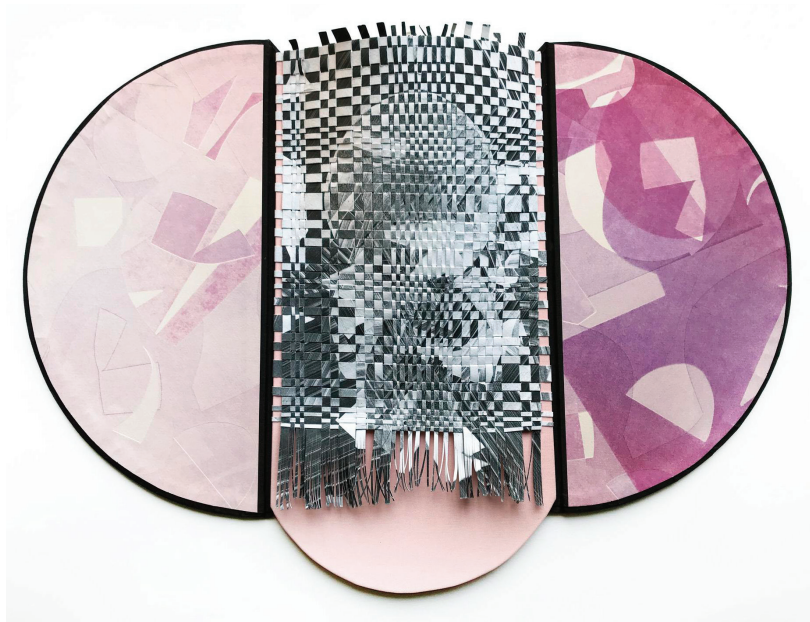


PAPER MIRRORS

Michael Ciesielski | Anthea Black | Ron Siu



July 18 - September 6, 2025

Paper Mirrors

Paper Mirrors brings together the work of three artists who explore print media through Queer perspectives. Anthea Black, Michael Ciesielski, and Ron Siu push printmaking beyond traditional boundaries to create engaging, innovative and—at times—playful artworks that reflect the importance of diversity and the value of belonging.

By expanding print into experimental video, unconventional sculptural books, and large-format woodcuts, these artists' works invert and subvert traditional gender norms and orientations. Through a range of representational and abstract approaches, the exhibition explores these artists' deeply personal responses to subjects including drag culture, Queer histories, and the role of mass media in manipulating the visibility and perception of 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

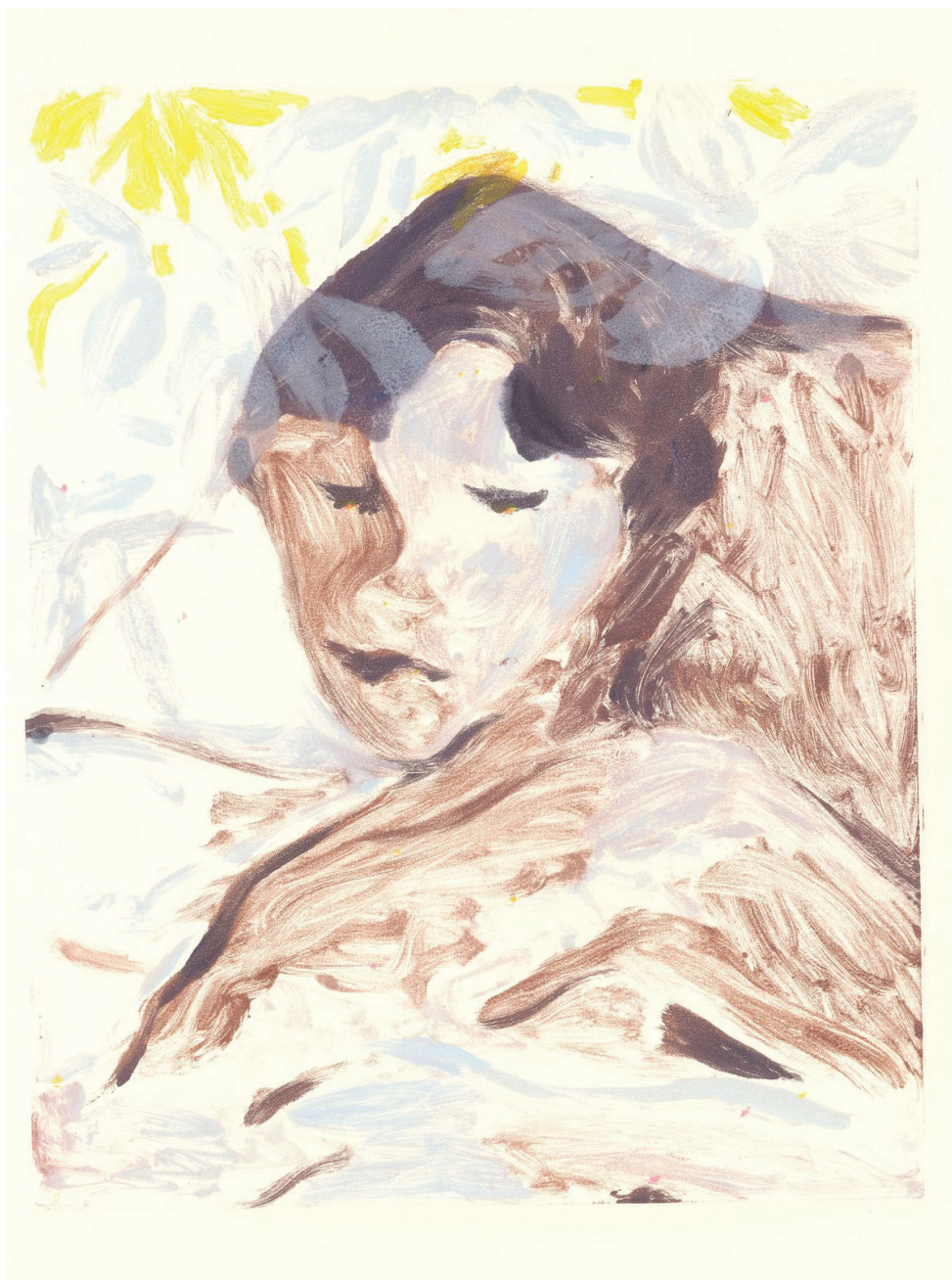
Cover clockwise from top : Anthea Black, *Grieve Weave 9* (overlapping grief weave) / Bauhaus wallpaper Ouija tea set, 2023, *Artists' book: monoprint on coventry rag and somerset, asahi silk and iris rayon bookcloth*. Courtesy of the artist. Ron Siu, *Feeling Nothing*, 2020, Monotype, ink on paper. Courtesy of Chris Ironside. Michael Ciesielski, *Soraya ft. Alice*, 2024, Woodblock Print, ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Most methods of printmaking involve the transfer of an image or design from a surface called a “matrix” to another surface such as paper or fabric. In woodcut printmaking, for example, the areas of paper intended to remain blank are carved away from the woodblock by the printmaker. Ink is applied to the woodblock, and paper is placed on the inked surface. Pressure is applied, typically using a press, causing the ink to transfer from the raised areas of the wood block to the paper, creating a mirror copy of the original carved design.

Printmaking has several points of historical origin—ancient Sumer, China, and Egypt each have print-related artifacts dating back thousands of years. A copy of the *Diamond Sutra*, a Buddhist handscroll from China, made in 868, is the earliest authenticated example of a print on paper. In each case, printmaking was developed to share ideas and images. Through the mass distribution of religious and philosophical texts, laws, newspapers and journals, print gradually became central to the development of cultures, to the production of social norms, and the establishment of ideologies and beliefs.

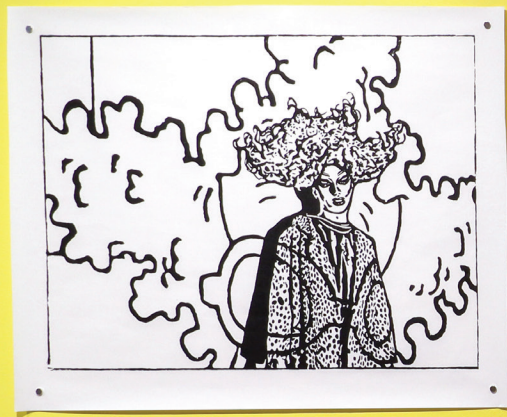
Print mirrors culture; in turn, culture becomes a mirror of print.

While print has a long history of establishing main-stream ideas, it is also used to distribute countercultural and revolutionary content. In the 2SLGBTQI+ community, queer publications—zines, magazines, and newspapers, such as *The Body Politic* (1971-1987)—were key to establishing a collective voice and providing platforms for activists, writers and artists involved in the Pride movement and the fight for equal rights. *Paper Mirrors* features the work of three artists who engage with the techniques and history of print media to explore their experiences in the Queer community and beyond.



Ron Siu, *Reading (Sweetgrass)*, 2020, Monotype, ink on paper.
Courtesy of the artist.

Michael Ciesielski creates large-scale woodcut prints based on photographs of his subjects captured in their drag personas. Drag is a form of performance art in which performers typically engage in exaggerated expressions of gender, often involving cross-dressing. The drag community introduced Michael to people who explore and perform the full spectrum of gender beyond judgement. Members of that community are represented and celebrated in this series of prints. Each portrait is superimposed with the image of a character from popular cartoons that Ciesielski associates with the subject's persona. These double portraits reveal the complex layering of



identity, gender, and the spectrum of masculine and feminine characteristics that are part of drag and trans experience.

Michael's work is arranged in alternating groupings of ink-on-paper prints and the carved woodblocks that were used to create the prints. Each grouping is distinguished by a different wall colour, representing the CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) printing process common in commercial printing. Much of the print material that we encounter daily—such as posters, books, and magazines—is produced by layering these four colours.



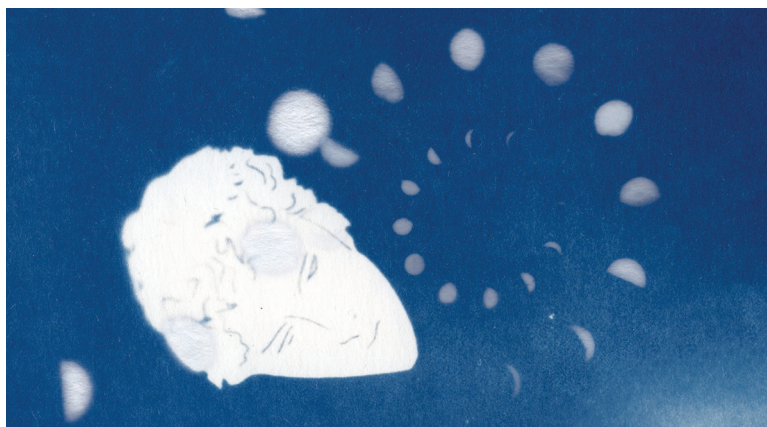
Installation view of *Paper Mirrors*. Left: Michael Ciesielski, *Irma Gerd ft. Didi Pickles*, 2024, Woodblock print, ink on paper. Right: Michael Ciesielski, *Irma Gerd ft. Didi Pickles* Woodblock, 2024, Birch Plywood.

Michael exhibits his original wood blocks alongside his prints to reveal a part of the printmaking process that is typically not shown publicly by most printmakers. The tools and physical processes involved in woodcut are similar to those used in sculpture, and that physicality is part of what attracts Michael to printmaking. Displaying the original carvings allows the viewers to see the mirroring that is an important aspect of printmaking and introduces a theme of the exhibition—the connection between mirrors and self-perception.

Mirrors are central to the experience of preparing for the day. Somewhere between waking up and heading out, one faces their reflection and either comes to terms with what they see or adjusts something to bring that reflection closer to the image they wish to project. It's not uncommon to encounter some degree of tension between our self-image and how others perceive us.

Michael's twinning of the print and the original carved woodblock explores that space between self-perception and external perceptions of Queer bodies—a tension that can be heightened when one's appearance does not conform to stereotypical gender norms. Michael considers the sense of isolation that can be felt because of that, but his work also expresses the relief and freedom that come from finding a welcoming community and safe places for self-expression.

Ron Siu's work is also touched by the sense of isolation that many in the Queer community experience at times. The lack of representation of Queer Asian subjects in mainstream culture—particularly in North America—is reflected in his series of monotypes. These works are influenced by *Yaoi* manga, a genre of Japanese graphic novels that primarily feature romantic relationships between male characters. Originally written by and for women, these emotionally



Ron Siu, *Shy Eyes, Singing Stone (Stills)*, 2025, Experimental cyanotype animation, digital video. Courtesy of the artist.

charged stories were among the few representations of Queer Asian characters available in North America. By integrating some of the coded imagery within *Yaoi*, Siu's monotypes subtly evoke queer desire from an Asian diasporic perspective.

Siu's experimental video, *Shy Eyes, Singing Stone*, is produced through a unique combination of cyanotype and animation—a hybrid of printmaking and “camera-less” photography. The video captures a moment of connection between two figures. However, because of the overlaying of images involved in producing the video, the two figures seem to never quite touch, creating an unresolved expression of longing and desire.

While Ron Siu and Michael Ciesielski address the visibility and representation of their subjects, Anthea Black's artist's books have evolved from her research into abstraction as a way of exploring queer and trans knowledge beyond identity and public visibility. Anthea departs from the canon of abstraction—with its emphasis on masculine virtuosity—to emphasize the bodily experience of making and the pleasure of craft. As she writes about her two-person performance *PASS*, “Queer bodies know and hold more than can be told or spoken.”

Incorporating bookmaking and printmaking techniques, Black's books are intentionally abstract and difficult to read. They are meticulously designed so that no “correct” orientation exists, making their display variable. As such, they become metaphors and embodiments of the invisible aspects of queer experience that transcend the body—opening onto a world of perceptions that the mirror cannot reflect. Black's books include traces of the print process by weaving together multiple stages of the print—the first pull, an offset image, and several “ghost prints”. The layering in each



Installation View of *Paper Mirrors*. Anthea Black, *Grieve Weave 19 (dull ache)* / *Cléo's trench-coat pocket*, 2024-2025, Artist's book: aquatint etching on Somerset and Stonehenge kraft, monoprint on woven paper, Iris rayon and found bookcloth.

piece echoes her observations about the ever-changing nature of queer experience. These pieces are also meditations on the body and dying, informed by her experiences as an artist and activist in the HIV/AIDS response—her primary encounter with loss until the passing of her mother.

The *Grieve Weave* series began as a way to process the grief of losing of her mother. Recalling time spent learning to weave with her mother, Anthea incorporated weaving into her process. As a book artist, her monotypes and etchings developed into more sculptural formats. Titles in this series include references to avant garde art movements in weaving, cinema, and fashion that reference pattern and fragmentation of self, as well as Ouija, a device to communicate with the dead. This idea of a persistent connection between the past and the present, and the living and the dead, is layered within these works. In Anthea's words: "What is felt or sensed but not entirely visible, requires multiple layers."

The image in a mirror can never capture the depth of the reflected subject. The interior lives and experiences of an individual are far more complex than what is seen on the surface. *Paper Mirrors* presents a deeply felt grouping of work by artists who share a compassionate and inclusive approach to supporting and expanding their communities through print. This exhibition provides opportunities to consider and appreciate the diversity of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and the role we all play in supporting it.

-Jeff Nye



Anthea Black

Anthea Black (b. 1981) is a Canadian artist, art publisher, and curator based in Toronto and San Francisco. Her studio work takes the form of prints, artist's books, and limited-edition publications to address feminist and queer histories, materiality, and archives. Black has exhibited in Canada, the US, Korea, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Norway, and her artist publishing work is represented in over 60 libraries and galleries. Her artist-publication work includes the globally circulated art newspaper *The HIV Howler: Transmitting Art + Activism*, and *HANDBOOK: Supporting Queer and Trans Students in Art and Design Education*, a queer and trans pedagogy project that took form as a collaborative letterpress artist's book. Black's curatorial projects include *The Embodied Press: Queer Abstraction and the Artist's Book*, *No Place: Queer Geographies on Screen*, *PLEASURE CRAFT*, and *SUPER STRING*. and her new book, *The Embodied Press* focuses on artist's books by queer and transgender artists from the 1950s to today.



Michael Ciesielski

Michael Ciesielski graduated from the Queen's University Fine Arts Program in 2017, specializing in woodblock printmaking. Following his academic training Michael attended the Spark Box artist residency in Picton, Ontario to develop his visual arts practice. This led to his acceptance as the Don Wright Scholar at St. Michael's Printshop, St. John's, Newfoundland. During this one-year residency he attended monthly workshops, worked closely with local galleries, and developed meaningful connections.

Wood carving is one of the oldest methods of printmaking and is what grounds Michael's practice as a traditional printmaker. When referencing pop culture or niche imagery, there is often a detachment between the project at hand and the authenticity of his practice. The more he indulges in the intersection between traditional and contemporary art - a balance between the old and the new - the more it defines his work. Through this combination, he is exploring themes of personal queer identity, internalized homophobia and toxic masculinity. By referencing subliminal queer references in pop-culture (magazines, comics, movies), he is subverting the idea that these identities and lifestyles were not present in mainstream media. They are, and have always been, right in front of us.



Ron Siu

Ron Siu is an artist currently based in Tkaronto/Toronto, Canada. Siu's practice incorporates painting, printmaking and animation elements to explore themes around Queer desire and fantasy. His work is informed by Western and Asian art historical canons, decorative art movements such as Art Nouveau, alongside more contemporary pop sources such as gay-themed Japanese romance manga (Yaoi), video games and supernatural horror. By making connections between seemingly disparate cross-cultural threads, Siu aims to express a contemporary sense of Queer imagination.

Siu graduated with his BFA in Drawing & Painting at OCAD University in 2019. He has participated in multiple residences nationally and his work has been in exhibitions across Canada and internationally in the UK and Germany. Siu is currently pursuing an MFA at the University of Guelph.

Ron Siu would like to gratefully acknowledge framing support from the Superframe Framing Fund and funding support from the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council and the Government of Ontario.

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