

Sandra Brewster

Token | Contemporary Ongoing



Or Gallery

June 15 - August 3, 2019

Curated by Sally Frater

Or Gallery// 555 Hamilton Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 2R1 Canada// +1 604.683.7395//
www.orgallery.org//

Or Gallery acknowledges its presence on the unceded territory of the
x^wm ək^w y' m (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlilwəta74/Selilwitulh
(Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

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Though Toronto-based artist Sandra Brewster has worked in a variety of media that includes collage, installation, and video, previously the artist's practice was most widely engaged with the medium of drawing. Producing renderings that spoke to issues of representation and the multivalent nature of Caribbean culture and identity, Brewster's figurative works often took the form of portraits that addressed the flattening of both "Blackness" and Black subjects that occurs as a result of racial stereotyping. Seeking to undermine notions of monolithic Black culture Brewster's drawn counter-narratives articulated the specificities and multiplicities of Black Caribbean-Canadian culture and experience.

For the past 8 years Brewster's work has shown an increasing engagement with photography. Her body of work *Blur* is an ongoing series of photo transfers. Featuring blurred [photographic] portraits of Black subjects in motion that have been shot at a low shutter speed resulting in a blurring effect on the final image, the work's evasive nature demonstrates an attempt [by the artist] to thwart attempts to categorize and classify Black bodies. The artist's installation for Or Gallery continues an exploration of similar thematic conceits of her earlier works and the *Blur* series in that it also engages with the tropes of portraiture and offers a way of capturing an aesthetic of the Caribbean in a manner that expands beyond the bonds of reductive cliché.

Token | Contemporary Ongoing is a moveable multimedia installation that consists of objects, photo transfers, murals, and a sound piece; each iteration of the installation is altered when it is shown in a new venue with different configurations of the works presented. The project began in 2018 when Brewster was an artist-in-residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario. During a tour of the Gallery's conservation department Brewster was struck by the level of care and



Image: *Calabash*, photo-based gel transfer on archival paper, 22x30in., 2018/19

attention that was directed to the objects in the institution's collection. The artist decided to adopt the methodologies and rubric of museum practice to create this recent body of work. Turning to friends and colleagues of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto Brewster set about cataloguing personal items in their possession that were of importance to them but also conveyed their familial, cultural, and emotional ties to the geographic region.

Beginning the process with a letter that requested their participation in the project along with outlining the terms of it, the artist then met with each participant to photograph each object and to record them speaking about object which, for the most part, involved them describing the pieces, how they came to be in their possession, and the significance that each item held for them. Loan agreements were arranged and signed, implying that the objects would be subject to a considerable degree of care in their handling. Brewster compiled the recorded narratives into an audio track, while the photographs were reproduced either as a set of grey-scale photo transfers

or as large-scale colour photographs. Within the context of the installation the original objects from the photographs are also included.

Without the aforementioned information to inform one's entry into the gallery the installation reads as slightly uncanny. The white-framed black and white transfers are minimalist in their execution, but closer inspection of the prints reveals slightly crinkled surfaces that are far from pristine. There appears to be no order or rationale for the assembly of objects on display, though one can cite their replication in the photo transfers and the murals. The sense of disorientation is underscored by the fact that no wall labels identify or contextualize the work. However, one who is a member of the Caribbean diaspora would likely be able to suss out a familiar aesthetic sensibility in items such as the print of a jar of Trinidadian pepper sauce, the carved calabash bowl from Guyana, or the carved wooden mask.

When one enters into the enclosed viewing space towards the rear of Or Gallery, the messaging around the import of the pieces becomes evident, for this is where one can hear the sound-piece that details why these items are so meaningful to the people who possess them. In addressing how these objects came into their possession, they collectively reveal the many ways in which these pieces operate as transmitters that help to collapse geographical distance, and that their use and presence in the lives of the owners is a way of invoking the past in the present, of bringing forth the presence of absent terrain and relatives, and as a way of performing cultural practice.

Similar to the way in which the participants' testimonies function as a form of aural provenance for the objects, Brewster's methods of display draw attention to, and undermine, the distinctions between what is positioned as an object of fine art or a fine art artifact, and what is considered as a mere object that is not worthy of the same methods of enshrinement and exhibition as for that which is typically exhibited within museological spaces. The worn appearance of the transfers mimics the worn surfaces of the objects; their subsequent framing suggests that it is their use that makes

them of value, rather than the suspension of their functionality as daily-use items (as does the fact that they are reproduced onto archival paper). The absence of vitrine coverings for the plinths operates in a parallel fashion. Rather than rendering them inaccessible behind acrylic casings their proximity to viewers brings them dialogue with visitors as opposed to maintaining the distance between viewer and object that has long been a cornerstone of institutional exhibiting practices.

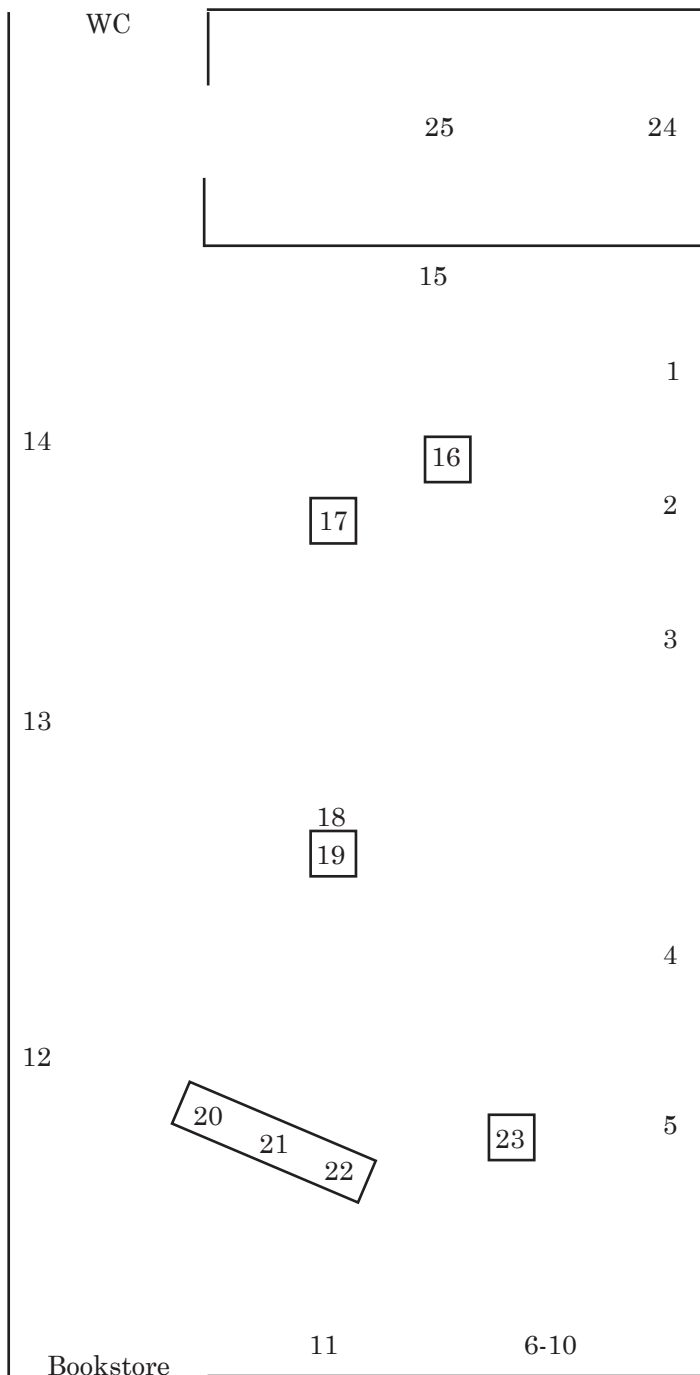
Nowhere is this more apparent than in the sound installation of the exhibition. Crossing the threshold of the doorway into the rear exhibition space, viewers are met with a large-scale gel transfer of a *pointer-broom*, the Guyanese term for a homemade broom that is made from the dried spine of the leaves from a coconut branch, versions of which are used throughout Trinidad and Tobago as well as in Grenada. Produced at a size that spans to almost the height of the wall, the handle of the broom has a trompe l'oeil effect: appearing as though the broom is encroaching upon the space of the viewer, the image encourages viewers to reconsider the value that is assigned to objects that reside within domestic realms, as well as the labour that is affiliated with their production and deployment.

Sally Frater, Curator

List of Works

1. Doily
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
33 x 46.5 inches (framed)
2. Monkey Jar
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
46.5 x 33 inches (framed)
3. Power puff box
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
25 x 33 inches (framed)
4. Peppersauce
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
33 x 25 inches (framed)
5. Dutch Pot
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
25 x 33 inches (framed)
6. Bangles
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
9 x 12 inches (framed)
7. Limacol
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
12 x 9 inches (framed)
8. English Verse
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
12 x 9 inches (framed)
9. Camera
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
9 x 12 inches (framed)
10. Jewelry Case
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
9 x 12 inches (framed)
11. Calabash
photo-based gel transfer on
archival paper
33 x 46.5 inches (framed)
12. Straw Mat
archival pigment ink on
Epson Enhanced Matte Paper
50 x 75 inches
13. Ma Lou Pot
archival pigment ink on
Epson Enhanced Matte Paper
75 x 50 inches
14. Oxford Dictionary
archival pigment ink on
Epson Enhanced Matte Paper
50 x 75 inches
15. Jewelry Case
archival pigment ink on
Epson Enhanced Matte Paper
75 x 50 inches
16. Calabash
17. Bird
18. Handkerchief
photo-based gel transfer on
plinth
23 x 12 inches.
19. Iron
20. Mask of Dominica
21. African Mask
22. Powder Puff Box
23. Ma Lou Pot
24. Pointer Broom
photo-based gel transfer on
wall
113 x 60 inches
25. Token Reflections
Audio, 40 minutes

Gallery Map



Biographies

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. She was the recipient of the 2018 Artist Prize from Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts and her 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 (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.

Sally Frater is an independent curator and writer who holds an MA (with Merit) in Contemporary Art from The University of Manchester/Sotheby's Institute of Art. She has curated exhibitions for the Ulrich Museum of Art, the McColl Center for Art and Innovation, the Pollock Gallery, Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto, among others. Her writing has appeared in journals and catalogues including for the Studio Museum in Harlem, The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Border Crossings magazine, C Magazine, Fuse, Blackflash Magazine, and Canadian Art. A former Core Critical Studies Fellow at the Glassell School at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, she was also a past artist-in-residence at Project Row Houses in Houston.

Cover image: *Powder Puff Box*, photo-based gel transfer on archival paper, 22x30in., 2018/19

Or Gallery Staff//

Denise Ryner, *Director / Curator*

Laurie White, *Assistant Curator*

Asia Jong, *Gallery, Bookstore and Communications Coordinator*

Thank you: Kevin Romaniuk, Jordan Milner, Cross Li, Cindy Chan, Jeff Powell.

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