

*Evidence*: Brian Belott, Petrit Halilaj, Ulrike Müller,  
Oscar Murillo, Alanis Obomsawin  
Curated by Amy Zion  
24 June – 20 August 2022



## Exhibition Viewing Guide

This exhibition contains artworks that deal with themes, images and stories that some viewers may find distressing, including children’s experiences of residential schools, war, and the aftermath of conflict.

*Evidence* is a group exhibition featuring contemporary artists who highlight the unique and alternative perspectives of the world that can be found in art by children. The projects in *Evidence* by Brian Belott, Petrit Halilaj, Ulrike Müller, Oscar Murillo, and Alanis Obomsawin, draw art by children into the framework of contemporary art, from which such cultural production has been historically excluded.

*Evidence* takes its title from Allan Sekula’s definition of the term, as that which is presented to the eye and made evident in the image or trace,<sup>1</sup> to characterize a range of artists’ projects that present art by children as worthy of recognition within larger stories of contemporary art and cultural history. *Evidence* is the second exhibition curated by Amy Zion that examines the role of art by children within the framework of contemporary art. The first exhibition took place at the Queens Museum, New York in 2020, in conjunction with a project by Müller.

[1] This paraphrasing comes from Thomas Keenan in: Keenan, Thomas. “Counter-forensics and Photography,” *Grey Room* 55 (Spring 2014), 58-77.

Descriptions of the works included in the exhibition can be found below.

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### **Brian Belott**

*Dr. Kid President Jr. (2022)*

Site-specific installation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Rhoda Kellogg International Child Art Collection

This installation by Brooklyn-based artist Brian Belott consists of paintings by the artist and child art from the collection of Rhoda Kellogg. These works are installed on top of tracings made by Kellogg from drawings by children.

Belott began collecting art by children while he was still a child himself. Later, as an adult artist, he began to copy art by children. He soon discovered the work of Rhoda Kellogg, a child psychologist and

educator who studied with psychoanalyst Carl Jung in Switzerland, and then worked for decades in San Francisco. Kellogg published several volumes on the topic of children's art and amassed a collection of millions of drawings from about thirty countries; a relatively small selection of this international collection appears in this installation. Finger paintings by four year old children (Debbie, Mike B., Rachel, Nicholas R., Jan D., Gary J., Peter L., Barbara, Rachel S., Dianna M., Mike R., Eva B., Marion L.), done from 1951–56 are hung below a series of drawings by a two year old child, Jean N., part of a box of about 450 drawings done over the course of 1958. Belott refers to his ongoing series as “failures” or “forgeries,” a way of acknowledging that his adult works are based on stolen motifs and cannot live up to the originals.

By studying vast samples of drawings, Kellogg classified a system for mapping graphic expression in early childhood development and hypothesized that children followed a predictable and innate continuum of development that could be applied universally. Belott's fifteen year fascination with Kellogg's work and engagement with her collection continues to inspire his practice in drawing, painting, as well as performance.

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## **Petrit Halilaj**

*Abetare (NEVER APPLE) (2022)*

Steel

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; galerie kamel mennour, Paris; and ChertLüdde, Berlin.

Production support provided by Mercer Union

*Abetare* is a series of large-scale sculptural installations based on drawings that the artist found in 2013 in his own elementary school. Halilaj was visiting the school in rural Kosovo, with a video camera to document it prior to demolition. Schoolchildren led him to a pile of desks which were being thrown out, and pointed out the drawings etched onto their surfaces. Halilaj used ink to reveal decades' worth of anonymous drawings, writing, signs, and symbols from generations of school children from the former Yugoslavia, up to and after the war in Kosovo. He found a wide range of imagery: references to the Kosovo Liberation Army (“UÇK”), math equations, initials in hearts, references to Real Madrid and other popular soccer teams, birds, flowers, stick figures, and even memes. In his transformation of the originals, Halilaj magnifies their scale to become life-size and larger, mixing drawings from different desks and students. *Abetare (NEVER APPLE)* is composed mainly of two such drawings, with an apple turned upside down and folded to produce a standing sculpture; its internal scribbles are installed on the wall behind it and the word “never” hangs above. This work was designed site-specifically for the exhibition and produced locally.

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## **Ulrike Müller**

*Moving Parts (with children's drawings from the Spanish Civil War) (2022)*

Site-specific wall painting executed by Erica Stocking with reproductions of historical drawings in the Alexander McLeod fonds, Archives of Ontario

Dimensions variable

New York-based artist Ulrike Müller began to exhibit art by children in the context of her own work in 2020 with a large-scale mural for the Queens Museum, New York. Primarily known for intimately-scaled works, Müller used the monumental commission to draw attention to subjects whose perspectives have been sidelined or overlooked, such as animals and children. Here, in a work adapted from the same series, the large, flat, opaque animal form lives in a virtual space inside the wall, teetering between figuration and abstraction. It is rendered in a color palette that references paintings and murals from municipal buildings by artists who were hired through the Works Progress Administration, a federal project that ran in the United States from 1934–43. Like an animal in a cave painting, the sentinel-like creature stands watch over a selection of reproductions of drawings by children sourced from the Fonds Alexander McLeod in the Archives of Ontario.

These drawings were done in France between 1936–39 by children who had fled the Spanish Civil War, many of whom were either orphaned or separated from their parents. Most of the drawings include the child’s name and age, and a title that describes a motif: scenes of war, evacuation, and relative peace away from the war. Drawings of airplanes are particularly detailed: by recognizing Nazi versus Soviet emblems, the children were able to distinguish an aerial threat from international aid. These drawings are among the first representations of civilian bombings, a tactic that became a staple of modern warfare. McLeod, a notable peace activist and later MP in the Ontario Parliament, collected the drawings while serving as chairman of the Canadian League Against War and Fascism.

Reproductions (top to bottom, left to right):

*“Le guerra [sic] en el frente” (The war on the front), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-1, Archives of Ontario, I0032428

*[Bombardment at night], [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-6, Archives of Ontario, I0032433

*“Le guerra en el frente” (The war on the front), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-3, Archives of Ontario, I0032430

*“Scena de mi evacuación” (Scene from my evacuation), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-4, Archives of Ontario, I0032431

*“Nostre evacuación” (Our evacuation), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-12, Archives of Ontario, I0029899

*“Escena de mi colonia” (Scene from my camp), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-7, Archives of Ontario, I0029894

*[People playing in the park], [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-20, Archives of Ontario, I0032438

*“Escena en Paris” (Scene in Paris), [1936—1939]*

Alexander Albert MacLeod fonds, F 126-4-0-39, Archives of Ontario, I0032457

## Oscar Murillo

### *Frequencies* (2013—ongoing)

A long-term collaborative project between the artist and schoolchildren in over forty countries worldwide

*Oscar Murillo: Frequencies*, artist book edited by Clara DuBlanc, published by David Zwirner Books (2015)

London-based artist Oscar Murillo began *Frequencies* almost a decade ago in his childhood home town of La Paila, Colombia where he lived until age ten. Seeing heavily graffitied desks at his former school reminded the artist of his own student days, and how drawing was an important mode of self expression in an otherwise normalizing setting. Along with members of his family, he covered the desks of a local high school in canvas and encouraged students to draw freely and collectively for the duration of the school year. The canvases were then sent to his studio in the UK. Today he has amassed tens of thousands of canvases from schools in forty countries. The project is titled *Frequencies* because its aim is to represent a multiplicity of lived experiences through cross-sections of society. Murillo emphasizes this diversity by ensuring that different types of schools and communities are included in the project, which documents adolescent development between age ten to sixteen across the globe.

For this exhibition, Murillo is working with Mercer Union and local partners to expand the project into Canada for the first time in the coming school year. He and his team will cover desks in canvas at their cost and collect them at the end of the school year. There are no rules and no demands from teachers aside from allowing students the freedom to express themselves graphically on the canvas.

To find out more about *Frequencies*, visit: [www.frequenciesinstitute.org](http://www.frequenciesinstitute.org)

If you are a teacher or an educational administrator and you would like to get involved in this project, fill out the form linked [here](#).

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## Alanis Obomsawin

### *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971)

16mm film transferred to video

13 minutes (looping)

Courtesy the artist and the National Film Board of Canada

Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin is one of Canada's most celebrated directors. *Christmas at Moose Factory*, her debut film, marked the beginning of a decades-long documentary practice centred on working with Indigenous communities, especially children, to present first-person narratives. For this work, Obomsawin traveled to a residential school in the Cree community of Moose Factory Island on the southern end of James Bay, Ontario. She spent time with the children who were living there, many of whom were far away from their families. Through a process of listening to the children and building trust, they began to narrate and illustrate memories and events that took place around Christmastime.

The film opens with a close up of a child's drawing of a dog; it is tied to a pole in a snowy rural landscape and accompanied by a soundtrack of barks disappearing into a harsh winter wind. After a brief introduction by the artist, the children recount episodes of bannock making, bear sightings, muskrat stew, church

sermons delivered in Cree, bright stars, and Christmas gifts. *Christmas at Moose Factory* is a rare document and record of the children's experiences in their own words.

This film is made available through the NFB's initiative *Aabiziingwashi (Wide Awake)*. Through this program, the NFB makes Indigenous-made works permanently available for community screenings.