulnerability and rebirth are at the forefront. Gow’s *The Fall of Icarus* frames the rising and falling between worlds. Through technology, the path to the afterlife is set and

cannot be evaded. Furthermore, Sally Mann's *One Big Snake* looks at the place of the camera as a temporal preservative between phases of change. Photography and video allow one to transcend time and sense obscurity, unknown presences. Finally, Sylvia Plath's mystical writing strategies allow the mind to imagine the cross to the afterlife, from darkness to light. She and Viola interpret water as a guiding force that humans are deeply connected with. Technical choices are the ultimate partner in reaching the unreachable.

## Endnotes

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# Material Deterioration and the Human Touch: Artistic Intention and the Conservator



Figure 1: Michael Montanaro and Navid Navab, *Aquaphoneia*, 2016, Glass, water, and metal, Topological Media Lab, QC, Canada, <https://www.navidnavab.com/works/aquaphoneia>.

## Sakeenah Montanaro

Sakeenah Montanaro is a third-year Art History student at Concordia University. In the fall of 2022, she will be pursuing a master's in easel painting conservation at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her interest in this field is based on the notion that through proximity to art, which is inherent to the restoration process, one can develop a special connection to the past and cultivate a relationship with an artist through an informed understanding of the unique way they manipulate their medium. She also hopes to combine her passion for the arts and sciences to safeguard culture for future generations to enjoy.

As conservation practices used today are born from fairly recent discoveries and debates, it is hard to tell where the field is headed. Instead of thinking about “conventional conservation theory” as something to replace, we often see new methods borrowing from their pasts.<sup>1</sup> My research catches conservation in a rather transitory stage of its life, where conservators must now look at how to adapt to changing styles, materials, and movements while navigating multiple debates surrounding their profession.<sup>2</sup>

To conserve and restore an art object is to help preserve artistic intention by trying to display artworks as they were intended. In the field of painting, this could mean removing yellowed varnish or repairing damage to the support. However, a painting is meant to be looked at and not touched, so how do we approach works whose purpose is to be interacted with?

The scope of my research is meant to shed light on the effects of human touch in the field of interactive art, and how these interventions might influence intention, and therefore, conservation practices.

Certain case studies reveal different approaches to objects and works of art. This essay will first focus on the conservation, or lack thereof, of Abbot Suger's Church of Saint-Denis restoration and the Bloomsbury Group furnishings (1914-1930). From these analyses, it will be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

The paper will then end with a series of questions and answers to enlighten the reader on current artistic practices. We will also look at unique points of view by artists, such as Michael Montanaro, co-director of the Topological Media Lab at Concordia University, and Vanessa Rosales-Castro, artist practitioner and bachelor's student in Studio Arts at Concordia University. Their individual takes on how they see the evolution and conservation of their work will give us an idea of the role art conservation will play in the future of interactive art.

## A BIT OF BACKGROUND AND VOCABULARY

When first approaching an object as a conservator, three primary questions must be answered:

- “1. What is to be considered the whole of the object, to which all operations must be referred?
2. What is the context of the object? and
3. What is the history of the object?”<sup>3</sup>

These questions allow the conservator to develop an understanding of the object and devise a unique plan for its conservation. The goal is not to go beyond what the work originally looked like; but what if its initial state was not the end product? As previously mentioned, the world of conservation is filled with many debates. Disagreements on the degree of “cosmetic work” conducted are frequently on the table as “historical value is often prized above artistic value.”<sup>4</sup> The only certain thing is that the artist did not intend to create something that is “flawed by time and intervention.”<sup>5</sup> These statements refer to works of art that are meant to be observed and not touched. As new artistic fields develop, the theories and ideologies on which conservation is based will have

to adjust accordingly. For clarity, here are a few terms that I believe should be defined before we continue. *Artistic intent*: what an artist wishes to achieve and the “aesthetic effect and/or experience” they want to express to the viewer.<sup>6</sup>

*ACQUIRED INTENT*: something valued by viewers from other generations that were not originally valued by the artist.<sup>7</sup>

*HISTORICAL VALUE*: places importance on the original condition of an object, as this can provide information about the past and enlighten our understanding of styles and their evolution.<sup>8</sup>

*AGE VALUE*: a “voicefulness” that comes from constant use over several generations, as each person leaves a trace of themselves behind on the object.<sup>9</sup>

*USE VALUE*: the value of an object as it was originally meant to be used.<sup>10</sup>

*NEWNESS VALUE*: based on the intent to impress. Objects are returned to “optimum condition” to preserve investment.<sup>11</sup>

## THE CASE OF ABBOT SUGER

This case is a curious one, as many different kinds of intent come into play. Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (1081-1151) was known for having remodelled and redecorated the church of Saint-Denis.<sup>12</sup> He was an admirer of luxury, and therefore believed the church should be decorated to reflect the greatness of a holy site.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the restoration, Suger would often turn towards use value, rather than historical value and age value, when making choices about the optical intent of the church. For example, he “regilded the Eagle in the middle of the choir which had become rubbed bare through the frequent touch of the admirer.”<sup>14</sup> Here, he completely wipes away age value to return the object to its original state. His actions are guided by his beliefs that “church furnishings were meant to impress and instill awe.”<sup>15</sup> While I can understand the reasoning behind these actions, I wonder about the erasure of a narrative that had taken generations to construct. People had rubbed this eagle so that their prayers could be answered. They had left behind a trace of their passage on this object. However, his beliefs were geared towards the use value of the object. By regilding it, he removes the “voicefulness” of the piece, but also creates a canvas onto which new traditions can be born.

We could say that this sculpture was an early

instance of interactive art. People touched the object freely in hopes that something would happen in response. But, the artistic intent of the original sculpture did not include its handling, as it acquired intent from its many admirers. In a case like this where there is a blend of intents and values, how would one develop the proper conservation treatment? The question of whether or not an object is meant to be handled may cause disagreements to arise in the field of conservation. The next piece we will look at will give us a different approach to the conservation and restoration of works that were intended to be interacted with. These traces of people—of the artists—give the pieces their age value, rendering them almost more valuable in this worn condition than if they were to look brand new. Viewers can get a sense of how objects were touched and from there, develop a narrative based on these marks. This is where we see how unique every approach to conservation is. Conservators must consider various angles before beginning the conservation process.

#### THE BLOOMSBURY TABLE

The Bloomsbury Groups' artistic furnishings are what sparked this research project to begin with. At the Victoria Art Gallery, an exhibition entitled *A Room of Their Own* showcased Bloomsbury interiors from 1914 to 1930. The art, created by Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell, was about lived-in spaces.<sup>16</sup> They hand-painted walls with motifs, tables, chairs, pottery, etc. Everything within the home was decorated to some extent. In the exhibition, curators tried to rebuild spaces so that viewers could get a sense of how these objects functioned and fit into everyday life.<sup>17</sup> Because most of the objects were made to be used as any other household object, conservators did not restore them to their original form. On the table, for example, you can see scratches, scuff marks, dents, and chipped paint. They kept these important traces of human activity to demonstrate that the true intention of a home is to be lived in.

#### QUESTIONING THE ARTIST

From this series of questions, readers will be able to gain an understanding of how different artists see the future of their work and its preservation. Following each question, I will relate what has been said to parts of the

conservation process as it is conducted today.

**Do you believe artistic intent to be of greater importance than the longevity of your work? Is the durability of your work even at the forefront of the creative process?**

Michael Montanaro explains that his artistic intent takes the longevity of what he is working on into consideration. Both work hand in hand to produce the final piece. He adds that his creations “will be placed in a historical context in terms of what they look like and their aesthetic qualities; their appeal and ability to communicate should be able to move through time, giving them a sense of durability.” For Vanessa Rosales-Castro, the thought of durability only comes in after the concept of the piece has been thought out. She believes that the artistic intent of a work is more important than its longevity. For her, including ideas of durability within the process of conception creates obstacles to her creative freedom, altering the initial design.

Each creator has a unique approach to the idea of durability. For Montanaro, creative intent and durability go hand in hand. Together, they create the essence of his work. However, he sees the durability of his work present in the aura it gives off and not the materials he chooses. Rosales-Castro goes about it differently, and what she brings up is what conservators are currently concerned about. With “imprudent experimentation” comes “premature deterioration.”<sup>18</sup> With the mixing of materials and the development of new techniques, conservators are met with many challenges on how to slow down and stop deterioration for objects that are unfamiliar to them. Art from the past frequently stuck to time-tested formulas devised by art academies.<sup>19</sup> Although, if we think about it, this was not always the case. When painting *the Last Supper* (1494?- 97/98) Leonardo da Vinci used an experimental technique to replicate the effects of oil painting.<sup>20</sup> This approach involved using a mix of tempera and oil to extend the medium's drying time, thus, giving him more time to render all the details.<sup>21</sup> This new, un-tested procedure did not allow pigments to remain fixed on the wall, causing his work to deteriorate not long after he had finished.<sup>22</sup> Experimentation with mediums has been taking place for ages, and that is often how new art forms develop. The issue here is the volume of new techniques

emerging, as artists now have much more material and resources at their disposal to create their art.

**Do you think it is appropriate for the conservator to impose their views on durability onto the process of creating?**

After a long pause, Montanaro explains that it depends on what the conservator is conserving. He states that his work does not involve using materials that degrade over time, so you should be able to set up his installations at any time and they would work fine.

The piece would be as it was when it was first created. However, he also believes that art is more important than its distribution in museums or art galleries because it existed before those. For this reason, he feels that conservators should not enforce their views on the creative process.

Montanaro's explanation demonstrates a rejection of outside influences. As he puts it, a work exists before it even becomes a consideration for conservators. Placing these types of restrictions on the creative process only alters the result. If conservators were to impose their views on such processes, there would be a large shift in the development of new techniques. Artists would have to first instruct themselves on how to best approach their art to avoid decay, which could eventually lead to interesting discoveries. I am not saying that there would be no development. Instead, what we would see would be a different kind of development, as restrictions block certain avenues, but also pave the way for alternative ones.

**Do you believe interactive art conserves an original intent from the point that it is completed and throughout its exhibition to the public? Can intent be altered by how individuals interact with the piece? Does it obtain an acquired intent?**

For Michael Montanaro, certain parts of his work acquire intent based on the public's interaction with it. He goes on to explain that a lot of what he does takes people's interactions into consideration. How the object functions and its interactivity is based on research that requires people to engage with the object before it is even put into the public sphere. He goes on to say that "yes, there are some surprises in how our work responds, [...] but it's not as though what the artwork is trying to communicate has changed by those acquired traces." His work appears as though it works by magic; an "alchemical magic." For him and his team, this type of mystery "should still remain, although as we move forward through time, people's perception of what is intriguing or what's captivating may change based on their understanding of the underpinnings of what's being shown." However, he hopes that even many years from now people will have an imagination and curiosity that allows them to move past their intellect and be able to appreciate art on an "emotional and aesthetic level." Rosales-Castro's work, untitled for the moment, involves



Figure 2: Vanessa Rosales-Castro, *The Beauty of Pressure*, 2021, Hair, wood, plaster, and sound, QC, Canada.

organic material—human hair—that will lose its shine and colour over time. Because of this decay, the intent will change as it is exhibited. She believes in the fluidity of meaning and in an intent that is not fixed, but there is still a specific idea underpinning the work.

Both artists see this unchanging idea at the core of their work. As time goes on, it is inevitable that people's perceptions of these objects change; however, the main idea they are trying to communicate will always remain the same. As an example, we can look at Van Gogh's "impasto." This element we have come to recognize as his style was never something the artist himself valued.<sup>23</sup> It was only after its viewing by several generations of spectators that this quality within his work was granted historical value.<sup>24</sup> Although this aspect of his art has acquired intent, a part of the artistic intent remains.

**Some artists believe that age and the effects of deterioration are meant to be displayed. As the public plays a large role in the functioning of your work, do you believe in age value? Or more importantly, do you believe in showing the effects of human touch on your work?**

For Montanaro, visible age is important, as it places his work within a different time frame than the one he is exhibiting it in. For him, marks give his art "a sense of weight and consequence." For this reason, he is unsure about how he would like his work to be restored/conserved. He agrees that restoration can be good, but only if it does not go past the original state of the object. He states that "if it got to the point where the original aesthetic and the original ideas were being buffered or covered over by the actions of the people who are interacting with it, then I would say no to preserving traces of touch. But if there was a delicacy about the way it was interacted with, then I would be ok with leaving traces." He followed this statement with the question: "In the end, does that really matter?"

It matters for the sake of narrative, no? It leaves behind a memory of past interactions and allows the use value to shine through, as the artwork was created to be touched. In his response to this, Montanaro explains that in some way, the work will always reflect some form

of human touch, whether visible or not, because that is the function of the work. Interactors know where others have been before them, and can picture the actions that were taken on the piece. The Topological Media Lab works a lot with sound-based art. For them, the traces left behind are then not made by hands, but by mouths. In *Aquaphoneia* (2016) (fig. 1), voices are registered and then turned into water. Montanaro specified that this piece "would benefit from people interacting with it and leaving traces of themselves behind, as it looks like it's from another time and would just look like it's getting older."

Rosales-Castro's work, *The Beauty of Pressure* (2021) (fig. 2), consists of plaster hands and human hair interlocked in a gesture. This piece is about touch and the actions we do with our hands that reflect how we feel. When asked if viewers could interact with the piece, Rosales-Castro said that it was meant to be delicately handled from the beginning. These traces left behind on the sculpture allow for a connection between the artwork and the viewer. The viewer is touching the sculpture, but the opposite is also happening. Touch is mirrored and links both bodies together. However, she also expressed the desire to see her object intact with no end in sight. In both cases, there is a deep appreciation for age value, as it adds a sense of weight to the work, as well as another layer of meaning.

Montanaro's work is created with a synthesised age value, meaning that the idea of age and human touch is important enough to add it artificially to the piece, but not as important as the function of the work of art. These artists demand an unnatural deterioration, where decay is halted before irreversible damage is made. Conservators would then have to intervene to prevent further deterioration while respecting the artist's vision. It is interesting to see this paradoxical desire for both decay and pristineness. However, an appreciation for age value is not unique to these two artists, as there has also been a "fondness for ruins [...] in the eighteenth century."<sup>25</sup> The goal of conservation is to reestablish and/ or preserve as much of the original work as possible without going beyond this point. Conservators do not impose their aesthetic preferences on a work of art. Therefore, they must create this distance that allows them to remain unbiased, but still be close enough to be able to devote themselves entirely to

their job.<sup>26</sup>

In Aquaphoneia, rather than touch, we see the traces of the voices that are recorded within the instrument. By keeping these voices and adding to them with each exhibit, the piece constructs a narrative as well as an acquired intent. To conserve these traces would mean preserving a bank of recordings.

**With newfound technologies appearing all the time, what do you think is the best way to capture and cement in place works of art that cannot be restored? Since most means of documenting are biased, would it be impossible to preserve intent and translate it for future generations to understand?**

Since his work is heavily media-based, Montanaro believes that it will be easy to restore the initial idea of an interactive piece even if the object itself cannot be saved. Technology and methods of documentation have all come a long way. Things are not only written on paper now. For him, “interactive works are environments that are based on software, logic, and algorithms. Most of these things are now open source, so everybody has access to them. With this source of knowledge, it’s not as though an artwork would appear and people wouldn’t understand how it works and wouldn’t be able to restore it.” This can also be said of organic materials and pieces. Montanaro states that because “the conceptual framework that allows specific growth and evolution to happen are so well documented, we may not be able to restore the original artwork, but we would be able to fundamentally restore the concept on which it was based.” A new entity would then be produced, connected to the original work through methods of production.

When asked, Rosales-Castro explained how she wanted to record her work for future viewings. If she could not preserve her work and save it from decay, she would document it using video. Since sound is also involved, she believed a video would do the work justice if the viewer could not be present to see it live. She explained that with a video, viewers could get a real sense of the space as well as the object from various angles, just like if you were to walk around it yourself. Videos

and the development of virtual reality can make viewing vanished artworks possible. Artists can recreate the experience of viewing these pieces in an exhibit setting. The possibilities for recording information are numerous, and therefore, it becomes easy to find information on specific works when it comes time to conserve them. It is not uncommon for conservators to return to the source if they still have access to the artist.<sup>27</sup>

Artists could give their input on how they would like to see their art conserved. It is also possible to obtain samples of the materials used by these artists to test them and devise the best plan for their conservation or restoration without ever even touching the artwork.

Moreover, thinking of the recreation of past organic artworks with only the concept intact is interesting. Although the work sustains many ends—by deteriorating and being regrown just to deteriorate again—it would seem to live on and be timeless through its reiterations. From these methods, artistic intent can in some part remain intact, but age value and acquired intent will disappear with the work. There is a loss of narrative that cannot be saved, but new works can gain their own unique traces during their time.

## CONCLUSION

Both artists adopt different views on each of their pieces, and every artist has their own unique perspective on their work. For this reason, conservators must approach every artwork uniquely for their conservation and restoration. However, what is evident is that we must still look very closely at the many intentions that come into play. We must ask ourselves whether the object was meant to be touched to begin with, and if this has changed through successive generations of viewing. Markings leave behind a weight and “voicefulness” that is appreciated by interactive art creators. Artists want to show age value—the human touch—until it starts interfering with how the object functions or decays it completely. If certain traces did not become problematic, then we can see that they would be left behind, as they give artworks a narrative over time. These traces can be left with voices as much as hands. It simply requires a different conservation specialist. From these marks, intent is acquired. However, it exists simultaneously with other intentions, such as artistic intent. At its core, an object will hold onto the intent the artist had attributed

to it.

In the case of material experimentation, challenges may arise for the conservator, but this is nothing new. Methods of conservation will have to adapt as they always have. Currently, there is a belief that “modern art won’t last.”<sup>28</sup> But from the insight into the methods of documentation brought up by Montanaro and Rosales-Castro, it is possible to see that even if art were to deteriorate to nothing, it could still live on in other ways. New artworks tied to the original work through methods of production could then develop and people would be able to experience works of art for themselves, rather than through someone else’s lens.

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# Strategies of Glitching and Abjection: Visual Illegibility in Teresa Margolles' Mundos

Teresa Margolles' work is needling outwards. As David Garneau writes, "art's power as a spur to personal and collective transformation is slight: a caressing seduction or a sliver working its way under the skin."<sup>1</sup> It is from within this sliver-ridden space that Margolles'

Mundos draws one out of complacency. By incorporating glitched and abject elements of visual illegibility, Margolles' photographic work elicits visceral reactions, and thus functions as a transnational appeal to attention and action.

In February of 2017, Teresa Margolles held her first Canadian solo show at Montreal's Musée d'Art Contemporain (MAC). Born in 1963 in Culiacán, Mexico, Margolles is a prolific and provocative artist who explores undercurrents of violence and troubles the borders between visibility and invisibility. As an ex-mortician with a background in forensic science, Margolles frequently addresses themes of death and human remains within her work. Her Canadian exhibition, *Mundos*, features works predominantly produced within the past decade and in relation to the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez. A place once bustling with industry and grandeur, Juárez's proximity to the Texan border during the onslaught of the drug war has ravaged the city. The series *Pista de baile* and the installation *Pesquisas* are photography-based works that document issues of violence particular to Juárez while setting up intercity parallels with Tiohtià:ke / Montreal.

Each photograph in *Pista de baile* depicts a singular figure standing within an indistinct landscape. *Pista de baile del club "Mona Lisa"* [fig. 1] for example, captures a strangely rugged terrain wherein mounds of gravel and debris dominate the visual plane. The ground is patchy, revealing what appear to be dusty tiles. In other areas, sprigs of green are tunneling out of the dirt. Electrical wires pass overhead, extending into a nearby cityscape. In the centre of it all stands a high-heeled woman with her hands on her hips. Her presence is arresting. This striking aura is enhanced by the patch of polished tile on which she stands. Here, the patterned tile gleams beneath her like a pool of blood. *Pista de baile del bar "Tlaquepaque"* [fig.2] has similar visual

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Sarah Elizabeth Dirks



Figure 1. Teresa Margolles, *Marlene, Pista de baile del club "Mona Lisa,"* 2016, colour print on cotton paper, 120 x 180 cm. Accessed December 2, 2021. <https://www.jamescohan.com/artists/teresa-margolles2/featured-works?view=slider#46>.

characteristics. A woman in a blue dress stands resolutely in front of a dilapidated wall. Splatters of black paint and crumbling mortar interrupt the white and pink brick facade. The word *salida* (exit) and a hand-painted arrow point fruitlessly to the left, gesturing only towards a meagre pile of rubble. Yet again, a puddle of polished red tile interrupts the dusty landscape. Seeping from beneath the woman's feet, the glassy tiles seem to splatter and ooze outwards urgently.

In English, *Pista de baile* translates to 'dance floor.' Travelling about Juárez in 2016, Margolles made intimate connections with a number of trans women who worked as sex workers. Working in collaboration with these women, Margolles sought out the ruins of local night clubs and proceeded to expose patches of their dance floors. After the tiles had been scrubbed clean, the women were invited to pose atop the cleared flooring. In Mexico, trans women sex workers are typically low-income and are thus often discriminated against within varying intersections of transphobia, classism, and sex-work stigmatization.<sup>2</sup> The closure and

destruction of night clubs increases the vulnerability of trans sex workers, leaving them without relatively safe spaces in which to work and / or shelter. In fact, by the time of the *Mundos* exhibition (just one year after these photographs were taken), three of the women featured had been murdered.<sup>3</sup> By documenting Juárez's decimated night clubs, Margolles highlights the real violence of this structural lack. Further, by naming the women in the photographs (*Marlene* poses in *Pista de baile del club "Mona Lisa"* and *Berenice* poses in *Pista de baile del bar "Tlaquepaque"*), Margolles pays respect and gives thanks to her collaborators whom she described as 'emblems of resistance' within a landscape so opposed to their existence.<sup>4</sup>

The 30 images involved in Margolles' *Pesquisas* [fig. 3] capture different women's headshots in various states of decay. The images are in turn mottled, torn, and faded. A grinning woman's face is smeared with uncanny mustard-brown streaks. A unibrow has been etched over the eyes of another. Elsewhere, a woman's forehead is cleaved in two. Faces are missing hairlines,

eyes, noses, cheeks, and ears. Some are scratched and damaged to near-oblivion. A rudimentary drawing of a cat makes an appearance beside a particularly sombre visage. As the headshots tear apart and away, the surface beneath them is revealed, exposing eerie patches of deep red.

*Pesquisas* means ‘inquiries’ in English, and is titled after the missing posters found throughout the streets of Juárez. Containing imagery and information about the missing young women in question, such papers have been plastered on walls of the city since the 90s. As time passes, the posters become weathered, sun-damaged, and illegible. So too are the posters marked by graffiti and vandalism. Margolles embraces these alterations, photographing damaged headshots of various women gone missing in Juárez between the years of 1990 and 2016. Audio recordings taken from the sites of several presumed femicides accompany the poster installation. At the time of *Pesquisas*’ production, more than 7000 Mexican women had disappeared in the past four years alone.<sup>5</sup> A seemingly willful governmental silence surrounds such disappearances and murders. Victims are dismissed and perpetrators escape retribution, rendering young women disposable. The city of Juárez has even attempted to prohibit the pasting of posters on city walls. In essence, *Pesquisas* speaks to the violence of silence which allows for disappearances to persist as victims are weathered into near-obscurity. Margolles preserves and pays homage to the missing women of Juárez, making visible those who are too often made invisible.

Legacy Russell’s notion of glitch feminism in conversation with Margolles’ *Pista de baile* series and *Pesquisas* installation further engages with themes of in/visibility and resistance. Russell’s work critiques confining dichotomies of gender. She explores the glitch as a means of interrupting and dis-identifying with bodily legibility. Within this “vehicle of refusal,” this “strategy of nonperformance,” the glitch’s “calculated failure prompts the violent socio-cultural machine to hiccup, sigh, shudder, buffer.”<sup>6</sup> Russell’s glitch makes space for nebulous possibilities outside of hegemonic binaries. It speaks to the radicality of intervention. Margolles performs such an intervention in her *Pista de baile* series by slightly altering the spaces in which the featured women are standing. Instead of leaving the ruins untouched, Margolles splashes water upon patches of remaining tile. The dance floors emerge in radiant red, rebirth-ed from the rubble. Emerging from a past place, the tile zips into the present, transcending time and effectively glitching the landscape. The deserted lot of *Pista de baile* del club “Mona Lisa” suddenly glimmers inconceivably beneath Marlene’s feet. Under Berenice’s watch, the dilapidated foundation of *Pista de Baile* del Bar “Tlaquepaque” almost springs back to life. These spaces are caught between temporalities, ever-glitching between the past and the present.

In *Pesquisas*, by collecting and gallery-displaying these missing posters, Margolles breathes new life into the images. Tugging the posters forwards in time, these pleas which span decades rattle forwards as well. In this glitched context, patterns of weathering and graffiti emerge across the posters. The facial illegibility



Figure 3. Teresa Margolles, *Pesquisas*, 2016, colour prints of photographs, 200 x 705 cm. Accessed December 2, 2021. <https://www.jamescohan.com/artists/teresa-margolles2/featured-works?view=slider#29>.

of these women becomes more conspicuous and jarring in this new context than it might if one encountered a single poster taped to a telephone pole. In both the *Pista de baile* series and the *Pesquisas* installation, Margolles' glitches of temporal distortion urge the viewer to consider the materiality and history of these ruins and posters. By emphasising and highlighting the illegibility of certain spaces and faces, Margolles' work 'glitches' Juárez, making space for dissent and inquisition.

Just as Margolles' work straddles boundaries between temporalities, so too does it engage with other states of in-betweenness. Julia Kristeva theorises that such ambiguous states "which perturb an identity, a system, an order"<sup>7</sup> are inherently abject. She writes of abjection as this "obscure revolt of being against that which threatens it."<sup>8</sup> The abject is an outside threatening to come in; an inside bubbling out. It is that which is human, yet not. It is a corpse, an object not fully detached from its subject, an illegibility. Kristeva writes that humans respond to such themes with fearful repulsion as they remind us of our own mortality and materiality, heralding back to that primordial soup from whence we all came. Margolles' *Pista de baile* series teeters into abjection by embracing the ambiguity of these neither completely destroyed nor completely revived glitched landscapes. Furthermore the burgundy tiles initially read as pools of blood, spreading outwards from beneath the feet of the women. Because pooling blood is an abject fluid - this viscous bodily thing; once inside, now outside; human, yet not quite anymore - Margolles' visuals function to elicit shock. Further initial reactions of revulsion and terror are drawn out in *Pesquisas*. Upon first glance, the women appear mutilated and mottled. Akin to grinning zombies, they oscillate between life and death. The distortion and tearing of the posters lend to horrific facial illegibility, as faces split in half and heads are decapitated from necks. As in the *Pista de baile* series, an interspersing of red textures and splatters initially appear to allude to blood. Again, such perturbing abject features work to evoke visceral reactions in the viewer.

David Garneau is especially interested in these gut reactions within the context of decolonial aesthetics. Garneau argues that while decolonization within ongoing narratives of colonialism and without repatriation can be difficult to navigate, art which extends beyond the visual and into the body can disrupt and provoke

change. He explains, "these unexplained, extra-rational, undisciplined irruptions of not-quiteness intrigue the mental/sensual system more perplexingly than beauty or didacticism alone. They are mentally indigestible. Rather than teach, they encourage people to puzzle with them and learn what they need of them."<sup>9</sup> It is in this way that Margolles' work weasels under the skin and jostles loose complacency. Her use of temporal glitch-work and abject visual language seek to disturb and unsettle the viewer. The eerie illegibility of her imagery grips and sticks in the mind, engaging with the viewer on a level outside of language and visuality.

Exhibited in Tiohtià:ke / Montreal, the stickiness of *Pista de baile* and *Pesquisas* functions as a local call to attention. In relation to Margolles' *Pista de baile*, a similar closure and destruction of nightclubs is occurring across Tiohtià:ke / Montreal and Canada, leaving many trans sex workers unprotected and unpaid.<sup>10</sup> A 2017 study on structural violence in Canada solidifies these statistics, further citing that such gentrification and construction "increase[s] vulnerabilities to client violence, displace[s] trans sex workers, and affect[s] policing practices."<sup>11</sup> *Pesquisas* sets up a parallel with Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. As Viviane Michel, president of the organisation Quebec Native Women, remarks of this situation, "when an impunity exists it opens a door to gratuitous violence where we... become acceptable targets for these predators... it is a total silence and a complicity in this silence."<sup>12</sup> The extent to which colonialism (and ongoing settler-colonialism) renders these bodies as disposable is insidious. Here, Margolles' installation encourages viewers to consider systemic causes of violence within a local context. The glitched and abject nature of Margolles' work is such that it sticks in the psyche, urging viewers to sit with, mull over and then extend outwards this transnational attention.

Garneau writes of that "the special role of the artist... as provocateur, an unreliable but necessary agent who plays between and among disciplines and cultures to create startling non-beautiful, needful disruptions, and to build hybrid possibilities that resist containment."<sup>13</sup> Margolles embodies this role: she glitches landscapes and headshots, making abject the tile and the paper. Traversing liminal spaces of silence and in/visibility, Margolles' work unsettles, nestling incessantly under the skin.



Figure 2. Teresa Margolles, *Berenice, Pista de Baile del Bar "Tlaquepaque,"* 2016, colour print on cotton paper, 120 x 180 cm. Accessed December 2, 2021. <https://www.jamescohan.com/artists/teresa-margolles2/featured-works?view=slider#8>.

## Notes

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2. Oralia Gomez-Ramirez, "We Are Trans Women': On-Street Sex Work and Transgender Politics in Mexico City," PhD diss, University of British Columbia, 2017, 10.
3. MAC Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, "Teresa Margolles: *Mundos / 'Pista de baile' Series*," YouTube video, 1:46, March 30, 2017, <https://youtu.be/KftaXOBZdUY?list=LL>.
4. Shannon Moore, "Memorialization and Commemoration: Teresa Margolles," National Gallery of Canada, March 7, 2017, <https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/your-collection/memorialization-and-commemoration-teresa-margolles>.
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6. Legacy Russell, "Introduction," *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), n.p. 7. Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 5, no. ½ (1982): 127. 8. *Ibid.*, 125.
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# Allotopie paysagère comme rhétorique artistique argumentative

## Étude comparée de *Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* de Melvin Charney et *Les Maisons Modèles* d'Isabelle Hayeur

Montréal est une ville aux caractéristiques exceptionnelles. Étant la plus grande ville francophone en Amérique du Nord, elle a connu et connaît toujours un parcours historique unique. Elle dispose notamment d'une riche vie culturelle dont les artistes visuels bénéficient et contribuent au développement de cette société inspirante. Certains observent les diverses méthodes d'expression particulières employées par les Montréalais, comme l'usage de la langue française, les mœurs et coutumes, les habitudes de vie comme le choix d'un quartier où élire domicile ou le type d'habitation pour héberger sa famille. L'aménagement de la ville et l'architecture constituent des modes de communication, un langage visuel qui colore le milieu. Melvin Charney et Isabelle Hayeur, artistes montréalais, se sont intéressés au langage architectural de la ville qu'ils ont critiquée au moyen de l'allotopie, une méthode artistique ra-

dicale et pérenne. Ils ont ainsi amené les habitants à porter une réflexion sur les choix architecturaux de leur temps. Grâce à la théorie de la mésologie selon Augustin Berque et de la théorie du non-lieu proposée par Augé, nous verrons comment les artistes ont illustré la perte identitaire architecturale de la ville ainsi que l'anéantissement du sentiment d'appartenance des citoyens à leur territoire, tant à l'époque moderne que postmoderne. Nous exposerons notre propos en analysant *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* de Melvin Charney et *Maisons Modèles* d'Isabelle Hayeur. Un survol de l'environnement social de leur époque mettra en contexte la démarche d'allotopie paysagère empruntée par les artistes. Nous en soulignerons les similitudes et différences pour ensuite évaluer l'efficacité de la démarche au service du rôle médiateur des artistes et ce, quelle que soit leur époque.

Julie Leblanc

Julie Leblanc (née. 1971) est une sculptrice et artiste d'installation Canadienne Française. La féminité, la grossesse, le travail, le maternage, la domesticité et les rôles de genre sont des thèmes récurrents que l'on retrouve dans le travail de l'artiste. Leblanc obtiendra son BFA (majeure peinture et dessin) de l'Université Concordia au printemps 2022 et poursuivra ensuite ses études à la School of Arts Institute de Chicago. Au cours de ses études, Leblanc a reçu des bourses de l'Association des étudiants en beaux-arts de Concordia. Son travail a été présenté dans le magazine *Yiara*. Leblanc a également participé à plusieurs expositions collectives. Leblanc vit, étudie et travaille actuellement à Montréal, Canada

Ayant étudié le droit et travaillé en communication marketing pendant 15 ans, Leblanc explique que « En tant qu'artiste, les questions que je soulève et l'approche que j'adopte s'enracinent dans mon expérience passée de débattueuse, de vendeuse d'idées, de mère, de fille, de partenaire et un briseur de plafond de verre. »



Figure 1: Hayeur, Isabelle. Nadia, 2004. [https://isabelle-hayeur.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/02\\_Nadia.jpg](https://isabelle-hayeur.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/02_Nadia.jpg)



Figure 2: Hayeur, Isabelle. Jade, 2004. [https://isabelle-hayeur.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/01\\_Jade.jpg](https://isabelle-hayeur.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/01_Jade.jpg)

Allotopie paysagère comme rhétorique artistique argumentative

C'est donc en 1976, au lendemain de l'époque moderne, que l'architecte et artiste sculpteur Melvin Charney conçoit *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* (figs.11 à 13). Il s'agissait d'une œuvre éphémère faisant partie de l'exposition en plein air installée tout le long de la rue Sherbrooke, nommée "Corridart", et dont Charney était le principal responsable. L'exposition Corridart avait été commandée par la Ville de Montréal dans le

cadre de son "Programme Arts et culture, Jeux de la XXIe Olympiade, Montréal 1976". L'œuvre *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* était installée sur la rue du même nom au coin sud-ouest de la rue St-Urbain. À cet endroit avait reposé une maison ancestrale récemment démolie par la ville et ce, dans le but d'y construire un nouvel immeuble municipal.

L'imposante installation montrait une copie inversée de la façade de la maison voisine du côté est de la rue St-Urbain (fig.12). Soutenue par derrière à l'aide d'échafauds d'acier, la façade de l'installation grandeur nature était construite à partir de bois contreplaqué et de bois d'œuvre récupérés sur des sites de construction locaux. Les matériaux utilisés, l'échelle de l'œuvre ainsi que la forme choisie par l'artiste rappelaient ceux d'un panneau publicitaire. Les fenêtres avaient été laissées béantes, laissant entrevoir en contrebas le centre de la ville.

La démarche de Charney dans la réalisation de *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* était en phase avec les insertions urbaines que l'artiste affectionnait. Il a débuté son projet en photographiant l'intersection du point de vue du sol (Fig. 11) pour ensuite inverser, coller, superposer (Fig. 12) et colorer le nouveau paysage imaginaire (Fig. 13). Une fois satisfait, l'artiste implanta une réplique fidèle de son photomontage au coin de rue choisi. Des échafauds soutenaient l'immense panneau qui imitait la forme, la dimension réelle et les motifs de sa voisine.

La perspective accentuée par le point de vue de la photo originale (Fig. 11) et le photomontage (Fig. 12) ont sans doute attiré l'attention de Melvin sur l'espace négatif créé par l'œuvre et la maison qui l'a inspirée. Elles formaient, en amont de la rue Sherbrooke, une sorte de porte de la ville, une porte comme on en retrouve dans plusieurs villes européennes. Cet artifice urbain architectural propre au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle encadre visuellement la Basilique Notre-Dame, elle aussi bâtie à cette époque. L'artiste semble vouloir guider simultanément notre regard et notre mémoire vers les racines historiques architecturales de la ville. Malheureusement, l'œuvre n'a été officiellement présentée au public que durant trois jours. Le maire de la ville ordonna unilatéralement le démantèlement de Corridart, insatisfait du résultat obtenu, considérant que les œuvres présentées étaient « laides et obscènes ». La démolition impromptue sèmera l'émoi au sein de la communauté artistique de l'époque.

Quelques décennies plus tard, la photographe et vidéaste Isabelle Hayeur semble suivre les traces de Charney en portant son attention sur un phénomène de post-industrialisation : les nouveaux développements domiciliaires en périphérie de l'île de Montréal en progression au début des années 2000.

Tout comme lors du périlleux phénomène de renouveau urbain moderniste propre à la période de Charney, Hayeur se soucie de la mouvance des citoyens hors de la ville, à l'étalement urbain généralisé au lendemain de la postmodernité. Tout comme la modernisation de la ville, l'expansion de la région métropolitaine doit également être surveillée. Laurent Lussier, dans son article, *Le grand Collage*, explique qu'à Montréal, le concept de banlieue a toujours un sens. Il explique qu'un emploi sur six se trouve au centre-ville, qui loge plus de la moitié des espaces de bureau de la région. Il explique de surcroît que la banlieue, « loin d'être monotone et sans histoire, » joue un rôle de plus en plus important « dans l'évolution de l'identité montréalaise. »<sup>1</sup> C'est donc avec beaucoup de pertinence que Hayeur pointe son objectif vers les terres environnantes de la ville entre 2004 et 2007. Elle travaillera donc sur la série de photomontages *Les Maisons Modèles* (Figs.1 à 10) afin de mieux saisir les enjeux de l'élargissement de la région métropolitaine.

Pour l'élaboration des *Maisons Modèles*, Hayeur photographie d'une part des maisons construites récemment, et d'autre part, une variété de sites qu'elle amalgame numériquement, modifie et trafique. Elle relocalise l'objet architectural dans un environnement qu'elle lui impose. Empruntant au dispositif utilisé par les promoteurs immobiliers qui affublent leurs divers modèles de prénoms féminins, Hayeur nomme ses neuf *Maisons Modèles* Cassandra, Nadia, Jade, Tiffany, Roxane, Catherine, Renée, Ellen et Linda. Toujours photographié de plein pied, souvent de face, parfois de trois-quarts, l'objet de chaque *Maison Modèle* investit la quasi-totalité du plan horizontal, ce qui laisse peu de place à la perspective. La maison est toujours seule dans un lieu souvent dégarni. Une grande place est donc accordée à l'objet, presque trop gros, trop imposant dans le plan, centré dans son environnement. Il semble s'installer avec grossièreté dans le paysage. Il est presque insolent par la droiture de son adresse.

Avec une composition formelle, Hayeur met en lumière les lignes architecturales de chaque maison. Parfois opulentes comme Catherine (Fig.1), Cassandra (Fig.2) et Tiffany (Fig.3), parfois modestes comme Ellen (Fig.4), Jade (Fig.5), Nadia (Fig.6) et Roxane (fig.8), les angles du bâti dictent la composition de chacun des paysages proposés par Hayeur. En résulte toujours une composition très angulaire et peu invitante. Le choix de la lumière naturelle blanche obtenue par un temps



Figure 3: Szilasi, Gabor. Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke. 1976. Tirage gélatino-argentique. 34,5 x 27,9 cm. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture. [https://www.cca.qc.ca/fr/evenements/2641/paraboles-et-autres-allegories-loeuvre-de-melvin-charney-1975-1990?lb\\_url=%2Ffr%2Fflightbox%2Fmediacopy%2Fsummary%3Fmediacopy\\_url%3D%252Fapi%252Fmediacopy%252F10702](https://www.cca.qc.ca/fr/evenements/2641/paraboles-et-autres-allegories-loeuvre-de-melvin-charney-1975-1990?lb_url=%2Ffr%2Fflightbox%2Fmediacopy%2Fsummary%3Fmediacopy_url%3D%252Fapi%252Fmediacopy%252F10702)

nuageux contribue à cette froideur, au mal-être ressenti par le spectateur. Les couleurs des photomontages de Hayeur sont, en outre, plutôt ternes, peu saturées, froides et dénuées d'intensité. Le fond blanc du ciel laisse toute la place à l'objet, son environnement immédiat et la ligne d'horizon. L'environnement qui entoure chaque maison est toujours naturel, discret, souvent désolant. On le discerne en avant-plan. Ainsi, la dissonance entre la maison et son environnement immédiat est transmise au spectateur avec affront. Le propos réside dans le plan intermédiaire et l'avant-plan habité par l'objet. Le message est ainsi présenté comme une interjection.

Ainsi, les deux artistes interprètent le langage architectural et son mode d'expression à l'usage des résidents. Or, le dictionnaire Larousse définit l'archi-

tecture comme l'« art de construire des bâtiments. »<sup>2</sup> Mais ce domaine campé à mi-chemin entre la science et l'art implique des ramifications beaucoup plus complexes que sa simple définition. Au 1<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C., Vitruve, architecte romain, affirmait que l'architecture apporte à la fois solidité, utilité et beauté au patrimoine bâti. Il allait même jusqu'à exiger qu'elle « élève les esprits et stimule les sens. »<sup>3</sup>

Ainsi, un objet dit « architectural » est non seulement robuste et durable, mais doit aussi répondre aux fonctions qui lui sont désignées. L'Institut royal d'Architecture du Canada (IRAC) explique, de plus, que le bâtiment ou le domicile, dans le cas qui nous occupe, doit « favoriser l'intégration harmonieuse des créations de l'homme à l'environnement, (...) en créant un héritage qui reflète et symbolise la culture et les traditions. » (raic.org).

Retenons ici que l'architecture, de par sa définition, fait partie intégrante de l'environnement et appartient au milieu de l'humain, tel que défini par Berque.<sup>4</sup> De plus, l'architecture doit assurer une intégration harmonieuse du bâti dans son milieu. Aussi, l'architecture du bâtiment doit être interprétée comme un langage visuel anthropologique au moyen duquel la culture et les traditions, ou, en d'autres termes, l'identité des habitants se manifeste, léguant un héritage aux générations futures. Ainsi, le langage architectural utilisé pour la construction d'un domicile doit se traduire par la présence d'un lieu tel que défini par Augé, c'est-à-dire, une maison aux caractéristiques identitaires, historiques et relationnelles.<sup>5</sup>

Hayeur et Charney réagissent aux tendances urbanistes et architecturales de leurs époques, posent un regard interrogateur sur les méthodes d'occupation du territoire de leurs contemporains et analysent les avenues architecturales empruntées par les habitants.

#### CHARNEY ET HAYEUR : OPPOSANTS AUX CHOIX ARCHITECTURAUX DE LEUR TEMPS

Pour Charney, Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke viennent en réponse à l'adhésion générale de la ville au développement et au langage architectural modernistes auquel il assiste depuis au moins une décennie. La venue de grands événements tels que l'Expo 67 et la construction récente du stade olympique avait accéléré le processus

de modernisation de la ville. Dès le début de sa carrière, Charney est témoin des tenants de l'architecture moderniste et en refuse les diktats. Le célèbre architecte allemand Mies Van de Rohe qualifiait d'« universel », ce mouvement qui imposait le même type de structures et bâtiments dans toutes les grandes villes et ce, sans égard aux racines du milieu. Lamoureux parle d'un « expansionnisme urbain sauvage et amnésique » alimenté par un désir du « paraître » commun et mégalomane.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxalement, cette époque marque une volonté marquée de la nation québécoise d'affirmation identitaire. On perçoit le spectre de l'indépendance alors que quatre années plus tard, un référendum sera tenu afin de connaître les désirs de la population québécoise quant à sa séparation du reste du Canada. Charney sera donc témoin de la table rase urbaine, de la destruction de l'« ancien » pour construire des autoroutes (Ville-Marie, Décarie, Métropolitain) et des immeubles dits modernes (Place Westmount Square, Place Alexis Nihon, Place Ville-Marie, Place Bonaventure,...). Charney, l'architecte, dénonce ce mouvement et fait doucement place à Charney, l'artiste, qui souhaite plutôt décortiquer son milieu de vie dans une approche non seulement architecturale mais aussi sociale et historique orientée vers le développement vernaculaire. Le Charney des années 60 désire un développement urbain conforme à la définition même de l'architecture.

Issue de la génération X, Hayeur réagit, quant à elle, au développement urbain postmoderne. Elle est témoin du besoin d'individualisme et de la migration de la main-d'œuvre hors de l'île. Étant native de la banlieue du Nord de Montréal, Bois-des-Filions, elle verra les marais de son patelin remblayés par des promoteurs immobiliers. Alors qu'on démolissait des immeubles patrimoniaux pour faire place au moderne à l'époque de Charney, ce sont désormais les terres arables au-delà des ponts qui sont nivelées afin d'en faire des « dortoirs » en banlieue. Charney questionne les mutations et le renouveau citadin alors que son héritière, Hayeur, appréhende l'étalement urbain.

#### LE GENRE PAYSAGER COMME OUTIL DE MÉDIANCE

Afin de critiquer l'évolution architecturale de leur époque, Charney et Hayeur ont recours au paysage afin d'influencer le regard des citoyens. Nous avons établi plus tôt que l'architecture vient caractériser le milieu de vie du citoyen. Pour reprendre

la théorie de la mésologie développée par le géographe Augustin Berque, le milieu implique deux pôles : il est, d'une part, objectif, en ce qu'il comporte des objets physiquement et universellement définis et, d'autre part, subjectif puisque interprété par, en l'occurrence, nos deux artistes dans une perspective qui leur est propre. Le milieu est ainsi défini par cette relation entre ce qui est, comme la ville de Montréal et ses banlieues, et ce qui est perçu, la perception de Hayeur et Charney quant au renouveau et de l'étalement urbains. C'est cette relation bidirectionnelle architecture – sujet – œuvre en constante évolution que Berque appelle le processus de trajectivité. Le paysage constitue l'outil techno-symbolique de médiance particulièrement efficace des deux artistes désireux de changer notre perception ou notre compréhension des bâtiments (Charney), ou, en d'autres mots, pour changer le milieu du sujet spectateur.

En ce sens, l'architecture constitue un apport éco-techno symbolique au milieu. Elle contribue au profil tant culturel, historique, spirituel, économique que social de l'environnement. Elle sera appréciée, dénigrée ou même ignorée par le citoyen en fonction de son histoire personnelle, ses connaissances, ses intérêts, sa personnalité. C'est dans ce contexte que les « sujets-artistes » jouent le rôle d'agents médiateurs/interprètes. Ils perçoivent leur environnement architectural au sein du milieu, l'interprètent, le traduisent et le critiquent. Ils interrogent la fonctionnalité, la durabilité, l'intégration, l'héritage culturel des bâtiments contentieux au moyen d'outils artistiques. Les œuvres qui en découlent s'intègrent au milieu éco-techno symbolique du « sujet-spectateur » qui interprétera à son tour son milieu altéré. La représentation de la réalité par les artistes éduque l'œil, façonne le regard du sujet-spectateur<sup>7</sup> et change ainsi les perceptions.

Pour ce faire, Charney intervient et, comme dans le cas du Land art, crée un nouveau paysage urbain à même l'environnement. Il suscite l'intérêt du visiteur et le provoque au moyen d'une insertion paysagère à la fois mi-représentative, mi-interventionniste. Hayeur, de son côté, visite les sites qu'elle estime contentieux, les capte et en fait des photomontages numériques. Bien que la présentation de paysages sous forme photographique puisse sembler conventionnelle, ceux d'Hayeur sont complexes et troublants car ils trafiqués avec subtilité et réalisme.

Tant pour Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke

que pour les Maisons Modèles, le sujet est hors-champ. Au moment du processus de création, il est incarné par Charney et Hayeur qui, subjectivement, découpent le cadre des œuvres, en choisissent l'objet, la situation, le site, l'angle de vue et, guidés par leurs intérêts, leurs appréhensions et leurs expériences. Les deux artistes « artisent (ainsi) le passé en paysage. »<sup>8</sup>

Comme Charney, Hayeur souhaite poursuivre les directives de Berque, c'est-à-dire interpréter la réalité, la déformer, diriger le regard du spectateur et ainsi modifier la perception du banlieusard à l'égard de sa réalité. Elle souhaite intervenir dans la médiance, par trajectivité et ainsi mettre un frein au mouvement architectural qui sert alors le « anything anywhere » en banlieue. Hayeur explique : « Mes images sont volontairement ambiguës et exemptes de références très explicites ou univoques. Je les construis pour qu'elles soient habitées par une pluralité de sens et pour qu'elles soient reçues comme des questions ouvertes. »<sup>9</sup> Melissa Bennett explique d'ailleurs que Hayeur « problématise le sentiment de réalité du spectateur (...) et incite à repenser à la place du sujet dans l'élaboration du paysage. »<sup>10</sup> On pourrait en dire autant de Charney et de ses insertions.

L'impact de l'œuvre paysagère sur le citoyen spectateur est d'autant renforcé qu'il y tient le double rôle de sujet artistique et sujet sociétal. Le spectateur est non seulement activement impliqué dans le déchiffrement de l'œuvre à titre de sujet hors-champs, mais il est mis en cause dans la réalité que les artistes désirent dépeindre et dénoncer.

## STRATÉGIE ALLOTOPIQUE

Outre le recours au paysage, une analyse des œuvres fait entrevoir plusieurs autres tactiques artistiques partagées par Hayeur et Charney.

Dans Melvin Charney *Parcours de la réinvention*, Johanne Lamoureux qui décrit le travail de Charney, avec *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke*, comme une « rhétorique élocutoire qui marquerait son allotopie par le ton de l'adresse. »<sup>11</sup> Incidemment, elle y constate une tactique de déplacement de l'objet à la fois dans le temps et dans l'espace, méthode également empruntée par Hayeur dans son processus de manipulation.

C'est à l'artiste français Roberto Martinez qu'on doit la définition d'allotopie relative aux arts visuels. Provenant des racines grecque allo pour « autre » et

topos pour « lieu », Martinez définit ce néologisme comme « un autre lieu, une autre proposition sociale ou politique que celles qui ont existé » et par extension, un « idéal, qui rencontre la réalité en son lieu même, ou en un autre lieu. »<sup>12</sup> Le professeur de théorie de l'art Jean-Claude Moineau met la notion d'allotopie en rapport avec l'utopie (le monde idéal), celle-ci permettant un rapport différent au réel. Elle permet, selon le chercheur, de transposer l'utopie au présent et ainsi donner un nouveau sens au réel.<sup>13</sup>

## L'ALLOTOPIE AVEC CHARNEY

### Un déplacement dans l'espace

Le choix du site constitue le pilier sur lequel repose le processus de création de Charney pour *Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke*. En l'espèce, la critique s'amorce avec le repérage d'un site dévasté à la suite de la démolition d'un immeuble patrimonial pour faire place à un bâtiment plus moderne. Le site choisi témoigne d'une tendance à l'effacement de l'histoire et à l'abnégation de l'ADN social de la ville que révèle la rue Sherbrooke. Selon l'artiste, cette rue a toujours joué un rôle social névralgique pour Montréal. Traversant la ville d'est en ouest, elle a, depuis longtemps, servi de passerelle aux diverses manifestations publiques et défilés festifs qui ont ponctué l'histoire populaire de la ville.

Conformément à la théorie de Marc Augé sur l'excès d'égo, le site de démolition choisi par Charney semble témoigner du désir de la ville à vouloir jouer dans la cour des grands. On y devine une adhésion aux grands courants architecturaux modernes qui font fi de toute racine culturelle locale. La manipulation du paysage qu'est *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* procède par insertions. Elle implique le dédoublement et le pivotement de la maison voisine suivi d'un déplacement latéral jusqu'au coin de rue transversal (Fig.14).

**« Les œuvres de Melvin Charney savent s'insérer spécifiquement dans un site d'une manière qui est paradoxalement indissociable d'un souci de marquer l'autre du lieu » estime Lamoureux. »<sup>14</sup>**

Charney réinvestit non seulement le site de la version miroir de l'immeuble patrimonial voisin au sein du paysage mais déplace aussi son regard au travers plusieurs médiums afin de bien saisir l'esprit du site qui lui est présenté.

## UN DÉPLACEMENT DANS LA DÉMARCHE

Le « déplacement » chez Charney se fait également dans le processus de création. L'artiste se déplace à travers plusieurs registres successifs : de la photo (Fig. 13), au collage (Fig. 14), au dessin (Fig. 15), puis à l'installation (fig. 11). Cette méthode est cruciale pour l'artiste car elle lui permet de découvrir, définir et décoriquer l'image dans l'image :

**« Les photographies sont des choses en soi, autonomes et abstraites. Et ce qui est «là» dans l'image n'est pas ce que nous voyons. Très tôt, j'ai commencé à découper les photographies, à superposer les images, à dessiner et à peindre les photomontages. Ce que je cherchais était l'image dans l'image. »xv**

## UN DÉPLACEMENT DANS LE TEMPS

Afin de percevoir la ville dans ville, Charney recule dans le temps et va au-delà de l'amalgame pictural. Il complexifie son approche par une combinaison d'images et d'idées. Il a choisi d'ériger Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke sur un échafaud emprunté, idée de précarité et caducité en contraste avec la représentation picturale de l'immeuble patrimonial voisin (Fig.12). Il plante une affiche neuve illustrant un immeuble ancien. Enfin, il donne une présence à l'absence. Au surplus, la disposition de l'installation forme une porte (Fig. 14) pointant vers des éléments structurants de la ville (Basiliques). En accordant une mission additionnelle à l'œuvre, Charney souligne l'importance du respect des racines urbanistes en opposant développement urbain et culturel. Il en révèle les caractères historiques, psychologiques, mnémoniques, collectifs et sociaux. Il décortique "la ville dans la ville" ou, conformément aux théories d'Augé, les éléments constitutifs du lieu.

Ainsi, la double allotopie spatio-temporelle de Charney transpose l'utopie au présent. Nous pourrions même parler du passé dans le cas qui nous occupe. L'artiste berne le visiteur et donne ainsi un nouveau sens au réel tel que décrit par Moineau (Roberto Martinez.fr)

## L'ALLOTOPIE AVEC HAYEUR

Déplacement dans l'espace

Tout comme Charney, Hayeur décale l'objet bâti. Elle plonge les habitations dans un nouvel environnement par le truchement d'un mariage numériquement forcé entre l'objet architectural (les maisons) et le site environnant. Elle capte les images, les joute, les trafique et se joue du spectateur. Alors que Charney cherche l'image dans l'image afin d'y percevoir la ville dans la ville, Hayeur extirpe l'image HORS de l'image, créant ainsi une allotopie paysagère qui trompe, déstabilise et inquiète le sujet.

Par exemple, les sites dans lesquels siègent désormais Catherine (Fig.1), Ellen (Fig.4), Jade (Fig.5), Cassandra (Fig.2) et Roxane (Fig.8) sont particulièrement suggestifs. Aussi, Hayeur repositionne Catherine là où elle devrait être, c'est-à-dire, un jardin français adossé à une forêt vierge. Elle met ici l'emphase sur l'incongruité de l'immeuble en sol québécois, tout comme Ellen et Roxane qu'elle déménage en bord de mer, sur les berges brumeuses ou les dunes. Comme un taudis, Jade git au sein d'un amas de déchets plutôt que sur un terrain gazonné et immaculé propre aux banlieues. Cassandra pavane près des pentes de Tremblant, une station de ski de luxe. Elle s'acoquine avec le pseudo village construit de toutes pièces dans les années 90 au pied de la montagne.

Le terrain sur lequel siège Nadia (Fig.6) est dénudé et incongru: de la terre battue où des camions de chantier ont laissé leur trace jusqu'au perron avec un grand vide en guise de cour arrière, une terre défrichée, arrachée et triste. Avec sa porte béante et son regard voilé, elle semble nous inviter timidement à entrer dans son petit univers. Borgne, Nadia semble vulnérable. Affublée d'une plaquette qui devrait normalement indiquer son adresse, elle se présente: Nadia. Sans adresse, elle est une maison sans abri. Elle est donc nulle part... en non-lieu.

Comme Charney, Hayeur met en lumière ce qui est absent. Elle pointe vers l'irréel, dénonçant ainsi ce qu'elle appelle le « ground zero », le rasage et le nivellement. Un processus d'effacement qui, selon l'artiste, anéanti toute trace identitaire, relationnelle et historique pour départir le site de son statut de « lieu. »

En parlant de sa série Excavations, Hayeur décrit le phénomène en ces termes : « Les lieux sont

dépossédés de leurs particularités géographiques et de leurs mémoires culturelles pour être finalement réduits à une sorte de degré zéro. (...) À travers ce nivellement, c'est avant tout le sens des territoires qui se perd, ainsi que notre capacité à renouveler les imaginaires propres à une société.»<sup>16</sup> La fusion des images de Hayeur génère une tension, une dissonance qui oppose la fascination du rêve immobilier à la désolation des lieux rasés, la tranquillité de la banlieue au désordre laissé par les bulldozers, la déchéance des terres arables à l'espoir d'une vie meilleure. Hayeur va même jusqu'à jongler entre le pouvoir de l'environnement sur l'objet et vice-versa: Jade (Fig.5) est « transpercée » par le paysage forestier qui traverse la porte principale. La photographie joue avec son sujet hors champ, le spectateur. Le reflet des fenêtres n'est pas conforme au paysage situé devant le bâtiment... L'artiste berne ainsi le spectateur en déracinant la maison, en anéantissant certaines caractéristiques architecturales ou en jouant de transparence et de réflexion.

### DÉPLACEMENT DANS LE TEMPS

Les Maisons Modèles semblent flotter dans un flou temporel. Virginia (Fig.7), bâtiment de style colonial, est à la fois construite de matériaux ancestraux comme des lattes de bois (lucarne, face gauche et façade partielle) et de matériaux contemporains comme le vinyle et le bardeau d'asphalte coloré (toit, balcon et tourelle). Les composantes abandonnées (fenêtres placardées et portes absentes) côtoient les matériaux préfabriqués. Les détails architecturaux des fastueuses Tiffany (Fig.3), Cassandra (Fig.2) et Catherine (Fig.1) proposent également un étrange mélange d'ancien et de nouveau.

En trafiquant les images, Hayeur souligne que le non-lieu bâti réfute les règles architecturales telles que la pérennité du bâtiment ou son intégration harmonieuse à l'environnement. Bien qu'il stimule l'essor économique, il ne reflète en rien l'héritage culturel ou les traditions des habitants. Contrairement aux objectifs de l'architecture, la santé des habitants y est, par ailleurs, mise en péril. Présentée comme terre promise, la banlieue promet tranquillité et individualisme alors que la santé mentale de ses habitants est compromise par les embouteillages et la solitude de chacun chez soi.

De plus, le bâtiment fait désormais fréquemment office de non-lieu tel que défini par Augé. Il rejette alors

tout apport au patrimoine. Il adopte un style architectural global, emprunté ou similaire au voisin, contraire au développement vernaculaire et local. Serge Bérard<sup>17</sup> souligne, en outre, que la maison de rêve du consommateur moyen arbore les mêmes ornements, le même style victorien, gothique romain et grecs ou revival colonial hispanique depuis 1870, comme si l'architecture n'avait pas traversé la modernité, comme une distorsion temporelle dans l'évolution architecturale en contexte d'étalement urbain.

*Les Maisons Modèles* ignorent l'environnement historique ou vocationnel dans lequel elles sont érigées. Les banlieues de Hayeur priorisent l'image telle que l'affichage du niveau de vie. «Construites de manière désinvolte étant de fabrication industrielle et de construction facile»<sup>18</sup>, la pérennité de la ville élargie est compromise. Tels des colonisateurs postmodernistes, les promoteurs immobiliers misent sur l'efficacité pour réduire les coûts avec le développement de complexes domiciliaires à étages multiples ou comme argument de vente en aménageant leur projet à proximité des autoroutes, du transport en commun et ce, sans soucis de respecter l'environnement, la valeur historique ou la vocation des terres investies. Il n'existe aucun lien psychologique ou social avec le territoire. Les bâtiments prennent parfois la forme de ce qu'on surnomme les McMansions, ces énormes maisons aux ornements tape-à-l'œil construites en masse à partir des années 80. L'incongruité des lieux et le jeu temporel de Hayeur donnent « à voir l'irréalité de la banlieue. »<sup>19</sup> Mona Hakim<sup>20</sup> fait remarquer que l'artiste transporte le sujet à travers un paysage dystopique, un récit cauchemardesque dans lequel on ne peut échapper aux diktats identitaires imposés, une stratégie opposée à celle proposée par Charney, qui réinvente le paysage invitant à un retour utopique dans le temps.

### DÉPLACEMENT IDENTITAIRE

Alors que le modernisme réfutait toute identité patrimoniale, le besoin d'individualisme postmoderne impose la création d'une identité inventée. Hayeur souligne avec justesse que les demeures aux traits empruntés imposent à leurs habitants une identité qui leur est étrangère. On assiste à une homogénéisation des quartiers qui a pour conséquence le déni de toute culture domiciliaire locale. Pour nous sensibiliser au danger,

Hayeur estime nécessaire d'aller au-delà du déplacement de l'objet dans le temps. Par exemple, elle affuble certaines de ses maisons de décorations inventées comme un voile et une affichette pour Nadia (Fig.6) ou des matériaux anciens pour Virginia (fig. 9) comme pour leur redonner une identité perdue.

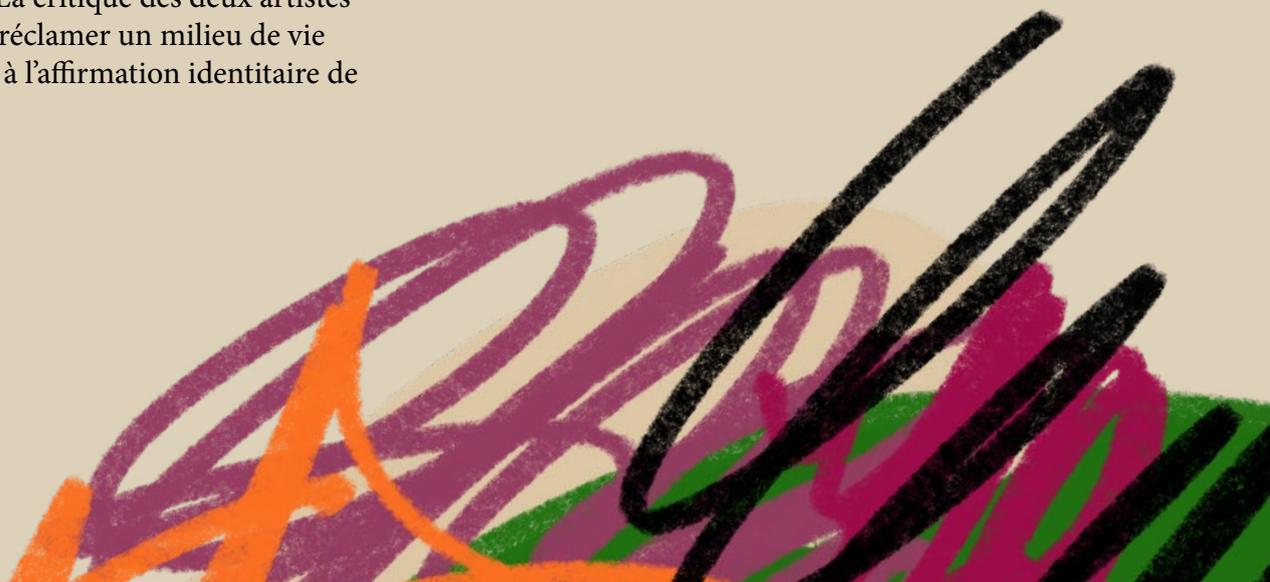
Alors que Charney critique la mégalomanie et l'excès d'égo de Montréal, Hayeur pose un regard sur les terres arables qui s'aplanissent sous le poids des promoteurs immobiliers répondant à l'individualisme démesuré des citoyens, autre forme d'excès de l'égo. La réappropriation du site par réinsertion de Charney autant que les exercices de décontextualisation proposés par Hayeur témoignent de l'absence d'appartenance aux sites et opposent ainsi urbanité à culture.

Melvin Charney, dans les années 70, et Isabelle Hayeur, aujourd'hui, nous offrent un moment de réflexion sur la manière dont les Montréalais occupent leur territoire. Par allotopie paysagère, les deux artistes nous invitent au jeu spatial, temporel et méthodique qui nous sensibilise à l'absence de rapport historique ou culturel du citoyen avec son milieu de vie, à l'absence d'architecture en tant que facteur coutumier et patrimonial. Les œuvres *Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* et *les Maisons Modèles* constituent un apport médiateur au milieu qui soulignent une perte identitaire architecturale montréalaise et par conséquent, l'anéantissement du sentiment d'appartenance à un territoire devenu un non-lieu tel que défini par Augé.

Par allotopie paysagère aux contrastes multiples, les artistes Charney et Hayeur soulignent le processus d'effacement dont « leurs » sites sont victimes. Ils exposent le dépouillement de toute caractéristique identitaire de la terre. Par médiance, les deux artistes réclament une réappropriation sociale du bâti et souhaitent ainsi combler le besoin d'appartenance essentiel à l'affirmation identitaire. La critique des deux artistes invite donc les résidents à réclamer un milieu de vie signifiant qui contribuera à l'affirmation identitaire de Montréal.

## Notes

- 1 L. Lussier, "Le grand collage." *Liberté* Vol. 301 (2013): 24.
- 2 "Architecture." *Larousse.fr*. Accès le 23 juin 2021, <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/architecture/5078>
- 3 "Qu'est-ce que l'architecture." RAIC. Accès le 2 avril 2021. <https://raic.org/fr/raic/quest-ce-que-larchitecture> 2 vril 2021
- 4 Augustin, Berque "Milieu et Identité Humaine / Milieu and Human Identity." *Annales de Géographie* 113, no. 638/639 (2004): 385– 99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23456690>, p. 390.
- 5 Marc, Augé, *Non-lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Montréal: Coll. «La Librairie du XXe siècle», Seuil,1992), 69.
- 6 Johanne, Lamoureux, dans *Melvin Charney Parcours de la réinvention = Melvin Charney : Parcours About Reinvention* (Caen, France: FRAC Basse-Normandie, 1998) 57.
- 7 *Ibid*, 110.
- 8 *Ibid*, 109.
- 9 Bennett, Melissa, Lise Beaudry, Isabelle Hayeur, Marie-Josée Laframboise. *Out of Place = Non Lieu* (Hamilton : Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2011) 29
- 10 Bennett, *Out of Place = Non Lieu*,19
- 11 Lamoureux, 57.
- 12 "Allotopie," robertomartinez, accès 23 juin 2021, <https://robertomartinez.fr/Allotopie/Allotopie/page102.html>
- 13 *Ibid*
- 14 Lamoureux, 59.
- 15 Melvin, Charney, " La ville en transparence," dans *Melvin Charney Parcours de la réinvention = Melvin Charney : Parcours About Reinvention*, (Caen, France: FRAC Basse-Normandie, 1998), 39.
- 16 "Excavations," Isabellehayeur, accès 25 septembre, 2021, <https://isabelle-hayeur.com/excavations/>
- 17 Serge, Bérard et Isabelle Hayeur, *Inhabiting : The Works of Isabelle Hayeur = Habiter : les œuvres d'Isabelle Hayeur* (Oakville, Ont.: Oakville Galleries, 2006), 12.
- 18 Hayeur, Isabelle et Chris Balaschak, *aisons od les: Model Homes* (Sagamie: édition D'art, 2008), 5
- 19 Lamoureux, 61.
- 20 Peggy Gale, Mona Hakim, Ann Thomas, Isabelle Hayeur, *Monographie* (Montréal: Ed. Plein-Sud, 2020), 38.



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# Structures of Control



Figure 1. Kapwani Kiwanga, 'pink-blue,' installation view: Esker Foundation, Calgary, 2018. Commissioned by The Power Plant. 'A wall is just a wall (and nothing more at all),' February 3 to May 6, 2018. Esker Foundation, Calgary. Photo by: John Dean.

# Exploring Disciplinary Architecture in Kapwani Kiwanga's *pink-blue* (2017)

#FF91AF and #0000FF are the specific hexadecimal codes used to identify a patented shade of pink and the public domain colour pure blue. While these colours may seem like just that, simply colours, they both carry institutionally discriminatory connotations. In fact, each colour is employed in both private and public spaces in Canada as mechanisms to manipulate and police vulnerable individuals. Bringing these truths to light is Canadian Paris-based artist Kapwani Kiwanga, whose installation *pink-blue* (2017) uses minimalist architecture to call out institutionalized discrimination. As a Black artist, Kiwanga grew up in Ontario, where she witnessed the ongoing harm of colonial institutions using space and place to marginalize Black subjects.<sup>1</sup> In her piece, the artist elegantly uses light and colour to identify manipulative and dangerous designs of carceral, gentrified, and highly surveilled spaces. Consequently, in her piece *pink-blue*, commissioned by the Power Plant Toronto as part of her solo exhibition *A Wall is Just a Wall (And Nothing More at All)*, the artist builds on extensive research through “quieted” archives,<sup>2</sup> illustrating “a history of architecture and design specifically devised to coerce, denigrate, and exclude.”<sup>3</sup> Effectively, these spaces increase the risk and hyper-visibility of vulnerable populations, making the Canadian government complicit in its use of the built environment to produce and police different categories of marginalized citizens. By analyzing the formal elements in Kiwanga’s work, this paper will deepen readers’ understanding of the piece, calling upon exhibition goers to recontextualize their understanding of structural racism in Canada and to actively resist the insidious ways that it permeates into the everyday life of vulnerable citizens.

First, a brief note on language; when speaking on behalf of stigmatized groups of people, it is extremely important to be mindful of the language being used so as not to perpetuate stigma and violence against said groups. According to the “Language Statement and

Montreal/Calgary-based artist Rhys Buhl uses video, performance and installation techniques to investigate the role of spirituality in a secular-settler society. Ever experimental, her artistic and curatorial practice encompasses ritual-making and the veneration of icons in terms of their potential for healing. Her work also involves community driven activities, holding space for eclectic approaches to processing grief, along with empathetic approaches to navigating trauma. As an artist and writer, Buhl is constantly evolving and wants to help others do the same. Eventually, she hopes to create spaces for education, discussion and healing by leading youth education programs founded in the arts.

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Reference Guide” released by the International Network of People Who Use Drugs, “[p]eople who use drugs are highly diverse and their relationship with drug use takes many different forms.”<sup>4</sup> Using words such as “addict” or “user” are pejorative, turning drug use into an identity category. Instead, using person-first language such as “person who uses drugs,” or “person who has a relationship with drugs,” is not only more humanizing, but avoids quantifying a person’s use. In this paper, the blue light implementation discussed has a harmful impact on anyone who uses drugs in these spaces, not only those experiencing addiction. Second, I use the term “vulnerable populations” to encompass subjects who are at risk of experiencing harm caused by architectural discrimination. In the context of this paper, and given Kiwanga’s piece, the two populations I most frequently refer to

are Black Canadians, and those who use drugs. Since these categories can be both separate or compounded, it is important to be mindful of the intersectional nature of discrimination and the diversity of individual experiences.

Effectively, *pink-blue* reconstructs what Kiwanga calls “disciplinary architecture” by confronting visitors with a “[space] designed to shape and regulate our behaviour.”<sup>5</sup> This results in the captivating employment of colours as a visual tool for social awareness. The installation consists of a narrow hallway glowing half pink on one end, and half blue on the other (fig. 1). Set-up as a visual metaphor for public and private space, it explores how this binary is collapsed for vulnerable populations. Painting the walls in signature Baker-Miller pink refers to experiments performed on prisoners in the late 70’s through exposure to the colour specifically engineered to reduce violent behaviour by “reducing their muscle strength as well as slowing their heart rate and breathing.”<sup>6</sup> In actuality, the experiment found that it increased aggressive behaviour over time rather than mitigating it, and yet this colour remains painted on many institution walls to this day.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, the other end of the hallway calls attention to the harmful blue light used in public space as a deterrent for intravenous drug injection, and how it ties into the wider phenomenon of stigmatizing and harmful architecture in Canada. Though minimalist in its form, Kiwanga’s hallway installation creates a poignant statement on how these architectural choices allegedly designed to mitigate risk, effectively increase harm in their respective contexts.

In *pink-blue*, the spatial design not only evokes a response using colour, but also instills a sense of confinement due to one’s haptic experience in the space. Rather than dividing both halves of the hallway with a straight line across the floor, Kiwanga uses a canted angle similarly employed in films by tilting the camera, giving a sense of imbalance and thus unease on the part of the viewer. Furthermore, the ceilings are low and the walls close together so that visitors feel trapped and claustrophobic. By choosing not only to base the work in a hallway, but also to make the hallway itself the actual work, Kiwanga creates a liminal space illustrating how vulnerable demographics in Canada are purposely and systemically pushed to the margins via alienating

architecture. This further communicates how spatial relations are inseparable from social relations.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, Baker-Miller pink has been produced by mixing one pint of outdoor semi-gloss red trim paint and one gallon of pure white indoor latex paint.<sup>9</sup> Based on this recipe’s units, one can understand how the mixture was created for mass coverage right from the get-go, even though initial trials were only carried out using patch tests. As the colour was developed, preliminary trials delivered promising results, and many prison cells across the United States were preemptively painted pink. However, in 1988 Dr. James E. Gilliam and Dr. David Unruh released a paper entitled “The Effects of Baker-Miller Pink on Biological, Physical and Cognitive Behaviour,” reporting that initial studies examining Baker-Miller pink’s influence on behaviour “yielded conflicting results.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they indicated that “professionals should exercise caution in the adoption (...) of the Baker-Miller pink colour.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the controversy around the validity of these trials, “calming pink” has become a widely used term,<sup>12</sup> and is enshrined on the walls of many institutional facilities such as prisons, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, and psychiatric wards. In effect, *pink-blue* is not an effort to demonize the colour pink, nor is it to say that pink is not comforting to certain people. Rather, Kiwanga contextualizes our understanding of the piece with the troubling fact that Black people are disproportionately incarcerated in Canada, most of them for non-violent offences. Therefore, the issue with “aggressive and violent behaviour” in prisons is not something coming from the outside,<sup>13</sup> but is rather produced inside the institutional structures themselves. Essentially, the use of Baker-Miller pink is an ineffective patch to the inhumane nature of institutional confinement, social isolation, and lack of access to basic human rights and freedoms.

Across the hall, the blue fluorescent light in Kiwanga’s piece provides a different example of colour being institutionalized for violence. Primarily, this eerie blue can be found in secluded public spaces to deter people from injecting drugs by obscuring one’s ability to locate their veins. Not only does this strategy

disproportionately hinder those with darker complexions, whose veins often appear more greenish and are therefore harder to locate in low-lit conditions, but it has been proven many times not to eliminate injection in these spaces. In practice, blue light only makes the attempted injection more dangerous. This is an example of an ideology-based method employing an abstinence forcing strategy that essentially says, “people should not be using drugs in the first place,” rather than focusing on evidence-based techniques to reduce the harms caused by unsafe drug use. As an alternative that focuses on proven ways to mitigate risk, harm reduction practices respect people’s right to make their own decisions, aiming to minimize negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies, and drug laws.<sup>14</sup> According to Harm Reduction International, “[h]arm reduction practitioners accept people who use drugs as they are,”<sup>15</sup> committing to methods proven to be practical, safe, cost-effective, and socially conscious. This encompasses a wide variety of services including, but not limited to, supervised consumption rooms, access to clean needles, overdose prevention and reversal, non-abstinence-based housing, and employment initiatives. These programs respect a person’s right to regulate their own substance use, placing the well-being of people who use drugs on equal footing as those who do not use drugs. By prioritizing safety above stigmatizing ideology, harm reduction saves many lives and helps vulnerable individuals stay out of prison. Unfortunately, these programs are not widely implemented, leaving many individuals with no other option than to occupy unsafe spaces.

Since the use of blue light intends to police individual behaviour, rather than promote safety, it ultimately perpetuates stigma around people who use drugs, creating hostile spaces for those seeking privacy with no alternative. In a study published by Alexis Crabtree in *Harm Reduction Journal*, eighteen people who have experience using injection drugs were interviewed from two Canadian cities “to better understand their perceptions (...) of blue lights in public washrooms.”<sup>16</sup> Effectively, while participants understood the aim of these blue lights, “[t]he majority had attempted to inject in a blue-lit washroom.”<sup>17</sup> The main finding was the play

between privacy and immediacy for people looking for somewhere to inject often resulted in public washrooms being the safest choice. While there are supervised consumption sites for alcohol in the shape of bars on nearly every street in city centers, safe injection sites for drugs are incredibly scarce and can be inaccessible to many. By placing blue lights in public washrooms, people are faced with the choice to either attempt an unsafe injection, or to find somewhere potentially less secluded and more dangerous. Not only does this inhibit access to privacy and clean water, it also creates a situation where drug consumption is forced to be “a more visible, shameful experience.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, “[b]y dispersing public injection drug use to places where it is more visible, [blue light] also make[s] it more stigmatizing.”<sup>19</sup> In her piece, *pink-blue*, Kiwanga draws attention to this dynamic while pairing it with the carceral Baker-Miller pink. In doing so, the artist reminds viewers that for vulnerable populations, choosing to use drugs in highly surveilled spaces puts one at extremely high risk of encountering police and getting arrested.

While people from every identity category and class use drugs, Robyn Maynard’s book *Policing Black Lives* explains how Black people in Canada, notably those of a lower economic class, are five times more likely to be charged, severely sentenced, and incarcerated because of incidents involving illicit substances.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Kiwanga’s piece aptly communicates how certain intersectional factors contribute to Black individuals who have a relationship to drugs being disproportionately incarcerated in Canada, which is further enabled by the discriminatory and stigmatizing architecture of certain public spaces. Consequently, the use of blue light in public bathrooms and other community spaces “shows a devaluing of the health of people who use injection drugs in favour of the experience of non-drug users,”<sup>21</sup> revealing the racist and classist ideologies enforced by the criminalization and stigma surrounding drug use.

Importantly, this piece is effective in how it draws attention to the classed way many citizens experience architecture, situating itself in the traditionally exclusionary gallery setting. Kiwanga’s work demonstrates how structural and architectural racism is designed to self-conceal, appearing innocent to many, but incredibly harmful to certain groups. In the introduction of a report presented to the UN by the Canada Council for Refugees, the group asserts that “[i]n the context of deep-seated societal racism, the denial

of the basic rights of racialized [citizens] is considered normal by many in government and in society.”<sup>23</sup> *Pink-blue* reveals this embedded racism in commonplace architecture, calling on Canadian citizens to recognize and actively resist it. It has long been clear that psychologically manipulative and abstinence forcing tactics, such as the use of Baker-Miller pink in institutional settings or blue light used in secluded public spaces, are ineffective and need to be replaced by compassionate, peer-led solutions respecting an individual's right to freedom and personal choice. Moving forward, this ideology should be at the forefront of policy making, implementation, and construction of safe spaces for historically vulnerable demographics, like racialized minorities and people who have a relationship with drugs. Kapwani Kiwanga's *pink-blue* is a much-needed reminder that architectural practices are never neutral, and a widespread shift in ideology around vulnerable members of a community will help foster more inclusive design practices promoting wellbeing and restoration rather than perpetuating harm.

## Endnotes

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