



Texture Hunger

A response to the group exhibition *Traces*
written by Blair Fornwald

EXHIBITION | 12 November – 11 December 2021

Traces explores the translation, appropriation, and rebirth of images through re-photography, collage and sculpture. The colour of what you were. An imprint of then, seen from here. Everything shifted, though nothing changed. Traveling to the view and onto one another. *Traces* are what's left, after. Curated by Tayler Buss and Meganelizabeth Diamond.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alexis L-Grisé is a Métis artist who lives in Winnipeg; Treaty No. 1 Territory. Alexis attended the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax as well as the Cooper Union School for the Arts in New York. His works are centered around the process and making of images in relation to place and time.

Katrina Marie Mendoza works with drawings as projections of space and the possibility of their becoming objects.

Hanna Reimer “I am a Treaty 1-based multidisciplinary artist currently working towards my BFA at the School of Art, University of Manitoba. Texture, pattern, and hands-on processes play a crucial role in my practice, which in the past has manifested through experiments with fabric, printmaking, digital art, and painting. My recent work pushes back and forth between analogue and digital art, and how putting an image through a process that deteriorates it legitimizes the mistakes it already had.”

Tobin Rowland is a Treaty 1-based multidisciplinary queer artist.

“My work creates space to yearn for the known in conjunction with the unknown. The decrepit familiarity of your kitchen chair now floats alongside my parents crumbling shower tiles. To wrap you in layers of an unsuspected happy accident, to bundle you up and send you on your way. The fleeting moment of crossing paths.” – Tobin Rowland

Chukwudubem Ukaigwe is a Nigerian born song, dispersed by a transient Atlantic breeze, currently passing through Canada. He consciously uses a variety of mediums to relay a plurality of ideas at any given time. He approaches his art practice as a conversation, or a portal into one, and in some instances, as an interpretation of this ongoing exchange. Chukwudubem operates as an interdisciplinary artist, curator, writer, and cultural worker. Ukaigwe is a founding member of Patterns Collective.

Texture Hunger

The last two years or so have been marked by an onslaught of strange new variants of lack and want. The most specific longings have triggered in me a pointed nostalgia that is simultaneously painful and strangely pleasurable to experience: the sense memory of stepping off a plane and taking the first whiff of salty ocean air, or the way my friend's oversized costume jewelry would dig into my sternum when she hugged me. I've longed to taste other people's cooking; their vegetables chopped more finely or coarsely than I would do so myself; their dishes seasoned with spices that aren't part of my regular repertoire. And I've longed for embodied experiences with art—art that is offline, off-screen, material and textural. I've come to think of this longing as a kind of starvation for texture and sensory variety, imagining that perhaps there's a word in German for it: *texturhunger*.

This particular longing has definitely intensified in recent years as so many interactions have taken place via screens, but it predates the pandemic by decades. Did it begin when I started taking digital photos? When my hand forgot how to write cursive? When I first tried to pinch-zoom in on an object on the horizon or on tiny print in a book? I have no distaste for technology or screen-based media but have been feeling the absence of its opposites: a Polaroid image coming into view as I hold it in my hand, a glossy magazine to idly flip through, a handwritten letter arriving by post, scented, lightly, like the home of the sender.

Visiting *Traces* satisfied some of this desire for the real, presenting pleasingly material print and photo-based works utilizing rephotography, phototransfer, image manipulation, and assemblage techniques. I was drawn to all of the subtle details that rarely come across in exhibition documentation: wavering, imperfect edges and seams, the warp and weft of canvas, the deckled edge of thick rag paper, the sheen and drape of silk, the grain of scrap lumber, a wrinkle here and there, the slight warp of a stretcher bar that allows a sidelong glance behind the canvas.

Katrina Marie Mendoza's work drew my attention to the textural surfaces and architectural peculiarities of the gallery itself. Installed in PLATFORM's antechamber gallery, Mendoza's works spreads across the floor and reaches up into the rafters, implicating the gallery's one-hundred-and-twenty-plus-year-old floorboards and ductwork, traces of past installations, and ad-hoc retrofits which might otherwise go unnoticed into her composition. The tenuous constructions in her work make use of a repertoire of forms that reappear in various iterations here and elsewhere. Mendoza's vaguely architectural digital line drawings are printed on squares of satin, and are placed amongst forms that partially recreate the illustrations in three dimensions: a few hang lazily from wavering black lines cut from opaque Plexiglas; another is attached with wooden clothespins to a thin wooden plank propped up against the wall, another is spread out on the floor like a doll's blanket; yet another is draped over a tiny tent-like armature beside a flickering battery-operated tealight candle. These forms, structures and arrangements, the artist states, represent feelings or fragments of memory. In part, they attempt poetic and non-representational recreations of Mendoza's family members' homes in the Philippines as remembered by the artist. Absent literal markers of the domestic space, like furniture and home decor, Mendoza instead crafts tableaux where the scale and proximity of objects feels homelike and specific: upon a narrow windowsill of a shelf, for instance, are tiny abstract sculptures gathered together like bottles of perfume, or vacation souvenirs, or stationery supplies. While a photograph might supplant or

affix one's memory of a place, Mendoza's fragile constructions occupy space in much the same way that memories reside in our minds.

While an analog photographer might carefully compose a shot or hesitate for a moment before clicking the shutter and committing an image to film, the ease of digital photography means that there's no need to be jurisprudent—one can just click away until they get what they want. My phone, like many, holds thousands of images on it, some documenting the most meaningful and important events in my life, others just artless visual notes to self, bewildering or funny screencaps, and blurry accidents I've neglected to delete. Hanna Reimer's elegant abstractions began as the latter, as "bad" images sorted by the Google Photos algorithm into a "Review and Delete" folder. Rescuing these images from their digital purgatory, Reimer subjects them to numerous manipulations, using Photoshop, Blender, and other photo editing tools that she admits she doesn't really know how to use. The final images have no identifiable visual referents; they are comprised of thick moiré stripes and blocky pixels, rendered in juicy, oversaturated tones. Printed on smooth satin and hung so that they drape and fold, Reimer introduces three-dimensionality to these born-digital images. Her luxuriously material treatment of these "bad" images, manipulated with the "let's see what happens" glee of an archly unselfconscious amateur, questions notions of success and failure, carving out a productive, funny little niche in between.

Tobin Rowland's process feels similarly motivated by playful experimentation and an interest in manifesting the physical and the singular from the digital and the multiple. Rowland's translatory processes are recipes, not for disaster exactly, but for a kind of productive decomposition, like feeding a compost pile or burning the underbrush in a forest to encourage new growth. They draw upon an eclectic personal archive of images compiled from the internet, first subjecting them to digital manipulations, then photocopying them in black and white and transferring them with Mod Podge onto canvas, a haphazard process that results in significant deterioration. Here Rowland presents three works utilizing this technique; amongst them, only one source image is truly legible, a picture of Dolly Parton, grinning in a frilly dress, with a shotgun. A not entirely incidental aside, this and another image of Parton from the same shoot appear regularly in memes and on tees and other merch sold by sketchy-looking online retailers, usually emblazoned with text: *FUCK AROUND* above, *FIND OUT*, below.

Rowland's are perhaps the most viscerally textural works in the exhibition. Like birthday cakes left out in the rain, they manage to be both charming and repellent. Glitchy, wrinkly, hard-to-make-out images gleam under a slick layer of Mod Podge and are adorned with heart-shaped stickers, daubs of bright colour, and scratchy little abstract drawings. Though they appropriate images available to anyone anywhere, Rowland's accretive processes make them feel like they are part of a defiantly private visual lexicon.

The complex constructions in Chukwudubem Ukaigwe's *Labyrinths* series are like microcosms, articulating, both pictorially, and through their materiality, the cataclysmic impacts of overdevelopment and overconsumption in wealthy nations. A skilled bricoleur, Ukaigwe has fashioned his work from materials found on construction sites: offcuts and scraps of wood, bits of rusted metal hardware, and discarded bricks are stacked, hammered, glued, and wired together to form little raft-like assemblages which are dispatched throughout the gallery. Transferred directly onto their wooden substrates are photographic images of North American cityscapes full of brick and metal, gleaming glass skyscrapers and iconic architecture. And painted directly onto these images, with near-photographic verisimilitude,

are factories and oil refineries, fires and plumes of acrid smoke and people navigating waterways that used to be streets. Collapsing both time and space, this work is a reminder that overdevelopment in one region is concomitant with underdevelopment in another, that our resources are both finite and unevenly distributed, and that there is no construction without destruction.

Though Ukaigwe depicts horrific scenes, they are rendered in a palette somewhat more vibrant and alive than the photographic images underneath; the clouds of smoke are opalescent, the water shimmers with bright turquoise and rich indigo, verdant green plant life covers pavement and concrete. Amidst all the chaos and destruction, there is still beauty, there is calm, and there is hope.

Alexis L.-Grisé's cyanotypes are the only works in *Traces* produced without any interfacing between digital and analog techniques. A type of cameraless photography, producing a cyanotype involves coating a surface with a photosensitive mixture of iron compounds and placing materials directly atop the surface. When exposed to the sun or other ultraviolet light, then washed, the iron oxidizes and ghostly white images appear on a vibrant Prussian blue background. L.-Grisé's work is quiet, contemplative, and at first glance, laudably straightforward. *Feather* is an afterimage of a feather. In *Film still*, we are presented with three different exposures of an identical 16mm film still depicting a flat Prairie road against a spare landscape.

Though quite simple, L.-Grisé's works are laden with associative potential. The feather, a metaphor for flight, is stilled against a ground bluer than any sky. The image in *Film still*, from L.-Grisé's film, *Emerson*, depicts the liminal space along the Canada-United States border. A perfect illustration of one-point perspective, the road narrows and eventually disappears along the horizon line. Our eyes follow it, also crossing this invisible boundary.

All of these works are the physical manifestations of things both immaterial and real. Fleeting memories, digital artifacts, restlessness, climate anxiety, the internet, a whim, a threshold, a question about the future. Not only are these all real, but they've all become constant companions during a strange and lonely time. It's good to see them sometimes.

Blair Fornwald

Blair Fornwald (she/they) lives in Winnipeg, Treaty 1 Territory, and is Director/Curator of the School of Art Gallery, at the University of Manitoba. Previously Dunlop Art Gallery and RPL Film Theatre's Curator, Moving Image and Performance, Fornwald has curated and co-curated over forty projects, including nationally-touring exhibitions such as Bev Pike's *Grottesque* and the large-scale group exhibition *Material Girls*. Fornwald has published writing for Black Dog Publishing, Neutral Ground, Vtape, the Organization for Saskatchewan Arts Councils and CARFAC Saskatchewan, as well as PUBLIC, BlackFlash, and Boulderpavement magazines. As an interdisciplinary artist, she has presented and performed work across Canada, the United States, and in Germany. Fornwald's practices are united by a collaborative impulse and an interest in how humor can be used to confront difficult truths. A queer white settler born and raised in Treaty 4 Territory/ rural Saskatchewan, Fornwald is also interested in Prairie (queer) aesthetics, regionalism, and social class. She holds a BFA from the University of Regina and an MFA from Western University in London, Ontario.

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121-100 Arthur Street
Winnipeg MB
R3B 1H3

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