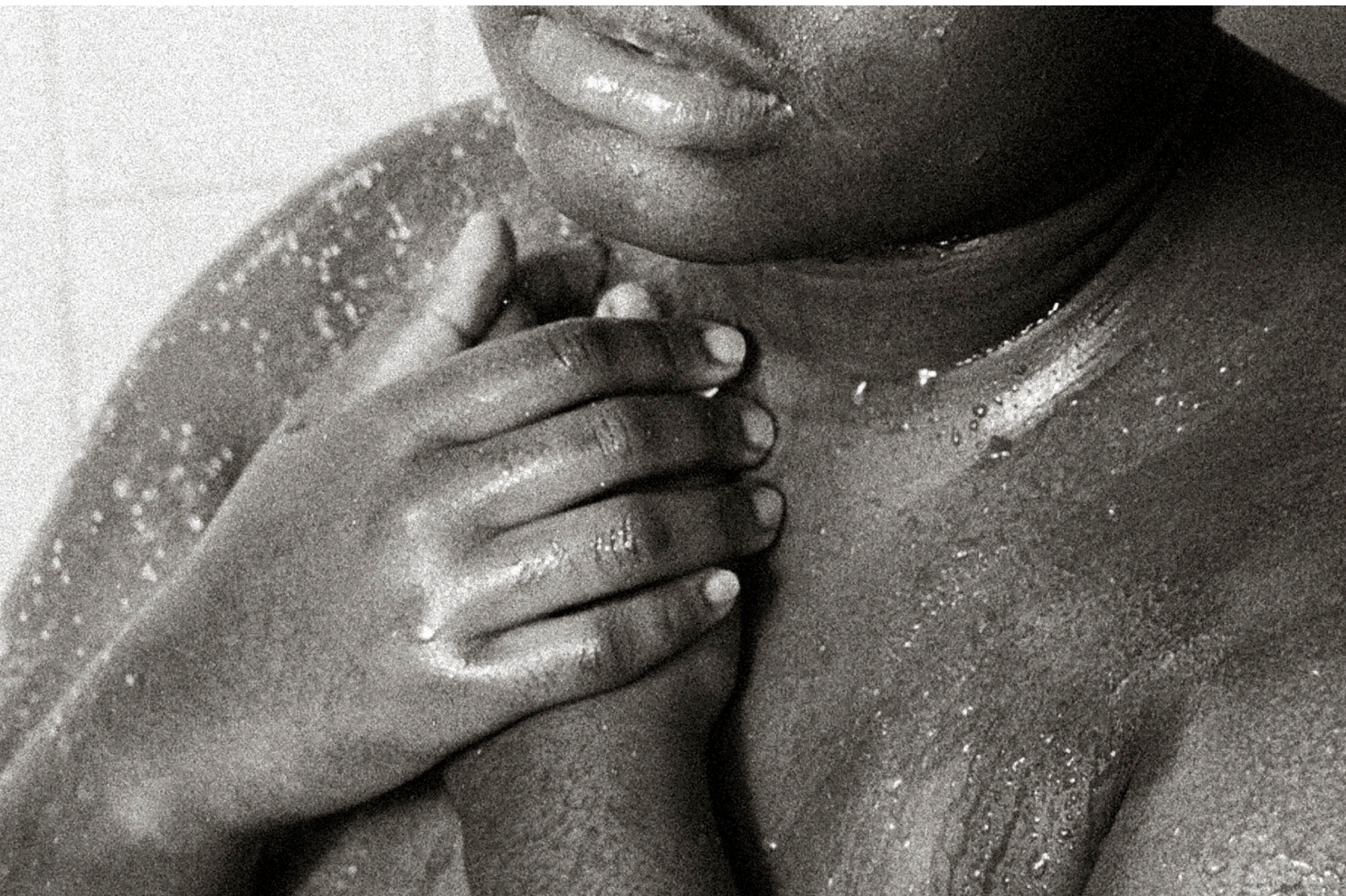


Proof 29

Neeko Paluzzi

Holly Chang

Christina Oyawale



G44

Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

JUNE 9-JULY 8, 2023

Cover image

Christina Oyawale, *pieces of a body, intertwined* from the series *careworn & coil*, 24 x 30 inch, digital print mounted on alupanel, 2021

Poster image

Holly Chang, *Portal*, chromogenic print, 2022

Neeko Paluzzi (he/him) holds two masters degrees from the University of Ottawa: a Masters of Fine Arts (2022) and a Masters of Film Studies (2013). In addition, he is a graduate of the Photographic Arts and Production program at the School of the Photographic Arts: Ottawa (2017). He was the recipient of the Karsh Continuum Photography Award from the City of Ottawa in 2021, had a feature exhibition at the Scotiabank CONTACT Festival in 2019 and was the winner of the 2018 Project X, Photography Grant from the Ottawa Arts Council. Paluzzi currently teaches English at the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute.

Holly Chang is an artist and curator living in Toronto who has completed her MA in Communication and Culture at TMU/ York University. Her overall artistic work explores the themes of her second-generation identity as a mixed-race person; she explores her cross-cultural identity and draws on her hybrid background for inspiration. In her practice, she incorporates photography, archives, ceramics, textiles, and collage. Chang identifies as a queer artist, and she further relates the experiences of being queer to her mixed-race identity.

Christina Oyawale (they/them) is a Black non-binary disabled lens-based Tkaronto artist, curator and designer. They hold a BFA in Photography and minor in Music and Cultural Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University. Their artistic practice is based in documenting the radical occupation of space, influenced by their interests in disability studies and aesthetics. They approach their practice as a means of exploring the ways in which identity and culture are both represented and embodied in our society and how it intersects with other social categories like gender, race and sexuality.

Talia Golland is a Toronto-based curator and writer whose work is informed by queer theories and methodologies. Particular investments of her curatorial practice include the materialities of new media, the metaphors intrinsic to digital space and the affective dimensions of internet-based visual culture. They are currently a co-director of Bunker 2, a curatorial collective organizing itinerant programs that explore issues of economy, mobility and industry. She holds a Master of Visual Studies in Curatorial Studies from the University of Toronto and a BA in History and Theory of Art from the University of Ottawa.

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is an artist-run centre committed to supporting diverse approaches to photographic and image-based practices through exhibitions, education programs and facilitating artistic production. Gallery 44 provides space and context for meaningful dialogue between artists and publics. Together, we offer an entry point to explore the artistic, cultural, historic, social and political implications of the image in our ever-expanding visual world.

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Talia Golland

In *Proof 29*, artists Holly Chang, Christina Oyawale and Neeko Paluzzi present installations that place their photographic practices within expanded spatial and material contexts, as their work moves from intimate specificity into the sphere of collective meaning-making. These openings correlate also to the artists' shared investment in the open-ended, the non-linear and the indeterminate.

Holly Chang shares photographs taken during two successive residencies: first in Banff, Alberta and then across the continent on Quirpon Island, Newfoundland. These periods of contemplation came in the recent wake of abrupt and traumatic ruptures in the artist's life. Chang's relationship to her mixed-race white and Chinese-Jamaican identity, already fraught, was further complicated by loss and familial estrangement. Through the slowness and uncertainty of the analog film process, Chang sought to ask: What possibilities might emerge from this discomfort, working *with* as well as through it? Foregoing the meticulous intentionality of research-creation she often favours, Chang adopted an intuitive, improvisational approach—her photography guided by the external cues of these two locations and the contours of the emotional landscapes she simultaneously traversed.

Arranged here in modular earth-magnet compositions, Chang's observations of the two distinct environments contrast and merge. Looming mountains, slick green algae, root systems, crags coated with crustose lichen—evidence of impossibly slow transformation. A still life tableau arranged on a laminated map and an open botanical field guide suggests the desire to index experience through an assortment of tiny gathered treasures—urchin shells, heaps of sea glass shards, a gull feather. Grief and uncertainty feel most palpable in a striking black and white image of a tide pool, its glass-smooth surface reflecting the infinite blankness of an overcast sky. Is this a portal, or a void?

Patchworked fabric backdrops hung floor to ceiling illustrate Chang's connection of textile craft and lens-based practices, which includes a molecular link—the cellulose of cotton fiber and film acetate. Here, her process involves another turn to landscape, another ecosystem, transforming thrifted bed sheets through natural dying with locally foraged materials. Nature offers solace, if not resolution, a place to recognize a self that cannot be contained: rootless, yet still growing.

Christina Oyawale's *careworn & coil* also reflects on periods of adjustment and expansion. Beginning as an open-ended

series of self-documentation within the artist's home space, the project coincided with the onset of changes in their health, within the collective context of the pandemic. Over the course of a year, the series took shape as a self-meditation in which the artist worked through shifts in their self-identification with disability—both their physical circumstances and their psychic framework.

Oyawale's work takes up crip aesthetics through a sense of openness and flux, a non-chronological movement across expressive registers. Their attention to alternate temporal rhythms begins with film's durational qualities and the patience it asks for. A handwritten note appears on one nude self portrait, strike-throughs suggesting the immediacy of a thought still in progress: *this my body runs exists on crip time*.

The concept of crip time involves both the ways that disability and illness shape experience of time and the necessity of deconstructing notions of progressive linearity that cannot account for or contain disabled existence. The attention to light and shadow in Oyawale's photographs distill one such experience: how days spent in the bedroom make the familiarity of recurring sunlight patterns another way to mark time's passage. Pushing against frameworks of limitation and deficiency, the artist's depiction of their intimate space conveys how much can be encompassed within its walls.

In their self-portraits, Oyawale appears clothed or unclothed, softly blurred or in sharp focus, looking out of frame or resolutely meeting the camera's gaze—negotiating the terms of their vulnerability. Exploration of their own self-concept within the work is tightly entwined with their consideration for what it means to inhabit such vulnerable modes of self-representation as a Black, trans, disabled artist. A printed banner alludes to this tension through the pairing of their brain scans with a transcribed excerpt from a poem by Audre Lorde: "*my body writes into your flesh the poem you make of me*".¹ Lorde's *Recreation* explores the vulnerability and reciprocity of both erotic and linguistic expression, while Oyawale's superimposition of the text over MRI imagery, both starkly exposing and opaque, also makes space for uneasy ambiguity.

Physical objects within the installation include items associated with Oyawale's own care alongside Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals*, Lea Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Care Work* and Alice Wong's *Disability Visibility*. In staging their work in dialogue with the writing by Black, femme of colour and queer disabled authors and activists that aided

1 Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time", in *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Alice Wong (New York: Vintage Books - Penguin Random House LLC, 2020), 189-196.

them in contextualizing their own experiences, Oyawale honours their words, work and lives through citation, while also continuing their generous work of knowledge-sharing. *careworn & coil* expresses a self-compassion that radiates outward.

Reference is also at the core of Neeko Paluzzi's practice, in which encounters with existing artistic and historical phenomena function as both vital entry points and malleable material to reconstitute. He implicates himself intimately within his methodologies of translation and contextual fusion, enacting connections between personally resonant sources through embodied performance. Diverging from linear frameworks of progression and precedence, Paluzzi's practice places technologies of image-making and queer performance strategies from across western history in mutual, continual dialogue as parallel counterparts.

Paluzzi's moving-image installation *the tales of hoffman* features a 1955 recording of an aria from the 1881 opera, "Les oiseaux dans la charmille", colloquially known as "The Doll Song". Its singer is a mechanical debutante attempting to conceal her artificial nature from an avid and delusional suitor. Midway through her performance, she powers down and needs to be rewound to finish. The libretto reflects this indeterminate melding of human and machine—repetitive staccato motifs, a pitch slide when the doll's motor dies. Paluzzi pairs the song with "Head of Girl," a widely collected mold of porcelain doll bust manufactured in the 1960s.

Paluzzi's installation includes an ovular screen of aluminum coated in frosted plexi—a material choice that subtly nods to the analog process of silver gelatin printing, as does a theatrical curtain backdrop dyed in shades of gray. Three "Girl Head" doll faces appear, semi-translucent, their smoothly ambiguous features layered to form a surreal, chimeric entity. As the aria plays, the triad performs and the amorphous mass of facial features appears to ripple and flutter on screen with the singer's vibrato. As they sing, wind down and sing again, slight differences between their movements compound and fragment to eerie, asynchronous effect.

While Paluzzi's trio of dolls are not machine-generated imagery in the technical sense, they are given life and movement through a computational process. In this case, the doll is, in fact, *more* human than it appears: through auto-encoding image software, Paluzzi paired photographs of the busts with videos of himself lip-syncing to the aria in three distinct performances. In determining this



Powell Michael, Pressburger Emeric (Director). 1951. *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Film poster. London Films.

relationship of his body to the "Doll Song" and doll object, Paluzzi drew inspiration from a queer theatrical mode from the turn of the 20th century: the hybrid "cantomime" of Georges Wague, a French mime who would perform along to music sung by an off-stage and often female singer. Veiled within this digital drag avatar, Paluzzi's processed subjectivity also functions as a processor through which past and present collide, collapse and coalesce.

Chang, Oyawale and Paluzzi deeply implicate themselves within their image-making methods, through ambient conditions of feeling, meditations on personal circumstance and veiled performance. In *Proof*, they allow us to join their working-through, offering the open invitation of the perpetually unresolved.

