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Gochujang
Blues
Yao Mou In

I work at a Korean restaurant near downtown where people tend to avoid eye contact. I don't blame them. It is a nocturnal street, fueled by street lamps that are trying too hard. I like working as a server. My mum would say it's because of my palmistry that predicts I am going to have a toilsome life serving others, the same thing that makes her believe her life is miserable. For me, serving people is quiet. Mentally. The ringing bells, the smell of oil mixed with spice, the poignant air that moves across you. It's the simplest thing that makes you feel appreciated. Between the gap of private small talks and group gatherings, I can find my value through the perfunctory 'thank you's. Alas, with the blasting k-pop music in the background, I finally reach a state of content, happily suffocating the echoes in my head.

There are always church bells ringing outside the restaurant. Every hour it resonates in me. Who are they ringing for? The first musical note that echoed in my brain was not church bells. My mum's dynamic scream overlapping with my dad's contemplative sigh, a unique melody that no one understands but them. What was I doing? I think I was busy thinking about how to amend this tune, hoping to turn this into a choir instead of a duet. It is the moment of realization, knowing that not all melodies can be mixed to create harmonic tunes, just like not everyone's birth is being celebrated under angelic choirs. Love is mysterious, and it's never about how much effort you put in. How long do we need to keep roleplaying Sisyphus? I recall the moment my mother decided to leave him, her world collapsed in a whimper. No tears were shed, but neither was it freedom. She is stuck in limbo, stuck with me. She is conditioned to accept prayers that never work, listening to the silent voices that keep her functioning every day. I guess I have to direct this hatred onto myself, or else who can she talk to? Family means unconditional support, regardless of how much it suffocates you. I am ready to drown together in this turmoil, and so is she.

Today I saw a father and a son sitting silently in the restaurant. Are they communicating love? My culture tells me perfect understanding lies within the silence. I think I am still working on that. Silence means I don't understand, it means I am confused, hurt, traumatized, giving up. How is it ever love? It's almost like revenge, a connection through silencing each other. To not give them a space to speak. Learning how to not care to self-protect from repetitive damage. The father asks his son what he wants, the kid, panicking because he is overthinking what his father wants him to eat, turns to me. I guess this is what love is, controlling with care. Is every father's interaction with their child like this? Starting with a forced introduction about the weather, then about what you are doing, finally ending it with 'keep trying and you'll be great'. The three-minute caring is suspended into a vacuum of awkwardness, where me and that kid still pathetically try to savor and retaste this over and over again. Perhaps it is because the melodrama I needed to forgive him was never there, like a deflated balloon that is too tall to replace. Perhaps it is because I am across the world so our realities are separating more and more. Perhaps it is because we are broken in our ways and we don't have the tools to fix each other. We are now stuck in this dilemma, fighting over who gets to be the shadow and who gets to be in the light. I wish school taught us more about how to fix unhealable wounds instead of equations.

I remember the night that my goldfish committed suicide. It was the night I told my mother that I don't want to end up like her. I could almost taste her tears when she started sobbing in the corner. The bitter moment of two hearts breaking, with a fish that witnessed this verbal crime committed by me. The way she looked at me. Fuck. For the first time, I realized it was the fish she connected with the most in this household. Stuck in a glass bowl, forever trapped in this microcosm. Maybe that is why the sea is salty, filled with fish tears as we take and take from the ocean, leaving sadness as the evidence that proves it once existed.

I'm sorry, I tell her, knowing that she must be so used to this quote by now. She vacantly looks at me, sniveled, and said 'it's okay.' How else can she react? Can she say 'I regret using you to save my marriage' or 'I don't think I was ever ready to have a child'? I think to stop understanding each other is our way of respect, a guideline we mutually agreed on and is the best I can do in stopping this rope from breaking.

Coming to America has been a way for me to escape this. I don't understand why people always put shame on running away from problems when we simply drink more expensive wine as we grow up. Although this has been a temporal Utopia, between the gaps of each desperate text, going from 'how are you?' to 'can you please respond', I realize I have failed as a daughter. When conversation falls into soliloquy. But I have reasons. I refuse to listen because there are times when she would make me hate my father so much that I hated myself. I am asked to remove traces of myself for the greater good, happiness. The overwhelming demand for self-repair when there is no guidebook. It is almost as hard as washing blood stains off your clothes. The repetitive motion of cleaning, of removing, between the rubbing cotton and the colored foam. How can cotton be so innocent? Even this softness is temporal, is delusionary. It was one day when I was under the cold bathroom light that I decided I am not allowed to embrace warmth before I can play the priest in the confessional and still feel whole, even though the three worn words of 'I love you' in my head has become a dead language in reality. Let it die, let my agony die, so I can be forever happy.

The apron drains me every time I put it on. The stripe that goes around my neck feels like a cangue, keeping you from always looking down. They say this is to help you stay clean, to protect you. But how does another layer of clothing help you stay sterile when you are already stained by the smell? They grab onto you so desperately, where people find nostalgia, memories, stories. The inventors of the fourth dimension are still living in the past, staying in dust-infused houses with low ceilings, lamenting about their youth that they forgot to cherish. What piece of memory should I choose from? There are so many. Freedom lies within the past and the future, but never the current. We are forced to make decisions when we don't even know what we want, letting regret form our wrinkles across our last layer of protection. The more I wear, the more I feel undressed. As wind shrivels my bones, I realize I am less than flesh. I am glass, a vessel that is supposed to contain water, to contain sadness. Or maybe I am a Russian doll, forever stuck in the nesting doll game, delivering women's suffering through time. Generations of pain. How to be a good mother, how to be a better mother than before. It's not like we're not trying, it is just there is never a right answer in teaching. The restless nights in balancing values on the scale, the tentative questions in trying to understand through actions but not eyes. Everything is silent, with a bitter lingering smell of surrender.

I'm tired of finding myself through others, as all that is left in me are hays. There is always a sense of fatigue in me, in having to try and find calmness through other's satisfaction. Perhaps I am not suitable for communication, a failure amongst the creation of social animals. Silence is the best melody I can offer and is one I can carry on for life. To connect through the five-minute monotone call or the incongruous conversations we have about ourselves. To find peace within pain. It is going to be ok.

Yao Mou In is an artist from Macau, currently an MFA candidate at the Ruskin School of Art, focused on big anime titties.

How Could Touch be Harnessed as Part of a New Wave of Feminist Art?

Women in art and touch are both restricted by their dominant counterparts, could they be a match for a new direction in feminist art? This essay enters a fluid ambiguous space seeping with contradictions of ugly beauty, individual universals, physical metaphors, completion in flux, creative destruction, serious irony, repulsive desire and painful pleasure. These dichotomies begin to congeal, secretly forming in a bodily excess of waste, threatening to resurface. I have attempted to imitate how touch dissolves boundaries in this essay by varying tone, slipping between focusing in and manhandling the tactile colloquial, then zooming out using the rigid formalities of the dominant ways of seeing. Riddled with desire in this digital age, are we are losing touch?¹ There is a lack of grounding in the epistemology of touch, despite the rigorous critical analysis of sight- held as more academic. Analysis that does exist weighs heavily and has led to the ‘dramatizations of the sensuous and violent epistemology of touch.’ Because I will explore feminist art, which deals with politics, violence, and sex to get to the heart of major feminist issues, I may add to this drama. It is important to note that both feminist art and touch are not limited to the context I will explore them in.

Molly
Lugsden

Ocular Centralist Hierarchy

We perceive the world through touch, using our hands to navigate our early years both individually and as a species- shown through the traces of handprints. Whilst other senses can be replicated, touch makes something real; feeling is believing. Why can't we touch things? To preserve them. But it also feels grounded in a hierarchy of ownership and senses, as touching something shifts dynamics. We are deprived of touch in art, but don't question it. Academics, Marc Jiménez-Rolland and Mario Gensollen, highlight Plato and Aristotle's role in creating a hierarchy of senses according to intellect: 'Touch was identified as the most basic and primitive sense, closely tied to physical needs and the material realm.'² And by extension caught up in sin and temptation, limited to pleasure and pain. So we comply to unexplained social structures from over 2000 years ago, rejecting touch and placing man above the natural world, looking down from a distance, altering our proximity to art. Jiménez-Rolland and Gensollen continue that 'sensory hierarchies are culturally contingent rather than fixed.'³ This has allowed feminist artists to defy vision in art, which has been claimed by the patriarchy. Although touch is tangled in sexism and violence which exploit the female body, it remains unclaimed in art, making it the *perfect sense* for feminist artists to challenge social norms, a partnership of the overlooked, disrupting sexist ways of seeing. Feminist ways of touching. Does art fear touch? Degrading it to a craft, it manhandles and disrespects, there is a fear of scrutiny and disrupting dynamics, hidden behind a façade of preservation.

Who/ What is Touching Who/ What, How?

Touch can be deconstructed into the physical/metaphorical touch of/to the artist/viewer. These factors intersect and overlap, making it hard to pinpoint touch in art. Then there is *how* touch is conveyed. Touch is surprisingly elusive. In performance art, there is physical contact with people or objects, the body begins to become the medium. Art can also touch us, and we can touch art, metaphorically, which may then be translated into the physical, through stimulating bodily reactions or translating surfaces to touch in our minds, going beyond metaphor. For instance, we can imagine what it's like to lick something because we have touched things with our hands, through comparison we translate vision into touch. So we don't need to touch art, but engage with it in a tactile way.

People hold the artist's touch highly, reducing art to a trace of touch, blurring the line where practice and art begin and end and the significance of outcomes. Artists can engage with touch by using it to think through ideas and translate thoughts, maybe the work exists when in flux. Artists are often forced to justify outcomes with practice, to make it swallowable, to feed academics. Performance art, film, and body art are particularly good at confusing this line, and feminist artists embraced these leaky, boundless media that place less emphasis on outcome. Elkin explores how 'Women occupy a space between mediums'⁴ and sometimes working against the medium.⁵ This ambiguous space between 2d/3d, real/fake, creation/destruction, serious/ironic can be collated through touch.

Elkin cites Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horrors* which explores femininity as a kind of abject, listing bodily processes that 'violate the border between inside and out.'⁶ She explains it's not the lack of cleanliness that causes disgust, but the ambiguous in-between that disrupts systems. To touch something, we step closer. This links to David Joselit's idea in *Populations* of how proximity can change our interpretations, and questions at what distance we should read (interpret) art? Too close- narrow minded, too far- disconnected. Again, we slip into metaphor. This closeness falls into the trap of analysing to assign meaning, pricing knowledge and commodifying touch. So how can the gap for tactile art be plugged? We could engage more with the touch of work (metaphorically), artists could make work to touch, we could just touch art, or artists and viewers could engage with how touch plays into aesthetics.

Marc Jiménez-Rolland and Mario Gensollen explain how touch is imperative in all art which 'invite, and often require, tactual engagement as part of their aesthetic reception.'⁷ This approach can be used as a method of reflection on past work, and a rudder for future work. They also explain how intimate tactile interaction with art 'seems at odds with art's traditional aim of creating shared experiences accessible to broad audiences.'⁸ Shared experience is venerated in art and art criticism becoming assertive and almost instructive. Can touch help us understand arts individually, cutting out the critic and creating a direct (tactile?) interaction.

Mop Up

To mop up, touch in art provokes splits between desire/repulsion, ugly/beautiful, pain/pleasure, art/life. The tactile isn't just a by-product and touch isn't just a necessary precursor, they are process and outcome, encouraging engagement between artist and viewer across mediums. Touch offers a new way into art that loses the heavily overused and corrupted sense of sight, allowing feminist artists to reclaim and free touch from objectified bodies, primitive desires, and degraded crafts. Touch's lack of critical grounding creates instability, which breeds opportunity. Whilst touch can be subtle, there is no prescribed way to touch, no heavy discourse to cower under, making it the perfect liminal place for invention. The sensation and interaction of tactile art is close and can evoke universal understanding through connection. Proximity is no longer measurable, you have consumed the work, or perhaps it has consumed you.

¹ Cornelia H. Butler, et al., *WACK! : Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Los Angeles, Museum Of Contemporary Art, 2007.

² Mario Gensollen and Marc Jiménez-Rolland, *A Subtle Aesthetic Touch in the Experience of Art*, Mexico, Autonomous Metropolitan University, 2025.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters*, Random House, 2023.

⁵ Lolly Adams, Lecture at Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, 2026.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gensollen and Jiménez-Rolland, *A Subtle Aesthetic Touch in the Experience of Art*.

⁸ Ibid.

Molly Lugsden is a second-year Fine Art Student at University of Oxford intrigued by working against mediums and overworking ideas in both my practical work and academic research.

Into Museum Orbit

A walk through the great hall of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and a push of a side door leads to the Pitt Rivers Museum. (Fig. 4) The light becomes dimmer and the room is filled with cabinets, drawers, and glass cases. In a sense, visitors arrive here only after passing through another kind of collection, the natural world carefully arranged as if by a creator, before entering this archive of human things.

At one point I asked Micheal about the labels.
“ Are these the dates when the objects were made?”
“ Not usually,” he replied.
“ They are the dates when the objects entered the collection.”
“ So the time recorded here is the museum’s time?”
“ In a way, yes.”

After that conversation the room began to look slightly different. Inside the cases are objects from many parts of the world: masks, spears, bows, axes, musical instruments, charms, textiles, small bone ornaments, and tools whose purposes are not immediately clear. The cabinets rise almost from the floor to the ceiling. Objects are placed close together, leaving very little empty space. Gradually the logic of the arrangement becomes visible.

The objects are not organised primarily by country or civilisation but by type. Masks gather in one area, musical instruments in another. Weapons, tools, and domestic objects form their own dense clusters. A mask from West Africa may appear beside one from the Americas or Oceania. Instruments made centuries apart share the same cabinet. Geography and chronology compress, while form and function provide the structure.



Pitt Rivers Museum, 2026. Haida totem pole (1901.39.1) from Star House, Massett, Haida Gwaii, belonging to Chief Anetlas (c.1816–1893).

Surrounding display cabinets also visible.

Photograph by the Artist, Oxford.

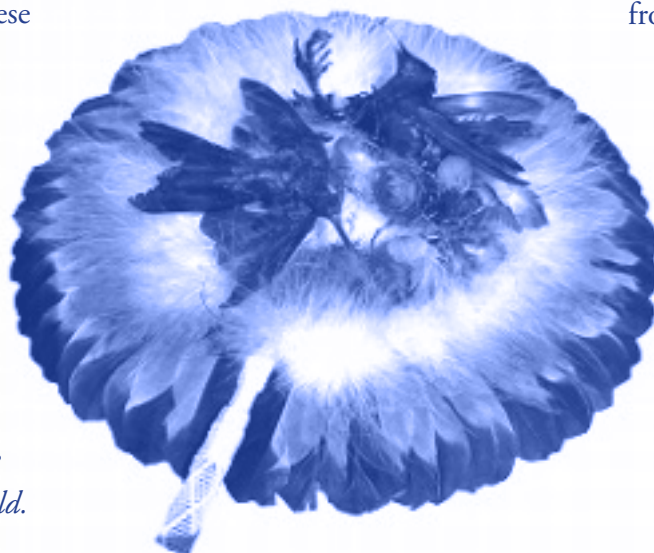
One of the most striking objects stands outside the cases. A tall totem pole from the Haida people of Canada rises through the room. The label lists the number 1901.39.1. It came from Star House in the village of Massett on Haida Gwaii and once belonged to the chief Anetlas (c. 1816 –1893). The pole was raised during a potlatch ceremony in which family rights were confirmed and transferred in front of witnesses.

*Figures climb the length of the wood:
three seated watchmen near the top,
a bear eating a frog with a cub between its legs,
another bear holding a human figure,
and below them a raven with its wings spread.*

The label records that the pole entered the museum in 1901, donated by the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor. It had been purchased for thirty-six dollars and transported to Britain by rail and steamer.

Nearby cabinets contain objects of a very different scale. Several woven bags from Queensland in Australia hang together. They are called ‘dillybags’. The word ‘dilly’ comes from the Yagara language and refers to vines, and fibres. These bags were used for carrying food. Some are painted with simple patterns.

*A painted hide
travels across distance.
Feathers circle an ivory handle,
bearing quiet routes of the world.*



In another case stands a lidded check-weave box from Sri Lanka. Beside it is a gourd container from the Marquesas Islands, numbered 1884.63.58. The surface still carries the outline of the cord that once wrapped around it. Years of sunlight slowly bleached these lines into a pattern.

Further along appears a large ceremonial canoe model from Cameroon, with twelve pairs of paddles, donated by E. M. Ingall in 1973. Nearby is a bow harp from the Uele River region in what was once the Congo. It has five strings, a hide-covered resonator, and two sound holes. It entered the museum in 1909 through the collection of Henry Balfour.

Other objects appear almost unexpectedly: a painted cowhide from Canada; a feather fan collected in England, decorated with swansdown, hummingbird, and macaw feathers, its ivory handle probably made in China; a large dug-out canoe from the Santiago River in northern Peru, donated by Major R. H. Thomas in 1923; and a helmet made from porcupine fish skin from Kiribati, produced before 1878 and collected in 1884.

Nearly every object carries a small label: a number, a place of origin, a donor or collector, and a year. After reading several of them, a pattern begins to appear. The year is often not when the object was made, but when it arrived here.

Then I asked Micheal where most of these objects had come from. “Many arrived during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” he said. “Travellers, missionaries, colonial officers, anthropologists.”

After a pause he added that some of the newer displays follow another logic. Instead of grouping objects by geography, they are arranged by material: leather, wood, metal, and stone.

Objects, he explained, can also be understood through what they are made of. Moving between the cabinets, another structure slowly becomes visible. Objects from different continents and centuries stand beside one another. A mask from West Africa appears next to one from Oceania. Musical instruments made hundreds of years apart share the same shelf. Geography becomes less important than form.

The dates on the labels begin to read differently as well. At some point a traveller carried the object across an ocean. Later it was registered, numbered, and placed in a cabinet. From then on it entered another kind of time.

Here objects no longer pass from household to household as they do in a flea market. They remain within a system of cabinets, labels, and classifications. Movement still exists, but it takes another form: cataloguing, conservation, research, occasional rearrangement.

After a while the room begins to feel less like a collection of things than a particular arrangement of the world.

“If these objects survive,” Michael said, “they become a kind of message to the future. Someone might look at them and see a small snapshot of how we lived.”

After a pause he added,

“Objects are not only about what they are. They are also about time. They make us think about time.”

Qi Baiting (齐百婷) is a Chinese artist based in the UK whose interdisciplinary practice was developed within the context of the University of Oxford, Linacre College and the Ruskin School of Art.

My Grandmother's
Tongue: Language,
Ritual and
Connection with the
Earth

Kyra-Sky Foster

There are words caught on the edge of the surf, on the bubbled spit at the tip of my grandmother's tongue. The words might be spoken or swallowed, they are a living testament—a record of the land, our history and bush magic.

My great grandmother's only language was Kwéyòl, and it was my grandmother's first. The Kwéyòl they spoke/speak is the St. Lucian variant of a language spoken across the Caribbean, and some parts of South America. The language is largely derived from French and West African languages, with some Pre-Columbian and English influence.¹

When my grandmother moved to London she spoke little to no English. She had no choice but to force her understanding, cutting up parts of her own language—repasting them with English words that don't represent her.

I come from an intergenerational matriarchal family structure. It's always been my grandmother, my mother and myself. My grandmother has always spoken whatever kwéyòl she can remember with us—I believe it's kept us rooted. We're connected through nature, practice and language.

Kwéyòl plays a significant role within my artistic practice. I didn't use it at first, instead I used my grandmother's voice/stories in English. It occurred to me later on though, that I was centring the needs of an English-speaking, Western audience over the integrity of the work. I really needed to incorporate more of my grandmother's native-tongue into my making. After all, I might not have the ability to use it later. I started immediately.

I rushed into using it because the learning is time-sensitive. The language is dying, the land is shrinking, and my grandmother is wrinkling. What I make might sound/read muddled, grammatically iffy or misspelt. It irritates me to look back at the mistakes, but I remember that the more I learn, the more I grow. The more I write, the more I make and the more I speak, the more I breathe.

I'm heavily influenced by the teachings and rituals of the mothers that raised and shaped me; this includes the earth. I use folk-ritual to investigate our heritage and intergenerational wisdom; My practice also acts as a medium through which I can reconnect to the land, and ancestors.

Language accelerates this connection, given that a significant proportion of indigenous African and American wisdom/practice/history has been passed down orally through generations.

The tongue is a powerful thing in witchcraft.

In some Haitian Voodoo practices the tongue of a cow can be used to prevent a person from speaking ill of you, or another entity.²

To “put your tongue on someone” is to speak a kind of hex onto them. This can be a dangerous thing when done wrong, and a potent action when done right. Speaking feels like an exhale - the byproduct of a thought translated through *Lèspiwasyon*, the *Kwéyòl* word for breath. To breathe is to be alive, without breath we are (by Western definition) medically dead. So, it would not be unreasonable to say that breath is what gives us *Lèspwi*, meaning spirit. The connection between speaking with intention and with life itself is interesting to me.

My grandmother taught me the word for earth—‘*Latè*’, it can also be translated to mean mankind. To treat the earth in the same way you treat a body feels right to me; ‘we are of the earth’, is something my mother always says—so, I try to treat nature the way I would treat my skin.

To me, Art is a creative intention that can move or change whatever surrounds it. Language is the same. Spoken or written, it's like a spell. A spell can be healing, protective or an act of spiritual warfare. Whatever the intention, wherever it is employed, it has the potential to leave a mark—physical or metaphorical.

In St. Lucia, and throughout the Caribbean, mysticism and the Occult practices have negative connotations. There are moral judgments attributed to practices concerning protection/warding, sending spells and even healing. The moral judgments are a colonial residue, oftentimes taking on classist, racial and misogynistic characteristics.³

The aim of my art/writing is to re-frame those practices in defence of the women who raised me. My family was, for at least five generations headed by a woman; and strangely enough, the folk traditions and mystical practices were rarely if ever frowned upon. Magic has been embraced, centred and passed down—I believe it lives within us, in you too. I believe in enchantment because it exists everywhere in the earth, and that is exactly what we are. It's in the soil, in the cream-coated dents of your own bones. Magic sits on the tips of your fingers and jumps off the head of your tongue.

It isn't just in St. Lucia that folk-based modes of intuition and understanding are rejected/scorned. We'd be remiss to forget that it was colonial powers that enforced monotheism across the globe. It scorched witchcraft and folk-practices in the same ways it did the land, and the bodies that worked in relationship with it. It was strategic in its arson, burn anyone whose connection with the earth threatens to undermine the imperial state.⁴

The loss we've seen in our language coincides (in a temporal sense) with climate change, and the devastation caused by it, to not only St. Lucia, but to the wider world. I'm convinced that reconnecting with the wisdom passed down through generations of femmes could help mitigate the severity of this ecocide.⁵ The flood we're scheduled to experience if we continue to push our climate; might, through indigenous wisdom and intuition diminish. Whether there's a way to reverse what we've done or not, our engagement with indigenous/folk-traditions could help us reconnect before we burn up—before our earth-mother follows the fate of the morning star.⁶

¹ Dalphinis, Morgan, et al., *Creole Cultures, Vol. 2: Creole Identity and Language Representations*, Springer International, 2024.

² Denise Alvarado and Doktor Snake, *The Voodoo Hoodoo Spellbook*, Weiser Books, 2011

³ Marie Meudec, "Ordinary Ethics of Spiritual Work and Healing in St. Lucia, or Why not to Use the Term obeah." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1 Mar. 2017, pp. 17–32.

⁴ Peter Grey and Geraldine Hudson, "Magic and Ecology: Apocalyptic Craft," Talk at Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, 7 December 2021.

⁵ Jason Brown and John Middleton, "Climate Change and Language—es: The Threat of Climate-induced Migration to the World's Vulnerable Languages." *Oxford Open Climate Change*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2024. And Benjamin T. Wilder, et al., "The Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Curbing the Loss of Language and Biodiversity." *BioScience*, vol. 66, no. 6, 30 Mar. 2016, pp. 499–509.

⁶ M. Way, R. Ernst, and J. Scargle, "Heat-Death by Volcano - How Venus Went Rogue?", EGU General Assembly 2022, Vienna, 23–27 May 2022.

Kyra-Sky Foster is an artist based in Berkshire exploring socio-linguistic and folk-ritualistic elements of the Lesser Antilles.

Art Not Genocide Alliance

In October 2025, after confirmation of Israel's inclusion in the 61st International Art Exhibition, the Art Not Genocide Alliance began circulating the below letter among participants and workers of the Venice Biennale.

ANGA's call responds to the appeal issued by Palestinian civil society to challenge the normalisation of Israeli apartheid and occupation within international cultural platforms. In this context, the Venice Biennale cannot be exempt from scrutiny.

The following letter calls on the leadership of the Venice Biennale to exclude Israel from the 2026 exhibition. It has been signed by 239 artists, curators and art workers involved in this year's Biennale and formally delivered to the President and Board of the Venice Biennale.



Protest sign installed in the Arsenale by participating artists in the Venice Biennale. Photo by Jason Waite.

April 29, 2026

To the directors of the Venice Biennale,

ANGA addressed you on 2 October, 2025, demanding the exclusion of Israel from the 2026 Biennale. As Zionist atrocities continue to mount, you have yet to respond. Now we, the undersigned, stand together as artists, curators and art workers in a collective refusal to allow you to platform the Israeli state as it commits genocide. We do this in support of our fellow artists and cultural workers in Palestine, in solidarity with Palestine, and in profound hope of an end to Zionist genocide and ongoing apartheid, and the rebirth of a free Palestine.

In 2024, the outrage against the inclusion of a genocidal state in the art Biennale was so strong that the Israel pavilion was forced to close. As we reach an appalling anniversary—two and a half years of open genocide against Palestine—and 77 years after the Nakba, the Israeli state once again seeks the legitimization of the Biennale to masquerade as a creator instead of a destroyer of life and culture.

We remind you that Israeli violence also targets the art and culture supposedly held sacrosanct by the Biennale: Zionist forces kill, jail and persecute Palestinian artists and cultural workers, raze museums, archives, cultural centres, schools, universities, libraries, galleries, historical buildings and monuments to the ground (Rana Anani, JPS, 2024), and slaughter artists, musicians, poets, journalists and writers. This is an attempted annihilation of not just the Palestinian people but Palestinian culture.

The Venice Biennale's complicity with the attempted destruction of Palestinian life must end. No artist or cultural worker should be asked to share a platform with this genocidal state. As long as Israel exists by means of genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid, it must not be represented at the Venice Biennale. Genocide cannot be tolerated by an institution that aims to investigate and celebrate the human values embodied by art. Let your actions reflect this obvious truth.

Signed,

239 artists, curators and art workers involved in the Biennale

Delivered to the President & Board La Biennale di Venezia

Art Not Genocide Alliance (ANGA) is a coalition of artists, curators, organisers, and cultural workers refusing artwashing, cultural complicity, and institutional collaboration with genocide, apartheid, and occupation.

Jason Waite

Review:

61st Venice Biennale, *In Minor Keys*

The 61st Venice Biennale entitled, *In Minor Keys*, was initiated by the indomitable Koyo Kouoh who tragically passed away in the midst of the preparations. Stepping in to realise the show was her protege and accomplished curator Marie H el ene Pereira along with Gabe Beckhurst Feijoo, Rasha Salti, Siddhartha Mitter, and Rory Tsapayi. One of the questions that hung over the show was how much of the exhibition did Kouoh manage to plan and how would the realisation team bring the show into being?

Upon entering the Central Pavilion it immediately became clear that Kouoh's innovative vision was lucid and well orchestrated by Pereira and the team. Artists' work intricately imbricated together in a conversation of materiality and ideas. Framed by muted blue and grey walls throughout the pavilion that united the sprawling, disjointed architecture into one flowing discussion will multiple composed of complimentary threads. Instead of a series of individual artist rooms, practices and artworks were in continual dialogue, with artists' practices appearing multiple times throughout out the pavilion evolving a rich and varied space that privileges evolving relations and matter that matters. Highlights abound and include Issa Samb's paintings, the assemblages of Daniel Lind-Ramos, Yoshiko Shimada's art in action, and Edouard Duval-Carrie's alter-like installation.



Central Pavilion of the 61st Venice Biennale, *In Minor Keys*.
Photo by Jason Waite.

The Arsenale instead frames its rooms with a series of flanking moving image works in every other room that sets up a rhythm as one moves through the cavernous old shipbuilding hall. In the place of white museum-style walls, temporary cardboard structures highlight a subtle sustainable approach to the exhibition utilising either its smooth face or ruffled edges that have an almost tapestry like feeling accentuating the surrounding works. Periodically the visitor is asked to choose one path or another in the show which sets up a conscious decision one must make in the act of viewing. Surprisingly, all of a sudden one arrives at the end of the vast hall, a testament to the paced layout that feels open and accessible but with plenty of engaging variation. Kaloki Nyamai's monumental hangings, the contemporary embroidery of Big Chief Demond Melancon, Dan Lie's aromatic bouquets, the sea meditations of Michael Joo, and Senzeni Marasela's hand-stitched hanging textiles are some of the standouts.

A strong showing among the national pavilions was led by Sung Tieu and Henrike Naumann's German Pavilion, evoking life in the former-GDR capped by the pavilion being covered in mosaics evoking the actual block-style apartments that Tieu grew up in with fellow Vietnamese guest workers. The performative artist Ei Arakawa-Nash has created a joyful Japan Pavilion full of 4-6kg baby mannequins that you are invited to take around the pavilion and change their nappy. The reproductive-cos play stemming from the artists own raising of twins has an underbelly of critique both of lack of support for parents in the nation he is representing and how generally the art world has shunned family-friendly infrastructure, working conditions for constant precarity. The Korean Pavilion curated by Binna Choi harnesses the power and potential of spiritual-esque practices of Goen Choi and Hyeree Ro. Yto Barada's cryptic poetics gracefully filled the French Pavilion. While the ongoing performances in the Belgium and Austrian Pavilions captured the spotlight, especially the latter's staging by Florentina Holzinger nude women riding a jetski or hanging upside being a clapper inside a large bell to mark the hour. A contemporary evolution of Viennese Actionism employing the confrontation with corporality but in this case a more nuanced inclusion of diverse ages and body types.

More-than-human perspectives were included by the hybrid mole-man of Jakub Jansa in the Czech and Slovak Pavilion, the four winds in Jenna Suleta's Finnish Pavillion and the aquatic journeys in Bogna Burska and Daniel Kotowski's Polish Pavilion and Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan's Romanian Pavilion. As well as the Holy See Pavilion of soundscapes curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Ben Vickers held in Carmelite monastery garden near the train station.

Recent arrivals of the Congo Pavilion held in a working hospital and Timor-Leste's Pavilion in the Arsenale were both noteworthy shows that can hopefully continue into the next edition.

While Li Yi-Fan's smart and sardonic Taiwan Pavilion curated by Raphael Fonseca was the most reflexive and entertaining diatribe on technology and nationalism that felt urgent and probing. The collateral exhibition *Canicula* is the final show in a trilogy of projects by Fondazione In Between Art Film that has laboriously renovated parts of the abandoned Complesso dell'Ospedaletto over the past 6 years opening a new section each time with a meaningful group of moving image artists including Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Yuyan Wang, and Wang Tuo this time.

The most meaningful event at the biennale was the general strike organised by Art Not Genocide Alliance a group of artists, curators, and cultural workers protesting Israel's participation in the biennale despite the ongoing war and genocide in Palestine. Culminating in the largest protest in the biennale's history with thousands of participants marching together and over 20 pavilions shutting down in solidarity with the movement. A poignant reminder that art does matter and artists have an incredible amount of political agency should they choose to use it.

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Minji Chun

Review: Performing
Conditions:

*Artistic Labor and
Dependency as Form,*
MIT List Visual Arts
Center, Boston

A small cluster of visitors gathers around a lone performer whose speech moves in restless loops. Corporate jargon slips into faltering confession and back again, never quite cohering. His cadence is flat, almost rehearsed to the point of exhaustion. In Goldin+Senneby's delegated performance *M&A* (2013), the actor remains near the entrance for as long as an investment algorithm tied to the work's budget continues to generate returns. His presence feels simultaneously scripted and precarious, suspended between live performance and financial instrument. From the outset, what circulates through the space is a form of labor diffused through speculation and repetition.

Throughout Performing Conditions: Artistic Labor and Dependency as Form, labor slips out of the position of subject matter and thickens into the exhibition's atmosphere instead. It moves between performers, contracts, rehearsals, and institutional protocols. Elsewhere, it recedes into the strained duration of an artwork or the visible fatigue of bodies. The word itself shifts along with these movements. Labor usually refers to physical work, but it also carries associations with childbirth, bodily strain, and reproduction. The exhibition resists separating these entangled meanings. Even moments of withdrawal never fully escape labor's reach. Strike, alongside more muted states of suspension and refusal, inhabits the exhibition as a form of presence-through-absence.

Across the gallery, labor becomes model, method, and material all at once. In Joshua Schwebel's *The Employee* (2018–2025), for instance, labor takes the form of a part-time administrative position extended into a durational performance.

Developed through the staffing conditions of Forest City Gallery in Canada, the work delegated grant-writing labor to a hired employee-performer, turning institutional precarity into its operative structure. Employment itself becomes the model. Gradually, a wage, a schedule, administrative correspondence, and the repetitive temporality of funding applications begin to seep into the work.

With Carolyn Lazard's *Fiction Contract* (2025), labor passes through rehearsal. Filmed in Elmhurst Hospital's simulation center, the work follows an all-Black obstetrics team as they perform a staged childbirth scenario with Jada, a Black birthing mannequin. The room oscillates between training exercise and performance, between clinical procedure and something more fragile. Everyone involved knows the birth is fictional, yet the gestures of care must still be carried out with precision and urgency. Lazard's camera moves between the delivery room and the observation chamber behind a two-way mirror, where Jada's voice and bodily responses are remotely controlled by another worker. Here, simulation functions as a method for rehearsing reproductive labor.

Ghislaine Leung's *Monitors* (2022) gives labor the texture of a signal. A baby monitor carries sound and image from one part of the exhibition to another, transmitting the dim atmosphere of a room devoted to films and archival material on artistic struggle. The device belongs to the domestic sphere of childcare, yet here it turns dependency into a condition of relay. Care and surveillance begin to blur. Someone watches; another space listens. The connection must be maintained. Care labor takes material form through the sustained transmission of dependency itself. The signal remains thin and faint, yet it continues to bind one room to another, holding infrastructural care at the edge of perception.

Beyond these works, the exhibition keeps multiplying labor's forms without allowing the term to come to rest. It appears in contracts that speak on behalf of artworks, in staff bodies asked to stand, in histories of strike and refusal, and in materials that carry the memory of debt, extraction, and support. Labor is not made visible once and for all; it flickers, recedes, returns, and attaches itself to the conditions that keep art in motion. What lingers, finally, is its ambient circulation through bodies, institutions, and systems of dependency.

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Alejandro Soto-
Chaves

Exhibition Review:
Donald Locke,
Camden Art Centre,
London

Modernism produced countless ‘autonomous’ objects. Donald Locke (1930-2010) spent five decades finding ways to hold them. Mounted, trapped, gridded, shelved, boxed, pinned, suspended, photographed, impaled. They migrate from clay to bronze, from sculpture to painting, from painting to literal *plein air*, from the land back into the artifice of photography. *Resistant Forms*, the first major survey of the Guyanese-British artist in London, reveals a practice in which forms rarely appear without a mechanism designed to catch them. Organised by Spike Island (Bristol), Ikon Gallery (Birmingham) and Camden Art Centre—with the Camden iteration curated by Martin Clark and Gina Buenfeld-Murley in collaboration with Robert Leckie—resisting the gravitational pull of biography.

The exhibition opens with the ceramic and metal sculptures for which Locke first became known. Their biomorphic language has often been discussed in terms of fertility and organicity. The paired vessels, bifurcating forms similar to cellular structures, invoke reproductive growth. What becomes striking in retrospect is the persistence of certain formal units that continue to surface long after the biomorphs themselves dissolve. Recurrence already appears as a governing principle. Forms split, double, reproduce themselves.

That logic reaches an initial critical point during his London years. *The Plantation Series*, produced throughout the 1970s, occupies one of the strongest sections of the exhibition. Here, the grid emerges as a dominant structure. Growing up between sugar plantations in Guyana, Locke understood the plantation as an onto-epistemic system that organised labour and movement, therefore, granting discernibility of its subjects. His gridded paintings and assemblages absorb those histories into method. The plantation, in Locke's work, operates as a visual structure to purge *jumbies*. Keep that in mind.

Nowhere is this clearer than in his first *Trophies of Empire* (1972–74), where ceramic forms are mounted within found objects sourced from Portobello Road Market and second-hand shops near Locke's home in Ladbroke Grove. These recurring cylindrical elements he often described as *bullets*. The term is as cheeky as it is useful. They resemble ammunition. Or fingers. Or bodies. And they *obviously* resemble phalluses. Nonetheless, and more significantly, they possess the rare luxury of circulation. Removed from one context, inserted into another, they disclose themselves as units of organisation. Their ambiguity is precisely their power. Held hostage within trophies, candle holders and cabinet-like structures, the *bullets* transmute the language of display into an image of subjugation itself. The testo-driven phallic ammo surrender(ED) to a latticed harness.

A large room dedicated to the works of the 1990s reveals another dimension of Locke's practice. At first glance, these immense black paintings appear monochromatic. Asphaltic, oxide-dense impastos dominate the surfaces. Photographs and photocopies emerge from beneath layers of paint. Fragments of earlier sculptures overlay. Fibre, collage and relief debris interrupt the picture plane. All paintings carry physical density. Against minimalist flatness, Locke quarried.

This room contains some of the exhibition's most compelling relationships between image and object. Locke incorporated colonial ethnographic material and even photographs of his own oeuvre. Documentation becomes part of the work's material life. Images mingle through paintings in much the same way the bullets circulate through the assemblages. Photographs of sculptures return as fragments embedded within painted surfaces. Earlier works, thus, acquire a second existence. Painting, a creolised infinite screen revamping Fontana's *concetto spaziale*, absorbs leaflets and reproductions until it begins to mimic a repository.

Clark and Buenfeld-Murley's curatorial choices afford to amplify this reading. Moving through the galleries, one encounters a subtle chromatic progression. Black gives way to a *kind of blue*, cerulean. Blue slowly approaches red. The transition progresses gradually, gracefully, almost hushed. The blue accumulates across paintings and works on paper, carrying associations with oceanic histories and migration. It is somehow caustic that an artist coming from the Caribbean only experienced insularity when he moved to the UK, after receiving a British Council scholarship. Red appears later, emerging through ruptures, cuts (ricordate i tagli!) and exposed surfaces. Colour behaves historically. It travels through the exhibition as forms do.

A slideshow, covert in a passageway between two main rooms, documenting *The Journey* (1973–74) and *Arizona Squares: An Environment with Fifteen Black Squares* (1979–81), introduces another concern. Locke's self-fashioning as a concurrent artist, archivist and documentarian is astounding. Ceramic bullets appear dispersed across nameless, unremembered landscapes in Spain, Britain, and France. Black paintings were carried into the Arizona desert. The environment becomes a temporary stage through which forms pass. The photographs, however, stage a quiet rebellion against ephemera. These works engage Environmental/Land Art from an unusual position. Monumentality never appears to be the objective. The interventions feel provisional, almost nomadic. They arrive at departure.

The final rooms, dedicated to the years spent in Atlanta, uncover an assemblage practice stimulated by the visual traditions of the American South. The shift in materials is unmistakable and striking. *Southern Mansions* (1996) embalms the moment. The work evokes a tau cross, a reliquary, the scar of the whip, a bulleted coat rack and a black tornado distorting the past, whether antebellum slavery architecture or a photograph of Locke's own cabinets. Right next to it, *Trophies of Empire #2 (The Cabinet of Billy Mick Miller [Altar Piece of Hernando Cortez])* (2006-2008), one of the latest pieces by Locke included in the show, doubles down on the bet and wraps everything up in extraordinary bravura. Objets trouvés occupy discrete compartments without resolving into a single narrative, despite the two-fold title. It is indeed another cabinet, though one that has entered the ceremonial territory of an altarpiece. Moreover, it hints at a colonial wound that exceeds the plantation world from which his practice emerged, entering into dialogue with the large sculpture pieces *The Legacy of Hernando Cortes #2* (2008) and *Malinche* (2010). History remains fragmented. Meaning emerges through adjacency. Bullets next to small tree trunks. Wooden chunks attached to cookware handles. Human hair displayed like a relic beside ceramic effigies. Materials carry the burden of memory.

A body of work such as Locke's inevitably acquires the structure of a myth. Raised in Guyana, trained within the institutions of the Imperial metropolis, moulded by decades in the American South, attentive to the histories of colonial Latin America, and genuinely interested in Classical mythology or in ancient Guyanese petroglyphs, Locke assembled one of the most syncretic artistic practices of his generation.

One is reminded of the Guyanese *Ole Higue*, a shape-shifting woman who removes her skin at night and crosses the sky as a fireball, leaving black, blue and red traces upon the bodies of her beloved victims: bled-out babies and young children. Locke's work performs a curious ultra-rational inversion of that myth. Forms travel, colonial pasts converge, yet the skin always reasserts itself. Nothing escapes taxonomy. Grids reappear. Compartments multiply. Cabinets, vitrines and shelves patiently gather what has been dispersed. If the *Ole Higue* slips through keyholes, Locke builds structures to catch her. Not to destroy her. To classify her. To hold her still for a moment, laying bare the hair, bones, feathers and shackles from which she is assembled. This is Locke's skin trap.

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Aram Masharqa
Review: Paul Majek,
House of Annetta,
London

Paul Majek's paintings feel like sculpture. Yes, because each broad, heavy stroke of oil or charcoal carries an embodied sense of the mark-maker. Yes, because his works take on three dimensions, often painted or drawn onto wood. And yes, because they often exist within an altar-like installation, composed of fragments of furniture from his family home, or reeds which extend out from the paintings themselves. But these are all ways his paintings actually cross into the realm of sculpture. There is another sense, belonging more to simile than to metaphor, that his work gestures towards sculpture, towards the mysterious opacity of the object, without ever being able to fully cross over. An easy adjective would be 'liminal', but this suggests a kind of planned, deliberate strategy. A more accurate, but more haunting word might be 'purgatory'.

Losing a Home is an exhibition which takes place in an old home. House of Annetta was once the home of Annetta Pedretti in Spitalfields, East London, a cybernetician and architectural designer who was committed in her lifetime to campaigning against the negative effects of gentrification and the broader financial speculation on housing stock. To honour this legacy, her family guaranteed that the building would only be used for community-interest organisations, and House of Annetta took over the semi-derelict building in 2020. Part of continuing Annetta's ethos meant taking a sustainable approach to repairing the home, using as much pre-existing material as possible. The challenge for any artist or curator is that the retrofitted home is itself an immersive installation. Majek's work emerges out of the context seamlessly: both the work and the space contain the memory of home without attempting merely to recreate it.

Both House of Annetta and Majek's paintings are palimpsests. Originally, palimpsests were manuscript pages where the original text would have been scraped or washed off to be reused – a sustainable answer to the high cost of parchment in the Middle Ages. They feel strangely contemporary, speaking to our current fascination with memory, and our everyday practices of writing and rewriting. Andreas Huyssen, writing about the 'memory boom' in contemporary art and society, finds the palimpsest a useful framework for understanding the traces of memory embedded in a sculpture, a building, or a city. The palimpsest, he explains, was previously reserved for the world of literature. I recalled false dates and erased printer signatures on Shakespeare's early quartos, brought to light by advanced imaging technology in Zachary Lesser's *Ghosts, Holes, Rips and Scrapes* (2021). By applying the palimpsest to sculpture and architecture, the result is not to read them as texts, but to demonstrate that their unique materiality actually traces this palimpsestic form. With sculpture, what Huyssen calls memory sculpture, a form of 'localizable, even corporeal memory' is inscribed into the work, distinct from the grand, historicising work of the monument.

Majek's method disrupts any straightforward process of remembering. Reductive monoprints on paper, such as *Rushing Nowhere* (2024) or *I Meet My Own Face* (2024), enact the subtractions of the palimpsest without the subsequent additions: paper is pressed onto a base plate, transferring the ink whilst it is still wet. Majek's subjects are often drawn from archival family photos only partially known to him, and this partial recollection is repeated in the monoprint transference process, each print a memory of a lost original. Memory is inscribed through its fragments, rather than represented in totality.

Writing about the recent revival in the 2010s liminal aesthetic (especially about the 2026 film *Backrooms*), Lewis Gordon explains that liminal spaces feel ‘strangely neutered’ and disconnected from lived, political reality.¹ In fact, they are defined by their lack of political substance, evoking a surface-level version of the uncanny. If the liminal aesthetics has any precedent, it might be minimalism, but this is the minimalism of the Kardashian-West LA megamansion: corridors and hallways all the way down.

The transient opacity in Majek’s work draws on a longer tradition of fugitivity and marronage. Its original meaning pertained to runaway slaves in the US and Caribbean, either as individual strategies of creating temporary spaces of resistance, or as larger-scale acts of escape. Fugitivity has come to occupy a central place in the Black Radical Tradition – including theorists such as Cedric Robinson, Fred Moten, and Stefano Harvey – as an articulation of freedom rooted in the history of the African diaspora. Locating freedom in spaces of hiding is described by Majek as the ‘wilderness’, reflected in the reeds which have come to characterise his recent works and installations. It is significant that reeds grow at the boundary between land and bodies of water. This is not a boundary which is purely liminal, but is instead rooted in historically specific geographies of the Black diaspora: riverbanks, coasts, spaces of commerce and transfer.



Paul Majek, *Our Mothers Turn into Flowers*, 2024. Oil, acrylic, soft pastel on wood .
Dimensions variable. Installation view. Image: Emmanuel Igboodu (@yorex_visuals).

Losing a Home is anchored by one of the most domestic pieces in the show, *To My Son* (2025). The boy in the foreground of the painting, perhaps the 'son', is set apart from the rest of the scene, both included and excluded from it. The larger figure, perhaps the parent, is shown dissolving into the domestic memory. This is a palimpsestic vision of a past, with multiple, maybe contradicting memories written over one another. The vibrancy of the painting's colour is tinged with a nostalgia, reminding us of the word's origin: the pain of not being able to return home. The painting is hung over what would have been Annetta's fireplace, situating the scene within the space of the sitting room, the heart of the home. Again, there is both harmony and disjoint: the painting both belongs in the room, and is a temporary fixture within it. This is the haptic, tactile sense of these paintings as memory sculpture. They begin to cross into the realm of the physical, but evade straightforward meaning just as we try to make sense of them.

¹ Lewis Gordon, "The Life and Death of the 'Liminal Space'," *ArtReview*, June 2, 2026.

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