

RED  
GREEN  
BLUE

GOLBOO AMANI

CHUN HUA CATHERINE DONG

BRENDAN FERNANDES

ARYEN HOEKSTRA

MANOLO LUGO

KIKA NICOLELA

JUDE NORRIS

KRISTINA LEE PODESVA

~~≠~~ WHITE

EDITED BY  
JOHNSON NGO



DESIGNATED  
NON-SMOKING  
ENTRANCE





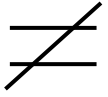
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*After Olympia*, 2011.  
Installation view.

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Installation view.

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Brendan Fernandes, *Changing to Summer*, 2005.  
Installation view.



JOHNSON  
NGO

Two parallel lines obliquely intersected by another; a road at a railroad crossing.

Open the door ever so briefly to ensure the coast is clear

Proceed along with caution across the tracks

As a curator, I have set up a scenario, an equation, with the exhibition title *Red, Green, Blue ≠ White*, making a claim that three colours do not equal a fourth. This statement, illustrated by the does-not-equal sign, was not intended to signify inequalities. Rather, it points to the impossibility of distilling ongoing and shifting discussions of race and identity down to a simple equation (mathematical, logical, or aesthetic). At a more poetic level, the structure of the “≠” sign serves as a device to open up possibilities to reconsider and challenge existing definitions surrounding race and the politics of identity. Animated by a set of mathematical equalities, the symbol gestures to multiple angles—positions highlighted not for their lack or disparity, but for their potential in relation to each other. The sign’s own equivalencies point to the contextual, relational, and spatial dimensions of examining identity in and through artistic practice.

Throughout this publication, the intersecting line, called a transversal, is used as a visual motif. When a transversal intersects two parallel lines, a series of equalities occur. Figure 1 illustrates a mathematical system within geometry

that demonstrates equalities by revealing the unknown variables. The opposite angles are equal (angle  $a = c$ , angle  $d = f$ , and angle  $g = e$ ); the corresponding angles are equal (angle  $a = d$ , angle  $c = f$ , and angle  $g = b$ ); and the alternate angles are equal (angle  $b = e$  and angle  $c = d$ ). As a visual motif, this symbol stretches beyond its function as a does-not-equal sign. The forward-leaning stretch of the transversal metaphorically refers to the extension of conversations about race, departing from an awareness of (in)equalities to arrive at the artistic potential of shifting perspectives. In other words, the transversal embodies a relationship to dialogue and time—it marks the territory of the unfixing, the process of defining. The exhibition explored that process of defining as performative, happening alongside live gestures, interactivity, and thoughtful conversation.

Discussions of race and identity politics have escalated since the conception and run of *Red, Green, Blue ≠ White*—within the contemporary art world, with controversies of cultural appropriation, as well as in the current political climate of Brexit, Donald Trump’s presidency, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the

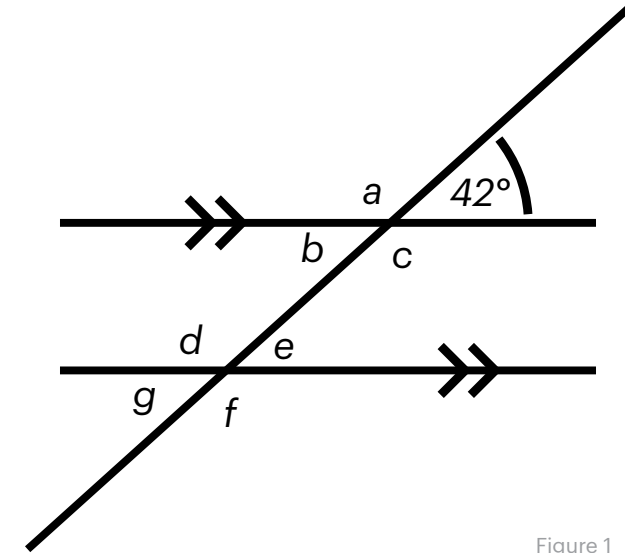


Figure 1

rise of the white-supremacist alt-right. It’s been four years now and perhaps this publication and its launch are aptly timed to further the discourses and discussions around race, colour, and difference.

In developing this project, I felt a great responsibility as a “culturally diverse curator,” as described in the title of the grant that generously supported my research and work with the Blackwood Gallery. It’s important to note that I prefer this term, rather than “person of colour,” because it privileges how one actively identifies instead of how one is perceived by others; the power and agency is with the individual. Structurally, this grant creates space and access for culturally diverse curators to circumvent existing systems of power within predominantly

Caucasian or white spaces for critical creative production, and in turn (I hope) shift the ways institutions work from the inside out. It was with this sense of responsibility that I conceived the thematic of the project, designed the exhibition, and shaped relationships with the artists and organizations I worked with across the Greater Toronto Area.

Curatorially, I wanted to disrupt the gallery’s preconceived notions and existing exhibition frameworks. Typically the Blackwood Gallery’s main space is understood to be a white cube, whereas the elgallery is used as a black box, better suited for time-based media such as video and sound installation. In a one-to-one exchange, I traded one wall for another, giving the Blackwood Gallery one black wall and the

elgallery one white wall. This subtle gesture of subversion, using colours that are often seen as neutral, controlled the container's canvas and allowed the artists' works to engage with the oppressive black box and white cube.

The bulk of the works address specific identities, power dynamics, and histories of colour's varied connotations, working to complicate the equation set out as the title and curatorial premise of the exhibition. I have arranged each section of the text that follows around these specificities of colour and their linguistic and performative extensions. I hope that the playful poetics of the text can capture some of the liveness animating the show, and do justice to the ongoing conversations and relations between practices that *Red*, *Green*, *Blue ≠ White* generated.

Ironically, however, Aryen Hoekstra's *Out of Focus (RGB)* (2013) both refutes and confirms the title of the exhibition. Three slide projectors, each devoid of slides, beam light through a coloured filter while continuously auto-focusing. The red, green, and blue beams are positioned to converge into a rectangular field, creating a white "non-image" that represents the absence of colour. Upon further reflection, however, one notices that the three beams result in a field of impure white, a not-quite-white. When a viewer intercepts any one of the projectors' throws, incidental colours created by the overlap of the two remaining primary colours mark the body of the interceptor with coloured silhouettes of yellow, red, green, magenta, etc. In this gesture, the body acts as a kind of prism—when white light meets the body, a multitude of coloured refractions result. Hoekstra playfully constructs a situation in which white light emitted by the slide projectors is converted through coloured filters, only to be overlaid in order to recreate white on a freestanding screen, thus exploring the formal qualities of coloured light and its inverse, the white non-image.

Here is where colour reconciles to white. To allow new points of view and conversations to begin, this is where I'll end this preface—with the only work that does not necessarily deal with the politics of identity or race, but with colour as relational. Though the work's relational presence hinges on this play of colour, it also centres the body as a site for many muddied and layered interactions. While monolithic whiteness remains an indisputable force for the control of bodies, *RGB≠W* looks for potential in hybridity, in the intersection of identities that complicate and resist whiteness's domination.





Stop

Stand

Be

Still

Stop

Stand

Be

Still

Stop  
Stand  
Be  
Still

Stop  
Stand  
Be  
Still

Stop  
Stand  
Be  
Still

Stop  
Stand  
Be  
Still



**RRAD**

Homophones: Read, read (as in the past tense of the verb “to read”—

*to look at and comprehend the meaning by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols)*

...it would probably be a better world if we didn't use colour terms at all to designate groups of people. Failing that, it might well be better if we used other terms, like pink, and grey olive, to refer to what we now call white people, partly because they are less loaded, partly because this would break up the monolithic identity, whiteness.

— Richard Dyer [1]

To understand how white is seen as the norm, we must shift between present and past tenses, looking to the prevalence of whiteness within western European art and popular culture. In the above quotation, film and critical race theorist Richard Dyer expresses frustration at the racial categorization established by German scientist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in the late eighteenth century, according to which people are divided into five so-called “natural varieties” of red, yellow, brown, black, and white. Against an understanding of this colourist history, the exhibition *Red, Green, Blue ≠ White* explored colour in its multitude of physical characteristics, forms, and subtle gestures

that allude to race and the construction of identity.

*To read*, as a verb, is active even in the past tense, in reference to an object; to be read gathers meaning and interpretation through actions between people, such as having read another's body language and, in turn, drawing understanding from that reading. Works by Brendan Fernandes and Kristina Lee Podesva ground the physical spaces of the exhibition with their nuanced approaches to the act of reading the colour brown.

Fernandes's *Changing to Summer* (2005) is an installation consisting of eight photographs and a single-channel video. The video—a single stationary shot—masquerades subtly as just another photograph in the series. Using stencils and a tanning bed, Fernandes emblazons his torso with paisley textile motifs and then exposes his skin to artificial UV light, layering tones and shades to make a photograph. Thus, his body is read as a marker of his cultural history of Kenyan-Indian-Canadian backgrounds.

In the serigraph diptych, *Brown Study Colour Line* (2011), Podesva employs the CMYK

printing process of layering four colours (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) to create another colour—an other that is an inextricable mix or blend. Perspectives change as the viewer nears the work. At first glance, the halves of the diptych seem matched in colour, but upon closer inspection, one serigraph is composed of small distinguishable circles of cyan, yellow, magenta, and black, whereas the other serigraph is resolutely one brown layer. As a metaphor for a universal colour, and by extension for race, brown blends and blurs the lines, causing a constant re-focusing.

Based on their multivalent artistic practices, Fernandes and Podesva were invited to think through their mixed subject positions at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), a campus known for both its architecturally-integrated natural spaces and its widely diverse student body. In the autumn of 2013, both Fernandes and Podesva joined the Blackwood Gallery as artists-in-residence. [2] Working with UTM students, the artists reflected on their earlier bodies of work on display in the exhibition and revisited their identities and subjectivities through the intricacies of language and translation. This led to the production of the two artist projects produced for this publication, found on pages 17 and 41.

Fernandes has looked to his traditional dance and ballet training to create performative gestures on various themes such as political action, celebration, and intimacy. Inspired by musical sight-reading—by which a musician can play the basics of a song by quickly reading and interpreting time signatures, keys, notes, and rests on sheet music—Fernandes sought to create an analogous process for movement. His *Stop. Stand. Be Still.* (2014) [page 17] commands a pause within this publication similar to that of a musical rest. The words of the declarative title undulate against the gradating colour field background, fading in and out of legibility, performing movement if only for a fleeting moment.

Podesva takes a similar approach to *Brown Study Colour Line* in playing with optics and legibility in *Enunciations* (2014) [page 41]. The work appropriates a quotation from Jacques Derrida in which he claims that language is one of the last identifiers for exiles and foreigners and yet also provides a sense of home. Podesva translates Derrida's writing from the original French—first into the International Phonetic Alphabet (breaking the words down into phonetic components) and then into mirrored English (flipping the words along a vertical plane). Playing with the duality of black and white and the legibility of the text, Podesva critiques the hegemony of the English language as it relates to questions of status and access.

Fernandes's artworks employ the performative, whether highlighting variances within the body as successive tanning sessions expose a cultural reading, or directing the viewer to pause for introspection. Similarly, Podesva's artworks utilize optical illusions to play with perception, spatial awareness, and interpretations of colour. In each, questions around the visibility of race are intimately tied to claims about colour as a determinant, offering a way to more carefully consider the politics of colour through the overlapping spaces of language and translation.



**YEGREEN**

*Is the grass that much greener on the other side?*

Yes, yes it is.

*Being white is better, easier.*

While the proverbial grass is generally not greener on the other side, when it comes to race, I posit that it could be: being white is easier. Critical race and multicultural education scholar Robin DiAngelo unpacks how white people in North America are insulated from race-based stress because they have the protection of the constructed social environment. [3] She quotes social psychologist Michelle Fine to support her claim: “I find myself trying to understand the micromoves by which Whiteness accrues privilege and status within schools; how Whiteness grows surrounded by protective pillows of resources and second chances; how Whiteness—of the middle-class and elite variety, in particular—provokes assumptions of and then insurance for being seen as ‘smart.’” [4]

Green, yellow. In the title of this section, I try to capture how the eye registers colour first, language second. We see one thing but read and understand another, as though the eyes are playing a trick on the mind. One’s cognition is challenged as the brain recognizes colour and language at different intervals,

initial impulses or reactions overpower interpretation and understanding. This subtle inversion of colour and language highlights the ways in which our perceptual capacities so frequently fail to present the world to us objectively.

In light theory, the additive mixing of red, green, and blue (RGB) creates pure secondary colours, while in colour theory, the subtractive mixing of red, yellow, and blue (RYB) results in duller tones and a smaller range of hues. How do the theories we use to structure colour affect our reading of it, perhaps favouring certain forms of misrecognition over other forms of interpretation? What are the political implications for reading, or misreading, colour?

The misrecognition caused by perceptual and linguistic shifts described above resonates with the experience documented by Kika Nicolela in *What Do You Think of Me?* (2009). Situated in Finland, the video records the points of view of off-camera gallery goers as they respond to the eponymous question. Speaking in their native tongue, they describe the artist, who stands unassumingly in a white cube gallery space. These responses are first

impressions as they become active participants in the work. Using descriptors such as “coffee,” “licorice hair,” “sunshine face,” and “carnival,” the viewers colour Nicolela’s body in difference as they focus on physical characteristics that seem remarkable to them. In one circumstance, an attendee expresses his synaesthetic [5] reaction, remarking, “You are black yourself but your doppelganger is blue,” reading her body as black and her aura as blue.

The Finnish locals make assumptions about her cultural heritage, racializing and othering her body—all of which remains, due to the language barrier, unbeknownst to the artist. It is not until the end of the video that the artist’s vulnerable position is acknowledged and the warm, receptive body language of her open arms and infectious smile triumphs over the cool colours of the audience’s descriptions in this awkward social experiment/performance.

Chun Hua Catherine Dong’s photographic work *After Olympia* (2011) was produced for the Bernie Miller Lightbox and was publicly displayed on the northwest exterior wall of the heavily trafficked William Davis Building on UTM’s campus. The photograph depicts a moment of pause during a three-hour durational performance in which the artist first cleansed the body of her subject, a white male, using rubbing alcohol before she meticulously licked his entire body with her tongue. Wearing a white lab coat, Dong dominates the image as an authoritative medical specialist.

The title is a reference to the history of western European art, through French artist Édouard Manet’s painting *Olympia* (1863), but in the role of servant, Dong casts herself in stark contrast to the archetype of the black female “Negress” in Manet’s picture, who is subservient to Olympia and presenting her gifts. In this work, the objectification of the female body in society is reversed, offering a critical commentary on racial stratification.

Gender roles are further complicated since in place of the confrontational gaze of the beautiful young courtesan Olympia, Dong gives us a submissive, fragmented, and mature white male body whose power is usurped. The licks contain the tongue’s capability for linguistic and sensual work—subverting the hegemony of the English language—Dong is empowered through measured articulation.

Slight contrasts in hue and language animate Golboo Amani and Manolo Lugo’s *Covergirl* (2012), a three-hour durational performance in which the artists conceal each other’s faces with twelve readily available hues of Covergirl foundation. From “ivory” to “normal beige” to “tawny,” each hue is ceremoniously wiped from the face using a white handkerchief, which is then displayed as a trace or study for further examination within the gallery space, to explore how similar each hue is to one another and reflect upon the naming conventions used by Covergirl.

The various hues of “white” foundation are seen as superficial—literally cosmetic—and are purged from the faces of the artists. The cloths are evocative. Some are suggestive of the Shroud of Turin—the cloth that supposedly reveals the face of Jesus of Nazareth, a holy relic which symbolizes purity and in turn, whiteness. [6] Hung together on the gallery wall, they have a ghost-like quality, and constitute a performative trace capturing the repeating gesture as the handkerchiefs accumulate across the wall. Each containing an indexical residue of the artists’ faces, these material traces are framed within a striking visual device, a white rectangular field on a black wall that emphasizes the striking contrasts between black, white, and the colour range of Covergirl foundation.

Foundation makeup is professed to enhance beauty by masking imperfections, but the constant masking and re-masking that takes place in this performance *muddies* the conversation



around race by painting each face with the same tone, even as Amani identifies with Iranian diasporic communities and Lugo is ethnically mestizo (mixed), linguistically Hispanic, Mexican by birth, and Canadian by choice. Their homogenous hues further problematize the visibility of race since the available spectrum tellingly excludes darker complexions. As Homi Bhabha demonstrates in his canonical text, *Of Mimicry and Man*, the idea of becoming “white” through mimicry reforms a subject as a recognizable Other, a “subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” [7] Here the artists are “reformed” through the gesture of the application of makeup, and who pointedly critique this need for assimilation through the absurdity of its repeated over-application. The artists’ gestures also conflate their subject positions, concealing their individual facial characteristics, mimicking one another, and blurring their genders and individual identities.

Misreadings lead to assumptions. In these works in particular, the viewer is implicated as an active participant, directed to consider their own subject position in relation to the subtle allusions to colour and contrast. Racialized bodies are required to navigate such (difficult) situations of contested power relations on a daily basis. These perceptual shifts between recognizing colour and reading through language demand a deeper looking, beyond face value and into further introspection.

*Red, Green,  
Blue ≠ White.*  
Installation  
view.



**B** **L** **E** **V** **E**

Homophones: Blue, blew—as in the past tense of the verb “to blow”

*Purse your lips and blow*

*that fleeting moment as your breath ends.*

When it is internalized within the body, breathing is an involuntary action, however the force or degree with which one must inhale or exhale is something quite deliberate. A purposeful exhale is always preceded by a pause, a single inhalation, before one uses their breath to sigh, to blow, to expel the air from the lungs. As a symbol of the performative and transitory, air and light come to stand in for that which is fleeting and impermanent. Similarly, identities shift and change—perhaps even becoming unclassifiable by known “standards.” This instability of subjectivity causes unease, but is it dangerous? Are *they* dangerous?

Artist and writer David Batchelor defines chromophobia as the fear of corruption through colour, which is interpreted as dangerous and alien. [8] However for a painter, the use of colour allows for control of how objects are interpreted in relation to other elements within a composition. A “cool” colour, such as blue, is refracted by the eye, causing the lens to flatten, receding the object back into the picture plane. Instead of being dangerous or alien, colour becomes active—and signifies difference.

Materially, Chun Hua Catherine Dong’s performative installation, *Hourglass* (2010) consists of a table set with tweezers, black ink, paintbrushes, and two fourteen-inch bowls—one full of white rice, and the other empty. The installation’s instructions invite the viewer to use tweezers to select a single grain of white rice, meticulously paint it black, and place it into an adjacent bowl that will slowly fill up as the exhibition continues.

As black rice accumulates in one dish, white rice diminishes in the other. The shift in levels that results from the repeated actions of the gallery goers contributes to the tracking of time, and allows for meditation on the symbolism of this gesture. The work becomes a performative timepiece, an hourglass that is slowed down to an irregular and illogical pace. In fact, during the run of the exhibition, one student repeatedly returned to the installation to contemplate and add to its progression, remarking on the arduous action and the absurdity of the task. [9] As Dong has commented, “Sand in an hourglass cannot flow without rotation as power cannot shift without struggle.” [10] The whiteness of the

rice represents the absence of colour, the ink its contrasting opposite. Dong invites viewers to participate in this gesture as a way to embrace not just colour but the darkest colour, as a performative, political metaphor for the shifting power relations between a perceived majority and growing (visible) minorities.

In Jude Norris’s single-channel video *self-portrait in alterNation between descension & ascension* (2010), the artist is caught in perpetual motion. Wearing a Plains-style deer hide dress and regalia, the Sohkatsiw Iskwe-wasakay or Strong Woman Dress with its flowing fringe, Norris draws on the stereotypical disjunction between traditional dress and the contemporary urban setting of the Brooklyn Library’s brutalist architecture. Stepping upwards and downwards on an escalator, Norris is stuck in a mesmerizing limbo between two symbolic planes: the freedom of spiritual movement and the rigidity of stereotypes about Indigenous people. In a subtle gesture of protest, Norris purposely impedes her own movement on the escalator, becoming caught in a transitional space between access and knowledge. The artist negotiates her identity as Métis (Cree/Anishinaabe/Russian/Scottish Gypsy) of the Plains Cree affiliation, and through this treading action on the escalator, her head is continually bobbing above the center of the frame (the horizon) as she navigates staked racial territories.

Through mechanical means, air is activated to animate and sustain Podesva’s vinyl sculpture *Brown Globe* (2007). At fifteen feet high and twelve feet in diameter, *Brown Globe* is a playful, inflatable monument in the shape of the world, not unlike the world globes common in classrooms. It overwhelms the viewer through its expandable mass yet its ephemeral nature as inflatable—and *deflatable*—alludes to the plasticity of identity and the rhetoric of globalization. As a mobile,

off-site project, *Brown Globe* extended the concerns of the exhibition beyond the white cube and black box galleries and into public spaces, disrupting and intervening into the everyday experiences of non-art audiences across the region. [11]

Composed of brown pigments created by mixing all colours together, the work furthers Podesva’s continuing investigation of brown as a metaphor of universality and inclusion. This larger-than-life gesture allows us to imagine the possibility of a utopian, globalized society while at the same time recognizing the futility of attempting to incorporate the world’s many populations as one.

This brown is muddy. To be visibly “brown” (or should I say to be visibly *darker?*) is to be the subject of disadvantage: violence, surveillance, racial profiling, hate crimes, etc. Here colour is relational, across a spectrum of darkness. Imagining future children whose heritages embody greater racial and ethnic variations, it’s optimistic to think that the dominance of monolithic white will be no longer, and yet I believe that the systemic issues of the domination of whiteness could still prevail.

As a “culturally diverse” curator, I recognize my power and privilege within my own subject position. It is with this privilege that I felt compelled to weave a complicated narrative of colour to further the nuanced discussions of race and identity politics. Diverse voices were given space to share their stories, and the performativity in the exhibition shifted viewers’ perspectives, moving past superficial understandings of skin colour, and engaging with notions of hybridity and intersectionality. *To colour*, then, outside and beyond the lines of the ≠, blurs the symbol of order and equalities; simultaneously problematizing ideas of race and reclaiming the verb in a positive light—to imbue with special character or quality. There is power through difference.

[1] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 48. "Painters and photographers have often rendered white people entirely or in large part literally white."

[2] The artist-in-residence program was supported by the Jackman Humanities Institute's Program for the Arts.

[3] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, vol. 3 no. 3, 2011, p. 54.

[4] Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda Powell Pruitt, and April Burns, "Witnessing Whiteness/Gathering Intelligence," *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 245.

[5] A synaesthetic condition is a neuropsychological condition where the subjective sensation of a sense, such as vision, evokes a contrasting sense, or in this case, the ability to read an aura.

[6] Dyer, p. 74. Arrah Evarts claims that white is "pure and untouched," and thus chastity is derived from whiteness.

[7] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 85–92.

[8] David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000), p. 22–3. Batchelor states that "colour has been the object of prejudice in Western culture," where there have many attempts "to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity."

[9] Dong asked a mathematician to calculate the length of time required to complete her

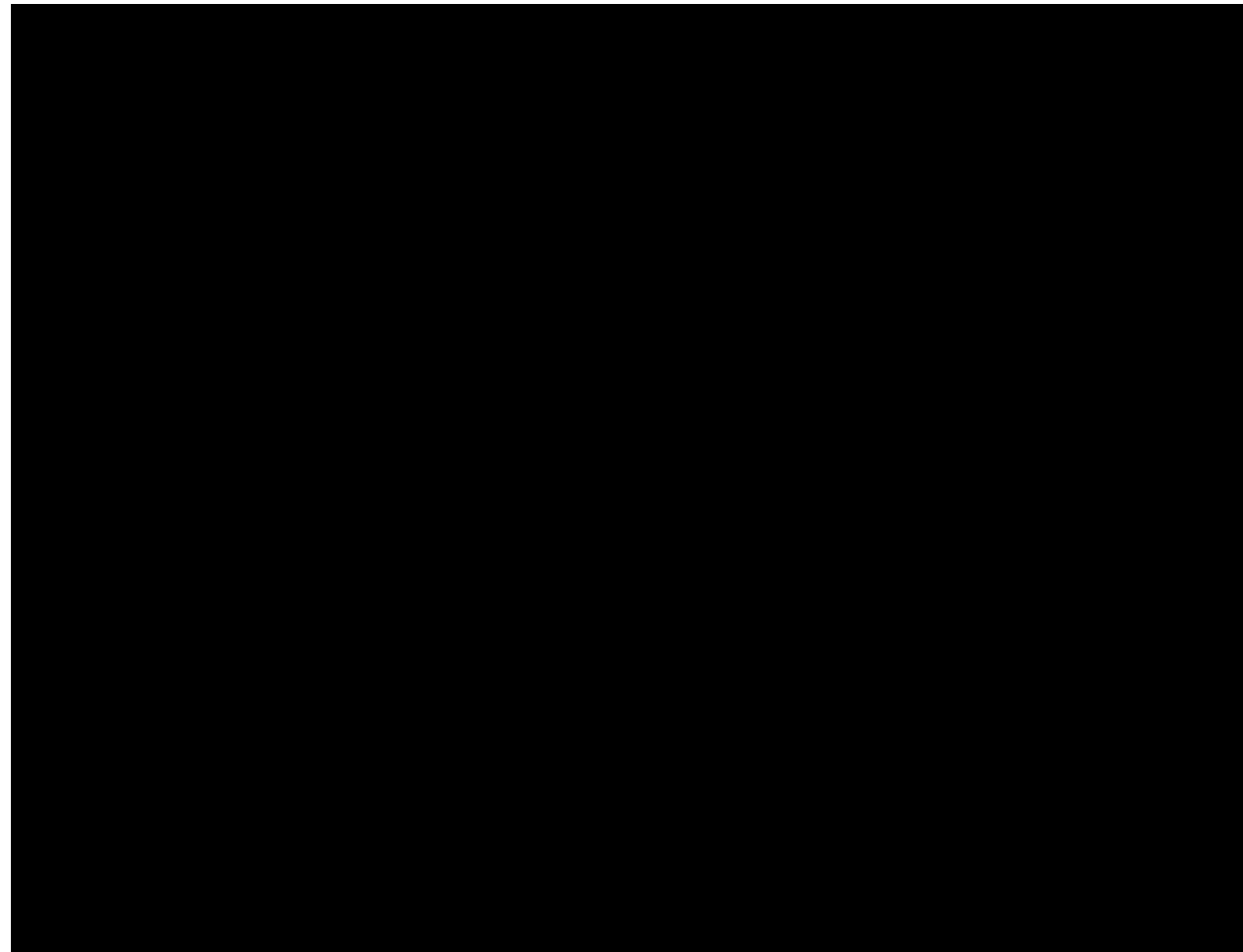
installation. There are approximately 333,000 grains of rice in the bowl and, on average, twenty seconds is required to paint each grain of rice. Therefore, if two people painted continuously for twenty-four hours a day, it would take 1,000 hours to paint all the rice from white to black.

[10] Chun Hua Catherine Dong. "Rice Performance Series—Hourglass." *Chun Hua Catherine Dong*, May 2010. <https://chunhuacatherinedong.wordpress.com/2010/05/21/rice-performance-series-hourglass/>

[11] *Brown Globe* was installed in various locations across the Greater Toronto Area, including the Isabel Bader Theatre, the Innis Town Hall, the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts, and the Blackwood Gallery as part of a co-presentation with the Toronto International Reel Asian Film Festival.

Συμπεριφορά

αποστροφή







# Enunciations

“Displaced persons,” exiles, those who are deported, expelled, rootless, nomads, all share two sources of sighs, two nostalgias: their dead ones and their language. On the one hand, they would like to return, at least on a pilgrimage, to the places where their buried dead have their last resting place (the last resting place of family here situates the ethos, the key habitation for defining home, the city or country where relatives, father, mother, grandparents are at rest in a rest that is the place of immobility from which to measure all the journeys and all the distances. On the other hand, exiles, the

deported, the expelled, the rootless, the stateless, lawless nomads, absolute foreigners, often continue to recognize the language, what is called the mother tongue, as their ultimate homeland, and even their last resting place...What is called the “mother” tongue is already “the other’s language.” If we are saying here that language is the native land, namely what exiles, foreigners, all the wandering Jews in the world, carry away on the soles of their shoes, it is not to evoke a monstrous body, an impossible body, a body whose mouth and tongue would drag the feet along, and even drag about under the feet.

The texts included in *Enunciations* are excerpted from pages 87 & 89 of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Hospitality* (in a volume published by Stanford University Press in 2000), which appear translated into IPA (mirrored), IPA, English (mirrored), & standard English.

*Enunciations*

Kristina Lee Podesva

2014



REFRAMING  
THE QUESTION  
OF COLOUR:  
EXHIBITION  
PRACTICES AND  
RACE POLITICS

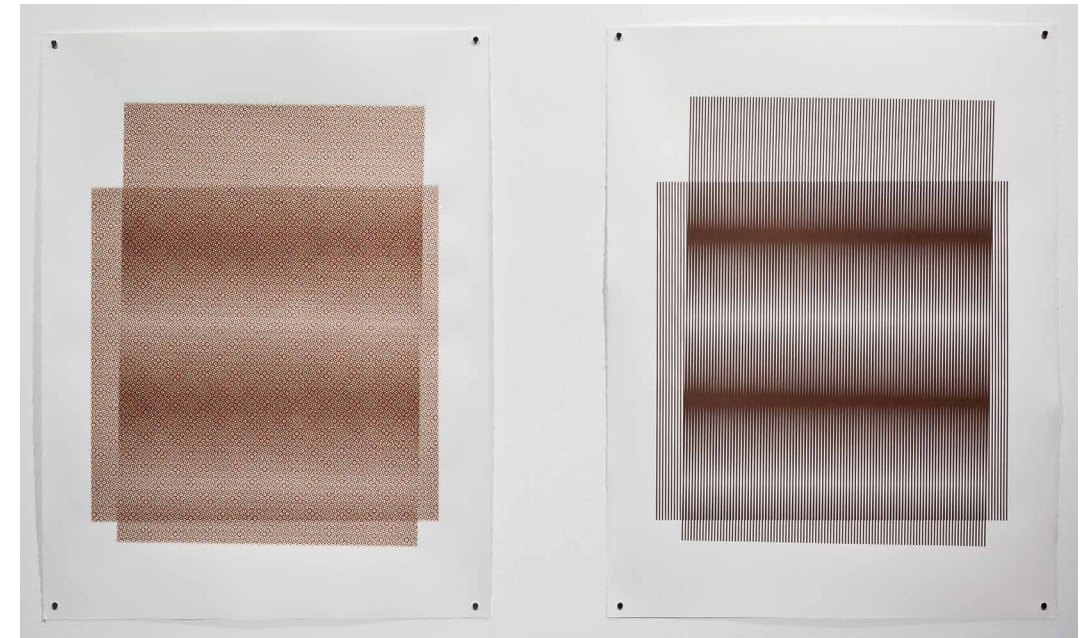
FRANCISCO-  
FERNANDO  
GRANADOS

*Red, Green, Blue ≠ White* proposes colour as a matter of both form and content, simultaneously aesthetic and political in dimension. Via colour theory, the exhibition extends site-specificity into the realm of racial politics. The state of contemporary art practice in Canada requires rethinking site-specificity in order to account for the colonial legacies that still structure the national cultural landscape. Such an expanded sense of site-specificity is fundamental in order to make space for art that simultaneously rejects two conservative modes of operation in relationship to the issue of colour: strict formalism and simplified identitarian sloganeering. The alternative to these two extremes is not a middle ground, but rather a critical practice that continuously recalibrates the relationship between form and content.

The curatorial strategy of *RGB≠W*, which steadily works through the double meaning of colour, is best understood as part of a history of critical, race-conscious exhibition practices in Canada. In this essay, I suggest the touring exhibitions *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (1990), curated by Paul Wong, and *Limits of Tolerance: Reframing Multicultural State Policy* (2007),

curated by Liz Park [1] as examples worth noting in relationship to *RGB≠W*.

Examining the possibility of expanding colour theory into the field of racial politics requires a transformation of ideas regarding aesthetic categorization inherited from the European Enlightenment. Theorizing site-specific sculpture in the United States after the Second World War, Rosalind Krauss proposes that, in addition to the task of mapping the structure of these emerging practices, “it is also important to explore a deeper set of questions which pertain to something more than mapping and involve instead the problem of explanation. These address the root cause—the conditions of possibility—that brought about the shift.” [2] Krauss’s reference to a set of “conditions of possibility” alludes to Immanuel Kant’s writings on aesthetic judgment. Yet, the task of reframing the question of colour to include a racial dimension runs counter to lines of thought in Kantian aesthetics. Douglas Burnham’s encyclopaedic reading of Kant summarizes the philosopher’s position, stating that “aesthetic judgment must concern itself only with form (shape, arrangement, rhythm, etc.),



Kristina Lee Podesva, *Brown Study Colour Line*, 2011. Installation view.

READING: In seventeenth-century Mexico City, the Catholic Church had racially segregated books for registering childbirths. “The Book of Spaniards” was reserved for those who claimed to have no Jewish, Arab, Indigenous, or African blood; those who could not claim such racial purity were registered in “The Book of Broken Colour.” [3]



Aryen Hoekstra, *Out of Focus (RGB)*, 2013.  
Installation view.

READING: Since the English word “colourblind” carries an ableist connotation, it could be said instead that aesthetics is *daltónica*, the Spanish word for the eye condition that shifts the perception of colours. This set of conditions is named after John Dalton, an eighteenth century English chemist who had the syndrome and published about it.

Golboo Amani and Manolo Lugo, *Covergirl*, 2012.  
Courtesy the artists.

READING: Outside the disinterested disciplinary bounds of aesthetic philosophy, the question of colour identifies and arranges bodies as cultural signs.



[...] not sensible content (color, tone, etc.), since the latter has a deep connection to the agreeable, and thus to interest.” [4]

As a mode of perception, the aesthetic is distinct from the rational, which is derived from concepts rather than the senses. [5] The notion of the aesthetic comes from the ancient Greek word *aesthesis*, meaning “sensible knowledge.” [6] Aesthetic judgment is supposed to be disinterested, “meaning that we take pleasure in something because we judge it beautiful, rather than judging it beautiful because we find it pleasurable.” [7] Disinterest separates beauty from physical pleasure and privileges form before content. What counts as beautiful in aesthetic judgment is determined on the basis of its own closed system of definition. The particularity, perhaps the intensity, of the pleasure drawn from colour is what excludes it from being a factor in aesthetic judgment.

The legacy of Kant’s form/content divide parallels a history of bias against explicitly politicized conversations about race within the North American art world, particularly when artists of colour have called for equal access to means of representation and distribution for their work. In the curatorial essay for Paul Wong’s groundbreaking exhibition of identity-based Asian-Canadian new media work, *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*, Wong describes this bias as a practice of exclusion echoed by official immigration policy. He cites laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 as one in a series of “racist obstacles” that “prevented earlier generations [of Asian immigrants] from obtaining equal rights in Canada.” [8] Wong suggests a link between the socio-political circumstances structuring the lives of non-white immigrants in this country and the opportunities individuals from these populations may or may not have to participate

as producers in the field of contemporary art. In theory, the promise of a multicultural society has made the right of immigrant and refugee people to become cultural producers universal; in practice, the question should be retraced in order to ask: *what are the conditions of possibility for participation as producers in the cultural field?* In Canadian art, the question of colour unevenly places artists and other cultural practitioners (particularly but not exclusively those of non-European background) in a double-bind. According to an episode of the CBC-produced television program *Hot Type* titled “True Canadians: Multiculturalism in Canada Debated,” Canada became the first country in the world to declare multiculturalism as official state policy, recognizing three founding cultures: Indigenous, British, and French. [9] First introduced by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1971 and adopted by parliament in 1988 as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, or Bill C-93, the policy aimed to validate the “diverse population” of Canada as an “invaluable resource.” [10] Artist, filmmaker, and theorist Richard Fung articulates a critical perspective on the issue as a participating artist in *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*:

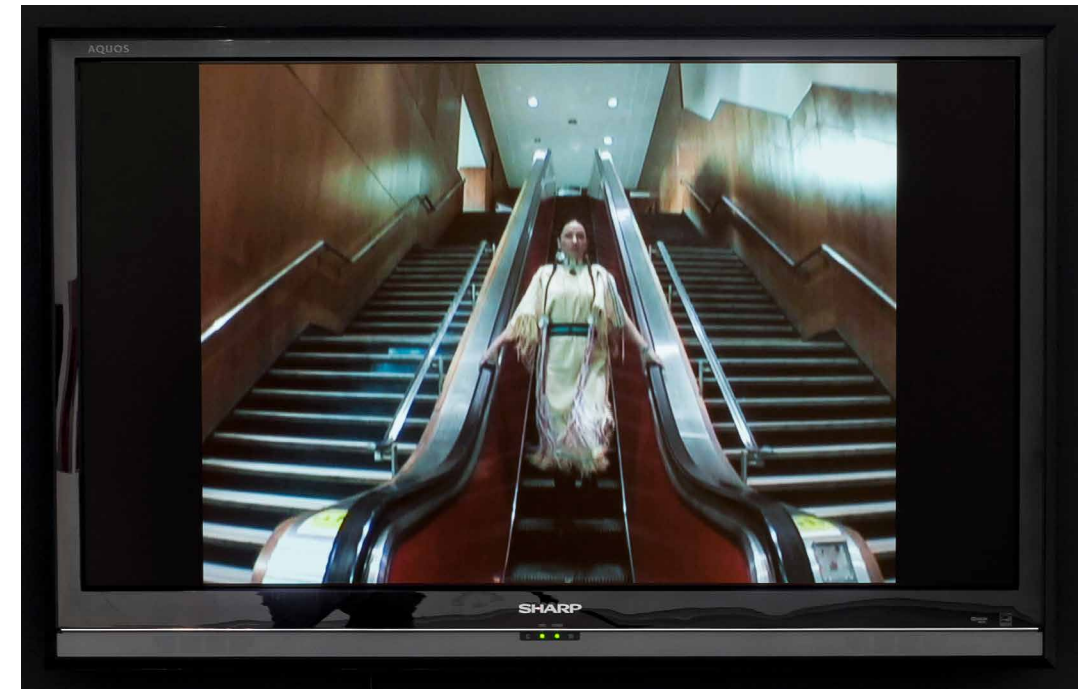
Multiculturalism shifts the focus away from the political and social questions of race such as housing, employment, education, access to power, into a political marketing of personal identity. It champions a notion of cultural difference in which people are encouraged to preserve cultural forms of song and dance they didn’t practice before they came to Canada. Multiculturalism’s function has been to co-opt and eclipse the potential threat in anti-racist organizing.

For this discussion, multiculturalism has most importantly shaped policies in the area of cultural

funding in Canada, rendering the two meanings of the word mutually exclusive. That is, culture as 1. an interest in arts, letters, scholarly pursuits, etc. and 2. as the sum total in ways of living of a group of humans transmitted from one generation to another [...] Ballet is art, Chinese classical dance is multiculturalism. [11]

Cultural diversity is a double bind because it operates as both a condition of possibility and a boundary for critical engagement with the racial politics of the Canadian art world. For Fung, increased visibility becomes a deterrent for the potential of anti-racist organizing. The type of bifurcated public funding that he mentions still determines who is allowed as part of the national imaginary, but the strategy shifts into segregated assimilation: “Ballet is art, Chinese classical dance is multiculturalism.” Although racialized migrant populations are handled differently from one another in relation to the Canadian state, the divide between what constitutes art and multiculturalism remains consistent as a formula for distinction, and the basis for exclusion. This exclusion does not only affect migrant populations from nations considered non-founding. Even though *Yellow Peril* focused on diasporic cultural identity as a connective category between the artists, the writing that accompanied the show acknowledged the problematic of race beyond Asian Canadian communities. Fung notes that, “[f]irst generation Western European Canadians don’t seem to have problems accessing power, yet Native Canadians, although they were here first, remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.” [12] A fatal flaw of multiculturalism is its inability to account and transform the structure of Canada’s colonial relationship to Indigenous populations.

In spite of the problematic nature of multiculturalism, it is important to acknowledge



Jude Norris, *self-portrait in alterNation between descension & ascension*, 2010. Installation view.

READING: Reframing the question of colour is a necessary step towards the enactment of a Nation-to-Nation dialogue, within the context of Indigenous decolonization and settler colonialism.

that is has also been an enabling structure that has created some public means of production and distribution of work by racialized artists and curators. Identity-based art of the 1980s and 1990s made it possible to think of colour as a structural element that can challenge the divide between aesthetics and the politics of race. For curator Liz Park, “it remains crucial to recognize that the artworks and cultural activities based on identity politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s paved an arena where more artists today feel freer to move away from discussions of identity and recognition of political and social injustices.” [13]

Park’s statement evaluates the impact of multiculturalism in the contemporary Canadian artistic landscape. Her research into cultural practices addressing issues of racial diversity in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s culminated in the exhibition *The Limits of Tolerance: Reframing Multicultural State Policy*. [14] She cited the shifting conditions of the post-9/11 world as her impetus for examining these artistic strategies. [15] The show included works by Dana Claxton, Stan Douglas, Laiwan, Paul Lang and Zachary Longboy, Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, Anne Ramsden, Ruby Truly, Henry Tsang, and Paul Wong. The artists in the exhibition come from Indigenous, Asian-Canadian, Afro-Canadian, and Euro-Canadian backgrounds. The curatorial re-contextualization of recent historical practices from the time period of *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* expands the scope of identity-based practice by curating across not only racial but colonial divides. From a curatorial perspective, this cross-cultural approach frames identity as a methodology for making art in a political way, expanding on the rhetoric of self-representation that often accompanies identity-based practices. Rethinking identity as a critical methodology beyond self-representation and self-promotion creates the possibility of re-focusing on the political and social questions of race that Fung references in his text.

Reframing, as suggested by Park’s exhibition title, is a deconstructive strategy that continuously points to the conditions of possibility of a given frame. For Judith Butler, “to call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene that it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable.” [16] The group of Indigenous and racialized artists of immigrant and refugee backgrounds who made visible the exclusions of the Canadian cultural system called colonial frames into question by rejecting the expected role of cultural informant. Wong and Fung’s writings are examples of artistic practices that use critical writing as a means of participation into debates in the public sphere. This strategic political move broadens identity from the idea of cultural homogeneity into a practice of embodied criticality.

*Red, Green, Blue ≠ White* gives a sense of a cultural landscape where racialized artists have a broader range of movement to determine the way in which they engage with the question of colour, a freedom of movement between figuration and abstraction. It is important to emphasize that this freedom cannot be taken for granted, that it was hard-won and must be preserved. Conceiving of colour as a contemporary dimension in art involves a dialogue between abstract processes of aesthetic perception and the sign-laden politics of representation. This dialogue is not a choice for artists for whom colour is a matter of embodiment rather than merely a matter of form. And yet, the issue is not limited to racialized bodies. It is a question of contextual awareness that folds together artists, institutions, and publics across the cultural spectrum. Reframing the question of colour performs an imaginative manoeuvre that can create the conditions of possibility for aesthetic experiences outside and beyond the colonial logics of racial hierarchy.

[1] Both Wong and Park have strong ties to Vancouver’s artistic community. While the exhibitions discussed in this essay address the national Canadian imaginary, as well as the global phenomenon of multiculturalism, it is interesting to note that half of the artists in *Red, Green, Blue ≠ White* have been, at some point in their careers, based out of Vancouver.

[2] Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” October 8, Spring 1979, p. 30–44.

[3] See Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), xvi.

[4] Douglas Burnham, “Kant’s Aesthetics,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, last modified June 30, 2005, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest>

[5] Burnham, “Kant’s Aesthetics.”

[6] Jean-Luc Nancy, “In Statu Nascendi,” *The Birth to Presence*, translated by Brian Holmes et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 213–214.

[7] Burnham, “Kant’s Aesthetics.”

[8] Paul Wong, “Yellow Peril: Reconsidered,” *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (Vancouver: On Edge, 1991).

[9] “True Canadians: Multiculturalism in Canada debated,” 2004. CBC Digital Archives, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/true-canadians-multiculturalism-in-canada-debated>.

[10] Liz Park, *Limits of Tolerance: Re-framing Multicultural State Policy* (Vancouver: Centre A, 2007), p. 3.

[11] Fung, “Multiculturalism: Reconsidered.”

[12] Ibid.

[13] Liz Park, *Limits of Tolerance*.

[14] Ibid.

[15] “Limits Of Tolerance: Re-Framing Multicultural State Policy,” 2007. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, <http://www.belkin.ubc.ca/satellite/limits-of-tolerance-re-framing-multicultural-state-policy>.

[16] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, New York: Verso, 2009), p. 8–9.



Chun Hua Catherine Dong,  
*Hourglass*, 2010.  
Installation view.



Golboo Amani and Manolo Lugo,  
*Covergirl*, 2012. Installation view.

Opposite:  
Golboo Amani and Manolo Lugo,  
*Covergirl* (detail), 2012.



TO  
COLOUR  
BETWEEN  
THE  
LINES

EMELIE  
CHHANGUR



I don't know about your experience, but whenever I go into Starbucks and ask for a "tall bold," the person taking my order replies back with "dark?" I don't usually say much of anything; I just nod and reply with "yes, sure, dark," my eyes fixed on the grinder on the counter marked "bold." But one day last year, I decided to hang back a bit and see how this bold/dark thing played out for others. I was shocked! It took a while, but as I lingered by the side bar, where the milky white lattes and whipped cream-laden specialty drinks arrive for consumption, I heard someone ask for a bold coffee. The person behind the counter simply said "of course." The thing was, the person who asked for the bold was white. It got me thinking ... I mean, I'm also four feet ten inches, but the barista never makes a comment on the "tall" part of my coffee order.

So, what exactly does it mean to *colour*? That is, to sense colour and ascribe it significance as a relational practice? How is colour seen, and felt, in relation? And what does it say about the person doing the colour-ing? Or about the things being colour-ed? After pondering these ideas for a while, I realized that I was no longer

thinking about colour. I was thinking about thinking about colour, and the language we use to engage in coloured thoughts: a being and thinking of the identity of colour, a *becoming* colour.

Another case in point: the Winter Olympics experience. Something rather dark dawned on me while watching the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014—call it colour becoming. There were no athletes of colour performing. [1] The winter games are white, I concluded. [2] White, like the snow and ice on which many of these games are played, its whiteness both apparent and camouflaged. Canada fought hard for supremacy in these particular games, to win as many shades of precious metal that mark rank in the elite hierarchy of world-class athlete. And throughout these games we, as Canadians, cheered on. We cheered for the white games because Canada, as a country, had invested in white athletes. We cheered in bars, we cheered in community centres, we even cheered in mosques.

If the winter games are white, then—as the story of achromatic colour goes—their opposite, summer games, must be black. Canada never does well in the black games when compared to the relative successes we achieve in the white

ones. We have Black athletes, certainly. But do our money and our enthusiastic cheers equally support them? What is the colour of our money, anyway? [3] Now who's being bold?

Following this logic, it would seem that the Pan American Games are *brown* games! No snow falls on them, despite the hemispheric nature of the competition. Yet these particular games are played in both winter and summer, depending on where in the hemisphere they're staged and viewed. [4] Toronto hosted the Pan / Parapan American Games in the summer of 2015, and I was watching. Watching athletes *and* audiences. Reception, of course, is part of a balanced equation. Audience is the tertiary colour that is the result of mixing summer and winter, south and north, in these games. A tertiary colour is made by mixing either one primary colour with one secondary colour, or two secondary colours, in a given colour space: red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, yellow-green, for example. And whether we view North and South America as one primary and one secondary, or two secondary colours depends upon, of course, from where in the world we are looking. Right?

I began to wonder why Canada doesn't seem to value the Olympic Games as equals, given that in Canada we have what constitutes the right mix in our demographic make-up to reign supreme in both. [5] Is it really a colour thing? What does it mean to be a multicoloured, excuse me, I mean a multicultural, country that only invests real money in white games? And what exactly is it that we want the games to portray: the shades and hues that constitute our composition, or the monochromatic undertones that colour position and frame importance, i.e., its white base coat?

Now, I realize that this simple analysis seems pretty extreme. And at least a little oversimplified, naive even; I know that athletes wouldn't reduce sport to colour distinctions, or clashes, and nor should they. Most people don't drink

their coffee wondering whether it is dark or bold, and most consumers at Starbucks don't have to. But then again, I'm mixed. Mixed in colour and in race, that is. Brown, like the Pan American Games and bold, like dark coffee.

The reason I feel compelled to analyze these experiences in terms of colour—as outrageous as it might seem at first—is because Johnson Ngo's exhibition and publication, *Red, Green, Blue ≠ White*, make it imperative. That, and I am a perfect "match" for the task. *RGB≠W* is a provocation to think about the performativity of colour and what it means to colour. Looking through this exhibition to see colour as an active verb, not just as a description, has coloured my world-view anew.

Thus, colour as a verb in the active sense means that colour does things: it heats things up or cools things down, rather than passively shape-shifting depending on what else is around it. Whereas descriptions of colour have long defined us so-called People of Colour—either constituting our place in the world (by way of geographical location) or what our place in the world constitutes (by way of class and social hierarchy)—to *do colour*, in the sense that Ngo suggests, is to make colour relational, not relative. Colour(ing) occurs through interaction, not comparison.

Ngo's subtle reading of race through the lens of visual science in *RGB≠W* offers a way to look at the significance of our own colouring, questioning whether the meaning of colour is inherent or ascribed. By opening up the possibility to look more closely at how we are coloured by our experiences of colour, Ngo puts the onus on us, the viewers. And in his writing, he too takes responsibility for how his curatorial undertaking might colour our assumptions about the works on display.

Through the exhibition's design, Ngo acknowledges that we, the viewers, are entitled to our own subject position as interpreters of the artworks by including works that depend

either on our participation to complete them or on our physical proximity to make sense of what we are seeing (i.e., viewing them up close or from a distance). But his display strategies also demonstrate that we emerge as both subjects and objects of colour *alongside* the other works in the exhibition. Indeed, “the liveness of colour” that Johnson seeks to enact in the spaces around these performative works belongs to us. We read these works differently depending on our relationship to them—both physically in the gallery space, through blocking the colour in Aryen Hoekstra’s work and changing the colour of Chun Hua Catherine Dong’s, and also culturally; I read Brendan Fernandes’s colour transformation and Jude Norris’s liminality not as formal investigations but as cultural expressions, likely because I’m “coloured” too.

The relationship between colour and race, it would seem, depends here on our perspective as well as our proximity to the works on display. This is of course a basic tenet of colour theory (and reception theory): to place the same coloured object on different coloured backgrounds, for example, changes the object’s colour in our minds. This is called subjective colour phenomenon, which shows how colour is relational. It is the spaces that surround coloured objects (for example, the nature of paint on the surface, the colour of light used to illuminate it, the intensity of this light, and the chromatic characteristics of other surfaces nearby) that give colour its meaning, and, I might add, its power.

Learning from the exhibition, and inhabiting the spaces Ngo curatorially opened up for my own participation in, and of, colour, in all its nuanced hues, races, aesthetics, and otherwise, I decided to play my own kind of colour competition and test colour theory in a performative way. To test the knowledge I have gained from hanging out at Starbucks or watching sports on TV or by simply allowing myself to be “coloured” by my personal experiences, I wanted to find

out how people look at colour. And whether they thought about race when asked *about* colour *by* a person of colour.

So, for three months, with a little voice recorder in hand, I asked everyone I saw, met, or passed by, the following question: “What is the first thing you think about when I say the word ‘colour?’” When I say the word “colour.” Me. Subtly, by announcing myself as the subject of a question regarding colour, I wanted to see whether the answer might shift from aesthetics to race, or from science to culture. I was curious to know how language shapes the perception of colour. What is the idea of colour for most people? How do we imagine colour in our minds? Do people really see colour in terms of race? Are people of colour more likely to see colour differently?

Interestingly, out of hundreds of people I asked, only a handful of individuals answered with race—and the pattern had nothing to do with the colour of their skin. One young person said, “colour is the difference between people.” Whoa. Most people said “hue,” or, simply named their favourite colour. A few people started with their favourite colour and then—as a secondary thought—mentioned race, although again their position on colour was not dependent upon their race. One of the individuals who answered “hue” qualified their answer with, “I’m white so I guess I have less at stake in relation to colour,” but that was then counterbalanced by a Person of Colour, who answered with “painting.” Another individual replied that they would have named their favourite colour if I had asked the question in their country. But because we were in Canada, their answer was race, believing that we, as Canadians, complicate things that are straightforward by, for instance, making the colour question also a race question. I didn’t bother telling them what I thought about the Olympic Games, or asking whether they had seen Ngo’s show, or whether they prefer a dark or mild coffee at Starbucks.

[1] Okay, I saw two.

[2] I am not the only one who has come to this conclusion. In a study conducted by the University of Toronto and published in the academic peer-reviewed journal *Public Health*, researcher and kinesiology and physical education professor D.W. Lawrence says it like this: 94.9 percent of athletes from Canada, USA, Great Britain, and Australia at the Sochi Olympics were white. And race is not the only thing on his mind: athletes are also coloured by class. (D.W. Lawrence, “Sociodemographic profile of an Olympic team,” *Public Health* 148 (2017): 149–158)

[3] Canada ranked third in the medal count at the 2010 Winter Olympics in contrast to thirteenth at the 2012 Summer Olympics. In September 2013, it was reported that Own The Podium officials discussed funnelling more money into the winter sports instead of summer sports as a way of bettering its investment in terms of increasing Canada’s overall medal count. (Terry Davidson, “Canadian Olympic Committee pumping \$37M into Own The Podium,” *Toronto Sun*, 12 December 2013).

[4] The *National Post* says the Pan Am Games “are a quadrennial multi-sport event, just like the Olympics, but without the glamour, prestige and round-the-clock international coverage.” <http://news.nationalpost.com/sports/what-the-figuring-out-torontos-plans-for-the-pan-am-games>

In terms of prestige, the *Toronto Sun* remarked “the Pan Ams aren’t even bronze medal. More like 4th place, after Olympics, world championships, and Ben Johnson commercials” and queried “who cares about the Pan Am Games? Ever hear of Mar del Plata? Me neither.” According to Wikipedia, there has been only one edition of the Winter Pan American Games,

in 1990. The idea was dropped due to a lack of interest and after Canada and the USA won all eighteen medals. <http://www.torontosun.com/2013/10/01/any-takers-for-the-pan-am-games-winnipeg-anybody?token=96db6964de082e958b1aec7e70a79239>

[5] Actually, I am being generous here. Lawrence’s study sadly—but not surprisingly—reveals that even the “black” games are still white: 81.7 percent of athletes from Canada, USA, Great Britain, and Australia were white at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro.



**You are black yourself,  
but your doppelganger is blue.**

VTR

Previous spread:  
Kika Nicolela,  
*What do you think of me?*  
(2009), detail.  
Courtesy of artist  
and Vtape.



Kristina Lee Podesva,  
*Brown Globe*, 2007.  
Installation view.

## ARTISTS

### **Golboo Amani**

Golboo Amani is a multidisciplinary artist best known for her performance and social practice works. Acknowledging that many of us are marked by long, personal histories and prescribed relationships with pedagogy, Amani's work often addresses the conditions of knowledge production that render epistemic violence as invisible, insignificant, and benign. Much of her work focuses on interventions or alternatives to formal sites of pedagogy to include forms, contexts, and content normally excluded from institutionalized knowledge production. She has presented her work nationally and internationally, including at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Articule (Montreal), Encuentro: Hemispheric Institute, TRANSMUTED International Festival of Performance Art (Mexico City), 221A (Vancouver), and the LIVE Biennial of Performance Art.

### **Chun Hua Catherine Dong**

Chun Hua Catherine Dong is a Chinese-born artist working with performance art, photography, and video. She has performed and exhibited her works in multiple international performance art festivals and venues, such as Quebec City Biennial, Canadian Museum of Immigration, The Aine Art Museum, Grace Exhibition Space in Brooklyn, Kaunas Biennial, Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival in Chicago, 7a\*11d International Festival of Performance Art, Place des Arts in Montreal, Dublin Live Art Festival, and more. She received a BFA from Emily Carr University Art & Design, a MFA from Concordia University and was the recipient of the Franklin Furnace Award for contemporary avant-garde art (New York) in 2014.

### **Brendan Fernandes**

Brendan Fernandes is a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. He completed the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art and earned his MFA from Western University and his BFA from York University. He has exhibited widely, including exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), The Studio Museum in Harlem, Museum of Art and Design (New York), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, National Gallery of Canada, MASS MoCA, Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Guangzhou Triennial, and The Getty (Los Angeles). Fernandes has participated in numerous residency programs and he is currently artist in residence and faculty in Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University. He is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

### **Aryen Hoekstra**

Aryen Hoekstra is an artist and writer. Recent solo exhibitions in Toronto have been hosted by YYZ Artist's Outlet, 8eleven, and Mercer Union and other recent exhibition venues include Scotiabank Nuit Blanche (Toronto), Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton) Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography (Toronto), Forest City Gallery (London), and Modern Fuel (Kingston). He has contributed writing to YYZ Artists' Outlet, Susan Hobbs, COOPER COLE, and Daniel Faria Gallery, and his art criticism has appeared in *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Border Crossings*, and *Magenta Magazine*. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the independent project space Franz Kaka in Toronto, Ontario.

### **Manolo Lugo**

Manolo Lugo is a Mexican-born artist and educator working in performance, video, photography, and installation. His work speaks to the conditions of migrancy, precarity, and queerness in advanced capitalist societies. He has performed and exhibited nationally and internationally in venues including Unpack Gallery (Toronto), University of Toronto's Art Centre, Ex-Teresa Arte Actual (Mexico City), LIVE Biennial of Performance Art (Vancouver), and Visualeyez Performance Art Festival (Edmonton). He received a BFA from Emily Carr University and recently completed a Masters of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto. He works as a Digital Media Technician at the University of Toronto, Scarborough.

### **Kika Nicolela**

Kika Nicolela is a Brazilian artist and independent curator whose work includes video, installation, and photography. She has participated in over 100 solo and collective exhibitions internationally, in institutions including the Museum of Image and Sound (São Paulo), MASP (São Paulo), Museum of Modern Art (Buenos Aires), KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin), Museum Ludwig (Cologne), LOOP Gallery (Seoul), GL Strand (Copenhagen) and Parc de La Vilette (Paris). In 2010, she had a retrospective of her videos at the Museum of Modern Art in Salvador, Brazil.

### **Jude Norris**

Jude Norris (aka Tatakwan) is a multi-disciplinary Métis (Cree/Anishnawbe/Russian/Scottish Gypsy) artist of Plains Cree cultural affiliation. Norris' work focuses on relationships—to self, others, animal world, earth, culture, community, territory, technology, spirit world, time/timelessness and the "Great Mystery"—and the placement of those relationships in contemporary situations. Her work has been screened and exhibited internationally and can be found in the collections of major museums across Turtle Island. She is a recipient of the Chalmer's Arts Fellowship Award.

### **Kristina Lee Podesva**

Kristina Lee Podesva is an artist and writer working between art-making, writing, and publishing. Her artwork has appeared in exhibitions at Artspeak (Vancouver), Darling Foundry (Montreal), Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, *No Soul for Sale* at the Tate Modern (London), and Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery (Toronto), among other venues. She edited the contemporary art journal *Fillip* from 2005 to 2015 and has co-edited the publications *Tradición versus Modernidad (Tradition versus Modernity)*, *Sur: Volume 1, 100% Vancouver*, and *Institutions by Artists: Volume 1*. She is currently working towards opening the Bruna Press + Archive, where she will be Editor and Publisher.

## WRITERS

### **Emelie Chhangur**

Emelie Chhangur is an artist and award-winning curator and writer. She is known for her process-based, participatory curatorial practice and the creation of long-term collaborative projects performatively staged within and outside the gallery context. Chhangur has developed an experimental approach to curatorial writing with an interest in how texts perform to create unique interpretative experiences that follows the operative principles of the artworks. Over the past decade, she has been committed to finding inventive ways to enact activism from within an institutional framework, questioning the nature and social function of the contemporary art gallery through embedded criticality and new methods of gallery “in-reach.” She currently holds the position of Assistant Director/Curator at the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU), Toronto, and is the founder of the AGYU’s residency program. Chhangur makes single channel videos, installations, and performances that are shown nationally and internationally.

### **Francisco-Fernando Granados**

Francisco-Fernando Granados is an artist whose multidisciplinary critical practice spans performance, installation, cultural theory, digital media, public art, and community-based projects. He has presented work in galleries, museums, theatres, artist-run centres and non-traditional sites since 2005. These venues include the Art Gallery of Ontario, Mercer Union, Art Gallery of York University, Vancouver Art Gallery, Darling Foundry (Montreal), Neutral Ground (Regina), Third Space (St. John, New Brunswick) Hessel Museum of Art (New York), Defibrillator Gallery (Chicago), Voices Breaking Boundaries (Houston) Ex Teresa Arte Actual (Mexico City), Kulturhuset (Stockholm), and Theatre Academy at the University of the Arts (Helsinki). His writing has been published in exhibition catalogues, magazines, art journals, online platforms and books including *FUSE*, *KAPSULA*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, and *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. He completed a Masters of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto in 2012, and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at OCAD University.

## CURATOR AND EDITOR

### **Johnson Ngo**

Johnson Ngo is an artist who works in performance and sculpture. Ngo’s research explores connections and disjunctions between his “gaysian” identity and Western queer culture. Recent exhibitions include Art Gallery of Windsor, Nuit Blanche (Toronto), Spark Contemporary Art Space (Syracuse, New York), Toronto Free Gallery, 7a\*11d, University of Toronto Art Centre, and the Mississauga Living Arts Centre. Ngo recently completed a two-year, curatorial residency at the Blackwood Gallery. Currently, Ngo works in the Public Programming and Learning department at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this multi-year project, I've had the immense pleasure of working with an amazing group of artists, curators, writers, and mentors.

Thank you to all of the artists in the exhibition—Golboo Amani, Chun Hua Catherine Dong, Brendan Fernandes, Aryen Hoekstra, Manolo Lugo, Kika Nicolela, Jude Norris, and Kristina Lee Podesva—and to the contributors to the publication, Emelie Chhangur and Francisco-Fernando Granados.

I am grateful for the invaluable mentorship of everyone at the Blackwood Gallery, past and present, throughout this project, including Christof Migone, Juliana Zalucky, Julia Abraham, Joanna Sheridan, and Christine Shaw. Their guidance, generosity, and the productive conversations we shared shaped the exhibition and my practice immeasurably.

I would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts, the Jackman Humanities Institute, the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, and the Ontario Arts Council. These projects would not have been possible without the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Grants to Culturally Diverse Curators for Residencies in the Visual Arts.

Special thanks to Deirdre Logue, Michelle Jacques, Allyson Mitchell, and all my friends and family who have supported me throughout this journey.

—Johnson Ngo

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Blackwood Gallery  
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The Blackwood Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the University of Toronto Mississauga.



All photographs were taken by Toni Hafkenscheid, unless otherwise indicated. All images appear courtesy of the artists, unless otherwise indicated.



### **Blackwood Gallery**

University of Toronto Mississauga  
3359 Mississauga Road  
Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6  
905-828-3789  
blackwoodgallery.ca

### **Gallery Hours**

Monday–Friday: 12–5pm  
Wednesday: 12–9pm  
Saturday: 12–3pm

The Blackwood Gallery promotes LGBTQ2 positive spaces and experiences and is barrier-free. The gallery is FREE and open to the public.

