

Nightmare Bathroom

Sula Bermúdez-Silverman, Nicki Green, Candice Lin,
Roksana Pirouzmand & Bri Williams

September 24 - November 19

Del Vaz Projects



*Inter faeces et urinam nascimur*¹
(We are born between shit and piss)

What am I doing here? I have come to terrorize you!
I am a monster, you say? No! I am the people!
I am an exception? No! I am the rule; you are the exception!
*You are the chimera; I am the reality!*²

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Opening: Saturday, September 24th, 2022, from 3 to 6 PM
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Preface

In lieu of a standard exhibition press release, and in light of the intricate nature in which I have decided to contextualize the works in this exhibition, I have opted to write an expansive, working text which I hope will be further shaped through conversations with visitors to the exhibition. It was through the generative conversation with many individuals in the months preceding this exhibition that inspired me to write a text that is viscous, changing, and unsealed. As such, this text is published in Google Docs in “Suggesting Mode” so that readers may comment on or suggest edits to the text, which will collaboratively evolve over the duration of the exhibition and appear in the exhibition’s final publication. To obtain access to this document in “Suggesting Mode,” please email info@delvazprojects.com. As you’ll read, [[prompts for response]] pepper the text, opening sites of response, reflection, and participation.

This exhibition illustrates how entangled imperial trade routes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries precipitated sanitary anxieties and influenced modern plumbing design at the turn of the twentieth century. These “technologies of separation and concealment”³ have facilitated the governance of sex, race, degrees of ability, and gender within the bathroom. The collection of works on view, and their interconnectivity, not only suggest the literal plumbing of a bathroom but also multiple parallels between the control and circulation of goods, labor, and bodies and, ultimately, the control and circulation of dirt, piss, and shit.

¹ A Latin dictum attributed to one of the early church fathers, usually to Bernard of Clairvaux or Saint Augustine, found in Bernard Tschumi, “Architecture and Transgression,” in *Architecture and Disjunction* (MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994), 73.

² Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, Semiotext(e), Barcelona, Spain (2021) 15. Preciado borrows this quote from Lorenza Bottner’s “Handicapped?” (1982) who lifted it from Victor Hugo’s *The Man Who Laughs* (1869).

³ Ruth Barcan, “Dirty Spaces: Separation, Concealment, and Shame in the Public Toilet” in *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing*, eds. Harvey Molotch and Lauren Noren, New York University, 2010, 24-41.

In her book, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe explores the lateral connections between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas at the turn of the nineteenth century, examining the relationships between colonialism, slavery, imperial trades and the advent of Western liberalism. By reading “across” colonial archives and texts from the period such as *The Trinidad Experiment* (1806-1838) and William Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848), Lowe is able to show how events such as the ending of the British East India Company as a commercial monopoly in 1833 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1834 enabled the British empire, preoccupied with the need for economic expansion and international competition, to shift away from mercantilism and colonial slavery to newer forms of conquest and imperial governance, a shift that has come to define Western liberalism. More remarkably, however, is how Lowe is able to point out how and why gaps have been made in history and literature in order to suppress the knowledge of these lateral connections in service of developing a smooth, hidden but still violent form of dominion and oppression. Lowe aptly uses the term *intimacies* to describe how the goods of liberal globalism became the necessities and luxuries of a Western interiority. [[What does it mean to hold dear the objects of hidden labor by exploited peoples we’ll never know?]]

Sula Bermudez-Silverman’s series of *Lunettes* and *Peepholes* employs an encyclopedic knowledge of colonial goods and commodities, thematizing how forgotten intimacies are at the root of colonial myth making. Bermudez-Silverman cunningly arranges these materials within semi-transparent resin casts of domestic architraves, creating complex and intricate ciphers that can only be decoded by unraveling the braided histories of the materials and images the sculptures contain. Various species of mantis, for example, are arranged on the window panes of the peephole titled *Grana Cochinilla, 2022*, serving as an index for both cannibalism myths purported by the Spanish invaders⁴ as well as camouflage and the experience of mixed-race individuals passing as white. This second index is especially interesting when reading both Lisa Lowe and Jennifer DeVere Brody’s analysis of the character of Rhoda Swartz, the West Indian mulatta heiress who appears in an early issue of *Vanity Fair* as a prospective match for the son of a wealthy English merchant. The character of Rhoda Swartz, “signifies and disavows racial mixture and the ‘impossible purity’ of Englishness”⁵ and “comments on the ‘illegitimate’ sources of English wealth and the unseemly origins of English imperial power.”⁶

⁴ A decree by Queen Isabella of Spain in 1503 only permitted the enslavement of indigenous peoples if they were identified as cannibals, leading colonizers to increasingly label the indigenous peoples they conquered as cannibals in order to “legitimize” their enslavement and increase Spanish economic power over the Americas.

⁵ Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1998), 18.

⁶ Ibid.

Another work by Sula, titled *English Flies*, 2022, is a lunette window cast in red resin and filled with honey bees. The title alludes to the reintroduction of honey bees to the “New World” by European settlers, and that indigenous peoples named them “English flies.” The terms “English flies” or “white man’s flies” are actually attributed to 17th-century missionary and Puritan pastor John Elliot, who had claimed that his Native American translators had used this term since there was no word in the indigenous languages for bee. On the window panes of the lunette, Sula has enigmatically placed multiple illustrations of conjoined twins by 16th century Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, identifying the origins of the fear, fascination and fetishization of the “other” or non-normative body that would permeate European colonization of Africa, Asia and the Americas, and whose legacy would manifest in the nineteenth-century American pop culture phenomenon known as “freak shows.” [[Othering and ableist narratives undergird contemporary American identities in insidious ways, how do we combat the parts of ourselves that degrade one another?]]

Such intimacies are similarly unveiled in Candice Lin’s *On Being Human (The Slow Erosion of a Hard White Body)*, 2019, a multipart installation in which a mixture of dried poppies, tobacco and sugarcane is boiled, distilled, and pumped around the room. The process begins at a table inlaid with clay tablets inscribed with a passage from John Searle’s 1980 essay *Minds, Brains, and Programs*.⁷ The plants boil and brew alongside the 1876 publication *Chinese Emigration: The Cuba Commission*, which records the demographics of imported Chinese laborers to the Caribbean preceding and following the end of the British slave trade in 1807 and the “emancipation” of slaves in 1834. The aforementioned Trinidad Experiment, for example, attempted to introduce Asian contract labor to the West Indies as a racial barrier between the British plantocracy and rebellious Black slaves. Lin’s arrangement uses allusions to colonial labor and commodities in order to shed light on the suppressed and subordinated intimacies of production in which “opium, grown, processed, and packaged in India, was exchanged for Chinese workers sent around the world.”⁸

From here, the liquid is distilled and circulates in tubes, connecting various sculptural components including a colony of turkey mushrooms grown with the piss of Lin’s students. The liquid is then pumped out of the room and into a bucket that sits on top of a wooden structure modeled after the nineteenth-century Chinese water torture device, itself a racialized term for a European device, containing as its victim 120 pounds of unfired porcelain clay sculpted by myself. Over the duration of the exhibition, the distilled liquid drips onto the porcelain clay body, slowly eroding the mass, distributing it drop by drop across the floor of the courtyard. The undoing of this material recalls the “occluded intimacies”⁹ of slavery, colonialism, and the imperial trade that were central to the “intimacies” of the nineteenth century middle-class home,

⁷ Searle’s essay used the inscrutability of the Chinese language to question what qualifies as a human level of sentience or consciousness.

⁸ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2015), 84.

⁹ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 82.

from the “English” custom of drinking tea to the introduction of the one-piece toilet in 1870, both of which depended on enmeshed colonial trade routes.

Reading across Sula's and Candice's works can explain how the movement of goods, commodities, and labor provided the material comforts fetishized in the late nineteenth-century Anglo-American home. At the same time, we can identify how this bourgeois intimacy was derived from and depended on the socio-spatial split between colonizer and colonized, and thus the need for and implementation of the occlusion of these intimacies was created. [[How do we ignore the violence of our comfort?]] This “economy of affirmation and forgetting”¹⁰ and the creation of “fugitive histories”¹¹ are manifested in the Victorian myth/idyll of the private-public split, or the separation of the feminine private sphere and the masculine public sphere. In other words, we may even consider that the many intimacies Lowe describes, and the notions of liberalism, self-possession, and equality which depended on those intimacies, are gendered to their core. It is these gendered intimacies which begin to be disrupted as Anglo-American imperialism fueled, and was fueled by, the second Industrial Revolution, requiring women to cross the imagined threshold and enter the factory workspace where the first sex-segregated public toilets became the norm.¹²

In his essay *Sex Separation: The Cure-All for Victorian Social Anxiety*¹³, Terry Kogan argues that the laws enacted toward the end of the nineteenth century requiring toilet separation in factories was an effort by policymakers to address the deep anxieties over the movement of women from the private to public sphere, and an effort to maintain the Victorian ideology of separate realms which women entering the semi-public sphere of the workplace threatened. In *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas declares that “dirt offends against order,”¹⁴ going further to explain how dirt is often a metaphor for anything that may threaten or disrupt socio-cultural ideologies (often and especially the division between male and female and the public and private). In eliminating dirt, both as a literal and cultural contaminant, society is able to “eliminate, conceal, or purify”¹⁵ that which it deems necessary in order to preserve social stability. In other words, the creation of the first sex-segregated bathrooms, intended to keep women's bodies within a domestic space outside of the public sphere, was not only an attempt to

¹⁰ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 3.

¹¹ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 84.

¹² The public toilet was gendered in the West, in Victorian England, for example, all public toilets were only for men and women were expected to either hold it or pee over a gutter using a device called a urinette. The first modern instance of a gendered public restroom was introduced as a novelty at a Parisian ball.

¹³ Terry Kogan, “Sex Separation: The Cure-All for Victorian Social Anxiety” in *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing* eds. by Harvey Molotch and Lauren Noren, New York University Press, 2010, 145-164.

¹⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge, New York (1966), 2.

¹⁵ Barcan, in *Toilet*, 2010, 25.

erase women's work from view but also resulted, once again, in the erasure of "all traces of history, of process, and of the conditions of manufacture."¹⁶

Bri Williams encases found objects, often with personal or allegorical meaning, in soap. Over time, the purifying agents begin to erode the surface of the contained object, which in turn begins to leach and release itself into the soap. Such is the case with Williams's *Biting skin off lips*, (2020), a hand mirror suspended in soap, which is then further encased in resin. Hovering between preservation and degradation, the mirror's reflective surface has been slowly eroded by the soap, while the metal frame of the hand mirror seeps rust into the alkaline soap body. Unlike Betye Saar's *Keepin' It Clean* washboard assemblages which contain brooms, bars of soap and grenades "tasked with removing the stains of racism and misogyny from American society,"¹⁷ the soap in Bri's works does not cleanse or wash away - it degrades and even absorbs the objects it contains. [[How did we convince ourselves that *things* must last?]]

The merging via decomposition of mirror and soap in Bri's piece is a charged and poetic gesture, especially when considering the force these two actants have in the private bathroom and public toilet. The bathroom is constructed and replete with these kinds of objects that not only shape who and what we are but also "our repertoires and personal choreographies."¹⁸ "Elimination and beautification take place in different zones," especially in women's toilets, explains Ruth Barcan, "dimly replaying a bodily separation between interiors (which are 'cleaned' by elimination in the cubicles) and surfaces (which are enhanced from the outside, with the aid of lipstick, powder, and hairbrush)."¹⁹ Rather than separating what Barcan calls the "internal, psychologically cleansing"²⁰ qualities of soap and the "external remaking"²¹ that occurs with the hand mirror, Williams's *Biting skin off lips* re-binds these functions, and their technologies, together via the destruction of their separation.

The binding of body and dirt likewise occurs in Roksana Pirouzmand's mechanical sculpture *A wave, A word*, 2022. Submerged in a galvanized steel tub filled with water is a bisque-fired red-clay cast of the artist's back and arms bent over, evoking the prostration position of *salat*²². At the base of the tub, a motor relentlessly pushes a ceramic paddle containing a childhood portrait of the artist's aunt along the water's surface, creating waves that advance and lapse along the back of the artist's body, muddying the water. Throughout her practice and across several recent "kinetic" or "performative" sculptures, Roksana heightens the operative qualities of water from

¹⁶ Eric Michaels, *Unbecoming: An AIDS Diary*, EmPress, Rose Bay, Australia (1990), 42.

¹⁷ "Betye Saar: Keepin' It Clean." New-York Historical Society, 7 Aug. 2018. Press Release.

¹⁸ Harvey Molotch, "Introduction: Learning from the Loo" in *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing*, 10.

¹⁹ Barcan, in *Toilet*, 2010, 31.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² In the ritual prayer of Muslims, the position in which the body takes consists of standing, bowing and prostration.

cleansing to eroding. The (often contained) water in Roksana's works erodes and then *holds*, collecting and absorbing more and more clay and then seemingly redepositing silt back onto the clay body. In these works, water is a solvent, and, perhaps, a solution. [[Can water, as Astrida Neimanis says, "challenge the phallogocentric Enlightenment vision of discrete, atomized, and self-sufficient, Man?"²³]]

Similarly, a series of "family portraits" are instilled with viscosity and porousness. In an inventive process unique to the artist, a collection of found family photos are essentially photo-transferred onto rolled-out, unfired slabs of clay. Once printed (reversed and enlarged), Pirouzmand paints onto the photos with various shades of liquefied red clay. Once dried and stable, the clay-painted photographs are re-moistened with a water spray bottle and quickly transferred onto the slab which absorbs the clay paint by application of slight pressure. Shards of glaze are then applied onto the image, in and around liminal areas — between folds of clothes, between wrists and sleeves, at eyelids, corners of the mouth, fingertips and cuticles. The painted slab is then placed vertically into the kiln at low heat, causing the glaze fragments to melt, or ooze, down the portrait like tears.

Bri and Roksana are dissolving the body. They are enhancing or exaggerating the functional or performative qualities of several actants (in this case soap, mirror, water, tub) to the point where their roles aren't reversed but perversely wild²⁴, where it becomes impossible to find the edges of the body. [[When have you lost the edges of your body?]] Rather than separating dirt from the body, these works challenge "deep ordering principles"²⁵ that were established at the turn of the twentieth century, and which still persist today, in regards to the division, separation and concealment of the self and the other in the public toilet. Remarkably, not only did "the recommendation that factory restrooms be sex segregated become conflated by sanitarians with other requirements of sanitary science related to piping, water supply, or sewage,"²⁶ but sex-separation would soon evolve into other forms of segregation that were perpetuated into and throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including that of race, class, age, degrees of ability, and gender. That all shit and piss becomes commingled had to be concealed.

As Kogan continues, the advent of modern plumbing and the architectural design of public toilets at the turn of the twentieth century reified deep ordering principles: the physical location of toilets; the amount of space dedicated to each sex-segregated toilet; the number of urinals versus stalls; the size of stalls; the precarious and flimsy nature of the partitions (curiously lifted from the floor, perhaps to reveal multiple feet in an act of podiatric surveillance?); the height and

²³ Neimanis, Astrida. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

²⁴ I take this idea from Jack Halberstam's *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*, Duke University Press (2020).

²⁵ Barcan in *Toilets*, 40.

²⁶ Kogan in *Toilets*, 157.

arrangement of fixtures; the color and material of those fixtures; lighting; ventilation; all of these are technologies for the division, separation, concealment, elimination, and disavowal of human waste *and* of the other. One-by-one each of these technologies, which are also architectures that attempt to control the movement of the body, its fluids, its sounds and its smells, are dismantled and reassembled in Nicki Green's *Kohler* series.

Completed during a residency at the John Michael Kohler Art Center in 2019, this triad of sculptures is composed of discarded single-fired toilet tanks, spouts, sinks, bidets and urinals collected from the factory's refuse pile, which Green then surgically re-anatomized and grafted together into intricate and complex porcelain chimeras, leaving visible the traces of sutures, scars, and supports. Before undergoing a second fire with Kohler's vitreous china glaze, Green meticulously covered the sculptures in a series of glyphs and illustrations, recalling Chinese and Dutch blue and white pottery. Green's images, however, are applied with a purple underglaze and are composed of a unique visual lexicon devised by the artist and culled from a variety of sources including feminist, queer and trans imagery; immersion choreography from the Jewish practice of *mikveh*²⁷; sacred geometry; and Gematria (a numerological tradition), effectively transforming these sculptures into objects of water ritual that "affirm the queer body"²⁸ through fluidity. [[One must create the architectures of affirmation where they are found lacking. Which have you created?]]

In *Splitting/Unifying (toilet tanks, slip spigots and medical sink laver with faucets)*, 2019, for example, the viewer is confronted with the triple-gaze of the artist as her head is submerged halfway into water. Above her head, the artist has depicted the parting of the Red Sea, an episode from Exodus in which the prophet Moses parts the waters so Israelite slaves can escape the pursuit of their Egyptian masters. Framing the scene, fungal gills are painted to resemble the lunar/menstrual cycle, and mushrooms (a symbol that has come to represent the nonbinary) sprout all along the edges and borders of the sink and tanks. On the sides of the sink, androgyne water bearers preside over a scene depicting the *Netilat Yadayim*, or the commandment of washing the hands, considered in Judaism as "the primary moral instrument" of the body. Hands appear again and most predominantly on the face of the sink, arranged to resemble the "shin" gesture used by high priests in Judaism during their benedictions; these hands, however, are kinked at the wrist, enclosing within them the queer symbol of the triangle.

In order to draw a direct connection between the transformational metamorphosis that occurs during the ritual submersion of the *mikveh* with the journey of transitioning from one sex to another, she has created a ritual for queer bodies they would normally be denied access to. Nicki

²⁷ The *mikveh* is the Jewish ritual cleansing that is regarded as a symbolic expression of re-birth. It occurs at before certain holidays as well as certain occasions such as marriage, conversion to Judaism, or at the end of a women's monthly menstruation cycle.

²⁸ "Splitting Unifying" Et al., 13 Sept. 2019. Press Release.

has been systematically mining the Talmud²⁹ for the presence of queer figures and bodies. These images and references are subsequently deposited like marginalia onto the white porcelain toilet fixtures, developing an edifying mythos around cleansing and creating the body appropriated from the traditions of Jewish mysticism. For the artist, “to see trans bodies is to reproduce trans bodies into the world.”³⁰ I myself am reminded of yet another “queer” body that appears throughout Jewish folklore, that of the Golem - an amorphous, shapeshifting organism which is entirely made of mud or clay and represents the moldable human body animated by the spirit. It only makes sense then that Nicki would choose clay, a material that undergoes a series of transmutations, as the primary material of her practice, reinforcing it as a trans material.

In her new series of “Tulipieres” titled *Nontactile Contact in Three Parts*, *Water Offering*, and *Receive and Be Received* (all 2022), three white porcelain vases (equipped with copper plumbing pipes to hold flower stems) seem to be undergoing a series of transformations as they emerge from a proliferating, fungal growth. Fungus and mushrooms, like dirt and (human) waste, is an undesirable entity in the bathroom. But for Nicki, fungus shares the same transformational qualities of clay — signaling growth, multiplicity, and evolution. Even the solid, pre-fired plumbing fixtures such as the toilet tanks, faucets, bidets, and sinks that Nicki used in the *Kohler* pieces are reconstituted, their “fixedness” of form mutating into new arrangements for new purposes.

The sink in *Splitting Unifying* recalls a number of other works in modern and postmodern art and architecture: the lavabo which stands ominously at the entry foyer greeting guests of the Villa Savoye, designed by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret in 1928; the inconspicuous sink between the mirror and the body in Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Still #2*, 1977; and the series of plaster sinks Robert Gober began to create in 1983. Perhaps more than any other fixture in the bathroom, the sink has come to embody moral and sanitary hygiene, and reifies the association of plumbing, and the receptacle, with femininity. In his book *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, Rem Koolhaas analyzes the appearance of Miss Edna Cowan, the “Basin Girl” in a 1931 photograph from the Beaux-Arts ball in New York. Cowan, who is dressed as a sink, is the only female in the photograph, surrounded by famous male architects who are dressed as New York’s skyscrapers (the Waldorf-Astoria, the Chrysler, the Squibb Building, the Wall Street Building, etc.).

“An apparition straight from the men’s subconscious, she stands there on the stage to symbolize the entrails of architecture,”³¹ writes Koolhaas. If hygiene is the modern project’s supreme act³²,

²⁹ The Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology.

³⁰ In conversation with the artist at her studio in CSULB. April 22, 2022.

³¹ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Monacelli, New York, 1994), 130.

³² Barbara Penner, “Entangled with a User: Inside Bathrooms with Alexander Kira and Peter Greenaway” in *Toilet*, 234.

then it has placed women in its servicing role, hooking up the female body to the machine. The sink is after all an appliance one hooks up to. I borrow this idea of “hooking up” or “plugging in” from Helen Molesworth, in her essay “Cleaning House with Duchamp,” who in turn borrows this term from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Molesworth goes further to explain, through the work of Duchamp, how the twentieth century was witness to the merging of the body and the machine, and that “women were perhaps not only representations of this phenomenon, but were practicing, in everyday life, different versions of machine-body relations.”³³ The vision of woman-machine “Basin Girl,” surrounded by the “upwardly thrusting forms of the male architects,” reinforces the notion of “verticality” and “uprightness” as morality in modernism and modernist architects. “Verticality,” Le Corbusier rules, “also underlies the workings of nature and the ethics of man: Insofar as man is *modern* [or vertical], he is *ruly*.”³⁴

In *Plumbing*, Nadir Lahiji and D.S. Friedman argue that “this verticality consists in its obstinate repression of the abject, the unclean, and the horizontal.”³⁵ In other words, if we cast the plumb line and follow its verticality down, we will eventually reach the horizontal, and uncovering with it, everything that modern architecture and plumbing, by way of Victorian moral codes and anxieties (both of which presuppose the fugitive “intimacies” of colonial and imperial trade), has attempted to suppress: “the juice, the spittle, the saliva, the snot, the sweat, the tears, the wax, the urine, the feces, the excrements, the blood, the lymph, the jelly, the water.”³⁶ As we have seen, it is not only the “other” that is associated with these undesirable fluids, but also the “other” who has become charged with the task of removing or even erasing this waste and, effectively, with removing and erasing themselves.

The genealogy of the bathroom is no doubt unsettling. [[Do we still feel shame in the bathroom?]] In unearthing “the intimacies of four continents” during European mercantile and imperial growth, we find the colonial-patriarchal roots of a system of classification and order based on power, race, and gender in the nineteenth century. Fueled by economic expansion and capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century, Modernism summoned and encapsulated the age of sanitation, where the bathroom became the pinnacle of a white, minimalist cube meant to separate and conceal people into categories, along with who or what may threaten those categories. One enters, evacuates the result of our most intimate connection to other species, then leaves, apparently unchanged, a modernist magic-trick verging on the religious.

In each of the works in this exhibition, the artist has hooked themselves up to the bathroom, but they (the artists and the bathroom) have decided not to work in the way in which they were designed. In these works, the plumbing is exposed and it leaks; the architecture is porous and

³³ Helen Molesworth, “Cleaning House with Duchamp,” in *Plumbing: Sounding Modern Architecture*, ed. Nadir Lahiji and D.S. Friedman (Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1997) 89.

³⁴ Nadir Lahiji and D.S. Friedman in *Plumbing*, 8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 25.

sweating. The pipes, and the smells and sounds they were meant to contain, are exposed, unruly and horizontal. Pumps and motors don't carry out waste, they consistently redeposit the waste (and all its connotations) back onto the body in an act of further dissolution. Here, the bathroom is unsealed, revealing the "psychic plumbing"³⁷ that exists between the body and its artifacts.

↳

This exhibition takes its name from Robin Schiff's *Nightmare Bathroom*, one of three bathroom installations that were created for the seminal *Womanhouse* exhibition which occurred fifty years ago in 1972. Organized by artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who had earlier founded the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, this exhibition contained the work of over twenty of their female students in various rooms and corridors of a house at 533 Mariposa Ave. Composed entirely of loose pink and white sand, Schiff's *Nightmare Bathroom* portrayed a reclining woman in a tub, with a snake painted on the bathroom's tile floor and a black bird hung over the tub. The bathroom's vanity cabinet was filled with glass toiletry bottles and vessels, which were themselves filled with different colors of sand. "Even though the bathroom can be a refuge and a private place, I have always been afraid there. It is not a rational fear. It may stem from the fear I had in childhood of being sucked down the drain with the water, the ritual of confronting my nakedness, staring at my face in the mirror, the fear of being intruded upon. I wanted to convey the idea of vulnerability," the artist stated as she later reflected on the work.

Several attempts were made to contact Schiff in order to obtain permission to use the name of her piece for this exhibition, as well as images of her piece for promotional material. In a recent and extremely thorough exhibition at Anat Ebgi Gallery in Los Angeles marking the fifty-year anniversary of *Womanhouse*, efforts made by curator Stefano di Paola also proved unsuccessful. "She was one of the very few people that were absolutely unfindable. I'd asked almost every participant of *Womanhouse* that I knew and met and no one kept her contact information or knew where she was. The other impossible find was Sandy Orgel who did the *Linen Closet*."³⁸ In response to my inquiry, Judy Chicago's studio replied similarly. "...we reached out to a few *Womanhouse* participants and unfortunately, none of the people whose contact information we have are currently in contact with Robbin [sic] Schiff... We did hear that she now lives on the east coast and works in graphic design, I hope this information helps."³⁹ In a conversation with Judy Chicago for *Interview Magazine* in 2017, Gloria Steinem recalled that "there was a sign saying, 'Please don't touch the sand,' which made it irresistible... Once you touched the sand, nothing could remove the mark you made."⁴⁰ By the end of the exhibition, the body in Schiff's sculpture was completely eroded away by visitor's fingerprints.

³⁷ In an email with Gan Uyeda, July 14, 2022.

³⁸ In an email with DiPaola, August 13, 2022.

³⁹ In an email with Judy Chicago's studio, August 18, 2022.

⁴⁰ Gloria Steinem, "Feminist Icon Judy Chicago isn't done fighting," *Interview Magazine* (December 11, 2017).



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman received her BA in Studio Art from Bard College and her MFA in Sculpture from the Yale School of Art. Recent solo exhibitions include *Neither Fish, Flesh, or Fowl* at the California African American Museum in 2020 and *Here be Dragons* at Friends Indeed, San Francisco in 2022. Through a practice of thematic diversity free from any material dependency, Bermúdez-Silverman explores the pillars of identity and history, singling her out as one of the most dynamic artists of her generation. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

Nicki Green is a transdisciplinary artist working primarily in clay. Her sculptures, ritual objects and various flat works explore topics of history preservation, conceptual ornamentation and the aesthetics of otherness. She has exhibited internationally, notably at the New Museum, New York; Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, France. Green is a 2022 Nancy Graves Foundation Grantee, a 2020 ART MATTERS fellow, 2019 SFMOMA SECA Award Finalist, among others. She received a BFA from San Francisco Art Institute (2009) and an MFA from UC Berkeley (2018). She is currently an artist in residence at California State University, Long Beach Center for Contemporary Ceramics and is participating in the 2022 Lyon Biennale *Manifesto of Fragility*.

Candice Lin works in Altadena, California. Lin creates multisensory environments that investigate the legacies of colonialism, racism, and sexism, often by mapping the trade routes and histories of colonial goods, including sugar, tea, indigo, and cochineal. She received her BA in Visual Arts and Art Semiotics from Brown University, in 2001, and MFA in New Genres from San Francisco Art Institute, in 2004. Her work is currently on view in *The Milk of Dreams*, the 59th Venice Biennale, Italy, and her solo exhibition *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping* is at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) until November 27, 2022. She is Associate Professor of Art at University of California, Los Angeles.

Roksana Pirouzmand is an Iranian multidisciplinary artist currently living and working in Los Angeles. Her artistic interest focuses on the interaction between the human body as a receiver/viewer and as an activator/performer, with the materials' qualities often serving as a method of communication between the two. She expresses her ideas through a variety of mediums including sculpture, installation, video, and performance art. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Past Seeps into the Present* at Murmurs, Los Angeles in 2022. She received her BFA from California Institute of the Arts and is a current MFA candidate at the University of California Los Angeles.

Bri Williams lives and works between Los Angeles and Oakland. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015 and their MFA from Mills College in 2017. Recent solo exhibitions include Murmurs, LA (2020); Queer Thoughts, NY (2020) and Interface,

Oakland, CA (2018). Recent group exhibitions include Smart Objects, Los Angeles, CA (2021); Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, Vienna, Austria (2021); Thierry Goldberg, New York, NY (2021); Chart Gallery, New York, NY (2021). She is currently a professor and visiting artist at CCA.

Edited by **Joel Kuennen**. They are an art critic, curator, editor, and artist. They received an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2010). Their practice investigates human relationships to the earth as a means of understanding social constructs that can interrupt the extractive and exploitative ways in which we engage with this planet. They are currently in residence at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL) working on a project that explores the burgeoning cultural imaginary surrounding exoplanets, aerospace materials, and interplanetary colonization.





Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022
Epoxy resin, transparency film, honey bees
28 x 36 x 2 inches



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman English Flies, 2022 (Detail)



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *English Flies*, 2022 (Detail)
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit





Candice Lin *On Being Human (The slow erosion of a hard white body)*, 2018 (detail)

Wooden structure, plastic tubing, fired ceramics, unfired porcelain, glass distillation system, hot plate, plants, dried mushroom (grown from the care and distilled urine of Occidental students), welded metal, plastic buckets, pumps, timers
Installation dimensions variable.

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



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Installation dimensions variable

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.





Bri Williams *Crush*, 2021
Metal & plastic bench
48 x 24 x 36 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Bri Williams *Crush*, 2021

Metal & plastic bench

48 x 24 x 36 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Bri Williams *Crush*, 2021 (detail)

Metal & plastic bench

48 x 24 x 36 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Bri Williams Crush, 2021 (detail)
Metal & plastic bench
48 x 24 x 36 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.





Roksana Pirouzmand *Great-grandparents*, 2021

Clay, glaze

22 x 33 x 0.5 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



On the left side of the room, a dark wood table holds a scientific apparatus consisting of a round-bottom flask on a magnetic stirrer, connected to a condenser and other glassware. Below the table, a white bucket is visible. On the wall above the table, a coiled orange tube is connected to a green metal device. A window is visible in the background.

In the center of the room, a large, light-colored metal bathtub is filled with water. A black and white photograph of a young girl is propped up in the water. To the right of the bathtub, a decorative cabinet with intricate patterns and a wooden stand holds various objects. A doorway is visible in the background.

On the right side of the room, a large, golden, textured vessel sits on the floor. A thin, clear tube is connected to the vessel and runs across the floor. On the wall above the vessel, a large, irregularly shaped object is mounted. A wooden door is visible in the background.



Roksana Pirouzmand A wave, a word, 2022

Clay, water, galvanized steal, motor

66 x 24 x 18 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Roksana Pirouzmand *A wave, a word*, 2022

Clay, water, galvanized steel, motor

66 x 24 x 18 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Roksana Pirouzmand *A wave, a word*, 2022 (detail)

Clay, water, galvanized steel, motor

66 x 24 x 18 inches

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Roksana Pirouzmand *A wave, a word*, 2022 (detail)

Clay, water, galvanized steel, motor

66 x 24 x 18 inches

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Nicki Green *Splitting/Unifying* (toilet tanks, slip spigots and medical sink laver with faucets), 2019
Glazed vitreous china with epoxy and found slip spigots.

54 x 40 x 36 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Splitting/Unifying* (toilet tanks, slip spigots and medical sink layer with faucets), 2019
Glazed vitreous china with epoxy and found slip spigots.
54 x 40 x 36 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



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54" x 40" x 36"

Photos courtesy of Kohler Co.



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Nightmare Bathroom Interior Installation View. Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Candice Lin *On Being Human (The slow erosion of a hard white body)*, 2018 (detail)

Wooden structure, plastic tubing, fired ceramics, unfired porcelain, glass distillation system, hot plate, plants, dried mushroom (grown from the care and distilled urine of Occidental students), welded metal, plastic buckets, pumps, timers

Installation dimensions variable.

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



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Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Nightmare Bathroom Interior Installation View. Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



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Installation dimensions variable.

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Bri Williams *Biting skin off lips*, 2020

Hand mirror, soap, beeswax, resin

17.5 x 14.5 x 1.5 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Bri Williams Biting skin off lips, 2020 (detail)

Hand mirror, soap, beeswax, resin

17.5 x 14.5 x 1.5 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Candice Lin *On Being Human (The slow erosion of a hard white body)*, 2018 (detail)
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Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



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Installation dimensions variable.

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *Grana Cochinilla*, 2022

Epoxy resin, cochindeal, jeweled flower matis, boxer mantis, phyllocrania paradoxa, unknown mantis
9 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View.



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *Grana Cochinilla*, 2022 (alternate view)

Epoxy resin, cochindeal, jeweled flower mantis, boxer mantis, phyllocrania paradoxa, unknown mantis
9 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman Grana Cochinilla, 2022 (detail)

Epoxy resin, cochindeal, jeweled flower mantis, boxer mantis, phyllocrania paradoxa, unknown mantis
9 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *Approaching to His Bed, She took Hold of the Hair of His Head*, 2022
Epoxy resin, maize, transparency film, miniature knife

9 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Sula Bermúdez-Silverman *Approaching to His Bed, She took Hold of the Hair of His Head*, 2022

Epoxy resin, maize, transparency film, miniature knife

9 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Nontactile Contact in Three Parts*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
12 x 6 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Nontactile Contact in Three Parts*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
12 x 6 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Nontactile Contact in Three Parts*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
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Nicki Green *Nontactile Contact in Three Parts*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
12 x 6 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Water Offering*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
8 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Water Offering*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
8 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Water Offering*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
8 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Receive and Be Received*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
10 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Receive and Be Received*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
10 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Receive and Be Received*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
10 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View



Nicki Green *Receive and Be Received*, 2022
Glazed earthenware with soldered copper, epoxy
10 x 8 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Del Vaz Projects, Santa Monica. Photo: Exhibit View

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