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# **2022 MVS Studio Program Graduating Exhibition**

Works by Arezu Salamzadeh, Kevin Schmidt,  
Anran Guo, and Jeremy Laing

May 11–July 30, 2022  
University of Toronto Art Centre

**Art  
Museum**

# 2022 University of Toronto MVS Studio Program Graduating Exhibition

The Art Museum, in partnership with the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto, is pleased to exhibit the graduating projects of the 2022 Master of Visual Studies graduate students Arezu Salamzadeh, Kevin Schmidt, Anran Guo, and Jeremy Laing. The new works demonstrate a capacious invocation of craft, utilizing techniques that critique the historical present and imagine worlds otherwise.

This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS Studio degree in Visual Studies at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, University of Toronto.

## **Our Supporters**

The exhibition is generously supported by The Valerie Jean Griffiths Student Exhibitions Fund in Memory of William, Elva, and Elizabeth. Additional support comes from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies.

# Foreword

Upon entering the Art Museum, a gloriously pink, hand-crafted push-button telephone seizes my eyes. How could it not, as it's enormous, sized for a giant. I hear it ring silently. The phone beckons, and I'm pulled closer. Do I pick up? The handset alone is practically the same size as myself. I would need some assistance from a gallery attendant to lift it. Who would I call anyways? Or perhaps a voice will be there on the other end of the line? I start to imagine the phone as a portal; this object has something to say beyond communication protocols as we know them. Arezu Salamzadeh's telephone is an alluring welcome to the MVS Studio Program Graduating Exhibition. The various artworks demonstrate a capacious invocation of craft. The Oxford English Dictionary states that craft is the skill to make with ingenuity. For the MVS graduates, an ingenious approach to craft means not only or simply a making with the hands but a broad, materialist utilization of techniques that critique the historical present and imagine worlds otherwise. The pink telephone is both a compelling material object and a novel mode of communication—it operates without electricity! All of the artworks exhibited are crafted in this sense, material forms that are also singular and situated constructions of desires, humour, politics, frustrations, philosophies, and artistic life itself.

Salamzadeh's mixed media installation stages drag performance within the American West, as signalled by the illuminated sign Saloon. Across a series of video performances, Rolls Rice, the artist's drag queen persona, queers country classics like Tammy Wynette's 1968 "Stand By Your Man." Adorned in a flowing blonde wig and pink

cowboy boots, Rice's impassioned twang sings, "Sometimes it's hard / being Asian / trying to date / like a straight femme / You'll have bad times / and he'll have good times / explaining things / he thinks you don't understand." Salamzadeh crafts a familiar yet unique camp aesthetic in order to disidentify with whiteness, womanhood, and the West, that is, there is an embracing, mocking, and transforming of her subject matter through drag humour and sincere yearning. The result is an undoing and refashioning of fantasies of the desert, which makes space for queer life beyond the harmful strictures of racism and misogyny. Salamzadeh also presents exaggerated prop-like saloon doors, and provocatively, they are not installed in a way that permits visitors to pass through them. Rather, the doors are wall-mounted and open directly onto wood wallpaper. Like her telephone, the saloon doors are another queer portal. To enter is seemingly impossible, as one would have to walk through a wall. And yet, in this imaginary beyond heteronormative logics of expression, communication, and belonging, Rolls Rice shows the way: beyond the fake wood wallpaper, a sprawling and wondrous queer desert.

Kevin Schmidt's video-based *Kiosk* series directs attention to his labour as an artist and to material and political conditions of artistic production that are not always evident in artworks and exhibition displays. Throughout the year, Schmidt collected disposed furniture to use in the construction of sound dispersion panels for a gallery exhibition. While creating these panels in his studio, Schmidt wore a head-mounted action camera, recording his point-of-view while working. He kept a portable modular synthesizer of his own construction close by and composed music with it, creating a soundtrack for his labours that frames his studio as a site of performance. Hilarious, disarming, and informative, Schmidt sings out his actions in concert with the synthesizer. In the

gallery, the kiosks supply information, the main function of such structures, as the embedded videos are embodied how-to guides, offering insights into the artist's studio as a site of labour, which is typically elided within exhibition spaces. The kiosks also provide practical knowledge for creating something, that is, how to make the sound dispersion panels. Schmidt's Kiosk series is strikingly self-reflexive, acknowledging that the transformation of artistic labour into a consumable performance all-too-neatly satisfies the ever ravenous and extractive processes of commodification in the contemporary art world. And yet, elements of artistic life and work still escape subsumption, like the haptic sensation of touching a tool or the structure of feeling experienced while singing and creating.

Entering Jeremy Laing's materially dense and luscious installation is like crossing through a portal, and indeed, the translucent hanging tarpaulin that one must pass through to enter it is so titled. Inside, a diverse array of materials, including crushed velvet, printed shower curtains, a facsimile of gingham, faux suede, and glitter camo stretch, hang, and extend, expressing a complex and sensuous non-representational queerness. In *Infinite Sample Set*, materials are displayed on human-scaled x-frame stands and spatially distributed. For Laing, the sample is concerned with potentiality and singularity, as samples are particular materializations of something that may or may not come to be in innumerable ways (think of how a single fabric sample can serve as a stand-in for a variety of options to manufacture clothing or furniture), but the sample is also materially specific and unique in and of itself. Thus, while Laing's installation may evoke an opaque hall of mirrors, their queer materialism does not simply reflect the self; rather, queerness is immanent and emergent, an assemblage of texture and pattern that

promises inventive modes of orientation and perception. Laing's queer humour best announces itself in the strange and abstruse cuttings to which they have subjected some materials. These cuts demand nothing less than new modes of relating to holes, slits, and openings. At a far edge of their installation stands *Leavings/Legend*, a pop-up display wall of amassed materials and fabric cut-offs that are draped and gathered. It is here where the potentialities of queerness teem most intensely, a material chaos unbound and unframed, open to infinite sampling, sensation, experience.

Anran Guo's objects and installations are punchy and pungent craftings of dark humor. In *Acceleration*, caster wheels have been fitted to a soccer ball, a superfluous addition that feels absurdist. One might ask, is this an attempt to increase speed in a competitive sport? But after an initial guffaw, a sense of foreboding creeps in, as the work provokes a vast consideration of acceleration and existence. Globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and digital networked infrastructure have dramatically quickened the pace of twenty-first century life, but Guo suggests that acceleration is not always the answer to societal progress. There is no guarantee that a soccer ball's speed will increase when wheels are added; in fact, this may slow the ball down, just as the caster wheels of a grocery cart frequently stick. *Everything is fine* consists of hand-made duck sculptures resting precariously on flimsy stool legs. Conjuring the surface of water, blue cloth spreads out beneath the ducks as their weight presses down on the stool legs and keeps the cloth in place. On first glance, the ducks appear serene and toy-like, similar to rubber ducks a child might play with in a bathtub. Everything seems fine. But foreboding returns more aggressively in this installation, as the ducks are starkly unaware that beneath their resting bodies stand support structures threatening imminent collapse. This anxious scene instigates

yet another terrifying realization: The ducks are decoys used in hunting. Everything is not fine. Where does one draw lines of empathy and identification, the work uncomfortably asks. Are you the hunted or hunter? Do you want to reinforce the duck's support structures, which would keep the ducks afloat but also targets, or do you want to tear the entire set-up down? Guo, like Salamzadeh, Schmidt, and Laing, ultimately encourages extending imagination beyond this scene, toward differently configured material conditions of existence, in which everything has the potential to be genuinely and exuberantly . . . fine.

Zach Blas

*Assistant Professor, Visual Studies*

*John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape,  
and Design*

# Arezu Salamzadeh

*A Flirting-Based Practice* is a mode of interaction that prioritizes self-expansion over the desire to consume, or consummate with, an object or scene of interest. I've long loved the landscapes and myths of the American Southwest despite never being more than a visitor to it. Flawed stories of cowboy heroism and an intoxicated nostalgia flavour this unreal, exaggerated scene of the desert that lives in my memory and inspires me as a term I've coined the desert imaginary. This flirtation with the desert—a gesture towards it, but only ever a mirage—mirrors the quick, legible sculptural language that my artwork inhabits.

My artistic practice is built upon an ethos of play and public interaction; it is auto-theoretical but audience-prioritized work that often adopts the disguise of other genres of entertainment. Through my drag persona, Rolls Rice, I have been re-writing the lyrics to classic soft country, Outlaw Country, and Rockabilly songs from the late 60s to early 80s and performing them with backing karaoke tracks. Rolls Rice is the *desert imaginary* meets nostalgia and admiration for the loaded femininities of country stars from said eras such as Wanda Jackson, Tammy Wynette, and Loretta Lynn. Her karaoke covers are citations of these stars, the original songs, and their eras, while the rewritten lyrics serve as opportunities for auto-theoretical critique. The prop sculptures seen in her music videos and performances, from a giant pink telephone to a carnival-style saloon sign, flirt around the edges of the *iconic object* and further reinforce fantastical constructions of non-existent places and times—there's no place like No Place.

## **About the Artist**

Arezu Salamzadeh (she/they) is a “queer,” “neurodivergent,” “mixed race,” Mississauga-based artist who creates objects, performances, music, and spaces for people to interact with and move through. They ask questions about nostalgia, selfhood, power, desire, and loneliness through a language of humour and play. She received her BFA, Honors, from the School of Visual Arts, New York, in 2016. They have since exhibited at galleries, museums, and unconventional venues throughout Canada, the US, Italy, and the UK.

## Kevin Schmidt

The *Kiosk* series are a set of “how-to” videos mounted within sculptural displays made from discarded furniture that I have collected from the streets of Toronto. Housed in these “information booths,” the videos document, disclose, and interpolate a process of art making: here, a set of acoustic diffusion panels constructed from the same abandoned materials and presented in concurrent exhibition at the Musée d’art de Joliette. Experienced through a musical soundtrack of a modular synthesizer that follows me during the recording of my work, these objects are both manifestations of my labour and reflexive critiques of its instrumentalization.

One aim in this body of work follows Charlie Chaplin’s in *Modern Times*: I identify and satirize the demands of efficiency and aestheticization that are internalized in our own neoliberal era of easy consumption. I perform as a one-person-band to juggle tension between doing something and explaining it, while aesthetically framing it. Like Victorian-era descriptions of artisanal craft, contemporary “how-to” videos attempt to render handiwork transparent, to a similar end. For the Victorians, a moral imperative to avoid secrecy served to enable the division and exploitation of skilled artisanal labour. For our contemporary selves, this transparency serves up the commodification of our own lives, skill, and time to further extend surveillance capitalism. Yet in the search for clarity there is always a gap: the tacit, embodied knowledge involved in making cannot be fully described or depicted. Complete knowledge comes from doing. Like Chaplin, I prod at this void through a materialist confusion of the aura of work—complicating the relations of process, object, and document.

As a meditation on labour, the *Kiosk* series examines and advocates for the work required to repair, maintain, or transform in an economic and social system reliant on the exploitation of fossil fuels and the ongoing fallout of empire. As an artwork, the *Kiosks* aspire to depict what they cannot.

## **About the Artist**

Kevin Schmidt lives and works on the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, Seneca, and Mississaugas of the Credit, as well as the unceded territory of the Secwepemc. His practice functions as a critical and subjective examination of spectacle. His works often conflate and displace, providing alternate vantage points on genres such as landscape, “how-to” instruction, or museum display. Schmidt’s recent solo exhibitions include 2018’s *We Are the Robots* at the Vancouver Art Gallery and *Reckless*, a public art installation on North Vancouver’s Polygon. In parallel to the 2022 MVS Thesis Exhibition, he has a solo exhibition at the Musée d’art de Joliette.

# Anran Guo

everything is fine

With the sound of steady beats,  
as long as you follow the tempo  
the hands will not get beaten;  
so, everything is fine.

As the metal bunk bed screams  
every time you flip over;  
the fluffy duvet is the only comfort -  
you just need to fold it into a perfect tofu shape by 6:30 am;  
so, everything is fine.

Things can move better with wheels on,  
you should just put them on,  
give it a push and  
see,  
it moves.  
So, everything is fine.

We do not force our kids to learn to play the piano;  
no one will hold the stick to catch your mistakes -  
so, everything is fine.

The tofu-shaped duvets look pretty nice,  
but our kids do not have “military training” at the age of twelve;  
so, everything is fine.

“If you are not a research-based artist you should not be in grad school.”

“He did not really mean that.”

So, everything is fine.

I just keep my mouth shut,  
And roll my eyes.

So,

everything is fine.

## **About the Artist**

Anran Guo is a female queer artist currently based in Hamilton and Toronto. She grew up in China and came to Canada in 2014. Guo is primarily focused on sculptures and installations; her works are critical and playful, offering layered readings, and are usually in response to political issues and social issues.

# Jeremy Laing

The frame is the originating condition, drawing in as it keeps out, co-constituting interior and exterior, normative and otherwise. Filling in the frame with surface delivers partitions, screens, walls, windows, frames within frames: overlapping, intersecting, implicating. Each surface a sample; transtemporal, an extraction of what exists and a projection of what could come; a present promise of futurity; mimetic of itself, but a self-anticipating transition, and, perhaps, also in aid of one. Each sample a version, a façade, an identity; site of administration and control, but, simultaneously, of joyous, agential emergence; coterminous limit and potentiality.

Frequency. Between sample and self. Vibration. Between optic visibility, abstracted from surface, and haptic visibility, concretely related to it. Push-and-pull. Between a centred, distant view and coming close, spreading out. Flickering. Between eyesight and eye-touch. Hovering. Beyond the visible, a queer visibility: affective seeing, attuned to that which is not quite there, but is revealed, in anticipatory glimpses, by the trembling shape of one's desire.

Toggling. From visual sign to haptic sign, entwined but in contradistinction: a mirror, reflecting sensation, and the self had in sensing. Oscillating. From perception as geography—perspectival, points plotted to map—to sensation as landscape, an ongoing emergence; that which exists, between subject and object, at the interface of the body. Moving. From this side to . . . no side, a non-binary transition; departure without arrival; a space, a duration between.

Individual narratives give way to a new context of irreducible totality. Texture (cumulative) echoes across scales, superseding-

yet-arising from particularities and mutual non-identity. The material and ephemeral substance of surface is a conduit to particularity, a source of connectivity, a transitional portal. From the waning shadow cast by the fantasy of a fixed state and stable view emerges a non-hierarchical distribution of variation, never static—an *Infinite Sample Set*—evolving in dynamic relation to shifting orientations: yours, theirs, ours.

## **About the Artist**

Jeremy Laing makes objects, spaces, and situations for embodiment and relation. Through the synthesis of craft, conceptual, and social modes, their work explores the interrelation and transitional potential of people and things, materials and meanings, and questions the normative logics of who and what matters, is valued, or not.

## From the Artists

**Arezu:** Thank you to Mom, Kian, Sara, Annabel, Shaheer, Lan, Kevin, Jeremy, Anran, Logan, Zana, Nicole, Shani, and so many more for your support, love, thoughts on love, and for enduring me through the making of this work. Thank you to the amazing Maria Hupfield, Vanessa Godden, Sanaz Mazinani, Jean-Paul Kelly, and Bridget Moser for your wisdom, humour, and continued guidance. Thank you to past lovers and singers and strangers who've clinked a beer with me around the pool tables, barbecue shacks, ranches, sticky karaoke dives, and gas stations of America. This work would not exist without you.

**Kevin:** Thank you to Holly Ward for love, support, and many great ideas; to my cohort: Jeremy Laing, Anran Guo, Arezu Salamzadeh, Logan Williams, Nicole Cartier, Žana Kozomora, and Shani K. Parsons from whom I learned so much; to Charles Stankieveh, Marla Hlady, Luis Jacob, Maria Hupfield, Lauren Fournier, and Michèle Pearson-Clarke, and especially to my panel: Jean-Paul Kelly, Gareth Long, Mitchell Akiyama, Maggie Groat, and Dylan Robinson, for inspiration and insight.

**Anran:** Thank you to my principal advisor Luis Jacob, my panellists Charles Stankieveh, Jean-Paul Kelly, Will Kwan, and my external Elsa Delage for the guidance. Thank you to Carlo Cesta and John McCartney for the unlimited support and encouragement, and my wife for the great patience and tolerance. Thank you to Arezu, Jeremy, and Kevin for all the joyful conversations and inspiring thoughts. Thank you to my parents for having

the courage of defending the justice you believed in 33 years ago and all the meaningful arguments we had.

**Jeremy:** With gratitude to my friends and family, lovers and interlocutors, peers and professors, for their generosity, inspiration, patience, and attentive care: Alex Bowron, Ameen Ahmed, Anran Guo, Arezu Salamzadeh, Barr Gilmore, Charles Stankievech, Dina Georgis, Eliane Sauriol, Erlis Dushi, Frank Griggs, Gareth Long, Greg Manuel, Johanna Laing, Jasmine Rault, Jessica Bradley, Kevin Schmidt, Lauren Fournier, Laurie Kang, Logan Williams, Luis Jacob, Maria Hupfield, Michèle Pearson-Clarke, Mitchell Akiyama, Natalie Oswin, Nicole Cartier, Robert Diaz, Shani Parsons, Sophie Hackett, Stephanie Comilang, Suzanne Carte, and Zana Kozomora; especially to my thesis panel, Jean-Paul Kelly, Maggie Groat and Marla Hlady, my external advisor Alan Belcher, and my principal advisor, Zach Blas.

## From the Faculty

Asynchronous. Synchronous. Distal. In-person. Online. Off-line. These once novel words have become idiomatic over the past two years. In education, as in other industries, they have been pervasively adopted for practical reasons of orientation or reorientation. Though already part of twenty-first-century pedagogy and labour discourse, the wider effects of such intensified and ubiquitous language acquisition—attesting to palpable confusion between the physical and the digital—has not, as of yet, had the distance required for perspective.

These terms also inform and circulate throughout the work of this year's MVS graduates, each characterized by the separate, but contiguous, tensions—rifts and intersections—in how research, craft, and philosophy can address contemporary embodiment and its mediations. Our congratulations go to Anran, Arezu, Jeremy, and Kevin for allowing us into relation with their vital perspectives as we define the changes in our own.

Thanks to the MVS graduate faculty who served on MVS Thesis panels this year: Mitchell Akiyama, Zach Blas, Vanessa Godden, Maggie Groat, Marla Hlady, Maria Hupfield, Luis Jacob, Will Kwan, Gareth Long, Sanaz Mazinani, and Charles Stankievech. Thank you to Sue Lloyd and Katie Lyle and all the exceptional Visual Studies sessional faculty who met and engaged with the artists in our program. Our gratitude to Digital Media Technician Renée Lear for her incredible work.

The 2022 MVS Exhibitions are also the first under the leadership of Daniels Faculty Dean Juan Du. A deep thanks to Dean Du, her office, and the Daniels community for their continued support and encouragement of the MVS Exhibitions.

This year again sees an incredible intersecting of the MVS Studio and MVS Curatorial graduating exhibitions at the Art Museum. For Daniels, this sharing of space generates pivotal relations between researcher-practitioners and the communities in which we are situated in. For this, we are incredibly grateful to Art Museum Director and Daniels Associate Professor Barbara Fischer, the museum's curatorial and technical staff, work-study participants, and volunteers—and, in particular, MVS alumni Kate Whiteway and interim lead technician Daniel Griffin-Hunt—for keeping us all on course. Thank you!

# Visiting the Art Museum

## **Justina M. Barnicke Gallery**

7 Hart House Circle  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3  
416-978-8398

## **University of Toronto Art Centre**

15 King's College Circle  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7  
416-978-1838

### **Hours**

Tuesday	Noon–5pm
Wednesday	Noon–8pm
Thursday	Noon–5pm
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Saturday	Noon–5pm
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

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