

SHEENA HOSZKO
Correctional Service
Canada Accommodation
Guidelines: Mental Healthcare
Facility

NASRIN HIMADA
The Gift of Grief Is Care

Collective Welfare
CIRCUIT 5/5, *Take Care*
Curated by
Letters & Handshakes
February 12–March 11, 2018
Blackwood Gallery

SHEENA HOSZKO
Correctional Service
Canada Accommodation
Guidelines: Mental Healthcare
Facility

Correctional Service Canada Accommodation Guidelines: Mental Healthcare Facility is a sculptural artwork based on the *Federal Correctional Facilities Accommodation Guidelines* set by Correctional Service Canada (CSC). Obtained by the artist in 2015 via an access-to-information request, this 700-page document is used by CSC for the building, maintenance, and everyday operations of prisons. In a section titled “Mental Healthcare Facility,” CSC outlines the locations and spatial dimensions required for waiting rooms, bathrooms, and staff offices for prison mental healthcare wings.

People with severe trauma and mental illnesses, due to a lack of resources for their care on the outside, are disproportionately imprisoned by CSC.¹ Parallel to this, symptoms of mental illness increase when people are incarcerated; the notion of “care” in a carceral context is an oxymoron, as the conditions of imprisonment are incongruent with treatment or rehabilitation.²

Correctional Service Canada Accommodation Guidelines: Mental Healthcare Facility consists of two closed structures installed in an atrium of the Communication, Culture, and Technology (CCT) Building at the University of Toronto Mississauga, and positioned midway between the Blackwood’s two gallery spaces. The installation dimensions conform to the CSC’s ten-square metre minimum spatial requirements for mental healthcare waiting rooms and treatment rooms. In this installation, these spaces are constructed out of rented pipe and drape, a type of temporary architecture often used for dividing spaces within warehouses, stadiums,

office buildings, and other open environments. “Walls” of pipe and drape hang from poles to the floor, recalling dividers from ambiguous institutional spaces, like hospital curtains or cubicle separators—a provisional architecture that simultaneously reveals and hides. The rooms are positioned under a staircase and close to the atrium windows; unable to enter the structures, viewers are relegated to the outside. The project understands prison as a system of power relations that extends far beyond concrete block walls, and asks “outsiders” to position themselves within this dynamic. After the exhibition, the materials are returned to the rental company to be used again, suggesting that structures of confinement circulate widely throughout society.

Accompanying the installation, this zine includes a letter to the artist from Nasrin Himada. This is Himada’s second letter to Hoszko about *Correctional Service Canada Accommodation Guidelines: Mental Healthcare Facility*. Himada’s first letter, written for the exhibition at The New Gallery in Calgary, reads, in part:

“Those on the outside who have never been inside a Canadian prison, who have never been incarcerated, don’t know what that space looks like, how it functions, what it does, and how it conditions and perpetuates violence. By providing a glimpse into the design elements of CSC you allow us to think further about the accountability of practitioners, such as architects and designers, and how the building of prisons extends beyond a national issue, as a capitalist, global project.

Prisons function as the implementation of new borders, and people are fundamentally separated from each other based on this fact. The inside and outside become a specific boundary. Creating the infrastructure creates a border, and people are separated from the population, the public realm. Carceral spaces are based on separation and isolation. I feel, Sheena, that your work challenges this violent manoeuvre. To have us walk around a gallery, reconstituted as a carceral space, is to let us wonder about the effects of inside/outside. By having our bodies move, you allow us to think about the space differently, to experience the effects of enclosed space, perhaps affectively. That is because your sculptural work specifically considers the repressive elements of space in scale, precise measurement, and in construction. The design process is as important as the concept, and you remind us of this relationship between making, ethical positioning, and power.”³

1. Fiona G. Kouyoumdjian, Andrée Schuler, Stephen W. Hwang, and Flora I. Matheson, “Research on the Health of People Who Experience Detention or Incarceration in Canada: A Scoping Review,” *BMC Public Health* 15, no. 419 (April 25, 2015).
2. Peter Collins, “The Pathology of Rehabilitation,” *Scapegoat* 7 (Fall/Winter 2014): 217–32.
3. Nasrin Himada, “Letter to Sheena Hoszko,” November 26, 2016. *Correctional Service Canada Accommodation Guidelines: Mental Healthcare Facility 10m2 x 2*. The New Gallery, 2016.

NASRIN HIMADA
The Gift of Grief Is Care

01/05/18

Dear Sheena,

I've been thinking a lot about grief and its relation to love. A few days ago, a poem was sent to me by a healer, entitled "Spell for Grief or Letting Go," by adrienne maree brown. In it, these lines resonate: "that perhaps love can only be as large as grief demands. that grief is the growing up of the heart that bursts boundaries like an old skin or a finished life. that grief is gratitude."¹ The lesson of this past year, since the last time I wrote to you in November 2016, seems to have us, most of us, contending with the limitations of grief, as well as the possibilities that it opens up. I begin here because I feel that so much of what has been driving my thinking, my writing, and my way of being (in my relationships) has to do with the effects of loss, and how that changes everything. For me, I began to think more seriously about care: how to provide care, accept care, and prioritize care as daily practice. I am really grappling here with what it means to anticipate the need for care as an intuitive practice that in some ways softens the intensity and experience of grief—as numbing as grief can be, and as raw and shocking as it can feel. And this is fitting, since I am writing to you, for you, and for the work exhibited in the *Take Care* program at the Blackwood Gallery, in its fifth circuit, "Collective Welfare." It is fitting, and a coincidence. I didn't think this was what I would write about, but it's all I can think about. Grief is most of what I feel these days. And care is what I need.

Your sculptural work *Correctional Service Canada Accommodation Guidelines: Mental Healthcare Facility* delves deep into the violence, isolation, and neglect of care in the Canadian prison system. When I first wrote to you about this work, I wondered about the effects of making art about prisons, specifically about the infrastructure of mental health care inside prisons, which is then shown in gallery spaces. In some way, this sculptural set-up—the design of it, the scale of it—reminds us of the distance, the mechanisms at play that reinforce the border between inside and outside, between people who are imprisoned and people who are not. How are the ethics of care incorporated into this process? How is this concern inseparable from what we do, what we make, how it is made, and for whom?

I would like to think—because I know you, because I know you're also dedicated and committed to organizing for prisoner justice—that for you this process might also be about art's relation to healing. Is it? We've never talked about it. In a recent email correspondence with M. NourbeSe Philip, I wrote to her about the impact her poetry book *Zong!* had on me and my conceptions around art and its relation to healing.² I told her that when I think of *Zong!*, I don't only think of it as a book, or a poem, or a piece of art, but as ritual. *Zong!* conditions a space for healing that deeply engages with the spirit-spaces of past, present, and future. The power of *Zong!*, and the power of her writing, has pushed me to think more about art's connection to healing practices, by situating healing within the realm of the arts.³ For me, this is how conceptions of

making and engaging might shift, in the sense that we no longer make divisions like these, or we shouldn't have in the first place—that art is life, and belongs to life in how it is lived, in ritual, in praxis, in thinking, as well as feeling and healing. These relations that bring art and life in proximity do so through care, and by honouring memory, and by contending with the pain and grief that is the work of everyday. I wrote NourbeSe and expressed that her work is incredibly important and provides such deep insight into thinking about the notion of care in the arts, and how her writing, her thoughts and work on ritual and healing, push us to think beyond the self, that this is something beyond just an individualist project. It's a collective one. Along with *Zong!* and many other examples, I situate your sculptural practice here, Sheena. I wonder at times, what is art's power in the context of the gallery space? What differentiates performance from ritual? How does art condition intimacy? How does it, really, take down walls? How does it soften the edges so we're open to receive its care?

NourbeSe's *Zong!* offers another way to think of what it means to practice healing, what it means to create conditions of care that are relational, collective, and sustainable. I wonder, having not yet done it myself, what it feels like walking around the structures you built, knowing what I know about prisons, knowing what I know about your work, knowing what I know about grief these days. I hope to think that what it does is bring me closer to the priorities at hand: the allocation of care that moves beyond the walls of the prison system. Reminding me of my position, reminding me that the gift of grief ushers in the urgent and

powerful feeling of needing to be connected, needing to be a collective. “Grief is gratitude” because it reminds us we care. Isn’t this the true work of abolitionist organizing? That, in concrete ways, and in meaningful ways, we try, as much as we can, to divest from the borders that condition isolation, separation, colonization. And not just divest, but do differently. Art must do differently, I think; otherwise, I’m not sure it matters. It must, *full heartedly*, decolonize.

all my love,

xNasrin

1. adrienne maree brown, “Spell for Grief or Letting Go,” last modified October 9, 2014, <http://adriennemareebrown.net/2014/10/09/spell-for-grief-or-letting-go/>.
2. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).
3. I am thinking here with Denise Ferreira da Silva and Valentina Desideri and feel very much moved by their Poethical Reading practice: <http://howtoworktogether.org/events/poethical-readings/>.

Resources / Further Information

Journal of Prisoners on Prisons

<http://www.jpp.org/>

Prisoner Correspondence Project

<https://prisoner Correspondence Project.com/>

Solidarity Across Borders

<http://www.solidarityacrossborders.org/en/>

Ear Hustle Podcast

<https://www.earhustlesq.com/>

End Immigration Detention

<https://endimmigrationdetention.com/>

Critical Resistance

<http://criticalresistance.org/>

Demand Prisons Change

<https://demandprisonschange.wordpress.com/>

It's Going Down

<https://itsgoingdown.org/>

Nasrin Himada is a Palestinian writer and curator based in Tio'tia:ke (Montréal), in Kanien'kehá:ka territory. Her practice and research explores the politics of contemporary art practice, specifically focusing on experimental and expanded cinema, and contemporary media arts. Her writings have been published in *Contemp+rary*, *C Magazine*, *Critical Signals*, *The Funambulist: Politics of Space and Bodies*, *Fuse Magazine*, and *MICE Magazine*, among others. nasrinhimada.com

Nasrin Himada would like to thank Sheena Hoszko, Christine Shaw, M. NourbeSe Philip, Teri Starnes, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Jeffrey Malecki.

Sheena Hoszko is a sculptor, anti-prison organizer, and settler living and working in Tio'tia:ke (Montréal), in Kanien'kehá:ka territory. Her art practice examines the power dynamics of geographic and architectural sites, and is informed by her family's experiences with incarceration and the military. Selected solo exhibitions include Centre Clark and La Centrale (Montréal), A Space (Toronto), Artspace (Peterborough), The New Gallery (Calgary) & Forest City Gallery (London) with upcoming projects at articule (Montréal). She is also an avid sci-fi / speculative fiction fan. sheenahoszko.com

Sheena Hoszko would like to thank Nasrin Himada, Ellen Gedopt, Pascale Busseau, Giselle Dias, Eveline Lupien, Su Strang, Manu Volaco, Jeffrey Malecki, Mark Harris, Canada Council for the Arts, and the Blackwood Gallery staff for their support with this project.

Correctional Service
Canada Accommodation
Guidelines: Mental Healthcare
Facility

10m² × 2 Rented pipe and
drape, safety pins.

Dimensions of mental
healthcare facility “Treatment
Room” & “Waiting Room,”
based on design manual
for federal prisons obtained in
2015 via access-to-information
request.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada