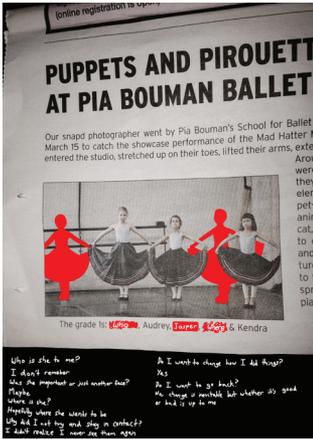


Presented by Latcham Art Centre

an intimate index

Audrey Hansen | Ramolen Laruan | Paula McLean



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Front cover:

Images, clockwise from top left: Audrey Hansen, *Heritage Photo Series 7* (detail), 2021. Image courtesy of the artist; Paula McLean, *Gaze*, 2021. Image courtesy of the artist; Ramolen Laruan, *that could dream about a thought*, 2020, bleached salvaged denim, 10 x 18 feet. Photo: Alison Postma.

an intimate index

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In late 2021, Latcham Art Centre released a call for submissions inviting artists 30 years old and under to submit works to be considered for a small group exhibition. From this call, *an intimate index* was created, providing space for artistic voices of a new generation.

How reliable are the memories we hold within us, and what can be found in their gaps? Within this multidisciplinary exhibition, artists Audrey Hansen, Ramolen Laruan and Paula McLean acknowledge the incomplete and fragmentary nature of memories, seeing their gaps as fruitful places where new meaning can be made. Hansen uses documents of a performance to memorialize a childhood friend and look into a hypothetical future. With her own experience of migration and family history weaving into her art practice, Laruan uses reclaimed denim to address ideas of translation and transformation via gaps in memory. McLean combines altered photographs, found personal effects and resin to physically solidify elements of memory that would otherwise be fleeting and ephemeral. Together, the artists draw on intimate memories to begin conversations about diaspora, community, loss and the ways we make meaning from the world around us.

On Recent Memory

It's not hard to recall how many of us felt during the early days of the pandemic. As a cultural worker I remember feeling lucky to work from home instead of being laid off, and like many others, I remember feeling dull disappointment when met with empty baking aisle shelves at the grocery store. But distinct memories are much harder to remember, which points out the gaps in my covid-era memories. A quick scroll through my camera roll triggers memories to start trickling back into focus, but for a moment I'm left to wonder *where did those memories go?* I spoke to an artist friend about this phenomenon, who replied similarly, evidencing a collective covid brain fog. "What do you remember about your pandemic birthdays? Did you mark them in some way?" I asked. One replied, "More than distinct memories, I think I have washes of memories from the pandemic period...those years felt so atemporal". A strange, lingering consequence of the pandemic is an accordion-like experience of time. At moments, the space between late 2019 and early 2022 feels like an instant; in others, it feels closer to a decade. In hindsight, the time warp is to be expected, with the last two years bleeding together in part because the world relived the same news stories for months on end. For many of us (and generally, the privileged who got to work from home) days were the same, weeks the same, months the same: roll out of bed, make sure you look presentable from

the waist up, flick on the computer and enter the digital work world. After work, when bingeing a tv show, we can't remember what event happened in what episode. "We also remember all the way wrong," one friend continued. "My immediate assumption [about my birthday] was that I had a lovely day with my partner doing nothing, since doing nothing was one of my favourite lockdown coping mechanisms. But, in fact, when I look it up in my calendar, I worked most of the time. So perhaps misremembering also creates memories that we want, or contributes to the narratives we want to tell ourselves." What these pandemic instances all make visible is how we individually and collectively remember, how memory is nebulous despite feeling solid and intact. What happens when we misremember, or find gaps in our recollections that we thought were intact? When can misremembering be a good thing, a fruitful space for new meaning and knowledge? For Audrey Hansen, Ramolen Laruan and Paula McLean, these questions are at the crux of their practice. Laruan investigates how cultural memory can be pieced together from within diaspora, to affirm and expand identity. Hansen uses dance as an act of memorialization, to prolong the feeling of a fleeting memory. McLean investigates the ways memories are created within the mind, showcasing its abstract and often unintuitive processes. Using denim, resin, documents of performance, archival photos and found personal effects, the artists speak to personal and cultural memory through a small and emotionally charged catalogue of works: an intimate index. Collectively, the exhibition questions the idea that memories are intact entities that we can recall completely at will, instead acknowledging that misremembering and gaps in memories are full of potential.



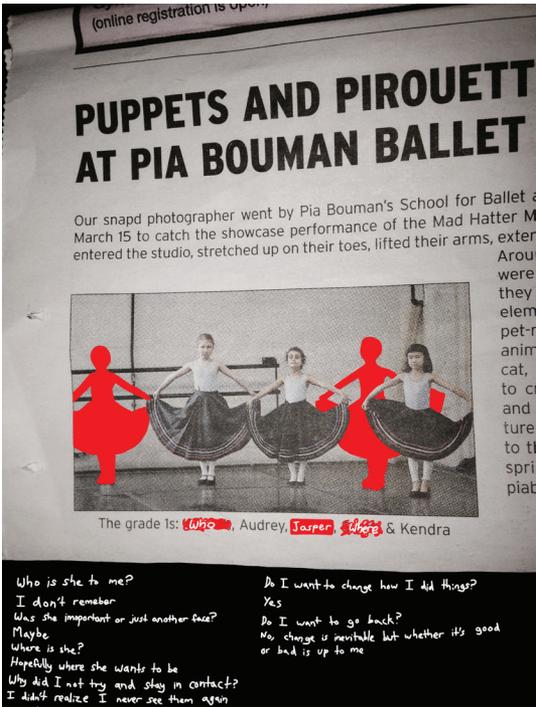
Ramolén Laruan, *that could dream about a thought*, 2020, bleached salvaged denim, 10 x 18 feet.
Photo: Alison Postma.

Centred on the Gallery's north wall, Ramolén Laruan's bleached salvaged denim sculpture, *that could dream about a thought*, pulls visitors inside the exhibition space from the entrance with a gravitational force. The floor-to-ceiling work includes variously sourced pairs of jeans, all flattened, ripped and sewn together into one unit, and hung with curtain ring clips. Stonewashed denim is placed toward the top, while darker navy fragments make up the bottom. Some are bleached through the middle to produce a pleasant two-toned effect, the off-white colour deepening into ultramarine to evoke a foamy, buffeting shore. On a surface level, the work is an object that presents as a birds-eye view of water, suggesting oceans. But for Laruan, denim is both poetic and political, it is a material way of presenting

concepts like colonization, diaspora, personal and cultural memory, and the limits of what the mind can recollect. The calming water-like images produced takes on a different shape, now suggesting water that migrant families cross, like Laruan's family did en route from the Philippines to Canada. A North American staple, denim has a comfortable way of remembering its owner; jeans scuff and fray in unique accordance with the bodies that fill them, more so than other fabrics. The knee-bend in a denim pantleg wants to stay bent over time. Rips happen idiosyncratically. In contrast, it is hard to avoid the material's other more uncomfortable associations, like its manufacture in distant countries with severe water scarcity, the fashion industry's history of labour rights violations, and the product's use by those who may ignore their colonial and capitalist involvement from the other side of the world. Stitching all these ideas together, Laruan's patchwork process "is vital in reinforcing the complexity of remembering and memorializing, where memories are constructed and redefined, passive and active, projected and received." The artist notes that "...fragmentation and sequencing are reinforced in the textiles where mending does not lead to a smooth surface, but [to] grooves and infinite sutures. A disconnected coherence... is fundamental to the pattern."¹ "Disconnected coherence" is an apt term to describe cultural memory for those who find themselves in diaspora². Cultural memory can supply touchstones for identity and shape foundational shared experiences, but what happens when you are removed from the origins of that memory — the locations, family members, meals, customs, climates, shared histories and infinite other building blocks of identity — or when you rely

on another to recollect those touchstones for you? *that could dream about a thought* makes visible the process of piecing together cultural memory from various sources in diaspora. Gaps are inevitable but aren't empty: they can hold space for new customs.

Playing on the notion of instability of time and memory, Audrey Hansen's *Heritage Photo Series 7* is titled to fall sequentially after works 1-6 in the series, but is in fact a prologue to the others. The work is a digitally altered newspaper clipping, originally printed by *Snap'd Magazine*, and it features the artist posing with dance



Audrey Hansen, *Heritage Photo Series (7)* (detail), 2021, digitally altered newspaper clipping. Image courtesy of the artist.

classmates when they were in elementary school. The artist digitally overlaid some of their classmates with red silhouettes, and crossed-identifying names below the picture – not so much as censoring, but questioning. Below the clipping, Hansen adds a dialogue with herself.

*Who is she to me? I don't remember
Was she important or just another face? Maybe.*

These questions and indefinite answers show the contrast between intense childhood memories interspersed with gaps. Often looking at childhood pictures, we are surprised at the faces we forgot, almost too far gone to recall. This work has a tinge of regret. In contrast, the images in her *Heritage Photo Series 1, 3 and 5* convey a lighter tone.

Hansen's *Series* are snapshots of informal, solo performances of the artist dancing in suburban Toronto streets and Toronto alleyways. Pulled from a stop-motion animation, the selected photos show the artist in a handmade costume—a knee-length, dark floral skirt and top—inspired by the dance outfit seen in *Series 7*. The performance acts as a memorial for a dance class friend who recently passed away from cancer. "I decided to recreate my own version of the costume that I danced in with her because I wanted a reminder of her and the fun times we had," the artist notes, adding, "I've noticed a pattern recently where I struggle to keep in contact with people that I care about. Naivety of permanence. I just always thought we would stay in contact." How do we commemorate the life of someone who has left us too soon? Hansen's *Heritage Series* builds on a history of



Audrey Hansen, *Heritage Photo Series 3*, 2021, 8 photographs, each 5" x 7".
Image courtesy of the artist.

artists who have considered this question and made work about memories and loss. Prominent in this list are queer makers, such as the artist collective General Idea, and contributors to the AIDS Quilt like Cleve Jones, who pay tribute to lives lost in the ongoing AIDS crisis while challenging how we remember the dead with new forms of mourning and memory-making³.

Hansen plays with this history by centering joy rather than grief. The images on display show the artist in between traditional dance poses, arms akimbo, smiling and not looking directly into the camera, as if lost in memory and unaware of the camera's presence. She twirls and glides in the images, obviously in action (contrasting the posed, static, early image from *Snap'd* - a

memory paused). Donning a handcrafted costume and dancing creates a space for the memories to be recalled and reactivated outside of the mind. In dancing, the artist prolongs the memory, one that might only last a few seconds in the mind, and draws it out into minutes allowed to exist in the body. This alternative memorialization keeps the unidentified friend in the present for as long as Hansen twirls. The sweetness of the impulse to keep moving is reflected in the installation of *Heritage Series (1-6)*, the work encourages the viewer movement and revisitation as the images are not presented together in a row, but sporadically spaced throughout the gallery

The rectangular gaps found between sutures in Laruan's wall work, and within the grid-like display of Hansen's *Photo Series*, are echoed in Paula McLean's wall-mounted sculptures. Referring to them as photo objects, the resin forms recall tablets, frames, screens, and technology used for viewing images. Some photos are encased in the plastic forms, in addition to 35mm film clippings, drawings, acetate and sometimes personal effects, and antiques. Combined with the physical objects that hint at memory (antiques, personal effects), many of the objects include square recessed areas in the resin, further signifying gaps in or lost memories, just as the other artists in the room have.

Taking it a step further, McLean is interested in exploring how the mind abstracts and juxtaposes fleeting moments to make memories. While we often think of the mind as a recorder that captures information linearly from start to finish, the truth is that memories are an assemblage of snippets of information over time. A memory is first made, but then shifts over time



Images, left to right: Paula McLean, *Fissure*, 2021, resin, mirror, photo on acetate, inkjet photo, 12" x 8". Image courtesy of the artist; Paula McLean, *Collapse*, 2021, resin, drawing on grid paper, inkjet photo, 12" x 8". Image courtesy of the artist.

with the recalling, re-telling and sharing of the experience. All of this input – information, images, feelings, colour and more – is curated to make meaning about a specific moment, and it's all subject to change as new data is taken into the mind.

McLean's tablets reveal repeating motifs of abstraction, juxtaposition and distortion, all tools the mind uses to make disconnected data from the world into meaningful memories. The works make physical the initial abstract workings of the mind, and the effects of constant revision of those memories. The artist pays specific attention to isolating, abstracting and extracting parts of images she collects as source material, before encasing them in resin. In *Collapse*, the work features a central image of spilled red wine on a tiled kitchen floor recessed behind

a square cut-out from the resin, pressing the view deeper toward the image. This offers a central moment of clarity on a banal image, while the frame around it remains translucent and water white. This is a tactic used in many of McLean's tablets, a way of revealing and further obscuring distorted images, which mirrors the activity of our minds as it negotiates a world in motion around it.

— Tyler Durbano, Curator

1. Laruan, Ramolen Mencero, "still, unfolding" (2020). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 7319. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7319>
2. Diaspora is a state in which an individual or group of people migrate from their homeland, or are involuntarily moved to a place where the predominant culture is different than in their place of origin.
3. <http://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt-history>

About the Artists

Audrey Hansen is an emerging artist based in Tkaronto/Toronto. They work primarily in watercolour, acrylic, and digital and lens-based media. In 2020, they assisted artist Elizabeth Jackson Hall with a public mural in Baby Point, Toronto. In 2021, Hansen was awarded two regional silver keys in the Scholastic Arts & Writing contest for her works *February 8th* and *Three Faces*. The artist would like to acknowledge the Etobicoke School of the Arts as a key supporter.

Ramolen Laruan is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice explores ideas of displacement and migration, politics of knowledge, memory work and failure tactics through sculpture, collage, print, textile, installation, moving image and sound. Working from their intersectional position as a Filipino-Canadian immigrant woman, they use family photos, oral histories, popular cultural productions, and domestic work to examine and offer other possible notions of remembering and collecting. Laruan holds a Bachelors of Fine Art from Queen's University, and a Masters of Fine Art from the University of Western Ontario. They have received support from the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts, and have exhibited throughout Ontario. Select exhibitions include *a low and slow stroll* as part of the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival, Toronto (2022); *Double-Edged* at Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto (2022); *still, unfolding* at Zalucky Contemporary, Toronto (2020); *Precarious Joy* at Hearth Garage, Toronto (2021); and *As the snail takes its shape* at The Plumb, Toronto (2020). In 2021, Laruan participated

in R.A.R.O, an itinerant artists-in-residence program in Barcelona, Spain.

Paula McLean is an interdisciplinary artist whose current practice focuses on metacognition – the awareness of one’s own thought processes – with particular interest in how experiences can be translated or transformed into a record or memory of this experience. They hold a Bachelors of Fine Art from Concordia University, Montreal, and a Masters of Fine Art from the University of Waterloo, where they were the recipient of a Shantz International Scholarship. They have received support from the Ontario Arts Council, and have participated in residencies at Artscape Gibraltar Point (Toronto) and the NES Residency (Skagastrond, Iceland). McLean has exhibited their work in Ontario, Quebec and abroad, including *Re/flux* at Patel Brown Gallery, Toronto (2022); *Faces and Places*, Dodomu Gallery, New York (2021); *Tiny Things*, Wavelength Space, Chattanooga, Tennessee (2021); *Reliant Devices*, The Plumb, Toronto (2020); and *Fresh Paint / New Constructions*, Art Mûr, Montreal (2018), among others.

Latcham Art Centre gratefully acknowledges the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Legacy Fund for their generous support of this exhibition.

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ART CENTRE

Latcham Art Centre inspires the community to engage with visual art through exhibitions of contemporary art and education programs including classes, workshops, artist talks and tours. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, membership and fundraising events as well as annual grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Ontario Arts Council.

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