Carole Itter: Only when I’m hauling water do I wonder if I’m getting any stronger
The exhibition *Carole Itter: Only when I’m hauling water do I wonder if I’m getting any stronger* brings together a selection of the artist’s multidisciplinary works and archival materials from the 1960s to the present. Revealing her attention to locality, language and choreography, the title references Itter’s writing and points to her self-reflexive labour as an artist, as a woman and as an inhabitant of shacks, old houses and cooperatives on the West Coast.

Itter’s artistic ethos is evident in her consideration of the places and communities that have framed her life, in her written, drawn and material expression, and in her practice of designing conditions for performance. The artist’s focus on the local was part of a shared sensibility in Vancouver and beyond in the 1960s and has found renewed urgency and wisdom in the context of the climate crisis. Itter’s hand-hewn work reasserts the presence of the body through ecological, feminist and anti-capitalist lenses, and offers insight into how humans see themselves in relation to each other and other beings in the world.

Included in the exhibition are a selection of installations, photographs, sketches, costumes, films and writing that reveal the artist’s multi-valent practice, blurring the lines between art’s traditional containers. Humorously subverting the status quo, Itter’s hanging sculptural “rattles” are assembled from wood detritus collected from alleys, basements and second-hand shops. Made of spindles, spoons, dowels and chair legs, they signal the connection between deforestation, production, consumerism and disposal. Made of wood, these “rattles” offer a performative invitation to an imagined sonic and physical interaction. These works connect to her “spill” installations on floors and water, and lead into later installations such as *The Inlet* (2011-ongoing) that will be installed for the first time at the Belkin, which includes projection, collage and textile to continue an embodied connection to place.

The exhibition *Carole Itter: Only when I’m hauling water do I wonder if I’m getting any stronger* is curated by Melanie O’Brien and made possible with the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and our Belkin Curator’s Forum members.
The Artist

Carole Itter (Canadian, b. 1939) is an artist, writer, performer and filmmaker. Itter began her fine art studies at UBC (1958, 1963) and continued at the Vancouver School of Art (1959-63) (now Emily Carr University) and at L'Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome (1964). Itter also worked seasonally at Theatre Under the Stars professional scene-shop in Vancouver (1958-61). Solo exhibitions of her work include the Western Front, Or Gallery, grunt gallery, Open Space, Vancouver Art Gallery and SFU Galleries’ Audain Gallery. Her work was included in WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2008 and in Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965-80, which toured across Canadian institutions from 2010-13. She is the author of Whistle Daughter Whistle (1982) and with Daphne Marlatt, she compiled and edited Opening Doors (1979), an archive of oral history about Vancouver’s East End. Itter collaborated with artist and musician Al Neil and joined him at the Blue Cabin in the Dollarton mudflats in the late 1970s, which was the start of a residency that would span more than thirty-five years. The cabin was a place of inspiration and art production for her while she maintained her residence in the Vancouver neighbourhood of Strathcona, where she has lived since the early 1970s. Itter’s work is included in the collections of the Belkin Art Gallery, SFU Galleries, Vancouver Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery, Surrey Art Gallery, Nanaimo Art Gallery, Canada Council Art Bank and Vancouver Public Library. She was awarded the VIVA award (1989) and Audain Prize (2017).

List of Works

For a complete list of works in the exhibition, please ask at the front desk or email Teresa Sudeyko, Registrar (teresa.sudeyko@ubc.ca).

RATTLES

Carole Itter’s assemblages, built from second-hand and discarded objects, speak to concerns around domestic life, resources and capitalism’s impact on local and global ecologies. Itter refers to her scavenged hanging collages as “rattles” after her late partner, artist and jazz musician Al Neil, shook one of the wooden sculptures to find out what it would sound like. Along with the rattles, her assemblage works have assumed many forms, including boxes, floor spills and floats, and have been taken apart, re-painted and assembled anew. Rattle #4 (1983) was part of a series of sixteen assemblages installed in 1984 at Western Front, while Rattle (c. 1990) and Grey Rattle (1994) were part of the larger work Desolate Combination of Objects with Long Assemblage (1994), installed at Pitt Gallery.

Table of Contents, c. 1977-78
wood, metal, ceramic and plastic
Collection of SFU Galleries

Rattle #4, 1983
wood, metal and burlap
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, gift of Bill Turnbull, 2009

Grand Piano Rattle: a Bosendorfer for Al Neil, 1984
wood, metal and paint
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, 1986

Rattle, from Desolate Combination of Objects with Long Assemblage, c. 1990
wood, metal and paint
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, gift of Karen Kazmer, 2021
Grey Rattle, from *Desolate Combination of Objects with Long Assemblage*, 1994
wood, metal and paint
Collection of the Surrey Art Gallery

*Desolate Combination of Objects with Long Assemblage*, 1994
gelatin silver print
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Rhoda Rosenfeld

THE INLET

*The Inlet* (2011-ongoing) is an installation that brings together multiple dimensions of Itter’s practice – projection, collage, found-material and textiles – around one locale: Burrard Inlet. Itter lived and worked on the shores of the inlet from the late 1970s until 2015 in the Blue Cabin, a squatter’s shack dating to the late 1920s that she shared with her late partner Al Neil. Installed here for the first time, *The Inlet* reveals the artist’s relation to the water, the foreshore and its non-human inhabitants.

*The Inlet*, 2011-ongoing
installation
Courtesy of the artist

FILMS AND VIDEOS

Itter’s interest in assemblage, performance, poetry, music and ecological concerns are interwoven through her films and videos. These works document performances, gatherings and site-specific installations, with the camera focused on Itter’s (and her collaborators’) engagement with the water, land and collections of found materials. *The Float* (1993), for example, follows a group of women as they orchestrate a “spill” of wooden materials on the surface of tidal waters. The jostling of wooden objects against one another as they move with the water share aural qualities with Itter’s rattles that received their name from the sound they create when shaken, and is a process that, she observes, “sometimes… sounds like water running.” Itter’s film and video works are exhibited alongside short documentary videos that follow her in the studio, as well as while she is installing her assemblages.

Tom Chartrand and Michael Smart
*Carole Itter: Untitled (long assemblage)*, 1988
video
8 m 42 s
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Carole Itter Archive

David Rimmer
*Carole Itter: Where the Streets are Paved with Gold*, 1991
video
28 m 10 s
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Carole Itter Archive

*The Float*, 1993
video
15 m 19 s
Luke Blackstone and Trudy Rubenfeld, camera
With Dominque Fraikin, Jill Fraser, Maxine Gadd, Madonna Hamel, Esther Rausenberg, Jehanne Rogowski, Rhoda Rosenfeld, Trudy Rubenfeld, Beatrix Schalk, Aki Yakimoto and Helen Yeomans, with special thanks to Shawn Chappelle and Al Neil
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Carole Itter Archive

*A Fish Film*, 2003
16 mm film transferred to video
5 m 11 s
Bo Myers, co-director and camera
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Carole Itter Archive
EARLY DRAWINGS AND PUBLICATIONS

Carole Itter’s use of text, drawing and word play emphasize language and form as building blocks for the creation of meaning. Her explorations – mainly from the late 1960s and 1970s – include ink studies that connect patterns and the alphabet, her engagement with visual poetry and her prose writing practice that has resulted in numerous publications. Vitrines include a selection of the artist’s sketchbooks, drawings, photographs, notes and ephemera.

*Early pattern drawings, c. 1960s*
ink on paper
Courtesy of Lorene MacDonald

*the log’s log, 1972-73/1983*
original scrapbook
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 2010

*the log’s log, 1973*
book published by Intermedia Press, Vancouver
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Carole Itter Archive

PERFORMANCE

Carole Itter’s interest in performance and the choreography of everyday life is linked to her education that included set design in Rome in the early 1960s and experience working summers at a professional scene shop at Theatre Under the Stars in Vancouver (1958-61), alongside her studies at UBC (1958, 1963) and the Vancouver School of Art (1959-62). Whether in the fabrication of costumes, the construction of rattles and spills, or the sets for her films, theatre has had an expanded influence on her practice.
Itter’s performances reflect her investment in life on the West Coast and the various social, political and environmental issues that impact this place. Like the assemblages, Itter creates her costumes from reused and hand-me-down materials. Included here is the golden vest Itter wore to the opening of her exhibition *Where the Streets are Paved with Gold* at the Vancouver Art Gallery (1991), her silvery costume for *A Fish Film* (2003) and *Button Vest* (c. 1967), which is made from buttons handed down from her grandmother.

*Button vest*, c. 1967
Courtesy of the artist

*Tribute to Chickens*, 1975
video documentation
17 m 58 s
Collection of Western Front
Edited for this installation, 2023

Fred Herzog
*Carole Itter on a motorcycle*, c. 1970s
gelatin silver print
Courtesy of Mr. Jim Smith

Vest from *Where the Streets are Paved with Gold*, 1991
Courtesy of the artist

*Fish Costume*, 2003
costume for *A Fish Film* performance
Courtesy of the artist

**AT THE WALTER C. KOERNER LIBRARY**
1958 Main Mall

*Raw Egg Costume*, c. 1971
vinyl
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery,
Carole Itter Archive. Photo: Taki Bluesinger

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Programs and Events
For details, visit belkin.ubc.ca

To arrange an exhibition tour for groups and classes, email belkin.tours@ubc.ca

Opening reception
Thursday, September 7 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm with The Carnival Band

Archival conversation with Carole Itter, Brandon Leung and Dan Pon
Saturday, September 23 at 2 pm

Curatorial conversation with Glenn Alteen, Daina Augaitis, Lorna Brown and Kimberly Phillips
Saturday, October 14 at 2 pm

Film Series at The Cinematheque
Thursday, November 2
1131 Howe Street, Vancouver, see thecinematheque.ca for details

Concert with UBC Contemporary Players
Wednesday, December 6 at 2 pm