

# Julia Feyrer and Tamara Henderson: Bottles Under the Influence

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by Kristy Trinier

The doorway to the party is ajar, and it's an invitation to the opening of a complex installation assembled by artists Julia Feyrer and Tamara Henderson. Inside the doorway is a moveable bacchanalian feast: a construct of a set for a film yet to take place, a drunken dissection of both the conscious and unconscious potential of what an object can mean.

Glass is a slow moving liquid, and this is precisely the pace at which the exhibition references reveal themselves to the viewer, and coagulate into some sort of cohesive yet astral narrative. The generative work of Henderson and Feyrer – born in opposing Canadian coastal regions of Sackville and Victoria, respectively – begins with the bottle, and ends in a film: where each incarnation of a set results in the next filmed encapsulation, each consecutively building a mystery.

What is a vessel if not a container? Like a body, the vessels assembled around the gallery are in essence figurative. The forms are anthropomorphically imperfect, and have appendages and curvilinear forms suggesting features as individual as any of us drinking away in the gallery. The bottles are glittering and mottled glass, and staged in a story line of props that serve as a guide to the space.

The artists have developed an oeuvre expounded on these simple vessels, and explain that indeed, the glass bottles forms are personified as characters, many who have made brief appearances in the artists' previous film work. There are actually five bottle characters in total and each has a corresponding assigned (or claimed) beverage of choice: the "Pest Detective" enjoys a hand-pressed apple wine, the "Old Hag" downs a calming valerian tincture, the "Newspaper bottle" takes straight whiskey, the "Blind bottle" craves moonshine, and the "Chance bottle" is a yuckflux mix of everything. Designed by the artists, the physical glass representations of these characters were made by professional glass artisans, using complex glass casting techniques to achieve the perfect character of the medium.

The sectioned areas of the exhibition then delineate as spaces for each character to reside in. The frontispiece is an office set: an architectural construct with the aforementioned doorway, and backed by a wall on castor wheels with an inset window. The window is of course a cut out of a classic Grecian vessel shape (a repeated silhouette of the Pest Detective bottle), a third eye fit with a custom venetian blind that can be opened and shut. This is the Pest Detective's official lair, replete with a heavy masculine wooden desk, drawers left suggestively half open, a wunderkammer ripe with Surrealist props of investigative industry from typewriter to cryptic dream-sourced notations.

If you were to snap the venetian blinds of the Pest Detective's office open, as in Henderson's solo film *Neon Figure*, you could spy on through to the Old Hag's resplendent grow op of narcotic sleep aids. Literally a lush and natural oasis of hand-potted plantings, each fragrant herb resides in a crude clay container of rich black soil. Hydroponic equipment and cool white fluorescent lighting swing above the secret garden like chandeliers. A pink quartz water feature tops the variety of curling plant leaves and tendrils, spilling water into a hand formed fountain labyrinth. *The Spirit of Garfield* (2012), also a solo work by Henderson, is the film which precedes this particular set: where grandmotherly gloved hands get high on delicately hand-rolled dried lavender cigarettes and coyly rings the cowbell-bejewelled sweater. The film culminates with a pillaged but gilded oyster shell being tossed back in dark waters:

quite possibly the source of the troubled cause of the anxiety requiring all of that holistic sleep medication.

The noir mystery fabricated by the artists is not so foreign; it's available to anyone as day is to night, we each can access and analyze our dreams. Henderson and Feyrer do so more obsessively than most: using hypnosis, dream journaling, and other specific strategies to capture and record the unconscious creations from the mind. As surrealist artists once did, à la Dalí – who slept in a chair with a handful of coins over a bucket, so that when his body relaxed into REM cycles and the coins fell, he would be awakened to the most active hypnagogic images of the dream cycle fresh in his mind.

Tamara Henderson presented a postcard-sized installation of the 16mm film *Sloshed Ballot & Anonymous Loan* (2011) in the Friedricianum's rotunda at dOCUMENTA 13 last summer, in an area of the exhibition aptly entitled *The Brain*. An extension of this work was published by Walther König, as a print-based dream transcription collaboration with Calgary-based artist Andrew Frosst. Frosst – part of the locally notorious *Wreck City* curatorial collective, has an elaborate history of emailing detailed dream reports back and forth with Henderson. Their out-of-print nocturnal reportage is the iteration of this text-based exploration that expounded at the Walter Phillips exhibition in the form of a newspaper: the *Night Times*.

At the back of the room is the Newspaper bottle's bar. Every city has one, the artists explain to me, and it's true. Usually this bar is located near to a courthouse or government building: a place for pressmen and hackettes to debrief and exchange stories over a drink. The bar constructed by Feyrer and Henderson has a curvilinear loungey form top, and the slatted plywood supports are stuffed with crumpled newspapers. To the left is a portable wall, covered in wheat-pasted newspapers, the headlines of the dreams the two have documented in *Courier Sans*. Stacks of freshly folded *Night Times* flank the bar with its glistening bottles of sparkling water and fluted glasses of champagne. Here we are all reporters, a Manet-esque situation reminiscent of the A Bar at the Folies-Bergère. The questions are prepared.

The *momento mori* of the drunken bottle party, where all the characters converge, exists at the back left of the gallery, in a room comprised of mobile walls. You begin by sitting on a bench constructed of telephone books – itself an obsolete catacomb of contemporary technology thanks to the online Yellow Pages, but by sitting on the archive of names a viewer gives the tomes a rueful purpose once again. This awkward bench is the theatre for the projected 16 mm title film, *Bottle Under the Influence* (2012).

The reels spin and reveal images of bottles carefully placed under a couch where the artist slept, as an invocation by proximity to her dreams. She tucks them under blankets in a cushiony bed. The characters are imbued with the psychopathology of dream content such as aggression and overt sexuality, inasmuch as the objects. After all of these intimate moments, the mouths of the bottles are crammed full with the makings of fun: colourful confetti, dyed cotton balls, sequins, primary pigments and all other manner of party stuffs.

Henderson and Feyrer's work is not so much literal in the sense of dream-like qualities represented in the medium of film, but rather the converse: films are mediums of characters of dreams of representations of objects. At the finale of the 16mm, morosely each bottle is lined up and shot, the executed contents exploding in an overlapping vomit of celebratory décor on the snowbank. The drunken party is over.