

SYPHON  
6.0

A publication  
of Modern Fuel  
Artist-Run Centre  
Kingston, Ontario  
Issue 6.0  
Fall 2021  
ISSN number:  
1480-0306

Distributed  
freely at select  
artist-run centres  
in Canada,  
by subscription,  
or online at  
[modernfuel.org/  
syphon](http://modernfuel.org/syphon)



STAY  
CALM



**Syphon** is an arts and culture publication produced by Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre that is meant as a conduit between the arts community in Kingston and communities elsewhere. It was created in response to the lack of critical arts commentary and coverage in local publications, and seen as a way to increase exposure to experimental and non-commercial art practices. Syphon has a mandate to feature local arts coverage in conjunction with national and international projects, and an emphasis on arts scenes and activities that are seen as peripheral. It acts, in essence, as a record and communiqué for small regional arts communities throughout the country.

**Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre** is a non-profit organization facilitating the presentation, interpretation, and production of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences.

We at Modern Fuel want to state unequivocally that Black lives matter, Indigenous lives matter, and that the lives of People of Colour matter. Modern Fuel strives to ensure that members and visitors feel safe and welcome in our space and at our events. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or violence including but not limited to ableism; ageism; homophobia and transphobia; misogyny; racism and white supremacy. It is also important to us that Modern Fuel not only continues to present works and programs that support Black and Indigenous artists, members and visitors, but invests in the work of becoming an inclusive, anti-racist organization. We feel it is only then that Modern Fuel can advocate for artists and foster community with care and respect.

We are holding ourselves accountable through comprehensive internal and external reviews of our board and staff, and our policies and procedures. We encourage our membership and communities to hold us to these principles as well and welcome feedback on how to make our space more welcoming and inclusive for you.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS	STAFF
Drew Burton, Chair	Anne-Sophie Grenier, Executive Director
Susan Brogly, Treasurer	
Richard Brant	Kait Allen, Outreach and Development Manager
Scott Bucsis	Naphtali, Programming Coordinator (2021-2021)
Nenagh Hathaway	Kelsey Newman-Reed, Marketing Coordinator
Greg Ivens	Emily Veysey, Programming Coordinator (2021-2022)
Sarah Chasity Johnson	
Liam Mills	
Erica Saunders	
Rachel Wiseman	
Fan Wu	

*Modern Fuel would not be able to function without the generosity and spirit of its volunteers.*

Suite 305	613 548 4883	Gallery Hours:
370 King Street W.	info@modernfuel.org	Tuesday to Saturday
Kingston, ON	www.modernfuel.org	12pm to 5pm
K7L 2X4		

**EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING FOR SYPHON 6.0**

Anne-Sophie Grenier, Editor and Publisher  
 Vincent Perez, Designer  
 McLaren Press, Printing

*We gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support of our major funders: the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, City of Kingston, Kingston Arts Council, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, as well as our many donors.*



**FORWARD**

This Summer, ceremony led and organized by Revolution of the Heart: Ceremonial Action facilitated the removal of the John A. Macdonald (JAM) statue from City Park. For people who did not support the removal, it signaled the end of the world within which architects of genocide like JAM are celebrated.<sup>1</sup> White settlers in so-called Canada are not used to having our worlds end. Some of us experience the ends of worlds through transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and other violences. But white supremacy is always there to recuperate us. To authorize our intimacies, transitions, and affirmations. To invite us to do harm, to say that just by breathing, we can end someone else's world. We do it everyday.

From reserves to residential schools to what we formally call prisons and jails, centuries of white settler stories denying this violence have shaped communities under racial capitalism. Counternarratives are usually told in the margins, where the city fails to see worlds. This failure to see the world-making at the margins is inevitable, it is the heartbeat of settler colonialism. Neither the city nor the state can decolonize, it is necessary to step aside so that Indigenous peoples can govern and steward the lands without punishment and violation.

Susan deLisle, a member of the Revolution of the Heart: Ceremonial Action, was quoted in the Kingston Whig Standard as saying that “we are relieved to see him [JAM] come down obviously, but it’s just a step in the journey. We are requiring that the city consult with Indigenous communities — us included — about where he will go from here. There’s been talk of him going to the cemetery, but the whole point of him coming down is to not memorialize him, to not put him on a pedestal, so there’s really no difference...this is something the city can do. They can’t put water on reserves, they can’t change education policy, but they can do this”.<sup>2</sup> deLisle points to the limitations of settler government in facilitating good relations with both human and more-than human communities. They can remove statues. What happens when we see the city as a statue, an edifice of state violence that is “crafted” to tell the stories of white settlement and supremacy as natural, of dispossession as inevitable, and of multiculturalism as progressive? If the city is a statue, we can remove it too.

COVID-19 has been described by some in the news, on social media, across porches and group chats as a global pandemic. The pre-existing global pandemics of racial violence, genocide and ecocide are what have given COVID-19 its particular character. COVID-19 continues to highlight the scale of dispossession happening on this planet. As vaccines go bad here in so-called Canada, other nation states are left without vaccines. When the pandemic was beginning to ravage North America and Europe, many in these nations marvelled at how people in African nations seemed to be dodging the virus; and now that larger percentages of citizens of Global North countries are vaccinated, the narrative has switched, as people in African nations are now experiencing the worst effects of COVID-19 due to the Delta variant and lack of vaccines.<sup>3</sup> As the economy ‘opens up’ in the Global North, the Global South is once again positioned as a cautionary tale of economic disobedience and disorder.

Syphon 6 responds to the theme of our juried exhibition, *Where From Here*. For both the exhibition and the Syphon issue, we bring the scale of the past year+ back down to the local or micro level. Living ‘here’ during COVID-19 has meant different things for different people. The ‘here’ of our bodies has changed so much. Some of us have spent the better part of a year indoors, isolated, while others have been forced to go to work and assume levels of risk that no individual should ever have to. Being ‘here’ feels different than it used to.

In this issue of Syphon we asked artists to share texts that reflect on their own processes and methodologies, in light of the rolling lockdowns that we have experienced in this part of the world. Nic Wilson describes grief and longing in his piece “Spray,” where he writes “People are ecosystems made up of other people, caught in an ongoing cycle of exchange; a cycle of decomposition and recomposition.” Nic invites us to consider how flowers are connected to rituals of mourning. Rafael MacDonald details his experience of shifting to an online studio space, and the myriad revelations around audience and authorship that he navigated in the world of live streaming on Twitch and Animal Crossing. Raf offers insights that will resonate with readers who have also shifted online, as well as those who have never even heard of the platforms he’s engaging: “The performances became more about improving with an audience member than the project I was working on. The worst day was a four-hour stream where I ran from island to island entertaining different viewers without getting to any of my own artistic goals.” Kait Allen’s canto poem, composed entirely from words and full phrases occurring within Peter Wohlben’s book *The Hidden Life of Trees*, challenges readers to compose and decompose the boundaries of *Where From Here*, to read ourselves as relatives of the more-than-human world, and to read beyond metaphor for the intimacies of our own sensory selves. Jose Bawagan’s piece offers a powerful reflection on his own experience as both a viewer and an art historian, and the way that this training is undone through his openness to being ‘here’ with Robert Houle’s solo exhibition, *Pahgedenaun* which ran at the Carleton University Art Gallery (CUAG) in 2018. Jose guides us through Houle’s work alongside his awareness of his own social location. In this regard, Jose deploys art writing as a location of accountability. Finally, in their Interview, Lou Lou la Duchesse de Riere and Damned Damsel discuss the Intersections of Burlesque, Identity, and Community. They present a down-to-Earth view on how the pandemic has shifted their artistic practices: “one thing that I’ve taken away from the pandemic is forgiveness with myself for not working as much.”

We hope that this issue of Syphon inspires you to reflect on the past year+ with an open heart, and with an orientation towards accountability and community. Where we go from here depends on each other, we’re all we have.

1. Taking matters into their own hands, some people vandalized the pedestal where JAM previously stood with white supremacist graffiti.
2. Goulem, Brigid. “Sir John A. Macdonald statue removed from City Park.” June 18, 2021. <https://www.thewhig.com/news/local-news/sir-john-a-macdonald-statue-removed-from-city-park>.
3. Gathara, Patrick. “Charity alone will not end the calamity of COVID-19 in Africa.” July 31, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/7/31/accountability-is-africas-best-route-out-of-the-pandemic>.

**COVER** Grace Dixon, *Stay Calm*, illustration, 2021.

**Grace Katie Dixon** she/her is a Katarokwi/Kingston-based artist that has always valued honesty and sincerity in storytelling. Many themes in her work speak to her interest in studying individuality, redefining spirituality, self-discovery and vulnerability. She especially enjoys creating patterns with textures and colours which can be found in her collage and graphic design. Her hope for her viewers is to find inquiry, depth, honesty and fun in her work while feeling safe to develop their own interpretations.

**ESSAY**



**Spray**  
 Nic Wilson

*“Not only do you lose them, you lose what they remembered about you; and if you don’t fully understand yourself you’re kind of doubly bereft, don’t you think?”*

—Steven Andrews in the film *Buffalo Death Mask* (2013) dir. Mike Hoolboom

Before the French invasion of 1797, Venice kept their dead close to home, interred in churches or buried under the paving stones of its narrow streets. This had been the custom for many Medieval cities, negotiating what historian Philippe Ariès has described as a “promiscuity between the living and the dead.” By Venetian standards, the cemetery on L’isola di San Michele is a fairly recent build. Before the island was a home for the dead, it was an abbey, consecrated in 1221. After the fall of the Republic of Venice, the French decreed that bodies could no longer be buried within the city. The monastery was dissolved and many of the cloisters were demolished in the early 1800s to make way for the cemetery.

On January 27th, 2020, I walked among the graves of San Michele cemetery. I had traveled to Venice eight days earlier for a performance workshop but so far this was my only outing not related to it. I went with a group of other participants who I promptly lost step with, preferring to roam the grounds alone.

I came across a cadre of stainless steel bins tucked behind one of the personal pavilions, a Modernist slab construction dedicated to a young child who died before they turned ten. I peered into the dumpsters and found a dozen flower arrangements in different states of decay. A casket spray with yellow orchids, lilies, and birds of paradise was toppled onto one of the lids. It looked like a rolled station wagon on the side of a highway. Slightly crashed, but still intact, I could see bits of the block of florists foam through which each piece of the arrangement had been pierced.

As I walked on, a woman wearing Prada loafers strolled past me speaking rapid, breathless Italian into a cell phone. She approached the dumpsters and stopped to pull four or five long-stem lilies from the toppled spray. She did it with swift precision like she knew every centimetre plunged into the gigantic block of foam, and the exact moment in which the length would be freed from its place among the others. Her activity bore the ease of routine like this was part of a habitual errand. She bundled the lilies into her left hand and walked away, down one of the cobblestone pathways lined with sagging Cyprus trees. The flowers hung from her hand like a broom, the petals swinging dangerously close to hallowed ground. She continued talking and turned into one of the shaded courtyards.

After witnessing the mourner’s moment of thrift, I walked back to the water bus and thought about what one could say to a flower who was cut down and trussed up and thrown into a dumpster, only to be plucked from the jaws of trash and placed elsewhere in the cemetery to rot in the open air. Where is the cemetery for flowers? Who mourns for them? As I sat on the boat, returning to the realm of the living, I thought about its next self, long after the arrangement rotted into new life on a trash barge—itsself retreating from the island of the dead.

- Funeral sprays are large floral arrangements meant to drape a casket from head to toe. They are almost like a surrogate body hovering over the dead. In one online advertisement, they are described as “a traditional tribute that communicates deep love and eternal commitment.” These objects are like a conduit between the living and the dead, a piece of two-way communication, representing both the body of the deceased and a message to them in the afterlife.

In my hometown of Fredericton, New Brunswick, Mi’kmaq territory, there is a florist called “Trites Flower Shop.” They specialize in sympathy arrangements which are advertised using pictures of pictures from magazines. Many of the images on Trites’ website are

warped from the undulations of slick pages and interrupted by the bright white sheen of reflected light on glossy magazine stock. Some images are low resolution and they explode into abstract blots of colour when enlarged.

Their largest selection of sympathy flowers are for casket sprays. These mounds of flowers and foliage hunch on coffins and hover above the body of your loved one, like a parasitic invertebrate drudged up from the sea. They have names like “Love’s Purity” and “Colourful Reflections.” Sometimes it seems like the culture of solemnity and earnestness has emerged to make it easier to roll one’s eyes in the face of death. Nothing associated with such ridiculous objects could be that serious, right? One spray called “Natural Woodsy Spray” features ferns, ivy, broad green leaves, wild berries, willow branches, and a plastic stag mounted triumphantly at the apex of this nest of rustic compost.

I browsed their selection from my tiny hotel bed in Mestre and lamented the fact that even in death there is no escape from bad taste, but immediately scolded myself for such immature thoughts. My classist aesthetic judgments about how people mourn are unnecessary but I do reserve a small amount of disdain for the funeral industry. I’m wary of businesses that could pray on the newly bereft, subtly suggesting an upgrade to better express the love you had for your late father.

Casket sprays and other funeral arrangements are a whole made of component parts, much like the vision of identity presented in Mike Holboom’s film *Buffalo Death Mask* (2013). In the film, a narrator (artist Stephen Andrews) recalls his lover of fifteen years who died of AIDS, noting that grief for the dead is not just grief for the person who died but also the version of you that lives within them. In this sentiment lives the recognition that our lives, our thoughts, and our identity, are truly not just our own. People are ecosystems made up of other people, caught in an ongoing cycle of exchange; a cycle of decomposition and recomposition.

It’s in spaces like cemeteries and funeral homes that grief is transformed into mourning: the performance of an intimate feeling. A lot of people might be put off by the idea of performing grief, like it is artificial and therefore insincere, but it is what people do when others die and humans routinely make use of artifice and fiction to access truth. We commit ourselves and our emotions to a communal space to venerate, remember, celebrate, or just externalize another person for a moment as a way to acknowledge the bits of them that still live within us.

For millennia, flowers have been a technology, medium, or language for speaking to the dead. I think a lot about what I would say to a dead person given the chance. I wonder what I might want to ask them. I wonder what those lilies in San Michele Cemetery were saying to their first dead person and what they said to the second, once they had been pulled from their initial arrangement. I wonder how those two dead people are connected by those flowers. The spray, now defused and disassembled—connecting unseen hands in unexpected ways—sits in my mind as a memorial to the conundrum of connection itself and to the distance between the living, the dead, and the palaces they smear together.

**Nic Wilson** (he/they) is an artist and writer who was born in the Wolastoqiyik territory now known as Fredericton, NB in 1988. He graduated with a BFA from Mount Allison University, Mi’kmaq territory, in 2012, and an MFA from the University of Regina, Treaty Four Territory, in 2019 where he was a SSHRC graduate fellow. In 2021 they were long listed for the Sobeay Art Award as a representative of the Prairies and the North. Their work often engages time, queer lineage, decay, and the distance between art practice and literature. Their writing has appeared in publications such as BlackFlash Magazine, Peripheral Review, and PUBLIC.

## Creating Optimal Conditions for Growth

Kait Allen

A tree is not a forest.  
 Alone, they are at the mercy of wind and weather;  
 fall prey to insects, fungi;  
 summer storms, a matter of life and death.  
 Trees are very social beings.  
 They suffer in isolation.  
 With no cozy, moist forest around them,  
 a tree has no one to protect them;  
 most never have the opportunity to grow old.

But together, many trees create an ecosystem.  
 Their well-being depends on their community.  
 Connected through their root systems,  
 trees warn each other about insects, draught.  
 Nutrients and water are shared,  
 equalizing differences  
 so each can grow into the best tree it can be.  
 Sick individuals are supported and nourished until they recover.  
 It's not in a forest's best interest to lose its weaker members.  
 Over the course of their lives, even strong trees get sick,  
 and depend on their weaker neighbours for support.  
 If the supposedly feeble trees disappear,  
 the others lose as well.  
 Every tree would suffer.

Trees are important,  
 but when trees unite to create a fully functioning forest,  
 the whole is really greater than its parts.  
 Forests matter at a level more fundamental than most of us realize.  
 In the symbiotic community of the forest,  
 every tree is valuable.  
 Every tree is worth keeping around  
 for as long as possible.

Creating Optimal Conditions for Growth is a Cento poem, composed entirely from words and full phrases occurring within Peter Wohlben's book *The Hidden Life of Trees*.

**Kait Allen** is a queer, non-binary poet and artist who uses creative writing, photography and visual art to challenge and disrupt social expectations of gender, power, and normativity. They are curious about themes of authority and surveillance, the influence these have on identity and connection. Kait thrives within the liminal; rejects binary opposition; feels seen by Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, and Emma Healey's *Stereoblind*.



Kelsey Newman Reed, imposter syndrome is too real, digital drawing.

**Kelsey Newman Reed** is an artist, published poet and has always been passionate about the arts. She has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree with a major in Art History and minor in Drama from Queen's University, as well as a Post-Graduate Certificate in Interactive Marketing Communications from St. Lawrence College. Kelsey is fascinated by art found in public and digital spaces, as well as the methods of displaying and sharing these artworks.

## Digital Escapism in the Time of Covid, or, Did anyone ever reply to On Kawara?

Rafael MacDonald

I knew I was signing up for a life of uncertainty when I decided to pursue a career as a visual artist. It was not a decision made one night, but over the course of many years as I realized uncertainty was a fact of life. It would be better to just take the path I wanted. Of course, the universe has a way of testing every decision we make. So, when March 2020 brought about epochal change I, and the rest of the world, got a glimpse of true uncertainty. Like many others I had to pivot overnight. The internet, while useful, was merely an archive for the work. A digital cave to hang pictures and bounce echoes. Fifteen months later it has weaved itself into every aspect of my practice and is starting to respond to my calls.

Prior to Covid I made a living as a freelance video/photographer/studio assistant/educator and weekends cooking breakfast at a restaurant. Not a bad way to spend your mid 20s in Halifax. I had lived there most of my life, only arriving in Kingston a few months before the Pandemic with my partner, who is now just starting her PhD. My plan was to move a little closer to the film studios near Toronto, get a gig in the art department, and pay down my student loans. Instead, on March 20th 2020, I found myself moving to a deserted island in the middle of an unknown tropical sea.

The Island's miserly owner, Tom Nook, had convinced me to move there with promises of a paradise built of my wildest dreams. All I had to do was take out a small loan to build my house and promise to spruce up the island to attract more settlers and tourists.

“What I am sure of is that the images we put on the internet today have as much meaning as the images our ancestors painted on cave walls 63,000 years ago, only now the cave replies.”

I am talking about the video game Animal Crossing: New Horizons, an established franchise from Nintendo for the Switch console. While the world was shutting down, millions of players were building their own islands and inviting each other to visit through the internet. Players must fill every inch of the island with premade assets to advance in the game. This opens new areas of the island to build on and new short quests to complete. Each island reflects the creator or creators, depending on how many human players live on the island (up to four). Some built games or other kinds of competition, others created themed islands like a murder mystery, while some even found it useful for political means like Hong Kongers reportedly using it for communications during their protests, leading to it being banned by Chinese authorities.

I love these types of games. “City builders” is what most fans refer to the genre as. You may be familiar with Sim City or Minecraft. They offer open ended creativity for little investment. I don't have to spend hours creating original digital models for a project. To me, working in a city builder feels like digital collaging. It's just fun.

Being a long-time fan of Animal Crossing and with my career firmly paused, I picked it up to see what it would inspire. For those unfamiliar with the deeper mechanics of the game it essentially runs in real time. There is a 24-hour clock, seasons, and weather variations, and even holiday celebrations. Players must take these aspects into account as they build their island. Players are required to slowly unlock pieces of furniture, clothes, and other items to decorate their house and island through daily quests. Some people will speed up the process by changing the Switch systems internal calendar, tricking the game into thinking time is passing quickly. I did not do that. I played slowly and deliberately as the game designers intended.

My premise began when I was asked to name myself (I went with Caballos which is 'horses' in Spanish, a reference to my Chinese/Western horoscope being Gemini Horses) and my island. I chose Cuzcatlan after the ancient Pipil city in what is now Western El Salvador, where my paternal heritage ascends. From there, a story started to form as I developed each part of my island. By June, my interest had waned as progress was slow and I began work on real projects. The Pandemic clearly wasn't ending any time soon, so I needed to find new ways to connect my work to people.

The paradoxical nature of permanent ephemerality: when something only exists in a feed for a moment, but is displayed forever. This creates the perfect environment in which to freely post work to see what happens. Who knows when the audience will find my work and what they will do with it? Now that everything is connected I'm instantly alerted through my phone when they do. I relish this moment like a child with his eyes closed following the cries of 'Polo' in response to my call of 'Marco'.

While everyone was using Zoom to host private classes I did not work for an organization to piggyback marketing off. I had to find an open streaming platform that would allow random viewers to find me. Enter Twitch. Now owned by Amazon, it is one of the largest streaming platforms and has launched multimillion dollar entertainment brands from a performer's living room. Taking inspiration from performance artist Alex Bag, I saw Twitch as an

opportunity to do public broadcasting. Twitch works like any other social media platform: create content to build a follower base. You can't see your audience, but you're able to read their messages in a live chat room that runs concurrently to your broadcast. It's a type of performance response I've never experienced. The critique is live, and it's being narrated in your head because you're reading it.

From June to December I experimented with everything from live cooking shows, art tutorials, mental health chats, and video games. I even spent 12 days dressed as Santa while I did Christmas themed events just like the hosts I watched on YTV as a kid. I built an audience and became affiliated in October, meaning I could monetize my content and upload my own emotes and other visual branding. I had a dream of working for HBO when I was a teenager. Twitch felt a little like a hobby for someone who fantasizes about that type of thing. It's just fun.

My partner purchased me an Elgato Capture Card for Christmas which allowed me to connect my switch to my PC and start streaming Animal Crossing. I returned to my island after months of neglect ready to finish what I started, this time with an audience. It immediately blew up (relatively). I would gain 3-4 new followers a day, each time a notification I set up would go off informing me of my new fan. Much like a slot machine it's easy to Pavlov yourself with such a visceral response to success. I chose a clip from the television series Deadwood. Al Swearengin screaming “Welcome to f\*cking Deadwood” is as friendly a greeting as any on the internet.

It is weird to see an audience start pouring in. You never quite know if it means you're doing something right or doing something wrong. You just have to keep doing what you're doing and hope for the best. On Twitch, the audience desperately wants your attention. With Animal Crossing they want to join your island or have you visit theirs. This gives them a spotlight on the stream for a bit. Twitch encourages you to engage with your audience. The expectations of some viewers to drop everything for them can be quite high. I wanted my time on Animal Crossing to be a short show about me working on my island a little bit every day to get my creative process started. Viewers would come in and I would tell them a little bit about what I was working on. They would stick around, and we would get to know one another while they watched me build my little world.

The stories from my real life began to imprint on the assets in the game. The history that was built on the island came from my combined heritage. A lighthouse to represent Peggy's Cove. Waterfalls for El Salvador's majestic vistas. I had been using El Scotiadoran for a few years to describe my unique background. My Cuzcatlan was their home, my Twitch viewers the tourists that Nook so desperately wanted. Like all tourism sectors, Cuzcatlan's took a large toll on the frontline workers who had to entertain the visitors. With the quick success, far more than I had ever experienced on any other social media platform, I felt compelled to extend my playing sessions, meet more viewers, and try to keep the energy going. The performances became more about improving with an audience member than the project I was working on. The worst day was a four-hour stream where I ran from island to island entertaining different viewers without getting to any of my own artistic goals.

To complete Animal Crossing you need to have a 5-star rated island. Mine had sat at 4 stars for weeks as I tried to figure out the last few pieces I needed to build to tell the story of digital colonialism. It was around the middle of March when I finally had enough. The project had dragged on too long partly because of the lack of assets, mostly from the delays caused by the live performance. It became impossible to be outgoing when I couldn't even go out due to the lock down. The viewers stopped rolling in, the experience soured, and I contemplated giving up streaming all together. I didn't know if I could really handle having a fan base.

It was too much of a habit to stop playing Animal Crossing. Without the audience I was able to finish off the last area, the ruins of the Nook family cemetery and original castle which I built using Super Mario 35th anniversary assets that Nintendo had added to the game. Nook declared the island complete, and I was rewarded with a golden watering can. This was to make my daily toil in the garden easier. One morning shortly after that I loaded it up to find a new resident on my island. A white horse named Colton who hoped to be an entertainer. At the start of the pandemic my first completed project was my logo: two black horses. I'm still not sure what his arrival means, if he's new to the stable or perhaps I was mistaken in my own renderings. What I am sure of is that the images we put on the internet today have as much meaning as the images our ancestors painted on cave walls 63,000 years ago, only now the cave replies.

**Rafael MacDonald** is a digital media artist who primarily explores the internet and the experimental narratives found there. His work can be found on various platforms under a variety of monikers. Find him on Instagram @el.scotiadoran, Twitch under DosCaballos, or visit his website [www.doscaballos.ca](http://www.doscaballos.ca) to purchase prints of work.

## Where From Here?

Anne-Sophie Grenier / Photos by Chris Miner

*Where from here?* Modern Fuel's 2021 annual juried exhibition was on display in our main gallery from August 31 to October 9, 2021. This accompanying essay includes thoughts by Modern Fuel Executive Director, Anne-Sophie Grenier, and excerpts from each artist's statement. Photos by Chris Miner

The central question of this issue of Syphon and of Modern Fuel's 2021 annual juried exhibition: *Where from here?* can be a very personal one - what next steps should be taken? Where will my life lead me?

The question is also outward facing and political and asks about the larger world in which we live. In the past year, "What are we supposed to do now?" "Where do we go from here?" has been asked over and over again in the contexts of the global pandemic, lockdowns, and sanitary measures, systematic racism, police brutality, ever deepening socio-economic inequality, environmental disasters, coups d'états, and a catastrophic exit from the twenty-year war in Afghanistan. While a trio of billionaires offer Mars as the answer to the question, I prefer to stay on earth.

So I posed the question to Modern Fuel's artist-members for our annual juried exhibition: Where from here?

Many artists offered beautiful, hopeful, and colourful answers. I thank them all for sharing their work and their optimism. The jury however, felt the darkness of our times should be honoured and reflected. In this group exhibition, **Elham Fatapour**, **Catherine Gutsche**, **Posy Legge**, **Elyse Longair**, **Tara Lynn MacDougall**, **Mari Moreno**, and **Andrew Rabyiniuk** respond to the past year and explore contemporary socio-political issues through their artwork. While none of the individual works propose a direct answer to the question *Where from here?* the exhibition invites you to view these works symbiotically, and reflect. I attempt to offer a few of my own thoughts along the way- take them as you will.

Four abstract paintings by **Catherine Gutsche** offer us temporal markers of the pandemic that ground the rest of the show: first, *Finding My Bubble*; then *The Path We've Been On*; ending with *Safely Inside*; and *One More May Enter*. Of the last two, Gutsche writes, "We finally chose to close the door on others, keeping to ourselves, opening the door only inches to allow others in one at a time." Our doors were closed not only physically, but also metaphorically, as debates about government restrictions became increasingly political and cut deeply across our society. One more enter. I invite you to think about who you have let in, or shut out of your closed doors.

Also spreading throughout the exhibition, are three science fiction collages by **Elyse Longair**: *Neuron Forward House*, looking for and researching possibilities towards a brighter future; *Cryopreservation Reproduction Chamber*, what might a future look like with forced suspended animation and artificial reproduction? ; and *After the Anthropocene*, protected from the environment while living in an enclosed city - the baby looks towards an unknown future and world. In the past few years we have witnessed incredible scientific advances, paired with a strong and growing mistrust of science permeating many levels of society and consuming our daily conversations. Longair's work is fiction (for now) and through fantastical worldbuilding, invites the viewer to participate and imagine their own narrative, world, or future. Longair's invitation to reimagine our future can move beyond the science presented in the collages, and move into the many issues explored in this exhibition and publication. We can't return to the status quo, so what will our world look like?

In the three corners of the gallery are **Elham Fatapour's** concealed satellite dishes, beautifully hand painted and wrapped in headscarves. Fatapour, an Iranian-Canadian artist, shows us covert female resistance against authoritarian regimes. Of her ongoing series *Homemade Satellite Dishes*, Fatapour writes: "Satellite dishes are one of the primary communication devices used to access mass media; therefore, they have become a part of urban design. These devices are also a dominant part of the infrastructure for surveillance and security systems. The networks that support media transmission are structured in relationship to power. Subsequently, ideologies and priorities which are built into media and get transmitted through media systems can't be neutral. Still many regions are subject to restricted media infrastructure and using satellite dishes are banned to control citizen's knowledge. In response, many citizens secretly engineered homemade devices, including satellite dishes, as a lifeline to outside media in order to understand what was really happening. The raids to find these became so frequent in Iran, during my youth, that it became imperative to camouflage them. They were often hidden in plain sight, camouflaged as air conditioning units, concealed under tarps or between hanging laundry. [...]"

At its most general, camouflage is taken to mean strategic concealment within physical, social, and political contexts as it pertains to surveillance, aesthetics, communities and, of course, nature. The concept of camouflage goes beyond simple strategies of mimicry; beyond the politics of appearance or beyond the art of disappearance.

In a digitally networked age of surveillance and counter- surveillance and under specific cultural conditions, pervasive networks have transformed the logic of camouflage. Because of new technologies and digital networks, the physical camouflage of dishes is not always necessary anymore. Subsequently, the perception of camouflage in the visual field may not play the same ontological role as it has in the past. My work attempts to understand how it works in society and culture. Camouflage can be a vital conceptual tool for analyzing today's sensory world. This sensory world starts from us to our domestic environment and outward to complicated social and political affairs. Self-censorship becomes more frequent, starting from a small scale in our daily interactions with others, or how we alter ourselves on social media. Eventually it develops to involve other people and to the scale of society. "

**Maria Moreno's** two side by side paintings, *Giros Inesperados* (Unexpected Turns) and *Punto de quiebre* (Breaking Point) further explore violent regimes and the people's resistance. An immigrant from Venezuela, Moreno's stark depiction of black figures against a white background, with bright red splashes is evocative of the pain of having to flee one's homeland, and the continued fight against police and military brutality. Accompanying her works is a short story written by her son when he was 11 years old:

"The events happening in Venezuela may be seen from different perspectives. What happens in Venezuela is that we are killing each other because of the way each of us thinks. The right to express one's view is fundamental for a society, and we do not have it here. You may see it black or white, but it all depends on each person's point of view.

If people, regardless of their beliefs, keep saying that we have to stand together, why do we attack each other with tear gas and shots? I know that not all National Guards behave this way. However, most of them enjoy shooting people who are just asking for more opportunities and a better country. Some police officers even laugh while watching the shootings that end up killing people.

The government uses historic figures such as Simón Bolívar, in an attempt to make us feel closer to them. They even claim to be like these figures, although their words speak otherwise.

Each child reading this knows we love our country, because this is where we are spending our childhood. Life might take an unexpected turn, but we will always love the place where we were born and raised.

Children know more than what some people may think. Even when we play or do homework, it is like we have an ear for each thing: the conversation and the match".

Moreno and her son's story is deeply personal, and yet ubiquitous. According to the UNHCR's 2020 report, "some 79.5 million people had been forced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, and human rights violations." That number includes 29.6 million refugees, 4.2 million asylum seekers, as well as 45.7 million internally displaced people. For people forced from their homes, Where from here? may be the most difficult question to ask, and I have no answer to offer, other than Moreno's visceral and haunting paintings.

On the far wall of the gallery, a series of five text paintings titled *I'm still unpacking these thoughts* by **Tara Lynn MacDougall** brings the viewer in to closely read the words on canvas, covered in bubble wrap. MacDougall says: "Each painting references a bold artistic declaration about art or life made by a prominent a male artist. I subvert their authoritative voice (and their canonical position) into statements of self-doubt and idiosyncratic wonderings. The text is further disrupted by emphasizing some words in black paint and rendering others as subtext by only drawing them in pencil. From a distance the original/ paraphrased texts read as something entirely different. The bubble wrap is meant as a tongue-in-cheek gesture to suggest the paintings (and the ideas) are still being unpacked."

Our art historical canon is dominated by white men, not because of a lack of "Other" talented artists, but due to the curating, collecting, and writing practices that have dominated this sphere for centuries. Feminist, Queer, and BIPOC curators and artists have been challenging this myth for decades, and MacDougall's work is a solid addition to this tradition of challenging the patriarchal, heteronormative, white bullshit both on our gallery walls and in our daily lives.

The final issue tackled in this show is the environment. **Posy Legge** offers us four small watercolour works on paper. From far away they look like beautifully coloured and vibrant landscapes. Seeing them up close reveals a different story. Hand written under each image is a descriptive title for each work. They are: *catastrophe-bound*, *imminent danger*, *uncertain fight*, *radiant future*. Of the works, Legge shares, "This series depicts military pyrotechnics, industrial explosions, and natural disasters, all intentionally obscured. The images and text are a rumination on words my partner shared with me as I was having a meltdown over the reality of the ongoing climate catastrophe, ecological escalating disaster, ecocide, mass extinction, and overall feelings of powerlessness in the face of it all. This series also pays homage to elements of Romantic landscape traditions."

Is there a radiant future ahead of us? How do we get there?

**Andrew Rabyiniuk's** handwoven black textile from a body of work called *In Being Draped in Being* places mourning and grief in the centre of it all. When I think of 2020 - 2021, I think of an intense grief that shrouded everything. Of this work, Rabyiniuk writes, "The cloth may be suggestive of mourning, embodied experience and fatigue, a collapsing interiority, as well as the comforting feel of a weighty cloth. I hope, however it is interpreted, that it offers a moment of pause to reflect on the question you pose, to feel deeply the historical moment and question what forms of material and social relations might emerge in what follows from here."

The second work by Rabyiniuk may help assuage the grief. A diptych titled *Of becoming* once again nearer shows two hands, one in each frame. They are distorted by the movement above a scanner, and appear to move closer together. "Here the issues of hesitance and difficulty of drawing close are suggested, as are the sensuous possibilities of contact."

Juxtaposing Rabyiniuk's two works, I propose we try to move beyond our collective grief, hand in hand.

So at the end of all this, I ask again: *Where from here?* To be honest, I don't know. Sorry.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

Catherine Gutsche, Andrew Rabyiniuk,

Elyse Longair, Elham Fatapour

Posy Legge

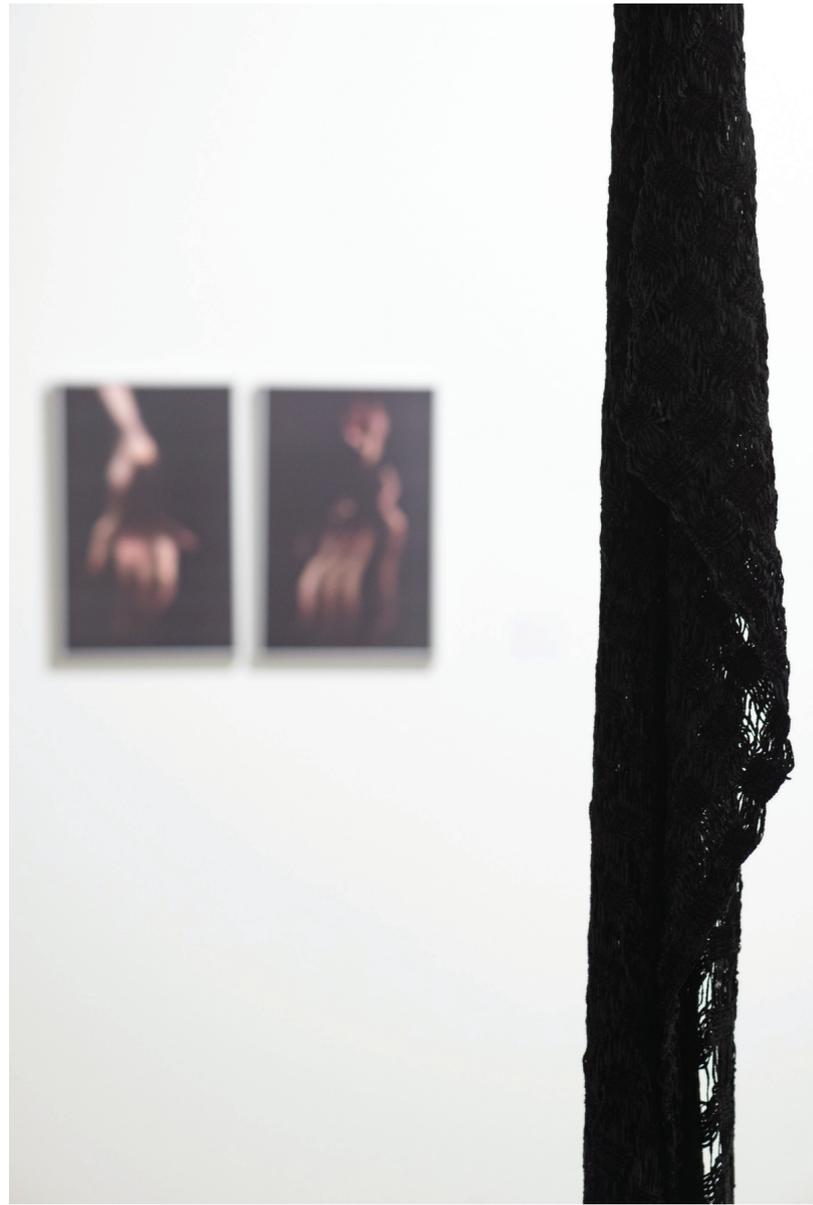
Maria Moreno



**Anne-Sophie Grenier** is a queer performing artist and writer with a keen sensitivity to storytelling and a desire to build better opportunities for artists at the local, national, and international level. She holds a Masters of Management in International Arts Management, from Southern Methodist University and HEC Montréal. In her graduate studies, she focused on the role that art co-ops and artist-run centres play in fostering innovation and creative placemaking. She also holds a B.A. in Communications Studies (Video Production) with a minor in Political Science from Concordia University and a Diploma of College Studies in Commerce from Champlain College.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
Elham Fatapour  
Andrew Rabyiniuk  
wide view of exhibition



ESSAY

## Ontological Revolutions: a reflection on decolonial curatorial practices

Jose Bagawan

**DISCLAIMER** This writing engages with issues of systemic racism and genocide, and looks to artworks that have confronted experiences of abuse in Canada's residential school system.

Quite recently, City of Kingston Officials agreed to the relocation of the Sir John A. Macdonald Statue from City Park to the nearby Cataraqui Cemetery, where Macdonald is buried. Their decision was guided by a sincere effort to recognize the pain and suffering felt under the colonial legacy of policies and rhetoric that MacDonal normalized during his lifetime— notably, his role in the implementation of what we have come to know as the Canadian Indian Residential School System.

Central to this decision was the discovery of 215 unmarked graves on the site of what was once Canada's largest residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia. However, at the time of writing this, more than 1,000 unmarked graves have been discovered on the grounds of other such schools with experts predicting many more yet (should Indigenous communities receive funding to conduct their own searches). In many ways, we are seeing the start of a revolution as we revisit the past/past heroes. However, I would encourage us to consider taking up the less-used definition of the word, and I will explain why.

In one sense "revolution" is the act of *'turning back'* or *'rotation back'* to move forward. This definition runs in contrast to that of radical overthrow, rupture, and change that the word generally adopts in social and political contexts. Thinking about the double meaning of the word in relation to art may help us posit the significance of art's temporal qualities. With revolution and temporality in mind, does an artist break with the past to imagine an impossible future, or do they revisit it, perhaps begrudgingly, in an attempt to imagine the world otherwise?

One such example is Robert Houle's solo exhibition, *Pahgedenaun* which ran at the Carleton University Art Gallery (CUAG) in 2018. The majority of works came from Houle's *Sandy Bay Residential School Series* from 2009, and confronted memories of abuse that Houle had kept suppressed. Describing the works, Shirley Madill, longtime writer and curator of Houle's work writes:

"This highly personal work reclaims the artist's memories of the residential school experience—of physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse. Images of dormitory beds, crosses, and shadowy figures occupy the spaces in the drawings, with disturbing inscriptions written in his own hand, such as "night predator," "I'm cornered," "outhouse abuse," "drive-in terror," "uhnuhmeahkazoo— pretending to pray," and "fear." The pieces are a powerful testament to a dark, shameful period of Canadian history."<sup>1</sup>

Later, Madill explains how Houle spoke in Saulteux, his indigenous mother tongue, throughout the creative process and how this was a way to decolonize himself from the English methods of speech and thinking that had been forcibly inculcated onto him.

In 2018, I attended a group tour of *Pahgedenaun*, which greatly challenged my understanding of what art history was, and what it did for the larger social body. Prior to walking the exhibition we were introduced to Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, an internationally renowned and celebrated Storyteller from the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation in Northern Yukon. She burnt sage and blessed the space, and made great emphasis on having visitors feel the exhibition for more than its empirical parts urging us to ruminate on works that 'called to us' as this was probably appealing to something subconsciously relatable within us.

I was slow to accept such instruction and thumbed through my notes from a prior visit intent on finding something new and *'significant'* to record. However, all I could do was find small bits of information to supplement my notes thus far: the name of a painting; the year something was made; or a material used.

On that day, I admit that I entered the exhibit with the wrong intentions— to find something for myself. I was preoccupied with how the exhibit related to me. In this case, how it related to my corporeal senses as a would-be art historian: what was I seeing? What did it look like in relation to other things I have seen? And what did it seek to record/impart to me, the viewer?

But Houle didn't make these works for me— he made them for himself. They were his therapy, and he was not creating them with my or anyone else's formalistic criteria in mind. As such, I will not offer a formalistic analysis of Houle's work here. The contents of the show were deeply personal and traumatic, and I do not want to co-opt Houle's suffering under the auspices of constructing art critique. If that is something you want to see/read, I implore you to seek out Houle's statements and writing or to see his works in person. It is not my place to confer meaning to his practice through a study of how his paint has registered onto his canvases.

Instead, I offer a reflection on how his works (and the curatorial practices that framed them) have shifted my own understanding of art and experience. After all, all we can ever do is speak from our respective positionalities and experiences, and to listen in earnest to the thoughts and reflections of others. Which is an important and generative start to thinking about art and curatorial practice in a decolonial way. That is, in a relational way that considers the differences unique to each person, and how these differences may result in someone experiencing the world in a way different than oneself.

With this in mind, Houle's works pre-figure the suspicion and fear associated with sites of "care" that we have become all too familiar with throughout recent events, but more than this, they plot a way forward from the tragic history that enabled them. "Pahgedenaun", a Saulteux word expresses the self-defining and self-determining act of "letting it go from your mind," which Houle took up as a more meaningful concept than forgiveness when confronting his memories of abuse. For Houle, a work was not done until the memories of the experiences that had prompted it had left his mind. In this way, Houle performed a revolution of his own whereby Canada's troubling past is not rejected to move forward but is a pre-condition to this movement.

"With revolution and temporality in mind, does an artist break with the past to imagine an impossible future, or do they revisit it, perhaps begrudgingly, in an attempt to imagine the world otherwise?"

For many of us, schools, hospitals, and other institutional structures for care are something that we endure when we need to. I have the fortune of not being sick often and for that, I am eternally grateful. Still, for others, this is not the case, and worse yet, for many, these places are not the universal site of care we often purport them to be. In some cases, they can be a site of prejudice where the colour of one's skin, social location, or general presentation of non-conformity may impart flexibility to a doctor's Hippocratic Oath. To this, I evoke the memory of the late Joyce Echaquan, the Atikamekw mother of seven who filmed herself being insulted by hospital staff in the moments leading up to her death less than a year ago.

Understandably, not all institutions are bad. After all, it is the tireless work of health professionals that will make the pandemic and so many other ailments distant memories that we may one day have the pleasure of forgetting. Still, we cannot deny all the evidence (statistics, video recordings, textual exchanges, and so much more) that will detract from this legacy. Because dismissing the actions of some as 'exceptions to the norm' is what enables asymmetrical applications of care.

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Madill, "Sandy Bay residential school Series 2009," Art Canada Institute, <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/robert-houle/key-works/sandy-bay-residential-school-series/>.

**Jose Bawagan** (he/him) is an MA candidate at Queen's University in the Art History and Art Conservation department, and this summer's Special Projects Coordinator. His research centres on the performative elements of Contemporary Digital Art with a specific focus on games and playable media.

## Backstage Banter: An Interview with Lou Lou la Duchesse de Riere and Damned Damsel on the Intersections of Burlesque, Identity, and Community

Damned Damsel, aka Crystal Harrison, has been performing burlesque in Montreal since 2016. She won the award for Best Stage Kitten at the Imperial Burlesque Canada gala in 2019. She is also a youth worker and community activist, whose work is rooted in sex positivity and harm reduction. Crystal is President of Rock Camp Montreal, a music camp dedicated to empowering girls, trans, non binary, and gender non-conforming youth through music, art, and performance.

Lou Lou la Duchesse de Rière, aka Lauren Ashley Jiles, is a half black half Mohawk internationally renowned neo-burlesque dancer, teacher, and activist hailing from Kahnawake, Quebec. She began her burlesque career in 2005 in Montreal with troupe Blue Light Burlesque. She has since headlined shows across North America and has performed in New Orleans, Las Vegas, New York, Texas, Detroit, and Chicago. She has been thrice voted into the Burlesque Top 50 by 21st Century Burlesque [2018 #44 worldwide; 2019 #16 worldwide; #2 in Canada; and Currently #1 in Canada]. In September 2018 she made history by becoming the first Indigenous woman to be crowned New Orleans Queen of Burlesque. She also holds titles at Burlesque Hall of Fame, including Most Innovative.

(This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

### How did you get in to burlesque?

**DAMNED DAMSEL (D):** I actually kind of stumbled into it. I had been a dancer for ten years and was looking for a way to get back into it when I came across burlesque dance classes while searching on Google. Initially I was taking classes just for fun without the intention of performing, but I went to my first burlesque show and realised that was exactly what I wanted to be doing. Going to shows lit the fire within me and helped me realise I really wanted to be on stage.

**LOU LOU (L):** So you took a burlesque class before even seeing a show? That is so interesting, because it shows how quickly things have changed. I haven't been performing for a million years, but when I started burlesque there were no classes. The idea of learning how to do burlesque still feels foreign to me. Most of us just learned by getting on stage and trial and error. I was looking for a new creative outlet when one of my friends reached out to me on MySpace and sent me an event that was a live burlesque competition where you could get a contract to join a troupe. I put together a number and I was terrified but I won the contract. I started off working with them and it just spiraled from there. I find it wild that the path to burlesque has changed so much.

### What does burlesque mean to you?

**L:** I have something I said off the cuff once that has become my definition of burlesque because it encompasses everything that I think burlesque is. I always say burlesque is satirical sexual pageantry. I see a lot of similarities between the work I do and the work my husband does as a professional wrestler, because it's all just gender performance. I realise I didn't have a normal trajectory to burlesque as I started when I was 18 and at that time I didn't have a voice sexually and didn't know how to express that. Lou Lou became a way for me to safely explore my sexuality and the power that I have in the feminine, which I didn't exercise as Lauren.

**D:** To me, burlesque is a safe space to explore gender and sexuality, but it also came to me at a time in my life where I was lacking confidence in myself and in my body. Burlesque helped me so much and has changed my self perception. So many people, when they find out I do burlesque, go "oh you must be so confident in order to do that" which now I am, but burlesque made me confident. If 100 people scream when you take off a glove, to have a crowd going wild to see your body, that feels so powerful. I've incorporated that into my sense of self and the rest of my life. Even if I were never to perform burlesque again that confidence will remain with me forever.

**L:** I always say applause is the gateway drug. It's addictive. In those five minutes you get on stage you feel like a god. I often get negative critiques as an Indigenous woman showcasing my sexuality. As a direct reaction to colonialism and the epidemic of missing and murdered Two Spirit and Indigenous women, we are often taught at a very young age to hide ourselves. When I get that criticism, I always tell them to come watch me perform. I don't perform from a place of helplessness. There is nothing delicate in the way that I perform and everything is from a place of power. So I feel very lucky to have discovered that at such a young age because I don't know who I would be if I didn't have burlesque.

### Let's talk about the burlesque scene in Montreal.

**D:** When I came onto the scene in 2016, we already had a flourishing burlesque scene in Montreal. There were shows at least three times at just one of many venues, so I feel that I've been very lucky to have started my burlesque career here. It was an ideal place and time to come up as it was already well established. I did have a bit of the feeling like I had to pay my dues first before starting to really perform, but that was just an internal desire



**TOP TO BOTTOM**  
LouLou, photographed by Marissa Parisella  
Damned Damsel, photographed by Cimmerian

to want to learn about the scene beforehand. I put in years of stage kitting where I got to meet almost all of the performers and the producers in Montreal, and eventually I started to truly feel part of the community.

**L:** It's wild to see the growth in the scene, now we have schools and several options for venues. It used to be a hustle to get stage time. I had a lot of frustration at the beginning of my career because for the longest time the burlesque scene was not diverse. There was very little representation of Indigenous people in burlesque and there was very little representation of BIPOC performers in Montreal. I wasn't being afforded the same opportunities, pay, or recognition that others were. Newer performers had little regard for the work I was doing and what I had contributed to the scene, so I started to leave. I was being paid more and getting more respect in other cities like New Orleans and Las Vegas. It was kind of painful for a little bit. I can't pinpoint when the shift happened but I'm glad that it did. Now Montreal has a very diverse scene. It's a very glamorous scene, there is a lot of high end burlesque coming out of our scene. On an international level people know that Montreal comes correct, that we represent.

### Given that burlesque feels integral to both of your identities, how did not being able to perform during the pandemic affect you?

**L:** As a mom, at the beginning I threw myself into parenting and holding down a household. As time went on, I had to adapt and that meant doing online shows and continuing to perform virtually. Which is a completely different animal, and I know several people chose not to go down that route. It felt completely different but also necessary. Everyone who has performed virtually this year has kind of kept the flame alive. It was very humbling; there is something almost satirical about stripping in these thousand dollar costumes and seeing someone's cat interrupt the video. A huge part of burlesque is intimacy, and you're typically revealing parts of yourself physically, but what is more intimate than giving people a look into your house?!

**D:** I was one of the people who didn't do any virtual performances as I had already taken a step back from performing right before the pandemic began. I was moving in to a new field of work where I was working with youth, so I basically had to take down my entire public burlesque persona for fear of parents, retribution, or getting doxxed. I often feel that you're not allowed to be a professional woman and a sexual woman at the same time in our society. Having already taken a step back pre-pandemic, and having the industry shut down made me initially wonder if I was going into forced retirement. To have something that is such a huge part of my identity forcibly removed was very tricky, and now that I've had many months to sit around and think about it, I've accepted it can still be part of my identity even if I'm not actively performing. I've also come to terms that the necessary distinction between professionalism and sexuality is bullshit, and if I were to try and hide that aspect of my life I would be inauthentic. Lately I've been in a place where I'm much more open about my burlesque, it comes up in conversations with my employers and colleagues now. As a youth worker it is important for me to be sex positive so I can't hide that part of my identity and feel like I'm doing my job properly. I still keep it under wraps until I feel it is safe to disclose and won't put my job in jeopardy, but it is an important part of my past and my future.

### What are some of the challenges you think we have in our community?

**L:** Everything comes from outside and it trickles down into our little microcosm. As a society in general one of the main issues is racism. Growing up as a racialized person it has been the biggest barrier for a lot of people, specifically in the performing arts and burlesque community. We have to do a lot of work to dismantle white supremacy in our industry and also shifting narratives around beauty standards. I think that's the work that a lot of BIPOC performers do, which is a reclaiming of glamour, a reclaiming of opulence. That is so important. It's hard for a lot of people because the language has changed even in the past five years, like tokenism and diversity. As a community we are growing together. Within the past year and a half, with all the anti-racism movements happening in America and Canada, it is happening at such an accelerated rate. People are looking at the infrastructures and the systems. It's a great time now because we are not doing live shows. We've had this opportunity to reflect on what changes we want to make when we return to the stage.

**D:** Absolutely. I also think we need to continue to promote the idea that burlesque really is for everyone. I think we need to change the image that comes to mind when you think of burlesque. Classically, it's a thin white woman who is very glamorous, but that's not what burlesque is. I think our community has been trying to challenge that. Burlesque is gender diverse, and body diverse, and racially diverse. Our scene is starting to represent that and that is what we are moving towards.

**L:** I see people doing the work and holding these spaces and asking questions. I am very hopeful. We've had a recent influx of powerhouse performers just move to Montreal who are shaking things up. I think we are moving in a good direction. I'm hopeful about the future.

### Where from here for your art form on a personal level?

**L:** I think that my work is shifting more towards community building. I've put in a lot of work towards mentoring BIPOC artists. I would really like to continue that work while focusing more on teaching and producing. I definitely used to subsidize my income and I've been able to look at what my career goals are and going forward I will just be doing burlesque and dancing. Art will keep the lights on.



Photograph by Marissa Parisella

**D:** I am very excited about getting back on stage, however that may look and whenever that may be. Personally I think this has been a big year of reflection. Doing my acts from a place of authenticity has become something I want to keep at the forefront. I've accepted it's okay to not be constantly creating acts just for the sake of it; it's okay to not be performing constantly. It doesn't make you any less of a performer, or any less a member of your community. I can focus on what feels good for me to be doing and do it on my own terms, because burlesque is always on your own terms. I also hope to let burlesque influence my practice and my work and my every day life more in the future. I know some people don't have the privilege of being out as a burlesque performer, as they may not be accepted by their families, communities or workplaces. Personally, I have decided I kind of need that integration to feel authentic in my day to day life. I want to incorporate the sex positivity that is inherent to burlesque by acknowledging the need and the value in exploring your gender and sexuality in whatever way you see fit, whether that be burlesque or another form.

**L:** I think that's really admirable and I'm excited for you! I'm excited to see where this is going to take you professionally. Once you allow yourself to just exist more freely doors start to open. That definitely happened for me when I made the shift from just loving burlesque and to making it professional.

One thing that I've taken away from the pandemic is forgiveness with myself for not working as much. Being a mom, and then a single mom, the only way that I could justify performing was if I was doing it at a really intense level. To kind of step back from that while everyone has been on a forced pause, I've been having a lot of these deeper moments of reflection. I've started being kind of celebratory of the things that I have accomplished and being able to say I've done all this stuff that is really great. Do I need to do everything? Do I need to perform 5 days a week? No, you can take gigs that feed your soul, or focus on mentoring or teaching. I've been able to explore different avenues of burlesque this year that I want to continue exploring.

**D:** I feel like we are both in a similar vein moving forward with our practice. As you said, we want to live more freely with it, we want to do it from a genuine place of both desire and love of performing but also for the social implications that our practice has. This moment of pause has afforded us the opportunity to reflect on how can we change the world with burlesque, how can we influence people with our art practice? Our art is a powerful tool for social change. We are both moving forward from this period with that newfound desire to acknowledge the power we have in our practice and try to make some positive influences.

**L:** I definitely feel more purposeful going forward.

**D:** As hard as this year has been, I remain hopeful there will be positive changes out of it.

**L:** You have to! I don't think there's any other way to exist. We should include our astrological signs here, Lou Lou is a Sagittarius and a constant optimist.

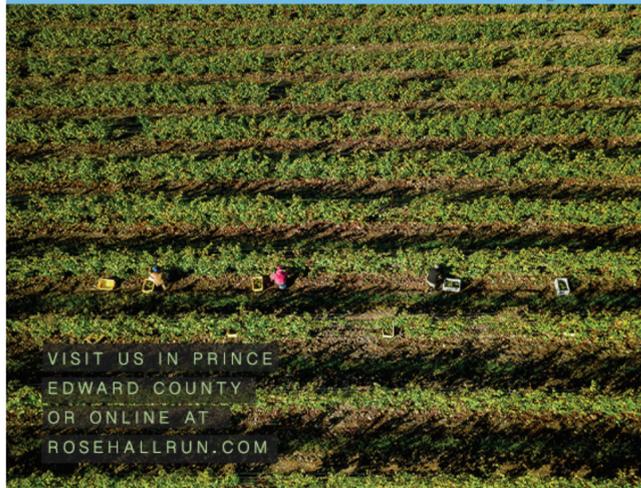
**Damned Damsel, aka Crystal Harrison**, has been performing burlesque in Montreal since 2016. She won the award for Best Stage Kitten at the Imperial Burlesque Canada gala in 2019. She is also a youth worker and community activist, whose work is rooted in sex positivity and harm reduction. Crystal is President of Rock Camp Montreal, a music camp dedicated to empowering girls, trans, non binary, and gender non-conforming youth through music, art, and performance.

**Lou Lou la Duchesse de Rière, aka Lauren Ashley Jiles**, is a half black half Mohawk internationally renowned neo-burlesque dancer, teacher, and activist hailing from Kahnawake, Quebec. She began her burlesque career in 2005 in Montreal with troupe Blue Light Burlesque. She has since headlined shows across North America and has performed in New Orleans, Las Vegas, New York, Texas, Detroit, and Chicago. She has been thrice voted into the Burlesque Top 50 by 21st Century Burlesque [2018 #44 worldwide; 2019 #16 worldwide; #2 in Canada; and Currently #1 in Canada]. In September 2018 she made history by becoming the first Indigenous woman to be crowned New Orleans Queen of Burlesque. She also holds titles at Burlesque Hall of Fame, including Most Innovative.



ROSEHALL RUN VINEYARDS  
PURE. COUNTY. PASSION.

1243 GREER ROAD, WELLINGTON . 1-613-399-1183 . @ROSEHALL\_RUN



VISIT US IN PRINCE  
EDWARD COUNTY  
OR ONLINE AT  
ROSEHALLRUN.COM

Kingston's Independent Bookstore

NOVEL  
IDEA 

156 Princess Street, Kingston, ON K7L 1B1  
Telephone: 613-546-9799 Fax: 613-546-5686  
novid@kingston.net • www.novideabooks.ca

you  
are  
wonderfully  
made.

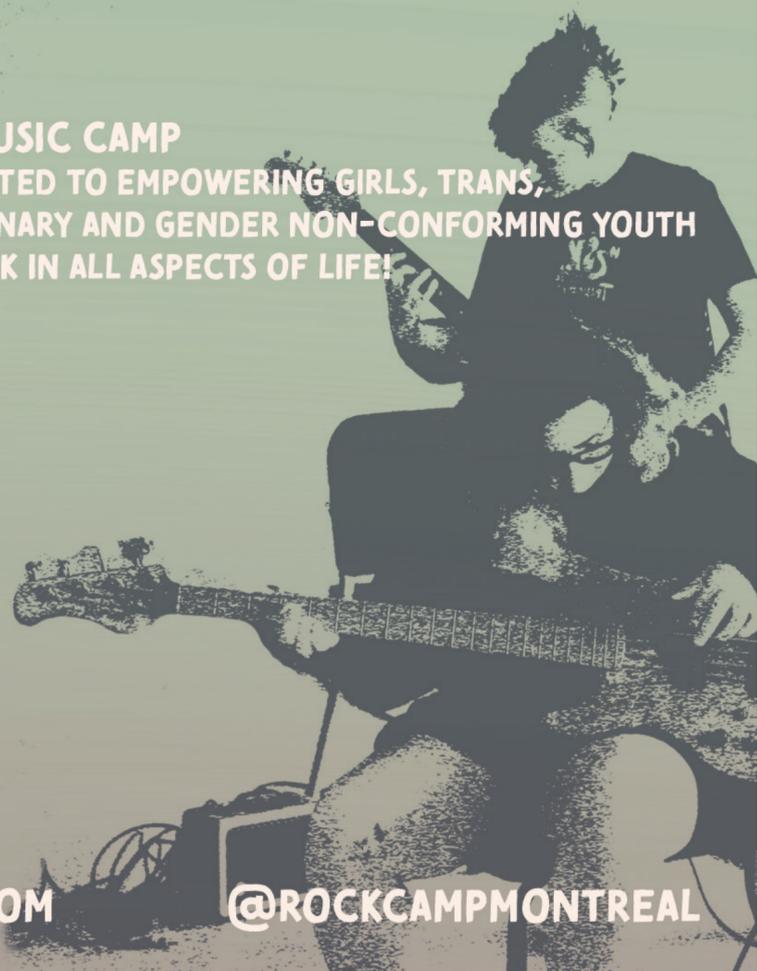
luxury robes & loungewear  
to remind you.  
produced in kingston, ontario.

onderbroeks

onderbroeks.ca  
@onderbroeks



IS A MUSIC CAMP  
DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING GIRLS, TRANS,  
NON BINARY AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUTH  
TO ROCK IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE!



SUPPORT US



GIRLSROCKMONTREAL.COM

@ROCKCAMPMONTREAL



we're neighbours

23 & 25 King Street East, Gananoque

www.steelstylegarage.com

www.instagram.com/drawingroomvintage



MATT & NAT

STEEL  
STYLE  
GARAGE

# Online art sales tripled in 2020, are you missing out?

New platform builds e-commerce sites for artists to sell online

*Powered by: Kingston Frameworks*

**A**rtists were forced to pivot to online sales and digital marketing to survive the pandemic – but some got left behind.

The 2021 Art Market Report revealed that online transactions accounted for 25 per cent of all global art sales in 2020, compared to just 9 per cent in 2019.

As offline sales plummeted, millions flocked to the web to decorate the homes they now couldn't leave. Having a bit of knowledge on website creation and social media management meant many artists could shift their business online and profit from expanded sales capacity.

But, smaller, newer artists, or those who weren't as comfortable online, couldn't make the transition.

Colin Morris has been running Kingston Frameworks, his custom framing family business for several years. He witnessed the change in the art industry right down to the local level.

Kingston Frameworks had to ramp up its fine art print production and drop shipping service to meet the demand of local artists — while also watching the increasing number of customers bringing in prints they bought online.

"You hear a lot of negative news about how this pandemic has hurt artists because galleries had to close — including my own. But what gets left out of those headlines is how innovative artists have become and

how willing they are to try new things," Morris said.

However, a lot of artists Morris spoke to were only party to the drop in sales, not the e-commerce boom, because they weren't selling online and didn't know where to start.

"Websites are sophisticated now. You can't just throw some words on a webpage and call it good — you need to build a site that's e-commerce enabled, you need a whole system that allows you to print, safely package, and ship orders," he said. "That's when your digital marketing can really pay off."

Morris decided he could help. He'd been marketing, printing, and drop shipping for the artists who came into his local shop for years, so he started Art Hustle.

***Art Hustle builds websites for artists and gives them the tools to market themselves.***

"We secure a domain and create their site with a built-in online shop. All they have to do is send us the prints they want to sell. From there, when an order is placed, we handle all the printing and shipping."

Members also receive guidance on how to market on social media. They get access to secure online communities where they can network, collaborate, and share marketing tips with other artists.

LEARN MORE AT  
**ARTHUSTLEDROPSHIPPING.COM**

SCAN ME!



- GLOBAL DROP SHIPPING
- ACTIVE ONLINE NETWORKING COMMUNITY
- ON-TREND ART MARKETING ADVICE
- GICLÉE FINE ART PRINTING