

AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE AT QUEEN'S

Diasporic Entanglements: Open Secret Artist + Curator Gathering

Notes From Our Residency by Fan Wu

In the dead of summer, nine of us – filmmakers and hosts – sat in a hot [Hearth Gallery](#). Two plastic fans, working overtime, were our only relief. In this heat we joined together in semi-delirious states, over trays of assorted cannolis, blurring the edges of our subjectivities. I've long loved the residency format for how it honours the minor sides of art-making processes that can only be explored through sustained and private intimacy. For this one, we gathered six artists from the series Open Secret: Screenings, Conversation & Workshops, curated by Agnes' Nasrin Himada, together in the same space so their practices could entangle in ways we couldn't predict nor expect.

To speak of diaspora, we first had to fumble for our origins.

Nasrin and I introduced the day with texts by M. NourbeSe Philip, Fred Moten & Stefano Harney, Eve Tuck, and Zhuangzi; we framed diaspora in light of the brutal ongoing genocide in Palestine, and in consideration of the paradoxes that diaspora produces. Speaking of Coltrane and Eric Garner in the same breath, Moten and Stefano write: "Am I angry? I'm so fucking angry I can't breathe. Am I angry? No I'm not. That's the new koan [a Zen riddle premised on paradox]."

[Sharlene Bamboat](#) showed us Jonas Mekas's text "Anti-100 Years of Cinema Manifesto." So many lines in that text acted as the epigraph to our gathering: "I want to celebrate the small forms of cinema, the lyrical forms, the poem, the watercolor, etude, sketch, postcard, arabesque, triolet, and bagatelle, and little 8-mm songs."

[Aman Sandhu](#) described a diasporic aesthetic incongruent with both the homeland and the chosen land: glitter walls in suburban South Asian family homes, and how this inexplicably disco style gets passed from one family to the next.

[Sofía Gallisá Muriente](#) revealed to us the absences in the vaults of the Smithsonian and the tenuous-ambiguous relationship the museum has to the objects it's seized over time.

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Kriss Li screened their documentary of an ex-prisoner returning to life outside, which showed us how the inhospitable can be made into a home, and how harsh it can be to return to severed roots.

Parastoo Anoushahpour produced for us a brand-new edit of one of her first and still-unreleased films, an object that bears the enigma of the ever-in-process and asks you to stay with that enigma.

And Rhayne Vermette's "A Black Square Too" shot us straight back to the origin of the void itself, offering us – in Sun Ra's literally immortal words – *a new model for the universe*.

We determined that diaspora is an unruly concept, no doubt, and if our answers came out in the form of questions they were all the more honest for that:

How can a filmmaker's poesis of diaspora – rendered as image, sound, sensation – be a pedagogical channel for study?

How can diasporic practice consist in the constant renewal of relationship to the local and to the land, rather than the projection of an essential nostalgic origin?

How can "diaspora" index the complexly entangled histories of colonial violence, climate change, global flows of capital, and deeply personal desires for safety and change?

At the end of the last day we visited Toronto Island courtesy Razan Azhari Ali, an artist-in-residence at Gibraltar Point. There we unspooled out into the lake and into those more unconscious layers of conversation. Sameen Mahboubi, our host at Hearth Gallery, made a beach fire out of bleached driftwood in the brazen light of day. We played a single game of Golden Boy (please inquire with me on how to play this game of absurdist storytelling) from which a frog leapt out of the story and onto the sand beside us. Our final hurrah as a group was a round of cocktails at the Westin Harbour's hotel bar where we felt gleefully out of place. With hardly any prompting at all – he was just raring to go – our server karaoked for us a version of Unchained Melody that brought us to tears, *I've hungered for your touch*. We danced on the street to Celine Dion like we had almost nothing left to lose; then we said our see-you-laters.

Nasrin theorizes diaspora as "the practice of nonbelonging", and practice only stays alive in being practiced. To share in our unbelonging, we must coexist in a wide swath of life together – in the harmony of study and pleasure. Our diasporic entanglements keep growing outward as we look to artists to form and reform images of our dispersed world.

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Biography

Fan Wu is a poet, performer, and community facilitator. His current work is informed by practices of originary emptiness in Daoist traditions. He is a founding member of the Toronto Experimental Translation Collective and collaborates on poetry/music projects with Prince Nifty, Vibrant Matter, and Thom Gill. He has written extensively on the oeuvre of Taiwanese director Tsai Ming Liang and how it expresses the wet & wounded condition of modern desire.