

LATCHAM ART CENTRE PRESENTS



The part of me that recognizes you.

Steven Beckly | John Delante | Christina Leslie | Joel Rodriguez

Friday, July 19 - Saturday, August 24, 2024

The part of me that recognizes you.

Steven Beckly | John Delante | Christina Leslie | Joel Rodriguez

How do we recognize our experience of belonging...

...to a place?

...to a culture?

...or, to one another?

When photographs whisper conversations about
the complex nature of home;

when our feelings of connection to the environment
are made physical;

and, when we find ways to celebrate
the ones we hold dear.

Steven Beckly, John Delante, Christina Leslie, and Joel Rodriguez weave personal stories and cultural reflections together, inviting us to contemplate how identity, community, and place intersect.



The Part of Me That Recognizes You.

Belonging can be a tricky concept to understand and an even more complex thing to feel. Attempting to describe it can lead us down several paths. The multifaceted and personal nature of connection is at the heart of *The part of me that recognizes you*, an exhibition that explores the many meanings of belonging through the work of Steven Beckly, John Delante, Christina Leslie, and Joel Rodriguez. These artists weave autobiographical stories and cultural reflections together, inviting us to contemplate how identity, community, and place intersect.

Cebu-born, Ajax-based artist John Delante presents photos that serve as personal introductions to how belonging relates to place, identity, and social life. His 2022 series *Finding Comfort Under the Sky* shows dear friends and places in the Philippines. These are mounted among photos from *Repose and Renewal*, an earlier series that focuses on life in Canada, bringing his two homes into dialogue. In one photo, a white T-shirt and dark shorts lay over a plastic lawn chair, with a Camotes Island shoreline in the background. In the adjacent photo, a blue long-sleeve top drips dry on armour stone, the kind that makes up breakwaters near Woodbine Beach in Toronto. Referencing one another, these images straddle different points in Delante's world and whisper conversations about cultural duality. They're attempts to visualize how histories and heritage can clash and coexist in new contexts.

Many of Delante's photos show childhood friends, captured with intimate nostalgia. Some highlight the feeling of distance between his subjects and the camera, but all act as reminders that returning to our roots can reaffirm who we are. Reaching out to family and friends, whether they live next door or across the world, reveals the beauty that Delante is moving toward: that belonging is a dynamic state, one of duality and expansive connection. We can find a sense of home in many places at the same time.

Joel Rodriguez is a second generation Salvadoran-Canadian. As an artist and documentary photographer, he prefers to make physical prints of his photos, transforming memories into eight-by-four-inch objects. Like Delante, Rodriguez's series *Delicate is Difficult* includes autobiographical scenes that tie belonging to place: his photos help recall where he has been and what he felt. However, another transformation occurs in this work. Each photo includes colourful embroidery, which inserts fresh perspective and emphasis.

Rodriguez takes inspiration from Ukrainian-Brazilian author Clarice Lespector, who wrote that when it comes to art, "what is called abstract so often seems to me the figurative of a more delicate and difficult reality, less visible to the naked eye."¹ So many cherished parts of life are known through sensing or feeling, which belong to abstract realms rather than definitive and physical ones. Coming to terms with this has allowed the artist to recontextualize his memories, exploring tangible and intangible aspects of everyday life: "I often need to remind myself that the world around me is intricately connected to my own existence —I am not separate from it; I'm part of the phenomenon of life outside myself."²



Joel Rodriguez, *Ontario Place*, 2024, framed gelatin silver print with hand embroidery. Photo courtesy of the artist.

His embroideries point out how we remember—some parts of memories are detailed and vibrant, while others are less so—but they also underscore his desire to make the abstract visible. In *El Camino de mi alma* (the path of my soul), Rodriguez shows us what he could only feel when he created the photograph. Energy fills the air as music is played and people dance. Even the dusty ground is peppered with colour. These are manifestations of connection to people. In other embroideries, like *Estamos conectados* (we are connected) he manifests the feeling of belonging to a place.

Making these spaces his own, he navigates what it means “to belong in a world that can sometimes feel foreign.”³

Christina Leslie uses photography to address significant social issues. Her work focuses on Blackness, Caribbean culture, Jamaican heritage, and biracial identity, and in *The Album*, she presents a deeply personal series that focuses on her parents’ early relationship:

“Both born in 1950, my father from Jamaica and my mother from Scarborough, Canada, their bond transcended geographical boundaries. Despite being raised in different countries, they shared common experiences such as afternoon teas, witnessing historical events, and even nostalgic recollections of how ice used to be delivered via bicycle—a testament to the solidity of their connection amidst diverse backgrounds.”⁴

The Album is a digital compilation of physical images Leslie brought together. Two of her album spreads, titled *Mom* and *Dad*, hold images of her young parents before they met. Looking at these, the imbalance of who had access to photography is clear: her mother’s childhood is well documented, whereas her father’s pages hold fewer photos. After her parents met in Canada, Leslie’s father appears regularly in photos among friends. The nostalgia of these photos—their rounded frames containing friends in vintage fashions—reveals the approximate time these were taken, and hints at the related socio-political context. In the 1970s in Canada, those who continued the fight for racial, sexual, and gender-based equality were opposed by those who understood so-called traditional family values as the only acceptable option. Despite

this, *The Album* becomes a metaphor for belonging, a time capsule of shared history and evolving identity. In *Together*, her mother and father smile from the back of a decorated limousine, a memento from their wedding day. They cuddle on the couch, and cozy up by their record player to select vinyl. The narrative honors her parents' resilience and enduring love, and acts as a counterbalance to the societal taboos associated with interracial relationships. These hopeful pages ask us to reflect on the complexities of belonging in a multicultural world, and the joy that it can bring. Leslie offers a perspective that blends historical insight with contemporary relevance.



Steven Beckly, *Self Shedding*, 2022, Inkjet print on washi paper.
Photo courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery.





Christina Leslie, *The Album - Together*, 2022, Photograph.
Photo courtesy of the artist and Stephen Bulger Gallery.

Steven Beckly's photographs are equally personal and intimate. They tap into the physical and emotional connections that shape our sense of belonging with others and our environment. Acetate and tissue, crystal pendants, golden chains, and sometimes holographic or pearlescent materials shape our relationship to Beckly's subjects by playing with light.

In *The Rescue*, the figure of someone intimately known to Beckly enters the frame. They reach out to touch a chair rail, their relaxed shoulders reflected in a mirror. It's a quiet scene, one would not have been the same without the delicate light. In front of the framed image is a starburst pendant. It's worth mentioning that when light passes through a prism, its different wavelengths slow and separate at different speeds before exiting the glass refracted and magical. As if to say slow down, look here, the pendant hangs just beside the figure's hand, calling attention to the light. In these poetic moments, when we see the ordinary turned extraordinary, our complex web of connection with others is more intensely felt.

Just as Beckly's portraits of people contain a profound intimacy, so do his portraits of non-humans. In works like *Self Shedding* the treatment of the image suggests that we're looking at more than just an ordinary scene. A heightened sense of beauty and wonder is revealed in nature, as if the artist has captured a rarely seen moment. Here nature serves as a source of connection—spiritual, emotional, or otherwise—which contribute to a sense of belonging to something larger than oneself. Beckly's art beautifully reminds us that our sense of identity is shaped not only by our relationships with others but also by our connections with the natural world.

-T.D.

Footnotes:

1. Pontiero, Giovanni, and Clarice Lispector. "Abstract and Symbolic." *The Foreign Legion, New Directions*, New York, NY, 1992, p. 126.

2. Rodriguez, Joel. "Artist Statement." 2024.

3. Ibid.

4. Leslie, Christina. "Artist Statement." 2024.

Steven Beckly

Steven Beckly (he/they) is a Chinese-Canadian artist and photographer residing in Tkaronto/Toronto. Recent solo projects include *Root of the Tongue* at Montgomery's Inn Museum, Etobicoke, part of the Toronto History Museums' Artist Mentorship Showcase: *Pride; and Phantom Eye*, a public art project commissioned by Capture Photography Festival in Vancouver. Beckly's work has been featured in exhibitions at the Doris McCarthy Gallery at the University of Toronto, Scarborough; Stride Gallery, Calgary; Remail Modern, Saskatoon; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Beckly is represented by Daniel Faria Gallery.

John Delante

John Delante is a visual artist working in photography based in Toronto, Canada. His work explores themes of home, belonging and identity that draws from personal and shared experiences. His practice is currently informed by capturing fleeting moments, exploring the concept of finding one's place and speculative futures shaped by personal histories. John graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Photography Studies (Honours) at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Joel Rodriguez

Joel Rodriguez is a second-generation Salvadoran-Canadian documentary photographer and visual artist based in Tkaronto (Toronto). In 2019, they received a BFA with Specialized Honours in film production from York University. Their work explores realms of expression within lens-based media, and includes small gauge filmmaking, fine art, and documentary photography, with recent explorations into mixed media that combine embroidery with darkroom photo enlargements. They have exhibited at Gallery 44, Arts Etobicoke, Artscape Daniels Launchpad for the Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival, and Underscore Projects. In Fall 2022, their work was featured in Photo Ed Magazine. Selected filmography has been shown at The8Fest Film Festival (Certified Organic), and Images Festival (Eclectic City).

Christina Leslie

Christina Leslie is a lens-based artist from Toronto, who earned a B.F.A. from OCADU in 2006 and an M.F.A. from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2022. Her art practice focuses on themes that delve into decolonization, identity, immigration, marginalization, history, memory, race, and her West Indian background, which she explores via various experimental photography methods and text. Leslie's photographs have been exhibited at various institutions across the globe, including The GAMU in Prague, Oakland University in Michigan, The Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's Pier 21, The Art Gallery of Windsor, The Caribbean Art Fair in Jamaica, The McMaster Museum of Art, Paris Photo art fair and the Museum of Contemporary Art. Leslie is represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery.

latcham

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, and fundraising events as well as annual grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

THIS EXHIBITION IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY:

