

The Fine Thread of Deviation is presented with Leading Support from Partners in Art.



Anne Low would like to acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.



Joi T. Arcand's *kiya itako (be you)* and the accompanying text by John Hampton have been commissioned in collaboration with MOCA Toronto.



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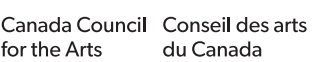
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Cover image: Evan Calder Williams and Anne Low, video still *The Fine Thread of Deviation*, 2018. Digital video on handwoven silk. Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto.

BIOGRAPHIES

Joi T. Arcand is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with Great Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan (2005). Recent solo exhibitions have been presented at Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff (2017); ODD Gallery, Dawson City (2016); Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (2014); Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon (2014); Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2013); and Gallery 101, Ottawa (2012). Arcand has served Chair of the Board of Directors for PAVED Arts and was a co-founder of the Red Shift Gallery, a contemporary Aboriginal art gallery in Saskatoon. She was founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine, *kimiwan* (2012-2014), and recently curated *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101.

John G. Hampton is a curator and artist currently living in Treaty 2 territory, Manitoba. He is the Executive Director of the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba and Adjunct Curator at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. He holds a Masters of Visual Studies – Curatorial Studies (2014) from the University of Toronto, and a BA in Visual Arts (2009) from the University of Regina. He is the former Artistic Director of Trinity Square Video (2013-2016) and Curator at Neutral Ground Contemporary Art Forum (2010-2013). He currently sits on the board of directors for the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and the Whitehead Foundation, and is a member of the Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization and the Aboriginal Education Council for OCAD University. He is a citizen of Canada, the United States, and the Chickasaw Nation.

Anne Low is based in Montreal, Canada. Recent solo exhibitions include *A wall as a table with candlestick legs*, Tensta Konstall, Stockholm (2018) and *Witch with Comb*, Artspeak, Vancouver (2017). Recent group exhibitions include *Soon Enough – Art in Action*, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm (2018); *Separation Penetrates*, Mercer Union, Toronto (2017); *Clive Hodgson & Anne Low*, The Block, London (2017); *Dream Islands*, Nanaimo Art Gallery (2017); *Ambivalent Pleasures*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2016) and *Reading the Line*, The Western Front, Vancouver (2015). Her ongoing project with Derya Akay, *Elaine*, has hosted events at AKA Artist Run Centre, Saskatoon; Haunt, Vancouver, and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Evan Calder Williams is a professor at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. He has a forthcoming solo exhibition with 13BC at NYU's 80WSE (2019). Recent projects have been presented at La Biennale de Montréal (2016); Serpentine Gallery, London (2016); Artists Space, New York (2016); Swiss Institute, New York (2016); the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts (2015); and Images Festival, Toronto (2014). He is the author of two forthcoming books, *Manual Override: A Theory of Sabotage* (2019) and *Prowling Forms* (2018). His previously authored books include *Shard Cinema* (2017); *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (2011); and *Roman Letters* (2011). He is an editor of Viewpoint Magazine and a founding member of the film and research collective 13BC. He received a PhD in Literature from the University of California Santa Cruz (2013) and was a Fulbright Fellow in Italy (2012).

Julia Paoli is the Director of Exhibitions and Programs at Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art.

NEW MEMBER EDITION BY LORNA MILLS

Toronto-based artist Lorna Mills has designed Mercer Union's 2018-19 member edition. This lenticular print will be available to new and existing members for the duration of the current program year. Existing members can collect their edition at the gallery or can expect it by mail this winter.

Memberships are available for purchase at Mercer Union, over the phone at 416-536-1519 or via the Join tab at www.mercunion.org

Lorna Mills is a Canadian artist, actively exhibiting her work in both solo and group exhibitions since the early 1990s. Her obsessive practice includes Ilfochrome printing, painting, super-8 film and video, and online animated GIFs incorporated into offline installations. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at venues including, Transfer Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2018); Times Square, NYC (2016); The Marshall McLuhan Salon, Canadian Embassy, Berlin (2015); and Transfer Gallery, Brooklyn NY (2015). Lorna Mills is represented by Transfer Gallery, Brooklyn and DAM Gallery, Berlin.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

FORUM: Evan Calder Williams

Thursday 18 October 2018, 7PM

This lecture is presented in partnership with the MVS ProSeminar at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Design at the University of Toronto.

fORUM is an ongoing series of talks, lectures, interviews, screenings and performances at Mercer Union. Please check the Mercer Union website for details about our upcoming fORUM events.

SESSION: Jean-Paul Kelly

Sunday 14 October 2018, 12-3PM

SESSION is a project modeling itself after an incubator that invites cultural practitioners to engage with questions that emerge out of a given exhibition. Considering *The Fine Thread of Deviation*, artist Jean-Paul Kelly will lead a SESSION that regards the purposeful abstraction of historical material as a means to defamiliarize the primacy of retroactive sense: using his own research and forthcoming projects related to the ethics of queer aesthetics in the work of American writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964), Kelly will engage Low's and Williams' project by contemplating Martha Rosler's sober reflection "[w]ith the passage of time, specificity fades and projection more easily does its work."

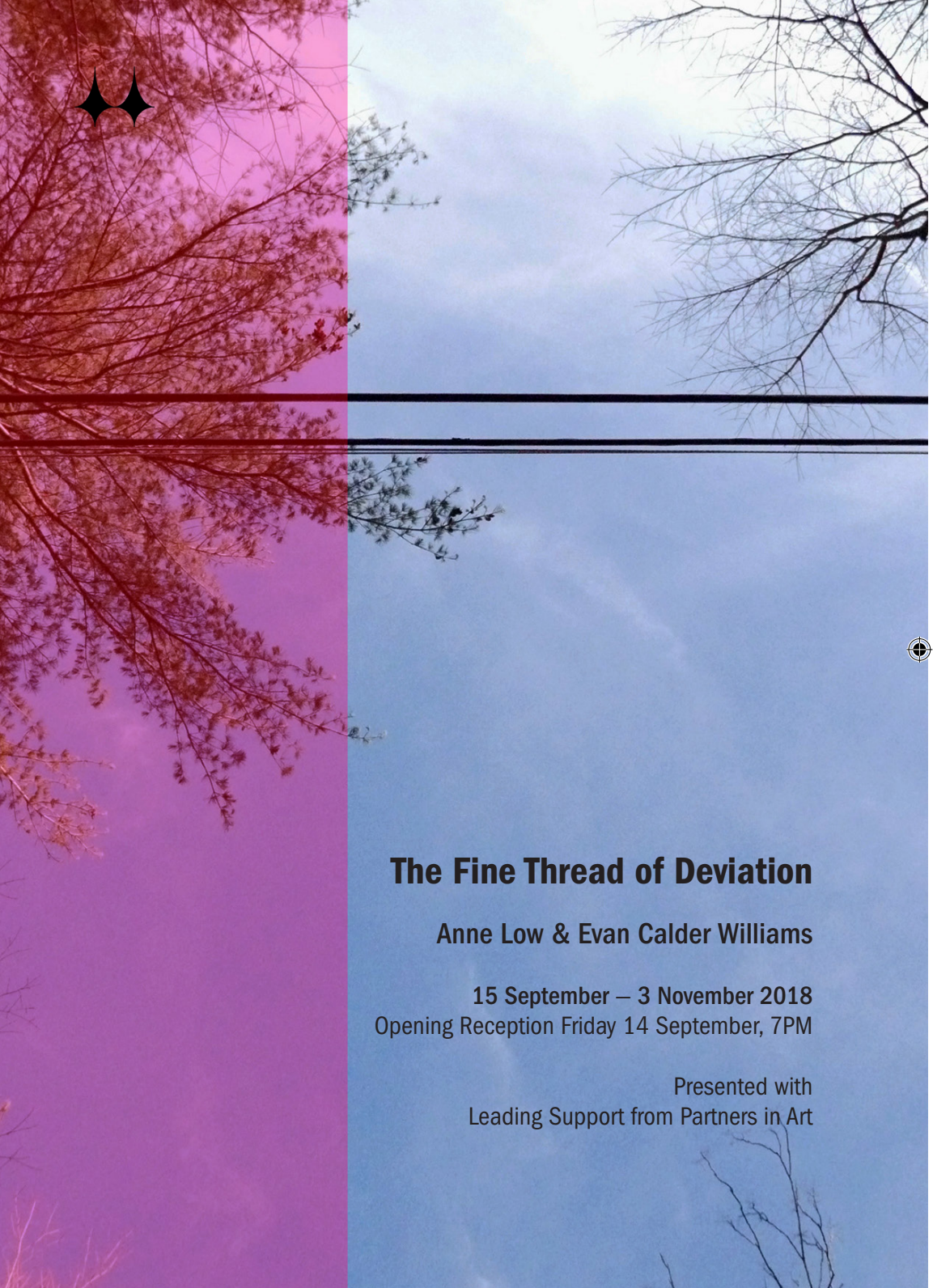
Space is limited; please RSVP to office@mercunion.org or 416.536.1519

Jean-Paul Kelly is an artist based in Toronto who makes videos and exhibitions that pose questions about the limits of representation by examining complex associations in the production, reception and circulation of documentary material.

SESSION is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group



Admission to our public programming is free and all are welcome.



The Fine Thread of Deviation

Anne Low & Evan Calder Williams

15 September – 3 November 2018
Opening Reception Friday 14 September, 7PM

Presented with
Leading Support from Partners in Art

The Fine Thread and the Paperstainer

Anne Low and Evan Calder Williams’ exhibition at Mercer Union derives its title from Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. In 1916 Gurley Flynn wrote, in defense of alleged textile saboteur Frederick Sumner Boyd, that only a “fine thread of deviation” separates the normal degradation of materials condoned by industry from that covertly pushed by they who seek to ruin such industry and its social forms.¹

According to Williams, we can define this “fine thread of deviation” as the “impossibly small difference between exceptional failures and business as usual, connected by the fact that the very same properties and tendencies enable either outcome. If we are to think of sabotage as a process that negates productivity, it’s a negation that can’t be disentangled from the structures of productivity itself.”² In his writing on the history of sabotage, Williams provides a useful consideration of the term:

“the deployment of a technique, or activation of a capacity, at odds with the apparatus, system, or order within which it is situated and for which it is developed. Incompatible with a model of cleanly delineated means and ends, sabotage takes procedures as always in potential excess to plans – that is, to structures that, first, articulate the link between a projected possibility and what actually gets produced, and second, establish conditions for what will be visible, how it will count, and what will support it. Less abstractly, sabotage also means putting vinegar on the loom, doubt in the smile, glass in the motor, milk in the bearings, shit on the spikes, sand in the soup and worms in the code.”³

Pursuing this minor gap between the plan, the conspiracy, the glitch and the willful mistake, Low and Williams’ work follows this fine thread. The heart of their collaboration is a projection screen hand-woven in silk using a variation on a twill pattern conceived by Low and Williams. This screen and its pattern ground the structure of the video shot and assembled by Williams, which uses the “rhythm” of a woven pattern’s binary construction – one thread over or under another – to generate a system of colour and montage that organizes text, thermographic imaging, digital video, and found footage. The content of the video is less a narrative than a mosaic of discontinuous histories, centred around Boyd’s alleged sabotage, that find points of continuity between ecology, industrial surveillance, insurgency, and technology and that takes shape in the video’s form itself, caught between the structured intervals of the pattern and the forms of contested visibility that take shape within it. For instance, the history of Rhodamine B, a fluorescent magenta dye, passing from its use by striking silk weavers in the early 20th Century as a form of production sabotage to the transformation of silkworms into miniature dye houses. While the silkworm has long been reared commercially for the production of silk fibre; in 2011 researchers in Singapore developed a technique of adding the chemical into the diet of silkworms, producing cocoons of brightly coloured silk thread.

The concept of sabotage expands beyond the abstracted content of the video, extending into the gallery itself through the materiality of the screen, which lends itself towards challenging our understanding of how one might read moving imagery and its infrastructure. Here, the screen is treated as interface in all its forms: a porous and continually shifting frame, endlessly permuting a luminescent light source and display structure; a dense net of woven gestures created for a single projection that is itself designed for this screen alone. It gestures towards a history of film theory and cinema studies that has largely repudiated the notion that film is dependent on a screen.⁴ The delicate silk hangs in the gallery, reacting to every current of airflow – often made by moving bodies – thereby undoing the controlled ninety-degree angle and flat plane with which we typically view and frame moving image. The film’s montage and its projection onto an un-stretched, subtle moving surface coupled together with the movement of images in time and the movement of bodies circulating the screen, fold into one another. The apparatus of the shifting frame suggests possibilities for undoing filmic boundaries, and, as a result, highlights the transition between images and the experience of them in order to give way to an expanded video installation that takes on an unpredictable and immersive quality.



Evan Calder Williams and Anne Low, video still *The Fine Thread of Deviation*, 2018. Digital video on handwoven silk. Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto.

This sense of immersion is punctuated by the artists’ use of fluorescent pink – the colour of Rhodamine B – a hue modulated by Williams to hover between the pure toxic dye and the hot red that came to stand for militant organization against the conditions of such labour, exemplified by Gurley Flynn and the Industrial Workers of the World activists. The pink washes over the screen and seeps deep into the hallway of the gallery, meeting the equally saturated light from the gallery’s pink front door, folding immersion and cinematic experience into one another. It would seem that the artists’ response is through their shared sense of materiality as already technical and temporal; seeing both textile and moving image as structured by unseen gestures and kneaded with time, though here, time is itself a permeable, malleable embodiment of history.

In contrast to the porous condition of Low and Williams’ collaboration, the back gallery of Mercer Union presents an interior space, belonging to a more singular subjectivity. Acting as a literal “backspace,” these so-called separate quarters house new sculptures created by Low. This room firmly demonstrates the artist’s ongoing explorations into the affect of hyper-specificity of material production, whereby her sculptures are produced through techniques that are traditionally associated with methodologies from functional object manufacture and decorative art. The show’s title *Paperstainer* – a historical term for wallpaper printers – is for the artist a reference to the existence of women paperstainers in 18th Century Sweden who were able to establish printing ateliers in a trade not yet controlled by male dominated guilds. By entering the room through a site-specific architectural fragment consisting of a lintel and paneled pass through extrapolated from an 18th century interior, this space turns into a private quarter that can be seen from the front gallery. Titled *Ingress to the Ugly Room*, these ongoing interventions are not considered autonomous works by the artist, but rather a category of activity that shifts the conditions of display within the room.

Meanwhile, each of Low’s newest sculptures are produced using highly specific material methodologies usually ascribed to furniture making and domestic interiors. *Bedchamber of a paperstainer (bedsteps)* (2018) takes



Anne Low, detail from *Bedchamber of a paperstainer (bedsteps)*, 2018. Wood, hand woven and hand dyed embossed wool, paint, paper, calcium carbonate and hide glue. 17 1/2 x 22 x 21 inches. Courtesy the artist.

the form of bedsteps typically used in royal and patrician bedrooms of the 18th Century to step onto bed platforms high off the ground. Through a process of approximation and extrapolation, the work is an idiosyncratic combination of contemporary materials performing traditional technique. For example the upholstery is an embossed harateen that the artist produced with a small company that over a decade developed the arcane techniques required to emboss woolen cloth. The production of the object is typical of Low’s interest in working with highly skilled techniques that disappeared with the onset of industrialization. At the heart of this process she remains unbound to any particular moment in history, instead activating a particular technique or skill while addressing contemporary interpretations of objects and materials. Therein lies the connecting force between the front and back gallery space.

Both remain entrenched in a playful exchange of models of influence. The artists aim to confuse and negotiate the material concerns and traditions that underlie each respective installation. Their work pulls at the fine threads, deviating from the structures of history that suggest how we ought to view and relate to material and objects. Low and Williams’ collaborative and respective projects open the potential for disrupting the assumptions of what objecthood and moving image looks like.

— Julia Paoli

¹ Gurley Flynn, Elizabeth. 2014. “The Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers’ Industrial Efficiency.” In *Direct Action and Sabotage: Three Classic IWW Pamphlets from the 1910s*, 89-115. Oakland: PM Press.

² Calder Williams, Evan. 2016. “Manual Override.” *The New Inquiry*, March 21, 2016.

³ *ibid*

⁴ This notion is connected to the history of expanded cinema, a term coined in the mid-1960s by US filmmaker Stan Van Der Beek. The term is used to describe a film, video, multi-media performance or immersive environment that pushes the boundaries of cinema and rejects the traditional one-way relationship between the audience and the screen. This history encompasses the moment when artists and filmmakers began to exhibit their works not in cinemas, but in art galleries, creating different ways of experiencing film and challenging the conventions of spectatorship.

SPACE: Joi T. Arcand

kiya itako (be you) presents two mirrored Nēhiyawēwin (Plains Cree) phrases written in syllabics. One phrase, set atop a prairie sky, is installed outside of MOCA Toronto; the other, on a childhood photograph of Arcand, is installed outside Mercer Union. The two sentences come from words spoken by Joi T. Arcand’s mentors, offering contradictory descriptions of Arcand’s “authenticity” as a Cree woman and as a second-language learner of Nēhiyawēwin. The words speak of the importance of Language to cultural identity, and the anxieties, hope, struggle and loss surrounding that relationship.

In 1892, Richard H. Pratt wrote, “Kill the Indian, and save the man.”¹ Shortly afterward, he founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, a model for nearly every other Industrial/Residential School across the United States and Canada. Pratt was an ardent proponent of cultural genocide as a more civilized alternative to the literal extermination of Indigenous peoples (which was the defacto aim of the US government at the time). He believed the elimination of Indigenous languages and cultural practices would be just as—if not more—effective a means for erasing Indigenous presence.

When an elder says “language is the key to our survival,” they are resisting this genocide. But this sentiment—as well as its less generous cousin, “you aren’t Indigenous if you don’t speak your language”—places the essence of Indigeneity in languages that very few individuals know. But how does one adequately learn a language without people to speak with, or access to communities that offer language immersion? How can one think in a language when only broken phrases have been learned from an Auntie, an app, or during week-long retreats? And how can tools for communication—that vary widely across nations and territories, and which have undergone continual evolution throughout history—be the sole repositories for an entire culture?

These are the central tensions within which Arcand’s work exists, a widespread struggle to recover language and a sense of self in the shadow of cultural genocide. Arcand’s imagery investigates the aesthetic, cultural and communicative meaning of Nēhiyawēwin, while demanding a confrontation with legibility—she asks: who has access to the knowledge carried within language? Although Cree is the most widely used Indigenous language in Canada, those who speak it account for less than 0.3% of the national population, and even fewer still are able to read syllabics.² Here in Tkaranto, syllabics are more likely associated with Anishinaabemowin, rather than Cree. This is because Nēhiyawēwin is not native to Tkaranto.

Monolingual Anglophones, who may interpret Arcand’s pieces as “foreign,” are partially correct if one follows a hyper-localized understanding of place. But these definitions of territory, don’t take into account that Nēhiyawēwin was likely spoken on this land long before English, since Indigenous ancestors were multi-lingual and they travelled through territory exchanging knowledge. Languages travel too.

In the future we may see something completely foreign to current languages. What comes from a Chikasha learning Cree on Dakota territory? Or Anishinaabeg mis-reading Nēhiyawēwin syllabics and finding something new? Somewhere in the ambiguity of this intersection—moving from nostalgia to constructive illegibility—there is space for understanding that doesn’t annihilate the cultural meaning imbedded in its constituent parts, but instead reaffirms their vitality. In between the foreignness and familiarity of these pieces, in between truth and falsehood, there is a new reality striving for articulation.

—John Hampton

¹ *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

² Damell, Regina and Michelle Filice, “Cree Language,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Published 2006, last edited 2018.

SPACE is a series of commissioned works for the billboard space on the side of Mercer Union.