Indiscernible thresholds,
escaped veillances
May 1–July 27, 2024

Art
Museu

2024 MVS Curatorial Studies Graduating Exhibitions

Liberation in Four Movements
Curated by Ingrid Jones
May 1–July 27, 2024
University of Toronto Art Centre

The Love that Remains
Curated by Samantha Lance
May 1–July 27, 2024
University of Toronto Art Centre

**Lost
and Found**

WED, NOV. 3: Chambers /
Brock / Hunter / Aylmer.
11:00am - 12:00pm. Hunt-
er / Simcoe / Aylmer / Be-
thune. 1:30 - 2:45pm.
Thurs. Nov. 4: Hunter /
Stewart / Brock / Bethune.
1:00 - 3:00pm.

Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances

YOU FEEL SOME UNWELCOME EYES ON YOU

Cover: Joshua Schwebel, *Hiding*, 2007-2010. Performance ephemera (detail), dimensions variable.

Right: Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT/ blacktransarchive.com*, 2020-2022. Interactive archive, duration variable.

Visibility has come to represent a dominant mode of inclusionary neoliberal politics through which transness is engaged in the mainstream, conflating representation with empowerment. Visibility promises to remedy social crises, but in actuality often translates to endangering exposure for trans people or to the extractive treatment of transness and trans culture for public consumption.[1] *Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances* considers the invisible, the illegible, and the opaque as productive alternatives to contemporary trans hypervisibility, a circumstance wherein the realm of the representational risks becoming all that is offered to trans people, rather than material support or true sovereignty. This exhibition brings together five artists who intervene in visibility, complicating notions of transparency and bypassing expectations of a consumable transness.

In his book *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant calls for "the right to opacity for everyone," asserting that opacity subverts the extractive dimensions of knowing the other.[2] Taking up this premise, the featured artists test the possibilities of opacity to negotiate presentations of transness, especially in relation to the archive. Responding to institutional and state archives as sites of surveillance and control, this exhibition wrestles with desires for access to a record of trans lives while simultaneously seeking alternatives to the archive's imposing demands for trans legibility. *Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances* revels in the ineffable and unindexable qualities of transness, allowing disappearance to take on an unexpected political power, possessing a very different type of agency than visibility.

Lucas LaRochelle's *Sitting here with you in the future* (2021) is a video co-produced by an artificial intelligence trained to generate speculative trans and queer experiences. These experiences are derived from the dataset of Queering the Map, LaRochelle's annotatable, community-sourced counter-mapping platform. A series of fractured, fictionalized, and intentionally incoherent experiences manifest alongside glitched imagery; the AI appears unable to convincingly replicate the materials that constitute its dataset. Responding to a history in which surveillance is the dominant mode through which trans and queer archives have been produced, LaRochelle employs a practice of data opacity, whereby their platform collects as little data as possible to protect contributors.

In his performance *Hiding* (2007-2010), Joshua Schwebel published advertisements in the lost-and-found sections of newspapers, sharing a specific date, time, and area in which he would be hiding. Schwebel's subsequent acts of concealing himself are gestures that circumvent visibility, suggesting discourses around passing, demands for disclosure, and accusations of deceptiveness directed against trans people. Here Schwebel's work manifests as a series of documents related to this performance: postcards of his hiding places, a Freedom of Information document, and newspaper advertisements allegedly contained within envelopes taped to the gallery's front doors. They demarcate an institutional threshold of access and visibility, emphasizing the controlled imperceptibility at the core of Schwebel's performance.

Lan "Florence" Yee's textile works respond to a fraught desire to see oneself within official archives while considering the simultaneous problematics of becoming possessed by a space that has historically enacted violence against racialized trans people. Their textiles hang between varied grids of wooden two-by-threes and across a stone archway, simulating structures of domestic privacy—curtains between an inside and an outside. Yee's partitions perform a barrier to access, critically negotiating the reductive legibility demanded by the archive and the reparative potentials of archival inclusion for racialized trans subjects. Repeated across their textiles is a Cantonese euphemism for empty, at once representing a yearning for what might be missing from the archive and a proposal to sit comfortably in absence and unrecordability.

Chelsea Thompto's *Fog Lights* (2023) investigate fog as a motif that figures prominently in the genre of horror and an atmospheric condition capable of hindering military vision. Appropriating the visual language of a device meant to aid visibility when driving, her procedurally generated video sculptures propose that fog be taken up as an aspirational mode for trans embodiment and resistance.[3] A second work, *Productive Bodies* (2019), brings together archival audio and visual materials documenting the industrialization of the Mississippi River with representations of trans bodies in the medical field. The procedural generation techniques used in these videos enable a nonlinear archival narrative to emerge, undermining expectations of trans legibility.

Finally, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT/blacktransarchive.com* (2020-2022) seeks to negotiate the archival erasure of Blackness and transness while refusing to be complicit in the consumability of Black trans trauma. Her video game functions as an interactive counter-archive for Black trans lives, experiences, and embodiments. In order to play this game, players must disclose their own positionality, which then informs their particular experience and access to the game's storyline. A negotiation of access and the artist's experimentation with distorted sounds and images combine to facilitate a participatory engagement with Glissant's concept of opacity, turning focus to the viewer's responsibilities in relation to Brathwaite-Shirley's archive.

If exhibitions seek to expose and display, *Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances* grapples throughout with the contradiction of its medium. Illegibility and opacity are offered up as a way of shifting exposure to a more interstitial space, calling on other tenors of relation between viewer and artwork. Rather than approaching visibility as an issue to be resolved, these artists consider the potentials of retreating from view, framing opacity as a protective act, archival illegibility as an escape.

Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances is the second of two exhibitions exploring the roles of absence and opacity in rendering trans and queer lives and archives. The first installment of this project, *Mnemonic silences, disappearing acts*, is on view at the Jackman Humanities Institute until June 21, 2024.

1. Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), xv-xvi.
2. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 194.
3. "Chelsea Thompto: The Fog," San José Museum of Art, 2023, https://sjmusart.org/digital-projects/chelsea-thompto.

About the Curator

Dallas Fellini is a curator, writer, and artist living and working in Toronto. Their research is situated at the intersection of trans studies and archival studies. Dallas is a co-director of the arts publication *Silverfish* and has curated exhibitions and screenings for Gallery 44, Vtape, Trinity Square Video, Xpace Cultural Centre, Hearth, Riverdale Hub Gallery, the Jackman Humanities Institute, and the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. Dallas is the recipient of the 2024 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators. (dallasfellini.com)

Curator's Acknowledgments

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Institutional Acknowledgment

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Public Programs

Joint Curatorial Tour: *Indiscernible thresholds, escaped veillances* and *Mnemonic silences, disappearing acts,* with Dallas Fellini
Friday, June 7, 2pm–3:30pm
Jackman Humanities Institute, 170 St. George Street, 10th Floor and Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, 7 Hart House Circle

Co-presented with The ArQuives and the Jackman Humanities Institute.

All programs are free and open to the public. For more information and to register, visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs.

Exhibition Tours

The Art Museum offers in-person guided exhibition tours for classes and groups. For more information or to book a tour, email artmuseum@utoronto.ca.

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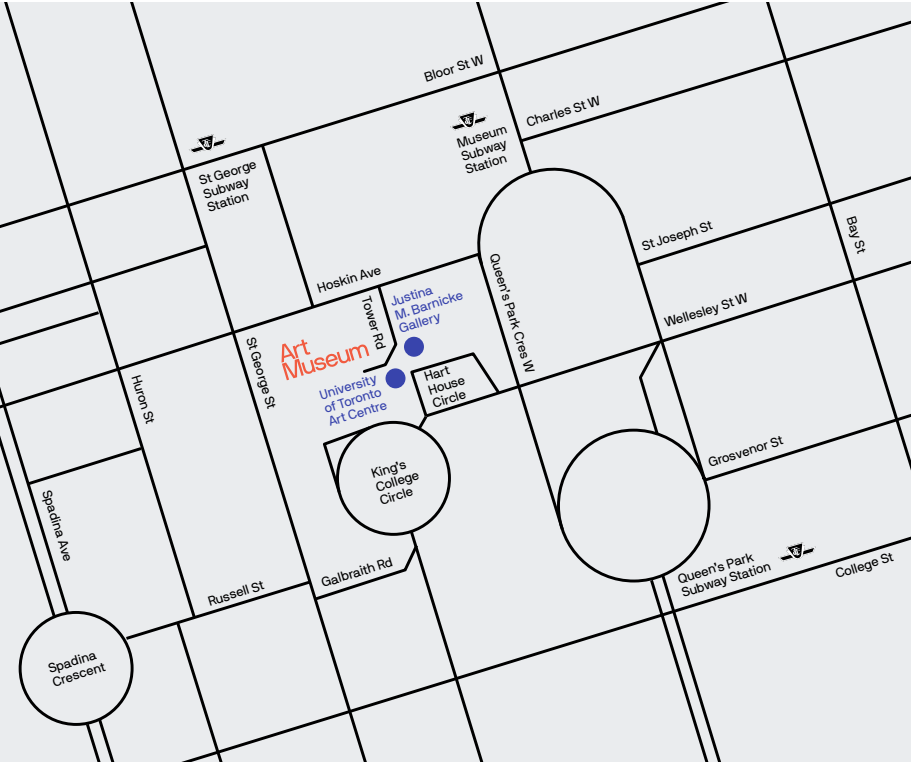
Visiting the Art Museum

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artmuseum@utoronto.ca
artmuseum.utoronto.ca
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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.

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