

cmagazine | 40

Institutions

Contemporary Art & Criticism Winter 2019



The Artist as Doctor (of Fine Arts)—Nasrin Himada—Meaningful Inclusion
Natasha Chaykowski on Calgary's Arts Commons—Jackie Wang
Unsettling the Biennial with Candice Hopkins—Gentrification Tax Action
jes sachse and Annie Wong—Deep-Time Construction



display until March 15

Deep-Time Construction

CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts

May 31–July 28, 2018

by Genevieve Quick

1 "Curatorial Statement: Deep-Time Construction," May 2018. <http://contemporary.org/curatorial-statement-deep-time/>

Curators Nasrin Himada, Gelare Khoshgozaran and Eunsong Kim, editors of the online publication *contemporary*, expand the concept of deep time as a Western geologic temporal frame with which to explore global disruptions to time and place in seven time-based video works. The artists, from diverse regional, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds, have seized the opportunity to shape and activate their present and future, when historically most identify with places that have been subject to Western interventions, colonization and war. In a bridge between their own writing and studio practices, *contemporary*'s editors have commissioned eight artists and writers to respond to individual works and the exhibition's thesis with a provocative range of voices and approaches.

Using rope and string, Lida Abdul's and NIC Kay's stunning and nuanced video works create symbiotic ambiguities between bodies and inanimate things, conjuring beginnings and endings, life and death, and ultimately history, the present and future. Abdul's *Once Upon Awakening* (2006), opens with a tight shot of about a dozen men in an Afghanistan desert straining as they pull on ropes; it's unclear whether they are building something new or demolishing something already present. As the frame widens, Abdul reveals that they are pulling on ropes attached to a ruin. Despite its decrepit appearance, the unwavering stone structure underscores the men's improbable, heroic enterprise, where the goal is to topple one of many damaged elements in their landscape. Closing with the men carrying a rock in a sling to a hole and burying it, Abdul synecdochically plants or buries the ruin, simultaneously suggesting the sprouting of new life and the resolve of death.

Lida Abdul, *Once Upon Awakening*, 2006, one-channel video, 7 min

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY, MELBOURNE, AND CCA WATTIS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS, SAN FRANCISCO

The title *Once Upon Awakening* alludes to the stock fairy tale beginning that imagines "a land far, far away." Afghanistan is a place that Abdul remembers from when she was a child, before her family fled in 1979. She only recently returned. Afghanistan was subject to Cold War-era proxy battles, and more recently the United States' war on terror and internal civil battles raised by the Taliban. In the work's accompanying text, tamara suarez porras writes about visiting her father's home of Nicaragua, from which he had immigrated to the US after the country, like Afghanistan, became embroiled in a civil war fuelled by US and Soviet Cold War hubris. suarez porras writes of her father's memory and her construction of those places in her own imagination, where they shift between being palpably here or distant and dream-like. Abdul's title also suggests the emergence from slumber, or consciousness. As the term "woke" circulates through popular culture, many are no longer ignoring or remaining inured to civil injustice and are becoming active participants in securing or creating equity. Abdul and suarez porras sit between imagining pasts and viscerally occupying the present, such that "woke" becomes both personal and collective memory.

Straddling both physical presence and imagination, NIC Kay's poignant *pushit! [exercise 1 in getting well soon]*, *Judson Memorial Church* (2017) begins with the artist descending the stairs at Judson Memorial Church in New York. Shot from below, the church's first-floor ceiling conceals the top of their body. As they slowly step down, viewers see legs, then a torso and finally a neck, to which strings are tied. Kay's descent and the string around their neck conjures the gallows and our brutal history of white people hanging African-Americans. Once Kay fully emerges, a small cluster of helium balloons tethered to their neck with delicate ribbon brings levity to their downward motion.

Kay's mechanical dance suggests a marionette like Pinocchio, who came to life, awoken. As their dance builds to rhythmic confidence, Kay becomes an active agent, moving and bouncing the balloons as an extension of their head, like a thought bubble. While the balloons are a constant reminder of the histories of lynching and civil injustice, they also



facing death.

With music from Knowledge, Kay's mechanical movements also become hip hop, one of the most globally celebrated contributions of African-American dance, music and style. In response to Kay's work, photographer and poet Sean D. Henry-Smith writes about the joy he felt when, as a teenager, he and his sisters cleared the couch and coffee table out of the way to crank the stereo and dance. Henry-Smith's writing celebrates the music and dance of black culture and assigns it a fond place, associated with home and his youth. Movement and music become freeing and healing elements, as remembered by Henry-Smith and enacted by Kay.

With its history of supporting HIV/AIDS patients, sex workers, victims of substance abuse, youth, immigrants and women's reproductive rights, Judson Memorial Church has a long commitment to political activism and community support. Additionally, the church has hosted multi-disciplinary arts programming, most famously with the Judson Dance Theater (1960–64), which featured collaborations with Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Morris—all of whom are white. As a trans black body dancing, Kay continues Judson's history and carves a new future that celebrates the hybridity of gender, race and the arts.

As the curators poignantly explain, "these pieces don't let us forget what came before us, what exists without us, and what will come after us. What these works show us is not an alternative to time. We're not waiting. Something else is at work. *Deep-Time Construction* grapples with what situates us in time, how we come to embody its cadence, and yet transforms this experience into one that is felt out of synch and at another register."

Genevieve Quick is an interdisciplinary artist and arts writer whose work explores speculative narratives, technology and media-based practices. In reviews and essays, Quick has contributed to *Art Practical*, *Daily Serving*, *Temporary Art Review* and *College Art Association*.

Lorna Bauer:
The Hand of Mee
Franz Kaka, Toronto
May 4 – May 26, 2018
by *Barbora Racevičiūtė*

Coming out of the unseasonably stark heat of a May afternoon, and into the basement space that is Franz Kaka, the languid warmth of Lorna Bauer's work is pleasant. It instantly brings to mind Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* (2016), a novel set in coastal Spain: namely, the dense sweet air, lazy sea breeze and deep late-afternoon light that make up the atmosphere of the novel. The reference in *The Hand of Mee* is not Spain, however, but Brazil. The exhibition comes out of the time Bauer spent at Sítio Roberto Burle Marx, the 40.7-acre estate of renowned Modernist landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, during an artist residency in Rio de Janeiro. Burle Marx's expansive garden designs can broadly be characterized by bold geometries, striking colour combinations and a commitment to local flora. Taking multiple trips, Bauer photographed his home and garden, chapel, library, studios and shade houses; the resulting works weave multiple narratives of observation, documentation and labour.