



This is an exhibition in multiple parts. One part in Houston, and one part in Montreal. Parts that are present and parts that are not. One part that is happening now and one part that happened before. A room of traces and a room of actions. Linking these parts together are a series of questions: about how and where to present performance art, about the role of audiences in relation to the live body, about how documentation works in tandem with actions. This publication gathers together traces from the first iteration of this exhibition, which took place in Houston in the spring of 2016. It is intended to offer a bridge between that exhibition, and the one at Optica in the spring of 2017.

Cette exposition comporte plusieurs éléments. Certains se trouvent à Houston, d'autres se trouvent ici. Certains éléments sont présents, d'autres sont absents. Certains se manifestent en ce moment, d'autres se sont déjà manifestés. Les actions ont un espace, les traces ont le leur. Une série de questions sert de lien: où et comment présenter la performance; le rapport entre le public et le corps performant; le rapport entre la performance et la documentation. Cette publication réunit des traces de la première itération de l'exposition, qui s'est tenue à Houston (É-U) au printemps 2016. La publication se veut un pont entre cette première itération et celle qui a lieu à Optica au printemps 2017.



I've Only Known My Own is a group exhibition of performance-based work that explores how the materiality of the body is represented through measurements, process, and documentation. First realised in Houston in the spring of 2016, artists Nadège Grebmeier Forget, Ursula Johnson, Autumn Knight, and Michelle Lacombe were invited to revisit, re-perform, or reinterpret their earlier performances for the second iteration at Optica in 2017, and to bring forward traces or echoes from the first exhibition. Writer Mikhel Proulx was invited to witness and respond to the performances in Houston, and his first-person account is included in this publication as another trace. In both iterations, the exhibition evolves over the course of its run, with objects, props, and actions set in motion during the presentation of each of the four works. The exhibition's title (adapted from the title of Lacombe's project) evokes the notion of knowledge that derives from a body, and is specific to a particular body; it is intended as a poetic echo of the themes in these works. The title also speaks to the gap between an individual experience of a performance and the traces that (might) be known or circulated afterwards. Together, the artists presented for this exhibition offer multiple positions from which to approach these ideas, and they open new avenues for considering the materiality and presence of the body within performance.

Ursula Johnson's past performances have used traditional Mi'kmaw basket weaving techniques to trace Indigenous bodies' presence within — and resistance to — legacies of colonial legislation and control. Through strategies of duration and display, her work interrogates outdated ethnographic and anthropological approaches to understanding Indigenous cultural practices. For this exhibition Johnson presents *hide*, a performance that uses leather tanning processes learned from her family and from YouTube tutorials to explore how material knowledge is transmitted from place to place, and from body to body — substituting a piece of synthetic fun fur in place of real animal hide. As in her other works, skillful making is downplayed in favour of an extended and difficult physical exertion, placing her body in close relation to her chosen material, and gradually improving her craft with each subsequent performance. Here, the body in question could equally be that of the animal (its form and qualities determining specific processes), or that of

a body-of-knowledge generated through the repeated performance of the task and translated through alternate materials.

The relationship between performance art and its documentation is a productive and complex aspect of the practice, and one that continues to generate debate among artists and scholars alike. While the four artists in the exhibition all approach this relationship in different ways, questions around how to present or record these traces are significant — if not central — to the way they each create and circulate their work. While there remains an inarguable difference between a live event and its (re)presentation, this exhibition favours those analyses that propose a co-constituting or supplementary relationship between a performance and its documentation. Or perhaps more accurately, these projects take up this proposition to ask: how might the supplementary relationship between a performance and its trace be factored into the practice of exhibition-making (whether through the work of the artist, curator, photographer, or writer)? By including traces in the creation and presentation of these works, this exhibition offers one possible approach — and one that is developed in dialog between artist and curator, as well as in the distance between the exhibition's two sites.

Nadège Grebmeier Forget's ongoing series *One on one's for so-called fans* involves private performances that are translated afterwards through oral accounts and performative re-tellings, and continues the artist's investigations into the role of documentation and technology in mediating access to her performing body. *Walls of Wind: The mirroring and rendering*, the latest in this series, takes up the idea of mirroring: responding first to the architectural features of the Houston gallery (and the performance that happened there), and then again to their absence in Montreal. While she initially limits the audience for her work, setting parameters around when and how she is seen, Grebmeier Forget then relinquishes control, relying on her chosen witnesses to transmit (sometimes inaccurately, but always personably) the story of what they experienced. The decadence and intimacy of her performances are contrasted with her more austere architectural interventions, which use forms that reference gallery spaces and display strategies. These spaces, while seemingly empty, are nevertheless invested with the presence of the actions that they once hosted.

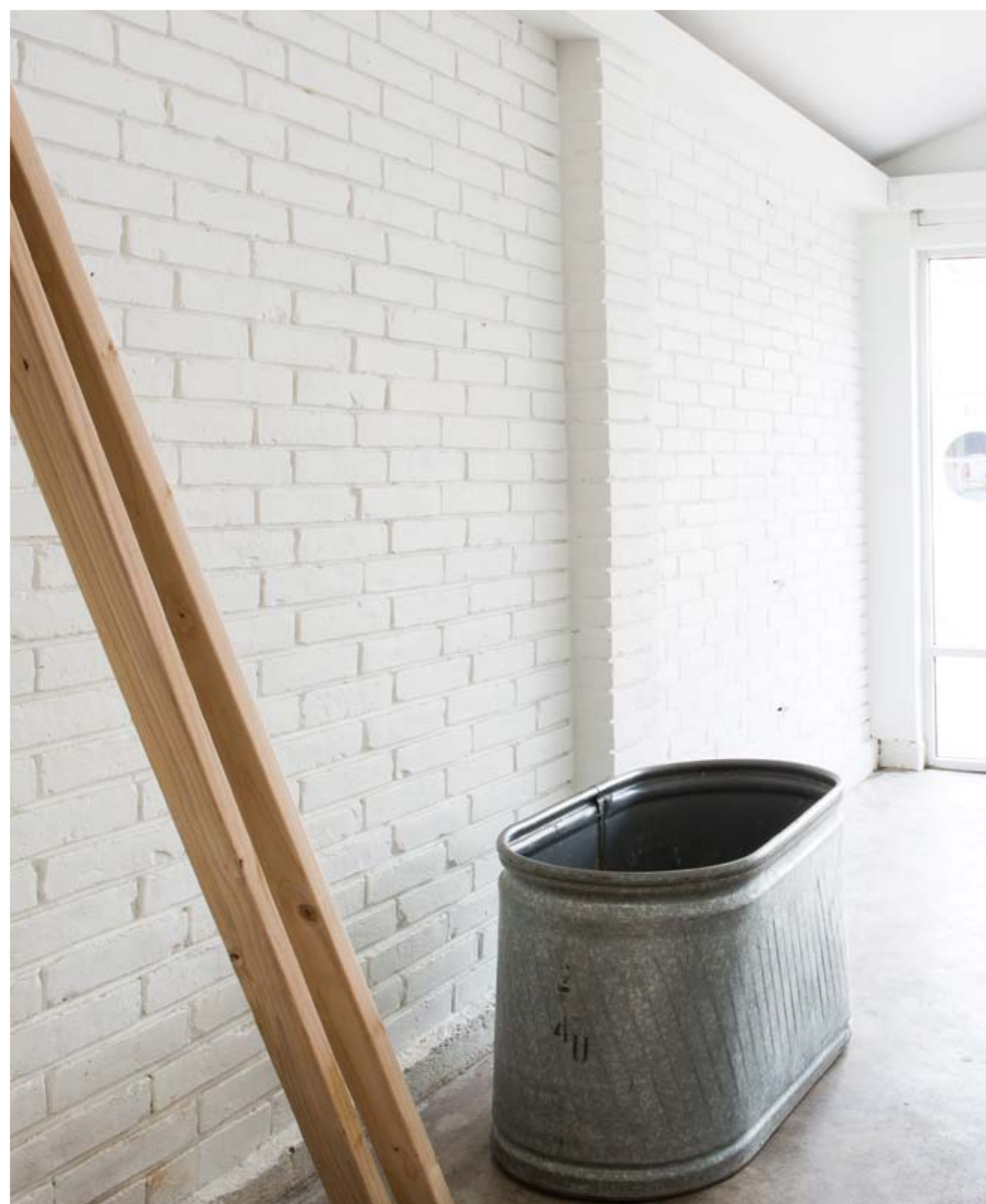
Central to this project is an interest in experimenting with the forms and sites for presenting performance art, and the ways in which artists, audiences, curators, and writers might work together to accomplish this. By reassembling

these artists and works, the second version presents further opportunities to consider the role of documentary traces, as well as the evolution of each work in relation to a new site. It also proposes a whole new set of questions and challenges: what does it mean to 'tour' an exhibition of performance-based works? In this sense, the exhibition can also be understood as a space of experimentation, where ideas are worked out in real time and in conjunction with a local audience.

Autumn Knight often uses conventions and props drawn from theatre, reworking these into performances that trouble the divisions between gallery and stage, performer and audience. Walking a line between something scripted and spontaneous, her performances centre the roles and presence of Black women, and use dialog, voices, and gestures to uncover and critique structures of power. Her performance *Documents* involves a public reading of the documentation that serves to authenticate or legitimize citizenship, adapted in the second exhibition for a Canadian (and more specifically, Montreal) context. A key element of this work is a filing cabinet that both holds the props required for the performance, and also serves as a portrait or trace of Knight herself, standing in the space before and after the performance takes place. During the performance, Knight's interactive reading of the documents in the files addresses the embodied specificities of race, class, and gender to contest whether these categories accurately reflect the bodies they are meant to represent — while underlining how different audiences and different relationships to power may influence this reading.

In many ways, the artists included in this exhibition reference and respond to the legacies of feminist and conceptual art, using predetermined rules or scripts to structure the creation of their performances, while allowing for variations and improvisations within the confines of these systems. Typical understandings of conceptual art tend to downplay the messier aspects of the bodies or materials that were nevertheless present in its creation. This exhibition instead proposes a closer relationship between the body and the systems and rules it may create. It asks how the matter of the body might become a tool or force that generates or expresses its own il/logical systems, and aims to think through how this material embodiment might function as a form of resistance.

In Michelle Lacombe's multi-phase project *Of All the Watery Bodies, I Only Know My Own*, the artist used a monthly measurement of the volume of blood in her body to determine the placement of a tattooed wa-



ter line around her calves. Here, the body's cyclical fluctuations became a rule for generating a monthly performative ritual, and a way of temporarily documenting and queering an unused reproductive potential. If, as in Sol LeWitt's well-known pronouncement on conceptual art, "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art," Lacombe's project reworks this proposition: the fluctuations of the body become the machine that makes the art. In Houston, Lacombe cut into a series of photographs she took of the moon, and then returned the final 13th moon to her body by tattooing a new waterline mark onto her abdomen. At Optica, Lacombe presents *The Mother Moon*, which begins with the distribution of temporary tattoos that reproduce this circular shape. These will be offered for free until they run out. Once (or if) depleted, she will present a second action that will make the mark permanent.

The popularity of performance and live art practices (both contemporary and historical) means that these are increasingly making their way into galleries, and occasionally museum collections. Live presentations are, however, less often presented as the main attraction, and instead included as public programming or event-based presentations in lobbies, stairwells, and at openings. Along with festivals and site-specific creations, these approaches to presenting performance are certainly derived by the demands and wishes of the artists and medium itself. But the gallery still remains a privileged site, one whose advantages and systems are taken up in *I've Only Known My Own* to provide time and space for the work to unfold and for traces to accumulate. Together, the artists in this exhibition use this site to create and perform, working within (and sometimes against) the support offered by its structures.

-Nicole Burisch, curator, 2017

I've Only Known My Own (Je n'ai connu que le mien) est une exposition collective qui explore les façons dont les artistes représentent la matérialité du corps, que ce soit par la mesure, le processus ou la documentation. J'ai invité Nadège Grebmeier Forget, Ursula Johnson, Autumn Knight, et Michelle Lacombe à revisiter, à repenser et à réinterpréter des performances réalisées à l'origine à Houston (É-U) au printemps 2016, tout en les encourageant à actualiser des traces et des échos de celles-ci pour cette seconde itération de l'exposition. L'écrivain Mikhel Proulx a été témoin de ces performances, et sa réponse, qui figure également dans cette publication, représente une autre trace de la première itération. Dans les deux versions, l'exposition prend une forme évolutive, par une mise en marche d'objets, d'accessoires et d'actions dans les œuvres des quatre artistes.

Le titre de l'exposition (adapté du titre du projet de Lacombe) évoque les connaissances qui découlent d'un certain corps, et qui sont propres à celui-ci. *I've Only Known My Own* se veut un écho poétique aux thèmes présents dans les quatre œuvres. Le titre renvoie aussi à l'écart entre l'expérience individuelle d'une performance et les traces qui en sont (ou qui ne sont pas) diffusées par la suite. Les artistes présentées ici proposent de multiples positions à partir desquelles aborder ces idées, ouvrant de nouvelles pistes de réflexion pour penser et repenser la matérialité et la présence du corps performant.

Dans ses performances antérieures, Ursula Johnson s'est servie de techniques traditionnelles de vannerie mi'kmaq dans l'optique de retrouver la présence des corps autochtones dans l'héritage de la législation et du contrôle coloniaux — et pour y résister. Par des stratégies de durée et de présentation, elle interroge certaines approches ethnographiques et anthropologiques dépassées pour comprendre les pratiques culturelles autochtones. Dans cette exposition, Johnson présentera *hide*, une performance qui utilise des procédés de tannage du cuir, appris de sa famille et de tutoriels sur YouTube, pour explorer comment le savoir matériel se transmet d'un lieu à l'autre et d'un corps à l'autre, en remplaçant le vrai cuir animal par un morceau de fourrure de fantaisie. Comme dans ses autres œuvres, l'importance de

l'habileté technique est minimisée au profit d'un effort physique prolongé et difficile qui met son corps en lien étroit avec le matériau, de façon à ce que sa technique s'améliore graduellement au fil de ses performances. Ici, le corps en question pourrait également être celui d'un animal (sa forme et ses propriétés déterminant le procédé à utiliser), ou celui d'un corps de connaissances créé par la performance répétée d'une tâche et traduite par des matériaux autres.

Le rapport entre action et documentation représente un aspect complexe et riche de la performance qui continue de susciter des débats autant chez ceux qui écrivent sur la discipline que chez ses praticiens. Bien que chacune de ces artistes aborde ce rapport à sa façon, la question de comment enregistrer et présenter la trace demeure importante, voire centrale, dans les quatre pratiques, autant dans la réalisation que dans la circulation des œuvres. Alors qu'il existe un décalage certain entre une action en direct et sa (re) présentation, cette exposition privilégie des démarches proposant une relation co-constitutive ou complémentaire entre une performance et sa documentation. Ou, pour être plus précis, les projets assument cette proposition dans le but de poser la question suivante : comment la relation complémentaire entre une performance et sa trace peut-elle s'intégrer à la monstration comme pratique, que ce soit celle d'un artiste, d'un commissaire, d'un photographe ou d'un écrivain ? En intégrant la trace à la réalisation et à la présentation des œuvres, *I've Only Known My Own* propose une approche développée en dialogue entre l'artiste et le commissaire, et entre les deux lieux d'exposition.

La série en cours de Nadège Grebmeier Forget, intitulée *One on one's for so-called fans* comprend des performances exécutées en privé qui sont ensuite traduites en comptes rendus verbaux et en nouveaux récits ; dans cette série, l'artiste poursuit ses investigations sur le rôle de la documentation et de la technologie dans la médiation de l'accès à son corps performant. *Walls of Wind : The mirroring and rendering*, la dernière de cette série, reprend l'idée du reflet — réagissant d'abord aux caractéristiques architecturales de la galerie à Houston (et à la performance qui s'y est déroulée), puis de



nouveau à leur absence à Montréal. Bien qu'elle limite au départ l'accès du public à sa performance, en établissant des paramètres quant au moment et à la manière dont elle est vue, Grebmeier Forget renonce ensuite au contrôle, se fiant aux témoins qu'elle a choisis pour transmettre (parfois inex-actement, mais toujours en mode personnel) le récit de ce qu'ils ont vécu. La décadence et la générosité de ses performances se démarquent de ses interventions architecturales plus austères qui utilisent des formes renvoyant à l'espace de la galerie et aux stratégies de monstration. Ces espaces, bien que vides, sont néanmoins investis de la présence des actions qu'ils ont autrefois accueillies.

Au centre de *I've Only Known My Own* se trouve le désir d'expérimenter autant avec les formes et les lieux de présentation de la performance qu'avec les modes collaboratifs (entre artistes, publics, commissaires et écrivains) qui rendent cette expérimentation possible. En réunissant ces artistes et ces œuvres, cette seconde itération de l'exposition devient l'occasion de repenser le rôle de la trace documentaire, et sur l'évolution de chaque œuvre par rapport à un contexte de présentation inédit. L'itération montréalaise propose un nouvel ensemble de questionnements et de défis : que signifie l'aspect « itinérant » d'une exposition d'œuvres performatives ? Dans cette perspective, on peut aussi comprendre l'exposition comme un espace d'expérimentation, où les idées sont travaillées en temps réel et en relation directe avec un public sur place.

Autumn Knight fait souvent appel à des conventions et à des accessoires empruntés au théâtre qu'elle retravaille sous forme de performances où sont brouillées les divisions entre galerie et scène, entre performeur et public. Oscillant entre le scénarisé et le spontané, ses performances s'articulent autour des rôles et de la présence des femmes noires, utilisant des dialogues, des voix et des gestes pour dévoiler et critiquer les structures du pouvoir. Sa performance, intitulée *Documents*, comprend une lecture publique de la documentation servant à authentifier ou à légitimer la citoyenneté, adaptée cette fois au contexte canadien (et plus précisément, montréalais). Au cœur de cette œuvre se trouve un classeur qui contient les accessoires nécessaires

à la performance et qui sert en même temps de portrait ou de trace de Knight elle-même. Par sa lecture interactive des documents contenus dans le classeur, Knight aborde les spécificités incarnées qui sont liées à la race, à la classe et au genre pour remettre en question ces catégories, pour savoir si elles reflètent réellement les corps qu'elles sont censées représenter, tout en soulignant comment différents publics et différents rapports au pouvoir peuvent influencer cette lecture.

À bien des égards, les artistes dans cette exposition font référence et répondent aux héritages de l'art féministe et de l'art conceptuel : elles se servent de scénarios et de règles prédéterminées afin de structurer les performances, tout en permettant la variation et l'improvisation à l'intérieur de ces systèmes. Les analyses traditionnelles de l'art conceptuel ont tendance à minimiser les aspects désordonnés ou confus des corps et des matériaux qui ont cependant toujours été bien présents dans les pratiques conceptuelles. En revanche, *I've Only Known My Own* propose un dialogue plus étroit entre le corps et les systèmes et règles qui en découlent. D'une part, l'exposition pose la question à savoir comment la matière qu'est le corps peut devenir un outil ou une force génératrice apte à exprimer ses propres systèmes (il)logiques. D'autre part, elle vise à repenser les façons dont cette incarnation matérielle peut fonctionner comme forme de résistance.

Dans le projet à phases multiples de Michelle Lacombe intitulé *Of All the Watery Bodies, I Only Know My Own*, l'artiste procède à un mesurage mensuel du volume de sang dans son corps pour déterminer la position d'une ligne de flottaison tatouée autour de ses mollets. Ici, les fluctuations cycliques du corps deviennent une règle servant à générer un rituel performatif mensuel ainsi qu'une manière de documenter temporairement et d'examiner, d'un point de vue queer, un potentiel reproductif inutilisé. Si « l'idée devient une machine qui fait l'art », selon la célèbre phrase de Sol LeWitt sur l'art conceptuel, le projet de Lacombe repense ainsi cette proposition : les fluctuations du corps deviennent la machine qui fait l'art. À Houston, Lacombe a fait des découpes dans une série de photographies de la lune qu'elle a prises, puis a transposé la treizième et dernière lune sur son corps en tatouant une

nouvelle ligne de flottaison sur son abdomen. À Optica, Lacombe présentera *The Mother Moon* qui s'amorcera par la distribution de tatouages qui reproduisent cette forme circulaire. Ceux-ci seront offerts gratuitement jusqu'à leur épuisement. Une fois les tatouages épuisés (s'ils le sont), elle présentera une deuxième action qui visera à pérenniser cette trace.

La popularité des pratiques performatives (du présent et du passé) donne actuellement lieu à une visibilité croissante dans les galeries, et, à l'occasion, dans les collections muséales. Les actions en direct sont cependant dans la majorité des cas présentées en marge de la programmation principale, dans le contexte d'événements ou de médiation publique, dans les halls d'entrée et cages d'escalier, et lors de vernissages. Ces modes de présentation (ainsi que les festivals et les créations in situ) découlent certainement des exigences de la discipline et des désirs des artistes qui la pratiquent. La galerie demeure toutefois un lieu exclusif ; *I've Only Known My Own* explore les privilèges et les systèmes qui lui sont propres afin d'ouvrir un espace et un temps où il sera possible pour les œuvres de se déployer et leurs traces de s'accumuler. Collectivement, ces artistes se servent du lieu d'exposition pour créer et performer, travaillant avec (et parfois contre) ce qu'offrent ses structures.

– Nicole Burisch, commissaire, 2017



NOTES FROM HOUSTON**Mikhel Proulx**

I hadn't intended to start an essay by referencing myself, but almost from the outset of witnessing these performances it was clear I'd need to account for my position. It's barely April and this place is already too hot for me. Houston is a sprawling city of giant shopping malls, southern manners, and firearms retailers. Throughout my week here—by invitation of the show's curator, Nicole—I'll spend most of my time in either the upper-crust quarter where a local gallerist is billeting me in her guesthouse, or the hipster neighbourhood where locals get delicious 2\$ tacos from a parked van. Really, most days are spent at the gallery – a former domestic residence turned white-cube, run by an impolite restaurateur. Nicole has asked me to write something about the exhibition. For the next week in Houston four artists will take as material the somewhat mundane aspects of performance art itself: the body, audience, and time. And each will be treated differently by these very different artists. Their artworks are also each concerned with documentation, and this text serves as another document of their actions—as flawed and partial as any photo or recording.



Ursula, April 2

The night before her performance we had a beer in the gallery. Well, she had a diet Coca Cola, and told me this would be her first time skinning a hide. I'm surprised: Ursula is known for working with craft processes that demand great skill, and has strong ties to Mi'kmaq cultural practice. Knowing as little as I do about traditional hiding techniques, I was chuffed to have access to a real—authentic—demonstration.

I came a few minutes late to the performance (twenty minutes into what would take several hours) and water had already begun seeping on the gallery's concrete floor: a small stream of liquid pooling between the metal basin and Ursula, now piercing industrial yellow twine through a black bear hide. Last night, when chronicling to me her tedious trip through the airport to get here, she jokingly described the tools she uses as prison shanks—makeshift scrapers and gouges—woodworking handles duct-taped to blades, and a shard of obsidian she'd be using to scrape the hide. The 'hide,' it turns out—dripping now as it's stretched—is a piece of quality faux fur she bought back in Halifax, and is proving at least as hard to pierce through as the real thing, though I wouldn't really know. Neither would Ursula, apparently.

With an amount of effort clear to those few of us sitting in the gallery, Ursula wrestles the wet fabric onto its frame—a large lumber square propped onto the white brick wall. A photographer follows her movements on his knees (he'd introduce himself to us later as Lynn, and tell us about some of the screwed-up politics of Houston's gay scene). Passersby who look in through the gallery's storefront window are alternately dumbfounded or blasé, but nearly nobody stops in, aside from the Texan art crowd keen to see the Canadian Indian at work. At one point Ursula grabs a spray bottle to slacken the realistic 'fur.' She looks up and mentions that she saw it "done this way" in a YouTube video.

It strikes me that this is a form of knowledge transfer like any other—learning from video tutorials—though it's not the familial heritage of crafting I had expected to witness today. Ursula's grandmother taught her basket-weaving, I think she once said in an interview I read. I suppose I was expecting something like access into this legacy, however vicarious, but instead she seems to be making it up as she goes along. I realize that I could very well be in Ursula's shoes, now kneeling to scratch through one edge of the synthetic coat: I might do this at least as well. It's becoming clear to me that I unwittingly brought some expectations into the gallery: that she would show off some expertise; demonstrate how a real Indian skins a hide. Perhaps each of us, now witnessing Ursula scrape polymer fibres from its woven backing, brought in such expectations. Mine were probably also fueled by rifts in my own Indigenous heritage: I never learned my grandpa's first language, never mind the craft skills of our ancestors.

We chat as visitors come and go. A time-lapse video would show this great piece of fabric balding, as it looks decreasingly like the real skin of a real animal. It's doubly removed from the wild—torn from a creature, dislocated from Canada, and now shaved in the window of a busy Houstonian thoroughfare. Of course the skin isn't really a bear's, and isn't really done right. But this seems to matter less and less, with each scrape of Ursula's tool. As she works, the thing on the wall becomes barely corporeal, while Ursula's own body is more physical now through this prolonged, tedious labour. The detritus of the endeavour—fine, loose synthetic hairs in dried clumps on the floor beneath the skin—has found its way around the gallery and into the street outside.









Michelle, April 7 Michelle seems nervous as she begins to set out the materials for her performance. Maybe thoughtful, not nervous—I'm unsure. We're all quiet in the audience and Michelle ignores us, largely, though she has begun to blush—averting from the faces of some twenty of us, flanking the rooms adjacent to her. Near a chair in the corner is a small tattoo-gun, which I recognize as belonging to the host of a barbecue party we went to last night. He served me something he called *bum-wine* and it was strong enough to see me ask for a tattoo of the word *Internet* on my ass. He didn't, thank god. He isn't here today, and those who are now sit silently as Michelle continues to lay out her tools: ink, cellophane, a shaving razor, scissors, Vaseline... The way she moves around these things makes me think she hasn't yet figured out what will happen next.

Michelle undoes her pants and lifts her shirt, exposing her abdomen. She has some visible scars and tattoos on her body. From the same gallon jug of water Michelle takes a sip, fills the tattoo-gun's cartridge, rinses a razor and then shaves her belly, facing us. I had asked her earlier what she planned to do here, and so am squeamish in my anticipation of what is going to happen next. Instead of what I had dreaded, she steps toward the other corner of the room, the walls of which hold a dozen prints which have been hanging since the show opened. They each show a snapshot photo with a full moon at center—a year's worth, I surmise. Some images show the moon through a lens flare or veiled behind clouds, but most display a clear, nearly perfect circle.

Michelle squats down and spits into a small cup of black ink and then dips in her finger. She steps up to one of the prints, lifts its bottom away from the wall, and then dabs the wall with her blackened finger approximately behind



where the moon is in the image. Next, by removing the two magnetic discs that affix the print to the wall (she sets them on her hoop earrings) she lifts the paper—revealing the smudge. She lays the print on the ground, snaps the blade from a utility knife with her hand, and then carefully cuts the circumference of the moon. The print now has a nearly perfect circle cut from its center. When she rehangs the paper, the effect is an eclipse-like image—the print hovering a few centimeters from the stained wall to show a black circle like a dead eye where the moon once was.

She cautiously repeats the process: squat, spit, dab, snap, cut, rehang; squat, spit, dab, snap, cut, rehang... And as she follows the rules of this ritual she remains silent, as do we. I can hear the sound of a recording playing from a tape deck in a closed drawer belonging to the installation of another artist, but it's as muffled as the sounds of passersby and traffic outside. Other than that, it's quiet. Just Michelle's hushed movements. And Lynn, prowling the room for the best shots. She's going to do this for all twelve prints, obviously, and we watch her move through the motions. I'm still thinking about the tattoo-gun. Squat, spit, dab, snap, cut, rehang.

Michelle has done about half of the photos when she wipes sweat from her palms and prepares to cut another circle. And then—in this cautious coordination—she slices herself accidentally with the utility-knife. She's been snapping them with her palm. This is the first of a few small blunders in her strict setup. Next, she finds her spit running dry when squatting to dilute the ink. Then she forgets, on her first of the last five prints, to dab a black patch behind the photo. At another point she drops one of the magnets and spends half a minute looking for it. They're small, trivial errors—human, in that peculiar usage of the word. And they show her own, very human body

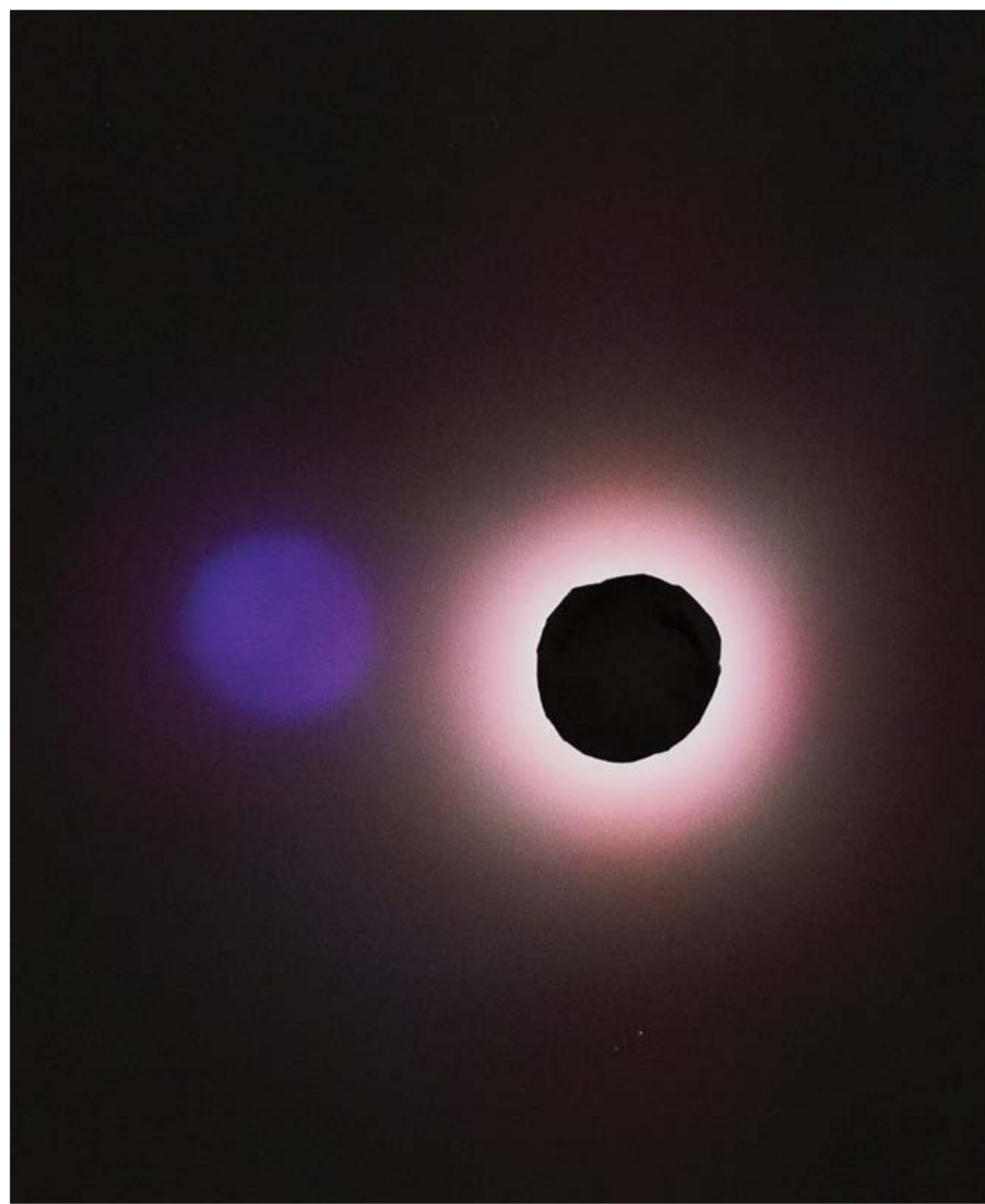
while the system stalls in these moments. She snuffles and I wonder if she has allergies.

By now—all prints rehung—some of the crowd has left before the real show begins, when Michelle returns to the other corner. She picks up the tattoo gun that—though I'm no expert—looks like something you'd find sooner in a prison than a parlour. At some point it becomes clear to me that I'm not seeing the full picture. Michelle is showing us a series of candid and accessible series of gestures, and yet I sense that something is lost on me here. Perhaps this is a reference to precedents in body art and tattooing, certainly also to female embodiment—relations to the moon cycle, herstories of blood rituals, and cultures of body modification—all of which I have limited access to. As I watch Michelle prepare herself for the next stage I am increasingly aware that her thinking seems to be layered with allusions and representations.

Michelle draws a circle with Vaseline on her gut, and then—without ink—tattoos a line over it. I had known this would happen, and the thought of witnessing it makes me squeamish. In truth it is less gross than anticipated. Far less blood and wincing. There had been no ink in the tattoo gun, leaving a whitish, swollen, slightly oblong ring on Michelle's reddened skin. So here it is—straightforward and explicit: an imperfect circle, in an incomplete system, on a very human body.







Autumn, April 8

We're late to the party—all of us now walking into the gallery at the specified time. Evidently the performance started an hour early, unannounced to all, save for the group seated already—clearly viewing the end of a lecture of some sort. The group, conspicuously, is exclusively made up of African Americans. Shortly after we—a mixed group, mostly white—shuffle hushedly into the gallery, the Black group finish up and exit the space.

The switch-over is swift, and now I'm waiting for things to start – my chair still warm from the last sitter. The first group has left some remnants, and our chairs face a folded plastic table and the metal cabinet which has been standing here all week. Nicole invites any of us here to volunteer to set up a table and read from a script left by the artist —herself notably absent. It's slightly awkward for a moment – this is the bit about participatory performance art that I usually hate. But a guy stands up, finally, willing to take the role. I would learn later that he is a curator at the local museum – 'Mike.'

Mike sits in front of us and picks up a few sheets of typed instructions, on top of which I can see are penned some annotations. Mike looks the sheets over, then reads aloud something poetic that I would mostly forget later. Largely it concerns documentation and citizenship, and how race, class, gender, sexuality, and mental ability might be 'proven' in some official way—how these things are implicit in documents and identification cards and such. The instructions next called upon the speaker to refer to a stack of papers tucked into one drawer of a standing filing cabinet. These include columns cut from newspapers, film stills, and pieces of the artist's identification: a birth certificate and New York State Benefits card. The script also takes the speaker through other drawers containing tissues and a Ziploc baggie filled with red wine. These are props that Mike uses as he guides us through a series of exercises.

First, the group plays a handful of rounds of *Never Have I Ever* from a list the artist has left for us, clearly written around issues of class: *Never have I ever attended a private school; Never have I ever had roaches in my apartment; Never have I ever borrowed money from my parents...* We play along,

us in the room, and after the list is exhausted we add our own: *Never have I ever used a public clinic; Never have I ever flown first class...* and we each raise our hand if the statement applies to us. It's a fairly fun game, and fun for me to see how others answer, though I know almost nobody. I feel a bit embarrassed admitting aspects of my privilege. I didn't go to private school, though my dad has loaned me money a few times.

The next act brings us through a small stack of photos of famous Black Americans: Oprah, Bill Cosby, Martin Luther King Jr., and we are encouraged to think about what stereotypes we carry when reading images of their faces. From here the conversation derails into something I don't quite follow—something about re-imagining the movie *Ghost* if Patrick Swayze was actually the ghost of Whoopi Goldberg. The discussion is dominated by two guys who were already taking up a lot of space. I don't mind, but I don't know the references, like Beyoncé's new video, which I haven't seen.

Next, Mike asks us all to check our clothing—our shirt and our pockets—then to help those seated beside us to see what our clothing labels read. As we're finishing this task, Mike holds up some endoscopic image of a body's interior—fleshy and medical—and we're told it's a photo of a urethra. Mike asks us if we're looking at a document of someone who is "gendered." And I think, *well, everyone is 'gendered' somehow, right—read as masculine or feminine by others?* But most people in the room seem to think otherwise, so I don't press it.

Finally, Mike picks up his phone and calls a number evidently printed on the instructions. He lifts it toward the mic, and we hear a woman. It's Autumn—I recognize her voice, and imagine that she's been waiting in a car around the block for the past hour. She asks about Mike – why he has ended up in the chair in front of us, who he is, how he identifies, etc. And it is clear now to us who hadn't already recognized: Mike felt self-empowered or entitled enough to stand up and take the lead in the room – a self-described straight, white man who has spent the last hour running the show. In truth, I feel bad for the guy in this moment – he unwittingly stepped into a role that I very well could have. Of all the unsettling elements of the last hour—racism explicit in pop culture, class difference among us in the room, the ways in which we read gender—this is the most worrying to me; another white-skinned guy not fully aware of the forces that allow me to be in this room and to speak up.







Nadège, April 9

I can't really describe Nadège's performance, though many of its elements would be exciting for me to think about: I didn't see it. Nor did any of us who showed up to the scheduled event. Like Autumn's production yesterday, we seemed to have turned up late to the main feature; Nadège has chosen to schedule her performance for a private audience, and we have turned up for the residuum. The handful of us now here prepare to hear two retellings in sequence by the only two who were present for what happened an hour earlier. Apparently, it involved elements typical in Nadège's work: selfies, pastries, live video... It was a measured and practiced performance of excess and hysteria, saccharine imagery of young girls online, slumber party pink, beauty culture excess... Again, I only gather that this was the case—I didn't see it.

Now, most of us are sitting on the floor along one wall beside Nadège, who is seated and facing another chair in front of the large mirror on the opposite wall. Beside us are several of the bubblegum pink panels that have stood in the room all week. In the mirror we can see ourselves and Nadège, and will be able sometimes to read her reactions to the retellings that will take place in a minute. She is a backdrop to the speakers, and despite herself, alternately laughs or shows surprise at how her performance is being interpreted for us. This is the middle-school empiricism of a game of telephone, and it is quickly clear to see how the retellings that take place are biased and subjective.

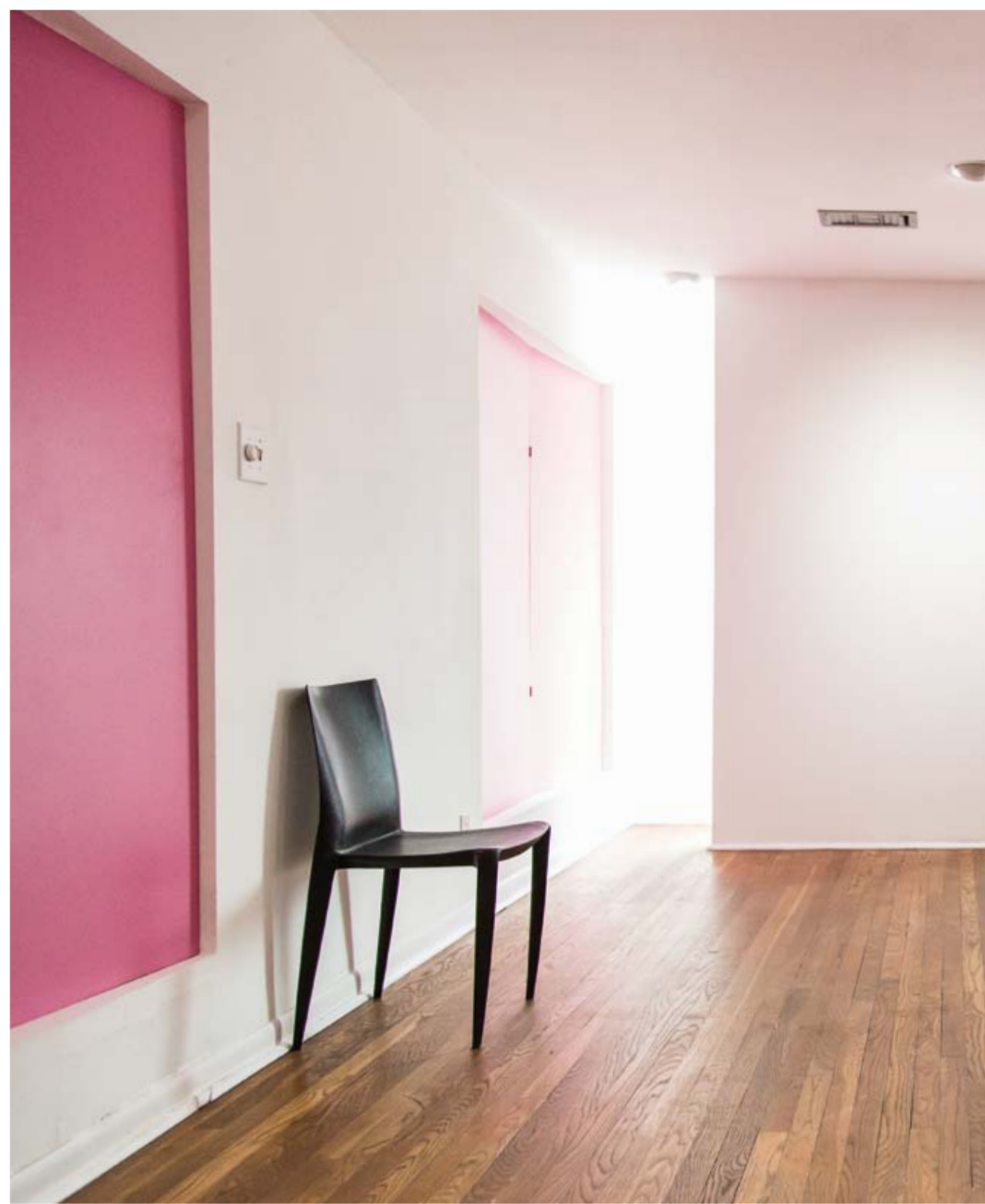
One speaker—Taraneh—a local scholar in residence who brought some of us to the strip club last night—gives a distinctly artistic retelling. And she does it self-consciously so, opening with a performance act of her own by slathering body cream into her arms. She does this while sharing an anecdote about her mother, allegedly obsessed with the simultaneous beautification of her body and home, who would scrub the floors with ammonia while made up in a moisturizing face mask. Taraneh has set up this account by design to give us insight into how Nadège's performance made her feel—what memories and emotions it conjured for her. But no less does Taraneh's own unconscious, right-brain sensibilities creep into this story and betray her at-

tempt to accurately describe the performance itself, slipping in and out of a linear narrative. As her description develops she seems less and less certain of what actually happened, and she relies on a stack of notes and hurried sketches she produced during Nadège's performance, which are now laid out at her feet for her and us to consult. She jokingly describes herself as a crappy courtroom illustrator.

Before Taraneh's retelling (and without Taraneh present), Katie, a successful academic type who I met minutes before, gave an account of an entirely different kind. She was sharp and articulate, and offered an ocularcentric reading of Nadège's work – referencing the artist Marilyn Minter, and locating Nadège in a legacy of abject postmodernism and conceptual use of the body in visual art history. Katie seems slightly posh to me, and she makes note that the buttercream icing Nadège apparently used throughout her piece did not weep (as the real stuff evidently should), and she remembers noticing that the milk was not organic. Her breath and her phrasing is careful, and remembering this during Taraneh's presentation I am struck by how little of the original performance I can now say with certainty happened.

Truthfully Katie's retelling is not such an opposite to Taraneh's: they are equally embodied and sensual, and Katie also focuses on her memories of elements heard, smelled. Though hers is certainly a more systematic retelling, with cautious description—unlike Taraneh's more loose, expressive one, both equally are evocative and sometimes funny. Despite the differences in these accounts, I'm sure I'm not seeing the full story. Beside Nadège, quiet and still, my back is sticking to the white wall.

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For the most part these performances are without pageantry – nothing theatrical, nothing too pretentious. And yet, Lynn, the quick footed photographer hired for the exhibition—though expertly sneaky—is a constant, visible presence in the room. As much part of the exhibition infrastructure as the white walls, Lynn is a reminder of the communal consent that us art-viewers lend to this privileged space. Even in those (frequent) moments where I feel I have a limited access—when I feel I don't have enough knowledge of or connection to the performance in front of me—I sense this communal consent of us small group of viewers. It's as if we all say, *we're in this together.*

Nicole Burisch (Ottawa, ON/Montreal, QC) is a curator, critic, and cultural worker. With a background working in artist-run centres, her projects focus on discourses of craft, feminism, performance, publishing, labour, and materiality within contemporary art. Her writing has been published by the Illingworth Kerr Gallery, *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, *.dpi: Feminist Journal of Art and Digital Culture*, La Centrale, *No More Potlucks*, *FUSE Magazine*, Stride Gallery, the Richmond Art Gallery and the *Cahiers métiers d'art :: Craft Journal*. Burisch worked as Administrative Coordinator at Centre Skol from 2011-2014, as the Director of Calgary's Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival from 2007-2009, and as Managing Editor for MAWA's upcoming publication on feminist art in Canada. She was a Core Fellow Critic-in-Residence with the Museum of Fine Arts Houston from 2014-16, and is currently Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada.

Nicole Burisch (Ottawa, Ont./Montréal, Qué.) est commissaire, critique et travailleuse culturelle. Elle a œuvré dans des centres d'artistes autogérés et ses projets portent sur les discours sur l'artisanat, le féminisme, la performance, l'édition, le travail et la matérialité en art contemporain. Ses textes ont été publiés par l'Illingworth Kerr Gallery, dans *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, *.dpi: Feminist Journal of Art and Digital Culture*, par La Centrale, dans *No More Potlucks*, *FUSE Magazine*, par la Stride Gallery, la Richmond Art Gallery et dans les *Cahiers métiers d'art::Craft Journal*. Burisch a travaillé comme coordinatrice à l'administration au Centre Skol de 2011 à 2014, comme directrice du Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival de Calgary de 2007 à 2009 et comme rédactrice en chef d'un ouvrage sur l'art féministe au Canada, qui sera publié par MAWA. Elle a été « Core Fellow » critique en résidence au Museum of Fine Arts Houston de 2014 à 2016, et est présentement adjointe à la conservation, art contemporain au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada.

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Nadège Grebmeier Forget (Montreal, QC) is a visual and performance artist, independent curator and freelance project manager. She has participated in numerous events, festivals, panels, residencies, and exhibitions in Canada, the USA and Europe. Her practice provokes reflection on the act of looking as a form of implicit consumption, as well as the power dynamics within which the gaze operates. Her work is characterized by a preoccupation with re-appropriation, actively exploring the role of meditation on identity construction and fiction. Circulating within the visual and live arts communities, she has most recently exhibited and performed at: Vu Photo, the Musée régional de Rimouski, the Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides, OFFTA - Live arts festival, CIRCA art actuel, Sophiensale Theatre (Berlin), the HOLD-FAST festival of Eastern Edge Gallery (Newfoundland), Centre d'art Mains d'Œuvres (Saint-Ouen, France) and Friche de la Belle de Mai (Marseille, France).

Nadège Grebmeier Forget (Montréal, QC) est artiste visuelle et d'art performance, commissaire et coordinatrice de projets à la pige. Elle a pris part à de nombreux événements, festivals, conférences, résidences et expositions aussi bien au Canada, aux États-Unis qu'en Europe. Sa pratique artistique provoque réflexion sur la consommation sous-jacente à l'acte de regarder et, aux relations de pouvoir qu'il implique. Elle s'inscrit dans une préoccupation particulière pour la réappropriation et le rôle de la médiation dans la construction/fiction de l'identité mis en scène. Circulant tant dans le milieu des arts visuels que celui des arts vivants, ses œuvres les plus récentes ont, entre autres, été performées et/ou exposées à VU Photo, au Musée régional de Rimouski, au Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides, au festival OFFTA, au CIRCA art actuel, au théâtre Sophiensale (Berlin), au festival HOLD-FAST de la Galerie Eastern Edge (Terre-Neuve), au centre d'art Mains d'Œuvres (Saint-Ouen, Paris) et à La Friche de la Belle de Mai (Marseille, France).

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Ursula Johnson (Dartmouth, NS) is a performance and installation artist of Mi'kmaw First Nation ancestry. She graduated from the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design and has participated in over 30 group shows and 5 solo exhibitions. Her performances are often place-based and employ cooperative didactic intervention. Recent works include various mediums of sculpture that prompt consideration from her audience about aspects of intangible cultural heritage as it pertains to the consumption of traditional knowledge within the context of colonial institutions. Her solo exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn: Do You Remember* (hosted by SMU Art Gallery) has recently toured to galleries across Canada. Johnson has been selected as a finalist for the Salt Spring National Art Prize and has twice been longlisted for the Sobey Art Award. She has presented publicly in lectures, keynote addresses and hosted a number of community forums around topics including 'Indigenous Self-Determination through Art' and 'Environmental and Sustainability in Contemporary Indigenous Art Practices.'

Descendante de la Première Nation Mi'kmaq, Ursula Johnson (Dartmouth, N.-É.) est artiste en performance et en installation. Diplômée du Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, elle a participé à plus de trente expositions collectives alors que cinq expositions individuelles ont été consacrées à son œuvre. Ses performances sont souvent in situ et ont recours à une intervention didactique de collaboration. Ses créations récentes font appel à diverses techniques sculpturales qui suscitent une réflexion de la part du public sur certains aspects de l'héritage culturel en ce qui a trait à la consommation du savoir traditionnel dans le contexte des institutions coloniales. Son exposition individuelle *Mi'kwite'tmn: Do You Remember* [Vous souvenez-vous] (présentée par la SMU Art Gallery) a récemment circulé à travers le Canada. Johnson a été choisie comme finaliste pour le Salt Spring National Art Prize et son nom a figuré, à deux reprises, sur la liste préliminaire du Prix Sobey pour les arts. Elle a fait des présentations publiques, a donné des conférences, des communications ainsi qu'animé plusieurs forums communautaires sur divers sujets comme « Indigenous Self-Determination through Art » et « Environmental and Sustainability in Contemporary Indigenous Art Practices ».

ursulajohnson.ca

Autumn Knight (New York, NY) is an interdisciplinary artist working with performance, installation and text. Her performance work has been included in group exhibitions at DiverseWorks Artspace, Art League Houston, Project Row Houses, Blaffer Art Museum, Crystal Bridges Museum, Skowhegan Space (NY), The New Museum, and The Contemporary Art Museum Houston. Knight has been in residence with In-Situ (UK), Galveston Artist Residency, YICA (Yamaguchi, Japan) and Artpace (San Antonio, TX). She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2016) and holds an M.A. in Drama Therapy from New York University. In 2015, Knight was an Artadia awardee, and she is currently a 2016-2017 artist in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem (NY). Knight's first solo museum exhibition, *In Rehearsal*, was recently hosted at the Krannert Art Museum (IL, USA).

Autumn Knight (New York, NY) est une artiste interdisciplinaire qui travaille en performance, en installation et avec le texte. Ses performances ont fait partie d'expositions collectives dans les institutions suivantes : DiverseWorks Artspace, Art League Houston, Project Row Houses, Blaffer Art Museum, Crystal Bridges Museum, Skowhegan Space (NY), The New Museum et The Contemporary Art Museum Houston. Knight a été en résidence à In-Situ (R.-U.), à la Galveston Artist Residency (TX), au YICA (Yamaguchi, Japon) et à Artpace (San Antonio, TX). Elle a étudié à la Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2016) et elle détient une maîtrise en théâtré-thérapie de l'Université de New York. En 2015, Knight a été lauréate d'une bourse Artadia et elle est présentement artiste en résidence (2016-2017) au Studio Museum in Harlem (NY). La première exposition individuelle de Knight dans un musée, *In Rehearsal*, était récemment présentée au Krannert Art Museum (Krannert, IL).

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Michelle Lacombe (Montreal, QC) has developed a unique body-based practice since obtaining her BFA from Concordia University in 2006. Purposefully minimalist, her research-based practice begins where gesture, corporeality and mark-marking are entwined and confused. Her work has been shown in Canada, the USA, and Europe in the context of performance events, exhibitions, and colloquiums. She is the recipient of the 2015 Bourse Plein Sud. Her practice as an artist is paralleled by a strong commitment to supporting the development of critical and alternative models of dissemination for live art and undisciplined practices. She is currently the director of VIVA! Art Action, a biennial performance event in Montreal.

Michelle Lacombe (Montréal, Qué.) élabore une pratique corporelle unique depuis l'obtention d'un baccalauréat en beaux-arts de l'Université Concordia en 2006. Délibérément minimaliste, sa pratique basée sur la recherche commence là où le geste, la corporéité et le marquage s'emmêlent et se confondent. Ses œuvres ont été présentées au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Europe dans le cadre d'événements, d'expositions et de colloques sur la performance. Elle est la lauréate de la bourse Plein sud de 2015. Sa pratique artistique s'accompagne d'un engagement sérieux dans le soutien du développement de modèles critiques et alternatifs de diffusion de l'art en direct et de pratiques indisciplinées. Elle est présentement directrice de VIVA! Art Action, une biennale montréalaise consacrée à la performance.

Mikhel Proulx (Montreal, QC) is a historian of art and digital culture. His research considers Queer and Indigenous artists working with networked media, and he has curated exhibitions in Canada, Europe, and the Middle East. He is a Canada Graduate Scholar and the Jarislowsky Foundation Doctoral Fellow in Canadian Art History. Proulx is a PhD student in the department of Art History at Concordia University, where he teaches media art histories and Queer visual cultures.

Mikhel Proulx (Montréal, Qué.) est historien de l'art et de la culture numérique. Sa recherche s'intéresse aux démarches des artistes queer et autochtones qui travaillent avec les médias en réseau, et il a été commissaire d'expositions au Canada, en Europe et au Moyen-Orient. Il est boursier d'études supérieures du Canada et détient une bourse de doctorat de la Fondation Jarislowsky en histoire de l'art. Proulx est doctorant au département d'histoire de l'art de l'Université Concordia où il enseigne les histoires de l'art médiatique et les cultures visuelles queer.

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-Nicole Burisch

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-Nicole Burisch



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p. 4-5, 14-15, 44-49 Autumn Knight, *Documents*, 2016.

p. 10, 20, 24-31 Ursula Johnson, *hide*, 2016.

p. 19, 33, 36-41 Michelle Lacombe, *The Moons of My Watery Body*, 2016.

p. 6, 20, 52-56 Nadège Grebmeier Forget, *Murs de vent*, 2016.

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