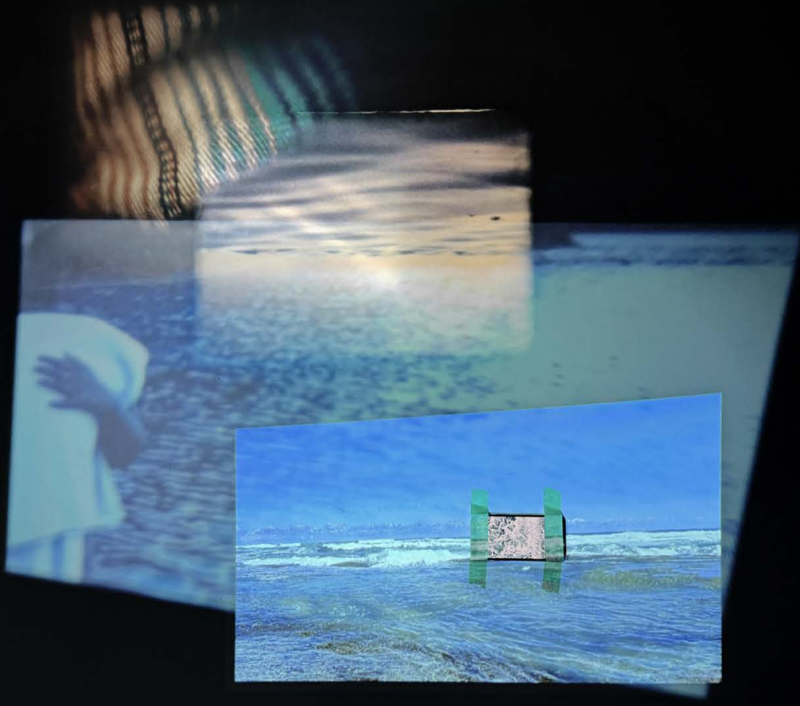


Aqueous Nerve

UBC Master of Fine Arts
Graduate Exhibition 2024



May 3-June 2, 2024

Francisco Berlanga

Alex Gibson

Tiffany Law

Jesse Ross

Morgan Sears-Williams

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Introduction

The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of work by the 2024 graduates of the University of British Columbia's Master of Fine Arts program: Francisco Berlanga, Alex Gibson, Tiffany Law, Jesse Ross and Morgan Sears-Williams. This program in the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory is limited each year to a group of five to six artists. Their contributions to this exhibition are the result of intensive feedback and development within an intimate and discursive working environment. During the past two years, these artists have worked closely with their Advisory Committees, engaged with their fellow MFAs in weekly group critiques and reading groups, artist talks and open studios and built relationships with their peers and the faculty of the department's art history and critical and curatorial studies streams to develop their own aesthetic, theoretical and historically grounded artistic practices.

Aqueous Nerve: UBC Master of Fine Arts Graduate Exhibition 2024 is curated by the Belkin team. The exhibition and catalogue production are made possible with support from the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia.

FRANCISCO BERLANGA

You Can't RSVP to a Ritual

Maya Rodrigo-Abdi

*oh vida por vivir y ya vivida,
tiempo que vuelve en una marejada
y se retira sin volver el rostro,
lo que pasó no fue pero está siendo
y silenciosamente desemboca
en otro instante que se desvanece:*

*oh life to live, life already lived,
time that comes back in a swell of sea,
time that recedes without turning its head,
the past is not past, it is still passing by,
flowing silently into the next vanishing moment:*

—Octavio Paz, *Sunstone: Piedra del Sol*¹

A tidal wave of vivid textiles has washed up onto the concrete floor of the gallery space. Shrouded spectres rise to greet us and related remnants are summoned to the scene. Folded squares of cotton levitate in the air. Swathes of textured colours interspersed with kitschy printed compositions of lurid cartoon cowboys. Their comforting creases have been draped above us on clothing lines and loom over our every move. Stacks of breeze blocks and cement-coated connective tissue remind us to avoid drowning in the deluge of fabrics. At this very moment, Francisco Berlanga is hosting a social gathering that we haven't officially been invited to but must remember to attend. The artist expects us to find ourselves in the gravitational pull of the ritual's ebbs and flows, or at the very least try to dip our toes into his ongoing solar sphere from time to time.



Francisco Berlanga, *Accounting for Bleed* (detail), 2024

All of the loose threads that we encounter here have been sourced from different streams of the artist's memory bank, reflecting the relationship he has with his own cultural heritage. Berlanga thinks about his Mexicanness in terms of partial absences and fragmented pieces that he has both connections to and distances from. These parts have all been either found at fabric stores, gifted by family members or crafted by the artist himself. Organic interventions that arise in Berlanga's Vancouver-based practice repeatedly alter the ways in which representations of Mexico are articulated and engaged with on a material level. Patterns of peachy Aztec-inspired triangles fade into fluorescent pink after baking in the sun through the summer months. Natural dye warps floral embroidery into an oversaturated surface area of multicoloured chemical reactions. Numerous breeze blocks deteriorate after being used and reused in various iterations of his constructions. The more intricately designed blocks are often the first to become casualties, but the separated halves are never discarded upon unexpected impact. Instead, these blocks, along with all the fragments we see here, are kept with Berlanga's other recollections.

Seven spectral figures appear before us. Their arrival has a fated quality to it. It is as if they have been left behind from a past life and are now destined to be drawn in and out of the current until they settle an unspoken something between themselves. It is difficult to make out their distinct features from where we are standing, but elements of their visage protrude behind synthetic veils. They avoid direct engagement with us and instead are turned towards the star-shaped piñata that is central to this meeting. Each figure has been blindfolded with a bandana that is inscribed with paisley outlines. They prepare to break the piñata, following what is popularly thought of as protocol for a party activity. Yet, as they splash in and out of our sight, they are incapable of making direct hits to the candy-filled core of this celestial body. Their passive forms extend into the abyss of other textiles. The longer we drift around this memorial to unfinished business, the more challenging it becomes to ground ourselves in this place.

It feels as if we have been thrown into the deep end together at the Belkin Art Gallery. On a recent studio visit with the artist, he manifested one of the spectres that would be seen in this exhibition in front of me. As I watched him contemplate the shape of this future presence, I began to sense the weight of the body that was suspended by a piece of string. The hope that one could eventually evenly distribute the burden of a haunting lay underneath the sunny yellow eyelets. Do you think we should tread through the depths until we find equilibrium here, or let the moment pass us by until next time?

1 Octavio Paz, *Sunstone: Piedra del Sol*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1991), 24–25.

ALEX GIBSON

Never an Island, Entire of Itself

Julia Trojanowski

Ask a queer person what the word “natural” means to them. Go on, I dare you. It can be a painful question. I am not going to provide a straightforward answer in this essay, but I will point to places where the question of what is deemed natural, and how it is made to appear so, materializes in Alex Gibson’s image, video and installation works. Conceptions of what is natural have been weaponized against queer people whose bodies and social structures tend to run up against normative models. However, queer theory has taught us that that collision can also be generative, in that it calls into question ingrained assumptions about how family life, medical and legal systems, and institutions operate. In living differently, or at least at a relative distance from the abstraction that is the “statistically imagined norm,”¹ queerness points to the tenuousness of that norm, as well as the support and management that it requires in order to maintain itself.² Queerness suggests that that very norm is not necessarily “natural,” but that it is in fact constructed, held rigidly in place, and constantly reproduced: in other words, naturalized. Gibson’s practice similarly opens up a place where conventions can be challenged and new questions asked that may make us think differently about all that appears “natural” to us.

For example, the courtyard of Gibson’s family home in Barbados meets the island’s vaster contours in *Extensions of unfixity*, exhibited in 2023, in which terracotta tiles are laid out among a collection of grey stones. Gibson’s work draws together the small and particular (their childhood home and its accompanying nostalgia) and the broad and expansive (the tectonic activity and erosion that take place in geological time) in order to transgress boundaries. In this work, the collision of scale is important, and there is also something distinctly diagrammatic about it (leaving aside for the moment Gibson’s trove of actual diagrams, which populate the walls), allowing for these disparate poles to be held in proximity. *Extensions of unfixity* comprises the aforementioned installation, a video work and scans of bagged beach detritus; the grainy scans of evidence bags, loaded with seashells, coral and beach glass, and complete with labels, constitute a humorously post hoc crime scene (in fact, it is the Canadian border that Gibson has



Alex Gibson, *My great-great-grandmother's mortar was sold in a garage sale but her pestle formed an island*, 2022

had trouble getting these materials across). All elements are connected by wires that find their way across the floor like so many lines and arrows. If we see the work as a “delineation used to symbolize related abstract propositions or mental processes,”³ it checks out. Queer romance, eroticism, domesticity, ocean currents, coral sand, and the shaping and breaking away of an ancient landmass. All of it is brought into contact here and furthermore it prompts us to ask questions: What is it that occurs when the scale of one’s life is wedged alongside the slow groan and burn of geological processes? Why, indeed, allude to the methods of scientific and criminal investigation in archiving and mapping one’s body, one’s family home and one’s place of origin?

With these observations I am, of course, alluding to the Robert Smithson-esque aspect of it all. Smithson, who famously positioned the minute – his meditations on Passaic, New Jersey, are among the most evocative in his oeuvre – and the mind-bendingly vast so that they could be contiguous. Who pursued a dialectic between the gallery space (the non-site) and the world beyond it (the site), and who aptly declared in “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art” (1968) that “there is nothing ‘natural’ about the Museum of Natural History.” All this in the service of interrogating the aesthetic categories, the “philosophical fictions,” and the cultural institutions whose roots he pulled from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ground.⁴ In troubling that which is assumed to be natural but is in fact culturally or socially reinforced, his mission is not unsympathetic to our own. Continuing Smithson’s work of questioning prescriptive categories, a queer artist, like Gibson, might map their domestic life and the island on which they came of age in order to: a) criticize hegemonic practices of documentation and control; and b) wrangle them into doing queer work. A queer artist might archive their body and their love because the archives that came before us marked us as social deviants (interestingly, in his work on Alphonse Bertillon’s nineteenth-century criminal identification system, “positioning a ‘microscopic’ individual record within a ‘macroscopic’ aggregate,” Allan Sekula, too, considers the relationship between vastly different scales).⁵ After all, as Judith Butler reminds us, heterosexuality requires the “prohibition” of homosexuality in order to be tenable as a category.⁶ Archiving is also the work of making a history, and the necessity of that work for a community that must constantly fight for its visibility and liberation is clear.⁷

By interrogating questions of record keeping and the experience of place, Gibson's work archives things in new ways. Moreover, spatial thinking suffuses so many of the seminal texts of queer theory. Sara Ahmed, for example, considers sexual "orientation" in a spatial sense, describing a normativity that is predicated on having "some objects and not others [with]in reach."⁸ It is through the repetition of acts of archiving that things begin to look "natural." Gibson's work suggests that if we organize things and record them differently, we may get a different idea of the norm. On another distinct but related note, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write that "the queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies."⁹ The archipelago on which Gibson grew up is so much more than a metaphor, to be sure, but isn't it a damn good one?

1 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (January 1998): 557.

2 Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 553.

3 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "diagram (n.), sense 3.b," last modified September 2023.

4 Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 84–85.

5 Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 18.

6 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136.

7 Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Thinking Archivaly: Curating WOMEN 我們," in *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, ed. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 256.

8 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 66.

9 Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 558.

TIFFANY LAW

Sedimentality

Tim McCall

Memory takes the shape of its medium: refracted in the crystal ball, blurred by tear-filled eyes, smeared by the sting of liquor, stolen by the photograph only to be betrayed by fugitive¹ emulsions. But perhaps memory's great peril is the individual's conscious mind. The lone remembering mind backflops on Narcissus's placid pool. Trying to pantomime the past, blind and with a now stinging back, a synchronized swimming routine of one agitates and scatters the reflection. One's attempt to recall and retrospect only disturbs the image of the past: all mimesis is creative. In her sustained critical dialogue with print and drawing media, Tiffany Law invites us to embark on a journey downstream of the Ovidian pool, where the drawing's surface becomes a site of endless inquiry and reinterpretation that register the rippling deformations of the thinking mind.

Central to Law's practice is the concept of sedimentation – a process wherein layers of memory accumulate and disintegrate, leaving behind traces of meaning while erasing others. As the grain of sand contains the vector of a melting landscape, the figment of memory contains the vector of a dissolving consciousness. In both, falling apart generates the seeds of sedimentary becoming. Floodplains, along with some other environments such as salt marshes and sand dunes, can have an excellent archaeological "memory."² If memories can be described to flood, in Law's drawings we see the floodplain, the river that is always tripping over its banks and overturning its course.

The flow of sediment obscures as it preserves, covering over as it entombs. Sediments ride the upstream effects of pool and riffle, eddy and current, wave train and thalweg, settling in for a while until the river shifts its course. In the riverbed, artifact and river stone, the thing made by hand and the thing made by water, are both destined for deposition. They are gathered up pell-mell, (re)collected and passed off from fluvial transit to the stony geology caretaker. Water passes through stone. The landscape deconstructs itself, and is remade, surfaces eroded down and piled up, hills becoming rivers becoming hills again. Artifact and Naturalia blend into the stratigraphy of a disintegrating landscape. In Law's practice,



Tiffany Law, *sentimentary formations* (detail), 2024

drawing becomes a medium of deconstruction – a process wherein memories are dug up, examined and rethought in the ever-shifting landscape of human consciousness. Each trace of the pencil, each layer of graphite, becomes a testament to the elusive nature of memory and the inherent instability of truth. Drawing becomes a plain of contradictions, a space where certainties dissolve and new senses of reality emerge. Look again.

A diamond degrades into graphite, the shimmering surface sloughing off imperceptibly on the temporal order of light years. One allotrope unfolds into the next. The brilliant amplifier of light, the mother of smudge and shadow. Like the dynamic unbecoming of diamond, Law's graphite drawing method initiates the surface as a relational site. With each mark, each gesture, the artist interrogates the boundaries between presence and absence, signifier and signified, inviting viewers to engage in a dialogue of interpretation and reinterpretation. In one staple drawing genre, the drapery study seeks to evoke the body through its covering, that is, volume through surface. Law resituates the representational equation evoking a departed person through a present object. Descartes burrowed into his distrust of appearance through sartorial skepticism. We are Rene(ge): to see the coat and hat, to conjure up the possibility of their having been worn, is to have doubt. To see them as smoky spectres drawn in graphite, as shadows thrown on an empty wall, is to wonder if these signifiers are as hollow as they appear. Through the interplay of light and shadow, Law captures the fleeting nature of memory and the ephemeral quality of certainty, inviting viewers to confront the inherent fragility that defines human consciousness. Drawing becomes a ground of endless openings – a testament to the liquid logic of postmodern flows expressed in the suspended sediment of graphite.

From the boards packed with gypsum, to the texture of the paper and the weight of the graphite, each material element embodies the paradoxical nature of representation and interpretation. Boundaries blur and meanings multiply in the liminal space between reality and representation – wandering through the ruinous, labyrinthine corridors of human consciousness where certainties capitulate, where the never-present vies with paranoid immanence, representability duels overdetermination. One makes up their mind, but only tentatively.

- 1 As in the antonym of "lightfast."
- 2 A.G. Brown, "Introduction and the Example of the Nile," introduction to *Alluvial Geoarchaeology: Floodplain Archaeology and Environmental Change*, Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–14.

JESSE ROSS

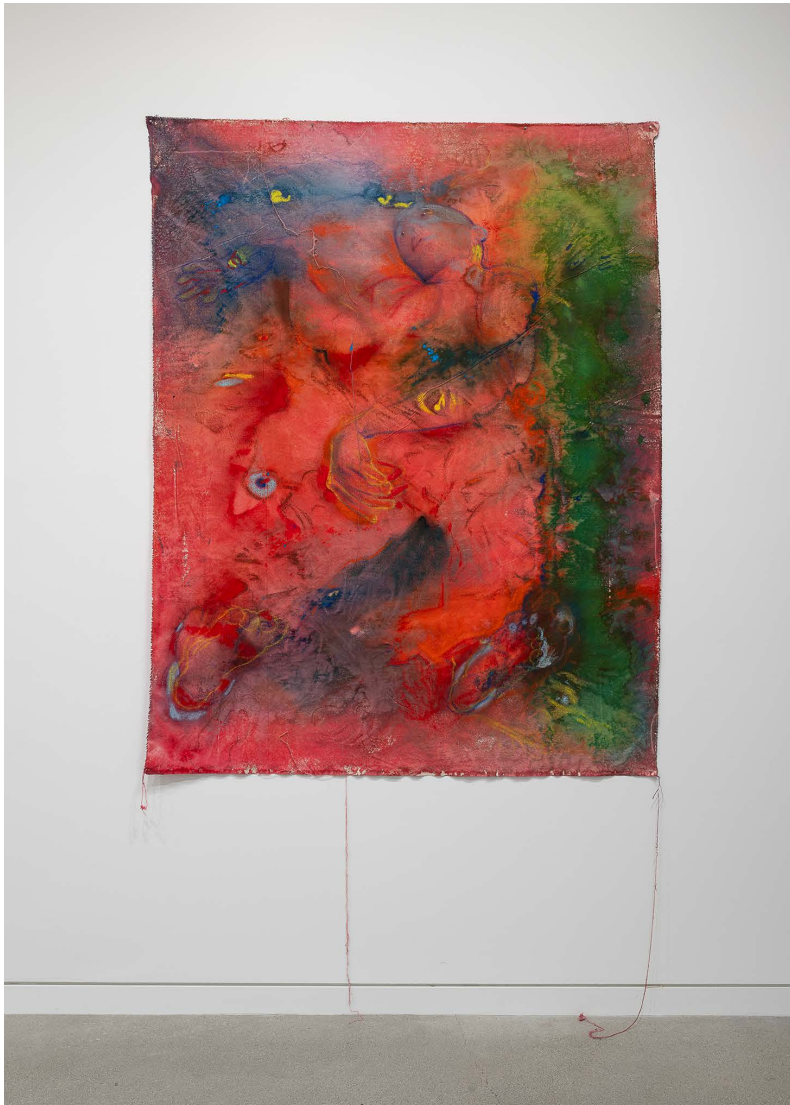
Force of Habit

Laurie White

Confronted with Jesse Ross's large-scale, polychromatic abstractions, my eye sets out across the canvas nomadically, glancing over its topography as if viewing an aerial landscape. Diffuse colours are interspersed with saturated areas, which appear to me as crinkles in the painting's surface. The canvas hangs flat against the wall, yet these "contractions" create a haptic effect, an optical experience of dimension and depth. My gaze lingers in these places where the fabric seems to be pinched or scrunched together, like knots in wood. What at first appeared to be a free-form explosion of colour is in fact mediated by a second layer of careful activity: Ross repeatedly selects and redefines areas of the canvas, which both highlights and makes order from the chaotic dispersion of colour.

This optical "pinching" or "contracting" of the painting's surface suggests a reading of Ross's work in terms of habit.¹ In the work of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, habit is understood as the "contraction" of previous patterns of experience into learned expectations, oriented toward the future. Simply put, if effect B follows cause A enough times, we can begin to assume that B will follow A next time. This pinching together of discrete, particular experiences into habits engages both mind and body; muscle memory and anticipation combine to make the world predictable and more easily navigable. The full texture and thickness of an event are filtered out and we proceed in our activities in a more streamlined manner.

While the formation of habits is not exclusive to modernity or even to humans, the manipulation and exploitation of habit is foundational to the capitalist system. As John Roberts notes, "Under the pressure to fall in line with socially necessary conditions for the production of a commodity, the efficiency and speed of producers (and consumers) are the only factors the value-form recognizes."² Fragmented, routinized and alienated forms of labour allow for the acceleration of capital's circulation. Spectacle culture then



Jesse Ross, *Grand finale followed by silence and falling rain*, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2 cm.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Michael Love

attempts to sell a sense of expansion back to us on its own terms by commodifying novel experiences. Habit, too, is commodified through products and “hacks” that promise to help us make good habits, improve personal efficiency and “get 1% better every day.”³

Without losing sight of these problems, are there also ways that we might recover habit’s immanent potential? For Elizabeth Grosz, following Bergson and Deleuze, habit mediates our ever-changing environments by giving us a repertoire of skills and experiences to creatively draw from in our daily encounters with the world. It is thus an index of a reciprocal relationship, a negotiation that leaves its mark in both our bodies and in our environments. Without this reserve to draw from there would be nothing to measure radical acts of freedom and unpredictability against, nor a ground for their support. “It is only because there is some orderly repetition in both the regularities of the world and in the performative possibilities of bodies,” writes Grosz, “that habits can ease the burden of a creative freedom.”⁴

Thinking about habit causes me to reconsider the visual associations I initially made when first viewing Ross’s work. Sixties counter-cultural appropriations of tie-dyed textiles and Eastern mandalas sprang to mind, along with the schematized colour charts and “thought forms” of nineteenth-century theosophy.⁵ Reflecting on these movements and their visual expressions, it strikes me that theosophy and psychedelia were both attempts to use colour and form as a visual aid in breaking *out* of habitual ways of viewing the world through mystical or hallucinogenic transcendental experiences. Despite the visual similarities I perceived, focussing on the idea of contraction, rather than expansion, allows an alternative reading of what is happening in Ross’s work. Here, the goal seems to be not so much to overcome habit as to explore the freedom to cultivate one’s own habits and “discern another dimension to habits than those that make [them] the object of social manipulation.”⁶

For Grosz, sensations “insert a delay, a gap,” between a stimulus and a response, and are the provocations for new actions whose repetitions and eventual habituation might actualize new desires. Simply by spending time on the patient activity of mark making, Ross enables an investigation of painterly habit as a kind of delay. As a viewer, I too experience a kind of delay when my gaze lingers and traces the contours

of Ross's marks. In the context of art's relationship to capital, delay also signifies a withdrawal, however temporary, from the relentless cycles of commodity exchange.⁷ That delay is created in Ross's works through the habitual practice of mark making is significant because it suggests the possibility for the force of habit to be, if not entirely overcome or decoupled from the routines of production, at least redirected. The question of where this force will be redirected to is open, but, for Grosz, this is the very meaning of habit's potential to think beyond the given order. "Habit," she writes, "not only opens up the living being to the acquisition of new characteristics and capacities, it also opens up the universe itself to being otherwise, to accommodating multiple forms of life with its own openness."⁸ Habit itself is a creative act, honed through practice, which creates "a gap for newness"⁹ in both subject and world.

- 1 Ross's own invocation of Deleuze's term "contraction" as part of the critical vocabulary used to articulate his practice has led me to consider it further here.
- 2 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (New York: Verso, 2007), 35.
- 3 James Clear, *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* (New York: Avery, 2018).
- 4 Elizabeth Grosz, "Habit Today: Ravaissan, Bergson, Deleuze and Us," *Body & Society* 19, Issue 2/3 (2013): 225.
- 5 *Thought Forms* is an occultist book compiled by the leaders of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, originally published in 1905. The book includes the authors' descriptions and illustrations of the patterns of colour and form associated with certain thoughts, emotions and states of consciousness. Annie Besant, Charles Webster Leadbeater and Mitch Horowitz, *Thought Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation*, ed. Lucy Lord Campana (Brooklyn, NY: Sacred Bones Books, 2020).
- 6 Grosz, "Habit Today," 234.
- 7 Roberts notes the importance of "delay" in any practical or imaginary confrontation with the effects of the value-form: "For it is in the space of delay – the space where use-values assert themselves against exchange-value – that the naturalization of the abstract socialization of labour can be confronted, and the division between intellectual labour and manual labour be opened up to reflection." Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 36.
- 8 Grosz, "Habit Today," 233.
- 9 Antonia Pont, *A Philosophy of Practising* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 21.

MORGAN SEARS-WILLIAMS

Technical “Improprieties” & Handmade Cinema: On the Work of Morgan Sears-Williams

Michael Dang

The ways in which Morgan Sears-Williams makes films is categorically “improper”: she buries her film in the ground and into sand, she develops it in lavender, she scratches and makes marks onto it, and allows for vintage equipment to digest it and spit it out. Her works challenge the “masculinist fetishization of technical mastery” and the patriarchal standards of perfectionism and professionalism that plague the film industry.¹ Instead, Sears-Williams allows audiences to see celluloid as a material object, something tangible and physical, rather than as something precious that cannot be handled. The very point of Sears-Williams’s aesthetics is its imperfection: the film grain, its harsh textures, its visible damage and erosion. For the artist, celluloid and 16 mm projectors are active agents and “co-conspirators” in the image-making process. By throwing out the “proper” and “authorized” ways to treat celluloid, as standardized in male-dominated commercial film, Sears-Williams instead aligns herself with the women and queer figures of “handmade cinema.”² The term “handmade cinema” includes the hand-painting, manual editing and careful manipulations made to each frame that has traditionally been the domain of unsung feminine labour in the film industry.

In her most recent work, Sears-Williams takes as her subject the clothing-optional beach at Hanlan’s Point on the Toronto Islands. Hanlan’s Point is a queer space known for community gathering, cruising and being the location of Toronto’s first Pride celebration in August of 1971.³ However, in the decades since, the continued existence of this safe space for queer expression has been jeopardized due to the effects of numerous floods and changing tide patterns. In addition, homophobic violence and proposed redevelopment projects have continued to threaten the queer sanctity of the beach, which is to say that the ecological preservation of Hanlan’s Point is part-in-parcel with the preservation of its queerness. Sears-Williams responds to these precarities by animating the interrelationships, both human and natural alike, of the site. In *feeling along the edges* (2024), she buried her film for five days in the sand dunes of Hanlan’s, where the natural elements (such as hungry fire ants and tiny rocks) were given space to affect the emulsion.



Morgan Sears-Williams, *through the bushes and the trees, you'll find me*, 2024

Sears-Williams's film interventions further echo the entanglement of human and natural survival and bodily presence of queer love in the ecosystem of Hanlan's Point. In *through the bushes and the trees, you'll find me* (2024), Sears-Williams hole-punches into the film and inserts images of couples kissing within the circular frame. One could imagine this series as being much older than it really is, as the images flicker and dance in front of the beholder, destabilizing the viewer's gaze. The choice to foreground queer kissing is multifaceted, most explicitly speaking to the histories of queer activism such as Toronto's kiss-in protests of the 1970s.⁴ In mobilizing this flickering vintage aesthetic, the work also defies the "canonical" male-centric histories of cinema that has foregrounded masculinized heteronormativity since its inception. It is as if Sears-Williams's work asks: what if the May Irwin kiss were lesbian?⁵ The queer filmmakers and artists that Sears-Williams often cites as her inspirations imagine and create new stories of queer cinema

that have often been erased or ignored. These influences include the openly lesbian filmmakers Cheryl Dunye, the Black Liberian American director and writer who is best known for *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), and Barbara Hammer, the experimental avant-garde filmmaker of *Nitrate Kisses* (1992).⁶ Sears-Williams's work emerges within a lineage of women and queer filmmakers and mentors that have shared their skills with her.

The technique of hole-punching film, Sears-Williams says, was inspired by Louise Bourque's practice of "imprints" that also used the circular motif and featured images within images. I am also reminded of David Wojnarowicz's *Sex Series*, in which the artist inserts circular negative images of gay pornography into innocuous landscape scenes to reaffirm the queer presences that have often been marginalized. I see the circular shape as akin to a peephole – speaking to both early instances of film practices as curio-attractions, but also to distinctly queer intimacies and sexualities that continue to be suppressed. Audre Lorde posited *the erotic* as a distinctly feminine and queer site of power that has been suppressed by patriarchal forces, but which can be harnessed as an energy to fight against systemic oppression.⁷

Sears-Williams's "peepshows" speak to Lorde's conception of eroticism as a method imbued with meaning to intimately connect with others. These hole-punches are akin to imprints in the memory – the flickering images in the mind from the past that play on a loop like it does on vintage projectors. Rather than any hegemonic notions of objectivity, Sears-Williams's practice continually emphasizes and foregrounds emotional truths and embodied lived experiences, both of her subjects and of her materials.

- 1 Scott MacKenzie and Janine Marchessault, "Introduction," in *Process Cinema: Handmade Film in the Digital Age*, ed. MacKenzie and Marchessault (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 6.
- 2 MacKenzie and Marchessault, "Introduction," 6.
- 3 Ed Jackson, "Hanlan's Point," in *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, ed. Stephanie Chambers, Jane Farrow et al. (Toronto: Coach House, 2017), 130.
- 4 Donald W. McLeod, "A Gay 'Kiss-In' and the Quest for Equality, 1976," *The Champlain Society* (June 2015), <https://champlainsociety.utpjournals.press/findings-trouvailles/archive/gay-kiss-in/>.
- 5 *The Kiss*, also known as the May Irwin kiss, was a commercial film produced by the Edison Company in 1896. The eighteen-second "peepshow" film showed vaudeville actors May Irwin and John Rice kissing. In contrast, Andy Warhol's *Kiss* (1963) can be seen as another important touchstone of queer representation in experimental cinema, albeit from a cisgender male perspective. See Gert Jan Harkema, "'The Very Act Itself, Even to the Smack': Early Cinema, Presence and Experience," in *New Perspectives on Early Cinema History: Concepts, Approaches, Audiences*, ed. Mario Sluiter and Daniël Biltereyst (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 66, doi:10.5040/9781350182004.ch-003.
- 6 Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 80, 291, muse.jhu.edu/book/32513.
- 7 Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic of Power," in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life*, ed. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 87–88.

List of Works

Francisco Berlanga

Accounting for Bleed, 2024

cotton eyelet, cochineal, lemon juice,
vinegar, calx, alum, iron and synthetic dyes
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Francisco Berlanga

En/tendedero, 2024

store-bought textiles, gifted textiles,
inherited textiles, found textiles, created textiles,
designer garments and dog clothes
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Francisco Berlanga,

Northerners Don't Pray for Rain, 2024

concrete, rope and breeze blocks
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Francisco Berlanga

Selvedge Swell, 2024

store-bought textiles, gifted textiles,
inherited textiles, found textiles, created textiles,
string, piñatas and hand-wrapped candies
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Francisco Berlanga

Spectres Chismosos 1-7, 2024

chicken wire, textiles, crepe paper, bricks,
breeze blocks, concrete and rope
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

*My great-great-grandmother's mortar was sold in a
garage sale but her pestle formed an island*, 2022

archival inkjet print on vinyl
30.5 x 22.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

Myth Piss, 2023

archival inkjet print on vinyl
76.2 x 55.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

Corner of the courtyard, peeling, 2024

inkjet prints, image transfer on translucent paper,
resin and ceramic cherub
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

Courtyard, 2024

4 m 57 s
Courtesy of the artist
Displayed on the Outdoor Screen, Morris and
Helen Belkin Art Gallery

Alex Gibson

Island Piss Index, 2024

archival inkjet print on vinyl
121.9 x 91.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

Leak, 2024

inkjet prints, image transfer on translucent paper,
resin, sand collected from the east coast of Barbados
and plastic
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson

Underside of the courtyard, 2024

dye sublimation print on polyethylene fabric
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson
Untitled, 2024
inkjet print, fossilized brain coral, shells and mirror
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Alex Gibson
Untitled (sand), 2024
archival inkjet print on vinyl
61.0 x 45.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Tiffany Law
sentimentary formations, 2024
graphite on gypsum panels
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Tiffany Law
tongue, 2024
eraser dust and graphite
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Ross
The Equestrian, 2023
acrylic and oil on canvas
254.0 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Ross
common nitrogenous waste, 2024
acrylic, ammonia and water on canvas
182.9 x 1,219.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Ross
*making no appeal whatsoever, asking
for nothing*, 2024
acrylic and oil on canvas
254.0 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Ross
the strangest part of the dream, 2024
acrylic on canvas and LED lighting
81.3 x 61.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Morgan Sears-Williams
iykyk, 2023
ink on paper
27.9 x 35.6 cm each
Courtesy of the artist

Morgan Sears-Williams
a crease or a ripple, 2024
inkjet print on paper and wheat paste
177.8 x 127.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Morgan Sears-Williams
feeling along the edges, 2024
16 mm film altered by fire ants, sand, dirt,
humidity and water
3 m 30 s
Courtesy of the artist

Morgan Sears-Williams
iykyk, 2024
sound recording
Courtesy of the artist

Morgan Sears-Williams
through the bushes and the trees, you'll find me, 2024
16 mm film collage
Courtesy of the artist

Artist Biographies

Francisco Berlanga (b. 1997) reflects on his relationship with his Mexican identity as a second-generation immigrant through the lens of craft. He attempts to understand how one can inhabit a culture while being partially absent from it. He engages in discourse with his own identity through the creation of traditional Mexican manualidades or crafts. His practice engages with concepts of inaccessibility attempting to bridge the gaps between his personal and cultural identities by forcing connections between them and trying to understand the limitations that these identities impose upon each other.

Alex Gibson (b. 1994) is a queer Barbadian artist who filters digital and material processes to generate and archive memory through image, video and installation. As an immigrant genderfluid artist, their work focuses on queer identity, space and temporality. Gibson's work has been exhibited at Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy; Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver; Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver; Tomato Mouse, New York; and Artists Alliance, Bridgetown, Barbados.

Tiffany Law (b. 1994) is a Hong Kong artist who expands the materiality of drawing and printmaking phenomenologically. She comprehends the experience of spatial beings' embodied movements by creating traces and surfaces. Her recent works incorporate rocks found in the Lower Mainland, making rock-pigmented prints that invoke the incarnate temporality, memory and loss entangled with land and landscapes.

Jesse Ross (b. 1991) lives and works in Vancouver. He is of predominantly settler heritage (English and Scottish) and also holds ancestry as a member of the Stó:lō (Skwah) Nation. His practice deals with figuration, embodied knowledge, surface and indeterminacy as a means of transformation. Jesse Ross is a recipient of a SSHRC Graduate Scholarship.

Morgan Sears-Williams (b. 1991) is an interdisciplinary artist and cultivator based in Toronto and Vancouver. She has exhibited her works across Turtle Island and internationally. Morgan Sears-Williams was the recipient of the Roloff Beny Award in 2022, the Pandora Y. H. Ho Memorial Award and the Artscape Youngplace Career Launcher in 2017. She received a Graduate Scholarship from SSHRC in 2023, and has received grants from the Ontario Arts Council including the Chalmers Professional Development and the Career Catalyst in 2021.

Acknowledgements

The artists acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the x məθk əy əm (Musqueam) people.

Inspired by connections and relations beyond the gallery and studio walls, *Aqueous Nerve* is generated via fields of reactive sensitivities. In producing this exhibition, the artists enmesh concerns of space, perception and time.

We would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory (AHVA) and the staff of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery for their support. And we'd like to extend special thanks to our advisors, professors and committee members: Dana Claxton, Gareth James, Terra Jean Long, Jaleh Mansoor, Karice Mitchell, Manuel Piña, Marina Roy, Erin Silver, T'ai Smith, Dan Starling, Althea Thauberger and Gu Xiong.

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We actively acknowledge that the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the x məθk əy əm (Musqueam) people.

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