

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Curator and author: Karen Tam

Rencontre avec l'autre soi-même

Participating artists: naakita feldman-kiss, Julie Lequin, Bogdan Stoica

This exhibition at EXPRESSION, in partnership with Les Territoires, brings together video and installation works by two emerging artists and one mid-career artist – naakita feldman-kiss (Montréal), Bogdan Stoica (Montréal), and Julie Lequin (Boucherville) – whose shared concerns touch upon notions of family, home, and the production of memories and the self. All three artists draw on their own experiences and histories (whether in Boucherville, Ottawa, or Romania) to understand their surroundings and relationships, as well as mixing fictive elements into their works. Although videos can document their stories, the accompanying sculptures, audio and text-based works, DIY props, drawings, and collages act as counterpoints to these impermanent holders of memories.

Inspired by everyday life, Julie Lequin uses narrative and humour in her semi-autobiographical works that explore the home and constructions of self within one's nest, one's neighbourhood, and the suburbs, through installations, drawings, DIY props, and videos. Her current series, *Un congé de maternité c'est pas vraiment un congé*, is about readapting to normal life after giving birth, and about navigating maternity and parenthood in the art world. In this series of forty-odd ink drawings and watercolours, as well as a maquette, and in *Vidéo-journal* (2020), Lequin depicts anecdotes about her life and immediate environments. *Vidéo-journal* consists of thirty short video entries made during the COVID-19 confinement and gives us glimpses of the artist with her daughter and partner at home, on outings, doing chores, and working in the studio. Functioning as a variation of a family home video, it also acts as a documentation of Lequin's studio practice. In addition to these pieces, Lequin has created props and sets for *Chroniques Confabulatoires (Volet II)*, a set of short videos currently in production that will star marionettes re-enacting the eight great

relationships of Lequin's younger self. Placed on plinths and on the gallery floor, these objects include DIY marionettes and papier-mâché sculptures in the form of a boat, an old iMac, and a truck.

In the vein of a tone poem, Stoica's film, *Ce qui reste à traduire*, translates memories into the present in Romanian, French, and English. As a record of taking his Québécois partner, Catherine, to visit his homeland in Romania, the work intersperses her initial reactions, responses, and interactions with his family and to the landscape with Stoica's own memories of home. Musical excerpts from Lili Boulanger's compositions drift languidly like a memory of summer, accompanying the idyllic snapshots of jogging in the park, Catherine practising her Romanian in the kitchen, a mother and daughter conversing on a Bucharest park bench, labourers stacking hay or transporting wood by horse and cart, a home video of a family wedding, and children on a school trip. There is a sense that the past, present, and future are melding together in these contemplative vignettes as Catherine connects to places close to Stoica's heart. Are they Stoica's re-enacted memories? Or are they events that he might have experienced? Each scene is a portrait, perhaps a different version of himself that Stoica sees in each of the characters. Presented alongside the film are companion pieces in the form of wood sculptures that recall pieces of furniture or body accessories. Stoica sees these as repositories of memories, acting as physical embodiments of experiences.

The affective space of Stoica's film leads us to the equally immersive work of naakita feldman-kiss, who examines familial legacies and oral tradition. Her five-channel video and sound installation, *Wednesdays, Before Piano*, is a series of performances created with her grandmother in Ottawa over a year of back-and-forth travel. We witness the close relationship between feldman-kiss and her grandmother, June, as they eat mangos and when the artist has her hair braided. Creating a portrait of her grandmother in each of the videos, such as when the camera lingers over the altar of her mementoes and when feldman-kiss is going through photographs of her early life in Jamaica, time seems to be suspended. On the audio track, we hear feldman-kiss narrating the origins of mango and the ways it can be eaten, recollecting her grandmother's stories, and describing how her grandmother's memories become her own memories and history. Centring on experiences of intergenerational

memory, trauma, and healing through active remembrance, feldman-kiss draws on her personal oral history archive and familial conversations as a way of exploring how an individual's memories can become collective and create a sense of self through inherited narratives.

Through their works, Lequin, Stoica, and feldman-kiss create a sense of belonging, self, and home by capturing and archiving their personal experiences, emotions, daily lives, and family relationships.