

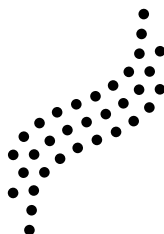
VIEW LOER

Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith

April 28 – July 2, 2022

The Bows

Mohkínstsis (Calgary, Alberta)





View Loser

Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith

View Loser, a collaborative exhibition by Tkaronto/Toronto-based artists Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith, is an intersectional conversation between the forms of displacement at the heart of their practices: respectively, the politics of land and politics of housing. This conversation came together over several years of collaborative practice built on the artists' shared interest in architecture's ability to sustain lack and loss. Together, Boulos and Garden-Smith explore how architectures can be deployed in the disappearance of certain people and their histories.

Boulos's paintings depict family memories of Palestinian life, and of her family's journey fleeing from Palestine to Lebanon in the late 1940s, and its subsequent flight from Lebanon due to the Lebanese Civil War. From Boulos's millennial perspective, a defining characteristic of the Israeli occupation is the existential logic of the wall. In her paintings, walls often appear in shallow relief of the picture plane—space is punctuated, views are lost. The interruptive function of these walls reverses their solidness, rendering them in the paintings as something akin to voids: ambivalent holes in the viewer's line of sight.

Garden-Smith extends this project of refusal, reversal, and voiding to the hidden politics of our living spaces, and, by extension, the background conditions of everyday life and its economic underpinnings. Taking décor as her point of entry, Garden-Smith exerts stress on interstitial bits of architecture—its thresholds and margins—and places accents on our habitual experiences of these interstices. Staged as an architectural intervention, Garden-Smith's arched, threaded rock façade and eccentric window blind sculptures mirror, double, reflect, and reverse the walls, arches, and edifices in Boulos's paintings. In their precarious dramatization of controlled spaces, they also amplify the paintings' sense of fugitivity.

(continued from first page)

I put a picture up on a wall. Then I forget there is a wall. I no longer know what there is behind this wall, I no longer know there is a wall, I no longer know this wall is a wall, I no longer know what a wall is.

—Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces*, 1974

As much as *View Loser* is an exhibition about walls, it's also an exhibition about visibility. As I'm writing this on the Monday before the opening, writer Jared Yates Sexton has just tweeted "Honestly, I don't think most people have even the beginning of an understanding of what we're facing" on the preceding Friday, anticipating Elon Musk's hostile takeover of Twitter by the length of a weekend. "A growing international authoritarian movement, historically concentrated capital, tech messianism coupled with white supremacy, and unparalleled surveillance and control."

In 1941, architectural historian Sigfried Giedion celebrated the modernist triumph of the curtain wall, describing it as effecting an "extensive transparency that permits interior and exterior to be seen simultaneously." Five years later, the United Nations proposed the partition of Palestine.

A wall is an ambiguous thing that can do many different things. It can separate, it can shelter, it can imprison, and it can segregate; as in the curtain wall, it can appear to disappear, but if you look at it the right way it can also lay bare its supports. Within the walls in Boulos's paintings are apertures, and a sense of fugitivity takes over the viewer's gaze as it seeks a way through the wall while also employing it as a cover. As the paintings ask us to focus on what obscures our view—inverting the solid, built environment into "negative space"—we also see our point of view reflected back at us, safe, at least momentarily, within the architecture, hidden from the surveillant gaze.

Here the uncanny, or unheimlich, is "unhomely" in its invocation of both the familiar and the strange. The gallery is an event, as it is time- and space-based, for there is an active void in the house, a transitory potentiality ... Or, perhaps, not a void at all, but a continuous present, an a-void-ing.

—Elisabeth Lebovici, "There Is a Void in the House," 2012

Paralleling the houses made strange in Boulos's paintings, Garden-Smith's thresholds subdivide the gallery space and implicate the viewer's physical positions relative to the paintings. These sculptures are laborious in their manufacture: drilled pebbles threaded to constitute a woven arched threshold, and kitchen-prepared and hand-cut gelatin sheets assembled into shuttering window blinds. Accenting the latter with marbling patterns sourced from antique endpapers from the rare books and special collections at the University of Toronto, Garden-Smith poses the handicraft of (architectural) marginalia as simultaneously a demarcating function that underscores the value production of private property—an operation also known by the name financialized housing, or often simply real estate.

The domestic manufacture of Garden-Smith's blinds, from storebought gelatin powder, draws out an articulation of the domestic as a prism for the separation of private property from the commons, and a necropolitics of housing as exclusive of the human right to shelter. At the same time, the blinds' materiality invokes the various uses of gelatin as a sealant, for example in boots and gel capsules. The modular shuttering function of the blinds is at odds with the impermeability of its gelatin material, complicating the architectural threshold with something perhaps epidermal.

Dotting the exhibition like little fugitives are Boulos's small cast-glass date sculptures, encasing old Palestinian coins from before 1948. These sculptures, which double the bunches of dates in some of Boulos's paintings, refer to a family story about Boulos's great-grandmother, who smuggled gold coins encased in a condom inside her body when she fled. Here, the resilience of latex bespeaks an intimate threshold, beyond the reaches of the occupation's looting hands. But there is something astonishing, almost miraculous, here about the fugitive condition: beneath bare life, another threshold.

These date sculptures hide in the architecture. In an unstable *mise en abyme*, they aspire to a state of viewlessness: bodies that hide gold, which protects wealth, to ensure life, nestled within walls that hide bodies. As themselves a precarious abutment, Boulos and Garden-Smith's works in *View Loser* enact "flights of thresholds, commenting on each other."



Amanda Boulos (she/her) is a visual artist and educator based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Engaging with national narratives from Palestine, Lebanon, and Canada, Boulos explores how oral histories undergo constant metamorphoses and take on different purposes and meanings. Boulos received her MFA from the University of Guelph in 2017 and BFA from York University in 2013. She has shown at Richard Rhodes Dupont Projects (Toronto, ON), Arsenal Contemporary Art (New York, NY), Galerie Nicolas Robert (Montréal, QC), and Anna Leonowens Gallery (Halifax, NS). Boulos is the winner of the 20th RBC Canadian Painting Competition and was recently the Isabel Pope Artist in Residence at NSCAD University (Halifax, NS). She is a member of the Toronto-based project space the plumb and a programmer for the Toronto Palestine Film Festival.

Shannon Garden-Smith (she/her) is an uninvited settler of Scottish, Irish, and British heritage and an artist living and working between Tkaronto/Toronto and Stratford, Canada. She completed an MFA at the University of Guelph ('17) and a BA at the University of Toronto ('12). Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Garden-Smith's recent projects focus on the surfaces that clad contemporary built space and their material-social impact. She has recently shown work with Franz Kaka (Toronto, ON), Gallery TPW (Toronto, ON), Christie Contemporary (Toronto, ON), Pumice Raft (Toronto, ON), Modern Fuel (Kingston, ON), TIER: The Institute for Endotic Research (Berlin), and she will participate in an upcoming two-person project at the Oxygen Art Centre (Nelson, BC).

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The Bows

2001B 10 Ave SW,
Mohkínstsis (Calgary, AB)

825.994.3366

info@thebows.org
www.thebows.org

Gallery Hours

Thursday – Saturday
12 – 6 pm

Press contact

Godfre Leung, Artistic Director
godfre@thebows.org

Notes from the essay

Georges Perec quote from *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, translated by John Sturrock (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), 39.

Jared Yates Sexton quote from his Twitter, April 22, 2022, 6:56 AM (MST).

Sigfried Giedion quote from *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 489. Originally published in 1941.

Elisabeth Lebovici quote from “There Is a Void in the House,” in *Interiors*, edited by Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, and Josiah McElheny (Annandale-on-Hudson and Berlin: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College/Sternberg Press, 2012), 27, 31.

The last quote is stolen out of context from Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 199.



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