

Negotiating Diaspora: From the Personal to the Universal

March 5 – April 18, 2021

This grouping of artists presents a multi-vocal mosaic of spaces that are at once deeply personal and at the same time reflective of universal lived experience. While distinct in their subject matter and form, what draws these artists together are the prevalent universal themes of migration, spirituality, socio-politics, and landscape. And through these themes, these artists undertake a forensic examination of difference as they negotiate change and parlay it into compelling aesthetic form. The art in this exhibition is powerful. Like multidisciplinary artist, Shani Mootoo, we can all identify with a moment in time when we looked at the land beneath our feet and truly noticed the intricate details of that personally inhabited space. Mootoo's landscape photography frames waterscapes, the medium through which we are all connected, through an intimate downward focal lens capturing the familiar space of immediate physical experience as opposed to the traditional, romanticised, landscape vista or the tourist postcard. Having grown up in Trinidad surrounded by the adversarial nature of saltwater, Mootoo utilizes this up-close and personal style of framing as a lens through which to acquaint herself with the moodier freshwater that surrounds the life she is living now, in Prince Edward County.



Shani Mootoo, *Lake Opinicon*, 2017,
Giclee print on cotton archival paper, 21 x 31.5 inches

Ivo Stoyanov and Chung-Im Kim likewise explore notions of landscape through contemplating the beauty in the bizarre. In his large-scale, luxuriously textured, abstract paintings Stoyanov represents environmental patterns that have imprinted onto his mindscape, such as the patterns created by moss growing in the crevices of branches or water staining on the rocks along shorelines. These patterns emerge spontaneously through his brush and are realized in acrylic paint, marble dust, and wax in textured planes of grey with bold geometric coloured forms or sometimes neutral tones. It is a mode of noticing that he began while training in Bulgaria and now employs inside his Toronto studio as a means of embracing the rich patterns of the Canadian landscape.



Ivo Stoyanov, *Equal Neutrals No 1*, 2020,
Mixed Media, 68x48 inches

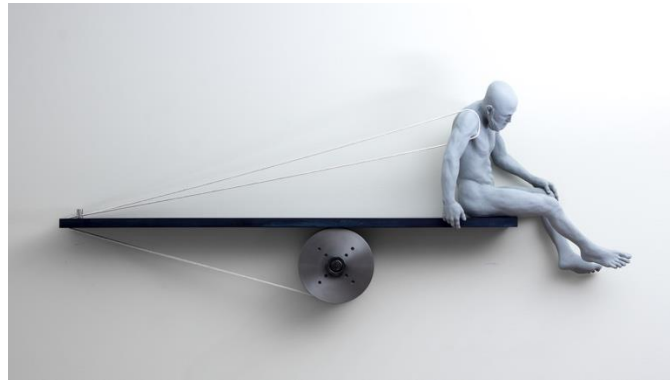
The textile artist Chung-Im Kim's three-dimensional wall pieces often explore the emergent form of the organic intertwining with the man-made, like the integration of sea life with the submerged ceramic vessels of a sunken ship. Kim relishes the beauty and sheer phenomenon of these meetings and collaborations between nature and man-made objects. Employing industrial felt and a seam stitching method used in traditional Korean Bojagi quilts, Kim explores themes of change and the evolution of time through the three-dimensional potential and pliability of her medium.



Chung-Im Kim, *Mutation 7*, 2015,
Industrial Felt, 30 x 16 x 4 inches

WW Hung and Dmitry Yuzefovich, negotiate landscape and geographic space somewhat differently, Hung does so through the human form and asks his viewer to enter that space with him; while Yuzefovich does so through the interiority of memory. WW Hung captures the universal lived experience through

utilizing the three-dimensional human form as a threshold for identification. His figures, always in a mode of contemplative resistance, inhabit abstracted spaces that invite universal identification. Chinese-Canadian, born in Hong Kong, Hung does not overtly address the diaspora, but is aware of how his work can be read differently depending on cultural context and cherishes open-ended interpretation.



WW Hung, *Tethered 1/9*, 2021,
Mixed media (cast Aqua-resin, steel, wood, cotton string, 45"W x 18"H x 8"D).

Dimitry Yuzefovich grew up in the USSR, now Ukraine, and his family departed for Israel in 1991 just shortly before the USSR ceased to exist. The dilapidated backdrop emerging from the socialist regime of his youth - torn wallpaper, exposed drywall, and stained hardwood flooring - were imprinted onto his memory and now re-emerge to set the intriguing scenes of his present paintings. Drawing from an internal reservoir of elusive and fragmented memory-scapes, he creates vivid, playful, and mysterious mise-en-scènes that bring the past into dialogue with the present. Each composition is realized in a highly skilled trompe l'oeil painting style that operates to preserve the ephemerality of the past and transform the elusive into the palpable.



Dimitry Yuzefovich, *Door No 50*, 2020,
Oil on Canvas, 70.86 x 59 inches

The work of Shireen Kamran, Andrew Lui, and Catherine Vamvakas Lay deploys elegant materiality that is conscious of its own physical means via spiritual connectedness. Kamran's artistic practice is rooted in Sufi

philosophy and inspired by Rumi's poetry – it is the underlying thread that unites all of her work and her relationship with the world. After immigrating to Canada she was forced to confront her work in a new and foreign context and she realized that what she yearned for was the deep spirituality of her life in Pakistan; her art is thus an anchor and a meditative connection with the universal.



Shireen Kamran, *The Sum of All Parts No 22*, 2020,
Pigments and Acrylic on Canvas, 54.5 x 51.5 inches

For Lui, the calligraphic mode of expression is indelibly intertwined with formative life events from youth in communist China and thus deeply a part of his existential knowledge of being. The subjective condition of being is revealed, and sometimes betrayed, by one's calligraphic hand. Lui is interested in bringing history into the contemporary space of his paintings. His East Asian background comes through in his treatment of line, his arrangement of colour, and the recurring themes of pilgrimage, time, timelessness, travel, and, using the metaphor of the horse and rider, the human journey.



Andrew Lui, *Epic of Darkness*, 2019,
Acrylic and Ink on Rice Paper Mounted to Board, Framed 39.5 x 71.75

Vamvakas Lay immigrated to Canada when she was 17 and found herself investigating the similarities and differences between the Greek and Canadian cultures in minute detail. Celebrating the similarities when she discovered them was her way of negotiating common ground and grounding herself. This seeking out of the similar is what guided her back to a spiritual practice in a more purposeful way: no longer surrounded by the rich byzantine iconography and the soundscape of church bells like she was in Greece, she decided to pursue the spiritual more strategically in Canada. Her work comes to her through dreams,

intuitions, and visions, and then she finds the materials and processes to express it. With the pomegranate sculptures she is processing the religious idea of practice and reflecting on its oppression during various points in our history. Pomegranates have long had rich associations in Greek culture and mythology – rebirth, fertility, abundance, and marriage.



Catherine Vamvakas Lay, *From the Earth: Red Seeds*, 2016,
Blown Glass, 6 x 9 x 8.5 inches

Derya Ozparlak and Viktor Mitic are confronting socio-political issues in aesthetically powerful and edifying modus. Ozparlak's sculpture grapples with the problematic work ethic of capitalist corporate culture, and ideas surrounding escape, belonging, and freedom. For Ozparlak, our past, be it our childhood, our culture, or our occupation, is always a part of us and how we come to terms with that is where the freedom occurs. High-gloss polyester balloons are a recurring motif in her work and a vivid symbol of the friction between freedom and escape. The thing that carries one away is still the thing one is bound to. Each of Ozparlak's sculptures are comprised of hand-hammered steel and attached to a bouquet of brightly coloured balloons. The physical impossibility of the material mass of steel being carried away by air-filled balloons renders her message even more compelling, that is that, freedom, the American Dream version, is an illusion. An immigrant to Canada from Turkey in 2016, Ozparlak is keenly acquainted with the bizarre feeling of something being very familiar and completely foreign at the same time. Her work encapsulates this.



Derya Ozparlak, *Blue is My Colour*, 2021,
Hand Hammered Steel and Polyester, 35 x 15 x 15 inches

Viktor Mitic is a Canadian-Serbian painter and sculptor who is known for his use of live ammunition in paintings and installations. His bullet-ridden creations have provoked both acclaim and controversy. His school bus riddled with bullet holes was displayed in Washington, a jarring commentary on school shootings seemingly unchecked. Mitic deploys a pop-inspired painting style with brightly hued colour-fields upon which strategically executed bullet holes pierce the canvas creating a tension between creation and destruction and ask the viewer to confront ideas surrounding the normalization and glorification of violence in contemporary culture.



Viktor Mitic, *Safe Harbour*, 2020,
Acrylic Paint, Gold Leaf, and Bullet Holes on Canvas, 56 x 164 inches

A forensic examination of difference, often and surprisingly, will reveal similarity. In this exhibition the notion of universal is reconciled with the notion of difference. In the high modern era of abstract expressionism that aimed toward the universal, difference was excluded, the hand of the artist erased. Here it is not. This exhibition draws attention to the value of the unique visual vocabulary of each artist and reveals that difference *is* universal, that personal *is* universal.