

Enchantment:

Rebecca Bair

Julian 伊中 Hou

Byron Peters

Curated by

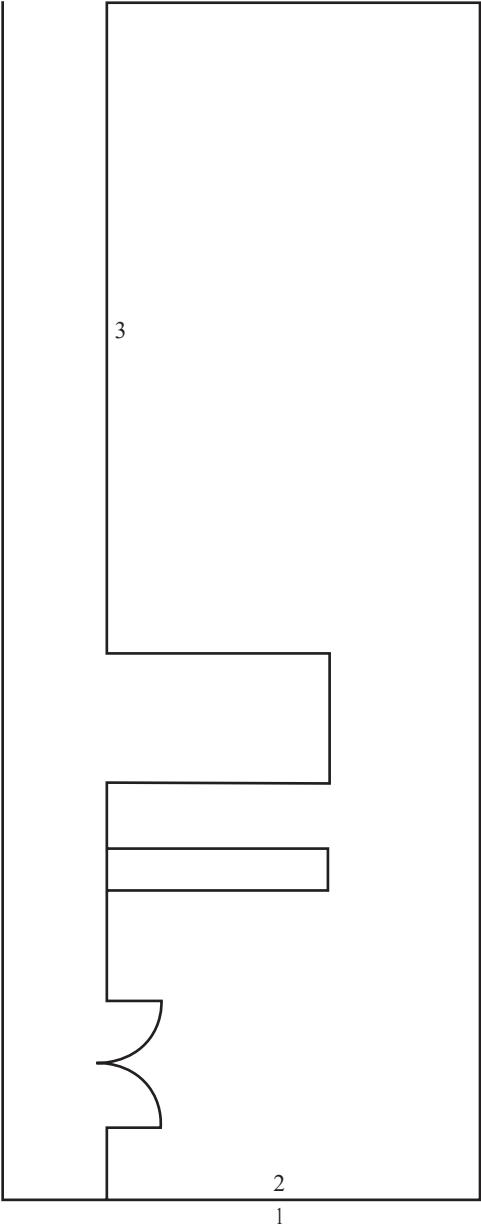
Phanuel Antwi

09 October 2024–

11 January 2025

Or Gallery

Exhibition Map



List of Works

1. **Julian 伊中 Hou**, *Autumn in the Neighbourhood*, multi-channel audio, speaker wire, transducers, amplifier, media player, 2024. Courtesy of the artist.
2. **Rebecca Bair**, *We Plant Seeds in the Ashes of Tide*, UV-light cured resin, salt, dye, fishing wire, metal rings, 2024. Courtesy of the artist.
3. **Byron Peters**, *B-Roll Video Poem (1987-2024, Ep. 1)*, 2-Channel Video (2024, dir. Byron Peters, 20min, Canada), CRT Televisions, Media Consoles, Audio Receiver, Speakers, Carpet, Sofa, Smalls (Ashtray, Glass Cups), Practicals, Cushions. Courtesy of the artist.

Enchantment:

Rebecca Bair, Julian 伊中 Hou and Byron Peters

Enchantment is a group exhibition that looks at the way that Chinatown-Downtown Eastside (and Vancouver in general) enchants international capital, investors, and tourists. Rebecca Bair, Julian 伊中 Hou and Byron Peters insist upon a counter enchantment. To these artists, this counter enchantment comes from reworking archival materials, to insisting on the lived experience of having relations in this neighbourhood, to mobilizing speculation, and fiction, to listening to the knowledge of the surrounding communities. In a political sense, there is a degentrification of enchantment at work in this group show, and the artists invite us to reclaim the means of enchantment. Through sculpture, sound installation, and video poetry, these newly commissioned works remain alive to the readymade imaginings of this space at the same time that they rework the knotty ties that secure the image of this place.

Enchantment

Phanuel Antwi

Art can be seen as displaced, as not interested in its place, as trying to be art in a cosmopolitan, global idea of art. This exhibition is wanting to attend to Or Gallery's literal place, and its place in these communities, these varied and intersecting communities living in where the gallery has located itself.

First provocation of *Enchantment*: Art institutions, like Or Gallery, have been involved in the gentrification of Vancouver's Chinatown. What to do when we know our presence participates in the continual invasion of Indigenous lands, as Lee Maracle pronounced in *Memory Serve*, as well as participate in the displacement of socially marginalized communities and its people?

My desires to live with these impossible questions, to learn how to ethically cohabit in the violent zones of displacements and invasion, inform the impetus of *Enchantment*. So, dear reader, with humility and awe, this exhibition, like me, a curator with a queer feminist anticolonial diasporic lens, dwells with impossible desires. Curating the space of the impossible (thanks to Gayatri Gopinath, whose *Impossible Desires* teaches me how) not only requires working against the desire for containment and recognition that institutions offer but also, through not quickly embracing and *queering*—that is, making strange—processes and modalities that rely upon the presumption of impossible's naturalness, spaces that are deemed impossible sometimes emerge. This sometimes is not a romantic rehearsal of enveloping discomfort: you are meeting me in a season where I am moved by practices of devotion; I dwell here courageously because artists whose artwork, and whose methods, and process, and practices, remains connected to communal devotional practices—by which I mean experiences

rooted in participating in social dramas with scripts that inform devotional scenes (from artworks that reanimate public archives to rituals and ritualistic behaviours tied to art institutions)—inspire me again and again to speak to other possibilities and re-conceptualise what is: *I wanna know the transformative joys in devotion*. The breakthroughs in devotion, like enchantment, “hold the possibility of our eventual emancipation, of our eventual full autonomy, as humans” (Wynter 195).

Rebecca Bair, Julian 伊中 Hou, and Byron Peters, artists I admire, crowd devotion differently, and yet share a common undercurrent: their devotion is a practice of nonpractice. It is in how they work and with what and whom they work, not simply in what they make. They allow it to be, they rest in devotion. They are nurtured by devotion. Devotion, as I understand through their work, is an indebtedness to experimentation. To borrow words from Katherine McKittrick, in *Dear Science and Other Stories*, devotion is their “way of living, and an analytic frame, that is curious and sustained by wonder (a desire to know). This is a method that demands openness and is unsatisfied with questions that result in descriptive-data-induced answers.” It is their openness and curiosity, their comfort with ambiguity and ambivalence, their belief that another way of living and making art is possible, that led to this congregation of these three works that live in three different geographies of the gallery.

The physical architecture of Or Gallery inspired the design of this exhibition. I wanted to re-imagine the underused spaces of the gallery’s liminal spaces—the spaces outside the display room in the gallery. I was interested in these spaces for how they defy classification along oppositional lines, for how they mediate between disparate categories and help us grapple the tensions

between binaries. I wanted the works to exist inside the interstitial, you know, the liminal space of the skin of the gallery itself, including its doors and windows, so that before you get inside the inside of the display room you would have to pass through other insides. I was interested in rendering the position of insides and outsides unstable. I wanted to develop a technique of curating enchantment that would offer “an aesthetic of opening[s] and encounter[s],” ushering viewers in a “constant passage from the spatial to the temporal, from geography to memory” (Mbembe 640, 638). Somewhere in between journeying these interstitial spaces lies the agency of the viewer to build relations between the works.

Because Hou enjoys putting things in the world that speak to the public, I offered him the opportunity to imagine with the outside space. He chose to work with the metal gate, the security gate that operates like an accordion. My ask: for him to enchant the streetscape of Or Gallery with a sound sculpture that invites passersby into a moment of meditation. To do so, Hou’s *Autumn in the Neighbourhood* leans in on the materiality of the gate, turning it into a medium with a resonating body, resonating sound. The sound is not an ethereal sort of sound wave: it passes through a body, from a place, with history, inviting us to consider the gate’s relationship to time. There is a sculptural dimension to the work: not only of how Hou’s is drawn to stretching and unstretching the music he is composing but also of how the device that warps the wiring cords mimics the accordion structure of the gate.

Another way into the gallery is through the glass window. Because of Becky’s ongoing collaborations with the sun and water, and given the fact that Or Gallery, on Pender Street, is situated on salt marshes, I invited her to re-imagine how to draw the neighbourhood into relation through this underused space. *We*

Plant Seeds in the Ashes of Tide consists of beautiful sculptural raindrops that beckon social interaction.

Byron Peters' installation, *B-Roll Video Poem (1987-2024, Ep. 1)* sits inside the primary gallery space. This video poem is truly a work of devotion. At once celebrating community filmmaker Sid Chow Tan's video archive, this work also celebrates people filming mostly protests, and then finding time in the protest to appreciate the wonderment of their contexts. As the title suggests, Peters cuts off each clip from its main event; he then foregrounds materials meant to be supplementary, in the background, providing colour, and texture, into a tender meditation and tenderly frames them as poetic archives with historical significance. Installing the work as a set, and as a waiting space that mimics those of the community television program, is an invitation to sit and consider the wide diversity and intensity of the archive in which this material comes from. Many from the neighbourhood would know the music, for example, is by Sean Gunn, Francis Mantis, Reverse Midas, and Paddy Wing. There are clips from Sid Chow Tan Archives (STA 001 - 475; tapes incl. *Chinatown Today* [1987-91], *Chinatown Tonight* [1987], *Earthseen #11-58* [1994-06], *Raw Silk* [2000], *ICTV* [1989-02], *Head Tax Strathcona Meetings #1-17* [1992], *FHH Chinese Laundry* [2010], *Get the Shell Out* [1996], *Goddess of Democracy* [1989], *Squat #1&2* [2002], *Head Tax Payers* [1990], *ACWW* [2000], *CCNC* [1992-04], *Gold Rush Clan Fights* [2003], *Equal Pay Railroad Construction Strike* [2003], *Ladner Arms Strip-A-Thon* [1988], *Tent City* [2011], *After Hours* [1994], *Saltwater City TV* [2003-07], and many others), and *The Search for Kwan Kung Pt. II* (forthcoming, dir. Sid Chow Tan & Byron Peters).

Bair, Hou and Peters' willingness to work in these interstitial spaces led them to engage with rather than erase the histories

of place, and, in doing so, they amplify narratives in this neighbourhood that go unheard.

The artworks featured in the exhibition are not the only work in *Enchantment*. As much as we acknowledge the labour in installing an exhibition, we rarely, and so I wanted to, highlight the poetry (the art) in an exhibition installation. More than highlighting, I wanted the labour of making art and the art of the labour to be on display—after-all, enchantment is not regular work. As a result, we did not block out the windows while we started installing. For over a month and half (which is how long it took to install this exhibition!), as we learned the design and shape of each work, with neighbours witnessing the artwork emerge, something magical happened: the separation between art and life merged, momentarily. Neighbours stopped to ask what we were doing, they began to acknowledge the coming together of the exhibition, and expressed wonder at the pieces they were seeing. The poetics of these engagements, which required us to remove the opacity hiding art's livingness; to remove the masks galleries wear; to expand the exhibition space of the gallery; to expand who the gallery serves; all highlight a momentous and revelatory glimpse, that there is an enchantment in coexistence.

Two more provocations: How to dwell with what art does and the public expectations of what art raises? What happens when the people in the neighbourhood are not located outside the process of art making, and how can artists engaging with the neighbours of the gallery strengthen their presence in the public sphere beyond the specialized field of contemporary art?

I want to end by returning to the literal space of Or Gallery and admit this: the spatial grammar of the gallery had me curating

Enchantment prepositionally; the works in the exhibition are near and beside one another. “In,” “near” and “beside” are terms of location. They are literally about how the place is laid out, that is what prepositions are, how do you interact and encounter this place, how is each piece in the exhibition relating to each other? To think through these relations in this space of engagement, I turn to Cree legal scholar Willie Ermine, who, in “The Ethical Space of Engagement,” contends that “the ethical space, produced by contrasting perspectives of the world, entertains the notion of a meeting place,... The ethical space offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity and disperses claims to the human order.” Ermine notes the need for “a venue [where we can] step out of our allegiances” (202) in order for “human-to-human dialogue” (202) to happen, that “to redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions” (198). The space of engagement, it seems to me, is an ethical space of engagement, not just a space of engagement. In other words, there can be a space of protestation or even violent concatenation. But Willie Ermine is saying an ethical space of engagement allows those who enter the space the respect of their own difference without immediately saying, *Okay, we’re all in the same place, so we all have to have the same mind*. What makes it ethical is the retention of difference in the same intimate place.

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Curator Acknowledgements

Thank you

I'd love to end this short curatorial essay with my immense thanks to a few people who have made this exhibition possible:

Jenn Jackson, Staff at Or Gallery, John Brennan, Katie Kozak, Paul Kuranko—thank you for everything you did to support this exhibition happening. It really does take a community to mount a show (especially at an artist-run centre).

There are a few friends I want to name who have made the last three months bearable. In my moments of disenchantment (and there were a few), these folks helped me keep me focused:

Lesley Loksi Chan, Chris Chong Chan Fui, Benjamin Evan James, Max Haiven, Amber Dean, Erin Goheen, Nathan Theunissen, Jorge Amigo, Anakana Schofield, Vanessa Kwan, Elisa Ferrari, Lyndon Gill, Daniel and Wendy Coleman, Michael Bucknor, Nadine Attewell, Chris Bum, Shireen Soofi, Zian Sally, Jade Ferguson, Jenn Blair, Karina Vernom

I want to thank the partners of all the artists (Adele, Amy, and David)—it's been a pleasure getting to know you all through this long process.

Last but certainly not least important, I want to thank the artists, Becky, Byron, and Julian: what an enchanting journey. Thank you for saying yes.

Biographies

Rebecca Bair is an interdisciplinary artist based in Vancouver on the unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Sḵwḵwú7mesh, and sə́lílwətaʔl peoples. Her research aims to explore the possibilities of specific representation and of identity through abstraction and non-figuration. Bair uses multimedia approaches and Sun collaborations to illustrate her exploration of identity and intersectionality, through the lens of her own experience as a Black Woman on Turtle Island. Her artistic, professional and educational goals revolve around common themes of celebrating Black plurality, as well as enabling interpersonal and intercultural care, and her work acts as a vehicle through which the complexities of history and identity can be uncovered, redefined and expressed.

Julian 伊 中Hou is an artist based in Vancouver on the unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Sḵwḵwú7mesh, and sə́lílwətaʔl peoples. His multidisciplinary practice includes the fostering and organizing of productions through a fluid collaborative art, audio, publishing and apparel entity (Second Spring), as well as an ongoing artistic practice that involves the accumulation of new skills and application of personal symbolic invocations, collective meaning, and original methods of divination that probe the darker recesses of psychic awareness. His stalwart mediums are drawing, sculpture, songwriting, album production, and clothing as art.

Byron Peters is an artist and filmmaker based on the unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh, and sə́lilwətaʔ peoples. Often through long-term collaborations, their work engages with collective labour practices, digitality and racial capitalism, community archives, and histories of science. Since 2018, Byron collaborated with the late activist and community television producer Sid Chow Tan towards archive-based films that weave together questions of racial justice, mathematics, mythologies, and histories of Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, including the forthcoming *The Search for Kwan Kung Pt. II*.

Phanuel Antwi is an Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literatures at UBC. In 2022 he was named Canada Research Chair in Black Arts and Epistemologies. He is an artist, curator, and organiser concerned with race, poetics, movements, intimacy and struggle.

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Or Gallery is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, and the City of Vancouver along with numerous community partners, donors, and volunteers. We are especially grateful for the visionary support of The Audain Foundation.

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