

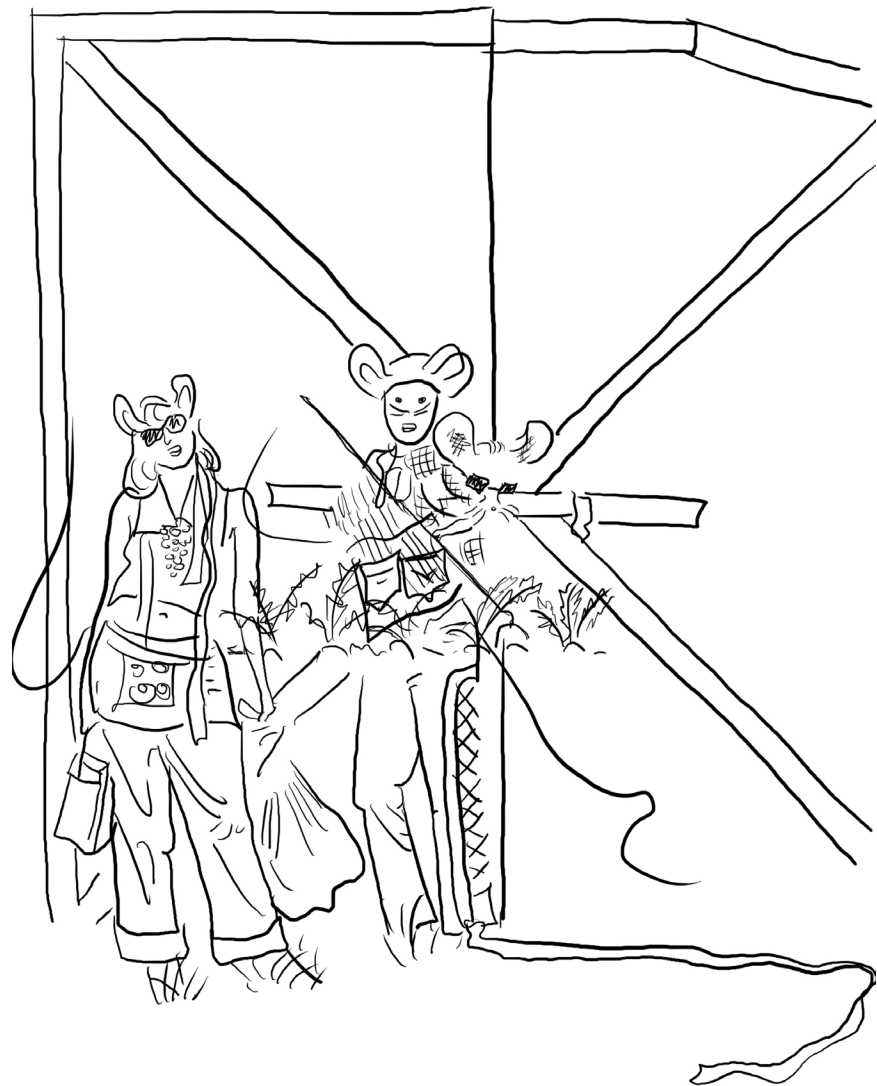
THE SIMPLE
LIFE

Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster

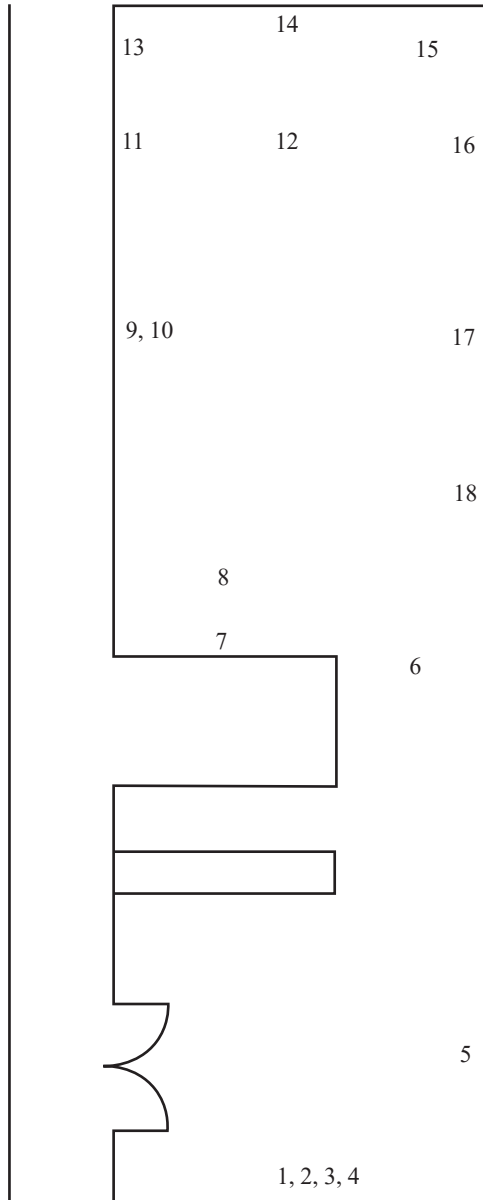
Tiziana La Melia

**06 February–
10 May 2025**

Or Gallery



Exhibition Map



List of Works

1. **Transits of Fantasy**, 2021, heirloom corn gifted from A.M., beeswax, peppermint, strawberry lights, watches, chain, wool, hemp, 188 x 43.55cm. Courtesy of the artist.
2. **Cherry**, 2025, glass, monobloc chair, tablecloth, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
3. **Hamster Vanity Loop**, 2025, spider phone stand, cellphone, excerpted loop from *The Simple Life Uncut*, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
4. **Grape Crush**, 2021-2025, custom glass, concord grapes crushed during *The Simple Life Uncut*, ash and minerality from the 2021 summer fires (fruit from family orchard), dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
5. **Glint**, 2025, Tiziana La Melia and Natasha Katedralis, 96 pages, Softcover Magazines.
6. **Pet Curtain**, 2025, synthetic caterpillar chenille, 170 x 430cm. Courtesy of the artist.
7. **Shute (Study for The Speed of Reflection Impermeability Rupture)**, 2023-2025, reprographic print on paper, grommets, string, paper, 107 x 408cm. Courtesy of the artist.
8. **Trips**, 2025, candelabras, tinted sunscreen on bulbs, leather, paint, aluminum, party favour flowers, steel snowflake on kitten heels (kitten healer), glass grapes, chain, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

9. **The Simple Life Uncut**, 2025, digital film shot on DVCAM, 9 hours, mixed-media installation: projection, cellphone, television, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
10. **Mood Boards**, 2021, hanging from various works or tucked into luggage—collected, altered and assembled costumes for *The Simple Life Uncut*: jeans (ex. Miss Me Jeans!, Luxe Carrelli Jeans, Victoria Beckham by Rock & Republic), denim overalls and mini skirts, bikinis, lace, blouses, Juicy Couture® sweat suits, sexy hat, velour sweat suits, capris, hats, tulle, prom dress, dress, puka shell necklace, various accessories (ex. pop tab chain belt), laminated collage, clay buttons, pink seersucker blazer, little black dress, corset, lingerie, handkerchief, patch work sarongs from scrap fabric and hand-dyed patch work by the artist, sunglasses, pencil skirt, crochet from various dowry cabinets: Franca’s, Clara’s, doilies and tatting found and gifted, quilt by the artist, veils, shoes, hi-vis ribbon, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
11. **Processors: Skimmer, Spatula, Ladle**, 2024, hand-made aluminum, modified kitchen utensils, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
12. **Conditions**, 2025, weather webcam footage, 9 minutes, poem (Italian/Sicilian translation of *lettuce lettuce please go bad* by Claudia Gangemi), pet cage, and shredded paper: Artforum, September 2017, hamster wheel, crop management program by ICI Chipman ephemera, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
13. **Knock Knock**, 2023, steel (salvaged doorknobs), 22.5 x 6 x 6.5cm. Courtesy of the artist.
14. **Cat and Mouse**, 2024, sinopia and charcoal Spolvero, paper, 226 x 137cm. Courtesy of the artist.
15. **City Grater Loop**, 2024, digital film excerpted from *The Simple Life Uncut*, on monitor, costumes, X-Ray luggage, orchard drawing 1992, LEDs, felted wool, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
16. **“I do”**, 2024, aluminum (cheese graters), hand-made unique shapes, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
17. **Glimmer**, 2024, rhinestone poem on ribbon and, paper, rice and paint on paper plate on hamster wheel, birdcage, balloon weights, motor, paper, jute, grommets, paper, photograph, disco motor, chain, purse strap, anagama fired clay (Vernon), air-dried clay, aluminum pigment, purse strap, accessories (with *The Simple Life Uncut* projection, X-Ray luggage and its personal effects), dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
18. **Wings of Desire**, 2025, wood, paint, personal effects, costumes, X-Ray luggage, LEDs, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

House Home Holding Holds Here

Jenn Jackson

*The shape of the land can be smelled at a distance,
between irrigated lawns and juicy fruits with loosening
skins that make puddles on the orchard floor. The birds
sing under the insurance of the season's sipped tempos.
A cascading melody stirred by windfalls.¹*

~ Tiziana La Melia

In her writing and artistic practice, Tiziana La Melia brings together a plurality of material approaches, to trace the ways in which overlapping encounters of place come to shape individual identity and the potentials for community connection—to uncover how the spirit of that which holds memory unravels and returns through overlaps and intimacies of the everyday.

Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster, also known as *The Simple Life*, is a roving exploration of the amorphous space between the contours of identity as shaped by what we have come to call rural and urban life. As an ongoing project that spans multiple forms and spaces, it paces with agility alongside the everchanging terrain of contemporary time. The project's slippery form of language and storytelling is aptly visualized within poetry, serial video montages, performances, paintings, sculptures and drawings that diffusely expand upon a familiar narrative of migration from the countryside to the city and vice versa.

Through the tall tale of two anthropomorphized mice-turned-hamsters and back again, an episodic journey unfolds. Traversing multiple geographies and time scales, the auto-fictional characters trace familial and symbolic understandings of food, shelter,

and belonging—blurring rural and urban chronicles while daylighting the interconnected landscape as a site for support, nourishment, and healing. *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* constellates around an ongoing episodic collection of footage that deploys an eccentric cast amid an archive of adjacent props and ephemera. The project calls towards the discards of recent nostalgic moments past—Y2K, tabloid magazines, reality TV, leaked celebrity tapes and the advent of analog film merging with that of digital proliferation—mimicking the historic depth of fabled stories with a yearning for alternate modes of relating the seemingly unrelated.

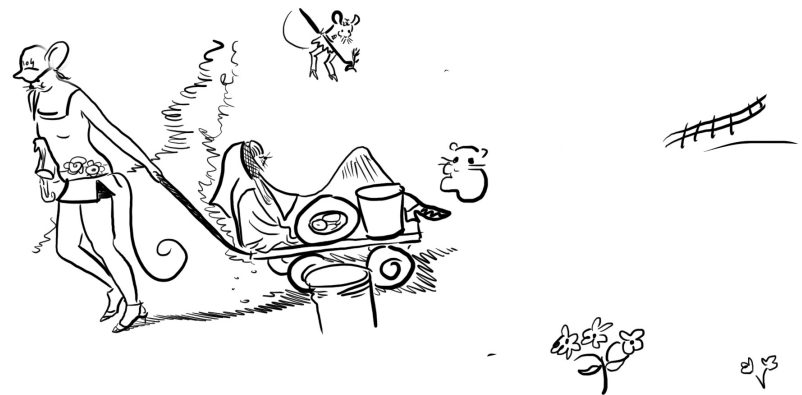
Visitors of the *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* exhibition at Or Gallery are invited to indulge in *The Simple Life Uncut*, a multi-channel video installation featuring over 9 hours of footage, while traversing a variety of printed, painted, bedazzled and embroidered ephemera. Personal artifacts from the making of *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* constellate amid banners and curtains that serve as backdrops and dividers for future performances. The gallery is made ripe for transformation as a site for active, living bodies. Light and shadow set the stage for rotating projections upon miniature homes for the domesticated hamster and its spinning wheels. Enhancing a sense of disorientation, fractured narratives of the film series are overlapped on multiple surfaces and assemblages. The spilling guts of a transparent suitcase deploys the overflow of consumable pleasures through the overload of aesthetic revulsion.

Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster continues to evolve through seasons and circumstances as relationships to place and community transform. The project was initiated during the developing conditions of the global pandemic, with scarcity and

social distancing creating a need for organizing with whatever resources were at hand and with whoever happened to be safely available to convene. Through a methodology centred on kindness and consent, a generative collaboration unfolded. In the making of *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster*, La Melia sought to bring interconnection towards the emergence of blending individual and collective networks of care. These bridges of community made space for dreaming routes for alternate forms of being. Inquiries about the formation of identity evolved alongside ways of understanding oneself and the communities in which the expansive cohort of collaborators emerged.

Within the *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* film series there is a splitting of identity through the interchange of primary characters played by different actors, each bringing their own sensibility to the real-time developing narrative. Scripts and storyboards were loosely devised together with on-camera improvisation as a central theme or, one might say, protagonist. The roving narrative's fragmentation feeds into the embodiment of a diasporic character, reifying the tenuous relationship of the individual body to the land, and the often destructive desire to interchangeably support and consume the vistas on which sustenance is repeatedly propagated.

Deriving its namesake and partial inspiration from *The Aesop for Children* fables and familial folklore, *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* leans into the proliferation of contemporary reinterpretations and visualizations of oral and written stories through popular and artistic media. From *The Town Mouse & the Country Mouse* fable to *The Simple Life* American reality TV show, *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* mixes and merges misrepresentations in a queering of the urban and rural sphere.



The resulting multiplicities propagate in a way that breaks through the isolated bounds of dichotomy, slipping and reassembling at will. Trials, tribulations, and the mystification of “city slicker” and “country bumpkin” are enacted with humorous codes of kitschy camp aesthetics. Characters rove from the rural to the urban in coded costumes reminiscent of the velour Juicy Couture® tracksuits worn by *The Simple Life* reality stars Nicole Ritchie and Paris Hilton, or the quick drag workroom attire of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* queens.

In *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster*, the methodology of 2000s reality TV expands beyond stylistic references to engage media devices of the era. Produced with a 2003-SONY Camcorder, the film’s footage is recollective of home movies during a period when celebrity consumption and Hollywood’s continued misrepresentation, of anything and everything, was catapulting the personal and private domain towards a place of compulsive interchange and collapse. The advent of intimate diaristic blogs was on the horizon, alongside Google searches, images and maps, YouTube, and foreboding social media platforms, where multiple geographies, contexts and ostensibly impossible overlaps would soon merge, simultaneously obscuring difference while further polarizing the language and visualization of political, social, and economic narratives.

Distanced by nearly a quarter of a century, the original fabric of belonging found within the Y2K souvenirs of *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* finds its way into an abject position that, as is typical of discarded pasts, brims with the potential to be a soon refashioned trend of a future generation. Consumerism and disposability circle above the drain in aesthetic defiance as

ecosystems of social norms continually tumble. It is through these layered encryptions that questions of class, taste and shame are brought to the forefront. Adjacent to the handmade refashioned costumes, each spontaneously crafted from thrifted textiles, discarded prom accessories, and personal artifacts, the performing of class and taste are invited to gather around the kitchen table—a site that for many evokes a range of feelings including celebratory comfort and shameful judgement. In both rural and urban spheres, the kitchen table provides a sense of familiarity and home. It becomes a culturally significant gathering place where sustenance is entangled with a sense of belonging, a safe distance from the peering eyes of status quo practices, of preparing, sharing, and consuming stories.

Loosely following the narrative of *The Town Mouse & the Country Mouse* fable, food acts as a foremost character in *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster*. Within the film, rituals of class are performed as the mice gather to break bread within both the rural and urban contexts. It is in this setting that a complexity of relations emerges. Beneath the glow of a haphazard chandelier (fashioned from harvest corn and a string of multicoloured Christmas lights), the country mouse invites the city mice to feast upon a dressed-up spread of economic yet thoughtfully considered fancy dishes, prepared to impress the special cosmopolitan guests. The city mice cautiously indulge in overflowing trays of processed fish sticks, imported hotdogs disguised as octopus from “the coast,” a gooey mash of Ambrosia marshmallow salad topped with canned pineapple rings and sticky-sweet Royal Ann maraschino cherries, watery baby carrots from a cellophane bag, and a ring of frozen shrimp displayed on a black plastic tray. The cornucopia initially garners side glances and dry swallows quenched through the

sipping of an unknown beverage from disposable red solo cups. A hamster roams the table, suspiciously sniffing around the squish of a slippery feast. Meanwhile, the mice nibble loudly, producing a cacophony of ASMR food sounds that would send even mild misophones into delirium.

The country dining scene closes with the city mice inquiring about a fuzzy delicacy—wild almonds. The rural mouse provides instruction on how to crack open the exterior almond pods to extract the edible seed. The conversation devolves into sexual innuendo around a love of fuzzy nuts, further queering the dynamic of the country mouse, played in this scene by La Melia’s mother, and that of the city mice, played by James Albers (aka famed local drag persona Lady Bankok) and Kiel Torres. Having found some commonality and comradery, the city mice invite the country mouse to visit their metropolitan penthouse in the sky—a place where milk comes from processed nuts rather than cows. The camera pans back to reveal a floor covered in almond pods as the country mice take leave into the neighboring farm to commiserate with the livestock and to try their hand at cultivating the orchards.

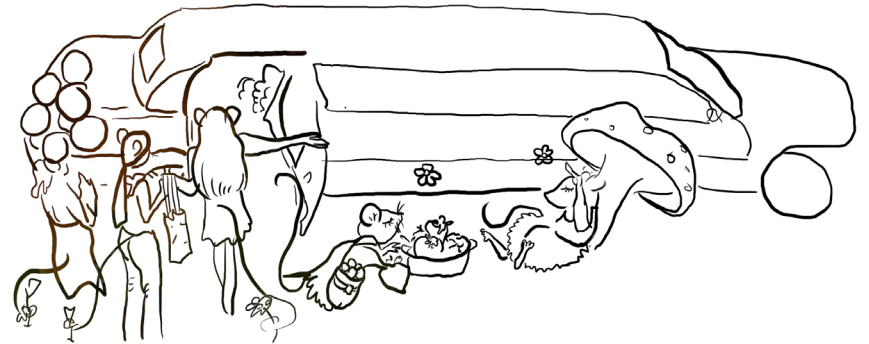
Much like the misadventures of *The Simple Life*’s Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie’s follies into the country, the city mice spend their time foolishly galivanting upon the bucolic territory in an aimless rove of absurd encounters that satirically romanticize the idyllic aesthetics of rural life and labour. In a visit to a neighbouring pasture, the country mice mistakenly identify a cattle farm for that of a dairy farm. In this genderbending mix-up of the livestock’s agrarian purpose, the city mice apprehensively approach and engage the docile herd. This encounter with the unfamiliar is shadowed by a sense of underlying danger. The viewer perceives



what it means for a queering of bodies from outside the community to infiltrate and subvert a sphere of dominion that depends on the upholding of hierarchies of capitalism and colonialism, how the insertion of messy togetherness reifies the threat of collective networks upon individual pursuits of wealth—upturning systemic forms of exploitation through imaginative association. In grappling with the messiness of collective production, *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* opens out to the necessity of approaching food security and territorial stewardship through a lens of collectivity and kinship with the ecologies of one’s surrounding spaces. Through the queering of singular authorship, the manifestation of individual identity is revealed to be as bound to the community connections and dimensions of dispersed networks as it is to the semblance of self.

Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster represents sites that are familiar to the cohort of producers, actors, pests and pets. The film series occupies understated spaces of the bus stop, gas station, pasture, orchard, local urban tourist destinations, and the aforementioned kitchen table. As in the *The Aesop for Children* fable *Town Mouse & the Country Mouse*, the mice eventually leave the comfort of the country to encounter the “luxuries and delights of city life.”ⁱⁱ When they reach the city, a homecooked meal of preserved tomato sauce, fresh pasta, rolled meatballs, aged parmesan, parsley butter (dispensed from a cake icing bag onto a silver platter), braided sourdough bread, eggshells, artisanal cheeses, and olives, is spread out onto a table set with fine trivets and silverware. The feast is delicately consumed between sips from goblets of Diet Coke, bubbling booze, and arugula martinis. The hamster returns and roves upon a light lilac tablecloth adorned with fleur-de-lis patterning. Outside, a stretch limousine awaits, offering

a luxury tour of the engulfing cityscape. The mice scurry to catch their ride, sliding upon pleather seats to the disorienting boom of early-2000s pop music. The evening devolves into a spiral of dissociative mischief as a disorienting Monday morning hangover of capitalist force looms. Amid flashbacks to the country, the monotony and precarity of life in the city and the dislocation from territories blanketed by paved concrete transitions to a dreamlike return to the rural landscape. The episodic sequence closes with a reading from La Melia’s book *lettuce lettuce please go bad*.ⁱⁱⁱ



Tiziana La Melia was born in 1982 in the city of Palermo, Italy. At the time of her birth, her father was a seasonal agricultural worker spending time between the olive groves and grape vineyards of Sicily and the orchards of the Okanagan Valley on unceded Sylix territory. Her formative years followed the harvest seasons from one region to the other until, at the age of five years old, her father announced that the family would immigrate to so-called Canada to live at one of the Okanagan orchards that they had come to know in their travels.

The multiple iterations and material manifestations of *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* create a home for the spontaneous and vital alchemy of place. The project is a visitation that reaches to the past while standing on a contemporary horizon that looks out towards a future of interdependence and connectivity. It is an invitation to collectively rewrite and visualize inscriptions that gesture to a plural positioning of perceptive horizons, to embrace the process of intuition and collaboration in the development of intricate narratives that open towards interconnection and community collectivity. *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster* is a house, a home, a holding, that offers to hold us here and now while a glint of the world orbits full speed towards a universe of uncertainty.

- i. Quotation from the feature length film *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster*, directed by Tiziana La Melia, 2024.
- ii. Æsop with Milo Winter, "The Town Mouse & the Country Mouse," [Online]. Source: Library of Congress, The Æsop for Children, 1919, <https://read.gov/aesop/004.html> (Accessed January 2, 2025).
- iii. Tiziana La Melia, *lettuce lettuce please go bad*. Vancouver: Talon Books, 2024.



Public Programs

Opening Celebration

Thursday, February 6, 2025, 5:00-8:00pm

Or Gallery

Tiziana La Melia Artist Talk

Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 3:30-4:30pm

Emily Carr University of Art + Design

Glnt Publication Launch with Emily Fedoruk, Natasha Katedralis, Tiziana La Melia, Dana Qaddah and Thomas Weideman

Friday, February 21, 2025, 7:00-9:00pm

People Gallery

Performative Reading with Kiel Torres, Christian Vistan and James Albers

Saturday, February 22, 2025, 2:00-4:00pm

Or Gallery

Film Screening with Maggie Groat, Joan Jonas, Tiziana La Melia and Krista Belle Stewart

Thursday, March 27, 2025, 6:30-9:00pm

The Cinematheque



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Biography

Tiziana La Melia is an artist and author born in Palermo (IT) and raised on an orchard-garden on Syilx/Okanagan territories. She works across many media such as painting, poetry, sculpture, collaboration, collage and drawing. In her writing and art practice, Tiziana gleans the detritus of the everyday and transmutes it into material textures, and iterative shapes and symbols, that move through layers of diasporic time. Over the past few years, they have been editing a video that features friends and family performing the simple life in a fabled drama between hamsters and mice, travelling between the rural and the urban, while tracing familial and symbolic understandings of food, clothing, and place. In October 2022, Tiziana released *Kletic Kink*, a poetry album with musical compositions by Ellis Sam. Her latest book of poetry, titled *lettuce lettuce please go bad*, was published by Talon Books in April 2024.



Artist Acknowledgements

A version of this project was first presented as a two person exhibition in conversation with Alison Yip, titled *confessions on sparkling hill* at Damien and the Love Guru (Zurich, 2023). A screening of *The Simple Life Teaser* and a poetry reading featuring Natasha Katedralis, Kiel Torres and Christian Vistan was hosted by Qian Cheng in her home at Nap Gallery (Vancouver, 2023). Feature length cuts of the film have been presented as part of solo exhibitions at Bad Water gallery (Knoxville, 2024) and as part of the travelling group show *Town & Country: Narratives of Property* and *Capital* curated by Caitlin Jones, Charo Neville, Melanie O’Brian at the Kamloops Art Gallery (2024) and The Belkin Art Gallery (2025). The seeds of this project were sowed during my residency at the Grande Prairie Art Gallery in Spring of 2019—thank you Derrick Chang for the invitation. Endless gratitude to Ellis Sam for working tirelessly with me on video editing.

My gratitude to the team at the Or Gallery for supporting the time and process needed to prepare the first exhibition of this expanded project in my community: Director Curator Jenn Jackson, Gallery Manager Queena Cheung, Preparator Katie Kozak, Gallery Assistant Agnes Fan, Young Canada Works Assistants Lily Le, Miles Saraswat, and Archivist Rea Saxena.

I am especially grateful to Or Gallery for supporting the printing, publishing and editing for: *Glint*, a collaboration with Natasha Katedralis. *The Simple Life Uncut* and *Conditions*, edited by Rea Saxena.

Deep thanks to the video cast and crew of *Country Mouse City Mouse Hamster*:

Cinematography with Kasper Feyrer

Editing with Ellis Sam

Soundtrack with Ellis Sam featuring improvised musical performances by James Albers, Jonathan Scherk, and Sam Dzierzawa

Costume with Natasha Katedralis

Location recordings and photography: Amy Kazymierchyk, Rebecca Brewer, and Hannah Rickards

Starring in order of appearance:

Martina La Melia, James Albers, Kiel Torres, Taro, Natasha Katedralis, Franca La Melia, Camilla Impronta, Rebecca Brewer, Suzy Chung-Smith, Reiko Inouye, and Christian Vistan.

Many thanks for the technical support and conversation with: Jac Bruneau, Kelsey Conley, Emily Fedoruk, Vanessa Disler, Maggie Groat, Justin Patterson, Krista Belle Stewart, Jac Bruneau, Tobin Gibson, Tess Rafael, Julian Yi-Zhong Hou, Karilyn Ming Ho, Michael Loncaric, Michelle Helene Mackenzie, Rachelle Sawatsky, Priya Shetty and Paolo X.

Special thanks to Jaan Andres Põldaas for making glass and Katherine Langdon for rhinestone support.

I am grateful to be living as an uninvited guest on the unceded territories of x^wməθk^wəyəm, Sł^wxwú7mesh, and səlilwətał, and neighbouring k^wik^wəłəm and Syilx Okanagan First Nations.

Video and costume produced with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Or Gallery 236 Pender St East, Vancouver, BC V6A 1T7, Canada

Contemporary Art Space and Bookstore
Open Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm

Or Gallery acknowledges its presence on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliwətəl First Nations, who have stewarded this land since time immemorial.

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.

All illustrations courtesy of Tiziana La Melia.

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