

Large Text

A scaffold with, against

Curated by Žana Kozomora

May 11–July 30, 2022

University of Toronto Art Centre

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Works by Jasmina Cibic, Caroline Monnet,
and Pejvak

**Art
Museum**

A scaffold with, against

A scaffold with, against features artworks by artists Jasmina Cibic, Caroline Monnet, and the collective Pejvak that take as their material the forms that prop up constructions of the future—processes that may appear elusive in the face of larger, seductive propositions for icons of progress. Beginning with references to material structures, the works expand to recognize a metaphoric scaffold, a perpetuating apparatus across borders, eras, and political contexts. Through film, print, and textile media, the works invite us to recognize and question our capacities and agencies to shift these scaffolds and generate new ones.

Cibic's film *Tear Down and Rebuild* (2015) takes as its stage the preserved modernist architecture of the former Palace of the Federation (Yugoslavia), presenting a debate that positions global questions surrounding propositions to rebuild, renovate, or destroy buildings, monuments, and cultural icons that no longer serve contemporary political contexts. Monnet's *Marking the Underground* (2021), a series of silkscreen prints on waterproofing membranes, considers the deep impact of the assimilationist vision of the Indian Act and the ongoing implications of colonial policy for housing on Indigenous reserves in Canada. Pejvak's poetic film *A Passage* (2018) is oriented around reconstruction projects in a land-locked border region in the south of Armenia experiencing rapid neo-liberalization since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. *A scaffold with, against*

considers a break with the commitment to a floorplan or blueprint for the future, asking us to imagine multiple futurities beyond the disaster-oriented schemes that presently persist.

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.

Our Supporters

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Exhibition Essay

Visionary plans often precede the construction of architectures, cities, and infrastructural projects, making imperative decisions of destruction and reconstruction. These decisions affect people and identities at various levels: land, community, and nation. The scaffold calls to mind a literal apparatus that draws our gaze to the structures that are erected, renovated, and destroyed before our eyes, but it also provides an apt metaphor for detecting what more invisibly supports and sustains projects of supposed progress. Considering the scaffold as a support for the future, we might ask, “Is the scaffold a temporary crutch rendered redundant upon the completion of such projects, or is it one that remains, sustaining other structures?”

This exhibition features artworks by Jasmina Cibic, Caroline Monnet, and Pejvak that take as their material the forms that prop up constructions of the future—processes that may appear elusive in the face of larger, seductive propositions for icons of progress. The works prod at this seductive fixation to bring closer the covert scaffold as implicitly tied to the conditions it continues to replicate. Beginning with references to material structures, the works expand to recognize the ambiguous scaffold as an apparatus across borders, eras, and political contexts. They invite us to recognize and question our capacities and agencies to shift these scaffolds and generate new ones.

Cibic’s film *Tear Down and Rebuild* (2015) takes the sumptuous former Palace of the Federation¹ as a stage for a debate that introduces four women as allegorical figures:

the Nation-Builder, the Conservationist, the Pragmatist, and the Artist/Architect. Collaging statements and speeches from controversial world leaders, architects, and critics spanning the past century, the discourse to shape the future of a nation emerges through justifications aimed at audiences primed for ideological shaping. The film masks the precise source of each statement, ranging from figures such as Thatcher, Stalin, Prince Charles and Reagan, revealing the fluidity of politically charged rhetoric that permeates today's most urgent debates—ones in which architecture, monuments, and culture teeter between agents and instruments in the name of progress. At the Artist-Architect's resolute call, the question of agency is turned towards the viewer.

Situated in the Meghri border region in southern Armenia, Pejvak's film *A Passage* (2019) unfolds across the mountain and desert landscapes in which the township of Agarak is nestled and a copper-molybdenum mine operates. The rumoured construction of an industrial Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in place of the defunct Soviet era Yerevan-Baku Railway emerges across episodic narratives that hint at larger infrastructural plans, initiating preparations for the neoliberalist revival of the regional economy. Choreographed drills in the film anticipate

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1. Located in the city of Belgrade, the Palace of the Federation was the headquarters for the Federal Executive Council of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Breaking with Stalin's U.S.S.R. in 1948, Yugoslavia embarked on the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) alongside the state heads of India, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, and other postcolonial states in the 1950s and 60s. The building's construction was completed in time for the NAM's first summit in 1961. Today, it is known as the Palace of Serbia.

the increased militarization in the region that sparked a war with the bordering nation Azerbaijan in 2020.² The spectacle of violence obscures plans brokered between multinational entities for the control of natural resources and transport corridors. Oriented around reconstruction projects, the film reveals the permeability of borders for neoliberal operations alongside characters' speculations towards a different future, even as they remain bound between territorial blockades and impending conflict.

Monnet's *Marking the Underground* (2021) finds inspiration in Anishinaabe birchbark biting, transposing geometricized patterns as silkscreen prints onto waterproofing membranes. The porous patterns of ink reveal the names of corporate entities that produce materials engineered for home construction projects. Citing the sedentary European-style housing prompted by the assimilationist vision of the Indian Act in Canada, the artist considers over a century of legislation that has shaped deplorable conditions for Indigenous dwellings on reserves—policy that perpetuates generations of physical and psychological harm in communities. Monnet's reworking of Anishinaabe tradition into her own formal language is inscribed onto construction material, pointing to what remains invisible in the structures and systems that hold the body. Reminiscent of ubiquitous QR codes, city maps, and circuitry, the works are not wholly legible (not scannable on our devices), but initiate the

2. Рита Соколовская, "A Passage: An Interview with Pejvak Collective and an Online Screening of Their Film," Syg.ma, Syg.ma/The Prince Claus Fund, June 15, 2021, <https://syg.ma/@rita-sokolovskaya/a-passage-an-interview-withpejvak-collective-and-an-online-screening-of-their-film>.

reworking of inherited designs, providing a subliminal gesture for a future that can be made otherwise.

A scaffold with, against considers a break with the commitment to a floorplan or blueprint for the future,³ asking us to imagine multiple futurities beyond the disaster-oriented schemes that presently persist.

3. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 216–17.

About the Curator

Žana Kozomora works across curatorial and visual practice. She has curated exhibitions with Cambridge Art Galleries and KitchenerWaterloo Art Gallery, and sits on the Program Committee and Board of CAFKA (Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener + Area). Her writing has been published in ASAP/ Journal and C Magazine. Originally from Sarajevo, BiH, she grew up in Kitchener, Ontario, the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. (zanakozomora.ca)

Curator's Acknowledgments

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Public Programming

Opening Reception: MVS Studio Program and MVS Curatorial Studies Program Graduating Exhibitions

Wednesday, May 11, 5pm–7pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

Free and all are welcome! For more information,
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Hours

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

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