

# Yearning for Comfort, Not Cure

An exhibition curated by Adele Ruhdorfer  
January 9 - February 8, 2020



## Artists

Yvette Cenerini • Lux Habrich

Bram Keast • melannie monoceros

Laurence Philomène • Jesse Turner

*Yearning for Comfort, Not Cure* features the work of six artists exploring their varied embodied experiences with disability, chronic illness, and madness, which are materialized and given form through the labour-intensive processes of performance, craft-based, and digital media. A guiding principle of this exhibition is to de-stabilize the disempowering medicalized discourse and emphasis on cure, and instead focus on the many ways art and creative processes can become sites of refuge, catharsis, and validation.

First, consider a thought experiment that I and many other disabled, chronically ill, and mad people have had to contend with. Upon learning about my chronic illness, some people will broach the question: “If they invented a cure, would you take it?” While I might want to relieve my body of pain and discomfort, this question fails to understand the multi-faceted experience of living with embodied differences. The person asking this type of question typically expects that you will answer with an enthusiastic and resounding ‘YES,’ assuming that a disabled life is only filled with suffering. Furthermore, there is an additional assumption that curative treatments are wholly positive experiences, without any major costs to the individual. In reality, that cost might be monetary, an investment of the individual’s time and emotional resources, or even additional physical pain. These sorts of questions simply perpetuate a discourse of disqualification towards disabled people, making it increasingly difficult to develop a positive disability identity. It should also be noted that any desire for comfort and relief in my present state is not an equivalent to ridding myself of my whole chronically ill experience. Without romanticizing or ignoring the difficulties I face as a chronically ill woman, I have also learned to love and appreciate my differences. I have learned to listen to my body, to lean into rest and slowness, and to cultivate supportive, understanding, and empathetic relationships.

Therefore, while medical treatments may provide a degree of comfort, yearning for cures is not the main concern for many of us. Cure is too ambiguous of a concept to provide real social change. Cure continues to locate the problem of disability in the individual, instead of taking the social contexts into account. It requires individuals to work for their acceptance in socially prescribed ways, giving their bodies over to a system that profits off of them. Managing one’s symptoms to be able to survive in this world requires a great deal of additional labour. Instead, we must conceptualize cure as a supplement to the social work that is required from each one of us, but especially from non-disabled people. For, even if curative treatments can provide comfort to some of us living with certain illnesses, cure does not solve the disenfranchisement, the disqualification, or the oppression disabled people face as a politically-identified group. Cure might only relieve some of the social stigma, but it does not address the dominant attitudes of society.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of comfort acts as a counterpoint to this dominant discourse. Comfort is about understanding, community, and social supports. It is about putting in the effort to ensure that we centre accessibility in our communities, so as not to make tasks more difficult for disabled people. It is about cultivating and centring comfort in our relationships and recreational

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1 For a detailed analysis of the concept of cure, see: Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).



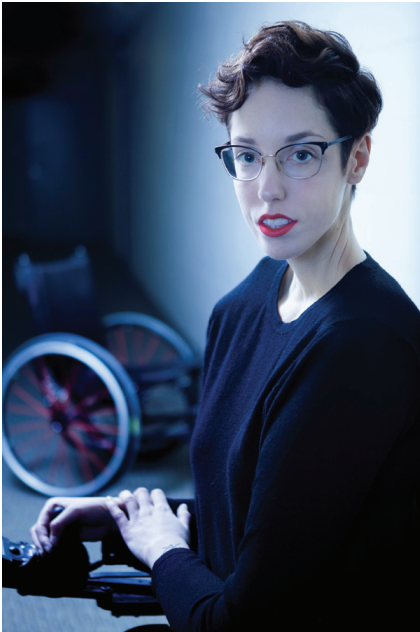
Yvette Cenerini, *Bras gauche / Left Arm*



Bram Keast, *A Measurement of No Distance*

activities, so as not to further isolate those who are unable to participate in socially-prescribed ways. It is about creating safer spaces, where we feel welcome to disclose and openly talk about our experiences, without fear of retribution, pain, or hurt. Comfort centres ease, acceptance, and accommodations. Comfort is about acknowledging interdependent relationships and reciprocity. Comfort is care.

The relationship to her body, the development of a positive disability identity, and the feelings of dis/comfort are central features of **Jesse Turner's** durational and participatory performance piece, *Take A Moment To Sit In My Chair*. Inspired by Marina Abramovic's performance *The Artist is Present*, Jesse asks participants to sit across from her in her old manual wheelchair. At first, participants will likely feel a sense of discomfort and confinement, as the wheelchair is immovable and cannot be used for its intended design as a mobility aid. In part, this represents the ongoing discomfort that she – and many disabled people with visible markers – must face on a daily basis. Yet, the participant is also asked to spend a moment with Jesse, to get comfortable, and to share a moment of silence, communicating empathy to one another without physical touch or verbal expressions, prompting a variety of emotions. For me, I was transported back to my own diagnostic journey, medical procedures, and surgery. As these were de-stabilizing medicalized experiences, I had to engage in the internal work of confronting my own negative associations of a wheelchair and consider it from a wider point of view. In this shared space, it transformed into a site of comfort. I could rest, knowing that, while not all of our experiences overlap, I was in a safe and communal space of understanding.



Jesse Turner, *Take a Moment to Sit in My Chair*



melannie monoceros, *Ancestors: Self Portrait (as ancestor)*

**Yvette Cenerini** also centres her embodied experiences, but she frames these through the lens of inter/dependence. In her latest work, *Paper Doll Template*, Yvette creates a segmented and fractured self-portrait. With surgical precision, she has digitally manipulated and cut up her own body parts to resemble an articulated paper doll template. The allusion to medical surgeries and intrusive medical procedures is heightened, by the opportunity visitors have to assemble and manipulate miniature versions of the paper doll figure. However, while she does contemplate the ways in which she feels detached from her body and feels frustrated with the degree of dependence on others, this work also serves to incorporate elements of gratitude. Although visitors can do whatever they like with her body, the interactivity is meant to empower them to consider their social roles and the collective responsibility they have for caring for people living with disabilities. By encouraging this type of visceral response through an interactive and tactile element, viewers may be able to better understand the complexities and positive elements about an interdependent and reciprocal relationship.

Fragmentation and assemblage are themes that are also featured in **Lux Habrich's** textile wall-hanging collage, *Mother's Tears*. This work is a collection of newly made craft-based elements and the repetitious use, recycling, and reformatting of textile fragments and motifs from earlier artistic works, experimentations, and written diary reflections. The act of repeating and re-using imagery, writing, and text from her other work gives these fragments new lives. This self-referential aspect of her work also highlights the multitude of perspectives that exist when contemplating the complexities of belonging to diasporic communities as a biracial woman. By processing the fragmented nature of her identity in a repetitious fashion, she expresses

the distance she feels from her ancestry and heritage, while also embodying it wholly and finding new ways to honour it. In reclaiming a closeness to her Chinese ancestry, she attempts to better understand the familial linkages of her embodied experiences of cross-generational trauma and mental illness, by referencing a fractured family history, her own memories, and the medicinal wisdom of her ancestors. These concepts are represented through a unification and materialization of various memories spanning across timelines: she presents the viewer with photographs of her maternal grandparents; her mother holding her after her birth; the healing qualities of lotus roots and chrysanthemums in Chinese medicinal practices; an embroidered version of a Chinese hairpin her mother wore; and two bamboo stalks, which are often a feature of gravestones.



Lux Habrich, *Mother's Tears*

**melannie monoceros** is also interested in drawing upon their roots and ancestry as a Black-Taino/Arawak person, to better understand their embodied experiences. *Point of Origin* references the medical industry's desire to focus on the individual, attempting to locate the feelings of suffering and pain to one specific point in the body and one original moment in their life. These ideas are materialized in *Pain Map*, a quilt featuring embroidered x-rays of their own body, alongside several questions posed by medical professionals. Yet, mel questions this sentiment and widens the system of knowledge, by connecting their non-binary, queer, and chronically ill Black body to ancestral and cosmological ways of knowing. In drawing upon the experiences of influential Black poets, writers, and artists in *Ancestors*, mel underscores the idea that they have a shared experiential history. Is finding a point of origin even possible, if Black individuals must grapple with contemporary systemic oppression and cross-generational trauma? Why is there such a concern for upholding the medical gaze, instead of addressing these debilitating social issues? Instead of attempting to find a simple solution to these questions and for their chronic illnesses, grief, and pain, mel metaphorically uses labour-intensive craft-processes to highlight the work that goes into building systems of care.

Similarly, **Laurence Philomène's** year-long daily photographic and self-portrait series considers the necessary labour that is required to care for oneself, as a chronically ill trans person dealing with burn-out and chronic fatigue. Their photographic series documents the everyday, mundane activities as they undergo the process of medically transitioning with bi-weekly testosterone treatments. By creating this record of the slow and ongoing changes they witness in their body, their moods, and in their physical space, Laurence provides an intimate glimpse into a trans





Laurence Philomène, *Watching tv in bed with Vashti*, June 2019

life outside of the public sphere. Aside from centring their trans experience in their oeuvre, the themes of comfort, community, and self-care are brought together in this series, through vibrantly lit self-portraits in their apartment, scenes from their local neighbourhood, and the ever-present connection to a supportive online community on social media. Not only does this work succeed as an immersive experience for the viewer in a gallery setting, but their process of regularly sharing these images on Instagram, provides a safe refuge for those who may only be able to safely access these communal supports in an online environment.

Finally, **Bram Keast** explores related themes of slowness, burn-out, and self-care, by incorporating his experiences of sensory disability within his work and playfully working with ideas of confusion, ambiguity, and communication. His series, *A Moment When Your Eyes Glaze Over*, deals with the exhaustion experienced after long days of solitary work and how these experiences can affect and blur our senses. The final products are bold abstract works that evoke a distillation and condensation of time, space, and place into simple shapes, objects, and seemingly recognizable patterns. The intentional ambiguity of the work encourages the viewer to relate to it on their own terms, bringing their own unique sensory experiences and interpretations to the fore. This work is an exercise in highlighting the potential for beautiful outcomes within the experience of confusion, affirming the idea of disability as a positive self-identity with possibilities to see the world from a different point of view.

This exhibition attempts to engage with the concepts of cure and comfort, by framing the creative processes of the featured artists as a starting point to understanding the nuances of the lived experiences of disabled, chronically ill, and mad individuals. By creating and holding

the space to explore their varied experiences of trauma, grief, ambiguity, confusion, and exhaustion, the artists are also able to create experiences of joy, pride, and comfort within their own body-minds. This process of vulnerably sharing and externalizing their experiences extends far beyond themselves, allowing for the building of a wider community. It is within this social community, where we might de-emphasize the role of cure for the individualized body, allowing more comfort and care to be created for all.

## Adele Ruhdorfer

Exhibition Curator

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## List of works in exhibition

### In Gallery 1C03:

Yvette Cenerini, *Modèle imprimable de poupée articulée en papier / Printable Articulated Paper Doll Template*, 2019, digital collage on photo rag paper and postcard, 58" x 32" and 7" x 5".

Lux Habrich, *Mother's Tears*, 2016-2019, fragmented quilt, found fabrics (linen, silks, cotton), natural dyes, hand and machine stitched, silkscreen and photo-transfer appliqués, glass beads, various threads, 41" x 44".

Bram Keast, *A Measurement of No Distance*, 2019, gouache on papier-mâché, 51" x 30".

Bram Keast, *Windless Chime*, 2019, gouache on papier-mâché, 24" x 24".

melannie monoceros, *Ancestors: Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Self Portrait (present), Self Portrait (as ancestor)*, Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Octavia E. Butler* (part of *Point of Origin* series), 2016, mixed media woven tapestries and accompanying poem, various dimensions.

melannie monoceros, *Pain Map* (part of *Point of Origin* series), 2016, machine-sewn quilt with embroidery thread on raw cotton and accompanying poem, 36" x 36".

Laurence Philomène, *Puberty*, 2019, series of 298 digital images presented as chronological slideshow on monitor.

Jesse Turner, *Take a Moment to Sit in My Chair*, 2020, performance with installation of wheelchair, prints, and textual documents.

### Off-site artwork, presented at Window Gallery (Bannatyne Avenue at Arthur Street):

melannie monoceros, *ancestora dio*, 2016-2020, digital prints and embroidered text on cotton, 36" x 36".

## Artist & Curator Biographies

**Yvette Cenerini** is a francophone Métis visual artist from Manitoba who lives and works in Winnipeg. Prior to obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Manitoba, she studied Psychology, Zoology and Education, which allowed her a detailed understanding of human as well as animal behaviors. The complexity and intimacy of intra- and inter-specific relationships are recurring themes throughout her work in painting, printmaking and photomontage. Cenerini's work has been included in several group shows in Manitoba, Québec and Ontario. An involved member of the artistic community, she has served on the boards of Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba and La Maison des artistes visuels francophones. She is currently enrolled in the Diversity through Access to Technology + Art Mentorship Program where she is experimenting with the amalgamation of digital collage and Media Arts.

Originally from Montréal / Tiohtiá:ke, QC, **Lux Habrich** finds frequent inspiration in her mixed racial and cultural identity. Having moved to Atlantic Canada in 2012 to complete an Interdisciplinary BFA at NSCAD University, Lux found herself drawn to the narrative potential in craftwork as a means of accessing ancestral knowledge. Layering fragmented, nostalgic imagery of girlhood with sharp instances of psychological despair – she often seeks to emulate the chaotic nature of memory and the many subconscious, untold stories and unspoken legacies that live inside each of us. Lux employs the immensely meditative qualities in tactile processes and the performative aspects of experimental mark making to record a personal history of inherited, embodied trauma. Her work involves investigations of temporality, subversive gender, feminine sacrifice, concepts of family and the home, diaspora and belonging, disability and cultural hybridization - to introduce an identity in all the complexities and contradictions that together formulate the self. Committed to expressing marginalized experiences and participating in support work, Lux externalizes intense internal grievances, to open up collective issues and qualities of larger community struggle to receive moments of healing and empowerment.

**Bram Keast** is an artist interested in the nature of visual imagery and its potential to be misinterpreted in tangential and nonsensical ways. His playfully inquisitive work investigates patterns of recognition, communication, and narrative, nurturing the possibility for visual phenomena to stumble their way into becoming something else. Working with painting, sculpture and paper, he explores tensions that develop from constellations of associations and digressions.

**melannie monoceros** is a poet and interdisciplinary artist exploring polysensory production and somatic grief through text/ile and performance, currently based in Winnipeg/Treaty 1, MB, home of the Métis Nation and the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Dene, Cree, Dakota and Oji-Cree Nations. melannie has read and performed at Drop the Mic (Winnipeg, MB 2019), This is Not a Sentence (Paoli, IN 2018), Republic of Inclusion (Ottawa, ON 2017), and at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (Toronto, ON 2016). melannie is a VONA fellow (Berkeley, CA 2014) and has since been awarded grants from the Canada, Ontario, and Toronto Arts Councils. melannie has been a guest lecturer at Concordia University, Ontario



College of Art and Design, Ryerson University, and Yukon College School of Visual Art. melannie's writing has appeared in magazines such as *This*, *Make/Shift*, *Shameless*, and *The Peak* as well as the zine *When Language Runs Dry*. melannie's textile and time-based work has been exhibited in Toronto, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Regina and Winnipeg.

**Laurence Philomène** is a photographer, director and curator based in Montreal, Canada. Their work deals with questions of identity and selfhood seen through a colourful queer + trans lens, blending documentary and fine art approaches. Laurence's work is informed by their lived experiences as a chronically ill transgender artist coming of age amid the rise of social media. Through long-form collaborative and autobiographical projects rooted in care for their community, they aim to celebrate and humanize trans existence. Visually, their work investigates how western understandings of masculinity and femininity inform our perception of gender, and how the two can co-exist outside of the binary. Laurence's work has been published internationally in magazines such as *Vice*, *Courrier International*, *The Independent*, *Dazed*, *I-D*, *Broadly*, *Teen Vogue*, CBC arts, *Wonderland*, and *Hunger Magazine*. Laurence is a recipient of the 2019 Lucie Foundation emerging artist scholarship and the 2020 Women Photograph mentorship program. Their work has been presented in over 40 exhibitions worldwide, including solo exhibits in Toronto, Montreal, Berlin and Krakow.

Born and raised in Winnipeg, **Jesse Turner** has spent many years living overseas. She studied A-level Arts at an International School in Singapore, and has gone on to receive a BA in Conflict Resolution and Psychology from the University of Winnipeg. A long-time researcher and disability activist, Jesse returned to her artistic endeavours in 2014 by participating in Making Our Mark, a mentorship program between the ArtsAccessibility Network Manitoba and Martha Street Studio. In the past, Jesse's mediums of choice have been drawing, painting, printmaking, and photography. She is most interested in the intersections of art, disability, and identity. Through her artistic practise, Jesse hopes to confront society's idea of disability, reclaim her identity as a disabled artist, and build community to honour Disability Pride.

**Adele Ruhdorfer** is currently in her final year of a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Art History at The University of Winnipeg, where she's focusing her research interests on applying critical feminist and disability frameworks to analyses of fine art and popular forms of visual culture. She is particularly interested in re-centring the politically-engaged embodied experiences of women, feminist, queer, and disabled artists, as they continue to be under-researched or, particularly in the case of chronic illnesses or disabilities, their positive connection to an artist's creative process is overlooked. After graduating, she plans on pursuing a master's degree in Cultural Studies, with the hopes of contributing to historical research, teaching, and curatorial practices.

## Acknowledgments

Gallery 1Co3 wishes to acknowledge the following University of Winnipeg departments and programs for their support of this project: History, Disability Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Accessibility Services. We are also grateful to the Institute for Women's and Gender Studies, greenhouse artlab, Window Gallery, and the Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba for their partnership on this exhibition's programming. The Gallery wishes to express its appreciation to exhibition curator Adele Ruhdorfer and all of the exhibiting artists. Thanks also to installation technician Glen Johnson, graphic designer Ian Lark, communications assistant Dana Nagata, photographers Stefan Ingthorsson and Karen Asher and all Gallery 1Co3 attendants.

## Affiliated programming:

**Offsite exhibition:** Window Gallery, a 24 hour display window on the outside of the Artspace Building located at street level in Winnipeg on Bannatyne Avenue between King and Arthur Streets. Featuring work by melannie monoceros.

### Performances by Jesse Turner at Gallery 1C03:

January 9, 4:00 – 6:00 pm  
January 14, 12:00 – 4:00 pm  
January 17, 12:00 – 4:00 pm  
January 28, 12:00 – 4:00 pm  
February 6, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

**Text/ile workshop with melannie monoceros:** January 24, 12:00 – 3:00 pm in the greenhouse artlab at The University of Winnipeg. Geared for 2SQTBIPOC writers and artists. Pre-registration required by emailing [j.gibson@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:j.gibson@uwinnipeg.ca).

**Lecture by Diane Driedger:** January 31 at 1:00 pm in Room 2C15 at The University of Winnipeg

**Panel discussion:** February 4 at 2:30 pm in Convocation Hall at The University of Winnipeg Featuring Yvette Cenerini, Bram Keast, melannie monoceros and Jesse Turner. Moderated by Adele Ruhdorfer.

**Gallery 1C03 hours:** Monday - Friday: 12:00 - 4:00 p.m., Saturday: 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
Open 10:00 am – 4:00 pm on February 6.

ASL can be arranged for the workshop, lecture, panel discussion and exhibit tours with two weeks' advance notice by contacting the Gallery.

## Gallery 1C03

1st floor of Centennial Hall, The University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9  
Phone: 204.786.9253 [www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery)

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