



LONGEVITY
OR A LACK THEREOF

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Anthea Black and Thea Yabut

Francisco-Fernando Granados

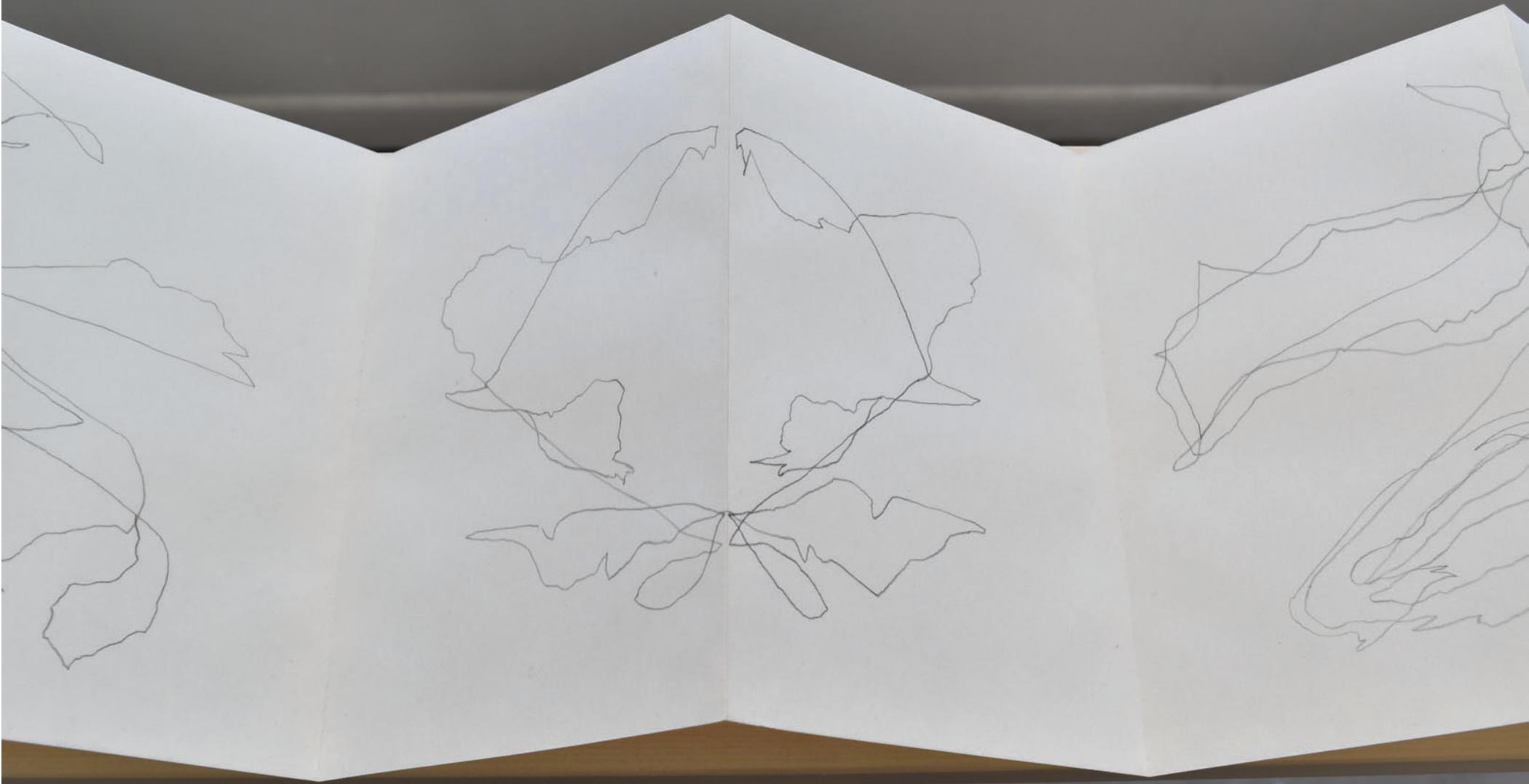
Derek Liddington

Alex Morrison

Meghan Price

Curated by Renée van der Avoird

MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario



Anthea Black and Thea Yabut, *Mirror Drawing Book*, 2016, graphite on rice paper, hand bound accordion book, 11 x 18 cm (closed)

The Drawn Line: Alterity, Experiment and Archive

BY RENÉE VAN DER AVOIRD

For its immediacy and truthfulness, drawing has always been a fundamental part of human expression. Defined as a mark-making process used to produce a line-based composition,¹ it provides an authentic document of bodily motion in a particular time and space. In contemporary practice, artists are opening up the possibilities of this time-honoured medium, taking advantage of its versatility and pushing it beyond its traditional uses. Drawing anywhere, on any surface, in combination with any number of other strategies and materials, they illuminate the ways in which seemingly stringent definitions of the medium can become porous.

Longevity or a Lack Thereof comprises work by six such artists, whose rigorous drawing practices form the basis of their multidisciplinary outputs. Anthea Black, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Derek Liddington, Alex Morrison, Meghan Price and Thea Yabut employ drawing as a foundational and consistent mode of expression. The exhibition highlights the cross-disciplinarity embraced by these Canadian artists, who broaden the medium by borrowing from sculpture, textile, performance and installation. Together, their works assert the vitality of drawing today, expanding it from its conventional preparatory or mimetic function into larger conversations about duration, documentation, collaboration and identity.

In their collaborative work, Anthea Black and Thea Yabut explore individuality and alterity through a shared drawing experience. *Mirror Drawings* is an ongoing series in which they perform an exercise of mirroring one another's actions with graphite on paper. The resulting drawings are gestural records of a singular moment of existence from dual perspectives. While each artist maintains her own solo studio practice (Black's in Toronto and San Francisco; Yabut's in Montreal), for *Mirror Drawings*, they sit face-to-face and simultaneously mimic one another's marks on the page. The drawings are symmetrical yet abstract, at times evocative of the human figure. The delicate lines exhibit an uneven, shifting quality that brings notions of chance and difference to the fore. Possibilities for imagining embodied and subjective differences—physical, sexual, gendered, ethnic—are opened.



Francisco-Fernando Granados, *spatial profiling...* (after Margaret Dragu's *Eine Kleine Nacht Radio*), 2013. Performed for Mayworks, Festival of Working People and the arts, Toronto. Three-hour performance and site specific drawing, dimensions variable. Marker on wall. Photo: Manolo Lugo.

Black and Yabut extend their mirrored abstractions into a horizontal format in *Mirror Drawing Book*, a nine-panel accordion fold publication containing a series of connected drawings. The folds of the pages, which offer natural boundaries between the drawings, relate to bookmaking (Black is trained as an antiquarian bookmaker), as well as sculpture (Yabut sculpts forms out of paper pulp, pencil shavings and other materials found in the studio). Evidently, their collaboration is equal on both sides, bolstered by their separate studio practices. And yet, drawing remains crucial for each of them: it enables freedom, experimentation and the development of new conceptual possibilities of working at once together and individually.

In a similar vein, Francisco-Fernando Granados's *spatial profiling... (extended)* posits the drawn line as a site of collaboration and alterity. The ongoing project, which has been presented in various iterations across Canada and the United States as well as Finland, comprises a participatory durational action and site-specific wall drawing. At the MacLaren, the work is enacted by three performers² who repetitively trace the outline of their own profiles along the gallery wall as they gradually move through space. The action rotates so that only one performer draws at a time, while the other two sit back-to-back on chairs in the gallery, reading aloud excerpts from Albert Camus' 1942 novel, *The Stranger*, and Jacques Derrida's 1996 theoretical text, *Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad / from the Foreigner*. When the person who is drawing reaches the edge of fatigue, they switch positions with one of the readers. The process continues for four hours, and the resulting drawing is an elongated abstract pattern that represents the varied profiles of the performers. The work pushes the limits of the performers' bodies, and re-frames the author-subject binary. The artist notes, "through this kind of handing-over of the action, ideas around the singularity of authorship (and the very claims to mastery that are at the heart of drawing as medium) can be suspended into a space of doubt, where no single author can be named. A shift towards the negative space, if we wanted to think about it in formal terms."³

In response to our current climate of widespread public surveillance and carding, Granados favours indexical or mimetic representations of the body in which identity is obscured. Born in Guatemala and currently based in Toronto, the artist has experienced the othering that accompanies a transcontinental move. *spatial profiling... (extended)* continues his examination of foreignness and identity politics through a lens that is both critical and personal. He skilfully employs collaborative performance and abstract drawing as vehicles for dissent against accepted norms and expected representations. In earlier iterations of this project, Granados performed the durational drawing himself in front of a live audience. At the MacLaren, the collaborative version removes the live performance aspect (the action is completed and documented before the exhibition opens) and adds an emancipatory one: through the repetitive trace, the performers act in lieu of Granados, negating the expectation for the performance artist to be front-and-centre, and embracing, instead, his right to refuse identification.



Derek Liddington, *A man, not unlike me, sitting where I sit, leaning how I lean, drinking from my mug*, 2015, graphite on canvas, hand painted watercolour on maple, 316 x 280 cm. Courtesy of Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto

The body as a fleeting and fractured image is also present in the work of Toronto artist Derek Liddington. In tandem with ambitious multidisciplinary projects, Liddington maintains a steady drawing practice that embraces experimental methods. *A man, not unlike me, sitting where I sit, leaning how I lean, drinking from my mug* (2015) is a graphite-on-canvas drawing that traces (literally) the pose of a male model. Liddington asks the model to emulate his own posture, thereby threading in an element of autobiography, which is characteristic of his work. The model is then draped in canvas, the folds and waves of which respond naturally to his physical contours.

Painstakingly, Liddington traces the body using graphite, documenting the model's attempt to suspend movement. As the body makes adjustments over time, the canvas shifts, impeding the artist's ability to gather a truly accurate rendering of the sitter. Once the tracing is complete, the canvas is lifted and stretched open to reveal corporeal forms fragmented into almost complete abstraction. The composition is an array of dislocated textural renderings that capture the elusive properties of the body rather than a realistic representation.

Liddington's innovative approach comprises the most basic form of drawing: tracing. Where Black and Yabut's drawings trace imagined forms, Liddington's are a result of physical pressure against a surface, a form of *frottage*. Yet, despite this indexical quality, his tracings have an evanescent, fugitive character. Like specters, they enable the subject to assume a new presence as it is removed from its real-life context. Lucy Lippard's description of tracing as a way to create new realities in those already at hand is applicable here: instead of the model's presence, the drawing embodies that of the artist—his time and labour. Inseparable from the moment of its making and from the fleetingness of that moment, Liddington's drawing is not a representation but a memento.⁵

For Toronto artist Meghan Price, tracing is a tool for recontextualizing natural patterns into constructed forms. In *Body Rock* (2014), graphite-on-paper *frottage* drawings are cut into irregularly shaped fragments and delicately sewn together into boulder-like geometric forms. To achieve such rich textures, Price rubs graphite against a variety of surfaces, revealing lush patterns and striking gradients of black and grey, punctuated by nicks and grooves picked up directly from gritty surfaces.

The precise needlework that joins the paper shards reveals immense skill and patience on the part of Price. Her fragile, animate rock forms are made through improvised pattern drafting and stitching—a process analogous to dressmaking. Wall-mounted with small dowels,



Meghan Price, *Body Rock* (detail), 2014, graphite on stitched paper. Installation view at the Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, 2016. Photo: Brian Medina

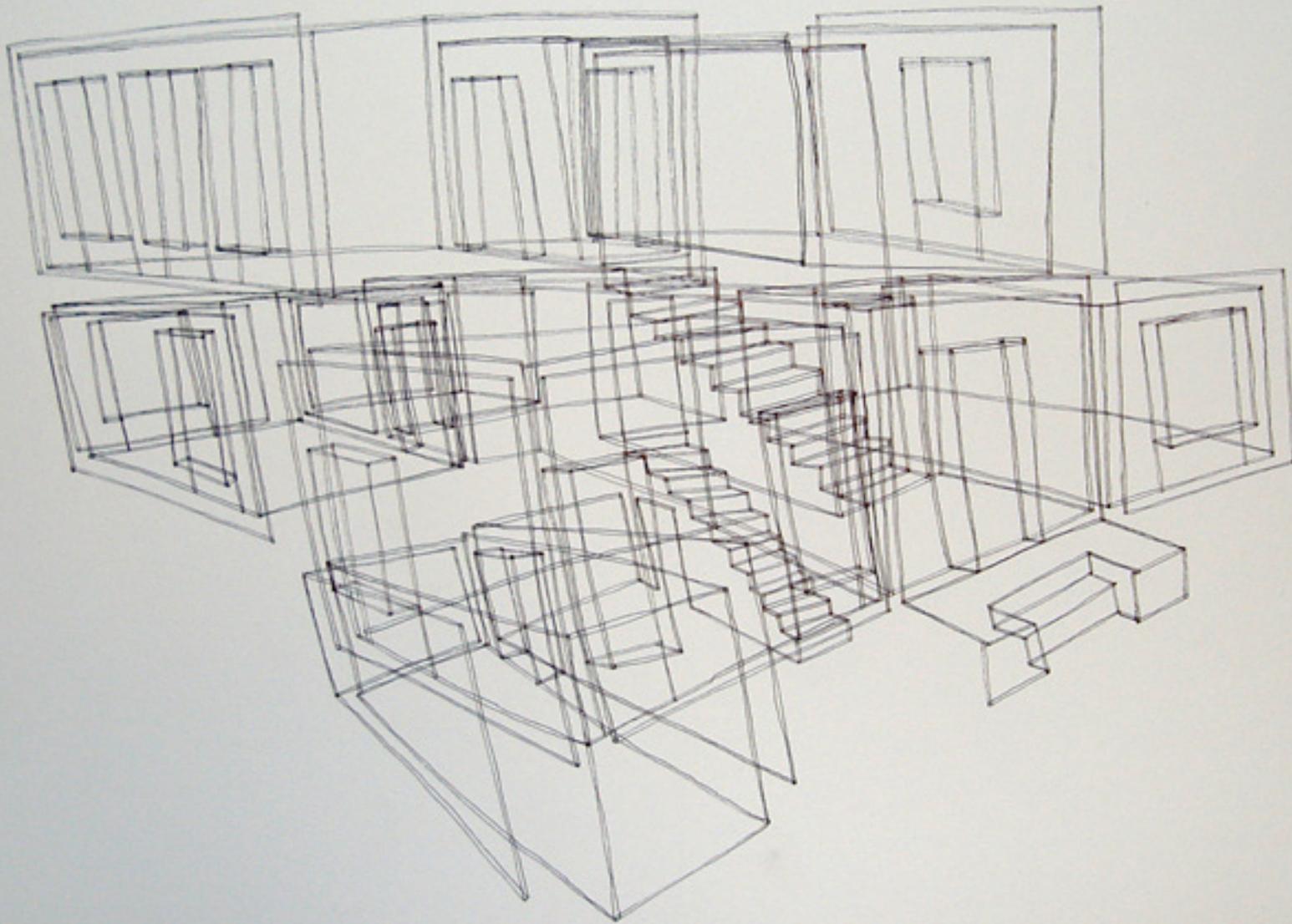
the boulders appear weightless, swaying gently as visitors walk past. The work brings forth several paradoxes: the lightness of the paper versus the weight of a boulder; the loose *frottage* textures versus the precise, stitched lines; the flatness of the paper versus the protrusion of sculptural forms from the wall.

Frottage preserves memories of a space or an object; it reveals layers of time. That Price experiments with this technique is no surprise, as notions of temporality are central to her practice. Many of her recent projects, including *Body Rock*, bring to mind geologic timescales, in which stone is considered temporal and relatively active. Price remarks: "The prevailing understanding of stone is that it is a lifeless, unyielding material. However, when viewed within its own timescale or "deep time", geology is fluid—its formations always in the midst of change."⁶

Victoria, British Columbia-based artist Alex Morrison preserves memories with drawing, although his works derive from mental images, not physical surfaces like those of Price. Drawn directly onto the gallery wall with deft formal ability, *Every House I've Lived in From Memory* (2005–2017) is a series of ten new images that depict homes in which Morrison has resided over the past twelve years.

This UK-born artist works in sculpture, installation and painting, in addition to drawing. His interests include built environments, architectural styles and (often counter-cultural) modes of inhabitation. At the MacLaren, Morrison's drawings are part of a larger body of work that chronicles his ever-growing list of residences since birth. The breadth of his former addresses is astonishing: there are over thirty-five of them from an array of Canadian, American and European cities. *Every House* evokes a nomadic, a socially transgressive character, one whose transitory existence thwarts conventional notions of consumerism and domesticity. By the same token, the drawings pay no attention to "things": expertly rendered in thin, even lines, they exclude all furnishings and trim. Their deliberate sparseness underscores the artist's lack of relationship with the contents of his former homes. The drawings are not even "things" themselves, as upon the close of the exhibition they will be painted over.

In an essay on drawing, Art historian Norman Bryson coined the phrase "inaugural blankness": the emptiness of a surface before the motions of a point trace lines across it.⁷ In Morrison's case, the inaugural blankness is the gallery wall, an entirely open zone, operating in real time. Like all the works in *Longevity of a Lack Thereof*, Morrison's are visual traces of thought that exist in the present tense, in the time of their own unfolding, representing signs of movement and buried histories.⁸



Alex Morrison, *Every House I've Ever Lived In Drawn From Memory* (detail), 1998-ongoing, felt tip pen on wall, installation view Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2003. Courtesy of the artist

As a documentary tool, drawing records time and space, giving form to physical actions and individual memories. In these five exploratory drawing projects the theme of temporality recurs and is manifested in myriad ways, ranging from graphite recordings of deep time to delicate ink tracings of *in-situ* performances. When it comes to longevity, or a lack thereof, drawing itself is said to be immediate, infinite, never-ending and always in motion.⁹ By pushing drawing beyond its material and conceptual limits, these six artists extend the continuum and relevance of our most primal medium.

¹ Dexter, Emma. *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*. Phaidon Press Ltd., London, UK. 2005. Page 5.

² Performers at the MacLaren are Tyler Durbano, Luc Fortin and Anna Lee.

³ Email correspondence with the artist. February 27, 2018.

⁴ Quoted in Pesanti, Allegra, *Apparitions: Frottages and Rubbings from 1860 to Now*. Exhibition catalogue, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, The Menil Collection, Houston. Yale University Press, New Haven and London. Page 14.

⁵ Newman, Michael. "The Marks, Traces and Gestures of Drawing" in *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act*. Exhibition catalogue, The Drawing Centre, London and Tate, London. Page 96.

⁶ Price, Meghan. "Body Rock: Artist Statement." <http://www.harbourfrontcentre.com/visualarts/2016/non-objective/>. Accessed February 6, 2018.

⁷ Bryson, Norman. "A Walk for a Walk's Sake," in *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act*. Exhibition catalogue, The Drawing Centre, London and Tate, London. Page 149.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dexter, Emma. *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*. Phaidon Press Ltd., London, UK. 2005. Page 10.

Artist Biographies

Anthea Black is an artist, writer, and cultural worker based in San Francisco and Toronto. Her studio work takes the form of printmaking, drawing, publications, textiles and performance to address feminist and queer history, collaboration, materiality, and labour. Black has exhibited in Canada, the US, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Norway. She is the co-editor of *HANDBOOK: Supporting Queer and Trans Students in Art and Design Education* with Shamina Chherawala. As a graduate of the Alberta College of Art and Design (BFA, Drawing, 2003) Black was named the ACAD Board of Governors Alumni of Excellence in 2015. She is an Assistant Professor in Printmaking and Graduate Fine Arts at the California College of the Arts.

Francisco-Fernando Granados is a Toronto-based artist and writer. His multidisciplinary critical practice spans performance, installation, cultural theory, digital media, public art and community-based projects. He has presented work in galleries, museums, theatres, artist-run centres and non-traditional sites since 2005. Awards and honours include Emerging Artist Grants from the Toronto and Ontario Arts Councils, a Projects to Visual Artists grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Governor General's Silver Medal for academic achievement upon graduating from Emily Carr University in 2010, and being named as one of Canada's 30 Under 30 by BLOUIN ARTINFO in 2014. He completed a Masters of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto in 2012.

Derek Liddington obtained his MFA from Western University and BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. His work holds a continuous interest in cultural memory and its iterations through abstraction, representation and modernist forms of visual language. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, with recent solo exhibitions at AKA Gallery, Saskatoon; the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto; and the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge. Liddington has received numerous public and foundation grants, including support from the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts as well as being a finalist for the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts. Liddington currently practices in Toronto.

Alex Morrison was born in Redruth, UK and currently lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Levy Delval, Brussels; White Columns solo booth, Independent, Brussels; Komplot, Brussels; La Plage, Paris; Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto; Mélange, Cologne; Simon Fraser University Art Gallery, Vancouver; and Burnaby Art Gallery, Vancouver. Selected recent group shows include: *La Norme Ideale*, Levy Dleval, Brussels; *Champingons*, galerie pcp, Paris; *Hybrid Objects*, L'inconnue, Montreal; *Stopping the Sun In It's Course*, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles; *The Poetics of Space*, Vancouver Art Gallery; *Melanchotopia*, Witte de With, Rotterdam; and *It Is What It Is*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Sternberg Press published a monograph on his work as part of their pocket book series in 2005.

Meghan Price is a visual artist living in Toronto. Recent exhibition sites include AKA Artist-run Centre, Saskatoon; Untitled Art Society, Calgary; The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design, Asheville, North Carolina; the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon; Katzman Contemporary, Toronto; Idea Exchange, Cambridge; and Blackwood Gallery, Toronto. Price has held residencies at Artspace, Sydney; The Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden; and The Banff Centre. In 2018, Price will have a solo exhibition at Fiberspace Gallery, Stockholm and will be in residence at the Icelandic Textile Center, Blönduós. Meghan Price holds a degree in Textile Construction from The Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles (2003) and an MFA from Concordia University (2009).

Thea Yabut received her MFA from Western University, London, Ontario, in 2013 and her BFA from Alberta College of Art and Design, Calgary in 2007. Her works have been shown across Canada at the Art Gallery of Calgary, Calgary; Forest City Gallery, DNA artspace, McIntosh Gallery, London; La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, Montreal and Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto. She has also exhibited at Cammy Leon Gallery, Glasgow, UK; and Embassy Gallery Annuale, Edinburgh, Scotland. Yabut lives and works in Montreal, Canada.

Acknowledgements

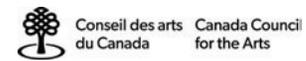
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Cover: Meghan Price, *Body Rock*, 2014, graphite on stitched paper. Installation view at the Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, 2016. Photo: Brian Medina

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