

The aleatory object  
May 11–July 30, 2022

Art  
Museum

## An exhibition-as-research

in relation to a selection of objects from  
the Malcove Collection at the Art Museum  
at the University of Toronto

Curated by Shani K Parsons

In conversation with Betty Julian,  
Dawn Cain, Emily Cook, Jasper Parsons,  
Jennifer Brethour, Jeremy Laing,  
Jules Lewis, Liz Ikiriko, Maureen Hynes,  
Mira Berlin, Nahed Mansour,  
Susan Low-Beer

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

We gratefully acknowledge the continued  
support of the Reesa Greenberg Curatorial  
Studies Award and International Travel Fund.

## 2022 MVS Curatorial Studies Projects

### Homo on the Range

Curated by Logan Williams  
May 11–July 30, 2022  
University of Toronto Art Centre

### A Guide for the Afflicted and Defiant

Curated by Nicole Cartier Barrera  
May 11–July 30, 2022  
University of Toronto Art Centre

### A scaffold with, against

Curated by Žana Kozomora  
May 11–July 30, 2022  
University of Toronto Art Centre



## The aleatory object

*Objects . . . often arrive by chance, and these aleatory objects evoke psychic textures which do not reflect the valorizations of desire. Instead we are played upon by the inspiring arrival of the unselected, which often yields a very special type of pleasure—that of surprise. It opens us up, liberating an area, like a key fitting a lock. In such moments we can say that objects use us, in respect of that inevitable two-way interplay between self and object world and between desire and surprise.*

—Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character* (1992)

*The aleatory object* is a proposition for the embrace of uncertainty and ambiguity in curating and exhibition making. Originating in an encounter with the Malcove Collection, the project makes visible a curatorial process that responds affirmatively to initial conditions born of chance and contingency and expands upon them through an ongoing critical orientation toward the unknown.

Taking an intuitive approach to curating that matter-of-factly admits to positionality and partiality in this embrace of uncertainty, *The aleatory object* unfolds as an open-ended assemblage of images, objects, and ideas that have emerged in conversation with a psychoanalyst's collection. It is a process that values attention over intention, curiosity over comprehension—resulting in a curatorial selection that defies easy classification. *The aleatory object* thus occasions an unconventional co-existence

between ambiguous and anomalous things, transcending normative cultural, historical, and disciplinary divides. Underlying the obvious question of how to treat “artifacts” vs. “artworks” within a single exhibition is a deeper, more vexing issue: when not much is known about a thing, it tends to languish in academic and museum contexts where value is often tied to knowability. Objects about which much is known are simply easier to teach and talk about. *But what is lost to a culture that only teaches and talks about what it already knows?*

Within the context of contemporary museology, such questions are of critical import; museums have always been sites of production of knowledge and ignorance alike. Calls to dismantle bureaucratic, linguistic, and psychological legacies of colonial power have been long in coming and will be most productively pursued through more consensual and conversational practices of relation making between people and things—even and especially those we can never fully know. *The aleatory object* thus situates itself precisely at the shifting interstice between self and other through responsive (associative, improvisational) approaches to research, foregrounding curatorial subjectivity as an inherent and integral, yet largely invisibilized factor in all stages of exhibition making. Further extending beyond intuition and introspection to encompass collaborative and conversation-based approaches to thinking and knowing, *The aleatory object* does not advance curatorial subjectivity as an end in

itself, but rather as a means toward fostering greater intersubjectivity—that which is essential to language and the production of social meaning—across the exhibitionary complex.

Upon reading that Lillian Malcove embraced the generative potential of ambiguity in her work and life, I recognized a shared affinity for open-endedness that is reflected in my own approaches to living and working. Citing Freud, she describes the analytic situation as a suspension of critical judgment on one hand, and maintenance of a “state of evenly hovering attention” on the other—both necessary conditions for sustaining mindful two-way relations. It is, she states, “to listen to everything with all of oneself”—and, borrowing from Keats, a much-desired capability for all forms of creative work—to exist in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without an irritable reaching after facts and reason.”

In thinking freely with people and things, other things and people spontaneously come to mind as cousins, counterpoints, conversation partners—and in contemplating the latent relationships between them, it becomes possible to discern fresh affinities. This belief in curating's associative and exponential potential is further extended beyond research and production into reception, with gallery visitors invited to respond aleatorically in turn. As such, *The aleatory object* is an exhibition-as-research as much as it is of-research. Through



Cover and Right:  
Curator's process  
sketches and images  
for *The aleatory  
object*, 2021–2022.

a different kind of (personal, critical, political, intellectual) engagement with knowledge production, *The aleatory object* does not simply restate what is known or not known, or strive to demonstrate expertise in any conventional sense. This does not mean that knowledge won't be produced or shared, but rather that we shall not be so constrained, to paraphrase Freud, by the imposition of reason on the imagination. Ultimately the questions such a project asks may be unanswerable, but the untold possibilities it engenders are the reasons for asking.

*A good question . . . is an honest question, one that, like good theory, dances on the edge of what is knowable, what is possible to speculate on . . . or what is possible to say. A good question, . . . like good theory, might be quite unlovely to read, particularly in its earliest iterations. And sometimes it fails or has to be abandoned. But we don't come together to perform what we already know. . . . We come together to be unlovely and take ourselves apart, in order to mutually construct even more difficult ideas. It's not supposed to be easy. The labour is what makes it beautiful.*

— Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know” (2016)

---

All quotes from Lillian Malcove, “The Analytic Situation: Toward a View of the Supervisory Experience,” *Journal of the Philadelphia Association of Psychoanalysis* 2 (1975): 2–3.

Public Programs

Writing by choice or by chance

Saturday, June 4, 5pm–7:30pm  
University of Toronto Art Centre and  
University College Quad

Join curator Shani K Parsons and poet  
Maureen Hynes as they guide participants to  
respond ekphrastically and aleatorically to any  
aspect of the exhibition.

All are welcome. Free with registration at  
artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs

Staff

- Barbara Fischer, Executive Director/Chief  
Curator  
Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Curator  
Mik Migwans, Curator, Indigenous Art  
John G. Hampton, Adjunct Curator  
Seika Boye, Adjunct Curator  
Maureen Smith, Business Coordinator  
Heather Darling Pigat, Collections Manager  
Esther Simmonds-MacAdam, Exhibition  
Coordinator  
Marianne Rellin, Communications Assistant  
Daniel Griffin-Hunt, Lead Exhibition  
Preparator  
Kate Whiteway, Exhibition Coordinator, Master  
of Visual Studies (Studio Art + Curatorial  
Studies)  
Melody Lu, Front of House Coordinator  
Hana Nikčević, Public Programming and  
Outreach Assistant  
Kaitlyn Simpson, Digital Communications  
Assistant

Brand Design: Underline Studio  
Printing: Flash Reproductions  
Copy Editor: Ruth Jones


About the Curator


Shani K Parsons is an independent curator,  
designer, and founding director of Critical  
Distance Centre for Curators. With degrees  
in architecture (Temple University, 1994) and  
graphic design (RISD, 2000) she has pursued  
an interdisciplinary, process-driven practice  
within both independent and institutional/  
museum contexts and has produced an  
eclectic body of work ranging from intimate  
artist’s books to large-scale exhibitions. Recent  
curatorial projects include *Infinite Distance*,  
an accessible online exhibition presented in  
conjunction with transmediale Festival 2021–  
2022, and *The Parkette Projects*, a public art  
exhibition for Gallery TPW. (criticaldistance.ca;  
skparsons.ca)

Curator’s Acknowledgments

In gratitude for the two-way interplay:  
*Interlocutors:* Betty Julian, Dawn Cain, Emily  
Cook, Jasper Parsons, Jennifer Brethour,  
Jeremy Laing, Jules Lewis, Liz Ikiriko,  
Maureen Hynes, Mira Berlin, Nahed Mansour,  
Susan Low-Beer. *Class of 2022:* Žana Kozomora,  
Nicole Cartier, Logan Williams. Kevin Schmidt,  
Jeremy Laing, Arezu Salamzadeh, Anran Guo,  
Ameen Ahmed. *Advisors:* Noa Bronstein, Julia  
Paoli, Gareth Long. *Art Museum+MVS:* Barbara  
Fischer, Heather Darling Pigat, Frances  
Loeffler, Kate Whiteway, Daniel Griffin-Hunt,  
Hana Nikčević, Marianne Rellin, Sarah Robayo  
Sheridan, Charles Stankieveh, Jean-Paul  
Kelly, Lauren Fournier, Luis Jacob, Mitchell  
Akiyama. *Also:* Ruth Jones, Gloria Gerson,  
Konrad Skreta. *U of T:* Natalie Oswin, Sarah  
Sharma, Andrew Franklin-Hall, Deborah  
Leslie, Jeff Packman, Cara Krmpotich, Costis  
Dallas, Fiona Coll. *Critical Distance:* Emily  
Cook, Cheryl Huber, Žana Kozomora, Hannah  
Somers, Beau Gomez, Josie Spalla, Tara Smith,  
Simon M. Benedict, Aubrey Reeves. *And:*  
Toleen Touq, Vera Frenkel, Neven Lochhead,  
Jennifer Rudder, Gabby Moser, Wanda  
Nanibush, Lucy Hitchcock, Wesley Wei.  
*A category of his own:* Luke Parsons. *Oceans of  
love:* Jas+Jones.

Visiting the Art Museum

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery   
7 Hart House Circle  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3  
416.978.8398

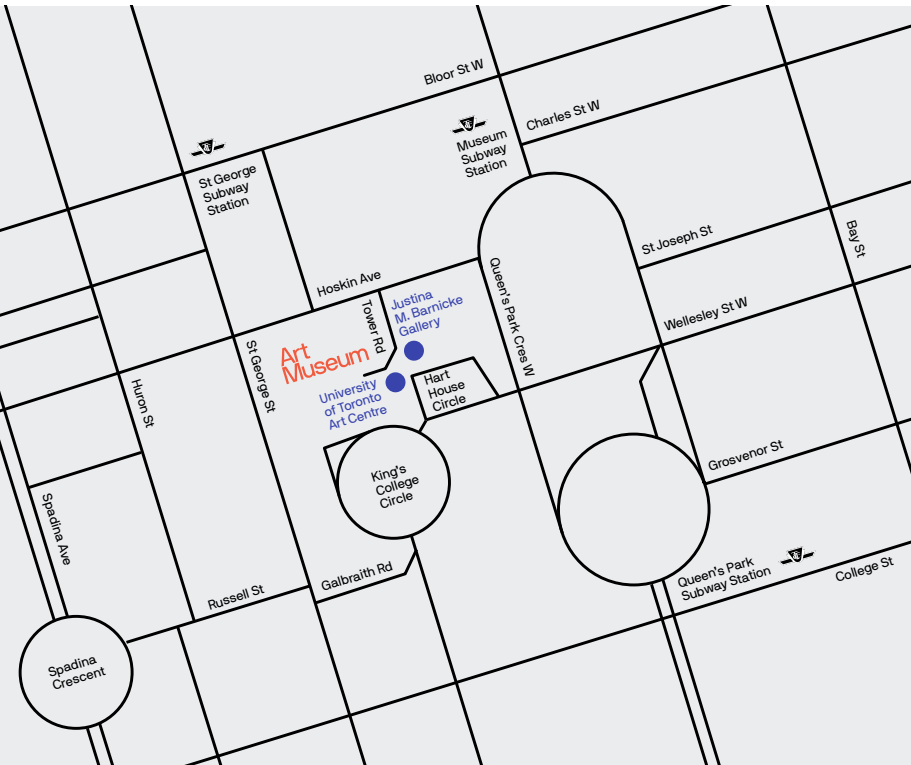
University of Toronto Art Centre   
15 King’s College Circle  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7  
416.978.1838

Access between the University of Toronto Art  
Centre and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery has  
changed due to construction for the University  
of Toronto Landmark Project. For more  
information, please contact staff  
at artmuseum@utoronto.ca or visit  
artmuseum.utoronto.ca/visiting

Tuesday	12 noon–5pm
Wednesday	12 noon–8pm
Thursday	12 noon–5pm
Friday	12 noon–5pm
Saturday	12 noon–5pm
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays.  
Admission is FREE.

artmuseum@utoronto.ca  
artmuseum.utoronto.ca  
@artmuseumuft



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

D  
AN  
IELS

Art Museum  
University of Toronto

—

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery  
University of Toronto Art Centre

7 Hart House Circle  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3  
[artmuseum.utoronto.ca](http://artmuseum.utoronto.ca)



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**

**HartHouse**



UNIVERSITY  
**COLLEGE**