

DIRECT

DEBUO

GRAM

WINGIM

SAMUEL DE LANGE
HAZEL ECKERT
BAILEY GOVIER
MONIKA HAUCK
BRYNN HIGGINS-STIRRUP
YOONJIN JUNG
ALICIA KUNTZE
CARRIE PERREault
RAZ ROTEM
OANA TANASE
DAPHNE VLASSIS
CLAUDIA ZLOTEANU

DEFAULT PROGRAMMING

By Oana Tanase

Default Programming features a selection of recent works and ongoing projects developed by emerging artists with diverse backgrounds, passions and practices, revealing surprising affinities when they are encouraged to approach, and reflect upon, the blurred borders between art and work. The exhibition presents works reflective of the studio environment and its varied conditions and connotations within the larger fabric of social reality, and thus it aims to cause a debate around the current conditions of artistic production. At first sight, one can easily approach these artworks as if they stage no precise critique, so do their young creators love to trick the viewer by manifesting a rather contemplative attitude towards life, bending their ideas into small and rather quiet gestures. However, none of this means they lack a sense of urgency in shaking the spatialized power relations and governing rules of economics.

Look around, listen to them and discover their effort to deal with the massive shifts that trouble today's world and a deep understanding of the irreversible changes they force. Here as elsewhere, one finds that the thirty-something generation is harshly confined to insecurity and fear, unemployment fatigue, social tensions, and economic breakdown. They are uneasy about both, equity of distribution of resources, and eccentricities in the judging of their professional contribution as visual artists. If we agree with Lars Bang Larsen that "work hours and workspace are no longer fixed entities", that "art and work are, in principle, no longer distinguishable"¹ then we should probably ask ourselves what does it mean for an artist to be at work beyond the contract of employment? How is the logic of the artists' daily life structured? Do artists really privilege one term over the other or are they ready to absorb the challenges encountered at their part-time precarious job place, and translate them later into creative impulses and strategies of production?

There is a general consensus defining this new generation of artists as hyper-vigilant, unsentimental, and persistent; these are the ones expected not to complain about the uncertainty of the future, but to imagine new possibilities, such as stepping into the public sphere as active agents ready to bring in social change. They are "the ungovernables": according to the curators of the New

Museum Triennial in New York (2012), Eungie Joo and Ryan Inouye, the ungovernables are those "faced with a bleak inheritance," ready to embrace "their complex relationship to history and assert a remarkable resourcefulness, pragmatism, and hopefulness in their work".

Unsurprisingly, the issue of artistic labour sits at the core of the present selection of works. *I'm Ambitious When Giving Up* is the title of a performance piece by Carrie Perreault. In 2013, the artist spent seven months in Cambodia, witnessing the volatile political environment and the country's struggle with a recent history of violence and genocide. It was a time not only of prolific work for Perreault, creating installations, audio and video pieces, and public performances, but more so an opportunity to articulate new questions about the everyday role of the artist, especially when working in or speaking about a vulnerable sociopolitical context. The experience provided Perreault with an important awareness of how artistic labour can reflect parallel modes of working and production in contemporary society.

The need to rethink the processes of making art or art-making and to develop new, flexible, nomadic, and collaborative strategies of working is also addressed by YoonJin Jung: accessible for all, her participatory performance pieces engage others to complete the artwork. Although employing a somewhat different strategy

to Perreault's, Jung favours the same precarious modes of working collectively. Even when temporarily abandoning the Internet and web-based social networks, she uses the tools of digital culture: focusing, magnifying, disassembling or reassembling. All these gestures are relevant both at the moment she is asked to position her own practice and when she strives to disrupt the viewer's expectations.

Thus, erasing the aura of authorship and craftsmanship, and constantly questioning skill and de-skilling in performance and participatory art, these artists invite us to reflect on politics and – why not? – the economics of cultural production. Such practices create a space for experimentation and dialogue, negotiation, and engagement.

Other possibilities open when we analyze the conditions of performance art in a post-Fordist era. Let's follow the contributions of Bojana Kunst: evaluating recent reductive trends that define artistic significance by commodity metrics, this art scholar proposes to reclaim political and social value in the arts by re-establishing the association between art and what we have in common as a society. In particular, in relation to performance art, Kunst provokes us to see that its core it is "a sensual and aesthetic diversion of commonality, a distribution of affective intensities and a temporal modulation of the shared perception."²

The work of Alicia Kuntze attempts to reframe this kind of "common reality." Interested in the processes and functions of the human body, the artist chooses to divert and translate them into something tangible. Elusive and sometimes visceral experiences, bittersweet or even melodramatic stories of her private life, are embodied in a collection of uncanny objects. Take for example the exact replica of a tissue box on her own nightstand, displayed in the gallery space, where on all the little tissues one reads the same typed statement: ". . . because it really is just one God damn thing after another." Or the tiny, shiny pins she made out of empty beer cans, or the fragile little pouches shaped like the bags under her eyes, hand-made using old pillowcases – all these works speak about the conditions of art and life being both familiar and strange, nurtured equally by hope and fear, smoothing events and igniting experiences, private memories and collective narratives.

Kuntze's practice is deeply informed by intensive labour, and the same goes for all the artists present in this exhibition. The production process became as meaningful as final product. Not only do

they incessantly explore, excavate, and rethink the conceptual frameworks of the contemporary, but they also probe, rehearse, and exhaust their physical possibilities.

For Brynn Higgins-Stirrup, the untiring commitment to repetition, accumulation, and other mechanisms of art-making shape not only her personal style but also her identity as an artist. Repetitive stabs embossing and colouring paper record and parallel the artist's mental choreography as she seeks that productive void where chance encounters existence itself. Re-enacting a complex set of processes and circumstances involved in the production of old manuscripts, Higgins-Stirrup becomes a contemporary illuminator, navigating ritual and mystery waves. Elegant, seductive, and ceremonial, her interventions on paper are infused with a striking sense of pulsating detail, and geometrical structure.

References to the "working status" of the artists can be also found in projects developed by Hazel Eckert and Bailey Govier. Eckert spends her days in a commercial letterpress print shop working with analogue technology, and her collection of scavenged off of the floor and out of recycling bins materials triggers her "archival impulse." Her body of work revolves around intuitive responses to these found materials, pieces cut away from a bigger picture that she appropriates, documents, and even curates. Eckert's recent *Glass Slide Compositions*, collages made from salvaged debris suspended between sheets of glass, show a tireless curiosity and reverence for these artifacts: the result is both a self-referential image and an ironic comment on the transformations of the context in which she lives and works.

Making use of different media – drawing and painting – Govier exploits the architecture and detritus of the personal studio space. In her latest series, *Working Space*, she not only incorporates new techniques, but also refers to interior design trends and condo architecture, from which she derives a distinctive hue spectrum, both fashionable and critical. Her interests in flattening the traditional static and harmonious representation of a habitable space stand for a constant investigation of the functions and conditions of the medium of painting, and the mechanisms of seeing.

The highly staged image of our daily life and its often-freezing architecture takes a different turn in the vast collection of drawings made by Daphne Vlassis. Unlike Govier, she liberates the picture frame, and sometimes intervenes on

the existing walls of real environments, derailing the perspectives, suggesting new entrances, exits, and secret paths. It is the lack of permanence and the constantly changing point of view that keep her awake to the built environment, her dismissal of security boundaries in the workplace that leads her to a poetic reframing of palpable life.

The desire to conflate different receptive states tuned to constructed space in order to advance a new understanding of the world we live in has a long history in the visual arts. But what these artists import alongside their research is an expression of critique into the system being scrutinized. Deriving a practice from her immediate surroundings, Monica Hauck – like the other artists in this exhibition – engages herself in serial explorations of an idea: she walks through systematic exploration, documentation, trial, error, and action, as she puts it. For her, the task is to explore the levels and consequences of engagement with a specific place, governed by dominant powers. Unsurprisingly, her attention is drawn to urban growth, living conditions, gentrification, and public space. Running through undeveloped fields and fixing their ruin-before-existence status is a productive choice for Hauck to generate mnemonic devices for saving the sense of belonging to a place. There is no chase of the spectacular or the beautiful, but instead of the unnoticed, neglected, and so often invisible precarious conditions of life nowadays.

Take a moment and ask yourself what it means to collapse the memories of all the places where you used to live: you might experience them merging one into another, appropriating each other's smells and colours, and colonizing your own long forgotten structures. And you'll find out why Caudia Zloteanu's artistic discourse focuses on the disruptive realities and parasitic forces within our urban environment. It's a hiatus perceived within the predetermined picture of life, the clash between the constructed reality and the organic, sometimes wild appearances we have to face. Can you still identify a healing-on guard nurse? Is there a presence you can invoke?

Or you play in turn the existing roles of the Guide or Coach, the Merciful One, the Soldier, and the Bride-to-Be, as Raz Rotem suggests to us, and by appropriating each other's voices, you position yourself in the realm of social life. Can we really imagine a future archive of unsettling lives? How can we deal with a raw material of a not yet imagined life? Are we ready to embark on a quest for potential systems of

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economy?

Samuel de Lange's work persuades us by talking about the changing ecology of our relationship with the social reality of here-and-now. Like Rotem directing a "real" drama of the times to come, de Lange is collecting the metadata of individual realities and the vernacular production of digital imagery to stimulate a dialogue about identity politics in everyday life. As Rotem is playing his video documentation piece on a loop to point out that there is no ending for rehearsing of the self, de Lange arrests the continuous developing of old film stock to bring in a specific picture that speaks about growth and decay. And again, one can find a dialogue between his large, monochromatic series of abstract prints and Zloteanu's sculptural works, for instance.

In his "irritating" essay cited above, Lars Bang Larsen addresses the ambiguous relationship between art and work, and articulates a series of arguments in order to favor both the alignment of art with labour, in which the later is seen as a kind of "eternal internship", as well as the treatment of art as non-work, since "aesthetic problems cannot be solved in social space". In his attempt to look at art beyond this dialectical approach, as a field capable of producing a multitude of reflections upon the social fabric of reality, he states that "art must be re-worked and un-worked in a thinking and acting that moves in two (or more) directions at the same time". *Default Programming* brings yet another bit to the music that "enables the articulation of things that have grown together, such as art and work, state and economy, left and right, politics and media, artist and entrepreneur, citizen and consumer, affect and production."³ Thematically free, this exhibition looks at artists' workspaces as sites of knowledge and labour: mobile, temporary, and most times fortuitous, their studios became particular settings for reflection upon all these fluid and complicated relationships.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lars Bang Larsen, "The Paradox of Art and Work: An Irritating Note", *Work, Work, Work. A Reader on Art and Labour*, Jonatan Habib Engqvist, Annika Engqvist, Michele Masucci, Lisa Rosendahl, Cecilia Widenheim (Eds.) (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 18.
- 2 Gabriele Klein and Bojana Kunst, "Introduction: Labour and Performance," *Performance Research*, 17:6 (2012): 2.
- 3 Lars Bang Larsen, 26.

SAMUEL DE LANGE graduated from the University of Guelph with a BA (Honours) in Studio Art and a minor in Art History (2014). His research-based practice results in photographic images, films, videos, and installations. He recently returned from a two-month residency at the Hochschule für Kunst in Bremen, Germany. Recent solo exhibitions include *One Night Stand (with Sam de Lange)*, at Immigration Office in Bremen, Germany and *The Lamp and the Laboratory* at Zavitz Gallery, Guelph, Ontario. In October 2014, his work was featured at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto as the national winner of the *BMO 1st Art!* annual invitational student art competition.

HAZEL ECKERT holds a BFA from OCAD University and is a multi-disciplinary artist and printer based in Toronto. Having worked for 8 years as a letterpress printer, she uses the skills and materials from commercial work both to fund and to produce her own projects. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions, including *If Walls Could Talk* at the Gladstone Hotel, Toronto (2014). In 2010, Eckert received The Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition's Best in Printmaking award and participated in Atelier Graff's Insertion Project in Montreal, Quebec, funded in part by an Ontario-Quebec Residency Grant from the Ontario Arts Council. In 2013, she received the Nick Novak Fellowship from Open Studio, where she opened a solo exhibition in October 2014.

BAILEY GOVIER holds a BA with Honours in Studio Art from the University of Guelph (2011). With close attention to space and colour, her abstract paintings challenge the viewer to perceive shifts between form and space. Exhibitions include *Sincerely Yours*, Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, Toronto (2012), *Abstraction in Canada, an Online Exhibition*, hosted by Little Paper Planes (2012) and *stArt: Young Painters of Great Promise*, Studio 21, Halifax (2011). Govier lives and works in Toronto.

MONIKA HAUCK holds a BA in Studio Art from the University of Guelph (2012). Her interdisciplinary practice is currently focused on documentary photography, public installation, and experimental exploratory practices. She is currently an inaugural participant and resident artist in the Arts Incubator Program at Boarding House Arts in Guelph, Ontario where she also lives and works.

BRYNN HIGGINS-STIRRUP holds a BFA in painting and sculpture from Queen's University (2013). During which, she studied painting at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and art history and philosophy at Hermonceux Castle in the United Kingdom. Her current work focuses on labour-based drawing and sculpture practices. Recent exhibitions include *Tell Me What You're Made Of*, Forest City Gallery, London (2014), *Drawing 2014*, John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto (2014), and *The Last Swim*, Union Gallery, Kingston (2013). In 2014, she was in the emerging artist sector of The Artist Project. Higgins-Stirrup lives and works in Toronto.

YOONJIN JUNG holds a BFA from York University (2011), and is currently a MFA candidate at York University. Jung creates visual exercises with varying mediums and methods including installation, video, sound, photography, and drawing. Recent exhibitions include *Discerning What It Is*, Gales Gallery, Toronto (2012), and *Gaze Into the Moment*, Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto (2011).

ALICIA KUNTZE holds a BA with Honours from Brock University, St. Catharines. Her artworks are often inspired by the human body and come to fruition through various forms and mediums such as installation, sculpture, drawing, audio, and video art. Exhibitions include *Perth Huron Exhibition*, Gallery Stratford (2011), and *Said the Attic*, Rodman Hall Art Centre, St. Catharines (2010). Kuntze currently lives and works in Toronto.

CARRIE PERREAULT holds a BA from Brock University, St. Catharines. Her varying social and political environments influence her work. She is an advocate for human witnessing, which translates into research in meditative gestural acts that counter and speak to discrimination and hardship. Her multidisciplinary work includes video, installation, sculpture, performance, and audio works. www.carrieperreault.com

RAZ ROTEM holds a BFA from UOCAD, Toronto (2009). Rotem's interdisciplinary work includes video, sculpture, fibre and textile, drawing and painting, performance and participatory pieces. He acted as the lead artist for FibreWebs Collective on *Weave – We Are a Part of the Fabric* (2014), a fibre-art community project in collaboration with SOY/Sherbourne Health Centre, SKETCH Working Arts, and was funded by the Toronto and Ontario Arts Council. Other exhibitions include *Travel an Inch; Erode a Day*, a duo show with Christina Kostoff, Interaccess, Toronto. (2009), *Emerging Artists of the Americas*, Albuquerque, New Mexico (2009), *Meditation's on the Curse of Macha*, Board of Directors, Toronto (2009). *The SCIN Show*, Gladstone Hotel, Toronto (2008). Rotem lives and works in Toronto.

OANA TANASE holds a MA in Art History and Theory from the National University of Arts in Bucharest, Romania. She is currently completing her PhD thesis that aims at discussing documentary practices in contemporary art. Previously, she worked as a curator at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest and has since continued her practice as an independent curator in Toronto.

DAPHNE VLASSIS holds a BA in Spanish and Philosophy from the University of Toronto and studied Visual Art at York University. Her artistic practice consists of painting and drawing. Her recent work was exhibited in *International Painting III*, The Jeffrey Leder Gallery, New York (2014), published in the *Hart House Review*, Issue 23, University of Toronto (2014), and cover art for *Rethinking Heritage Language Education*, Cambridge University Press (2014). Vlassis currently lives and works in Toronto.

CLAUDIA ZLOTEANU is currently a graduate student in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto and holds a MFA from the University of Fine Arts, Bucharest, Romania. Between 2010 and 2012 she was an artist in residence in Rome, Italy. Her work includes sculptures, drawings, and photography. Recent group exhibitions include *Spazi Aperti X*, Romanian Academy, Rome (2012), *The Dark side of the Soul*, Museo Magma, Roccamonfina, Italy (2012), *Edgardo Manucci*, Arcevia, Italy (2010), and *Body*, Caminul Arlei Gallery, Romania (2009). Zloteanu currently lives in Aurora, Ontario.

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