



## The Best Shows to See During Art Toronto

From Shellie Zhang's altars to elusive homelands to Anna Boghiguiian's chessboard of historical icons

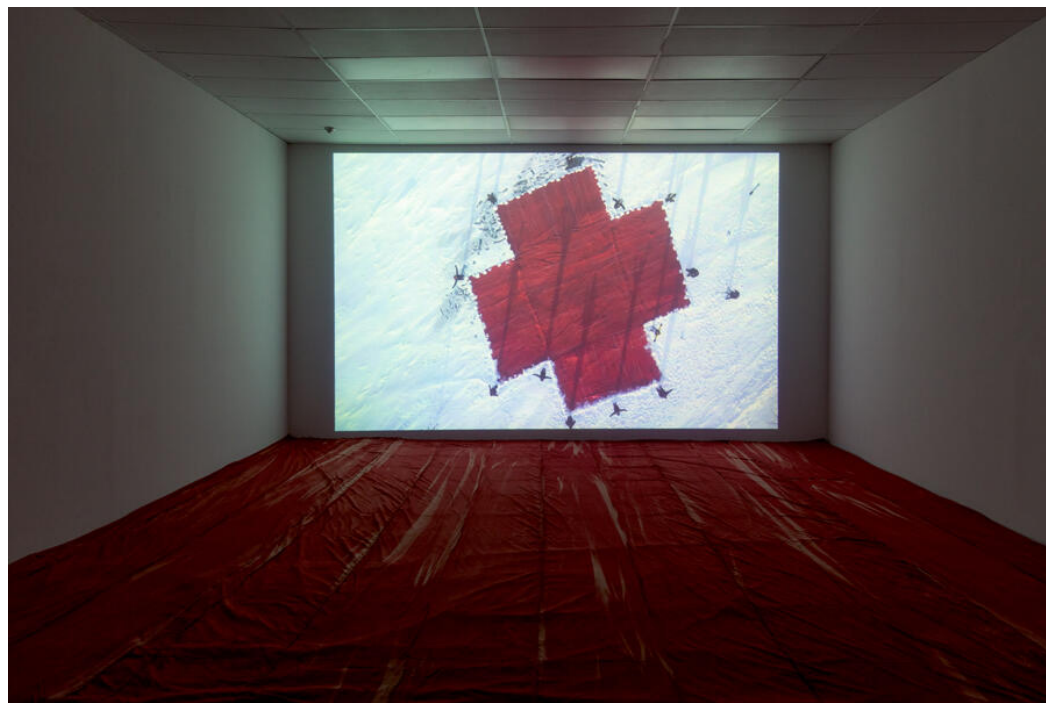
BY NEIL PRICE IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 26 OCT 23



### Maureen Gruben

COOPER COLE

23 September – 11 November



Maureen Gruben, *Nuna*, 2023, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and COOPER COLE, Toronto



gruelling, collective performance: multiple pairs of hands pull at once from different corners of the fabric. The cloth, seen from both close-up and aerial perspectives, eventually takes the shape of the Red Cross symbol. Embedded in melting ice, this icon reinforces the urgency of our changing climate and the need for a cooperative effort to pull us out of crisis. In a separate room, multimedia sculptures convey Gruben's ongoing concern for the tenuous relationships between human consumption and organic life. Intriguing and playful fusions of natural and manufactured objects result in works such as *WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?* (2023), a foam bear head used for taxidermy crowned with a streak of optical fibres. The throughline of these eclectic sculptures – which marry mitten strings and polar-bear hides, drum skins and bubble wrap, sinew and electric cables – emphasizes the unstable relations between our manufactured and natural surroundings.

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**Shellie Zhang**

Patel Brown

14 September – 4 November



Shellie Zhang, *Fire Elemental Alter*, 2023, framed photo, edition 3/3 + two hand-painted sculptural elements. Courtesy: the artist and Patel Brown, Toronto

Referencing the five elements (wood, water, metal, earth and fire) of Chinese *Wuxing* philosophy, Zhang presents photography, sculptures and installations that mediate cultural connection, remembrance and projection through transplanted lives. Altar-like forms structure the exhibition as a quietly resonant space that elevates and transforms kitschy commercial products into works that carry personal and historical weight. *Fire Elemental* (2023) – a red, large-format archival inkjet print situated between two plinth-like structures – for example, arrays cheap convenience-store lighters and household candles against a red background, recalling shrines that honour the dead. Such works suggest that ordinary objects – even those which are cheap, mass-produced or easy-to-discard – can act as critical stand-ins for distant places. At the same time, works like *Earth Elemental*, in which replicas of *gongshi* (scholar's rocks) are displayed in front of a marble background as interior design objects, highlight how such items can become denuded of cultural value. In a deftly designed exhibition, Zhang probes the ways in which we try to maintain the essence of who we are through reproductions associated with diasporic homelands that are both endlessly desired and elusive.

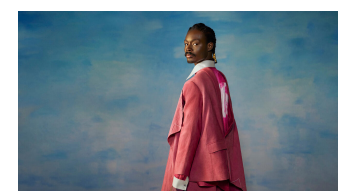
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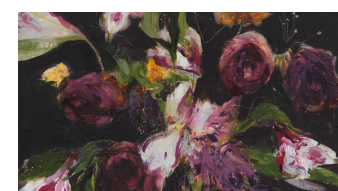
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13 October – 7 January 2024



Anna Boghiguan, 'Time of Change', 2023, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and The Power Plant, Toronto; photograph: Henry Chan

Marie Antoinette, Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein are just a few of the influential players from the past three centuries who Anna Boghiguan translates into life-size cutouts on a massive chessboard in a kaleidoscope of thought and action. For this edition of *The Chess Game* (2022–23), the artist has added notable Canadians, including former prime minister Lester B. Pearson, jazz pianist Oscar Peterson and writer Margaret Laurence. Like an array of precariously placed dominoes, Boghiguan's personages are lined up in conversation with each other, presenting interconnected and layered collisions of political ideas and debates that ripple across the world stage. In one pairing, for example, we see Marie Antoinette across from her mother, Maria Theresa, perhaps discussing how the former's oblivious decadence fanned the flames of the French Revolution. By requiring viewers to walk around the large chessboard to observe who is depicted on some of the cutouts, Boghiguan suggests the necessity for personal engagement with history. The show also includes *Time of Change* (2022), a work comprised of 96 drawings hung in the form of a wall-sized, comic-strip mural – only in this case the subjects and themes are far from lighthearted. Scenes including figures such as Vladimir Lenin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky anticipate the horrors of World War II, personified here by Nazi doctor Aribert Heim, whom the artist uses as a motif for humanity's capacity for evil throughout the exhibition. In Boghiguan's expressive, sketch-like drawings, revolutionaries, independence movements, executions and cataclysmic wars overlap with ever-increasing political and social consequences.

### Rochelle Goldberg

Mercer Union

9 September – 11 November



Rochelle Goldberg, *Partial View*, bronze, aluminium, 66 × 66 × 41 cm. Courtesy: the Artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery; photograph: Vuk Dragojevic.



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Rochelle Goldberg's installation comprised of stretched wires, cat-food tins, star-tipped wands and aluminium-covered decomposing bread. *Obstructed View* and *Partial View* (both 2023) – two bronze casts of Mary and Marilyn Monroe – anchor the show. Both appear pregnant and seem either to be falling apart or to have never been whole: the figures, which rest upon tin cans, are fragmented and hollow, forcing the viewers to imaginatively complete their form. The artist is interested in the ways these two historical figures have been shaped, reduced, constricted and erased – one portrayed as a virginal saint, the other a tragic sex symbol – as well as the roles they both played in the construction of contemporary femininity. These sculptural works are situated under an architecture of wire ropes and vanity lights, infusing the exhibition with an electrified metallic glow that recalls a blinding production studio or lab, in which Goldberg experiments with themes of transformation, agency, embodiment and decay.

### Sarindar Dhaliwal

Art Gallery of Ontario

23 July 2023 – 7 January 2024



Sarindar Dhaliwal, *At Badminton*, 1998, mixed media on paper, 1.5 × 1.2 m. Courtesy: © Sarindar Dhaliwal and Art Gallery of Toronto

Sarindar Dhaliwal's colourful drawings weave family histories and stories into tapestries of words and remembrances related to migration, identity, travel and a life of artmaking. In vibrant, mixed-media works such as *At Badminton* (1998) – in which overlapping panels of disparate images (figures in saris dancing beneath archways; sepia-tinted thresholds) are set on gold-painted paper with frayed edges, like an old memory – the artist lulls the viewer into nuanced consideration for subjects such as intergenerational experience and childhood. Dhaliwal's drawings appear like quilts, stitching together the fragments of experience scattered and softened by the passing of time and distance, beguiling in their mutedness. That's not to say there isn't also a sense of biting humour and satire. Alongside mixed-media, video, photographic and sculptural works, the full-room installation *Hey Hey Paula* (1998) consists of 544 eerily similar, red-tinged portraits of smiling women, all wearing pearls, culled from newspaper engagement announcements. This snarky commentary on conformity and arranged marriage contrasts with an adjacent red rotary telephone on a red wooden table, which plays Paul & Paula's silly, repetitive and trivialized romantic ditty 'Hey Paula' (1962): 'Hey, hey, Paula, I want to marry you ...'

*Main image: Sarindar Dhaliwal, Peonies II, 1997, acrylic paint, opaque and translucent watercolour, metallic paint, graphite, gummed postage stamps, self adhesive vinyl lettering on handmade paper, 80 × 240 cm. Courtesy: © Sarindar Dhaliwal and Art Gallery of Ontario*

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### NEIL PRICE

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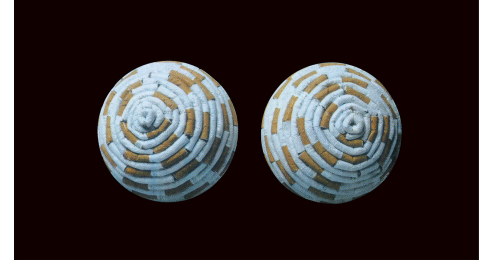
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