

**Amalie Atkins
Jacynthe Carrier
Julie Favreau
Of all the places**



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G44

Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

Of all the places

by Noa Bronstein

Of all the places brings together three artists whose video, installation, performance and photography offer an intense and intimate invitation into imaginary, enigmatic and science fiction-like worlds. Shared between Amalie Atkins, Julie Favreau and Jacynthe Carrier is not only the carefully choreographed movement of actor and object within hypnotic spaces but also what appears to be some unnamed fable or parable. Yet these allegories do not serve to edify or moralize. Feats of strength or will are played out through the ritualized, slow and laboured interaction with and the movement and collection of seemingly symbolic objects and bodies. These indefinite narratives meander through familiar and unfamiliar landscapes, never quite arriving at any one conclusion, but always reaching towards new possibilities.

Amalie Atkins's *The Braid Harvesters* (2013) is set against a long prairie horizon that engulfs each frame with an ever-expanding skyline. Two characters, presumably a mother and child, attentively take on the task of collecting disembodied braids and hanging these to dry on an extended clothesline. The characters do not seem particularly daunted by this bizarre task, which sets us into an easy state of viewing. While, as Atkins notes, the cutting of hair has conflicting implications, as both a symbol of trauma and liberation, the film ascribes a somewhat sinister undertone to these displaced braids. Atkins's films often feature hand-sewn costumes and props, characters that appear to be borrowed from fairytales, and soundtracks that are tonally twinned to her images. It is this confluence of stagecrafts that makes her works markedly cinematic and vaguely reminiscent of early silent films. Just as the Lumière brothers mesmerized with *The Serpentine Dance* (1896), Atkins compels with movements that mysteriously merge cinematic space with real space.

Julie Favreau's *Anomalies* (2012) similarly positions four protagonists to carry out single tasks. Each chapter of the video reveals an individual mediating his or her solitary environment through a distinct meditative action. In one scene a pail, elderly woman precariously balances a large wooden contraption atop her head and in another a male, seated crossed-legged in a room covered in sand, balances a tall pole on his ankle. A second male character uses the pale blue, dunce cap situated on top of his head to poke at a delicate, wired contraption hovering above his station and a second female character arranges various small items within a glass-made cabinet of curiosities. The video unfolds as do stanzas in a poem, and as in a poem, it reveals its inner-workings through expertly composed prose. Favreau's visual register seems to pull from new age and science-fiction references and has been likened to the works of Bergman and Tarkovsky.¹ Still her genre melding

approach is unequivocally ambiguous, residing somewhere between reality and fantasy.

The poetic also enters into Jacynthe Carrier's *Les Eux* (2013), a film that converges on the intimate contact and repetitive actions made between the 13 members of what Carrier calls an "improbable community."² Each individual was invited to perform two actions on one of the other actors for an hour and a half, the result of which was edited down into a more distilled dance.³ The mass of bodies within the precisely calibrated mise-en-scène takes on the appearance of fibres tightly woven together but slightly fraying at the margins. The camera focuses in closely, at times awkwardly so, making us acutely aware that we are implicated in this entanglement. As with many of Carrier's projects, *Les Eux* traces the relationship between space and the body and how we conceive of and consume rural and urban landscapes. Here, the knotted group seems to allude to a fragile web of ecologies and perhaps portends that if any part of the latticework is compromised the whole system will unravel.

Atkins, Favreau and Carrier's works evoke a kind of daydream that propels image, actor and object through spaces of intrigue and speculation. These non-narrative compositions reflect Gaston Bachelard's writings on the "intimate immensity," in which he describes that "...the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity."⁴ *Of all the places* permits the mind to wander where it will, to travel through endless corridors and passageways. These languid daydreams become suggestive of a fork in the road; a step in any direction leads somewhere unexpected, maybe even into the places of intimate immensity.

Taking seriously this permission to wander and giving it form, Kegan McFadden offers a winding and poetic response to *Of all the places*.

the weight of lilacs

by Kegan McFadden

"I can't imagine." It's a lie we share between friends on occasions too hard to actually try to comprehend. It might be a micro-aggression; it might be outright violence because we refuse to engage out of some sort of politesse. What ends up happening, when we "can't imagine," is that we deny our friends empathy. "I can't imagine" is really code for "I do not want to think about that." *That* is always something we



Amalie Atkins, *The Braid Harvesters*, c-print, 2013

could very well see happening to us, and so it is not so much beyond our scope of imagination as it is outside of what we would rather consider. In this regard, two friends having coffee, or a group gathered for dinner or a funeral, no longer embody the promise of friendship(s), rather become stand-ins; chess pieces; countries after the fall-out of war; bodies at an impasse; trade embargoes; synapses in the brain after a stroke. In this regard, it becomes about appearing to try to do what is supposedly expected, instead of what you want to do, what you know you ought to do.

The armature of empathy is unnecessarily complicated. This is because of the ego... that same false, but understandable, ego bred in lilacs. This armature is echoed in the languid, winding, knotted branches that refuse to bend but will somehow find their way through fence boards or most other obstacles, slow and resilient over years. In such circumstances we should also consider the fence, forced to withstand the lilac bush, or the lawn under which it gasps for sunlight if it gasps at all, or the spot against the house that doesn't match the rest thanks to the imprudent shade and constant rubbing against its paint from the bush – like a liver spot or a blackened toe nail – consider that too. We know it is not the undeniable strength of the evergreen, nor the spindly opulence of the tiger lily, but the fleeting burst of audacity that wills the lilac into summer bloom. It's this youthful confidence, born anew with each spring, that gives little recourse than to shower adoration upon the lilac.

What can we learn from the weight of lilacs in full bloom, drowning from millions of their tiny pastel petals? The thing about lilacs is, well, they are wild – unkempt in back lanes, but also manicured into bushes and shrubs and trees for lovely park picnic photo-ops. For others, they are cut and placed into crystal vases for the kitchen table. Imported to the Western world in the 18th Century as a decorative plant, it is still nearly impossible to come across the purple (or white, or pale pink) petals unless there are people who have planted it, cared for it, cultivated it, and abandoned it. How strange it must have been to witness the proliferation of this purple plant along the rivers, in the wide fields, and eventually dotting the streets that would come in time. Of course



Julie Favreau, *Lévi-porteur*, inkjet print on cotton paper, 2012

there were bigger changes afoot that needed attention, which continue to need our attention. The thing about lilacs is you can't really make anything from their wood: no cheese boards, no chessboards, no sideboards, nor fence boards, not even protest signs. Then again, perhaps their complete unwillingness to cooperate, their anti-utilitarianism is, in itself, a form of protest. Their simultaneous embodiment of (and total disregard for) labour is nearly as effortless as the scent the lilac produces. This scent, however, found its way into air fresheners, laundry detergents, perfumes, and deodorants, permeating our lives with its indifference.

Consider the etymology of the plant. In Greek mythology it begins with a nymph named Syringa, whose beauty attracted the unwanted attention of Pan – the god of forests and fields, but also the originator of panic. In her attempt to escape Pan's relentless sexual advances, Syringa ran into the woods and turned herself into an aromatic bush, what we now know as lilac or *Syringa vulgaris*. This is how the lilac burst forth – just as one hand seeks another, travelling first up your back, then across your shoulder, down your arm, and finally finding your hand. This might be the route of the lilac. The clumping of earth, wet with tears or sweat or piss or spit or cum; collectivity is a burden, resulting in strength. This is the promise of the lilac, grown from fear. Native to the Balkan Peninsula, including Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia, and Turkey (to name a few), can we imagine a more beautiful plant among the atrocities of Modern times? The grey of its bark in a double blind with the smoke from explosions, long-range missile targets, fire on civilian's homes. The fall of economies, perhaps, informs this melancholy flower, too. The Balkans are said to be among the oldest civilizations. The Balkans are said to have been responsible for introducing farming to Europe. The Balkans are said to have developed a form of writing even before the Sumerians. Consider then what history weighs on the lilac – the poetry it has inspired, the hurt it has witnessed, the power struggles it has survived, the apathy it has endured, and the millennia of history it embodies with each wayward strand.

"I can't imagine", the lilacs say to the fence.

¹ See for example Saelan Twerdy, "Julie Favreau: Mastering the Moment," *Canadian Art*, Spring 2014, accessed August 20, 2015, <http://canadianart.ca/features/julie-favreau/>.

² Jacynthe Carrier, in a phone conversation with the author, July 15, 2015.

³ Ibid

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 181.

Cover image

Jacynthe Carrier, *Les Eux*,
inkjet print, 2013

Poster images

Jacynthe Carrier, *#1 de la
suite Les Eux*, inkjet print,
2013

Julie Favreau, *Anomalies -
psychée nuage*, inkjet print
on cotton paper, 2012

Amalie Atkins, *The Braid
Harvesters*, c-print, 2013

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing artform. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs, Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

Amalie Atkins is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Saskatoon. She creates cinematic fables through a blend of film, textiles, installations, performance, and photography, imprinting a fictional world onto everyday life. Atkins' work has shown nationally and internationally and toured with major survey exhibitions, most notably, *Oh, Canada* (MASS MoCA) and *DreamLand* (The Textile Museum of Canada). Her photographs have appeared on the covers of Canadian Art Magazine, Visual Arts News, Grain Magazine, CV2, and in MUZE magazine (Paris). Atkins was the recipient of the Locale Art Award for Western Canada in 2011 and long listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2012 and 2013. Recent exhibitions include *We live on the edge of disaster and imagine we are in a musical* at the MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina), SAAG (Lethbridge) and the College Galleries (Saskatoon), *Wundermärchen*, at the Kenderdine Art Gallery (Saskatoon), and *Little Black Listening Hut*, commissioned by Remai Modern for Nuit Blanche (Saskatoon). In 2015 her work appeared in exhibitions at the Gerald Moore Galley (London, UK), Schleifmühlgasse 12-14 (Vienna), and at NPAK/ACCEA in Yerevan, Armenia.

Jacynthe Carrier explores, through photography and video, the different ways we occupy and alter modern-day territories. Her works have been shown in several solo and group exhibitions, including at Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains, la nuit blanche de Paris, Québec triennale, Québec biennale, and Interstate Projects. Her videos have been included in a number of programs, most notably in Europe, Brazil and the United States. In 2012 she received the Montreal Pierre-Ayot Prize, and was longlisted for the 2013 Sobey Art Award. She is represented by the antoine ertaskiran gallery in Montreal.

Julie Favreau's practice, located at the crossroads of visual art and choreography, is based on inventing

gestures out of objects (sculptures) or, conversely, on inventing sculptures out of gestures. Recent works induce a state of heightened sensory awareness in the viewer, inviting concentration, focus, and intimacy. Favreau has presented/performed her work in many contexts including exhibitions, festivals and performances on stage. In 2011 she was part of the MACM Québec Triennial. Recent awards include: Pierre Ayot Prize - AGAC City of Montreal, The Claudine and Stephen Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art and a nomination on the long list for the Sobey Art Award. In residence for three years at the Montreal studios of the Darling Foundry, she is working on a new creative cycle that includes sculptural propositions, video and photographic works for various sites: Gallery 44 (Toronto), Edinburgh art festival - Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Scotland), Battat Contemporary and Darling Foundry (Montreal).

Kegan McFadden is an artist, curator, and writer based in Winnipeg. His projects have been commissioned by artist-run, university, as well as public and private galleries across Canada over the last ten years. Throughout 2014 BlackFlash Magazine published Kegan's column, "Notes With a Broken Camera" - a series of experimental essays using the work of emerging artists as springboards for an unruly blend of art history, gossip, and free-association.

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