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Cover image: Fayçal Baghriche, detail from *Elective purification*, 2009. Wallpaper, variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Jérôme Poggi, Paris.



BIOGRAPHIES

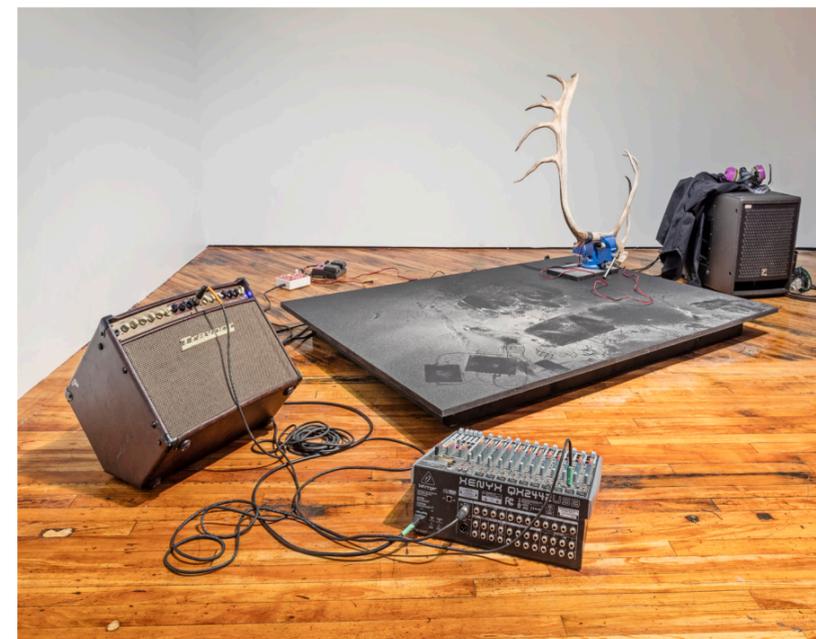
Fayçal Baghriche was born in Skikda, Algeria and is currently based in Paris. He studied at Villa Arson, Nice, and co-founded La Villa du Lavoir artist residency in 2003 and Le Commissariat, the collective curatorial structure, in 2006. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Le SHED, Centre d'Art de Normandie (2017); Human Resources, Los Angeles (2014); The Delfina Foundation, London (2012); Bielefelder Kunstverein (2010); and Le Quartier, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Quimper (2010). Baghriche has participated in group exhibitions at various institutions including Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Villa Arson, Nice (2017); Centro Pecci, Prato (2017); Malmö Konstmuseum (2017); Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (2016); Arab Image Foundation, Beirut (2016); and 54th Venice Biennale. He is represented by Galerie Jérôme Poggi, Paris.

Sandra Brewster is a Canadian artist and holds a Masters of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto. Her work explores themes of identity, representation and memory. Her recent solo exhibition *It's all a blur...* received the Gattuso Prize at CONTACT Photography Festival (2017). Her work has been featured in recent group exhibitions at Aljira Contemporary Art Centre, New Jersey (2016); Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland (2016); and Allegheny Art Galleries, Meadville, Pennsylvania (2015). Brewster recently received a resident fellowship at the Instituto Sacatar, Brazil (2017). She is represented by Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto.

David Hartt was born in Montréal and is currently based in Philadelphia, where he is an Assistant Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin (2017); The Art Institute of Chicago (2015); and Or Gallery, Vancouver (2015). His work has been featured in group exhibitions at The Studio Museum in Harlem (2017); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015); and Canadian Biennial at the National Gallery of Canada (2014). His work is in public collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; and The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. He is a recipient of the Foundation for Contemporary Art Grant (2015) and United States Artists Cruz Fellowship (2012). Hartt is represented by Corbett vs. Demsey, Chicago; David Nolan Gallery, New York; and Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin.

Jeneen Frei Njootli is a member of the self-governing Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and is a co-creator of the ReMatriate Collective. Based between the Yukon and unceded Coast Salish territories, she works collaboratively with artists, communities, youth and the land. Her work has been exhibited at various institutions including Artspace, Peterborough (2018); Trinity Square Video, Toronto (2016); and Whippersnapper Gallery, Toronto (2013). She was the recipient of the Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver Artist Prize in 2017.

Denise Ryner is the current Director of Or Gallery in Vancouver. She has presented projects at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; SFU Galleries, Vancouver; VIVO Media Arts Centre, Vancouver; the Contemporary Art Gallery of Vancouver; Jackman Humanities Institute, Toronto; and Beleven Project Space, Toronto.



Jeneen Frei Njootli, *Herd*, 2016. Mixed media sound installation. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

EXHIBITION TOUR: Denise Ryner

Saturday 17 February, 2PM

We are pleased to have guest curator Denise Ryner provide a free public tour and discussion of the group exhibition *Common Cause: before and beyond the global*.

ARTIST TALK: Sandra Brewster

Tuesday 13 March, 7PM

Please join us for a public artist talk by Sandra Brewster in conversation with Richard Fung.

ARTIST PERFORMANCE: Jeneen Frei Njootli

Tuesday 20 March, 7PM

Soundtools created by Jeneen Frei Njootli will be used in her performance to create a live soundscape in the gallery.

Admission to our public programming is free and all are welcome.

To receive future publications by mail and many other benefits, become a member of Mercer Union. Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.



Common Cause: before and beyond the global

Fayçal Baghriche
Sandra Brewster
David Hartt
Jeneen Frei Njootli

Curated by Denise Ryner

16 February – 24 March 2018
Opening Friday 16 February, 7PM



Common Cause: before and beyond the global

What's left is politics but even the politics of the commons, of the resistance to enclosure, can only be a politics of ends, a rectitude aimed at the regulatory end of the common. And even when the election that was won turns out to have been lost, and the bomb detonates and/or fails to detonate, the common perseveres as if a kind of elsewhere, here, around, on the ground, surrounding hallucinogenic facts.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 2013

In response to writing on how the global can be recuperated from its associations with cultural homogenization, the rhetoric of capital finance and reactionary nationalism, the works in this exhibition address how generations of migratory passages and shifting ideological, as well as physical geographical, terrains might reveal a transnational commons.¹ Together they consider where flight, fugitivity and survival are negotiated, beyond the logistical constructs of global capital.

Identifying the varied spaces of the global, beyond the fixed abstractions based in neoliberal ideology, as the works in this exhibition do, allows for an engagement of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's 'elsewhere.' To think of ourselves as always already accessing a commons, a surrounding ground of possibility and connectivity, transgressing singularity and delimitation.

Installations by Fayçal Baghriche, Sandra Brewster, David Hartt and Jeneen Frei Njootli consider historical, present and speculative expansions on the global, as a permanently unfixed, interdependent but disordered whole. Theorist Denise Ferreira Da Silva refers to this as "The World as a Plenum," a term borrowed from G.W.F. Leibniz, which she applies to an imaginary that sidesteps the composition of the modern subject as bound to linear temporality and spatial separation.² Instead she proposes rethinking sociality where, "What if, instead of the Ordered World, we imaged each (human and more-than human) existent consisted not as separate forms relating through the mediation of forces but rather, as singular expressions of each and every other existent as well as of the entangled whole in/as which they exist?"

Observing the emergence of nativism and populism in response to the influx of refugees and immigrants in Europe and elsewhere, Ferreira Da Silva calls out post-Enlightenment modern methodologies of *separability*, *determinacy* and *sequentiality* as an opposite and obstacle to our radical creative capacity to think *the World otherwise*.³

The artists in this exhibition mine transnational counter-flows,⁴ alternative representations as well as marginal terrain that resemble Harney and Moten's 'elsewhere.' Their work was curated here to illustrate complications of the Ordered World as challenged by Ferreira Da Silva. The re-emergence of a commons beyond the enclosure of the nation state occurs as a result of the emerging and reclaimed ecologies and sovereignties that underline the narratives in Brewster, Hartt and Frei Njootli's work, as well as the dissolution of sovereignty in Baghriche's national flags.

Baghriche's work tackles the way nationalism takes root through visual metaphors, by engaging formal strategies to obscure symbols of optimism, uniformity and exceptionality that are claimed by a nation-state upon its founding. In *Elective Purification* and *Enveloppements*, Baghriche pares down global flags to shared motifs and colours, thereby undermining the visual rhetoric around nationalism in favour of representations of pluralism.



David Hartt, still from *adrift*, 2015. Courtesy the artist; Corbett vs. Demsey, Chicago; David Nolan Gallery, New York; and Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin.

The world that is foregrounded in Brewster's *A Trace* is comprised of constant circulation on waterways that first witnessed the transformation of enslaved African labour into commodities, then connected Afro-Caribbean cultures following mass migration and settlement of those communities in eastern Canada. These migratory routes were first defined by 18th and 19th Century water-borne trade routes between Canada's east coast, and slave-holding plantations in South America and the Caribbean islands, to exchange salted fish and rum, molasses and tobacco.

This geography of commerce, the waterways and harbours that supported the global slave trade and former British Empire, is the flip side to similarly interconnected communities of safe harbour, established by Maroons, as escaped African slaves were called. Maroons found safety away from shorelines, in the inhospitable mountain elevations, scrublands and swamps of the Caribbean, and North and South America. They slowly developed settlements connected by the common cause of survival and reclaiming sovereignty over their bodies and labour.

These cultures and communities re-emerge in Canada's Caribbean diaspora, with which Brewster identifies. Her images of shores and waterways recall both familial and broader migrant passages, where home and belonging is a matter of creating an *elsewhere* through cultural identification and transmission across multiple borders and frontiers.

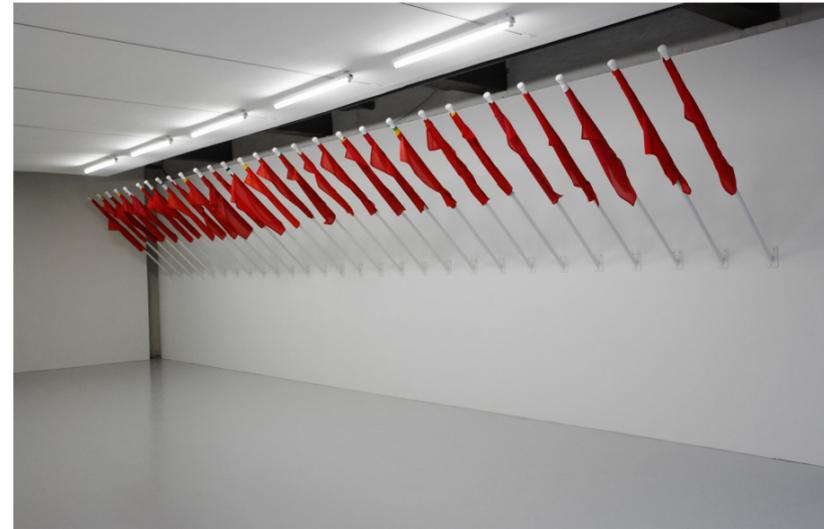
Migration has also underlined Frei Njootli's art practice. The seasonal route of the Porcupine Caribou in northern Canada and Alaska has for centuries circumscribed the expanse of land identified as the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, predating the national borders established through settler colonialism.

These caribous are counterparts in the survival, sovereignty and culture of the northern, transnational community, of which Frei Njootli is a member. Both are also connected to a region currently threatened by the possibility of renewed oil drilling and exploration in the Arctic.⁵ Frei Njootli's sound work, *snow crust and sinew*, responds to and amplifies the realization of a culture and territory through the nexus of movement and kinship between the Gwitchin and caribou. Her recordings, distortions, loops and audio transmissions echo conceptions of nationhood extending to the furthest reaches of broadcast sound waves moving across large distances and resistant to enclosure.

Such broadcast soundwaves are heard in Hartt's video installation, *adrift*. Radio news transmissions about disintegrating borders caused by global warming, corporate outsourcing and the flow of big data can be heard, interspersed with eavesdropped snippets of an intimate phone conversation. These soundtracks narrate the post-national future in Hartt's work of speculative fiction. *adrift* infers a world that is pushed beyond the recognizable structures of nationhood by massive environmental and technological disaster. Attempts to control the damage of global warming and rising sea levels have unleashed a destructive halo-bacteria that eats the traditional symbols of progress – architecture and communications infrastructure – and, thereby, throws into question the ideologies connected to them. The viewer learns of this backstory through Hartt's protagonists: two would-be lovers who are separated not by national borders, but by the designated limits of a quarantine zone meant to contain the spread of the pathogen. Their overheard youthful flirtation and planned rendezvous risks crisis level cross-contamination and negates the frontier ideology that dominates their worlds.

The itinerant and provisional entities represented in this exhibition might provide models for how proposed entanglements operate as a commons across which all peripheries connect and thrive, rather than a globalization comprised of mediated connectivity in the service of monetized flows and frontiers.

— Denise Ryner



Fayçal Baghriche, *Enveloppements*, 2010. 28 flags and flag stands. Courtesy the artist and Nadour Collection, Germany.



Sandra Brewster, *A Trace*, 2017. Installation view: Master of Visual Studies Studio Program Graduating Exhibition, Art Museum, University of Toronto, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

¹ Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12.1 (Winter 2000): 1–19. Activist and writer Arjun Appadurai describes the development of "Globalization from below" as a result of agency amongst citizens who live in marginalized regions through which, "...a series of social forms has emerged to contest, interrogate, and reverse these developments and to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its international affiliates and guarantors)." This is thought of in connection with Denise Ferreira Da Silva's writing on rethinking cultural difference and sociality through models of universal entanglement in her 2016 text "On Difference Without Separability," published in the catalogue of the 32a São Paulo Art Biennial, "Incerteza viva" (Living Uncertainty)."

² Denise Ferreira Da Silva, "On Difference Without Separability," 32a São Paulo Art Biennial catalogue: *Incerteza viva/ Living Uncertainty* (November 2016). Ferreira Da Silva considers shifts towards relativity in particle physics and social anthropology to propose a subversion of cultural difference as a tool that enacts the delimiting of modernity. The goal of this is to disable the power of cultural difference and withhold the universal application of humanity to those perceived as Others.

³ Ferreira Da Silva, "On Difference Without Separability," 60. Ferreira Da Silva further explains the development of the methodologies *separability*, *determinacy* and *sequentiality*. She states that the first two are "... interrelated elements of the Kantian program continue to influence contemporary epistemological and ethical projects: (a) *separability*, that is, the view that all that can be known about the things of the world is what is gathered by the forms (space and time) of the intuition and the categories of the Understanding (quantity, quality, relation, modality) – everything else about them remains inaccessible and irrelevant to knowledge; and consequently (b) *determinacy*, the view that knowledge results from the Understanding's ability to produce formal constructs, which it can use to determine (i.e. decide) the true nature of the sense impressions gathered by the forms of intuition."

⁴ The movement of cultural influence from peripheral societies or collectives to the center.

⁵ "We're fighting for our way of life: Republican tax bill presents grave threat to Alaska's tribal groups," *The Guardian* online (December 7, 2017), last accessed Jan 21, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/07/alaska-republican-tax-bill-oil-gas-drilling>