



Introductory Essay

"Incantation" by exhibition curator, Kimberly Phillips

Haunting can be described as a state in which an unresolved condition or event makes itself known. It is one way we are informed that something forgotten—or concealed—is in fact vital and present. [1] If we are haunted by someone (or something), we momentarily lose our bearings in the world. The familiar becomes strange. Objects move on their own. Unsettling sounds are heard. The dead reappear. Time folds over upon itself, and the past refuses to stay where it "should," uncoupling us from our comfortable, forward-facing linearity. A ghost might confront us head on, with a sudden, terrifying directness, or seep furtively, almost imperceptibly, into the rhythms of everyday life. Individuals can be haunted, but so too can entire societies.

This project was propelled by our contemporary condition. In our Western culture of disposability, proliferation, and excess, grappling as we are with the persistent structures of colonialism and patriarchy, with so many suppressed histories of dispossession, dislocation, and loss, we might ask: What can artists, and art itself, do? "How can art," to reframe a question posed by renowned American sociologist Avery Gordon, "reckon with all that modern history has rendered ghostly?"[2]

13 Ways to Summon Ghosts considers the work of thirteen artists of diverse origins and experience for whom the practice of haunting can be considered an artistic strategy. If we posit the spectral as an integral part of modern social life (rather than dismiss it as superstition or an isolated psychosis), then this exhibition is a proposition for how we might attend to our individual and collective ghosts. Through works of sound, sculpture, painting, photography, drawing, textile, print, and video, these artists—Abbas Akhavan, Brady Cranfield, Brenda Draney, Betty Goodwin, Vanessa Kwan, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Cindy Mochizuki, Lyse Lemieux, Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn, Ryan Peter, Kathleen Ritter, Carol Sawyer, and Jin-me Yoon—alter our experience of being in time: they unravel our ability to separate past, present, and future. Some of their hauntings are deeply personal, summoned from a grandmother's dream, invoked by the recollection of family memories (or the absence of them), or conjured through the space once inhabited by a loved one. Others are resolutely historical (and art historical), pursued as a means to examine the intersection of war and the women's movement, the politics of the AIDS crisis and its impact on the art community, or the meeting points between Vancouver's architecture and the ideology of empire. Archives and museums—and the colonial constructs that underpin so many of them—are the necessary sites of haunting for other artists, for, as Unangax scholar of Indigenous studies Eve Tuck and multi-disciplinary queer feminist artist C. Ree have argued, "settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation." [3] For still others in this exhibition, found and formed materials are coaxed to enact repeated returns, [4] conjuring the fragility of the body and granting it a second life as diminutive but potent assemblages.

Contemporary artists could be understood as prime poltergeists (or summoners of them). [5] They are in a position to unsettle. The artists whose works together constitute this exhibition consistently work across disciplinary boundaries, walking through walls, as it were, to draw from anthropology, philosophical and scientific thought, archival studies, cinema, literature, and music. Their practices are roving, investigative, and frequently research driven. They inhabit peripheries and provoke that which exists, overlooked, at the margins. They make repetitions and stage unlikely recoveries. Such artists are comfortable operating in the interstices of the visible and the invisible. [6] They understand the creative potential of the ghost's

“paradoxical phenomenality,”[7] for what is significant about the figure of the spectre, as philosopher and literary theorist Martin Hägglund has argued, “is that it cannot be fully present; it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*.”[8] One could argue that it is precisely the “no longer” and “not yet” that is the *working medium* for the artists in this exhibition. Precarious and elusive, such a medium requires an entirely different way of seeing, hearing, and handling. It is one that perhaps necessitates being “more willing to be surprised, to link imagination and critique,”[9] but also demands an acknowledgement that the spectral “thing,” whatever it may be, always exists in excess of our ability to understand it. To summon a ghost (the word “summon” originates from the Latin roots *sub*, “secretly,” and *monere*, “to warn”) is a provocative, wilful, and even potentially dangerous act. It may well trigger a series of unanticipated associations and affective states, the outcomes of which cannot be known.

This exhibition is fractal: it has an irregular and fragmented shape. It neither proposes a comprehensive survey nor presents a smooth terrain. Its accompanying publication, by extension, does not attempt to synthesize the exhibition’s contents, but bends them outward further still, prompted by the provocative written contributions—each its own form of incantation—of Adam Frank, Vanessa Kwan, Tanya Lukin Linklater, and Eve Tuck. As the project’s title suggests, in an unanticipated invocation of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” early twentieth century American poet Wallace Stevens’s meditation on plurality and perspectivism, there can be no singular means of apprehending these artists’ and writers’ apparitions. The works of each are remarkable because, like haunting, they produce a “something to be done.”[10] They demand our rapt attention, beg a reconsideration of presumed positions, call up histories with which we are complicit, ask us to look—and listen—differently, and make *matter* of that which is otherwise invisible.[11]

[1] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

[2] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 18.

[3] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (London: Routledge, 2015), 642.

[4] As Jacques Derrida notes, “A question of repetition: a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because *it begins by coming back*.” Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge: 1994), 11.

[5] The word “poltergeist” translates from the German literally as “noisy ghost,” from the verb *polter*, “to cause a disturbance,” and the noun *geist*, “ghost.”

[6] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 2008, 24.

[7] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 7.

[8] Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 82.

[9] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 2008, 24.

[10] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 2008, 24.

[11] “The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation. It is unforgetting. It is mattering.” Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Collective, “Before DIspossession, or Surviving it,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 12, no. 1 (2016): 2.

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