

A complex sculpture of a face, possibly made of clay or plaster, with various textures and colors. The face is white with a prominent eye that has a greenish-yellow iris. The sculpture is set against a blue background. The text "MIGRATING" is at the top, "THE" is in the middle, and "MARGINS" is at the bottom.

MIGRATING

THE

MARGINS









MIGRATING



THE



MARGINS



CIRCUMLOCATING  
THE FUTURE OF  
TORONTO ART



BY EMELIE CHANGUR & PHILIP MONK

**agYU**

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# agYU

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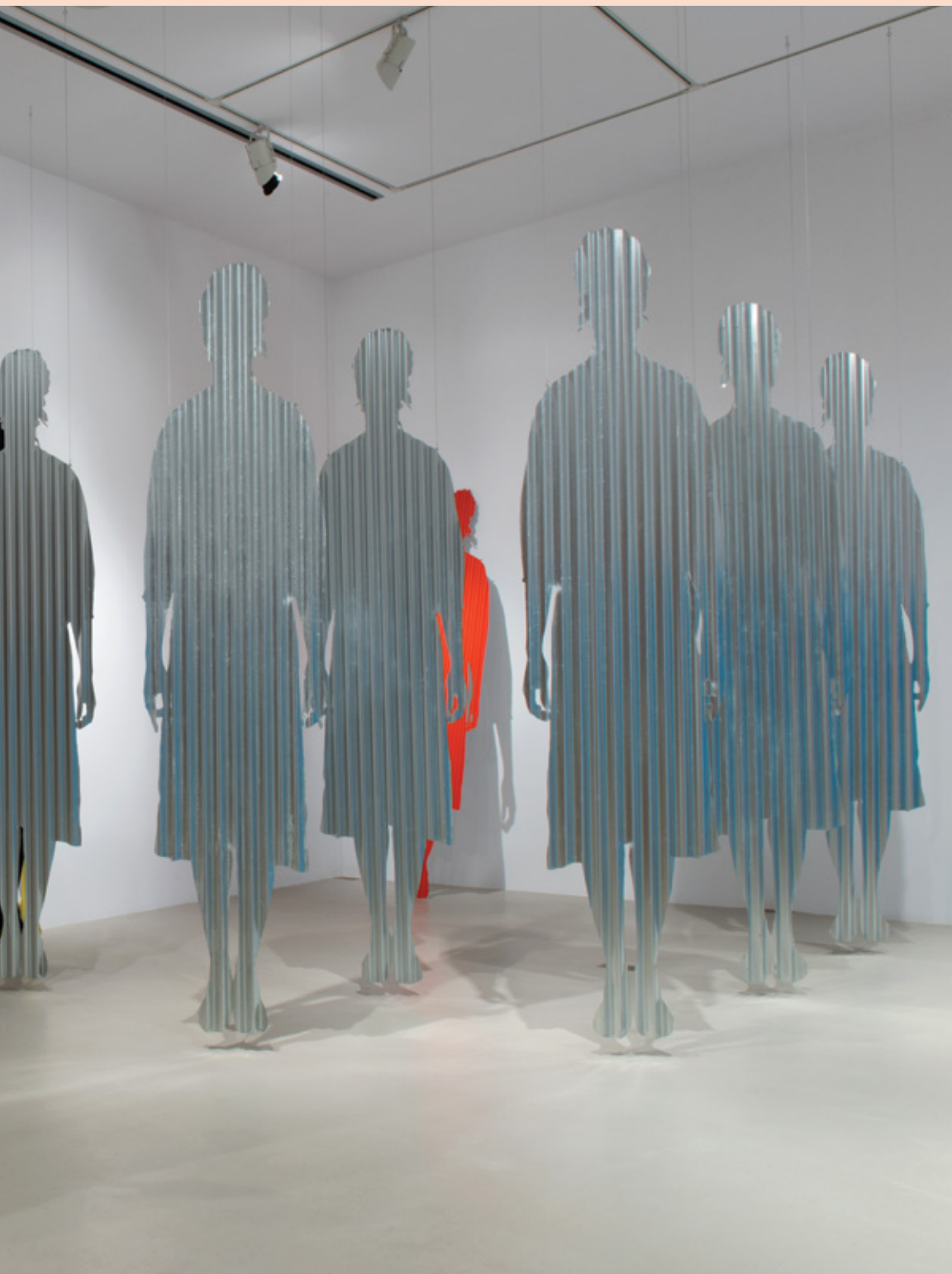














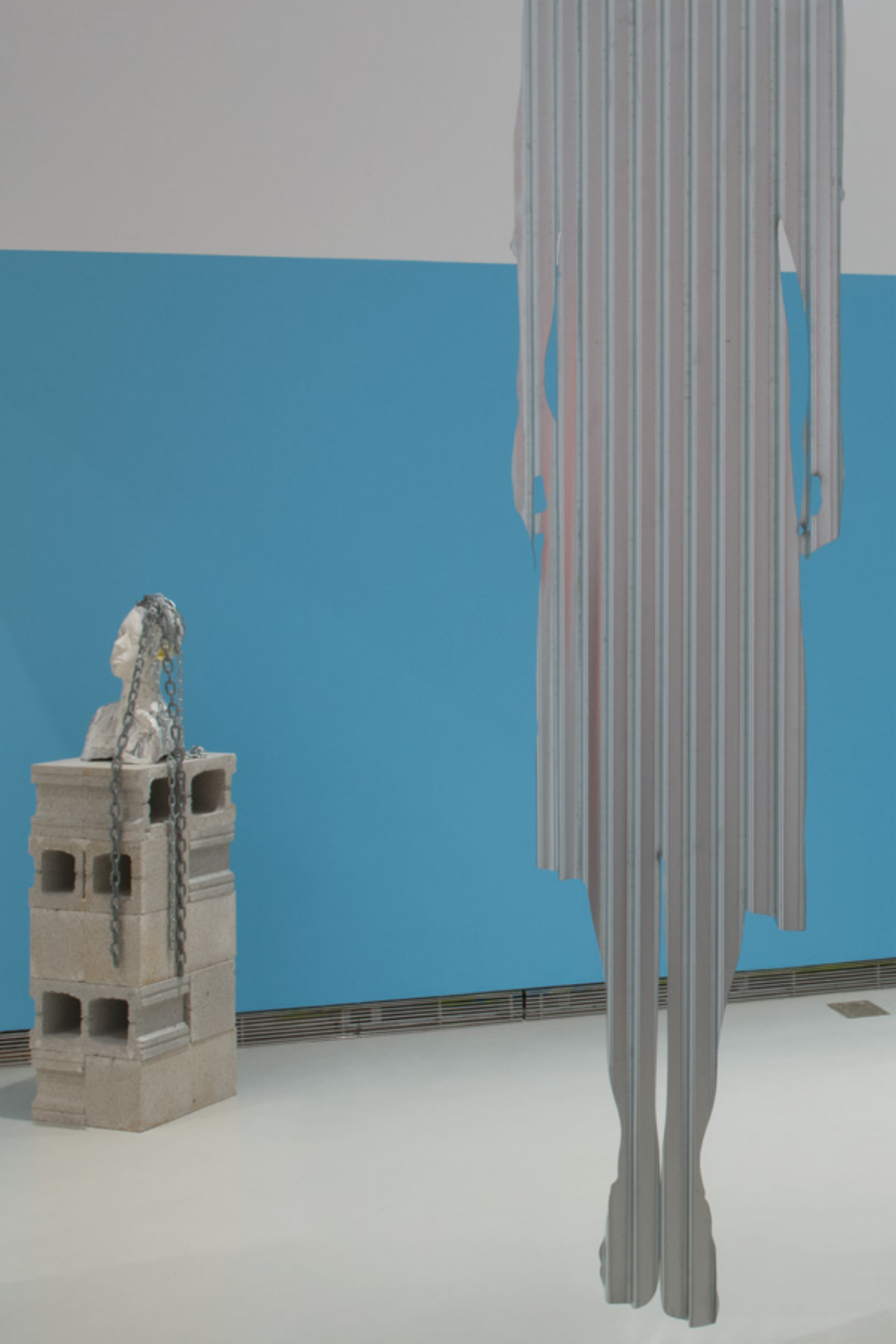














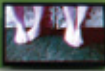








EXIT













MIGRATING



THE



MARGINS

*Migrating the Margins* was neither a survey exhibition of recent Toronto art nor a showcase of new trends in its production. Trends are false universalizing forces. We wanted to understand something about Toronto by way of the artistic inquiries happening in the cultural mixtures that constitute its suburbs and the special perspectives that this peripheral condition has to offer. Even in the “lieux-communs” of the suburbs, nothing is exactly the same.

The works included in *Migrating the Margins* should not be seen as proof of a thesis: it was not our intention to reduce a selection of artists to thematize their similarities (the diasporic condition, for instance)—even if commonalities did become apparent later on, as kinships.

If anything, we were compelled by the opposite: we were interested in proliferating differences in the discourse of Toronto art by extending the geographical and cultural scope of what has traditionally defined its limits. Each of the artists’ approach (to the world and to this place, i.e., Toronto) is a microcosm of this; through the mixing of forms, traditions, archetypes, and aesthetics, their practices exemplify Toronto’s political place-full-ness—of *being at home with an elsewhere*. But their work is not *about* this. Neither was the exhibition. We weren’t seeking a constant in a set of variables, but rather to set in motion even more variables: to expand the aesthetics of Toronto’s changing cultural future and not to reflect upon its past, or comment upon how it has changed. Ends are not appropriate to the kind of relational thinking that underpinned our research, led as it was by intuition, impulse, and fortuity.

Goals, too, are incommensurable with the processual nature of our errant inquiry into the commonplaces of Toronto’s cultural cracks. Errant is in the movement: migrating; and cracks are of the places: margins. Movement and place are to be understood then as guiding principles, operative concepts in fact: concepts of difference that differ, not from comparison with an “other” (people, places, pasts) but a difference that differs from itself—Toronto’s own cultural transformation, for instance. How we move and make place at the interstices of



cultural mixing (be that of traditions, aesthetics, or even race) is one way to think about what this exhibition was doing and learning from.

We, too, were starting from a peripheral place: the suburbs of North York, where the AGYU is located. AGYU is a suburban gallery that values its locale, Jane–Finch, as a site of artistic innovation. We know from experience that being embedded in the vernacular cosmopolitanism of our neighbourhood has had a transformative effect on our institutional practice. In many ways, *Migrating the Margins* was an autobiographical show of the AGYU, a gallery in solidarity with artists also operating outside of the centre. Being “out there”—our slogan at the time—is also related to movement (out) and place (there) but only if it is measured in relation to a centre. No longer measuring, comparing, contrasting, or excluding, *Migrating the Margins* acknowledged that the margins define their own centres. With this exhibition, we retired our “out there” slogan. The much-anticipated Line One subway extension—itsself manifesting a geographical realignment of the City of Toronto—opened a week after *Migrating the Margins* closed.

*Migrating the Margins* didn't trace the cultural roots of artists' diasporic identities but *re-routed* the traces: how in Toronto, for instance, Caribbean carnival becomes a form and strategy in contemporary art, or how Sikh kirpans extend beyond their cultural symbolism to function as decorative codes in artworks. But the list of artists and their practices do not constitute a checklist. While the exhibition countered the exclusionary apparatus that defines downtown art scenes (keeping some artists in and others out; keeping some cultural practices suppressed as festivals while others are elevated as contemporary art, etc.), *Migrating the Margins* certainly wasn't itself an “all-inclusive” exhibition. Intuition guided our curatorial inquiry and identity politics—“representation”—was not the exhibition's principle concern. We were guided by intuition and *impulsiveness*: artists were invited and commissioned to make new work by the end of our studio visits together! All along, we were feeling our way toward an exhibition whose outcome—like the consequences of the cultural experiment that is Toronto—could not be foreseen. Traces provided trajectories, which we followed with *ex-centric* curiosity, not a sense of representational responsibility.

Curatorial research methodologies often employ notions predicated on discovery, interpretation, analysis, exposure, examination, value, etc. Intuitively, we knew *Migrating the Margins* should not reproduce systems of power that are rooted in these ideas of transparency, filiation, and legitimacy. For the Martiniquan poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant, intuitive relation is what allows one to feel what cannot be pictured, known, and thus possessed. In terms of gestalt, intuitive relation takes into account what lies outside the frame. Intuition is a form of oblique understanding that does not require a totalizing concept of knowing: putting frames around things can be a limit-form, a container, a box that delineates and maintains—for instance, concepts of centres and peripheries. For all of the artists in *Migrating the Margins*, backgrounds—be they compositional or cultural—are newly foregrounded, even if in palimpsest form. In the world of *Migrating the Margins*, a series of banal diasporic signifiers—laundry drying racks—conceal themselves in a futuristic Mecha-Drone disguise, for instance.

As curators, it was imperative for us to approach this exhibition in ways that were respectful of the divergent lived experiences of the artists: all the “stuff” that surrounds their practices and final pieces without making that the subject or “identity” of their work. Over a two-month installation period, artists developed and installed their work in-situ, alongside other artists and their works which were also in development. Connections between works were made organically and subconsciously. Intuition is a method that respects opacity. It would not be remiss to reroute these important concepts—as theorized by Caribbean writers and poets (Aimé Césaire, Wilson Harris, Glissant, etc.) to curatorial practices in Toronto. Glissant’s “right to opacity” is a heuristic strategy for curating as an *appositional* practice. If curating is a way to bring artists and works into relation, relation via Glissant enables us to conceive of the encounter not as a way of reducing difference, but as an assembler of differences. As happens in the suburbs, in fact.

To “opacify” implicitly acknowledges the absence of any unified interiority/subjectivity that—curatorially speaking at least—might present

itself as a constitutive form of relating artworks, cultures, artists, concepts, traditions, etc. Curating across cultural differences in Toronto requires us to be guided not by a quest for transparency—to insist that exhibitions “examine, uncover, unmask, expose, reveal, reflect, illustrate, comment [upon]”<sup>1</sup> or that an artist must declare their “cultural origins” and thus make work about them—but by a poetics of opacity. To give shape to resonances, traces, and echoes that take into account all that cannot be represented. To give space, in fact, to all that is *denied* by representation: hair caught in the cast of a sculpture, for instance, or finger prints left in moulded clay. Toronto’s opacity is the never-ending process of transformation that its cultural experiment—decades of immigration and amalgamation—has set in motion. The conditions of Toronto no longer allow for transparency. Thus, the exhibition tended to follow potential pathways of solidarity rather than propose models for comparison.

An artwork’s opacity is its poetics: the way in which movement between places or signifiers of different cultural protocols or ceremonies are made implicit to the workings of artworks, not made explicit by them. Does it matter if we know the cultural “roots” that give rise to works that deal with concepts of translation, oscillation, and migration, aside from these experiences being manifest in the works because the works themselves are shaped by the conditions of these experiences and are opaquely channelled through the artists? These “roots” are specificities, of course—in Trinidad the neutral materiality of corrugated zinc is infused with particularities of class and race—but specificities are always full of variables. Variables are multiple and opaque. Opacities cannot be deliberately created as representations even though they fully exist in the density of lived experience, which is manifest in the artwork’s totality.

Guided by processes of intuition and openness, feeling and fecundity, our approach to making *Migrating the Margins* has made it difficult to describe and de-code—and in part this is the point. “*One truly must focus on the texture of the weave and not the nature of its components.*” Like the

commissioned artworks that comprise it, the exhibition is not about knowing something but rather proposing an approach to knowing something differently. There was something still alive in the exhibition: the resulting artworks were all living monuments and the exhibition was all the more living, we speculate, because it manifested the ways in which it was made, and which performed the processes that underpinned the artists own experiments vis-à-vis their histories and experiences.

*Migrating the Margins* would not be—could not be—unified, especially for us as an intergenerational and inter-racial pair of curators-in-collaboration. Already the project was thick with multiplicities! In *Migrating the Margins*, we begin, therefore, by conceiving of identities from the starting point of their transformations—not as a sociological study but as they are reflected in the immanent aesthetics of Toronto’s future visual culture. We are witnessing an “aesthetics of amalgamation” that is constituted in the consequential cracks of Toronto’s so-called multi-cultural diversity and multi-local pluralities. *These* cracks are where new traces abound.

This is the borderline work of culture in Toronto.

*Give-on-and-with!*







ARTISTS



AND



WORKS



## TAU LEWIS

From her composite *Self-portrait #2*, 2017, Tau Lewis looks out onto the world through the stereoscopic vision of a split gaze—with one brown eye and one blue eye. The portrait is a body-double and a singularity: it is how Tau sees herself seeing but also a way she wants to be seen. Tau's heterochromic stare sees from two points of view in one position. This is not to suggest that this position is static. Mobile, these eyes are thick with peripheral vision—as well as gazing backwards and forwards in time.

Composed of diverse materials both found and repurposed, Tau's portrait continues from *foraged, ain't free*, her series of mixed media sculptures that give shape to the diasporic experience of multiple identities in flux and in dynamic relation. They are portraits of her peer Black artists (e.g., *Angolano [God Gift]*, 2016), who take root, and rise up, in a sometimes inhospitable environment.

Rooting and rising, the portrait subjects in *foraged, ain't free* work in and through the material that they are given as their living conditions, and that Tau manipulates to this end.

The component materials are arranged and re-arranged, put together and taken apart; they are reassembled, rearticulated, and refashioned until a moment is made manifest and an image emerges through the work's many iterations. When we first visit Tau's studio in 2016, she is still middling in this process—still settling into what these works are becoming. Her dissatisfaction with any sort of outcome is the first sign that Tau's sculptures are more than portraits. Her poetics is more than mere representation—of culture, identity, or of authenticity. These *bricoleur* procedures are heuristic.

But the elements are not just composed; materials are first gathered. This is even more evident in subsequent series, such as *the forecast* from 2017. Materials are scavenged and beachcombed. They already have a history, but their history is one of erosion and decay, of wearing down, of being rusted and corroded by salt spray. (In *Self-portrait #2*, the eyes are pieces of sea glass found in Jamaica.) They are detritus found on the edge of things: beside broken-down concrete curbs and ocean shores. It is as if they belong to the category of the forgotten and unloved.

Rooting into cinder block structures that function as plinths, Tau's portraits literally sprout from the "cracks" as open-ended assemblages. They arise from the interstitial spaces of these repurposed urban materials, which are their second- and third-generation use. (Sometimes readymade composites already contain their own history—for instance, corroded concrete where cement binds loose aggregate, so that their new use joins composite to composite.) Instead of being fixing-devices, however, these assemblages portray processes of change and transformation. Sometimes, in fact they literally grow.

Set off by their plinths, the portraits nevertheless are not idealized figures or elevated representations. Their very precarity holds them together. Fragments form disrupted facial topographies through linked yet disparate elements. It is as if the heads were excoriated to reveal their ligaments and bones. Linkage is exposure; yet this rawness instead suggests survival. The same goes for Tau's self-exposure in her self-portraits. If she lets herself be seen in *Self-portrait #2*, she nonetheless hides something away there: according to the artist, the base is a time capsule. So doing, she accords herself a power, thereby both bringing

these works to life and, fetishistically, protecting them.

Tau's sculptures are multi-temporal amalgamations: they index the past through mediums and techniques of preservation (use of cement or casting) and gesture toward the future through the inclusion or traces of living elements, such as plants (*Everything Scatter [Army Arrangement]*, 2016) or remnants of her hair (*Self-portrait*, 2016). The many cacti she includes, celebrated by the artist for their ability to survive across climates and geographies, keep these assemblages alive and changing. The cacti are cast too as in *for every defence mechanism, a valid reason*, 2016, a process that doubly preserves their perseverance. The portraits are diasporic monuments to what is both left behind (refuse) and what persists (cacti, hair) as well as what grows forth in their combination. These assemblages are propositions that manifest forms of co-existence and carve out an in-between-ness that settles in the cracks of culture and context.

This mixed way of looking—simultaneously from one blue and one brown eye or from multiple temporalities, for instance—is not a metaphor for hybridity. The mixed compositions of these sculptures—and

the mixed vision the eyes of  
*Self-portrait #2* point toward—  
are operative, not illustrative.  
It might be bold to state right  
from the start, but this mixed  
vision is an inchoate condition  
that is giving shape to the future  
of Toronto's aesthetics. But why  
not be bold? Yes, let's begin here,  
because, as Tau's work (and its  
poetic heuristic) teaches us,  
beginning means starting from  
the middle—or in the cracks—  
which of course is not at all the  
same as starting from the centre.





“*foraged, ain’t free* showcases a series of mixed-media sculptures created over a two-month period, where I created sculptural portraits of black peer artists using found objects, repurposed materials and live plants sourced from urban and rural landscapes. I connect these acts of repurposing and collecting with diasporic experience and black bodies. The portraits interrogate the dissociation between black bodies and nature; they are recuperative gestures that counter persistent tendencies to erase or peripheralize black artists and narratives within Canadian art and history.

“I frequently use cacti in my work. They are tropical plants that come from hot climates; they have become heavily domesticated and can survive anywhere in the world. Cacti grow prickly spines that act as built-in preservation tactics, letting you witness their beauty, letting you know it hurts. Surviving inapt surroundings and very little attention. Still requiring love. These are the ways that I find cacti to symbolize African diaspora and the perseverance of black life.”

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**Tau Lewis, SELF-PORTRAIT #2,  
2016**

Pages 38, 45

**Tau Lewis, EVERYTHING SCATTER  
(ARMY ARRANGEMENT), 2016**

Pages 41, 44

**Tau Lewis, ANGOLANO  
(GOD GIFT), 2016**

Page 42

**Tau Lewis, SELF-PORTRAIT, 2016**

Page 43

**Tau Lewis, IT TAKES ME MORE  
COURAGE TO BE SOFT, 2016**

















## ANIQUE JORDAN

A suspended procession of figures floats just above the gallery floor, their feet now rooted in a groundless ground. We say rooted because these figures *are* connected to an underlining structure even if the 'mas they play isn't anchored (in)to the gallery's floor proper. This is to say that the connections *arming by clara*, 2017, make is not to/through the institution of art but in/with the components of the cultural milieus that the work reciprocally connects: Port of Spain and Toronto; processional culture and corrugated zinc; Clara Ford and Black Canadian history; racism and freedom; haunting and survival. The figures in *arming by clara* are contradictorily grounded in a multi-local complexity that most first- and second- generation Canadians now know well how to negotiate—differently than their parents do. *arming by clara* is of a different kind of rootless root or groundless ground. Uprooted and re-routed? Perhaps. Created by Anique Jordan, these figures do not re-present/reproduce the post-colonial concept of *unrootedness*, of not being at home anywhere; they fully participate in being at home with an elsewhere. *Being at home with an elsewhere* is

the new identity of Toronto's political place-full-ness. And, we want to suggest, this full-of-places-from-elsewhere is also the subject—vis-à-vis its presentation, materials, and subject matter—of Anique's gallery procession, which is also a self-portrait. The corrugated zinc cut-outs are based on Anique's profile and through this body-double, the apparition of Clara Ford—a Black Toronto-born woman who in 1895 was acquitted for the murder of a white man—ventriloquizes her story of here, from here. Unknown to most, Clara Ford's story speaks through the clamour of Anique's processional proclamation for legitimization and *it does get heard*: through Anique's installation, Clara Ford's story makes the mainstream press in a review of the work in the *Metro*, a giveaway paper read by thousands of Toronto commuters.

Anique's procession of cut-outs, and her own performative implication in this newly constituted collectivity, is processual. *arming by clara* is thus both a process *and* an event. It stages something particular to Toronto: its story is from here but it is told through a form that comes from elsewhere. But this elsewhere is also now here: after sixty years of Toronto's Caribana, Caribbean carnival is from here, too. In this regard, the band proudly parades across

the Savannah and also militantly marches through the streets of Scarborough; Clara Ford walks the streets of Toronto as a man and goes on trial as a Victorian woman; Anique Jordan arms herself not with a gun (though the silhouette suggests she's potentially packing one) but with the ancestral strength of generations of Black women. Anique's armour—a palimpsest really—is comprised of the physical, emotional, and spiritual strength of this Toronto woman's story and also the “poor” material it is made from: corrugated zinc is a boundary marker and class signifier in Trinidad, used by some to build shanty houses or by others to gate-off communities. The form and content of Anique's work are rooted in and re-routed through the storied streets of Toronto and the institutions of power that have kept the story of Clara Ford locked away in archives. The installation re-roots the stories of Trinidad here, too. Materially speaking, *arming by clara* is derived from the colonial history of Trinidad (corrugated zinc was exported from Imperial Britain to its colony, Trinidad) and, importantly, stands strong: *arming by clara* is the elevation of this material as a viable source for both 'mas and for contemporary art being *made in Toronto*.

This makes us wonder: in a city that has now played host for over sixty years to one of the largest Caribbean festivals outside of the Caribbean, why is the carnival tradition still considered a “festival” and not a viable source of inspiration for contemporary artists working in and from the perspective of Toronto? And this is to doubly ask: why isn't Clara Ford the subject of Caribana? Why doesn't Caribana take up Toronto's political sphere as the subject of its reversals? It is thus imperative that contemporary art be the place where cultural traditions get taken up and then transformed. We believe that it is the new generation of artists from the suburbs who have taken up this charge. As long as we continue to celebrate Caribana as a Caribbean festival, then we empower the subjugation of Caribbean culture as it is constituted here. This is the centre gatekeeping the periphery. As Anique has stated, “what haunts me is the fear of loss of freedom.” So, let's learn from what haunts us by ensuring that the culture of this place is entangled with the freedom of difference that no longer differs from “back home” but differs from itself, in the here and now.

With this work, we have moved beyond concepts of migration

and belonging that pigeonhole and force artists of colour to educate audiences about cultural references “from elsewhere.” In Anique’s installation, the narratives manifest in the “jumbies”—the black, red, and yellow figures at the rear of the procession—are not made explicit to the viewer. As a spiritual connection to the Orisha pantheon of gods, Anique’s “jumbies” act as gatekeepers, watchers, and guardians of the body (transposing the function of corrugated zinc from gatekeeping class in Trinidad to protecting and projecting culture in Toronto). Their coloured forms hold the right to their own opacity and thus point to the ways in which survival, particularly for the Black body throughout history—from the middle passage from Africa to America and then within the Americas—is also singular and opaque. As Anique acknowledges: “the things we hold onto that enable this survival are not accessible to everyone...they are intimate moments: teachings from a parent, blood memory and the encoded lessons in ciphers, movements, gestures, and rhythms.” These are the unrepresentable elements that are ungraspable. By acknowledging the opaque sources of inspiration that inform her artistic production, Anique’s work isn’t dwelling on

binary discourses that deem some cultural forms as festivals and others as “contemporary art.” Work such as this is not “about” what diasporic practices do to places, or what places do to them. This kind of work asks us to consider, what this place, Toronto, *will do* with diasporic practice to new effect through their mixing; with other diasporic practices, histories, cultures, and materials; entangled with yet other movements, gestures, and rhythms to no known ends. Isn’t *Toronto* the material we should be working with to develop the aesthetics of this place?



“*arming by clara* is a 12-foot self-portrait, armed and armoured monument commemorating the life of Clara Ford and the lives of Black bodies, whose survival is often read as threatening or encoded in a grammar of militancy. *arming by clara* is inspired by the story of Clara Ford, a Black, Toronto-born person accused in 1895 of murdering a wealthy white man who assaulted her. Known for wearing men’s clothing and carrying a loaded revolver, Clara appeared in court in a Victorian dress, ultimately leading to her acquittal as the jury imagined no woman, much less a Black one, could perform a crime as lethal as murder. Clara went on to join Sam T. Jacks Creoles, the first all-Black woman burlesque company in the United States. I am very interested in the links between her survival and my own haunting. Much of what haunts me is a response to the judicial system, incarceration, slavery, colonialism, and the ways we experience and resist these violences in our daily lives and through intimate relationships. What haunts me is a fear of lost freedom.

“This is a monument to Black bodies, negated, some thrice or four times, which carry with them the subconscious awareness that stepping outside the threshold of ‘home’ and maintaining and/or protecting freedom means arming oneself psychically, emotionally, physically, spiritually. It means we have to learn from what haunts us.

“Like the narratives embedded in the coloured figures, the things we hold onto that enable this survival are not accessible to everyone, nor are they commodifiable or even material; they are intimate moments: teachings from a parent, blood memory and the encoded lessons in cyphers, movements, gestures and rhythms. The head of the V, where viewers are invited to stand to complete the formation, is a site of negotiation, of sovereign power and of witnessing, or releasing an armour, which is often and necessarily invisible.

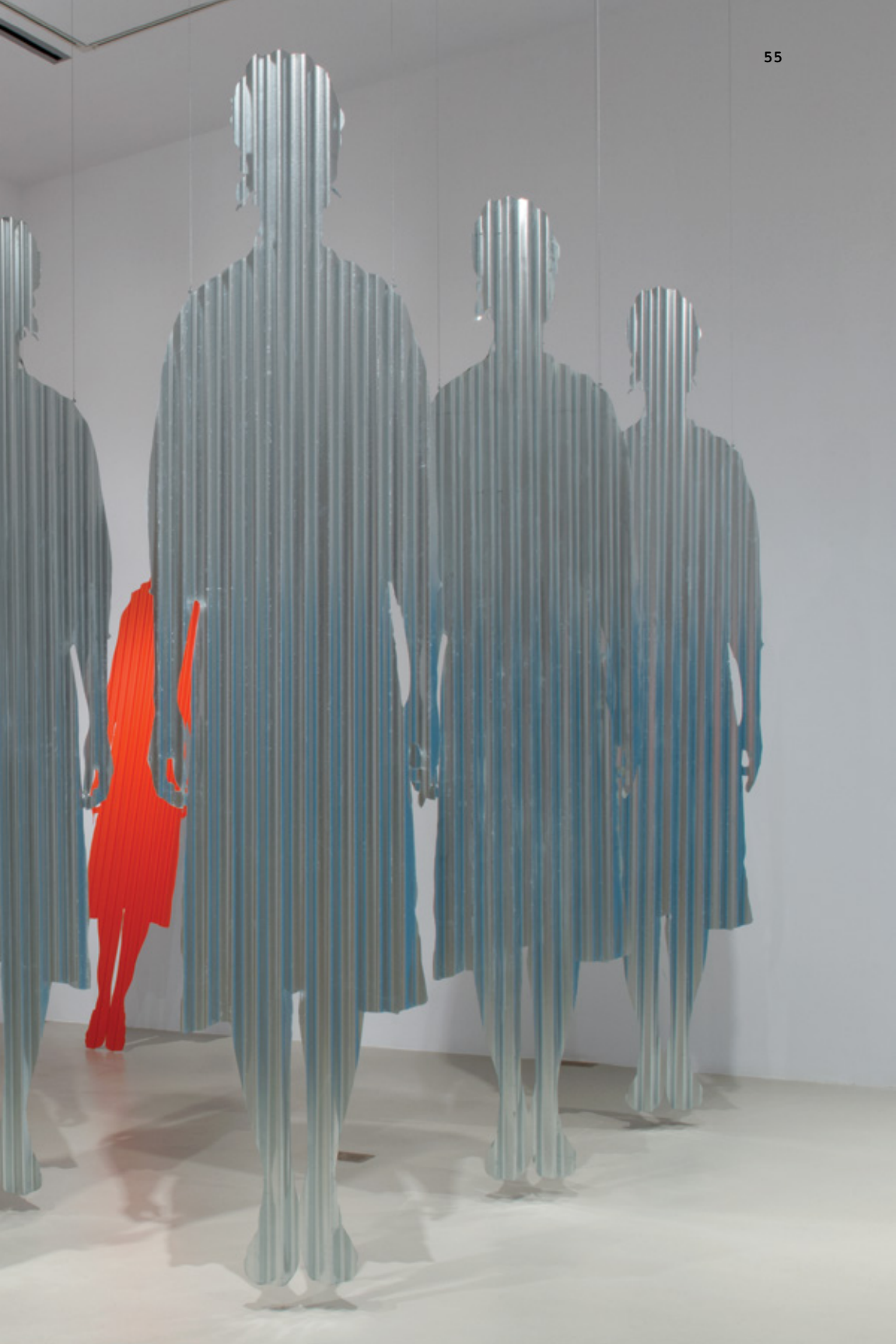
“The hands of the figures gesture slightly, one hand relaxed, the other forming the grasp of Clara’s revolver. You are invited to complete the V by standing or sitting at its helm.”



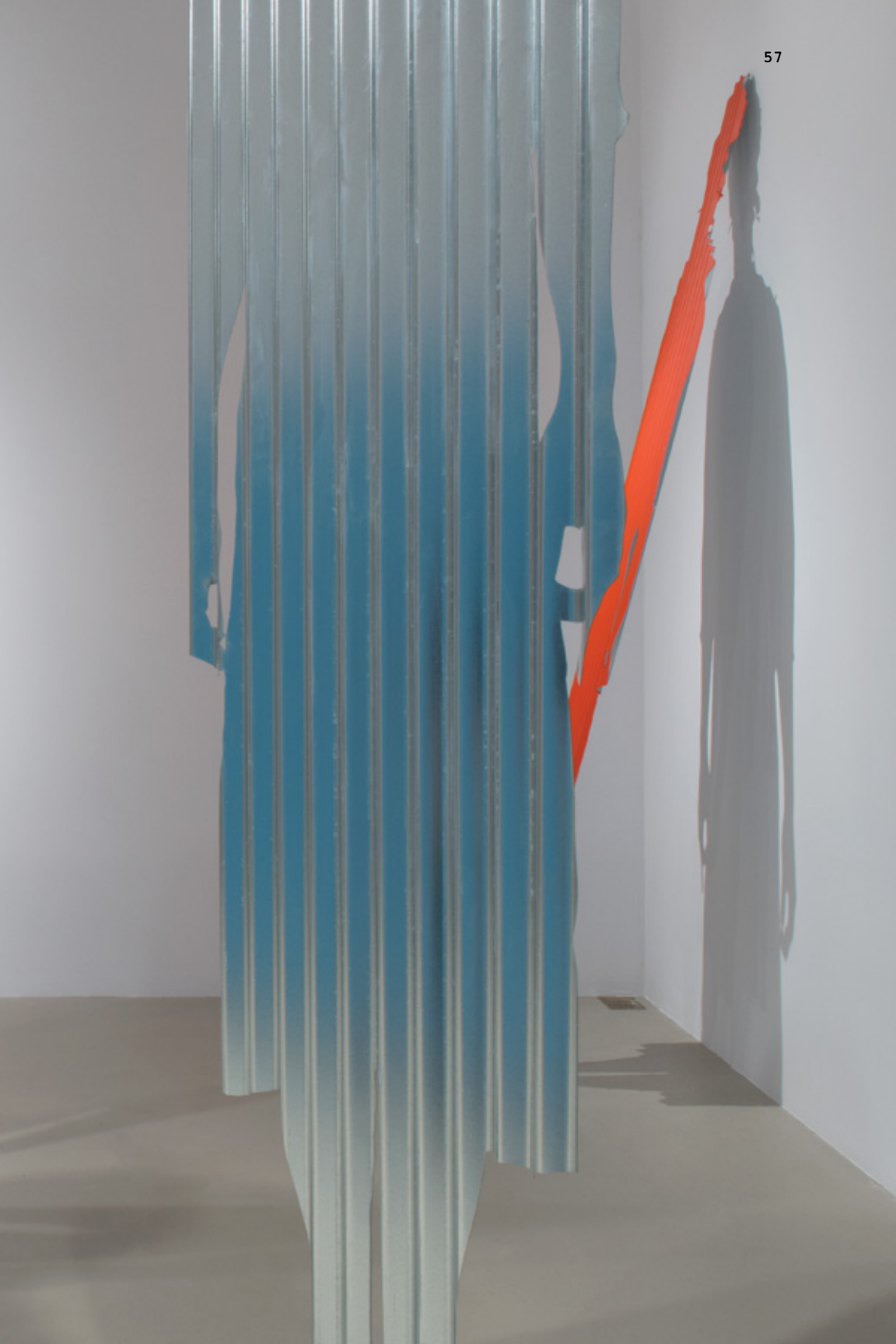


















## ERIKA DEFREITAS

In her syncretic garden of divine meditation and earthly commemoration, Erika DeFreitas negotiates her identity through acts of translation: in between her and her mother, Toronto and Guyana, larkspurs and hibiscus, wholes and parts, processes and structures. More akin to oscillations than to migrations, these translational acts evolve new poetic sensibilities for the artist, whose work has often pre-emptively mourned what is always already being lost: culture, identity, time, etc. In the video *Studies for gardens (each form is a fixed snapshot of a process)*, 2017, we see Erika's hands arranging and rearranging paper collages, repeatedly unfixing whatever she provisionally sets into place. Erika's are not grasping hands, however. Rather, these hands navigate and negotiate an unformed territory of intermingling floral archipelagoes: her handiwork making and un-making these montage compositions *ad infinitum*.

Instead of mourning a potential loss—or giving visual form to dichotomies of absence and presence, as in her past works—now we see Erika enacting processes of creolization: the constant reconfiguration of what is not lost but that which is perpetually

made anew, or, even, potentially, found in-formation. Her *Studies for gardens (a mixture between concept and discipline)*, 2017—the fixed and final collages that are installed in a grid around a video of their making and un-making—are, after all, a “fixed snapshot of a process.” This process undoes the structure that otherwise undergirds the logic of the garden from which Erika's takes its cue and its cuttings. Based on medieval “Mary Gardens”—comprised only of plants affiliated with the Virgin Mary—Erika's syncretic garden not only references processes involved in the creation of religious syncretism vis-à-vis the colonial importation of Christianity to the Americas, but also points toward the ways in which concepts of purity are also subject to contamination. Negotiation proliferates new and radical forms of belonging through strange (and intuitive) circulative *connectedness* and *unfixedness*.

Structured around six discrete works set in relation to one another, when taken as a whole Erika's garden could also be considered a syncretic portrait of familial negotiation through matrilineal translation. For the artist's mother, the hibiscus flower, for instance, is a prompt for stories from “back home” (Guyana). At the centre of her installation, Erika's *a small*

*monument*, 2017, comprised of 1000 hand-made clay hibiscus petals, is thus a monument to anecdote and memory rather than to filiation and rootedness. Each petal is a part of a whole that can never be reassembled back into any originary form. But unlike the broken vase that is lovingly glued back together in Derek Walcott's story of the restorative role of Antillean art, Erika's petals are not broken, nor are they in need of repair. Despite the regenerative quality of flowers, these hibiscus petals serve as deconstructed indexes of "back home"—their identities now acknowledged in/through their fragmentation. In the movement from one place to another, *re*-generation—as symbolized by Erika who is indeed the next generation—becomes an operative concept of difference that differs from itself and not from a comparison with something else: Erika and her mother; Toronto and Guyana. The "and" that connects mother and daughter and multiple locales through the movement and experience of diaspora accumulates difference and doesn't reduce these elements to essentializing differences—which "or" tends toward. Translation transforms systems of equivalence into polyvalent practices that negotiate new meaning. Erika embodies transformation in her handiwork

performance that shows off her intuitive dexterity. Her hands are into everything here: moving the paper pieces in the video; finger prints in the clay petals; holding and letting go of her mother's hands in the video *an earnest weight in the crease*, 2017.

Perhaps this is why—for the first time since the artist began collaborating with her mother in 2003—we see a portrait series *without* Erika (arguably, though, the garden as a whole is a portrait of Erika's many parts). In the past, these ongoing photographic portrait series pictured Erika and her mother side-by-side as if set up for comparison. But the photographic portraits *On Larkspurs and Sorrow*, 2017, and *On Pincushions and Lace*, 2017 (part of *les pâles se sont ouverts*), included in Erika's syncretic garden, show only her mother, side-by-side with her multiple selves. Now we are confronted by confluences rather than comparisons ("and" not "or"). Her mother performs as the Virgin Mary—these portraits akin to the statues of the Virgin always found in Mary Gardens. In *On Larkspurs and Sorrow* Erika's mother is enveloped by flowers that are representative of the Virgin Mary's sorrow: the blue delphiniums a familial offshoot of the larkspur, commonly known as "Mary's Tears." Next to the representa-

tion of her mother's sorrow is her strength: the pincushion and lace alluding to the matrilineal trajectory of textile work practised as a means of earning an income for both her mother and grandmother in their hometown of Georgetown, Guyana. In this portrait, Erika's mother appears, like the Virgin Mary, with Queen Anne's lace flowing out of her mouth and from the palms of her hands—a form of transmission. But transmission itself can transform and in Erika's garden it also translates. Transmission as a portrait and gesture is paralleled in the small video entitled *real cadences and a quiet colour*, 2017, placed on the floor, off to the side of the iconic mother photographs. In this video two sets of feet perform a strange choreography, side-by-side, "like mother, like daughter," as if rehearsing received cultural gestures but now with a sense of unknowability and mutation, or as Erika states, "in ways we could not predict." Difference is what is found in the acts of translation from all the proliferating oscillations Erika now uses as a medium (in the sense of channelling) and artistic material.



“In addition to having botanical and common names, there is a history of flowers and herbs being assigned Catholic names, and this tradition goes as far back as the medieval era. The flowers that I am primarily interested in are those that have been named after attributes associated with the Virgin Mary, a figure I believe embodies motherhood, female sorrow, and grief.

“In this photograph, my mother is enveloped by flowers that are representative of the Virgin Mary’s sorrow. For example, the tall blue delphiniums visible in this photograph are in the same family as the larkspur, flowers named *Mary’s Tears*.”

“Working with textiles is a skill shared for generations on the matrilineal side of my family. My great-grandmother and grandmother crocheted items for decorative purposes, but primarily as a means of earning an income in their hometown of Georgetown, Guyana. My mother and I have collaborated in my practice since 2003, and some of the works created employ the use of crochet, as well as embroidery. In this photograph, my mom has flowers that represent the Virgin Mary’s relationship to textiles flowing out of her mouth and from the palms of her hands. The large white flowers, commonly known as Queen Anne’s lace, are also known as *Our Lady’s Lace*.”

“The hibiscus flower is often a catalyst in generating an anecdote from my mother about ‘back home’. Gathered here are 1000 clay hibiscus petals that are fragments that can never be gathered to make the whole that they were once a part of. There is a regenerative quality to flowers that are akin to that of memory; with each remembering and retelling something may be lost or gained, yet they never are reconstructed precisely as it was once before.”

“*real cadences and a quiet colour* is a study of portraiture and gesture. [Unbeknownst to myself and my mother,] our feet appear to be choreographed and at times our movements mirror each other in strangely familiar ways [in ways we couldn’t predict].”

“During the medieval era, gardens were planted using only the flowers named after the Virgin Mary. These were called Mary gardens. These gardens were seen as sacred spaces where one could tend to the flowers and plants, and visit as a form of reverence and contemplation. *Studies for gardens (a mixture between concept and discipline)* were created as a meditative process of thinking through these Mary gardens and gardens in general as commemorative spaces, as symbols of promise and possibility, sites for meditation, and one where structure is imposed.”

“Each screen displays the creation of abstract gardens. There is a mixture of textures and patterns used which reference both textiles and the body. Every colour used symbolizes a body of flowers, and each shape is deliberately placed to create a layout for potential spaces.”

**Page 58**

Erika DeFreitas, ON LARKSPURS AND SORROW (LES PÂLES SE SONT OUVERTS), 2017

**Page 62**

Erika DeFreitas, ON PINCUSHIONS AND LACE (LES PÂLES SE SONT OUVERTS), 2017

**Page 65**

Erika DeFreitas, A SMALL MONUMENT, 2017

**Pages 66–67**

*Foreground*  
Erika DeFreitas, A SMALL MONUMENT, 2017

*Background*

Erika DeFreitas, STUDIES FOR GARDENS (EACH FORM IS THE FIXED SNAPSHOT OF A PROCESS), 2017

Erika DeFreitas, STUDIES FOR GARDENS (A MIXTURE BETWEEN CONCEPT AND DISCIPLINE), 2017

Erika DeFreitas, AN EARNEST WEIGHT IN THE CREASE, 2017

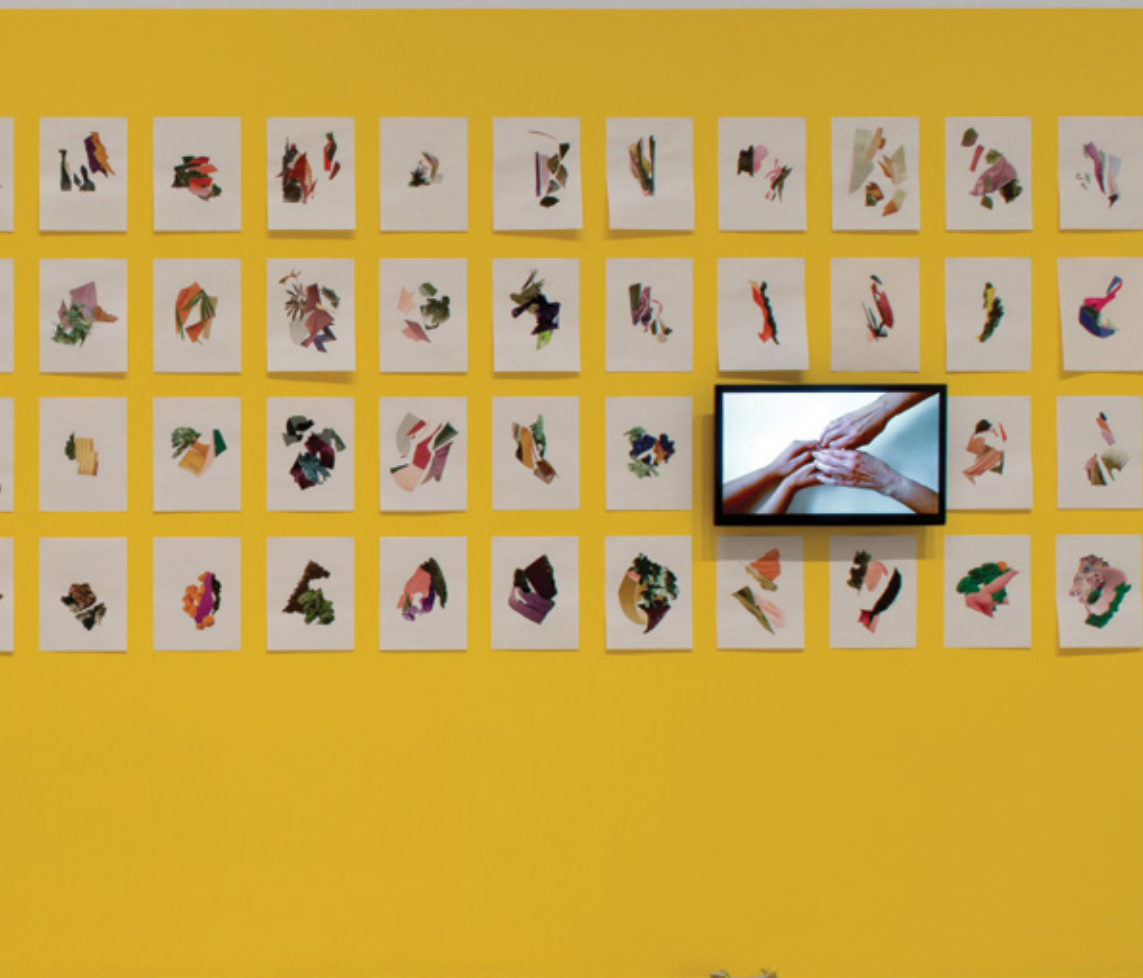
**Pages 68–69**

Erika DeFreitas, AN EARNEST WEIGHT IN THE CREASE, 2017 [video still]

















RAJNI  
PERERA

Three figures loom large over any prescribed mythologies that might otherwise underwrite their freedom to announce and project their presence and their particularities. Three figures pneumatically fill the space, which can hardly contain them. Yet they gracefully proportion it with their dance steps. Fleeting presences, they alight momentarily, touch down home here temporarily in their east-west passage, like the flamingos that pass through them. The three figures comprising *3 Figures*, 2017, by Rajni Perera dance with grace and haste, their arms and legs entangled in new forms of movement that overstep any one-to-one relationship to culture as knowable, definable, or categorizable. We can't hear the beaten melody of their imagined soundtrack—perhaps a mash-up of *baila*, *virindu*, gospel, blues, and more—to which they freely frolic, but we feel its vibratory effects, deep inside our chests. The cacophony is clamorous, disruptive, *alive*. The dancers: ambivalent, shape-shifting, *future obsessed*. We want to belong to the worlds that Rajni opens up with her hybrid figures, creole fashions, and sampled sounds, not the other way around.

*3 Figures* refuses to fit in. Scale is tipped toward new horizons. Horizons that are now no longer in the background but are instead painted *into* each figure's body-landscape.

Hyper-performing the miniature painting tradition by blowing it way out of proportion, Rajni's eighteen-by-twenty-foot wall mural denies scale as an assimilationist form of knowing or as an instrument of disavowal. We can never fully grasp the "*tout-monde*" of this mural's multifaceted totality because the figures depicted in it are just too big. But big or small, miniature or maximalist, everything exists simultaneously in Rajni's composite poetics. Her references, genres, forms, and techniques draw from and upon polymorphous peripheries of diverse contexts, cartographies, and choreographies. For instance, *3 Figures* performs the eastern miniature painting tradition with dance-moves inspired by Alvin Ailey, an African American dancer and choreographer inspired by "blood memories," the blues, spirituals, and gospel as the basis for his choreography—a kind of kinship that crosses cultures and geographies. For Rajni, these multi-local and poly-faceted references become malleable frameworks for the creation of an entirely new and novel repertoire recursively found—



like a *mise-en-abyme*—nestled within and in between these diasporic traditions-cum-hybrid-contemporary expressions. The mural is an ever-expanding container-form into which new traditions, textures, and temporalities are added: each dancer constitutes their own mythopoetic form of self-presentation as a creolizing morphology. New futures begin to unfurl.

These strange morphological transformations are also new geometries of spiritual and mental adaptation. Heads are conical projectiles and hands are trajectories that exceed bodily dimension. Rajni gives form to fantastically re-imagined structures of semi-physical phenomena: from wakes of energy and exhaust to the theoretical space-time passage proposed by wormholes. *3 Figures* reshapes the boundaries of its own cultural universe by turning the structures of ours into processes to play with: *3 Figures* becomes a third space that has nothing to do with the two-dimensionality of painting. For the Austrian physicist Ludwig Flamm, a white hole is a theoretical time reversal of a black hole. Entrances to both black and white holes could be connected by a space-time conduit—a wormhole—which is likened to two mouths connected by a single throat. In Rajni's

work, connections abound across binaries and culturally coded differences that mix and mess with general relativities (physical, geographical, cultural). One of the faces of Rajni's figures in fact contains a *brown* hole. Come to think of it, wormholes are brown bridges that connect the spaces in-between Black and white worlds. New horizons indeed.

With no stable figure-ground relationship, *3 Figures* refuses the privileged position of two-point perspective (as it wormholes its way in-between binaries). Here, in a chiasmatic inversion, landscape is set within the body and not the other way around. Geographies *and* biographies are co-related entities with no clearly delineated separation. The body *is* a landscape and—like the flamingos inside both—a paraphyletic assemblage. The paraphyly is a matrilineal arrangement, and, in terms of Rajni's hybrid aesthetics, provides a very special kind of composition that speaks to lineage without linearity. A paraphyletic assemblage consists of a group's last common ancestor and all the descendants of that ancestor inside its diasporic form: the flamingo is both foundational and generationally folded.

Portuguese lends etymological association to these figures,

whose hands flame like flamingos (in the word “flamingo,” *flama* = flame). Their fiery hands make these figures inaccessible, set off like gods in the obscure ritual of their nimble presence.

Alighting, do they belong here? Yes, their presence says so. Perhaps Rajni can conjure this scene because of the flamingos that fly through her—those from her Sri Lankan homeland. Rajni’s hybrid mural is a good example of cultural mediation happening here in Toronto. Is this what linguistics calls an interlanguage, a learned language through which one’s mother tongue still shows through and thus makes one’s origins unapologetically known? But who really knows what cultural unconsciousness resonates within what Guyanese writer Wilson Harris calls its “fantastic mythological congruence of elements.” For Rajni, creating a space for the Black and brown body to exist in the other-worldliness of sci-fi fantasy means that these bodies must be pictured as protagonists of the future. What other futures would begin to unfurl here?

*VHTI*, 2017, is one—a constructed futurity. If *3 Figures* depicts a timeless presence where all gods are brown, *VHTI* projects a future of Black and brown citizenry. *VHTI* presents a diasporic

aesthetics constructed from the present, here in Toronto, and assembled from what Rajni calls diasporic signifiers of the day-to-day. Like *3 Figures*, *VHTI* looms large, but not because of its robotic appearance. *VHTI*’s mechanical bulk is made from welded together commonplace IKEA laundry drying racks. To the artist, these were once embarrassing reminders of growing up in the immigrant suburbs with saris drying in the backyard. (This is the “back home.”) Now through her fascination with their poploric, not folkloric, association with science fiction and Afrofuturism, Rajni monumentalizes these hitherto degraded assemblages in ways that parallel the elevated pedestals on which the Black and brown female body is positioned in her paintings. The drying racks have become a Mecha-Droid, its appearance derived from the Robotech New Masters anime series Rajni watched as a child growing up in Sri Lanka. Now in the gallery, it makes its presence known. As if momentarily poised in the present before re-embarking on its cosmic passage, this hybrid-Mecha-Droid-drying-rack assemblage appears tentatively poised, ready-to-pounce back to the future. The surrealistic night-sky mural and the room’s purple hue sets the scene: *VHTI* is from another time-space, cosmically

resonating with an elsewhere and tidally tuned to its own moon—and totally de-linked from its embarrassing drying-rack associations. Doubly articulated, doubly directed forward and back, doubly voiced, too, *VHTI* articulates Rajni's insistence that "science fiction requires a full revolt and rebuild in the image of, and fully reflective of, the diasporic citizen—which is indeed the citizen of the future."

Both *3 Figures* and *VHTI* were made in-situ over two months while Rajni was the AGYU's artist-in-residence. While the "artist-in-residence" has become a trope for global citizenship, in this case, Rajni's residency marked a return to her suburban childhood neighbourhood of Jane-Finch. In many ways Rajni's contributions to *Migrating the Margins*—in particular *VHTI*—were made with this micro context in mind. We might then say that these works constitute a kind of cosmopolitan vernacular.

“These three figures find a dynamic freedom and comfort in their bodies in reference to dance choreography by the Alvin Ailey dance company. The conical protrusions of the figures goes back to a time when I wanted to explore a mutation of female forms that embody graphic representations of semi-physical phenomena such as imagined structures of wakes of energy or exhaust, wormholes, and the structure of our universe.”

3 FIGURES, 2017

“For the installation *VHT1*, a common physical diasporic signifier (laundry drying racks) is sculpted into a Mecha-droid deriving from the Robotech New Masters series of anime fame. As such, this makes way for the brown and black body in science fiction by not concealing the materiality of the drying racks but instead pushing it as an important part. This is to say that the coloured body in science fiction is essential and not merely taking up space in a formerly white world. Rather, the faceted windows into possibilities that science fiction affords requires a full revolt and rebuild in the image of, and fully reflective of, the diasporic citizen—which is indeed the citizen of the future.”

VHT1, 2017

Pages 70–81  
Rajni Perera, 3 FIGURES,  
2017

Pages 82–83  
Rajni Perera, VHT1, 2017







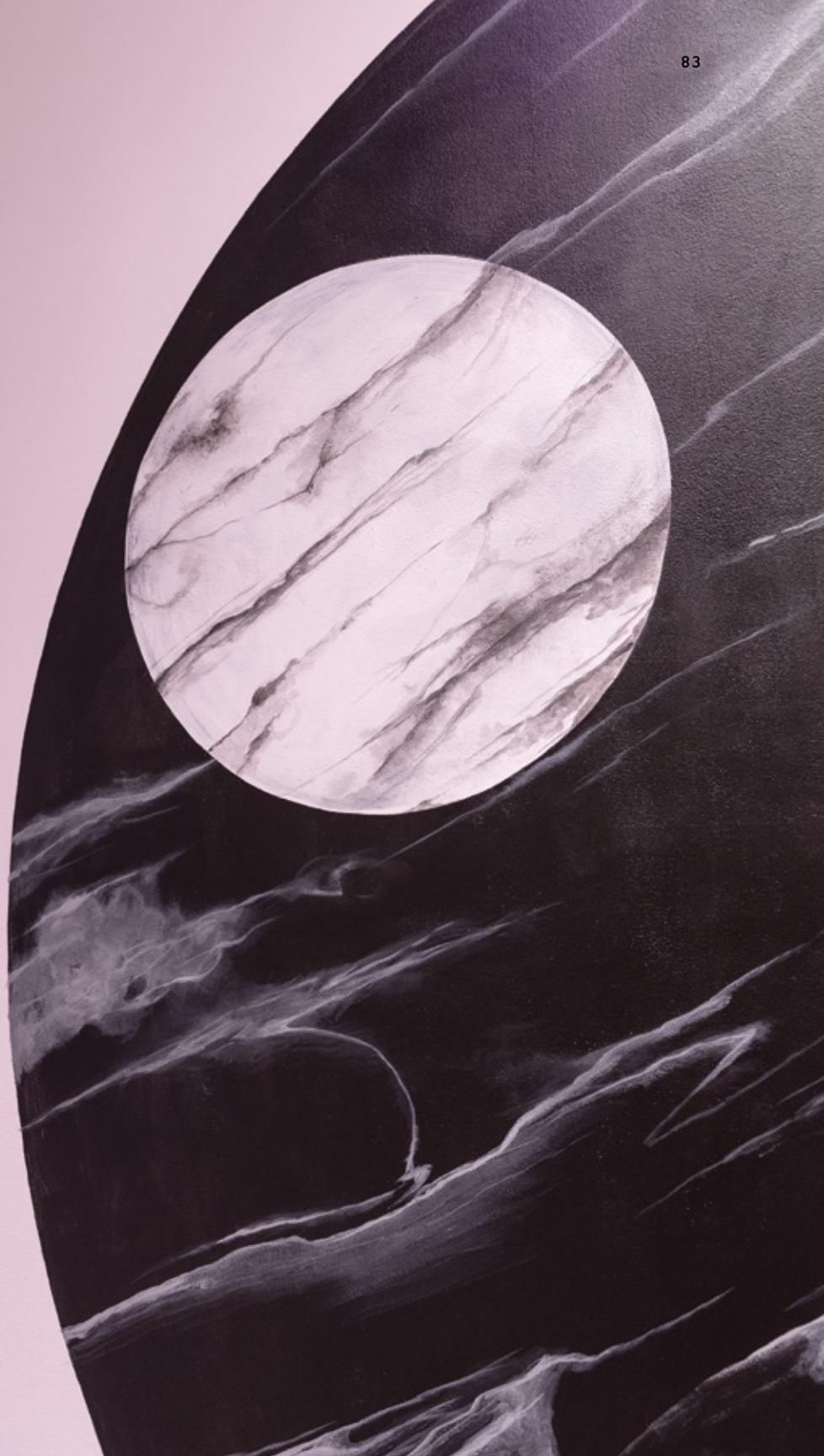














ਮੈਂ ਠੱਗੀ ਹੋਰ ਬਹਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਨ ਲਿੰਗ  
 ਡਾਵੈਂ ਅਪਣੇ ਬਾਰਾ ਵੀਰਾਨ ਹੋ ਗਏ।

ਰਾਜੀਂ ਛਾਂ ਵੀਜੀ ਲੇਖਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਫੁੱਲਾਂ ਨੂੰ  
 ਮਿੱਟੀ ਜਾਰੇ ਦੇ ਜਾਰੇ ਕਰਬਾਨ ਹੋ ਗਏ।

NEP  
SIDHU

We're not sure that sacrifice is a pressing issue in so-called "advanced" contemporary Toronto art. Nor that Sikh ceremonies have been a "valid" subject matter in the downtown art community. But behind the kirpans and "beards" that function as decorative elements in some of Nep Sidhu's tapestries, they now are. Here is a (deeply-entrenched and systemic) problem of contemporary Toronto art: cross-cultural interpretation. When one is not culturally competent regarding codes and protocols, even signifiers of other cultures, what can these works mean for all Torontonians? How do they communicate across the many cultures here? But maybe these are the fundamentally wrong questions to ask. As Édouard Glissant reminds us, each culture has a "right to opacity." But he also says, "Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components."<sup>1</sup> Here would be a Toronto condition Nep's works embody, a condition "contaminated" by weaving, a condition that reflects itself in the weave as a process not a product,

certainly not as a subject matter identifiable as cultural identity. Is it because Nep, in a happy coincidence, works with textiles and weaves tapestries, or because he has a Punjabi background, or is it because this is the undefined new way of composing art in Toronto?

If there is no key to understanding other cultures, neither is there a key to unlock the mystery and meaning of any of Nep's works. But maybe it is not that these works *mean*, or how they mean; rather, it is how they *resonate*. They signify by resonating. A key to Nep's work would be its tonal signature, its texture. Yes, in the sense of a musical key. This is what the warp and woof of the weave would compose: a composition, not a framework for subject matter. It would be no collection of components, analyzable internally. Its texture would be ambient, auditory.

This would account for, and make resonate, the titles Nep gives to, for instance, his Surrey Art Gallery exhibition (*Shadows in the Major Seventh*) or the commissioned tapestries in *Migrating the Margins (In the Melody of Sacrifice, Let Us Learn Your Chant and A Song for My Father, In The Key of My Mothers)*. They suggest an aural architecture as the

1

Édouard Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 190.



spiritual conveyance of his work: an *architexture* that “protects and exalts.”

Nep said as much about his collaboration with Shabazz Palaces musician Ishmael Butler, *SonicArchiTextile* (the collective title incorporating Nep’s three tapestries *Malcolm’s Smile* and Butler’s sound installation *Ecdysis*), commemorating Malcolm X: “Leveraging the sacred through unseen protocols, seeking truth by creating spaces that favor feeling over materiality, we have created a work that goes far beyond tribute. Rather, we have materialized the essence of transformational energy, and harnessed it.”<sup>2</sup>

Closer to home, he has commemorated his father in the tapestry *A Song for My Father, In The Key of My Mothers* by way as well of acknowledging his family’s creation of the Sher E Punjab Academy, a consciousness-raising boxing school for girls in his family’s home town of Chakar, Punjab. He honours his father’s ambition to plant thousands of trees around the school as well as his teaching the children

about nature and the virtues of care. But here, too, Nep gets at the essence. He has taken seven of his father’s favourite plant species and put them under the microscope. “I establish their basic rooted forms and have them grow around the ‘four portals of sacrifice’ [alluding to the sacrifices that form the homage of the tapestry *In the Melody of Sacrifice, Let Us Learn Your Chant*] in order to show a continuous present—that which begins again and again, not through any kind of copy or simulation, but rather as an understanding of divine systems.” The sacred is the opacity of all opacities; it cannot be disclosed. Disclosure here rather is of another order of abstraction. Transmission is genetic; the “root” incorporates code and message, seed and growth, stitch and thread. Rather than an outcome, the code/message passes on an inheritance, beginning again and again. Sacrifice would be coded within the genes, so to speak: it is what one receives as a family responsibility. Yet, all of this is not stated in Nep’s tapestry but transmitted decoratively within its “weave,” conveyed within the codes where

## 2

Nep Sidhu quoted in Negarra A. Kudumu, “Multimedia artist Nep Sidhu’s ‘Shadows in the Major Seventh’ at Surrey Art Gallery,” ART RADAR, <http://artradar-journal.com/2016/05/08/multimedia-artist-nep-sidhu-shadows-in-the-major-seventh-at-surrey-art-gallery/>.

culture resides, its floating signifiers integrated by the weave and resonating there.

Likewise, the tapestry *In the Melody of Sacrifice, Let Us Learn Your Chant* doesn't immediately show itself, reveal itself, because it presents itself to us in the exhibition first from its backside. What it does show is its architectural framework, its internal construction and how it holds itself together and rises up. Its comportment, in fact. An ethics could thus raise itself within the warp and woof of a tapestry and transmit a teaching. Weaving could convey an ethic, as it does here.

So, too, Nep's work with fabric, delineated and articulated in costumes, is an architecture enclosing and protecting the body. Sometimes Nep makes "ceremonial work wear" for his collaborators in the Black Constellation collective or the musicians in Shabazz Palaces. As Jordan Strom says, "these garments are less about costuming and more about the intrinsic and ceremonial aspects of incantation."<sup>3</sup> Incantation creates a third

space, sometimes shamanistic, at other times protective. (For Nep, the textual, the architectural, and the emotive open this third space.) Clothing carries this task to protect, and to ornament, too. If clothing creates a space of exaltation, ornament is the body's armouring.

In his constitution of cross-cultural adornment and armouring, Nep takes what is common to many traditions as passed on by visionaries and healers. He creates these hybrid costumes not as cultural appropriations but rather as cultural collaborations—relational resonances. For instance, he made the 2015–16 series *No Pigs in Paradise* with Tlingit/Unangax̄ artist Nicholas Galanin for Galanin's *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* exhibition at the Anchorage Museum of Alaska. The series was created in the belief that a greater understanding of the Feminine and Divine Cycle will lead to the restoration of societal harmony. These ornamented costumes bridge communion between First Nations and people of Indian descent. Nep sees *SHE in Light Form* as a "middle passage to take place

## 3

Nep Sidhu quoted in Jordan Strom, "Off the Bias: Nep Sidhu's Audio Textile Art," NEP SIDHU: SHADOWS IN THE MAJOR SEVENTH (Surrey: Surrey Art Gallery, 2017), 14.

between shamanistic protective symbols and veiling, to form a shared understanding and union between both communities.”

Cross-cultural collaboration invites the mixing of symbols and signifiers. In its combination of images of temple and teepee, the fabric panel descending the front of the white figure of *SHE in Light Form* refers to Chilkat weaving, while the crest on the back combines a *Tináa*, a Tlingit copper shield (a symbol of wealth and status achieved through gifting) with a design based on a traditional Sikh *Khanda*. Neither Nep, nor Galanin, who carved the cuffs and mask based on a traditional Tlingit warrior mask, appropriated the other’s culture but rather created a third space for their spiritual-aesthetic cooperation. Cross-cultural interpretation is undone in cross-cultural collaboration.

Describing the aesthetic mash-ups that appears in Nep’s *Paradise Sportif* series, Jordan Strom writes: “There are cotton and cured leatherette kurta pajamas with abstract shapes evocative of modernist painting, an emerald green satin jacket with vintage sari panelling, a basketball jersey with gold rope collaring and Ghanaian Kente cloth weaving, and a Rajasthani abhala bharat mirror-work embroidered motorcycle vest, among other designs.”<sup>4</sup>

In such a mash-up, the question arises of cultural appropriation but even when Nep works alone on pieces, he isn’t their only author. *Paradise Sportif* shares in the cultural imaginary of diverse design. This isn’t appropriation; it’s another form of cross-cultural interpretation. It is the commonplace connector—a shared ethical sensibility, for instance—that links Nep and his work to these other cultural forms and their significations. Nep integrates and differentiates in the third space of relation. Opacity and appropriation are the warp and woof of the weave of Nep’s art.

“Throughout the history of Sikhism, it is sacrifice that has been our greatest savior and example. Through sacrifice we have survived as a people, gained our knowledge of self, and retained our values towards that knowledge. As one of our supreme archetypes of sacrifice, Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Guru) had his four sons sacrifice themselves as living testaments to the universal tenets of brotherhood and sisterhood. I’m interested in investigating how sacrifice can be applied in learning—in the programs, curriculums, and surroundings—at the Sher E Punjab Academy, the boxing academy for children that my family helps to run with volunteers in Chakar, Punjab. This piece explores these various relationships with sacrifice and our dance with it through levitation, ceremony, and harmony.”

*Although my own springs turned to winter,  
I did not let wither the blossom of my people.  
In sacrificing each of my four sons...  
having protected the thousands of sons that  
would come.*

—Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in the jungles of  
Machhiwara, Punjab, Dec 7, 1705.

“This work is based on my father’s continued goal of planting thousands of trees of varying types of vegetation at the Sher E Punjab Academy. He is doing this to beautify this place, while also making the children of the Academy take ownership of care for the growing vegetation. As such, they further understand our values and harmony with nature. Here I have taken seven of his favorite species of plants and put them under a microscope: Mango, Jaman, Orange, Beri, Kikar, Tahli, and Neem. I establish their basic rooted forms and have them grow around the ‘four portals of sacrifice’ (alluding to the four sacrificed above) in order to show a continuous present—that which begins again and again, not through any kind of copy or simulation, but rather as an understanding of divine systems.”

These two works are part of a series Nep Sidhu created with Tligit/Unanga̓ artist Nicholas Galanin for Galanin's *Kill the Indian, Save the Man* exhibition at the Anchorage Museum of Alaska, as a response to missing and murdered women in Canada, Alaska, and India, in the belief that a greater understanding for the Feminine and Divine Cycle will lead to the restoration of societal harmony. The works bridge communion between First Nations and people of Indian descent. Sidhu sees *SHE in Light Form* as a "middle passage to take place between shamanistic protective symbols and veiling, to form a shared understanding and union between both communities."

The fabric panel descending the front of the figure refers to Chilkat weaving in its combination of images of a temple and teepee, while the crest on the back combines a *Tináa*, a Tlingit copper shield—a symbol of wealth and status achieved through gifting—with a design based on a traditional Sikh *Khanda*. Sidhu associates *SHE in Shadow Form* with the principles of his family's Sher E Punjab Academy, which aims to increase morale and instill values of pride and spirituality for girls in an environment of socioeconomic and societal challenge. In the tradition of boxing robes, this garment captures the girls' pride and power, while the embroidered text on the shield on the front discusses Sidhu's mother. Nicholas Galanin carved the cuffs and mask based on a traditional Tlingit warrior mask.

Pages 84, 96, 97  
Nep Sidhu, IN THE MELODY OF  
SACRIFICE, LET US LEARN YOUR  
CHANT, 2017

Page 91  
Nep Sidhu, A SONG FOR MY FATHER,  
IN THE KEY OF MY MOTHERS, 2017

Pages 92, 94  
Nep Sidhu with Nicholas Galanin, SHE  
IN SHADOW FORM, NO PIGS IN  
PARADISE, 2015–16

Pages 93, 95  
Nep Sidhu with Nicholas Galanin,  
SHE IN LIGHT FORM, NO PIGS IN  
PARADISE, 2015–16

























NEIGHBOURING  
ZONES:



GOING



FARTHER  
AFIELD

A significant component of *Migrating the Margins* took shape in common-places that surround the AGYU: in vitrines located on the exterior of the Accolade East Building where the gallery is located; around York University's suburban campus; and in our neighbourhood of Jane-Finch—in particular in and around Black Creek. These locales were not the “margins” of the exhibition. For that to be, we would have to consider the gallery the centre, which—in acknowledging art's interdependence and inseparability from the wider world in which we live—we obviously can't. With centres and peripheries set aside, three special public art commissions by Otherness, Farrah Miranda, and Sister Co-Resister were neither contained by the exhibition space nor conditioned by its discourses. Set free, the works were more processual than presentational. These three works, furthermore, anchored *Suburban Hospitality*—an ambulatory symposium that relayed some of the core concerns with which all the works in *Migrating the Margins* were contending: immigrant memory; dialogue with place-origins through alliances with and allegiances to mothers; traces of Afro-Caribbean and Indian diasporas; the perseverance of Black life and the recovery of forgotten Black histories in Toronto; paeans to working class immigrant life in the suburbs and their burgeoning aesthetics; Brown chic; spirituality and sacrifice, etc. The public works commissioned for *Migrating the Margins* simultaneously refracted these concerns, complicating concepts of belonging that such lines of inquiry—their own included—point toward, especially with regards to the history of Canadian colonialism and Indigenous-settler relations.

*Suburban Hospitality* put into practice forms of kinship that trespassed the borderlines of con/texts, locations, and cultures. If the works in the gallery constituted what we are calling an aesthetics of amalgamation, the three commissioned public works enacted it. This is to say that these artworks were operative more so than they were demonstrative. Each represented a methodological proposition: the artists worked the concepts of amalgamation, participation, and exchange as activist practices to register real consequences in the public sphere: to change the rights of migrant farm workers in Ontario, for instance, or to

unsettle guest-host relations in the context of belonging within a colonial framework. The public works by Otherness, Farrah Miranda, and Sister Co-Resister peripatetically engaged the viewer-participants of *Suburban Hospitality* in ways to establish *opaque alliances*: future oriented forms of solidarity that upheld difference to produce new and unforeseen kinship configurations. It is through their work that we might consider participatory art practice as a form of creolization.

All the public works in *Migrating the Margins* were produced collaboratively through mixed, poly-disciplinary means: Otherness is the collaboration between artist-pedagogue Pamila Matharu and designer-pedagogue Marilyn Fernandes; Farrah Miranda's project was created through her collaboration with migrant farmworkers from across Southern Ontario, a network of migrant justice organizers, and other artists; and Sister Co-Resister (formerly known as Bonerkill) is an intergenerational art collective that formed as an after-school club to discuss and respond to systemic oppression perpetuated by the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum (and thus the Toronto District School Board) and embedded in aspects of the Toronto art community, which these young feminists are also navigating.

Different from the *aesthetic* mixing taking place in the gallery, the three public works made mixing a means toward different and perhaps disruptive ends. The aesthetics of amalgamation was constituted through social practice that brought together individuals and groups with no perceived natural affinity into new kinds of proximities and thus relations. The three public works conceived hospitality as an errant practice rather than a rooted, identity-based concept. This opened up the possibility of hosting other artists, projects, and perspectives within the framework of *Migrating the Margins* as a meta-methodology of suburban hospitality itself and thus as a performative reflection on the ways in which decades of immigration have informed the common-place of the suburban condition. Syrus Marcus Ware and Gloria Swain were both invited to create new works at the Stong farmhouse on campus in this context: *A Long Table* and *Rememory*.

# FREE FARMS FOR THE MILLION



# CANADA

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BRANDON,  
MANITOBA, CANADA

EXPERIMENTAL FARM,  
INDIAN HEAD,  
NORTH WEST TERRITORIES

RED RIVER VALLEY,  
Saskatchewan Valley

THE GREAT FERTILE PLAINS  
and British Columbia

LARGE AREAS SUITABLE TO GRAZE OR CATTLE

VAST MINERAL RICHES  
GOLD, SILVER, IRON, COPPER, SALT,  
PETROLEUM, ETC., ETC.  
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LARGE AREAS SUITABLE FOR GRAZING & CATTLE  
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## DOMINION CANADA

EXPERIMENTAL FARMS,  
BRANDON,  
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EXPERIMENTAL FARMS,  
INDIAN HEAD,  
NORTH-WEST TERRITORIES.

RED RIVER VALLEY,  
Saskatchewan Valley.

THE GREAT FERTILE PLAINS  
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OTHERNESS  
(PAMILA MATHARU + MARILYN FERNANDES)

TAKING A PAGE...

How in 2018 might we reconcile an 1893 poster promising free acreage to lure British citizens to Canada in order to settle on stolen Indigenous land? Especially when this poster, produced by the Canadian Government, was reproduced for decades in curriculum-based social science textbooks to illustrate the historical time-lines of Canada's celebrated multicultural origins? In *Taking a Page...*, Otherness appropriates the 1893 poster *Free Farms for the Million*, advertising said (presumed empty) land, and under the title of promiser and location, "Dominion of Canada," overlays an accusatory text: respectively, (1) *Who's Home on Native Land*; (2) *Is Stolen*; (3) *Our Violence Has Consequences*.

Otherness uses an updated form of advertising—the lightbox—to détourne a historical document, transcoding the conventions of advertising and the rhetoric of multiculturalism and, in the process, indicting education as a primary tool of colonial storytelling. (*Taking a Page...* was presented in AGYU's three exterior vitrines located along a colonnade, where thousands of students, faculty, and staff pass by daily en route to their respective teaching and learning duties at York University.) To take a page from what we said elsewhere, a palimpsest inscribes a new text over an older one that is erased but not completely obliterated: the old text still partially shows through. For Otherness, the palimpsest can be a decolonizing tactic when *we* can see through its registers and witness what remains of its outmoded discourse. As composite images with mixed messages, *Taking a Page...* thus operates as a doubly-directed palimpsest that provides passersby with a potential process of re-inscription: How can we think about the future when we don't even know our past? How might we understand, or not, the poster's propaganda when presented anew today?

Both members of the Otherness collective teach within Toronto's public school system and must contend with outdated social science text books such as *The People We Are: Canada's Multicultural Society* (Gage, 1980) where they first found *Free Farms for the Million*. For Otherness, the re-presentation of this "found text" is a form of critical engagement with what Lenape and Potawatami educational scholar Dr. Susan D. Dion calls the condition of "the perfect stranger." The perfect stranger is a quintessential settler position: a person—and for Dion as an educational scholar, a teacher—who forthrightly believes that Indigenous "issues" are solely the business of Indigenous Peoples and their relationship with the Canadian Government. The perfect stranger is a condition that allows teachers, and by implication other Canadians, to "be off the hook" when it comes to thinking about Indigenous issues, people, or relations. *Taking a Page...* was Otherness's way of collectively taking up Dion's charge in the public space of a pedagogical institution—another palimpsestic intervention. Interestingly, over the course of the exhibition, the vitrines became a backdrop for student activists, who put up their own posters (overtop Otherness's artwork!) advertising campus events intended to unsettle exactly what *Taking a Page...* set out to set up. Lateral communications abound.









#SPEAK





*The weather was  
difficult, I needed  
warmth like a person  
needs clothes*

*I produce the best quality of  
grapes for other local wineries.  
I have to subsidize my  
family with children, parents.  
Separating myself from them  
for a long time to work.*









## FARRAH-MARIE MIRANDA

## SPEAKING FRUIT

“I wanted to create a space for workers to join in the artistic process. Migrant workers can be artists too. Many already are.”  
—Farrah-Marie Miranda, Artist and Community Organizer

“La uva nos da amor a trabajarla.”  
*As we work with the grapes, the grapes transmit love.*

“Las uvas es como si fuera familia sin fronteras.  
Que lindo seria si así fuéramos toda la humanidad.”  
*The grapes have become my borderless family.*  
*How beautiful it would be if all humanity was like this.*

“When I go out in the morning, the cucumber is a just a baby. By the end of the day it is ready to be picked. They pump the vegetables with chemicals that make us sick. They make you sick too. I care about my health and about the health of the people who eat what we grow. Why do you think so many people have cancer?”

“Being part of this project makes me feel big. I feel so big.”  
—Migrant Farm Worker project participants

“All of their humanity—the rest of their humanity—is erased, including who they are as whole people.... Many of them are indeed artists, singers; they write beautiful poetry.”  
—Evelyn Encalada Grez, Activist, Justice for Migrant Farm Workers

When social justice activists, artists, researchers, and migrant farmworkers convene under the auspices of a public artwork, we have a special instance of lateral communication enacted through social practice. For Farrah-Marie Miranda, *Speaking Fruit* was conceived as a platform for critical dialogue “among migrant workers, the general public, artists, community workers, and researchers on the labour conditions in which local produce is cultivated in Ontario.” *Speaking*



*Fruit* was designed to collectively generate ideas “regarding how immigration and labour policies might be changed to reduce the precarity and exploitation of temporary foreign workers” and as a means “to share knowledge in a multi-directional fashion by drawing on the skills of migrant farmworkers, academic researchers, and community-based artists.” All this was a process—of meetings, community consultation sessions, workshops, and more—intended to “draw the general public into a more focused discussion on migrant justice issues.” That is, to bring the public into an artwork as a social justice practice.

*Speaking Fruit* was also an opportunity to grow with baby cucumbers, live alongside grapes, and poetically express a sense of collectivity modelled on the family farm structure, as if its family knew no borders. But this project was not simply speaking about fruit. The fruit spoke, too. Through its mobile dissemination structure—a trailer turned into a fruit stand—people heard what the fruit, and by implication its caretakers, had to say about issues at stake in this project.

Beginning with a single question posed to migrant farmworkers in Southern Ontario, *Speaking Fruit* asked: “If the fruits you grow and pick could speak from dinner tables, refrigerators, and grocery aisles, what would you want them to say?” From this single question a polyphony of responses provided the initial framework and direction of the project. Even Ontario produce was given a voice, ventriloquizing the messages migrant farm workers wanted to communicate directly to consumers, which were screen-printed on the packaging of local produce given out at the fruit stand. Vegetables were a prompt for better farming practices. Fruit was a conduit through which to explore the often-unacknowledged toil of precarious labour. Art was a tool to cultivate land-based encounters.

What Farrah calls multi-directional knowledge-building is also a form of translation, though not necessarily as a one-to-one system of equivalents. Or at least it seemed so at first. What was “bought and sold” here was a different form of exchange. *Speaking Fruit* would require a careful negotiation between things that presented themselves as unequal:

migrant farmworkers and artists, for instance, or fruit and labour precarity. Through the creative processes of *Speaking Fruit*, these negotiations became reconciliations: migrant farmworkers are in fact artists, their creative output showcased in the fruit-stand-cum-mobile-art-gallery that travelled across Southern Ontario (and beyond) to farmers markets, festivals, demonstrations, and more. Yet the ways in which the workers had to hide their project participation from farm landowners, or remain anonymous for fear they would not be permitted back into Canada for next year's harvesting, proved that Canada's immigration policy cultivates labour precarity.

We might consider *Speaking Fruit's* negotiations as a form of creative creolization that diversifies social processes and artistic methodologies, the two becoming one through this project. Adopting strategies from social movement activism and foregrounding the principles of mutual aid, relationship-building, and the co-creation of knowledge were means and a methodology for creating a hybrid form of public art. Farrah's multi-staged project was a form of storytelling that combined oral, written, and visual components as much as it was a temporal composition that persisted over its year-long commitment to intervene in the discourse (and practicalities) of migration and food security in order to break the isolation faced by migrant workers in Ontario. The screen-printed messages distributed through the fruit stand were accompanied by a *#hashtag* so consumers could respond. Yielding digital dialogue between migrant farmworkers and produce consumers in Southern Ontario, *Speaking Fruit* forged new and innovative models for social research and experiential learning. Visitors to the stand could also experience a virtual reality film that transported them onto a farm in Leamington, Ontario, to watch land-based dances choreographed and performed by the workers.

*Speaking Fruit* strategically considered how the various participants and partners in this project—and by extension the wider socio-political context of migrant farm work as a labour paradigm (which includes sellers and consumers)—could sit alongside one another, move with each other, and think differently together. From September to December 2017, its

fruit stand was stationed on York University's campus on the terrace adjacent to the Native Species Garden outside the front doors of the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES). From time to time, it migrated to other places on and off campus: to the Black Creek Community Farm for *Suburban Hospitality*, for instance, where Farrah choreographed a day-long event that brought migrant farmworkers and Indigenous food producers (Six Nations, Our Sustenance) together with artists (Ruben Esguerra, Heryka Miranda, Moyo, Kuda) and Jane-Finch-based community organizers (Promoting Economic Action and Community Health (PEACH), Black Creek Food Justice Network). Adrienne Lickers, the coordinator of Our Sustenance, talked about the connections between food, land, and community and the ways that linking them can change lives; Evelyn Encalada Grez, organizer and co-founder of Justice for Migrant Workers, led a participatory discussion on re-envisioning and humanizing our food system so to expand our capacity to re-envision ethical food justice for all; and Gabriel Allahdua from Justice for Migrant Workers and the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change discussed their efforts to build solidarity with migrant farmworkers and to share their understandings of the land and their relation to it. We danced, ate, and further built the network of *opaque alliances* for future social justice work.

Over the course of *Migrating the Margins*, *Speaking Fruit* also performed as an experiential learning hub and co-curricular platform for FES professor Lisa Myers' new course, "Food, Land, and Culture." In partnership with the social justice student group Regenesi and local Jane-Finch based organizations the Afri-Can Food Basket and PEACH, *Speaking Fruit* engaged York University Farmers' market (YUM) with the aim of establishing long-lasting connections between the Black Creek Community Farm and YUM. From the micro to the macro, Farrah's work was a future-oriented attempt at re-centring the struggle for racial equity within calls for food security and provided opportunities for the various stakeholders to enact change vis-à-vis the relationships built through *Speaking Fruit*.























## SISTER CO-RESISTER

### WALKING SALON

According to the collective, co-resisting is a counter-hegemonic strategy to actively engage in liberation and solidarity consciousness-building for the future forward. Changing their name from Bonerkill to Sister Co-Resister established a new kind of commitment for this intergenerational collective of feminist resisters. (Bonerkill was retired as a name precisely because of critique coming from trans and other non-conforming communities.) The salon was the common format they used to get feedback for their own in-process works (artworks, social justice work, etc.), generate new ideas, and, importantly, be challenged by the diverse and often politicized perspectives of fellow collective members and the audiences that were drawn to their events. For *Migrating the Margins*, Sister Co-Resister chose to re-think their salon format and instead of presenting their ideas for collective discussion, they opted for a diverse range of invitees to discuss together the in-process work of settler-colonial relations, in particular forms of Black-Indigenous solidarity.

Sister Co-Resister's discursive walking salon focused on walking side-by-side with Indigenous, 2-spirit, and trans lives, acknowledging that every step we take together is political. As an act of Indigenous sovereignty—in relation to land, culture, and people—the walking salon also enacted the double function of migrating the physical margins of York University to include discussions regarding treaty demarcations on campus and point out buried (and largely forgotten) Indigenous settlements that were literally beneath our feet. We began the journey with a collective reading of Dr. Lynn Gehl's *Ally Bill of Responsibilities* that set the tone for the way in which ally-ship was to be addressed and put into practice for the rest of our walk together. Number six was particularly pressed upon:

[Responsible Allies a]re aware of and understand the larger oppressive power structures that serve to hold certain groups and people down. One way to do this is to draw parallels through critically reflecting on their own experiences with oppressive



power structures. Reflecting on their subjectivity in this way, they ensure critical thought or what others call objectivity. In taking this approach, these parallels will serve to ensure that non-Indigenous allies are not perpetuating the oppression.

On our two-and-a-half hour walk, we discussed concepts of belonging, what it means to deconstruct the proprietary understanding of land, and found ways to question Canada's immigrant paradigm and treaty partnership identity in both concrete and metaphorical terms: for instance, by analyzing various native and invasive plant species we encountered on our walk. Indigenous social thinkers Nettie Lambert, Janet Csontos, and Lisa Myers guided the tour, though it was our collective responsibility to participate in what it means to walk politically on land that has been for so long presented as de-political.





















**Pages 102–105**  
**Otherness (Marilyn Fernandes and**  
**Pamila Matharu), TAKING A PAGE...,**  
**2017**

**Pages 108–113**  
**Farrah-Marie Miranda, SPEAKING**  
**FRUIT, 2017**

**Pages 118–123**  
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**Pages 126–128**  
**Syrus Marcus Ware, THE LONG**  
**TABLE, 2017**

**Page 129–131**  
**Gloria Swain, REMEMORY, 2017**



WHY WE  
ARE  
GLISSANTIAN



...AND HOW



TORONTO IS,  
TOO

Evolving cultures infer Relation, the overstepping that grounds their unity-diversity.

— Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

When we were beginning to think about this exhibition, coincidentally, we were also reading Martiniquan writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation*. We were struck by the relevancy of what he had to say to conditions in Toronto, though this book originally was published in French in France in 1990 and was about the Caribbean. As so often happens in writing or thinking, something fortuitously appears at the right moment to move you along. Out of the blue, here was justification for the intuitions we had about something new happening in Toronto's suburbs. If we wanted a manifesto, here it was. If we wanted a polemic, here were the tools. But we wanted neither. We wanted Glissant as a guide, but we also wanted to say proudly, *Voilà, M. Glissant, Toronto is the fulfillment of your thesis!*

And it is. But we are on our own figuring it out.

Of course, Glissant was not writing about Toronto. He was talking about the diasporic situation of the Caribbean as enabling the creole conditions of an evolving culture. Remarkably, though, he saw this as extending beyond the Caribbean crucible as an evolving world condition: *le tout-monde*.<sup>1</sup> The difference between the Caribbean and Toronto is that the diaspora resulting in the Caribbean was the effect of trafficking in slavery while that in Toronto is the result of immigration policy. But if the Caribbean failed to achieve Glissant's hopes (and Glissant's

1

"Without necessarily inferring any advantage whatsoever to their situation, the reality of archipelagos in the Caribbean or the Pacific provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation. What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in [Victor] Segalen's sense), a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry."

Édouard Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 33–34.

homeland Martinique in particular, remaining as it is an overseas department of France) because, on one hand, of destructive global economic forces and, on the other, partly because, Glissant among others would say, of its continuing capture by the essentializing nationalist discourse of its colonial independence (necessary though it was), Toronto, we find, is that evolving culture Glissant foresaw.

Toronto more creole than the Caribbean? No! But there are important creole conditions in the making here. And they precisely achieve what Glissant outlined almost thirty years ago. (It's a matter of letting that word "creole" embody Glissant's thought.) We just don't think of Toronto as creole. Policy alone didn't make it so. And not one privileged diasporic group, either. It is a product of "transversality": the result of what Glissant in 1980 called a "cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence."<sup>2</sup> This "cross-cultural poetics" is an "organized manifestation of Diversity."<sup>3</sup> By 1990, Glissant renamed it a "poetics of Relation." Toronto's transversality, its known diversity, is a result of the unforeseen communication and indeterminate combination of its suburban cultures. If Glissant were alive today, he would identify this process here as creolization: "The poetics of creolization is the same as a cross-cultural poetics."<sup>4</sup>

We were attracted to, seduced by, you might say, Glissant's poetics as a form of *imagining* Toronto's future. So when he wrote, "The poet's word leads from periphery to periphery, and, yes, it reproduces the track of circular nomadism; that is, it makes every periphery into a center; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery,"<sup>5</sup> we said, isn't Glissant describing the conditions of Toronto's suburbs? But it is not merely the fact of a poet speaking; the poetics of Relation

2

Édouard Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 98.

3

Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, 100.

4

Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, 142.

5

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 29.

obliges us to give-on-and-with the diversifying variations of an evolving totality. Any “non-projectile imaginary construct,”<sup>6</sup> such as a work of art, is a variable singularity within a diversifying totality that is always open to change through its relation with an Other, but in ways that cannot be anticipated or determined. We made this exhibition in the belief that Toronto suburban artists were products of, while at the same time realizing, these new conditions.

These two notions—of peripheral circulation and a diversifying totality—are conditioned on movement and on the presumption that movement leads to mixing and mixing leads to more entangling motion. These intersecting movements (periphery–totality) bring about ever-more-complex mixes following the logic of diversifying difference—difference differing from itself in an ongoing motion: a system of variables within an “open totality.”<sup>7</sup> The suburbs and suburban artists are forever fated to be entangled in difference, where rooted identities are a thing of the past.

“...Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”<sup>8</sup> What more beautiful thought than this—the poetics of Relation, which *we*, as Torontonians, are participating in, living through, and opening ourselves collectively to a diversifying totality—could there be? The suburbs have made this possible.<sup>9</sup>

6

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 35.

7

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 171.

8

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 11.

9

For point of comparison to our analysis in “An Aesthetics of Amalgamation?” of what this aesthetics might look like, here is what Glissant says about the poetics of Relation as he saw it manifested in writing: “Throughout this book I return again and again to what I have so long considered the main themes of such a poetics: the dialectics between the oral and the written, the thought of multilingualism, the balance between the present moment and duration, the questioning of literary genres, the power of the baroque, the nonprojectile imaginary construct. But even this constant repetition is sufficient evidence that such a poetics never culminates in some qualitative absolute.” Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 35.







AN  
AESTHETICS



OF



AMALGAMATION

?

## 1.

## THE COMMON-PLACE

The common-place...allows us to compose with contraries and incite them toward reconciliation.

— Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Toute-Monde*

Could artistic practice here, in Toronto, be a potential common-place? Could diasporic culture constitute a special kind of relation? And, would the ensuing aesthetic innovations—Toronto’s future visual culture—be most evident in that assembler of difference, *the suburbs*? In the context of artistic production, at least, might there arise out of these processes new potentials for mutually constitutive poetics? A cross-cultural poetics? Perhaps. Or, since we are most interested in the specificities of this place, we ask: Toronto, an aesthetics of amalgamation?

Saved from the banal by its hyphen, the “common-place” is something shared across distance—cultural affinities that are not on the order of commodities or corporate brands, such as those disseminated through fashion and the mass media. Rather, Édouard Glissant, whose term, “*lieux-communs*” we adopt, thought of the common-place not as a universalizing force but as a connector. He wrote that the common-place is “a place where a thought about the world encounters a thought about the world.”<sup>1</sup> Here and there, we expect to find a peripatetically shared poetic that crosses multiple contexts, locations, cultures, and times—yet without erasing difference. We think of Toronto as a common-place manifesting relation.

Two decades after the amalgamation of the City of Toronto, we are now witnessing the emergence of the common-place relation of Toronto’s multi-local and plural-cultural poetics. And this is key: the amalgamation of Toronto presents itself as a special kind of compositional

1

Édouard Glissant, *TRAITÉ DU TOUTE-MONDE* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 161.



arrangement, one that is not only in-forming Toronto's cultural picture but expanding the artistic tools, references, and traditions that the city's cultural milieu now has to express itself. Amalgamation has forced Torontonians to look at themselves differently. No longer the outer limits beyond the pale of Toronto but embedded within its boundary (the outside of the inside), the "peripheries" now define the city's cultural content—the style, memory, and address of the whole city. Amalgamation is a special kind of arrangement that gives rise to innovation and difference.

In Toronto's re-arrangement, the suburbs initially might be considered common-places that differ from the downtown. Not that this automatically relegates them together because of what they stigmatically seem to share: to use the social language of governments, "priority neighbourhoods" (one time, "underprivileged" and now relabeled "strong neighbourhoods"). Though similarly formed through waves of immigration and similarly suffering from economic precarity and lack of public transit, proper public space, and social resources, etc., what is common to them can still be opaque. Downtown certainly can't necessarily know everything about Scarborough, but Scarborough, too, cannot know everything about Jane-Finch—they can't be mapped onto each other and thus be read the same. That's not what makes them common-places. Their evolving culture, however, does. So we ask: Can we learn something about Toronto's future from the peripheral relations ensuing from amalgamation, in which the suburbs now lead?<sup>2</sup>

## 2

*Give-on-and-with:* Was this something we learned unconsciously from working with our Jane-Finch neighbourhood spoken-word poets? After a while, they asked us to create programs that would link them to young poets in other neighbourhoods, such as Regent Park or Scarborough. Though Toronto was amalgamated, the old isolation between the original boroughs continued to exist and young people did not cross the borderlines between the suburbs, failing to recognize, yet anticipating in their desires, the common-place. But thinking back and across disciplines, wasn't spoken word a precursor of what we are talking about? Hadn't the poets already rejected the monolingualistic presumption—or imperialism—of writing, a transcendent representative of the centre, over the overlooked and under-regarded oral culture of their neighbourhoods, analogous in their suburbs to what Glissant related of the power of the "words of griots and storytellers washed up on the edges of large cities."

Édouard Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 103.



## 2.

*LATERAL COMMUNICATION*

Our exhibition was small in terms of the number of artists but they filled the gallery with authority—monumentally, in fact. Yet, in an exhibition without a theme, could they collectively tell us something different about the cultural conditions and artistic production here in Toronto? Could such a small statistical sample as this speak to what collectively suburban artists were speaking about? And how they were doing it? The difference doesn't depend at all upon subject matter—although we unexpectedly found curious connections. It doesn't depend completely on techniques and practices either. In the entangled world of contemporary art, it's hard not to share working practices. The difference depends first on certain outlooks and procedures of understanding and affiliation.

Locating the common-place is one such procedure and outlook. Another is lateral communication. Lateral communication is about locating common-places and acting within and between them.

In the peripheries of the suburbs, dialogue is circular; it takes place along peripheral circuits that do not correlate to, or rather correspond with, the centre. It does not bend back to the centre in terms of answering to a message received from there (in a commanding, one-way linear transmission, response actually only ever is the order fulfilled, that is, obeyed: yes sir!). Rather in its communication, the periphery gives-on-and-with its neighbours, to use Glissant's expression. Through its sideways referrals, the suburbs' appositional aesthetic is counter-filiative, or perhaps rather apo-filiative, in that it does not merely counter but steps away or aside. The affiliations it chooses are also what its works add onto. Artists and works find their sources and references in what

**2 (cont'd)**

The majority of these poets have one foot in another land, culture, or language. Their audience, too, shares their status as both Torontonians and as immigrants—having come predominantly from parts of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. As a result, a sense of non-belonging, "in-between-ness," or duality is often expressed and performed, and the poets are ready to give-on-and with their compatriots beyond the boundaries of distance that seem to separate them.

are beside and around them, not given to them by a discourse, especially one that already comes from elsewhere. Their process is appositionive in that it places things side-by-side but also finds them side-by-side in the peripheries. It combines the side-by-side (already a potential composite) in a new mixture as an ongoing set of variations—and from the point of view that the “point-of-view” is, as well, always moving on, peripherally expanding, aggregating itself anew.<sup>3</sup>

Unexpected consequences follow that redefine the permissions and possibilities of art that suburban artists fully take advantage of. In the suburbs, the artist is a sideways transmitter rather than a receiver of messages from a centre. The sender-receiver model demands a clear channel of communication and an unambiguous content. It requires transparency to function properly. What cannot be seen head on but moves sideways, as in sideways transmission, is opaque. That is, it is obscured from the point of view of the centre. Communication happens in the suburbs, but not back to the centre—or according to the centre’s model of transparency. So if this model is abandoned or set aside, what are the consequences for its messages? It is not just the conveyance of contents that is put into question; it is the code itself. It’s not that we ever escape from dominant codes, or so we were told by poststructuralists from Barthes to Derrida (and so we fully believed), but art should no longer be restricted solely to borrowing the resources of dominant codes in order to subvert them. In their own centric obsessions, postcolonialist theorists still tell artists so, instructing what discourses are permitted, even if only by implication. Talking back to the centre means, well, that you are still only talking to the centre—even if your discourse is about critical disruption, ideological critique, deconstruction, appropriation, subversive inhabitation, or parodic mimicry. Such discourses can’t be done away with altogether, but delinking from them, some say, is the beginning of decolonial art. (Centric is Euro-centric.) It’s not just that “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” as

## 3

We take inspiration from the side-by-side restaurants, interspersed between other shops, of the suburban mall at 4800–4810 Sheppard East in Scarborough: the Silver Spoon (Pakistani, Indian), Babu (Indian), Dumplings Garden (Chinese), Paan Darbaar (Indian, Pakistani), Ten-Ichi (Japanese), Mona’s Roti (Trinidadian), Spicy Garden (Hakka Chinese), Hyderabad Palace (Indian), and Yuan Yuan (Chinese).



Audre Lorde wrote; another house is being built anew, elsewhere, with new materials and new tools. Welcome to the suburbs.

So the choice in Toronto no longer is that between an identity art based on the politics of cultural identity and a modernist-derived post-conceptualism free from such questions, that is, each deriving respectively from a value-laden and a, supposedly, value-free tradition. Who is to say what path a suburban artist can choose. But the side-ways-referring-giving-on-and-with of suburban art practices opens (onto) new territory.

While we didn't assemble *Migrating the Margins* as a means to draw comparisons between artists working from the so-called peripheries (be they cultural or geographical), intuitively we knew that similarities would arise. And they did, despite the fact that we were not working from a theme and almost all of the work was commissioned for the exhibition, which would preclude any such arrangement. How could we know, if not by feeling something at the interstices of the common-place of these artists' lived experience in Toronto? Yet, the connections revealed themselves over time—every time, in fact, that we would visit the exhibition or give a tour of it to others.<sup>4</sup> New vocabularies started to arise. These commonalities are kinships—aesthetic common-places, even. Connections, however, are made by way of repetition, by artistic process, not by the revealed value of any particular content.

Here are some of our observations. They are not conclusions. As Glissant has said about creolization, we are working with “variables that we have to imagine as much as define.” We put our faith in this process of imagining as much as defining, “because what it relates, in reality, proceeds from no absolute, it proves to be the totality of relatives, put in touch and told.”<sup>5</sup>

4

Themes arose such as: the influence of the mother culture (not the motherland, but the mother herself) in the work of Erika and Nep, but also we realized in other works not in the exhibition by Tau and Anique; the notion of (ornamental or embellished) protection and armouring in the figures of Anique and Nep, and obliquely in Tau's cacti; etc.

5

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 34, 28.



## 3.

## A NEW WEAVE

Some of these observations derive from the look and subject matter of the art, some from its techniques and practices, while others touch upon its operational concepts. If at times it appears difficult to keep these levels separate, frankly, it is because we are at the beginning of understanding the consequences of this work, which, as well, necessarily is still evolving.

*“Discourse” no longer is determined by the downtown art community*—which also means that it is not necessarily an *art* discourse that is conveyed here. It is significant that the majority of artists in this exhibition have not received art school training, though they may take up various art strategies in their work. Being relieved of the expectations of fulfilling normative discourses automatically opens up new territories of expression. This situation is analogous to Glissant’s notion of a “non-essentialist aesthetic, linked to what I call the emergence of orality: not to the extent that the latter dominates the audio-visual but because it summarizes and emphasizes the gesture and the speech of new peoples.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to reduce this exhibition’s work to the category of the oral but to suggest that its deviations from authorizing discourses fulfill Glissant’s condition of orality as “the organized manifestation of Diversity.”<sup>7</sup> The artwork here is resistant to writing insofar as we are mindful of its right to opacity.

## 6

“The aesthetic we have come up with is that of a nonuniversalizing diversity, the kind that seemed to me to emerge from global relations ever since the peoples of the world have realized and demanded the right to express themselves. A non-essentialist aesthetic, linked to what I call the emergence of orality: not to the extent that the latter dominates the audio-visual but because it summarizes and emphasizes the gesture and the speech of new peoples.”

Édouard Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 253.

## 7

“The transition from the written to the oral. I am not far from believing that the written is the universalizing influence of Sameness, whereas the oral would be the organized manifestation of Diversity.”

Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, 100.

Beyond their specific cultural identities, the artists are involved in *new modalities of storytelling* that convey new stories in ways that combine oral, written, and visual components. These tell of their lived experiences as divided as they are, staged between cultures, and as ambiguous and ambivalent might be their allegiances. Sometimes the telling verges on the ceremonial—or becomes ceremony by other means, new ceremonies and celebrations, in fact. The “sonorous” weaves of Nep’s tapestries (songs and melodies he calls them) are such cases as they are new modes of celebrating both culture and family, and family within culture. Sometimes we don’t even know that such works are stories, but history (and sometimes trauma) slips through to make them so. In *arming by clara*, Anique tells a story not of a time and place, but *between* two times and two places, a conjoined time-space where haunting persists and sometimes protects. This is not the story of a haunting; the haunting is the means and medium of the story—as what can only be told through (between) what elides and overlaps in one place and reverberates there, while signifying two different places and times. The tale is told *through* the storyteller but by means of its material medium, itself a medium channelling storytelling.

Similarly, the multiple, more than two times and two places of Erika’s work weave diverse media to ambivalently entangle mother and daughter, here and “back home,” religion and nature, and the rooted and the dislocated. At the same time, the artist’s detached, displacing hands disperse what seemingly ought to belong together, but always is a brought-together that then becomes an ambiguous letting-go. Nothing can be allocated in these histories or stabilized in identities. There is no allocation without collocation, no belonging without its ambivalent opposite. Here lies a tale, and it is actively being told by Erika unsheafed in the dispersed storybook of this collective work.

In some of this work *poor or craft materials and techniques are elevated*, the raising of which is also a value operation since these works celebrate immigrant culture and life in the suburbs. Rajni’s laundry drying racks are suburban working-class signifiers transformed into a superhero. The stuff of cheap housing, Anique’s corrugated zinc literally is elevated and



socialized in a mock communal procession of Trinidadian carnival. In Nep's tapestries, weaving conveys homage and ceremony. And while they seem to have no cultural denotation or connotation, Tau's non-signifying, brute raw materials only seem to indicate the degraded history of their waste and decay; yet their material history as residue is raised up into portraits. In all, it is the process that signifies, not necessarily the end product.

*Cultural referents are no longer traditionally conceived as subject matter.*

Instead, in some of these works decorative elements rather are cultural signifiers where code and use diverge. Think of Nep's use of Sikh "kir-pans," "karas," and "beards" in his tapestries' hanging apparatus. Signifiers slide, detached from their original cultural signifieds, and link up in new cultural mashups. Tradition and innovation align in a technical medium that can be old or new. Assimilated into pop milieus, affiliations do not demean dignified traditions but find their shared sacred zones anew: for instance, various cultures' rituals of protection collect in the common-place of Nep's hybrid ceremonial outfits.

*Instead of recoding dominant discourses, these works transcend traditional disciplines and media.* We are thinking of transcoding in the sense of conversion of one encoding into another, of translating an old format into a new one that works in contemporary circumstances. Nep's tapestries are such works. But in general, and in all the artists' works, we can conceive of the weave as a common process and fluid medium that temporally incorporates, in its back-and-forth iterations of its woof and warp: the foldings of history, the temporal displacements of diasporas, and the overlappings of traditions and techniques.

As a temporal composition, Erika's video *Studies for gardens* (each form is the fixed snapshot of a process) is a weave-in-process, where the artist composes, de-composes, and re-composes collage elements that are forever unfixed in time. Like a mise-en-abyme, the video itself is housed within the larger, static weave of a wall of one hundred collages [*Studies for gardens* (a mixture between concept and discipline)], but its placement there only works to unsettle the grid, compelling us now to conceive each

individual collage as a temporary transit of form, not fixed in it. Temporality points out the temporariness of things, of their locatedness in the here and now. As implicated as Erika is in the back-and-forth weave of her mother's story of "back home," there is no getting back to the garden, to fixed origins—and the artist, in the meditative, repetitive flow of her work (religion by secular means?), seems okay with this.

Between old and new, in this transcoding process there is no generation loss, only generation gain, if you allow us this pun! New generations of users, i.e., artists, "update" and translate their traditions by linking themselves in new ways to their biographical, genetic, or ethnic histories, but doing so they always weave themselves into new forms of contemporary association, affiliating themselves to other cultural forms, altogether becoming amalgamated otherwise in the ensuing mix by translating themselves forward. Implication is also complication. Implication in one's own history equally is a complication in another's. Here we must now also think of transcoding as a general translation process that is all about locating the common-place, weaving what is common together, weaving the common-place.

Temporality is a clue that the weave is not just a technique and weaving not just a medium. (And that it is not just about one artist who happens to employ the practice.) Neither only technique nor thematic, "weaving" is an operational concept that discloses itself differently in the processes of these works. We suspect that the weave is related to the palimpsest in this respect—that is, if we think of the palimpsest as a medium, too, but also in the sense of it being mediumistic, capable of registering haunting as well as being over-written.







#### 4. REGISTERS

So here we have the beginning of some of the operational concepts employed by these artists/works: *weave*, *palimpsest*, *transcoding*, *translation*. Each operation is a communication between two or more things, or brings two or more things together, or transforms two things into a third: all translational, transformational, or hybrid. (It's important to say "two or more" so we don't fall into a binary trap of posing dichotomies or oppositions: any hybrid outcome is multi-accentuated.) Strikingly, these operations are all temporal processes, too, and we must constantly be aware of how the shuttle of time functions to link disjunctive histories, temporalities, and places in these works. The *temporal* then is one more category, one more operation, as invisible as it seems, seemingly more medium than operation. To these we add, on the one hand, a *double-directedness* to the works, and, on the other, their performance of a *double dialogue*, the two being related but perhaps occupying separate conceptual categories. All the operations already listed perform in this doubly-directed manner, too. As such, categories interact and interconnect in any one work, as covert or obvious or ambivalently expressed they might be at any one moment.

#### **Palimpsest**

A *palimpsest* both registers and shows through. It inscribes a new text over an older one that is erased but not completely obliterated, merely elided: the old text still partially shows through. A palimpsest, thus, is automatically doubly-directed in terms of what comes from outside it (inscribing on) and what is internal to it (showing through). Strangely, it assumes both active and passive modes, its surface marking a temporal difference, too: the present of inscription, the elided past. Like the notion of the weave, the concept of the palimpsest is adaptable to many uses, of which we outline a few here.

In many ways, the palimpsest is a metaphor for the overwriting of identity. One can see how useful the notion of the palimpsest is for letting

ethnic or family histories, traditions, even memories of backgrounds growing up in the suburbs, show through in a non-determinist way, that is, not necessarily as overt subject matter, but materially subtended, material on which the sliding of the signifier always works its effect. The palimpsest is not a subject, it is always material.

But that doesn't mean it doesn't act between two things, registering both while transitioning within a single substance, even something immaterial. A case in point, the palimpsest is translational in the traditional sense of one language resting within another, but it is also an "interlanguage" as we saw analogously rendered in Rajni's mural *3 Figures*, where the "mother tongue" lets itself be known in another, current language or medium.

The palimpsest shows itself to be something temporal—or shows itself sometimes only temporally. While in her collage video Erika always starts again from zero, from a seemingly blank slate, the history of the forms, or our memory of their arrangements, persist throughout. The video is a multilayered palimpsest existing in time. So collectively are each unique imprinted clay petal of *a small monument*, sustained as they are, story-wise, between "back home" and Toronto, between the erosions of memory and the repetitive present of their making. Erika's comments are an allegorical lesson here: "The hibiscus flower is often a catalyst in generating an anecdote from my mother about 'back home'. Gathered here are 1000 clay hibiscus petals that are fragments that can never be gathered to make the whole that they were once a part of. There is a regenerative quality to flowers that are akin to that of memory; with each remembering and retelling something may be lost or gained, yet they never are reconstructed precisely as it was once before." Regeneration, the daughter following on the mother, makes one the palimpsest of the other. This condition is uncannily choreographed in Erika's video *real cadences and a quiet colour*—as Erika and her mother's feet align and deviate in an unconscious performance duet.

Haunting is palimpsestic. Its persistence induces a temporal disjunction, which serves to reverberate one story within another, registering its two

times together: Clara Ford's story within Anique's profile in *arming by clara*. Not only carrying two stories in one substance, the palimpsest of this work also syncs two places in its one material, the corrugated zinc found as building material in Trinidad. And Erika's photograph of her mother with flowers exuding from her mouth (*On Pincushions and Lace*), is this not the effluvia that has haunted photography in the past?

The same could be said for Tau's portraits, that their unadorned materials are a palimpsest on which new subjects are re-aggregated.

## Translation

It is said, and Salman Rushdie perhaps said it first, that diasporic subjects are translated: "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men." Citing Rushdie, Stuart Hall adds, "Such subjects must learn to inhabit more than one identity, dwell in more than one culture, and speak more than one language, for as Homi Bhabha suggests, to speak in the unsettling place in between languages means to constantly negotiate and translate across their differences."<sup>8</sup> Translation is negotiation. This is a lived experience that the artists in this exhibition know, whether they made the diasporic journey themselves or are the offspring of it. *Translating* men and women, not translated, since the "bearing across" that Rushdie points out in the word's etymology suggests that translation is an ongoing process and not a product. So here, *translation* must be a process made manifest in the artwork, or rather a process manifesting the work. (In the exhibition's artworks, we see that the concept of translation overlaps with that of weave, palimpsest, and haunting.) It is neither some meaning borne from one language to another, nor some content brought to a work and represented in it, but rather translated through it into something else.

### 8

Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," in *IMAGINARY HOMELANDS* (London: Granta, 1991), 17.

Rushdie adds that Indian writers in Great Britain, like himself, are "capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society" (19).

Stuart Hall, *THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE: RACE, ETHNICITY, NATION: RACE, ETHNICITY, NATION* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 173.





Unavoidably, some of the concepts we use here derive from or overlap with postcolonial theory. It is impossible not for this to be the case, especially for this generation of diasporic artists. When we use these shared concepts, however, we must strive to *add on* and *reach for* a third that surpasses what the past disposes, to search for a difference beyond the synthesis of any two pre-given things. We seek a transformation across, not just a dialogue with a dominant language or an answer back within its system. Even translation has its limits, though. Glissant's multilingualism, for instance, is not translational. It is not a dialogue between two different languages but rather a creolization that is neither the sum nor synthesis of its elements.<sup>9</sup> Here is the desired outcome.

## Double Dialogue

The same precaution should be kept in mind when using insights derived from diasporic subjects' "double perspective" or "stereographic vision," to use Rushdie's terms. The positive dissonance resulting from any oblique-angled looking is not at all, however, Du Bois's (and Fanon's) famous "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others."<sup>10</sup> While Rushdie's terms introduce difference, we have to avoid being detained within any form of "two-ness" (Du Bois's term), whether of an identity that doesn't change or of any temporal relation that does not invoke the future—the present captured by the past, past wrongs restituted in the present, for instance.

### 9

So, as well, Glissant would completely disagree with Kobena Mercer on his definition of "creole" when Mercer writes, "Across a whole range of cultural forms there is a *syncretic* dynamic which culturally appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and *creolizes* them, disarticulating given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise. The subversive force of this hybridizing tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where creoles, patois, and black English decenter, destabilize and carnivalize the linguistic domination of 'English'—the nation-language of master discourse—through strategic inflections, reaccentuations and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes." Kobena Mercer, "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain," in WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE: NEW POSITIONS IN BLACK CULTURAL STUDIES (New York: Routledge, 1994), 63.

### 10

W. E. B. Du Bois, THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.

Rather, by means of a differential *detour* we seek a *beyond* that isn't necessarily determinable, undefined as it is by the dualist doubles that set it in motion. Such double-directedness leads on to the *future*. This is what is at "stake" when Hall writes, "Above all, what such new ethnicities confront us with is the symbolic 'detour' to the present that moves through the past, marking the site of collective investment in stakes made on the future within these difficult, more vernacular experiences of modernity."<sup>11</sup>

So the *double-directedness* of this work—whether it weaves back-and-forth, passes between past and future, or ambiguously localizes a here and there—is a condition that is *posited* in this work only in order always to move beyond present possibilities. This is what makes this multi-accentuated work surpass postcolonial theory, while fully taking advantage of its concepts at the same time. Any mention of the double-voiced and double-accented opens discussion to Mikhail Bakhtin and the theoretical resource made of him by many postcolonialist theorists attracted to his ideas of the heteroglossia of speech diversity. Such theorists would find common ground with the "heteroglot, multi-voiced, multi-styled and often multi-linguaged elements"<sup>12</sup> of the work in *Migrating the Margins* opposing the ideological domination of any centralizing unitary language. But does that make *Migrating the Margin's* work hybrid in the postcolonial sense, which is not always precisely that of Bakhtin's? Not in the sense of one voice always directed back to the centre critically or the other ironizing it.<sup>13</sup> Rather, hybridity must be fully creolized and forward looking.

11

Hall, *THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE*, 123.

12

M. M. Bakhtin, *THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 265.

13

For instance Kobena Mercer, note 8 above and Robert Young: "Bakhtin's doubled form of hybridity therefore offers a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically. Hybridity therefore, as in the racial model, involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against

## Creolization

Hybridity is not at all two differences coalescing in a third, and henceforth remaining unchanging. Hybridity is diversity in motion, an ongoing evolution of “proliferating contact of diversified natures.” A “limitless *métissage*,” Glissant says.<sup>14</sup> This is why Glissant also says that creolization it is not about the contents of what is brought together but its processes: “Creolization, one of the ways of forming a complex mix—and not merely a linguistic result—is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the ‘contents’ on which these operate.”<sup>15</sup> Which all goes to say that the artists of *Migrating the Margins* have not arrived at a point, an end, the set of conditions which we can completely analyze. They have initiated what another generation of Toronto artists will continue to carry forward as a new aesthetics whose diversifications, “the quantifiable totality of every possible difference,” we cannot anticipate. They, too, will mix and add on.

A mixed aesthetics, a hybrid aesthetics? At the beginning of the last century the French author Victor Segalen called his aesthetics of otherness an “aesthetics of diversity,” although it was not yet then a question of hybridity.<sup>16</sup> It is now: hybridity and diversity. We have been led there not out of any moral obligation to the representations of this work in terms of its cultural identity. There is now in Toronto no longer a question of the Other, in terms of contestation or accommodation, but a question of what conditions, i.e., aesthetic manifestations, result from the new social realities here. Indeed, Glissant saw in Segalen that rather than moral obligation it was the *aesthetic* constituent that was “the first edict of a real poetics of Relation.”<sup>17</sup> The artists of *Migrating the Margin* perform the new aesthetic constituents of Toronto’s poetics of Relation.

### 13 (cont’d)

the divisive, the generative against the undermining. Hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation. For Bakhtin himself, the crucial effect of hybridization comes with the latter, political category, the moment where, within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other. This is the point where authoritative discourse is undone.”

Robert J. C. Young, *COLONIAL DESIRE: HYBRIDITY IN THEORY, CULTURE AND RACE* (London: Routledge, 1995), 20–21.

14

For Glissant, *métissage* and creolization are not the same thing: "If we posit *métissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time."

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 78, 34.

Elsewhere he writes, "La créolisation est la mise en contact de plusieurs cultures ou au moins de plusieurs éléments de cultures distinctes, dans un endroit du monde, avec pour résultante une donnée nouvelle, totalement imprévisible par rapport à la simple synthèse de ces éléments."

Glissant, *TRAITÉ DU TOUTE-MONDE*, 37.

15

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 89.

"Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify 'unique' origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. In Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity, just as Genesis legitimizes genealogy. To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of 'creolized' that is considered as halfway between two 'pure' extremes."

Glissant, *CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, 140.

16

Victor Segalen, *ESSAY ON EXOTICISM: AN AESTHETICS OF DIVERSITY*, trans. and ed. Yaël Rachel Schlick (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).

17

"Segalen's crucial idea was that encountering the Other super-activates poetic imagination and understanding. Of course, from that moment on there could be no question of hierarchy in pursuit of relations with the other. Let me point out, however, that Segalen does not merely describe recognition of the other as a moral obligation (which would be a banality) but he considers it an aesthetic constituent, the first edict of a real poetics of Relation. The power to experience the shock of elsewhere is what distinguishes the poet. Diversity, the quantifiable totality of every possible difference, is the motor driving universal energy, and it must be safe-guarded from assimilations, from fashions passively accepted as the norm, and from standardized customs."

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 29–30.



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**Anique Jordan, ARMING BY CLARA, 2017**

**Page 146**

**Nep Sidhu, A SONG FOR MY FATHER,  
IN THE KEY OF MY MOTHERS, 2017  
[detail]**

**Page 151**

**Erika DeFreitas, STUDIES FOR  
GARDENS (EACH FORM IS A FIXED  
SNAPSHOT OF A PROCESS), 2017  
[video still]**

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**Rajni Perera, 3 FIGURES, 2017  
[detail]**

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**Tau Lewis, SELF-PORTRAIT #2,  
2016**





TORONTO:  
THE  
LOCATION  
OF  
CULTURE



We must join suburban artists in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question...it is to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell, i.e., the suburbs, that we must come.

In Toronto, we have discovered a “zone of occult instability” where the future already has been decided. It is the suburbs. Etymology confirms (*sub*-urban: secondary or inferior to the urban) what we already know: the suburbs are degraded zones. Any artists who want to make a name for themselves should hightail it downtown and join the art community in order to be recognized *there*. But something seismic has shifted in Toronto. Values have been inverted. It is now the suburbs where everything is called into question. And what is called into question is precisely...both Toronto and the downtown art community.

When we conceived this exhibition we used our intuition to guide us. We wanted to make an exhibition about the future of Toronto. Of course, the future already was now, and we decided that it was taking place in the suburbs. Here we discovered that the future is imagined differently by a new generation of artists operating through principles of cultural mixing, which itself was the result of decades of immigration and life in the suburbs. This cultural experiment is called Toronto.

And now that we have made the exhibition and are writing about it, we realize that Toronto is the calling into question of all past discourses about the future, especially those of national origin. And while we had no intention of making a thematic exhibition about cultural identity circa 2017, we find that Toronto is a mutation in the discourse of post-colonialism: Toronto *is* the future, the future of postcolonialism. Not that we intended to situate Toronto in this debate, but is Toronto the “location of culture”?

Toronto is multicultural. Toronto is mixed. Everyone knows that Toronto is the most mixed city in the world, but can we imagine what Torontonians, and Canadians, think mixed means? When we imagine



what mixed means we think back to Canada's experiment with immigration and to the enshrinement of concomitant values of harmonization ensured by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 and the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. In the Act, the government pledged not only to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage" but also to "promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation."

If the future of Canada was imagined in this inspired experiment, Toronto was the result. But if the bureaucrats back then imagined multiculturalism, they got *mixed*, which is not the same thing at all. "Continuing evolution and shaping" has turned out to be unpredictable and it is the children of these immigrant cultures who are now deciding what our common future *looks* like. If multiculturalism was meant to guarantee the rights of culture in the belief that cultures in Canada would exist harmoniously side-by-side in mutual respect, diversity is thought differently now. Diversity is not a case of maintaining separate but equal identities. Diversity is a matter of this mixing.

Now that we are here, in this matter of diversity, is Toronto any different from anywhere else? Or is its mixing merely a fulfillment of postcolonial theory, here no more than there—a *general* fulfillment given that our colonial status as a state, speaking of Canada now, differs significantly from postcolonial states in Africa and the Caribbean, for instance? In light of its situation, could Toronto possibly offer a new discourse?

"Toronto: The Location of Culture" could better use a question mark, you might say, and an ironical one at that. Of course this phrase "Location of Culture" brings us round to Homi Bhabha's influential theorization of postcolonialism under this very title of his 1994 book and, in

particular, the pertinence of his concepts of “hybridity” and the “Third Space” to phenomena manifesting here in Toronto in 2017. In a 1990 interview he brings these two concepts together when he says:

Now the notion of hybridity comes from the two prior descriptions I've given of the genealogy of difference and the idea of translation, because if, as I was saying, the act of cultural translation (both as representation and as reproduction) denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

The Third Space is a useful concept and immediately applicable to conditions in Toronto. This is the case even if it is “inadequately understood” *or* resisted—and not just either by a dominant or a minority culture, each wanting to uphold an essentialism of tradition or vested authority, and who see the borderline between cultures as a site of clashing, but also by postcolonial adherents themselves—who valorize the clash. Ideally, cultural translation is not just seepage across a borderline, where the dominant and minority cultures influence one other to

## 1

Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” *IDENTITY: COMMUNITY, CULTURE, DIFFERENCE* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

## 2

“It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.” Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

different degrees. The Third Space is constitutive of something new. Yet, although “unrepresentable in itself,”<sup>2</sup> its emergent interstitial zone “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference,”<sup>3</sup> we still tend to hypostatize it precisely as a borderline: locatable as a zone of conflict between cultures. This is the legacy of postcolonialism, which believed it surpassed the encounter of antagonisms and affiliations of two contesting cultures, yet maintains itself there in stasis in its postulation of conflict. The impasse of postcolonial theory is that the location of culture always only is a locus of conflict and negotiation between disproportionate powers.<sup>4</sup>

Bhabha himself admits, “In my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of *political antagonism or inequity* [our italics].”<sup>5</sup> But what if the liminal boundary of the Third Space no longer is only the site of traumatic history seeking compensatory representation, “for the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major

## 3

Bhabha, “Locations of Culture,” *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE*, 2.

## 4

For instance, as Stuart Hall, speaking of contact zones, says: “Characteristic of these primal scenes, new and old, are the complex relations of asymmetrical exchange, mutual interchange, regulated contact, and enforced exclusion among different cultures that have nonetheless irrevocably transformed the identity of everyone involved. Under the conditions of transculturation, such change never takes place on equal terms, of course, so here too we find an instance par excellence in which relations of cultural difference are also simultaneously relations of power, articulated in structures of hierarchization and subordination.” **Stuart Hall**, *THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE: RACE, ETHNICITY, NATION* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 165.

## 5

“In my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the ‘authoritative’, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies

social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees”<sup>6</sup> We are not denying the legitimacy of these histories or the fact that the diversity of emigration to Toronto is a consequence of these historical catastrophes.

If the Third Space no longer is (only) the negotiation of these histories, communities, and subjectivities, if it is no longer based on conflict (or is representative of the *locus* of conflict), what would hybridity then be, and what would it be here in Toronto? Moreover, if the situational, not the historical, conflict, that is to say the situation *here* in Toronto, between a so-called dominant culture and a so-called minority culture was no longer that between the resistance of “the self-recognition of the national culture” and the self-authorization of a “minority position,” what would hybridity be?<sup>7</sup> What if the Third Space in Toronto emerged in part from a *withdrawal* from conflict on the part of both sides? What if it was no longer based on the model of war but of cosmopolitanism (yes, we know, another postcolonial theme!)? What if conflict was no longer a contest, but negotiation or resistance already moved beyond? Where would we situate this space? And what would we now call it?

Perhaps the Third Space actually is, and always was, a *beyond* of postcolonial discourse itself. Whether this is the case or not, certainly Toronto is beyond this discourse. And if *Toronto* is beyond postcolonial discourse, then *Migrating the Margins* is not an exhibition about cultural identity or identity politics. This is also to say that *Migrating the Margins* is not an exhibition about a *new* politics of identity and belonging. Belonging, yes. New communal identity, yes. But a new *politics* of identity and belonging? No.

5 (cont'd)

find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole.”

Bhabha “Culture’s In-Between,” in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *QUESTIONS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 58.

6

Bhabha, “Locations of Culture,” 6–7.

7

We use Bhabha’s terms from “Culture’s In-Between,” 54, 58.

The “no” to identity politics is not a “no” to either identity or politics—or to the ideals of social justice. Least of all is it to suggest that Toronto is the peaceable kingdom when we know the city to be riven by systemic issues of race, class, and gender—violence, too, as well as targeted lack of access to mainstream cultural representation. Rather it’s a no to rote abstractions and applications, and a nod to where identity and politics are realized instead in their *particularities*, not conceived abstractly as categories of Subjecthood or Politics—rather, small case, not majuscule. We are talking about postcolonial *theory*, after all, where “the construction of a cultural authority” is always predicated on a political discourse, not a cultural one. (Of course, we realize that we are flying in the face of Bhabha, when he writes, “Just as there is no *after politics*, there can be no *after theory*.”<sup>8</sup>) Moreover, a political discourse in postcolonial theory always assumes that we are talking about *the nation*.<sup>9</sup> What would

## 8

Bhabha, “Foreword,” Robert J. C. Young, *WHITE MYTHOLOGY* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), x.

Note, however, what Édouard Glissant writes about theory: “Because, as I have already emphasized, these trajectories (from the European here to elsewhere) end up abolishing what yesterday originally occasioned their being: the linear projection of a sensibility toward the world’s horizons, the vectorization of this world into metropolises and colonies. Theoretician thought is loath to sanction this abolition—thereby shutting down its bastions. It tries to be clever with the thrust of the world and sidesteps it. It thinks up screens for itself.

“In addition, the poetics of Relation remains forever conjectural and presupposes no ideological stability. It is against the comfortable assurances linked to the supposed excellence of a language. A poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible. Theoretician thought, focused on the basic and fundamental, and allying these with what is true, shies away from these uncertain paths.... Here poetic thought safeguards the particular, since only the totality of truly secure particulars guarantees the energy of Diversity. But in every instance this particular sets about Relation in a completely intransitive manner, relating, that is, with the finally realized totality of all possible particulars.”

Édouard Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 31–32.

## 9

Benedict Anderson’s 1983 *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM* and the 1990 *NATION AND NARRATION* anthology edited by Bhabha are typical examples of this link. Closer to home, Rinaldo Walcott writes, “*RUDE*, the anthology, intends to undermine or at least trouble notions of the nation—that is, the Canadian nation-state—when it encounters a self-assured Blackness”



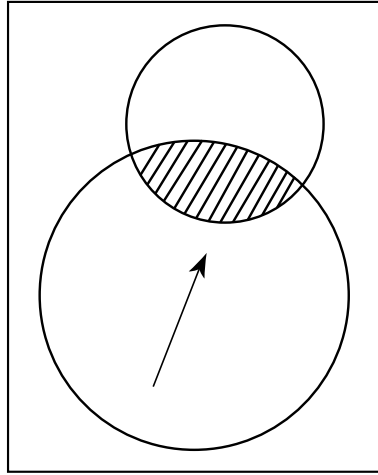


Diagram 1

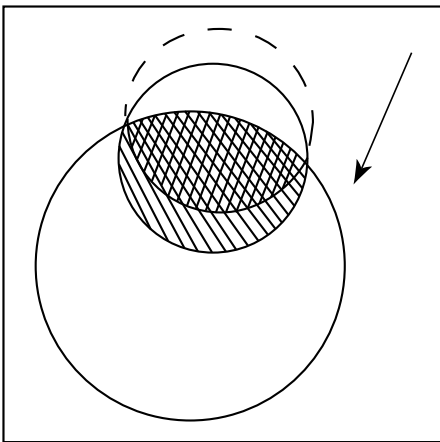


Diagram 2

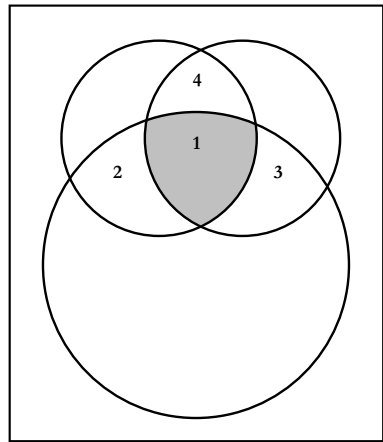


Diagram 3

happen to the particularity of Toronto, the *city* of Toronto, in this discussion? But what if the nation and a national history, moreover, are called into question, too, by what is happening in Toronto? What if we no longer look to the past to validate our history but to the *future* to do so? What would become of a national discourse then? *And* of an inherited art discourse?

If the Third Space is “unrepresentable in itself,” but not abstract, then to imagine it, or to visualize it, we need the help of artists. But this brings us to our second issue. If the first question was what if the borderline was no longer a site of conflict, the second question is what if this borderline has been wrongly placed, or actually is displaced altogether? It is no longer where we thought it should be. Once again Toronto provides an example.

To represent the unrepresentable, let’s seek, as well, the help of diagrams. When we think of the convergence of cultures, one initially dominant, the other a minority, as in the case of the various visible minorities that over time have immigrated to Toronto, we think of the crossing of an invisible borderline. (The reality of any situation, however, is that the minority culture is always already both adjacent *and* within.) At first, it appears as in Diagram 1 that the overlap is more a consequence of the dominant culture penetrating and influencing the peripheral one. But actually an intersectional *interculture* emerges in between. *Transculturation* happens in these contact zones, and what takes place in them is not so much a dialogue or negotiation as an

9 (cont’d)

(“By Way of a Brief Introduction—Insubordination: A Demand for a Different Canada”); and again, “It is my contention that when Blackness works to elaborate Canadianness it simultaneously unsettles Canadianness. That is, Blackness interrupts ‘Canadian’ scenes and simultaneously sets the stage for particular and different enactments of Canadianness. These different enactments of Canadianness are instances of what Homi Bhabha calls ‘narrating the nation’. Blackness is a counter-narration of the normalized image of Canadian as chromatically white,” (“Who is she and what is she to you?: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian Studies” in Rinaldo Walcott, ed., *RUDE: CONTEMPORARY BLACK CANADIAN CULTURAL CRITICISM* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2000), 7, 37.) Yet, we are on common ground, when Walcott asks, “What happens when marginality is not claimed but the centre is assumed instead?” 39.

unconscious accommodation realized in lived experience. So over time, as Diagram 2 shows, what really happens is the reverse: the minority culture's influence uncontrollably seeps deeper into the dominant culture.

Toronto, however, is not *bi*-cultural, with only two intersecting zones (downtown/suburbs), unless we think of the multicultural collectively simply as *one* Other. But this is not the case. Each culture intersects and interacts separately and differently with the "centre." But each peripheral culture in Toronto also intersects and interacts with its fellow outsider others; so the Venn diagram becomes ever more complex. Take the situation of two cultural communities interacting with the centre. In Diagram 3, we see the emergence of this more complicated configuration: zones 2 and 3 show what we have already seen of the intersection of a dominant and a minority culture. Zone 1 perhaps is the ideal, the equal overlapping of three cultures within the radius of the dominant one. Yet, what interests us here is what still is peripheral to the centre, zone 4, where two other cultures/communities interact outside the gravitational pull of the centre. And since Toronto is an amalgamation of many cultures, we would have to repeat these peripheral intersections and interactions all the way around the centre's circumference, thereby creating a hybrid necklace. And following this necklace, as if fingering so many prayer beads, we would be on the "track of circular nomadism [that] makes every periphery into a center [and that] abolishes the very notion of center and periphery," as the Martiniquan poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant describes in his book *Poetics of Relation*.<sup>10</sup> "It is at their undefinable limits, through 'precipitate contact', that cultures moves," he writes.<sup>11</sup> Postcolonialism tells us nothing positive about this situation.

## 10

"In a third stage the trajectory is abolished; the arrowlike projection becomes curved. The poet's word leads from periphery to periphery, and, yes, it reproduces the track of circular nomadism; that is, it makes every periphery into a center; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery." Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 29.

## 11

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 163.

In their radical encirclement, the peripheries link to one other without need of validation from the centre, without need to pass through the centre for validation. It is this peripheral encircling *that feels no obligation to report to the centre* that is perceived by the latter to be a threat. The peripheries' solidarity, their suburban hospitality, is a type of cosmopolitan connectedness; it is an acknowledgement that mixing is now more consequential than the transmission of tradition, the latter that roots itself, other than you might think, in the centre. This suggests that the idea of the Western project as exemplified by the historical continuity of avant-gardes, with the implicit, concomitant privilege afforded to downtown art communities, has lost its authority. A cosmopolitanism without a centre means that migrating the margins to the centre does not mean moving them "there." It means realizing that the margins, or the suburbs, create their own centres.

Welcome to the suburbs! Welcome to suburban cosmopolitanism and its convivial connectedness.

It wasn't so difficult to get there, maybe, if you are from downtown. If you are from the suburbs, you are already here. But what are the consequences of getting, or being, there? We've mentioned that there are two issues. One is the displacement of the notion of the borderline, a double displacement, in fact. On the one hand, the borderline is not where we expected it to be; the suburbs have displaced it. The borderline no longer references that between the centre and the periphery but that permeable, permissive borderline between the suburbs themselves, the various suburbs, or, rather not between, but added on: a circular and, and, and. On the other hand, the suburbs (and every time we say "the suburbs" we mean artists from the suburbs) are now automatically freed from a border negotiation with the centre, where postcolonialism always situates its ethnic endeavour, and maintains it there. Postcolonialism wants to hybridize the suburbs (ethnicity) with the centre, whereas the suburbs want to hybridize themselves with their cosmopolitan neighbours. Postcolonial theory and downtown art communities are in unexpected collusion here. But this collusion is masked in conflict. What the suburbs withdraw from, confident in their proximate

creativity, precisely is postcolonialism's investment in conflict, wherein the peripheries are reduced to negotiating with the centre, but only as a problematic. This negotiation is always presumed to be critical and conflictual before it potentially can become something else.

Sidestepping conflict, affiliating with their neighbours rather than negotiating with the centre (Deleuze and Guattari remind us that “in a hierarchical system, an individual has only one active neighbor, his or her hierarchical superior”)<sup>12</sup>, it's as if one suburban community enters here with another in an economy of barter: Better to barter than negotiate with the central currency, trading and translating rather than exchanging in a rate determined by that central authority. So doing, another economy of images arises in this global marketplace. In this new suburban constellation, in these new conditions of dialogue, in this *future* economy, does the very nature of cultural signification change, i.e., the function and address of a work of art?

Well, we know that the work in *Migrating the Margins* addresses these issues. Its artists are forward looking. But let's look back, or let's look to what looks back to secretly validate its present privilege. Take memory. For a downtown art community said to be avant-garde, memory is programmatic. It is what links the present to its past before it arrives at its determined future. From command central, the Western tradition of the avant-garde allocates moves logically and in a linear way, generally and abstractly—here and everywhere else. An artist affiliates with this tradition even as it leads one to a lonely, non-communicating, cultural cul-de-sac. That's because the system commands from elsewhere, it also privileges that place, too, so what we are left with *here* is to manipulate empty ciphers and exchange worthless tokens among ourselves. Nonetheless, we think we are communicating. Talking peripherally among ourselves, we actually think we are, as well, communicating with the centre!

On the other hand, in the suburbs, among the ethnicities we think are so traditionally bound, among their offspring artists communication is

12

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 16.



not a program, tradition, that is, but a process. Nonetheless, responding here, not elsewhere, whether that elsewhere is an avant-garde Western metropolis or a homeland, they freely reminisce, freely *mixing forward*, about received cultural traditions, divided roots, working class families, and growing up in the suburbs, and do so in a mixed aesthetic that opens to the future. The suburbs are already a fully emergent condition in excess of both the metropolis and modernity.

It's obvious. The future of art in Toronto is the suburbs, not the downtown art community. Or, rather, the future of art in Toronto *presents itself* now first in the suburbs, not initially downtown. *Migrating the Margins* proves it, even if you might cavil and say that some of the artists in it now live downtown. Rather, these artists are moving the discourse downtown, and this changes everything.<sup>13</sup>

## 13

We take as much advantage of postcolonial theory as we critique it. Perhaps this is a contradiction. But we only critique it insofar as we want to make sense of what is happening here in Toronto, and if Toronto is ahead of the game, so be it; we have nothing to apologize for. We take what is useful in postcolonial theory and reject what holds us back. Toronto, a leader? No way. Yes, way (as a famous Toronto suburbanite said)! Toronto is a leader because Torontonians have embraced our collective mixed way forward. The "rejection" comes by way, also, of a division within postcolonialism itself, or, rather, as well, a "contestation... inside the notion of ethnicity itself" (Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *STUART HALL: CRITICAL DIALOGUES IN CULTURAL STUDIES*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 448). Both can be figured within what Hall calls "the return to ethnicity" resulting from inflection within some quarters of the postcolonial debate towards the experience of the diasporic subject. This began to be elaborated in the late 1980s (among a number of his texts, especially with his 1988 "New Ethnicities" where he dropped the controversial phrase "the end of the essential black subject" (444); his 1994 lecture series, *THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE: RACE, ETHNICITY, NATION*; and Paul Gilroy's 1993 *THE BLACK ATLANTIC*.) This "awareness of the black experience as a diaspora experience" ("New Ethnicities," 448) with all its subsequent talk of hybridity and the unfixing of identity could only lead almost thirty years later to where we are in Toronto today: with our mixed population and mixed aesthetic, which doesn't at all supplant individual diasporic experiences and their artistic expressions, as our exhibition makes clear.

In his 1994 lectures, Hall expressed the worry that "The tension between the two terms [i.e., 'race' and 'ethnicity'] also gives rise to the widespread concern that, once again, the scale and enormity of racial oppression will be sidelined as it gets dispersed into the more segmented and generalized spectrum of differential incorporation and exclusion that is associated with

*Give it up for the suburbs!*

And what would we give up?

That is, the suburbs' withdrawal has to be matched by one from downtown, but not in equal terms—although equal in generosity. Suburban artists' withdrawal from the *idea of conflict* has to be matched by downtown artists' withdrawal from the *idea of authority*, whether subscription to this latter idea is conscious or unconscious. If “suburban” artists can give up identity politics and their affiliation to traditional cultures and ethnic origins in favour of embracing a new, hybrid aesthetic, then “downtown” artists can give up the legitimizing trajectory of their modernist affiliations, whose origins, as an implicit value system, justify their work over others. Of course, the situation is more complex, more mixed than this, in both the suburbs and the downtown art community. The latter has been giving up territory since the early 1980s, but in an uneven development reflective, you could say, of its liberal multicultural tolerance. Tolerance has its limits, though, when it is no longer just an issue of “plural choice,” where one does one's thing and allows other theirs. “Liberal discourses on multiculturalism experience the fragility of their principles of ‘tolerance’ when they attempt to with-

13 (cont'd)

ethnicity” (FATEFUL TRIANGLE, 87). And although Hall saw the diasporic turn as a shift within *Black* cultural politics, he himself embraced the outcome as “an awareness of the Black experience as a diaspora experience, and the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and ‘cut-and-mix’” (“New Ethnicities,” 448). Yet “the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity” (“New Ethnicities,” 448) is still not embraced by all, to say the least. Today the tensions between “race” and “ethnicity” are represented by Afro-pessimism's strict opposition to what it calls “multi-racialism” or what we might call cultural mixture. For instance, Afro-pessimism sees Asian immigrants to the United States as “junior partners” in the anti-Black foundation of modern society. On this, see Frank B. Wilderson III et al., eds., *AFRO-PESSIMISM: AN INTRODUCTION* (Minneapolis: racked & dispatched, 2017) and Jared Sexton, *AMALGAMATION SCHEMES: ANTIBLACKNESS AND THE CRITIQUE OF MULTIRACIALISM* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

stand the pressure of revision."<sup>14</sup> We are in one of these moments of revision today—but it is not because of a demand for recognition by the minority other; rather, an opportunity presents itself for a complete re-vision that surpasses old oppositions.

So it is not where we are from, with a history from the past that legitimates us in the present, but where we want to get to that counts. We are in a paradigmatic shift in Toronto where the tradition of modernism, and all its derivatives, no longer validates production here (and this also includes the authority of other art scenes: whether New York, London, or Berlin). We have to start afresh in our re-evaluation of place, which is also a total re-valuation of artistic production.<sup>15</sup> Something new is being created here in Toronto that is *future* oriented and that finds it values rather in the diversifications of an *evolving* culture.<sup>16</sup>

## 14

"...we introduce into the polarizations of liberals and liberationists the sense that the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, 'peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash'. The peculiarity of cultures' partial, even metonymic presence lies in articulating those social divisions and unequal developments that disturb the self-recognition of the national culture, its anointed horizons of territory and tradition. The discourse of minorities, spoken for and against in the multicultural wars, proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence.

"These borderline negotiations of cultural difference often violate liberalism's deep commitment to representing cultural diversity as plural choice. Liberal discourses on multiculturalism experience the fragility of their principles of 'tolerance' when they attempt to withstand the pressure of revision." Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 54.

## 15

Indeed, Glissant writes that one of the characteristics of creolization is, "l'intervalorisation qui en provient et qui rend nécessaire que chacun réévalue pour soi les composantes mises en contact (la créolisation ne suppose pas une hiérarchie des valeurs)" (it intervalorizes whatever is brought into contact, whose components we then must reevaluate for ourselves; creolization itself doesn't suppose any hierarchy of values [our translation]). Édouard Glissant, *TRAITÉ DU TOUTE-MONDE*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 194.

Just as we ask, what *here*—though a discourse coming from elsewhere (postcolonial theory)—prevents a *new* discourse arising in Toronto; we also ask, what *here*—though a discourse coming from elsewhere (modernity)—prevents *another* type of artwork being seen.

We already sensed, but did not yet know we could be bold enough to say, how implicated these questions are in each other if we fully consider the consequences of the hierarchical relationship between the downtown art community and the suburbs.

Once we are already where we believe Toronto to be, recognizing the role suburban artists have played getting here, we have to think back with Glissant the consequences of having arrived. But the route we track back is different than the one by which we arrived. Tracing forward and tracking back express two different worldviews: respectively, of errantry and its conception of identity flux; and rootedness with its conception of fixed identity.<sup>17</sup> Each corresponds to two world systems: *creolization* or *domination*. One is cosmopolitan in emphasis while the

## 16

Moving forward what shall we do with our past, with our history, our art history, too? History no longer authorizes. Instead, we look to the future to validate the present, not the past, as strange as this seems—a mutation, indeed. The strange thing about Toronto is, that when Canadian-specific anti-colonial discourses originally were proposed here in the late sixties and seventies (and Toronto writers were then speaking for English Canada as a whole in nationalistic economic and literary discourses that addressed the then branch plant colonialism of continental corporatism—and Canadian complicity during the Viet Nam war—rather than the lingering malaise of British colonialism in Canada), that this was the moment, as well, of Caribbean immigration, and of the arrival of writers like Dionne Brand, Lillian Allen, and M. NorbeSe Philip. In retrospect, we see that the received history of Canadian culture, even as it was only being constructed, was already being unraveled by immigration. At that moment, the concept of “garrison mentality” might take on another unconscious inflection than its literary-critical application then to the Canadian past. We would have to pursue a like coincidence in the visual arts, although in the visual arts, Canadian history has always been a vacuum, artists seeking validation instead from elsewhere. The point is that if Canada, as our Prime Minister and many others claim, is a postnational state, then the category of “nation,” traditionally instituting national histories, no longer validates, authorizes, or legitimates what happens presently. Falling back then on local or regional histories is no solution, however, when the same temporal anomaly applies: the future validates, not the past, as recent as it is. In this paradigmatic shift, when did year zero happen?

other is nationalistic—while presuming it participates in a *universal* discourse. Here our second intuition was confirmed by our reading Glissant: not only, firstly, that the suburbs represent a shift of cultural worth to the conditions of its locale, but that, secondly, the values of the downtown art community have to be dismantled precisely because of its implicit rejection of this fact.<sup>18</sup> But what have these large concepts to do with an art community expressing its values that it deems to be so natural *and* neutral? Or that the art community believes itself to represent errantry and identity dissolution, not domination, when perhaps it is exactly the reverse? It is a surprise that the suburbs have become so unfixed and the downtown so fixed in their identities.

Tracking back with Glissant, we find that errantry is the third and culminating stage—where the trajectory of “conquering linearity,” which the West has rooted itself in since Europe’s opening to the world in discovery and domination centuries ago, is abolished. The West’s originating “arrowlike nomadism” that set off conquest has been supplanted by a “circular nomadism”; colonialism’s “vectorization of this world into metropolises and colonies” has been replaced by a movement from periphery to periphery that “abolishes the very notion of center and periphery.”<sup>19</sup>

From the first moment of contact, the West was contaminated by the Other, and Glissant traces liberating poets’ (artists’) consequential trajectory beyond the hegemonic forces of domination toward diversity in three stages. In its projection toward, this trajectory initially shared

## 17

Glissant opposes trace to system: “Voici là ma deuxième proposition: Que la pensée de *la trace* s’appose, par opposition à la pensée de système, comme une errance qui oriente. Nous connaissons que la trace est ce qui nous met, nous tous, d’où que venus, en Relation” (Here is my second proposition: that the thought of *the trace* establishes itself, in opposition to the thought of system, as an errantry that orients. We know that the trace is what puts us, all of us, from wherever we come, into Relation [our translation]). Glissant, TRAITÉ DU TOUTE-MONDE, 18.

## 18

See “Why We are Glissantian... and How Toronto is, Too” elsewhere in this publication.

## 19

The references to Glissant, POETICS OF RELATION, are pages 56, 28, 29, 32, 29.



the arrowlike nomadism characteristic of colonialism and imperialism: the first leading from centre to peripheries (Glissant uses author Victor Segalen as an example but could well have substituted Segalen's idol Gauguin); the second reversing direction from periphery to centre (colonial writers travelling from their birthplaces to imperial centres); the third abolishing trajectory altogether, reproducing a circular nomadism ("the arrowlike projection becomes curved") in such a manner that "makes every periphery into a center" and "abolishes the very notion of center and periphery."<sup>20</sup>

This trajectory of the willing, a willing to diversity, is where we find ourselves today in Toronto. "We will agree that this thinking of errantry, this errant thought, silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us."<sup>21</sup> Not all, though, think this way...and one might say that the art community traditionally, generally, and unfortunately, is among them. Destructuring applies to it, too, which necessitates the deconstruction of the linked concepts of linearity, filiation, and legitimacy—all forms of generality.

It is Glissant's insight that the basis and bias of this related cluster of concepts reside in "the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal." The universalizing trajectory of a rationalizing generality was coincident with and consequent on the West's "territorial conquest and scientific discovery (the terms are interchangeable)." Legitimacy "with its resultant imperative succession of the law and order of reasons [was] linked to the order derived from possessions and conquests." Legitimacy and filiation, too, were linked, as filiation was the linear transmission of authority (supposed to be not at all violent because natural).

Filiation led to "the undiversifiable linearity of a generalization."<sup>22</sup>

20

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 28–29.

21

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 18.

22

The references to Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, are pages 17, 56, 61, 51.

What's the problem with generalization? Glissant answers, "Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model."<sup>23</sup> We are all too familiar with this exclusionary model from the history of modernism. But we are also complicit in reinforcing the authoritative construction of its linear history (its "conquering linearity") through reception of its transmission, from centre to peripheries such as Toronto.<sup>24</sup> As in all deconstruction it becomes a question of how a historical construction became a natural assumption. It is a question of how filiation grants legitimacy.

So we are left with the question: Who authorizes? Who authorizes what passes for a discourse, the legitimate one, in an art community? By what natural assumption? Actually, once set in place, as the downtown art community has set itself in place over the last few decades, filiation grants authority, filiation alone, which is why its allegiance can be conscious or unconscious: intentionally following a path or unconsciously fulfilling it. This is why the Western art tradition is so perniciously rooted in its value assumptions. Unconsciously it leads to a generalizing universality, which overestimates its own (Western, liberal, humanist) tradition and underestimates any other. It leads to an over-representation of its own activities, on the one hand, and a blind under-representation, or a projection of an undervalued or inferior other outside the universal code altogether, on the other. This is the case in Toronto, too, though we blame no one politically or aesthetically. We are not interested in summary convictions here. Sylvia Wynter's excoriating critique of Western bourgeois liberal

## 23

"Errant, he challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it."

Glissant, *POETICS OF RELATION*, 20–21.

## 24

We are fully aware that we are as reductive in our citing of Glissant's reductive characterizations as modernism is in the reductions of its historical linearity.

thought, however, shows it to be contaminated as a *whole* by its “over-representation of this ethno-class or Western bourgeois genre or mode of being human, *as if* it were that of the human itself. An over-representation, which therefore had to repress the reality of the quite different self-conceptions and sociogenic codes of the multiple groups now subordinated and classified as *natives*.”<sup>25</sup> Over-representation and undervaluing are applicable to all fields—including art, criticism, and curating. Admittedly, this is a heavy-handed, sweeping condemnation, and who, mere artists working quietly in their studios, should bear the burden of this globalizing critique, unaware that they repeat locally the unequal and hierarchical distribution of power between the centre and its margins? Well, some of us. If withdrawal is necessary on this order it needs to take place now.

So withdrawing from authority is not merely making space for others while continuing to maintain one’s own practice (modernist, post-modernist, post-conceptual). Withdrawing is de-linking, recognizing here Walter Mignolo’s “assumption that there is no modernity without coloniality, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity.”<sup>26</sup> De-link, then “relink, relay, relate,” to use Glissant’s terminology.

Two withdrawals would cancel out the borderline. And perhaps do away with hospitality, too, you might say. What is left of hospitality when the host can no longer presume to offer it, that is, because the guest is already at home here and doesn’t need to be welcomed? What is asked for now are new forms of conviviality, on equal terms. Toronto: convivial, cosmopolitan. Welcome to the new Toronto art community.<sup>27</sup>

25

Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project,” in *NOT ONLY THE MASTER’S TOOLS: AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (London: Routledge, 2016), 129. Such “neutral” terminology is a “veiling, that is, of *Man’s* specific ethno-class attributes, a veiling effected by the projected truth, ‘in a universal abstract sense’, of our present order of knowledge, as well as by the psycho-affective closure effected by our present mainstream aesthetics,” 131–32.

## 26

Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking," in *GLOBALIZATION AND THE DECOLONIAL OPTION*, eds. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 9.

"Now, and this is important, the critique of the modern notion of Totality doesn't lead necessarily to post-coloniality, but to de-coloniality. Thus, the second direction we can call the *programmatic* that is manifested in Quijano as a project of 'desprendimiento', of de-linking. At this junction, the analytic of coloniality and the programmatic of de-coloniality moves away and beyond the post-colonial.

"Coloniality and de-coloniality introduces a fracture with both, the Eurocentered project of post-modernity and a project of post-coloniality heavily dependent on post-structuralism as far as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida have been acknowledged as the grounding of the post-colonial canon: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. De-coloniality starts from other sources."

Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *CULTURAL STUDIES* 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 451-452.

## 27

We have to admit that the opening epigraph to this essay is a fiction. It is actually an adaptation of Frantz Fanon, who writes, "we must join them [the people] in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light."

Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 227.

**List of Works in Exhibition****Nep Sidhu****1**

**Nep Sidhu with Nicholas Galanin, SHE IN LIGHT  
FORM, NO PIGS IN PARADISE, 2015–16  
Melton wool, jute, silver zari, chenille, cotton, manikin**

**2**

**Nep Sidhu with Nicholas Galanin, SHE IN SHADOW  
FORM, NO PIGS IN PARADISE, 2015–16  
Raw silk, brass, gold zari stitch, jute and cotton  
rope, manikin**

**3**

**A SONG FOR MY FATHER, IN THE KEY OF MY  
MOTHERS, 2017  
Cotton, wool, 144" × 129"**

**4**

**IN THE MELODY OF SACRIFICE, LET US  
LEARN YOUR CHANT, 2017  
Cotton, wool, gold zari, 156" × 92.5"**

**Anique Jordan****5**

**ARMING BY CLARA, 2017  
corrugated zinc, each 33" × 141.5"**

**Tau Lewis****6**

**FOR EVERY DEFENCE MECHANISM, A VALID  
REASON, 2016  
Plaster, cement, tissue paper, fur, cinderblock,  
concrete**

**7**

**SELF-PORTRAIT, 2016  
Stones, plaster, silicone, alginate, polyurethane,  
human hair, soil, chalk pastel, zip ties, high gloss finish**



8

EVERYTHING SCATTER (ARMY ARRANGEMENT), 2016  
Christmas cactus, soil, chain, wire, polyurethane,  
plaster, epoxy, chalk pastel, pvc pipe, paint can,  
rebar, cinderblock

9

GEORGIA MARBLE MARKS SLAVE  
BURIAL SITES ACROSS AMERICA, 2016  
Plaster, cement, acrylic paint, chain, high gloss finish

10

ANGOLANO (GOD GIFT), 2016  
Fish hook cactus, plaster, epoxy, acrylic paint,  
fur, chain, wire, soil, stones, tree bark, rebar,  
cement, curb

11

IT TAKES ME MORE COURAGE TO BE SOFT, 2016  
Plaster, cement, tissue paper, fur, cinderblock,  
concrete

12

SELF-PORTRAIT #2, 2017  
Plaster, asphalt, stones, silicone, seashells, seaglass,  
acrylic paint, sterling silver, ceramic vase, pipe, wire

### Erika DeFreitas

13

REAL CADENCES AND A QUIET COLOUR, 2017  
Video, 05:13

14

ON LARKSPURS AND SORROW  
(LES PÂLES SE SONT OUVERTS), 2017  
Digital inkjet print, 40" x 40"

15

ON PINCUSHIONS AND LACE  
(LES PÂLES SE SONT OUVERTS), 2017  
Digital inkjet print, 40" x 40"

16

A SMALL MONUMENT, 2017  
Clay, variable dimensions

17

STUDIES FOR GARDENS (EACH FORM IS  
THE FIXED SNAPSHOT OF A PROCESS), 2017  
Video, 5:44

18

AN EARNEST WEIGHT IN THE CREASE, 2017  
Video, 2:00

19

STUDIES FOR GARDENS (A MIXTURE  
BETWEEN CONCEPT AND DISCIPLINE), 2017  
Collages on graph paper, each 8.5" x 11"

### Rajni Perera

20

3 FIGURES, 2017  
Mural, 370" x 240"

21

VHT1, 2017  
Metal, fabric, mural, variable dimensions

### Otherness (Marilyn Fernandes and Pamila Matharu)

22

TAKING A PAGE..., 2017  
Backlit vinyl in AGYU vitrines, 43" x 89"

### Farrah-Marie Miranda

24

SPEAKING FRUIT, 2017  
Modified trailer, performative events

### Sister Co-Resister

A WALKING SALON, 2017  
performative event

### The Authors

EMELIE CHHANGUR is a Toronto-based artist and award-winning curator and writer known for her process-based participatory curatorial practice and long-term collaborative projects performatively staged in/outside the gallery context. Currently the Interim Director/Curator at AGYU, Chhangur questions the nature and social function of the contemporary art gallery through a form of embedded criticality that she calls "in-reach."

PHILIP MONK was Director of the AGYU from 2003 through 2017. Previously, he was a curator at the Power Plant and the Art Gallery of Ontario. A writer since 1977, his most recent publications are *Is Toronto Burning?: Three Years in the Making (and Unmaking) of the Toronto Art Scene* (2016) and *Glamour is Theft: A User's Guide to General Idea* (2012).

### The Artists

TAU LEWIS' self-taught practice is rooted in healing personal, collective and historical traumas through labour. She employs methods of construction such as hand sewing, carving, and assemblage to build portraits. She considers spaces of erasure, what they might hold, and how we can re-access these spaces as generative information centres through storytelling and imagination. Her work is bodily and organic, with an explicit strangeness. The materiality of Lewis' work is often informed by her surrounding environment; she constructs out of found objects and recycled materials. She connects these acts of repurposing collecting and archiving with diasporic experience. Her portraits are recuperative gestures that explore agency, memory and recovery. Her work is gaining international attention with recent exhibitions at New Museum, MoMa PS1, Shrine Gallery, Chapter NY, Jeffrey Stark, New York; Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta; Night Gallery, Los Angeles, USA; Art Gallery of Ontario, 8-11 Gallery, Cooper Cole, Gallery 44, Toronto; Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga; and Plug In ICA, Winnipeg. She is represented in Toronto by Cooper Cole.

Scarborough born, ANIQUE JORDAN is an award-winning artist, writer, and curator who looks to answer the question of possibility in everything she creates. Working for over a decade at the crossroad of community economic development and art, Jordan's practice stems from and returns to the communities that inform it. As an artist, Jordan uses sculpture, photographs, and performance to play with the foundations of traditional Trinidadian carnival and the theory of hauntology challenging historical narratives and creating, in her words, *impossible images*. Jordan has lectured on her artistic and community-engaged practices as a 2017 Canada Seminar speaker at Harvard University and in numerous institutions across the Americas such as University of the West Indies, MIT, University of Toronto, and UCLA. She has received numerous awards including 2017 Toronto Arts Foundation emerging artist of the year and the 2018–19 Hynatshyn Emerging Artist of the Year. Jordan has participated in residencies around the world and exhibited at galleries such as the Art Gallery of Guelph, Doris McCarthy Gallery, Art Gallery of Windsor, Art Gallery of Ontario, Art Gallery of York University, and Gallery 44. She is the founder of *Black Wimmen Artists*, a virtual community of over 150 Black women arts workers across Ontario and has held the 2018–19 artist-in-residence position at Osgoode Hall Law School.

ERIKA DEFREITAS is a Scarborough-based artist whose practice includes the use of performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, works on paper, and writing. Placing an emphasis on process, gesture, the body, documentation, and paranormal phenomena, she works through attempts to understand concepts of loss, post-memory, inheritance, and objecthood. DeFreitas' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including at Project Row Houses and the Museum of African American Culture, Houston; Fort Worth Contemporary Arts; Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita; Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery; Platform Centre for Photographic and Digital Arts, Winnipeg; and Gallery 44, Toronto. A finalist of the 2016 Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts' Artist Prize, recipient of the 2016 John Hartman Award, and long-listed for the 2017 Sobey Art Award, she has also been awarded several grants from the

Canada Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council. DeFreitas holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

RAJNI PERERA'S practice in painting, installation, and curating explores issues of hybridity, sacrilege, irreverence, the indexical sciences, ethnography, gender, sexuality, popular culture, deities, monsters, and dream worlds as they inform and create diasporic mythology. A graduate of OCADU where she won the Medal for Drawing and Painting in 2011, Perera has shown locally and internationally, most recently in the Colombo Art Biennial in Sri Lanka (2016), her native country; the Laval Triennial in Quebec; and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Toronto.

NEP SIDHU'S art practice in painting, textiles, and sculpture explores the way in which memory, social landscape, and stylistic interpretation can give way to myth, identity, and truth. His work has been shown nationally and internationally, most recently at the Aga Khan Museum (2017) with a solo exhibition, *Medicine for A Nightmare*, that will travel across Canada along with the release of his first book of the same name. Sidhu's current collaborations with the Black Constellation Collective and Shabazz Palaces examine ritual, acknowledgment, and continuum in the worlds of fashion and music. In 2017, he was the recipient of the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Artist Award. Along with his family, Sidhu has formed Sher E Punjab Academy, an institution of boxing and learning for the village youth of Chakar, Punjab.

Born in the Gulf to parents who were migrant workers, FARRAH MIRANDA'S lived experience has confronted her with the way people, places, objects and experiences are bordered. This inspires aspects of her artistic practice in which she questions how borders are enacted through processes of categorization, securitization, censorship, and control. Moving between the gallery and the public sphere, she creates situations that actively engage the viewer. With mediums that range from manipulated found objects to performance, installation, and new media, her projects experiment with the pedagogical possibilities of art in undoing colonial borders, citizenships, and illegalities. Miranda



co-directed *Mass Arrival*, a public intervention and installation which intervened in the discourse of illegality surrounding migrant boat arrivals to Canada. The work was featured in Tara Atluri's *Uncommitted Crimes: The Defiance of the Artistic Imagination* (Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2018). Her writing has appeared in diverse publications such as *In the Wake of the Komagata Maru: Transpacific Migration, Race and Contemporary Art* (Surrey: Surrey Art Gallery, 2015); *VOZ-À-VOZ; Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society; Border Criminologies, Rabble.ca;* and *Fuse Magazine*. Miranda holds a Master of Environmental Studies degree from York University, where she studied under performance scholar and feminist theatre director Honor Ford-Smith.

OTHERNESS is a collaboration between graphic-designer MARILYN FERNANDES and visual artist PAMILA MATHARU. Often working in an interdisciplinary practice at the intersections of art, design, and pedagogical strategies, they create installations, small-run publishing/ephemera, and socially-engaged projects through their contentious lens of personal and political. Marilyn Fernandes is a graduate of the School of Design, George Brown College (Dip, 2003) and University of Toronto (BEd, 2011) and Pamila Matharu is graduate of York University (BA, BEd, 2002).

SISTER CO-RESISTER was born out of the collective formerly known as Bonerkill. SCR is a feminist art collective focused on collaborative art making and trans-disciplinary exchange. Crisscrossing public pedagogies, intersectional feminism, and contemporary art with solidarity building, projects have been activated through social practice, installation, performance art, and publishing as a catalyst for social change. Exhibition and public programming opportunities are utilized as platform projects to extend an invitation to underrepresented women and non-binary Indigenous, Black, and artists of colour. Lead artists and producers are Marilyn Fernandes, Pamila Matharu, and Annie Wong. BONERKILL ran from 2013-2017 and included: Kiera Boulton, Marilyn Fernandes, Ananda Gabo, Ana Guerra, Ashlee Harper, Shaista Latif, Sylvia Limbana, Pamila Matharu, Sofy Mesa, and Annie Wong.

*Migrating the Margins* was an exhibition held at the Art Gallery of York University from 15 September through 3 December 2017. Curated by Emelie Chhangur and Philip Monk, it included commissioned work by Erika DeFreitas, Anique Jordan, Tau Lewis, Rajni Perera, and Nep Sidhu with additional public art projects by Farrah-Marie Miranda, Otherness (Marilyn Fernandes and Pamila Matharu), and Sister Co-Resister. Works by Syrus Marcus Ware and Gloria Swain were also commissioned as part of Suburban Hospitality, a symposium affiliated with the exhibition's opening.

Photographs on pages 105, 112–113, and 118–131 by Michael Maranda. All other photographs by Jennifer Rose Sciarrino.





The future of Toronto art is now—and it is happening in that assembler of difference, the suburbs. *Migrating the Margins* traces the roots of artists' diasporic identities as rerouted through the cosmopolitan hospitality of Toronto's suburbs. Being at home with an elsewhere is a common condition, but suburban artists affiliate themselves with their neighbours in the peripheries rather than seek their identities "back home" or mimic the artistic strategies of the centre. Beyond the identity politics of postcolonialism, beyond postcolonialism itself, these artists reflect an oppositional practice that links periphery to periphery. *Migrating the margins* is not a matter of moving the margins to the centre; the margins create their own centres. The suburbs now define the city's cultural content. The social experiment we know as Toronto is a result of the cultural mixing deriving from decades of immigration and life in the suburbs. As a result of the peripheries no longer reporting to the centre, we no longer look to the past to legitimate our history but to the diversifying differences of an evolving future.

Taking a Glissantian point of view on Toronto's creole conditions as an organized manifestation of diversity, this book sketches out some of the developing characteristics of an aesthetics of amalgamation that have newly evolved in suburban conditions of peripheral circulation and diversifying totality. The suburbs and suburban artists are forever fated to be entangled in difference, where rooted identities are a thing of the past.

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On the front cover:  
Tau Lewis, *Self-portrait #2*, 2016 (detail).  
Photograph by Jennifer Rose Sciarino.  
One of five different covers.

YORK  
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UNIVERSITY

The logo for York University, featuring the word "YORK" in a large, bold, serif font, with "UNIVERSITÉ" and "UNIVERSITY" in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the text is a stylized red letter "U" with a white outline.