



*I Hope I'm Loud When I'm Dead* is commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto; Bergen Kunsthall; Camden Arts Centre, London; and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. The work is produced with support from the Julia Stoschek Collection, Outset Germany\_Switzerland and Arts Council Norway.

*Deux Soeurs Qui Ne Sont Pas Soeurs* is commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto; Bergen Kunsthall, Borealis Festival, Bergen; Camden Arts Centre, London; and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. The work is produced with support from Fluxus Art Projects and Arts Council England, and features a score by Laurence Crane commissioned with support from Arts Council Norway.

This exhibition is realized in partnership with Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival: 1–31 May 2019, and Images Festival: 11–18 April 2019.

*Plural Dreams of Social Life* is made possible with Leading Support from the Hal Jackman Foundation.

Mercer Union thanks Support Donors Elisa Nuyten and David Dime.



**Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art**  
1286 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M6H 1N9 Canada  
(one block east of Lansdowne TTC Station)  
office@mercerunion.org | www.mercerunion.org

Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11AM – 6 PM  
Tours every Saturday at 2PM – Free, all welcome

**Executive Director:** York Lethbridge  
**Director of Exhibitions & Programs:** Julia Paoli  
**Exhibitions & Programs Assistant:** Aamna Muzaffar

**Audience Development Assistant:** Sonya Filman  
**Lead Preparator:** Danielle Greer

**Board of Directors:** April Alierio, Sandra Brewster, Rebecca Carbin, Miles Collyer, Nicole Cropley, Miles Gertler, Geoffrey Gibson, Sarah Heim, Laurie Kang, Jeremy Laing, David Neligan, Michael Salem, Nicola Spunt, Marya Syed, Brigid Tierney, Negin Zebarjad

Mercer Union acknowledges the support of its staff, volunteers and members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.



Canada Council  
for the Arts  
Conseil des arts  
du Canada

ISBN: 978-1-926627-51-9



Cover images: Beatrice Gibson, film still *Deux Soeurs Qui Ne Sont Pas Soeurs*, 2019. 16mm digital transfer. Courtesy the artist.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Beatrice Gibson** is an artist and filmmaker based in London. Her films are often improvised in nature, exploring the pull between chaos and control in the process of their own making. Drawing on figures from experimental modernist composition and literature—Cornelius Cardew, Robert Ashley or Gertrude Stein—her working method is often participatory, incorporating co-creative and collaborative processes and ideas. Recent solo exhibitions include: Camden Arts Centre, London (2019); Bergen Kunsthall (2019); and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2018). Gibson's films have been included in such festivals as the New York Film Festival; Toronto International Film Festival; BFI London Film Festival; International Short Film Festival Oberhausen; Courtisane Festival, Ghent; Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival, Spain; among others. Gibson is twice winner of the Ammodo Tiger Short Award, International Film Festival Rotterdam; and winner of the 17th Baloise Art Prize awarded at Art Basel. In 2013 she was nominated for both the Film London Jarman Award and the Max Mara Art Prize for Women. Gibson's films are distributed by LUX, London. She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London.

**Erika Balsom** is a senior lecturer in Film Studies at King's College London. Her book *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation*, was published by Columbia University Press in 2017. She is the co-editor of *Documentary Across Disciplines* (2016), author of *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (2013), and a frequent contributor to magazines such as *Artforum*, *Frieze*, and *Sight & Sound*. Her scholarly work has appeared in journals including *Cinema Journal*, *e-flux*, and *Grey Room*. She was international film curator in residence at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre, New Zealand (2017), resulting in the 2018 screening programme and publication *An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea*. She is a winner of the Philip Leverhulme Prize (2018) and the Katherine Singer Kovács Essay Award (2018), from the Society for Cinema & Media Studies.

## SPACE: Joi T. Arcand

13 April - 1 June 2019

Joi T. Arcand presents the last in a series of commissioned image works for SPACE—a billboard project located on the east façade of Mercer Union. An accompanying text written by Mika Lafond is featured on the following page.

**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). She is founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine, *kimiwan* (2012–14); and in 2017 curated the group exhibition *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101, Ottawa.

**Mika Lafond** is a member of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation. She holds an MFA in Writing from the University of Saskatchewan where she also currently teaches. Her poetry has been published in *The Malahat Review*, *kimiwan* zine, and has been included in several anthologies. Her first book of poetry, *nipê wânîn: my way back* was published in 2017 by ThistleDown Press and follows the journey of one woman discovering her Cree heritage and how it has come to shape her. Lafond is currently at work with the Saskatoon Public School Division's Indigenous Ensemble on the production of her first stage play entitled *otâcimow*.

To receive future publications by mail and many other benefits, become a member of Mercer Union. Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.

the flavour of change

the land has changed  
no longer do the grandmothers pick  
from the wild breast of our mother  
we no longer move with the season  
with the herds  
since Treaty  
we have had to learn to find value in what the land gives us  
from this space where we have been placed  
displaced yet we find livelihood  
domestic animals  
domestic lands  
servants of survival

each morning before the sun breathes light onto this land  
the grandmothers pin back their hair  
wash their hands in basins of warm water  
tie their kerchiefs of pinks and reds  
to catch the sweat of their labour  
long days on their aching feet  
comforted only by the moose hide wraparounds  
from grandmothers who knew the wild  
knew how to chew the hide  
to embrace feet with a supple caress  
those born now do not necessarily know  
the magic of moose nose soup  
or the intricate significance of each bone muscle organ  
memories held under tied back hair and kerchiefs  
wrapped around  
from grandmothers

we learned that with change  
one thing did not  
one animal can provide for many needs  
waking before the sun  
to give thanks and pull flavours from animals in ramshackle barn stalls  
then haul pails splashing with the weight of each step to the porch  
where grandmothers churn and churn and churn  
to fill our mouths  
with butter  
found wealth from a changed land

—Mika Lafond



Beatrice Gibson:  
Plural Dreams of Social Life

13 April – 1 June 2019  
Opening Reception Friday 12 April, 7PM

## Edgelessness

I am a galactic cloud so deep                   so involuted that a light wave could take 15 years to travel through me                   And has taken                   I am an instrument in the shape of a woman trying to translate pulsations into image                   for the relief of the body and the reconstruction of the mind.

—Adrienne Rich, “Planetarium,” 1968

Beatrice Gibson’s *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* (2018) opens with an account of what it is to feel the world coursing through the body—corrosively, brutally. The claustrophobia of crowded underground trains, the shattered windows of an urban uprising, the oppressive fear of sudden violence, the dull ache of a warming planet, the fallout of social domination: all push in through chiselled fragments of image and sound, punctuated by blackness. The ideology of neoliberalism preaches a gospel of self-reliance and autonomy, selling to all a retreat from mutual interdependence that benefits only the most privileged few. In the first moments of Gibson’s film, the reality of contemporary existence tears through the illusory promises of this paradigm. To live is to be vulnerable, exposed. “I can still feel my body but it’s like the skin is gone. It’s all nerve, edgeless,” the artist relays in voiceover. Forty years after Adrienne Rich described the self as a galactic cloud of deep involution, pressures have intensified. In our cruel and accelerated present, Gibson offers the image of a raw wound through which light waves of actuality pass unimpeded, instantaneously stinging and staining.

Nestled within all these evocations of what denudes the self of epidermal comfort, dissolving by force any sense of bounded individuality, there is something else: glimpses of Gibson’s young children, Obie and Laizer. In *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* and its sororal companion *Deux Soeurs Qui Ne Sont Pas Soeurs* (2019), the bonds of parenthood emerge as a second site at which subjective integrity falters, now not as violence but as ethics. The child is a paragon of an ethical relation to alterity, coming before the self, demanding a relationship to the future in a time of woe, when such a thing can feel so hard to imagine. Here is another edgelessness, very different from the first. These films, more dyad than diptych, with images and themes passing from one to the next and back again, trace the relationship between these dual dispossessions of the self. They hold the horrors of the world in one hand and the obligation—and joy—of a relation to alterity in the other, searching for reparative responses to the morass of a present ever more privatized, ever more desperate.

In this project of repair, Gibson assigns a central role to queer and feminist poetry. Whether they create literature or cinema, Rich’s instruments of translation are still here, shaping the pulsating mess of life into images—not to neutralize or tame the problems of the world but to offer counsels for survival and contestations of what is. *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* borrows its title from the poet CAConrad. Following the film’s opening evocation of crisis, a handheld camera moves around a room in which Gibson and Conrad sit together with curator Mason Leaver-Yap and poet Eileen Myles, all four enveloped in rutilant light. On the soundtrack, United States president Donald Trump speaks of the need to rebuild and restore the promise of America. The irony of this audiovisual counterpoint is palpable; the “we” of Trump’s spurious promises excludes those pictured, as it does so many more. Yet the urgency of change is what is at stake for Gibson, too. She excerpts Trump’s rebarbative address only to interrupt it with Conrad reading poetry, beginning with the line of the film’s title, wresting the mandate of social transformation away from the patriarchal right.

As the presence of Conrad and Myles suggests, these films leave behind the references to male avant-gardists that populate many of Gibson’s previous works—be it Cornelius Cardew, William Gaddis, or B.S. Johnson—to espouse a different citational politics, a citational politics of difference. *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* also calls on the poetry of Rich, Audre Lorde, and Alice Notley. These queer and feminist voices mingle with the artist’s own, as she embeds them amongst images of daily life: books and toys, tarot cards and crystals, her children at the beach and at home. *Deux Soeurs Qui Ne*

*Sont Pas Soeurs*, meanwhile, is the name of an enigmatic, page-long film scenario written by Gertrude Stein in 1929, until now left unrealized. Gibson begins the film with Notley—a literary granddaughter of Stein<sup>1</sup>—describing her desire to track daily life on multiple levels before delving into a liberal adaptation of Stein’s scenario, an oneiric fable of repetition and recombination in which two women search desperately for a white poodle. To embody Stein’s characters, Gibson draws from her community, casting educator Diocouda Diaoune, artist Adam Christensen, curator María Palacios Cruz, and artist-filmmakers Basma Alsharif and Ana Vaz. Collaboration prevails over the mythos of singular authorship, as Gibson moves between her adaptation of Stein’s absurdist tale and non-fiction encounters with these friends, several of whom read letters to absent loved ones. All confront unknown prospects: Alsharif and Diaoune, both pregnant, speak to their children in utero, while Vaz questions whether her home country of Brazil, where she no longer lives, has a future. “The barbarism has returned that never went,” she says.



Beatrice Gibson, film still *Deux Soeurs Qui Ne Sont Pas Soeurs*, 2019. 16mm digital transfer. Courtesy the artist.

Both films pull citation away from its familiar employment as postmodern textual play to render it, as Sara Ahmed has described, a form of feminist memory, a place of feminist dwelling, a way of acknowledging a debt to those who have come before.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, these are works of great intimacy, produced within a cultural moment that sees the first-person singular frequently deployed in art and literature as a guarantee of authenticity—a moral value that is today so often a matter of consumption and commodification. The “I” can be an arrogant dismissal of the “we” that we always are, proclaiming a false uniqueness and autonomy that conforms perfectly to neoliberal demands. By making citation and collaboration integral to these emphatically personal works, Gibson turns away from these tendencies—and the solipsism and narcissism that lurk within them—to see the “I” as an indeterminate field forever shaped and inhabited by others. “This is Alice speaking now...”, “This is Audre speaking now...”, she says in *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead*, ceding her place to these women. Rather than refer fixedly to single biography, a single body, as the anchor of meaning and point of focalization, these films embrace the polyvocal weave of the collective. As much as Gibson remains at their core, they are choruses, not monologues, and even less confessions. On this last count, the lodestone of poetry is key: though it may convey what is ownmost, in its judiciousness, it is the antithesis of direct speech, channelling personal expression through the impersonal opacity of crafted language, not to obstruct or dilute, but to intensify. For Gibson and her interlocutors alike, the artifice of rhetoric shapes the miasma of experience into the sharp corners of art.

As with the “I,” so with the domain of parenthood: it is an opening onto the outside. The role of the parent is sometimes seen as a retreat from public life, enclosing the child in an impenetrable cocoon. *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* invokes this shelter, as Gibson cuts between tender images of her partner, Nick Gordon, in a disco-lit bath with their children, and footage of Grenfell Tower burning, with flashes of refugees arriving on a Sicilian beach in between. This constellation stages a candid reckoning with the privilege of private security in the face of endangered, even extinguished, life. Yet understood within the film’s larger forcefield, which incessantly situates parenthood in relation to political, ecological, and humanitarian emergency, these cuts figure as both distance and relation, irreconcilability and proximity. We are not all equally exposed to the gales of precarity, but we are all implicated, and no one is fully exempt from their devastating

power. How to cope with the guilt, the responsibility, of relative safety? Perhaps it is a matter of heeding as much as one can CAConrad’s impossible call: “Love all unloved parts without pause.”

Gibson suggests that the child is not merely a being requiring protection from a vile world; the child is a being that demands that the parent engage with the world in all its vileness, loving all its unloved parts—because the child is, among other things, a demand for a future that might be different and better than our tumultuous present. This demand shapes *Deux Soeurs*, as the two strands of the film—the Stein scenario and the non-fiction testimonies—seemingly so different, are braided together as forms of transgenerational communication, a taking and giving of strength that flows backwards and forwards through time. Both films position parenthood and the citation of women’s artistic practices as twin reproductive forces that suture past to future, creating pathways of feminist inheritance. This conception of lineage and responsibility encompasses blood ties but is not bound by them; it is open to creative affinity, exceeding the bounds of heteronormativity and privatized affect. When Diaoune and Alsharif speak to their unborn children, their concerns are both personal and political, whether it involves life as a racialized subject in France or the pain of the Palestinian diaspora. Of her life in Cairo, Alsharif admits, “Our security is precarious here,” before adding, “but so is the entire world’s.”

So much is uncertain. But what is certain is that no parent will be able to make a better future for their child alone. The effort of worldmaking is one that we must undertake together, breaking out of secluded enclosures to stand with others. In her engagement with a corpus of queer and feminist cultural production, Gibson suggests that art itself may provide a forum for this experience of transformational collectivity. She, too, reads a letter to her daughter, near the end of *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead*. In it, she describes the film as a resource for resistance to come: “I wanted to put all these voices in one frame for you, so that one day, if needed, you could use them to unwrite whoever it is you’re told you’re voiced to be.” Though it is a gesture of aspiration and empowerment, as well as a statement of confidence in the power of art, it equally harbours a grim acknowledgement: the future might not be any better, any different. Our children, biological or otherwise, could continue to face what we have, or worse. *Deux Soeurs* refers less openly to the global political situation than *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead*, but it is a film more palpably under the sign of Saturn, full of sombre, seemingly unending nights and plangent music. Danger feels close at hand, because it is. In their mournful song of frustrated desire, does Christensen hurt for the catastrophe that has already occurred or the catastrophe to come? Both films register in their own way the nimbus of anxiety, sadness, and anger that blows in from what Franco “Bifo” Berardi has called the “slow cancellation of the future.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet as Antonio Gramsci knew, pessimism of the intellect can be matched by optimism of the will. The letters of *Deux Soeurs* voice resilience more than fear, while *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead* concludes with an emphatic assertion of beauty and perseverance, in Gibson’s restaging of the closing sequence of Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail* (1999). In the original, Denis Lavant’s character is contemplating suicide when, through the magic of a cut that may also be a leap into the afterlife, Denis delivers him to the dancefloor of the Bar des Alpes. Suspended out of time and freed from the imperial discipline that had governed him, he dances with abandon to the house beat of Corona’s “Rhythm of the Night.” Cinema resurrects the dead, giving the joy life could not. Gibson remakes Lavant’s solo as a duet with her son, replacing the patriarchal one with the two. The night of dark, collapsed horizons give way to the night of freedom, play, possibility, togetherness. Through dance, through cinema, through the relationship between mother and child, the world courses through the body once more—again edgeless, now ecstatic.

—Erika Balsom

## PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

### SESSION: EMILIA-AMALIA | in residence

Responding to *Beatrice Gibson: Plural Dreams of Social Life* through a series of four public programs, EMILIA-AMALIA invite artists and practitioners to consider Gibson’s propositions for collective authorship, feminist histories, and the maternal as an essential point of collision between the self and the external world.

#### Thursday 25 April 2019, 7PM

Artist and writer **Moyra Davey** offers a reading from her new monograph accompanied by a screening of notable excerpts from her film work.

Registration for the event opens 13 April, and is limited to thirty persons.

#### Sunday 28 April 2019, 12–3PM

Therapeutic Sound Practitioner **Samara Livingchimes** will lead a meditative sound bath for a small group of participants in the spirit of Pauline Oliveros’ principle of deep listening.

Registration for the event opens 16 April, and is limited to fifteen persons.

#### Sunday 5 May 2019, 12–3PM

Artist **Erica Stocking** hosts a participatory reading of her play *The Artist’s Studio is Her Bedroom*—a choreographed statement on autobiographical art making towards a new grammar for living, working and being in the world—influenced by the methodology and writings of Gertrude Stein.

To participate as a reader inquire with Aamna Muzaffar: aamna@mercerunion.org. General registration for the event opens 23 April, and is limited to thirty persons.

#### Thursday 23 May 2019, 7PM

Artist **Amy Wong** hosts a performative lecture focusing on mother-work as interwoven with social, communal and activist work. Wong explores a range of inspirations and traditions: the popularity of mid-19th Century quilting bees, Cantonese traditions of postpartum nourishment and healing, and the artist’s own use of and thinking around breastmilk production as linked to cultural production.

Registration for the event opens 7 May, and is limited to twenty persons.

SESSION is a project modelling itself after an incubator that invites cultural practitioners to engage with questions that emerge out of a given exhibition.

EMILIA-AMALIA is a Toronto-based exploratory working group of writers, artists and curators that employs practices of citation, annotation and autobiography as modes of activating feminist art, writing and research practices.

For registration and childcare accommodations during these events please inquire in advance: office@mercerunion.org

SESSION is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group



<sup>1</sup> Notley begins her published lecture *Doctor Williams’ Heiresses*, quoted by Gibson in *I Hope I’m Loud When I’m Dead*, with an account of artistic parentage that begins with Edgar Allan Poe mating with a goddess. In the messy ancestral lineage she fabulates, she names William Carlos Williams as her grandfather. She states that Williams was married to Stein, but does not name her as grandmother. See: Alice Notley, *Doctor Williams’ Heiresses* (Berkeley: Tumba Press, 1980), np.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 15–16.

<sup>3</sup> See: Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Benosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2011), 18.