

# Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art

An exhibition curated by Noor Bhangu



Susan Aydan Abbott  
Sarah Ciurysek  
Dayna Danger  
Christina Hajjar  
Kablusiak

Ayqa Khan  
Luna  
Matea Radic  
Sophie Sabet  
Leesa Streifler

Print on demand publication of the exhibition

***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art***

presented at Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg and Window Gallery

from September 13 – November 24, 2018

Curated by Noor Bhangu

Images and text © Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg,

The authors and the artists, 2018.

PDF ISBN: 978-1-989111-02-4

Gallery 1C03

1st floor of Centennial Hall

The University of Winnipeg

515 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9

Phone: 204-786-9253

[www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery)

Introduction: Jennifer Gibson

Curatorial essay: Noor Bhangu

***10x Magnifying Mirror*** creative response: Sharanpal Ruprai

***About Inflammation*** critical response: Dunja Kovačević

Graphic design: Susan Chafe

Photography: Karen Asher, Leif Norman, and Daniel Dueck

## Acknowledgments

Gallery 1C03 is the campus art gallery of The University of Winnipeg and is grateful to the University for its ongoing operational support. The Gallery also acknowledges the financial support of the Winnipeg Arts Council and Manitoba Arts Council for ***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art***, and partnerships with Window Gallery, Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, Queer People of Colour Winnipeg, the Institute for Women's and Gender Studies, the University of Winnipeg's Department of Women's and Gender Studies and the greenhouse artlab. Without these supports and partnerships, this project would not have been possible.

Gallery 1C03 wishes to express sincere appreciation to exhibition curator Noor Bhangu for agreeing to curate this exhibition and for her unwavering commitment to it. We are extremely grateful to and humbled by exhibiting artists Susan Aydan Abbott, Sarah Ciurysek, Dayna Danger, Christina Hajjar, Kablusiak, Ayqa Khan, Luna, Matea Radic, Sophie Sabet, and Leesa Streifler for the trust they placed in agreeing to present their work for this exhibition. We thank writers Sharanpal Ruprai and Dunja Kovačević for their vital contributions to this publication and for sharing their vulnerability with its readers through their highly personal texts. We value deeply the artists and academics who shared their work and their expertise with the public at the events affiliated with ***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*** not limited to, but including, panel discussion, workshops and performances. We also thank graphic designers Susan Chafe and Ian Lark, videographer Hassaan Ashraf, installation technician Glen Johnson and the staff of the University's Centre for Academic Technologies for their work, and we extend our appreciation to the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba and Plug In ICA for the loan of equipment for the exhibition.



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG



WINNIPEG  
ARTS COUNCIL



MANITOBA ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DU MANITOBA



## Introduction

Gallery 1C03 is pleased to issue this online pdf publication in conjunction with *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art*, an exhibition that was presented in 1C03 and at Winnipeg's Window Gallery from September 13 through November 24, 2018. *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* has been curated by Noor Bhangu, a recent graduate of the University of Winnipeg's Master's program in Cultural Studies: Curatorial Practices. Bhangu is the first graduate of the program to curate an exhibition for 1C03 and we are honoured that she accepted our invitation to do so.

*Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* features work by ten local, national and international artists that explore memory, history and representations of the female and non-binary body through painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, video, audio and performance. It is a feminist art exhibition that makes space for and asserts the importance of memories and stories held by marginalized voices: those of women, non-binary, queer, Indigenous and people of colour. The artists in this exhibition—Susan Aydan Abbott, Sarah Ciurysek, Dayna Danger, Christina Hajjar, Kablusiak, Ayqa Khan, Luna, Matea Radic, Sophie Sabet and Leesa Streifler—address themes of displacement, diasporic movement, body image, aging, psychic trauma and, especially, survivance. These are stories that are often left out of official history books and archives. They are brought together with great passion, rigour and intellect by curator Noor Bhangu, who rightly considers herself the eleventh artist in this exhibition. As Bhangu argues at the beginning of her curatorial essay, it is her position as a doubly othered individual, a South Asian woman, that enables her to present *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* with the sensitivity so duly required. Bhangu's curatorial essay offers readers a complex and layered context for these artworks. She asserts the subversive value of both the subjectivity and ephemerality of marginalized bodies to hold and disseminate potent truths which we are invited to witness.

Within these pages you will read two additional responses to the art in this exhibition that also prioritize subjectivity. For "About Inflammation", writer Dunja Kovačević shares a

creative text couched in critical theory that situates *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* amid the perspective of her own bodily trauma. Poet Sharanpal Ruprai offers "10x Magnifying Mirror", a series of six poems in which she shares her observations of the exhibition's opening reception and selected works. Positioning herself as South Asian Aunty, or "Masi", special tenderness is given to her "nieces" Bhangu and Khan.

This publication is one of several streams of discursive engagement around this exhibition project. *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* has been activated during its two month run through various, often ephemeral means, such as performances by Christina Hajjar during the opening reception and by Luna at the closing reception; through well-considered remarks given by Drs. Roewan Crowe and Angela Failer at these respective receptions; through a panel discussion moderated by Bhangu and featuring artists Sarah Ciurysek, Dayna Danger and Ayqa Khan; through workshops on self-reflexivity, body image and gif-making by Khan, Leesa Streifler and Matea Radic; and through tours led by Bhangu, myself and the gallery's student art educators for varied publics, including university classes, school and community groups. Our hope is that through this exhibition, publication and affiliated public programs we have affected the bodies of those who have engaged in learning with us.

**Jennifer Gibson**

Director/Curator

Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg

# Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art

Noor Bhangu



Since its opening, when asked to speak about *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art*—by family, friends, colleagues, radio hosts, journalists—I have found it increasingly difficult to articulate the themes that went into developing this exhibition. This is not to say that themes and questions did not contribute to my thinking—they did—yet, they were not the primary lens through which I related to the ten exhibiting artists or how I saw them relate to each other. Instead, what I insist as central to my thinking on *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet* is my position as an Indian-born woman and a settler of colour. Culturally and politically marked as a double other—a woman and a brown immigrant—I have slowly begun to gather the ways in which my similarities and differences from other and othered bodies around me have been a point of connection and solidarity. With the diaspora-centric artists whose work is included in this exhibition, possibilities for solidarity and mutual understanding were easy. But even when I found myself outside the realm of mutual connectivity—here I am thinking specifically of **Dayna Danger's** *Gi Jit* and the particular audience the artist has in mind for this image—it was my position that saved me from crossing boundaries and going too far into a world in which I was a temporary guest. It was precisely because my body knows a different version of colonization and subjugation that I was prepared to recognize the boundaries that kept another's sense of self and community intact. Finally, it was by way of understanding my own position and its brush against other bodies that I came to investigate echoes of loss that had reverberated in our overwhelmingly difficult and different experiences, as a direct result of our positions in history and contemporary society.

To make sense of the cracks in our current system and the urgency of exhibitions such as *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*, we have to sketch out basic definitions of the problems we are dealing with: history and the archive. In their overview of key concepts in cultural theory, Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick define history through the lens of historian E.H. Carr as “not what most people think it is.”[i] In Carr's view, history is not just a case of facts but an association of facts and

interpretations, marking the historian as a personification of “progressive values that detect in history ‘a sense of direction’ that reflect the present's projection of future goals and aspirations.”[ii] Running with this future-oriented and veiled objective approach, we can jump to history's silent partner—the archive—to understand the ways in which history and the archive—at least in the postcolonial context—work together to exclude bodies and narratives that resist their “hidden structure of interests,” namely patriarchy and white supremacy.[iii] Building a case for the archive in *Public's* latest issue, “Archive/Counter-Archive,” Adam Siegel begins by defining the archive in twenty points, three of which are included here:

“V. The archive is a collection of objects that share a location...

VI. The archive is an ordered process that consists of rules for administration, accession, appraisal, arrangement, description, access, and retention.

VII. The archive is understood in the post-Enlightenment West as an instrument.”[iv]

While our first definition grants us a laconic view of history as a site of power and construction, the second leads us to imagine history as it is mobilized through the materiality of the archive. With the simultaneous rise of feminism and decolonization in mainstream culture and institutional enclaves, we have little need for resurrecting and sustaining these traditional artefacts that have consistently marginalized and invisibilized our experiences. Steph Schem Rogerson sums up the exclusion as follows: “Official records of people of colour, women, queers have created gross omissions in the historical configuration of the archive. Those outside the margins of authoritative power are poised precariously between being written out of history or declared as criminals, mentally unfit or dangerous through state dominance. Colonial and imperial powers have controlled the archive and influenced the dissemination of history by wielding political power through law, the state, order, and regulation.”[v] Undoubtedly, we have no love for history and the archive that has long abandoned us.[vi]





Ayqa Khan, *untitled* (detail)

How can we intervene in this archival system in a way that does not braid together participation with legitimacy? One way forward might be through thinking in terms of body archives, whose embodiment presents a threat to the invisibilizing method of archives and whose ephemerality is a long-overdue retort to the archive's fetish for materiality and object-preservation. Through this exhibition I propose that instead of taking history and the archive at face value, we forge new directions into the past, present, and future for women, queer, and non-binary bodies that are delivered through the body, a living medium that threatens the ghosts of official archives.

As British historian Carolyn Steedman has written, “nothing starts in the archive, nothing, ever at all, though things certainly end up there.”[vii] What becomes possible when we think of the body as a form of archive—a living and breathing one—is that the old and tired understandings of the archive melt away to make way for a line of thought that incorporates creation. For the two artists contributing performances to the exhibition, **Luna** and **Christina Hajjar**, the body is more than just a location for existing stories. In creating her politically-charged work dealing with the horrors of the 1973 Chilean coup, Luna's performative body is not only an illustrative documentation but an active vessel through which memory is channelled to confront hegemonic history and build new solidarities with similarly displaced people. Christina Hajjar's performance, on the other hand, explicitly comments on the inheritance of past memories to make for an awkward position that obstructs new directions. In her performance Hajjar attempted to digest the Lebanon of her mother's

memories, only to discover that her body is more than its diasporic longing. And she realized, as did her audience, it was through her inability to easily digest (read: inherit) that she was able to make space for her own, unique, story.

Let's return briefly to Siegel's outline of the archive as a location, a process, and an instrument of power. For artist **Ayqa Khan**, the archive's three potential states are manifested in her research-based practice. Beginning her career on Instagram, the social-media platform that both records and is a record of time, Khan made illustrative work that tackled the presence of body hair alongside the joys and discomforts of diasporic movement. More recently, she has moved away from this medium and taken up a collage-based strategy that combines photographs of herself, her family, and her community with found materials like text messages, screen-shots and other such ephemera. Together, these photographs and found materials reconstitute objectivity and order in the archive. In ***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet***, Khan presents nine square images that mimic the structure of Instagram but not its linearity. Different images are lifted out of time to encapsulate and give context to the central photo of a half-shaved lip, which performs an uncertainty that is an apt metaphor for the archival body. What Khan signals through this work is a question of historiography, by which I mean our ways of doing history. In her hands, the archive is retooled as an instrument that begins by disordering the linearity of a single story and ends by reclaiming power to tell her own story from a place of localized knowledge.

On the heels of Khan's historiographical turn is Winnipeg-based **Sarah Ciurysek's** *Dear Mary*, which serves as an entry point into thinking about the body and the archive in less visual terms. Produced during her artist residency in Longborough, United Kingdom, Ciurysek was asked to create a photo-based project that would respond to the unique cultural site of the residency. Using what she calls "a sonic stack of photographs," Ciurysek illustrates the life of an elderly woman who walks with two canes and whose connection to rural farm life mirrors her own. The artist finds herself in the woman and so narrates her story out of traces that act like points of mediation between what was imagined and what was lived. We may never know Mary, just as the artist herself never did, but through the aural fantasy we can picture how feelings travel between different bodies and how they are kept safe in another's remembrance. With *Dear Mary*, Ciurysek breaks away from traditional forms of history in two steps: first by using the medium of audio to record, even then presenting a pastiche of half-remembered and half-imagined fragments; and second by focusing on narrating the life of a strong, elegant woman to counter long tales of heroic men.

Although the body is not the central motif of the exhibition, it is a recurring lens through which many of the artists engage with time and memory. Through her ongoing series, *R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)*, **Susan Aydan Abbott** returns to the scene of a gang rape, where her body was broken by the violence of her aggressors. While the physical trauma was inflicted upon her decades ago, it was the persistent feelings of shame that continued to seep through her skin every day. When looking closely at the dismembered feet and upper body in the gallery, it is no longer the young victim that we see but the aged survivor, whose wrinkled neck like the rings of a severed tree trunk display her endurance and growth.

Cross-generational dialogue is a strategy that has been used to close the fragile distance between different bodies, and **Leesa Streifler** and **Sophie Sabet** duly explore it. Leesa Streifler's painting *Her Body: Fragility: Legs* depicts the aging legs of her weakened mother. Having explored issues of her own body image and aging in her other work, it is almost dislocating to see Streifler turn the lens onto her mother. In this painting, the artist's characteristic critique of the body is now accompanied by a certain warmth that comes dangerously close to an appreciation of the physical form. This is not to say that Streifler has lost her edge—she has not—but she has found another. The act of witnessing

and recording her mother's likeness has forced consideration onto the discomfort that has manifested in Streifler's own body. In *Though I am Silent, I Shake*, **Sophie Sabet** asks her mother about her art exhibition in post-revolution Iran, which was censored by the government for featuring female nudes. Hoping to have a meaningful conversation with her mother about feminist resistance and visual art, Sabet's directional voice quickly becomes a subject in the tense visual dialogue that abandons solidarity for disapproval. By the end of the film, the artist is not any closer to her mother or learning about her mother's radical past. Yet, as the closing still of Sabet's breathing neck indicates, as long as there is life in her body there is still a possibility for connection. Through their work, both Streifler and Sabet demonstrate that participation in cross-generational dialogues is vital to unraveling the profound legacies of feminism that continue to harvest in our bodies, however unspeakable they may be in the present.

**Kablusiak** similarly grapples with the difficult topics of trauma and healing as they relate to personal and collective histories. *an exercise in not taking myself so seriously* was first produced by Kablusiak for an undergraduate fine arts class and an almost all-white peer audience who, unable to offer thoughtful critique, gifted this lesson instead: there is not an outside (or an outside audience) to the unpacking of trauma. What an exercise in not taking myself so seriously offers then is an unreserved love for and of the body. Kablusiak recorded themselves dancing to the theme song of *Match Game '75*—a game show they watched with their mother growing up—with deliberate asides focusing on trails of scars embedded in the skin from years of self-harm. In the space of the Gallery 1C03 exhibition, the slowly-annoying sound of the game show is projected almost as a sonic aura around the small television screen to foreground the cultural archive available to Kablusiak as nostalgia. I would be remiss if I were to leave out Stuart Hall from my own reading of this piece. In his essay, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" Hall deftly articulated popular culture's domain as a site of struggle, which simultaneously supported "containment and resistance."<sup>[viii]</sup> Following Hall's suggestion, countless cultural theorists have approached culture itself as a battlefield, employing it to understand how power is negotiated between dominant and peripheral groups. This thinking is visually worked through in Kablusiak's video where culture is indeed a battlefield with the body its agent and witness. Certainly the theme song of *Match Game '75* can be readily interpreted as the cultural site for the battle,



Susan Aydan Abbott, *Foot, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series

but what is more difficult to assess—at least at first—is what is contained in the archive of feelings that are played out. Layered in between the theme song and the cascade of Pepto Bismol are, undeniably, feelings buried from the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples of Canada and its effect on family relationships, body image, and feelings of self-worth. As Kablusiak shifts around these weighty topics in the constructed battlefield, they are not only thinking about the past but also negotiating what to keep and what to dance away.

Another artist that further pushes Hall's envelope of culture as a battlefield is Winnipeg-based and diaspora-informed artist **Matea Radic**. In her recent work Matea Radic has shown an interest in the Yugoslavian Civil War, which undergirded her childhood in Sarajevo and her eventual immigration to Canada. Through seemingly soft and colourful drawings, Radic develops a character—herself at the time of the displacement—that is touched by the souls of anonymous children, whom she remembers vividly and whose lives were cut short during the war. In both works, *They Took You Away From Us* and *We'll Never Be Silent*, she relates that while the everyday body persists after the war, it continues to be shadowed by invisible and painfully intimate marks. In addition to the body, Radic also discovers the symbolism of Sarajevo as a mediated battlefield, which simultaneously captured the heightened violence of the Yugoslavian War and the painful wounds of its aftermath.

Finally, accompanying these various layers of histories and memories, is the element of refusal that similarly participates in making the body archive a necessary and urgent location for cultural revision. In her introduction to the Summer 2017 issue of *Canadian Art*, the Indigenous writer-at-large Lindsay Nixon wrote briefly about **Dayna Danger's** work and a specific encounter the artist had with a white curator, who was unable to “see himself” in the *Big'Uns* series. Danger's response to this comment was, “This work isn't for you.”[ix] This line of thinking, and refusal, is at the heart of *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*, which opens with Danger's *Gi Jiit* from their *Big'Uns* series.

Granted that the artists in this exhibition are guided by a desire to share their individual and collective stories with themselves, their communities, and the broader public, they are also united and firm in their decision to draw and maintain boundaries that prevent outsiders from moving into territories that are more personal than universal. James C. Scott has named two languages in which subordinate groups can speak: public and hidden transcripts.[x] Public transcripts are an open dialogue between subordinate and dominant groups, whereas hidden transcripts locate the discourse of subordinate groups offstage, away from the censoring eyes of dominant groups as they are often credited with the power to undermine and change power relations.[xi] Scott's concept of hidden transcripts can help us understand



how Danger, in particular, resists an easy entry into their work. For them, it is not crucial that we know the details of the sitter's tattoos or body history, but that we quieten under the oppositional direction of their gaze.

The story of this exhibition was initially informed by a reading of Allan Sekula's essay, "The Body and the Archive," in which he employs the metaphor of the camera and the filing cabinet as a way of differentiating between modes of production and preservation. While I am compelled by the feminized metaphor of the filing cabinet and the ways in which it illuminates the accumulation of histories—passed down and bound up materially—my response is not to lock these artists or myself in a corner. I am more inclined to secure a position for the filing cabinet as our primary and inherited vantage point, from where we are just as capable of preserving our histories as we are in directing and building upon them. Like the bodies that protect them, each archive represented here is diverse in its history and purpose. No two archives are ever speaking the same story, nor is that their intention. What they are collectively working toward is a legacy for future generations, who may experience life and story, unbound by a singular narrative. Because the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns us "there is danger in a single story" and so we must be vigilant in resisting the story that is shuffled down to us without our consent. In the end, where is the archive: in the camera or the filing cabinet? What matters more: where we have come from or where we might go?

In an interview published by *Ocula* magazine the curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Gabi Ngcobo, was asked to respond to the international art world's fickleness in "jump[ing] from one theme or issue to another without ever really spending enough time on a particular subject—or context—to enable a lasting impact." [xii] Ngcobo stated that her exhibition *We don't need another hero* was a position, one that was a "message to history, a message to the future, and therefore a way to stay comfortably with the things we cannot yet know." [xiii] Let us center the position, Ngcobo compels. And so I follow, by considering both my own cultural position in relation to the exhibiting artists and then the position this exhibition takes in relation to its institutional location and broader contemporary culture. At Gallery 1C03, ***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*** suffered and enjoyed proximity to fields of objective knowledge that have served as vehicles through which ideologies of colonialism and white hetero-patriarchy have been upheld. But ideologies

are shifting and so should the manner in which we relate to systems of power. June Jordan warns, "When we get the monsters off our backs all of us may want to run in very different directions." It is no small coincidence that as the political climate shifts to make space for previously marginalized peoples, we look to the visual arts for grounding. As university professors— Drs. Adina Balint, James Hanley, Catherine Hunter, Claire Labrecque, Serena Keshavjee, Julie Nagam Sharanpal Ruprai, and Heather Snell to name a few—bring themselves, their colleagues, and students to the exhibition, they are slowly suturing together the inherited dominant discourses of their fields with the resistance offered by the visual arts that exemplify new moves towards "things we cannot yet know." In tune with myself, the artists, and their works, it is the audience interaction that demarcates ***Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*** as a dominant position—a vision—that has the power to propel us forward, into directions that are presently uncertain but whose emergence is like a star in the otherwise dim horizon of history.

[i] Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 159.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] Adam Siegel, "Twenty Theses on the Anarchive", *PUBLIC*, No. 57 (2018), 12.

[v] Steph Schem Rogerson "I, Mabel Hampton: Political Power and the Archive", *PUBLIC*, No. 57 (2018), 83.

[vi] Organizations such as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, and scholarly projects such as Dr. Janine Marchessault's "Archive/Counter-Archive" are exceptions, however, as they challenge preservation histories and advocate for greater public access *while* situating themselves closer to the practice of history and the archive.

[vii] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 45.

[viii] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular", *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 228.

[ix] Lindsay Nixon, "This Work Is Not for You", *Canadian Art*, January 5, 2017. <https://canadianart.ca/essays/summer-2017-editors-note-lindsay-nixon/> Accessed August 20, 2018.

[x] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2-4.

[xi] Ibid, 4, 202-203.

[xii] Mohammad Salemy, "Gabi Ngcobo in Conversation", *Ocula*, June 8, 2018. <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/gabi-ngcobo/>. Accessed October 1, 2018.

[xiii] Ibid.

# About Inflammation: Skins/scapes and Gestures of Defiance

Dunja Kovačević



Skin meets the world. Reconciling to what degree skin also determines how the world greets us is perhaps more difficult. Difficult to qualify, as internal bias does not surface consistently, and difficult to bear—to live with and especially, under.

Prarthana Purkayastha likens it to a “horror,” “the hideousness of which continues to infect the way we construct a version of our own identity in relation to those of others.” [i] Moving through *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art*, curated by Noor Bhangu and exhibited at Gallery 1C03, my flesh spoke. It prickled, in reaction to and in solidarity with the other and othered skins/scapes inhabiting the gallery space. Moved by this fleshy response and my own complicated skin history, now in the company of these women and non-binary artists, I ask: How do we survive, navigate, and defy, the world from a place of inflammation, whose horror is felt by, and inscribed upon, the skin?

*Horreo*, the root of horror, refers to a bristling felt on the skin. [ii] Horror and the skin are always already etymologically and metaphysically entangled. Living with excoriation disorder, I am too fixated on skin and its attendant horrors: in skin as a surface and a site for surfacing. I pick. I trade psychic pain for physical pain, transform the topography of my skin, and set it ablaze. The wounds and infection sites/sights wrought by this practice (or ritual, coping mechanism, compulsion) testify, albeit temporarily, to deeper, embedded, wounds and traumas that are here revisited. Through this re-wounding, trauma is repeated but with a difference (context, location). Trauma and horror are then linked by their relationship to vision: what is unbearable to look at is also seductive. Revulsion has its own allure.

I see myself bloodied in the mirror and sit with my hurt. In this state, I no longer look like me. I look like hurt. In this small window, seconds long, before horror sets in, I am witnessed. I am also witnessing. The damage will heal. Scars ultimately fade. But the body remembers. Sometimes in fragments, as with Susan Aydan Abbot's *R.O.T (Rape Over Time)* series. Here, the dismembered extremities reveal the body's inability to hold a traumatic event. Drawing from Holocaust testimony,

Dori Laub describes trauma as “an event without a witness” [iii]. Trauma ruptures, signaling a catastrophic failure of memory and the body as container.

From their place at the centre of the gallery, erected on pedestals, the decontextualized body parts invite, or demand, us to visit with a specific horror, a particular hurt. Reduced to object state, this body is “revulsed...by its own dismemberment” and by “the violence that undoes it” [iv]. These are scenes of a rape that refuse to heal. This is what the body remembers: arched foot, blooming bruise, face turned away. The rest, including the location of the assault, is deliberately absent: lost to trauma and the imagination. But it is felt. It is felt in the faithfully rendered positioning of a body in pain, and on the discoloration of skin subjected to violence.

Sara Ahmed reminds, “[w]hen something gets under your skin, you feel it.” [v]. The boundary between self and an/other, it is also the site where we meet one another. It is a border, yes, but one that “feels.” [vi] Something getting “under your skin” is first a breach: a boundary violation, a border crossing. Here, the vividness and varieties of dermal injury become an easy metaphor for a whole host of less easily articulated hurt and loss. Rather than a root, I understand excoriation as a symptom of the deeper psychic picking of the anxious or traumatized mind. Some inflammation is, after all, internal, happening slowly and unseen. I connect my skin picking, which is largely concentrated on the face (a signifier of identity and familial/ethnic belonging), as stemming from, and wrestling with, the immeasurable losses associated with displacement. Displacement, too, is a rupture—a violation of boundaries. This fragmentation is two-fold, at least: both outside (geographical) and inside (psychological). How do we redraw the boundaries of the self when we have been ruptured several times over? And is there a way to take advantage of skin's porosity, by allowing things to fall away, to pass through?

*Ghanouj*, a performance by first generation Lebanese-Canadian, Christina Hajjar, opened *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*. Seated at a small table, Hajjar repeatedly slices a trembling rose gelatin cake, like flesh tearing, with



increasing urgency as the accompanying refrain habibi grows louder and more insistent. Meticulously, she carves: removing pieces, abstracting, reshaping, chewing, mixing flesh cake with saliva, spitting kernels, molding. In the end, it spells ghanouj, spoiled brat, in a tongue she inherited, that she belongs to, but is not fluent in. It is an act of reclamation—reframing a word, an identity, from flesh (family) with flesh (hands). Perhaps it is also an act of skinning: peeling back a dermal layer and corresponding identity, re-contextualizing it in the process. This is the work: to take what has been hurled at us, what has marked us, and to find means by which to let it pass through our skin. In other words, it is about what we learn to metabolize.

Skin has a history. A legacy. An inheritance. Skin is also connective tissue: it signals group belonging or non-belonging. Sometimes, it registers both, concurrently. **Sophie Sabet's** contribution, a video installation titled *Though I am Silent, I Shake* explores boundaries of the self as articulated through a frustrated matrilineal gesture that, though rooted in mimicry, instead reveals distance between its subjects.

It is intended as an interview with her mother who, also a visual artist, battled against the censorship of her work in Iran. But the largely one-sided conversation devolves, in fits and starts, to the purported role of women within a (heteropatriarchal) family structure. Woman as support. Woman as sustenance. Throughout, we return to freshly laundered sheets floating on a clothesline. Alongside a few frustrated redirections and heavy silence, Sabet's mother unwinds her story: in 1991, twelve years post-revolution, narratives of femininity had shifted. In an effort to speak back to increasingly oppressive conditions, she crafted a series of paintings centering a particular domestic image of her youth: a freshly hung sheet containing a woman's body silhouetted behind it. To her, it contains a feminine ideal of purity, of motherhood. The small, everyday work of keeping a family together perhaps. Knowing, however, the context out of which this image is borne—revolution, the execution of her brother—infuses it with a melancholic nostalgia. A longing for an impossible return. Not simply to a place of origin, but before the origin of pain.

A clean sheet. Tabula rasa. A nondescript silhouette, whose romance is directly linked to its opacity, its lack. Perhaps our cultural fascination with poreless, unmarked, skin is similarly located in a longing for a return to innocence. Erase fine lines and wrinkles. Undo the stress of time. Lighten scars and hyperpigmentation. Return to a place before hurt.

Marked skin is hard to look at. One only photo exists of me post-picking. I can't visit, can't stomach, the naked vulnerability of it but I have vowed to keep it nonetheless. Typically the revulsion following relapse outweighs the desire for witnessing. Delete. The finality of it is rousing. Just like that, the mystic writing pad is wiped clean. The digital archive remains unblemished, beyond hurt, at least. This photo is the single digital entry in a spectral archive, whose only other records contain the paling hyperpigmentation that dapples my skin. This dappling, might, to a trained eye reveal: I have experienced hurt. Or maybe: I am still here.

For, inscribing, materializing, abstracting, recreating, recuperating, even picking: these are the tools of survivance. Again, I return to the site of feverish inflammation—which is equally a reaction to, and protection against, potential harm. What if we could strategically deploy our collective inflamed or stigmatized skin? This is what I want to write: a narrative skin large enough, sheer enough, to hold our collective fleshiness. One loosely thread together that maps how to move through the world inflamed, without burning up or out.

[i] Prarthana Purkayastha, "The Annotation of Skin," *Performance Research*, Vol. 20, no. 6, 114-121.

[ii] This etymological unpacking belongs to Adriana Cavarero, from *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[iii] Ann Cvetkovich, "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's 'Fun Home'," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, no. 1/2 (2008), 111-128. [www.jstor.org/stable/27649738](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27649738). Accessed October 5, 2018.

[iv] Cavarero, 8, emphasis mine.

[v] Sara Ahmed, "Under the Skin," Reposted by Mary Coble as "Under the Skin," *Gestures of Defiance*, March 4, 2015. <http://gesturesofdefiance.blogspot.ca/2015/03/under-skin-by-sara-ahmed.html>. Accessed October 3, 2018. Note: Original text by Ahmed post to her blog *Feminist Killjoys* has been removed.

[vi] Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacy (Editors), *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001), 8



Top: Sophie Sabet, *Though I am Silent, I Shake*  
 Bottom: Christina Hajjar, *ghanouj*, Matea Radic, *They Took You From Us* and *We'll Never Be Silent*

# 10x Magnifying Mirror

Sharanpal Ruprai



## Homecoming

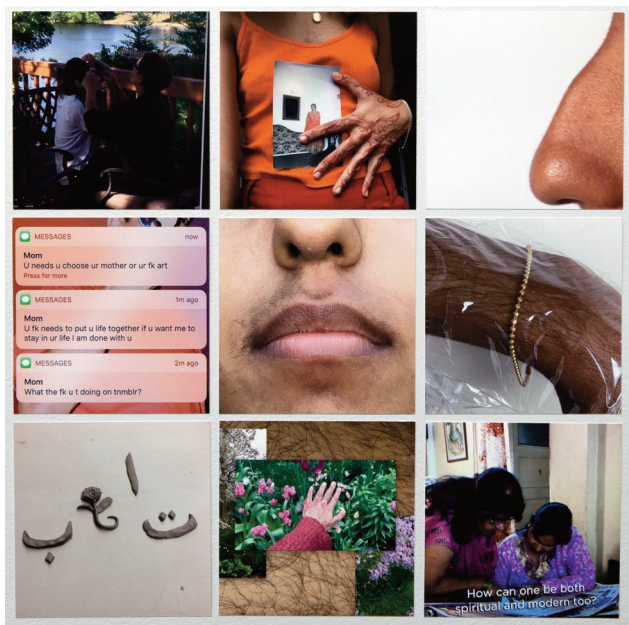
For Noor Bhangu, Curator of *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet*

Punjabi parents proud  
Father's tear in the eye  
a daughter leaves home  
but not on the marriage trajectory  
yet, his daughter's love of art career  
she will be always be at homecoming

Punjabi parents proud  
Mother's proudly un/knowning  
don't touch the art  
she hopes, white body parts on pillars  
does not mean what she thinks  
it's an artful production  
that she doesn't want to voice

Punjabi brother proudly  
acutely alert of how to be in the shadow  
of his sister easy access to success  
brother's non-conforming view of rules  
apply to art galleries parties  
headphones on, does not mean a brother  
is listening to "Dear Mary," feminist practice  
rather he watches for the exits

Punjabi sister un/knowning how to accept family  
in art work space, *don't touch that, watch your bag*  
*go stand over there*, a proud family moment  
will only come in the car ride home  
or in the photograph taken  
outside the gallery  
a precarious tradition  
as a daughter makes her way



## Belong

For Ayqa Khan, *untitled*, 2018,  
nine digital photographs, each 5" X 5".

Aged out of youth  
a cliché for white mainstream artists  
but what of us, South Asian Aunties  
or rather Masis, as we like to call ourselves,  
a small distinction but in the age of youth  
tumbler to twitter to snapchat  
name calling captured and released

Here is how Masi did it:  
only understood the weight of boundaries  
a hula hoop of breakage  
brown skin not a protective shield  
a degree or two, a double pane window,  
kept heat in our gaze out  
that is what Masi learned early on

Masi stood here, walked here, fought battles here,  
have been here before. Masi left flowers in novels,  
tears drops on paper forms, cut up their saris to include  
pockets to carry artwork, love notes, our weapons.  
Masi did not provide you with survival skills rather  
artful degrees and gallery spaces

These are detail photos  
an inward fresh-off-the-boat stereotypes  
of young brown queers,  
body hair kept against mehndi tattoos  
gold chains, body gardens  
a torso of a wedding dress  
here the inward  
outworld of digital photos

Masi thread twist your upper lip  
twist uproot body tiny hairs  
visible under a magnifying mirror  
or only to your lover  
#threadinglife



Mother, the answer is my *fk art*  
 your answer was opening a salon  
 against white beauty standards  
 Mother, the answer is my *fk art* and you.  
 Mother, be done with me then  
 display my chopped-up self is in full global view  
 it can only be pulled together with heartstrings  
 Mother, the answer is not much  
 documenting a daughter's adult life on *tnmblr*  
 Am I following you, mom? Or is it the other way around?  
 Mom, #whatareyoudoingon*tnmblr*?



## Alumni

For Susan Aydan Abbott, *Bust, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series, 2017, silicone and foam, 20" x 24".

For Susan Aydan Abbott, *Foot, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series, 2017, silicone and foam, 12" x 20".

For Susan Aydan Abbott, *Leg, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series, 2017, silicone and foam, 16" x 10".

a shade of pink silicone foam  
that rose colour that's so in right now  
against leather hide a bust, foot, leg,  
soften the look stark white against body skins  
everyone, including our mothers caress  
steal moments to touch stroke the toes  
or massage the leg  
caress a memory of women  
an empty space in the middle of women  
no matter our skin empty invisible to location  
we stand here a middle of your torso  
slightly brush  
down the road





For Susan Aydan Abbott, *Rebirth, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series, 2018, digital photograph, 36" x 36"

in this window we find you whole.



## Harvey Was Her Horse

For Sarah Ciurysek, *Dear Mary*, 2013, audio. Running time: 16:11

what did you understand of the colonial homeland?

a longing for land

a desire for an elegant woman

a way into your own death story

a companion guide to lost in the woods





## Mothers as Artists

For Sophie Sabet, *Though I am Silent, I Shake*, 2017, single channel video, Running time: 9:14.

When a mother asks, what else should I say?  
tell her what you want to hear:  
her paintings are rage filled resistance  
her way to being the world  
overwhelms even your own gaze  
tell her, that when the Seyhoun Gallery  
banned her painting she should have  
rioted or thrown bricks at the building  
And that you, her daughter, would be by her inside  
a rage filled embryo

When a mother asks, what else should I say?  
tell her that you love her no matter the tension  
that your \_\_\_\_\_ body came from hers  
tell her that womanhood is constructed  
tell her, you are learning to hang  
bedsheets clean crisp laundry  
out in the sun  
tell her to meet you, in the kitchen  
so, you can stare out the backyard  
tell her you forgive her

Mother's painting was banned  
there is nothing else to say.





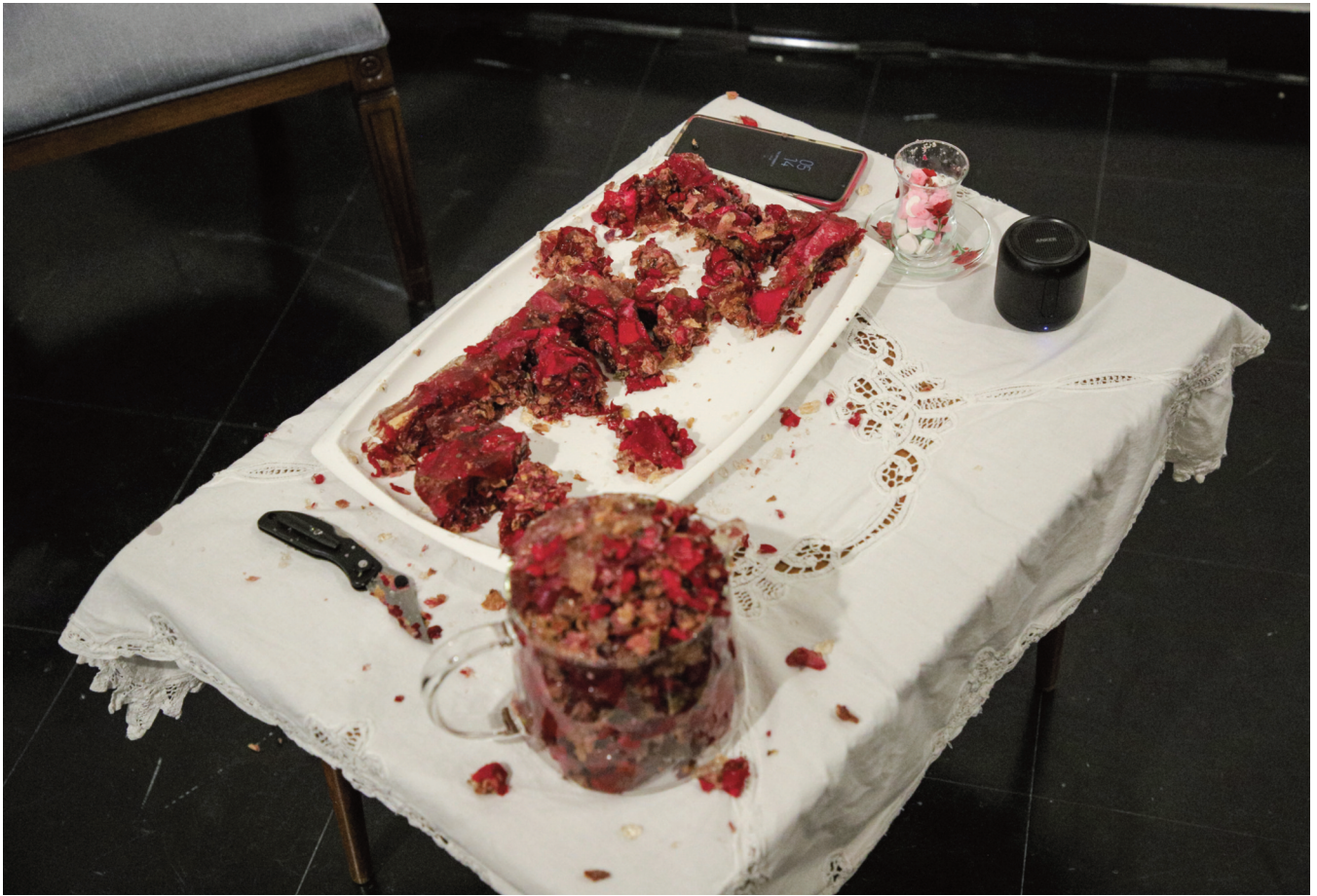
## Daughters Only Inherit the Recipes

For, Christina Hajjar, *ghanouj*, 2018, mixed media (performance remnants), dimensions variable.

a small stack of books under the coffee table  
a daughter's unlearning  
of rose petals candy arts degrees  
a foundation of memory only the body holds DNA  
the spit of rose fruit flies  
liquid release for our grandmothers  
are no longer a performance of labour  
is pink liquid fragility of inheritance











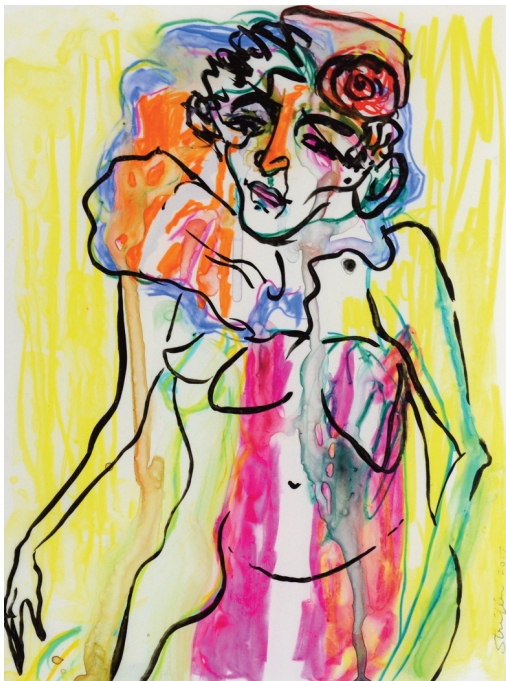
1

- 1 Leesa Streifler, *Her Body: Fragility: Legs*
- 2 Leesa Streifler, *Chronology of One Woman's Body*
- 3 Leesa Streifler, *Dreamer*
- 4 Leesa Streifler, *Two Sides*





2



4



3



left  
Kablusiak,  
*an exercise in not taking myself so seriously,*  
stills from single channel video

right  
Dayna Danger, *Gi Jiit*







Luna, *que dira la santa madre*, photograph for performance.





left: Matea Radic, *We'll Never Be Silent*  
right: Matea Radic, *They Took You From Us*

## Biographies



## Artist Biographies

**Susan Aydan Abbott** is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in Winnipeg. Her work focuses on themes of social justice. Her *R.O.T. (Rape Over Time)* series is part of a larger body of work titled *BOOBY HATCH (WO)MANIFESTO: a feminine perspective of Century Manor*. This project was supported by grants from Canada Council for the Arts, Manitoba Arts Council and Winnipeg Arts Council.

**Sarah Ciurysek** is a visual artist exploring the relationships we have with the ground. Soil figures prominently in works that reference graves, voids, and death, but also that highlight the life-giving components of the earth. The heart of Ciurysek's practice is photographic: she uses the full complement of analogue, digital, and hybrid photographic practices to examine the boundaries and impact of images, and is equally interested in conceptual photography (e.g. *Dear Mary* is a sonic photographic piece). Ciurysek was raised on a farm in northern Alberta and continues to work with the land there, although she often studies other relationships to place during national and international residencies. She lives in Winnipeg, where she is an Assistant Professor at the School of Art, University of Manitoba.

**Dayna Danger**, Tio'tia:ke - Moonyang, 2Spirit, Metis - Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) - Polish. Through utilizing the processes of photography, sculpture, performance and video, Danger creates works and environments that question the line between empowerment and objectification by claiming space with her larger than life works. Ongoing works exploring BDSM and beaded leather fetish masks explore the complicated dynamics of sexuality, gender and power in a consensual and feminist manner. Danger has exhibited her work nationally and internationally in such venues as Latitude 53, Edmonton; Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg; Warren G Flowers Art Gallery, Montreal; dc3 Projects, Edmonton; Roundhouse, Vancouver; and the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe. Danger has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts and at Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art. Danger currently serves as a board member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC/CCA). Danger is an Artist in Residence through Initiative for Indigenous Futures at Abtec.

**Christina Hajjar** is a first-generation Lebanese-Canadian queer femme emerging artist, writer, and organizer based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Treaty 1 Territory and Homeland of the Métis Nation. Rooted in performance art and poetry, Hajjar's multidisciplinary practice grapples with diaspora, intergenerational inheritance, food culture, and feminism. She is a 2018-19 recipient of the Foundation Mentorship Program at MAWA (Mentoring Artists for Women's Art) and was a 2017-18 recipient of Cartae Open School at aceartinc. Hajjar co-runs Flux Gallery and is co-creator of the zines *Whiny Femmes* and *Carnation*. Hajjar recently earned BBA and a BA degrees from the University of Winnipeg.

**Kablusiak** is an Inuvialuk artist and curator based in Calgary/ Banff and they recently completed the Indigenous Curatorial Research Practicum at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Kablusiak uses art and humour as a coping mechanism to address cultural displacement. The light-hearted nature of their practice extends gestures of empathy and solidarity; these interests invite a reconsideration of the perceptions of contemporary Indigeneity.

**Ayqa Khan** is a New York-based artist working in photography and digital illustration, whose work explores the experience of living within two cultures. Featuring a blend of traditional South Asian motifs and symbols of American youth culture, Khan's art centers on confident brown bodies to make visible body hair and practices of body hair removal. The women in Khan's work are often seen in casual, personal or social settings, which are underpinned by broader dialogues about Islam, South Asian diasporic culture and mental health. Khan has exhibited her work in Alt Space, Cooper Union and Chinatown Soup. She is currently pursuing a BFA degree at Cooper Union, New York.

**Luna** is an interdisciplinary indigenous artist. Born in Chile, Luna eventually moved to Canada and, while continuing to travel extensively, she currently resides in Winnipeg. The female human body plays a primary role in Luna's recent work. Luna explores the connections between classical music and the human body, as well as its connection to

## Writer Biographies

storytelling. The artist is devoted to community education and activism. Currently, Luna is working on the *Dream Room Project*, which seeks to provide children suffering from life-threatening illnesses with the opportunity to work with artists to decorate their rooms in original and creative ways.

**Matea Radic** is an artist and animator from Sarajevo, BiH. Her work focuses on confronting the moment her childhood was split in two. Then four. Then eight. And so on. She confronts this moment of displacement in hopes of allowing the trauma to release itself from the deepest part of her being. Longing for a feeling of home and belonging is a repetitive theme in her drawings. She aims to reintroduce herself to the person she suppressed for so long in an attempt to survive. There is a desperation to reclaim a time that is long gone. Her drawings are a battlefield.

**Sophie Sabet** is an emerging media artist working predominantly in video. As an Iranian-born woman raised in Canada, her work focuses on exploring identity and the influences of the diasporic experience within the domestic sphere. She holds a BA degree in Art History from Queens University, and a MFA degree in Documentary Media Studies from Ryerson University.

**Leesa Streifler** is a Saskatchewan-based artist. Born in Winnipeg, Streifler received her BFA honours degree from the University of Manitoba and her MFA degree from Hunter College, New York. Her painting practice focuses on feminine subjectivity and agency. She has exhibited widely in Canada and has received significant funding nationally and provincially. Her work is included in major public collections including the National Gallery of Canada and the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Streifler has been a professor of visual arts at the University of Regina since 1986. In fall, 2018, she is exhibiting her work at the Angus-Hughes Gallery in London, England.

**Noor Bhangu** is an emerging curator of South Asian descent. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in the History of Art and her Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies: Curatorial Practices from the University of Winnipeg, where she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship. She recently completed her internship as the Gallery Program Assistant at the University of Manitoba's School of Art Gallery, where she curated four collection-based exhibitions and one student group show over seven months. She is based between Winnipeg and Toronto. In the fall of 2018, she began her PhD in Communication and Culture at Ryerson/York University as a Ryerson Graduate Fellow. *Not the Camera, But the Filing Cabinet: Performative Body Archives in Contemporary Art* is her first exhibition as an independent curator.

**Dunja Kovačević** is an emerging critical writer living on Treaty 1 Territory. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English (Honours) and Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies from the University of Winnipeg. Her work is exceedingly informed by her position as an immigrant, femme lesbian, and anxious Balkan. She works in community development, sits on the board for the North Point Douglas Women's Centre and co-founded *Dear Journal*, an annual feminist anthology. Her work has appeared in *jeunesse: young people, texts, cultures*; *Border Crossings* and *Martha Street Journal*.

**Sharanpal Ruprai** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Sharanpal Ruprai's debut poetry collection, *Seva*, was a finalist for the Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry by the Alberta Literary Awards. Her poetry is featured in a number of anthologies: *GUSH*, *The Calgary Renaissance*, *Red Silk*, and *Exposed*. She completed two short films, *(Narrow Field of Vision)* and *Home Economics*. Sharanpal Ruprai is one of four poetry editors for *Contemporary Verse 2: The Canadian Journal of Poetry and Critical Writing (CV2)*.



## List of works

All images courtesy of the artist.

In Gallery 1C03:

### Susan Aydan Abbott

*Bust, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time) series*, 2017, silicone and foam, 20" x 24".

*Foot, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time) series*, 2017, silicone and foam, 12" x 9".

*Leg, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time) series*, 2017, silicone and foam, 16" x 10".

### Sarah Ciurysek

*Dear Mary*, 2013, audio. Running time: 16:11.

### Dayna Danger

*Gi Jiit*, 2017, digital photograph, 66" x 44".

### Christina Hajjar

*ghanouj*, 2018, mixed media (performance remnants), dimensions variable.

### Kablusiak

*an exercise in not taking myself so seriously*, 2016, single channel video. Running time: 2:52.

### Luna

*que dira la santa madre*, 2018, performance.

### Ayqa Khan

*untitled*, 2018, nine digital photographs, each 5" x 5".

### Matea Radic

*They Took You From Us*, 2017, gouache and graphite on paper, 12" x 12".

*We'll Never Be Silent*, 2017, gouache and graphite on paper, 12" x 12".

### Sophie Sabet

*Though I am Silent, I Shake*, 2017, single channel video. Running time: 9:14.

### Leesa Streifler

*Chronology of One Woman's Body*, 2014, gouache, ink, caran d'ache crayon on yupo, 21" x 26".

*Dreamer*, 2014, gouache, ink, caran d'ache crayon on yupo, 15 ½ x 17 ½".

*Her Body: Fragility: Legs*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 40".

*Two Sides*, 2017, gouache, ink caran d'ache crayon on yupo, framed 18 ½" x 15 ½".

Off-site artwork, presented at Window Gallery (Bannatyne Avenue at Arthur Street):

### Susan Aydan Abbott

*Rebirth, R.O.T. (Rape Over Time) series*, 2018, digital photograph, 36" x 36".

