

Undeliverable, Tangled Art + Disability, Toronto, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

Jennifer O'Connor

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Undeliverable

Entering *Undeliverable*, a group exhibition curated by Carmen Papalia, is to be within and without a space, to act and be acted upon, to discern and desire—to “occupy a point of orientation that is based in complex embodiment,” as Papalia suggests in his “Open Manifesto.” Papalia is an artist and disability activist who is concerned with curation as a form of care. For *Undeliverable*, he collaborated with six artists from the mad, deaf, and disability communities who have created works that “[re-envision] the museum around the demands and desires of the disabled body/mind.”

The first thing you see when you enter the Tangled Art + Disability gallery is a padded bench upholstered in a pink velvety fabric. Two small plaques facing in opposite directions have been placed on top of the pile. They read, “I need a minute.” This work by artist, writer, and performer jes sachse speaks to another collaboration with Papalia, *Provisional Structures*, which was exhibited at the MacKenzie Art Gallery from June to October 2021. At one of the entrances to the MacKenzie—calling to mind the traditional “donor wall”—is a series of more than eight hundred “I need a minute” plaques. Here, sachse is asserting their body, insisting on the consideration and compassion that other bodies might expect.

Graze past the plush bench toward the screen where artist and educator Sage Lovell fills the frame. They are speaking in American Sign Language, but there are no voiceovers or subtitles. Above the screen, written in interdisciplinary artist Aislinn Thomas’s hand, are the words “The Possibilities of Care as a Sculpture.” You realize that you are part of creating this work, an “ongoing, collective effort,” which Thomas has imagined as an invisible sculpture created by the physical and emotional labour of those present. Through collective effort, the space has been made fragrance-free and accessible to those whose bodies would otherwise react with pain

and illness. (Thomas created a PDF resource to accompany the exhibition: “Fragrance Free at the RMG and Tangled Art + Disability.” Among the information in this document: “Even products labelled ‘scent-free’ may contain masking fragrance. Please read the ingredients list on product labels to ensure that no fragrance, perfume, essential oils, or masking fragrance is present.”)

The words that Lovell is signing are the extended and alternate titles for the piece:

ongoing, collective effort and learning in appreciation and humble recognition of bodily complexity, permeability, and vulnerability, as well as the interdependent nature of our survival, our thrival

OR

fragrance-free sculpture piece (in which we imagine and co-create toxicant-free access and fragrance-freedom as a fragile, dynamic, invisible sculpture co-created by the efforts of everyone who is present and everyone who maintains this space)

Turning to your left, you come upon Jessica Karuhanga’s audio work *You Feel Me?* (2021). Take the earphones off the hook, clip the belt around your waist or around your body like a sash, and press play. *Da-da-da-dummm. Tap-tap-tap-tap.* It’s an instrumental piece, co-produced with Emilio Portal, that is at once meditative and eerie. As the music plays, you feel a humming over your abdomen, vibrations from the portable amp that you’re now wearing.

Then, the lively red lines by Heather Kai Smith. Hands playing string games. Fingers stitched together become a loose seam for another to share. Three frames are screening on the wall. Kai Smith and Papalia have worked together on this animation. The lines form hands passing a ball, a circle of bodies lifting and lowering a parachute, and sometimes there is just a blank screen. Narration—by turns a male- and a female-sounding voice—fades in and out:

Carmen Papalia

Reflection Circle (from *Provisional Structure 1*), installation view, 2021.

Vanessa Dion Fletcher

Relative Gradient (expanded), installation view, 2021.

Chandra Melting Tallow

Blood Count, installation view, 2021.

Photos : courtesy of Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

Jessica Karuhanga

U Feel Me, installation view, 2021.

Photo : courtesy of Tangled Art + Disability, Toronto



*Open Access... is a perpetual
negotiation...
is radically different...
is the root system...
is... temporary...*

In Vanessa Dion Fletcher's quillwork *Relative Gradient* (2020), red becomes pink, yellow, brown, white. Looking closely at the inkjet print of the quillwork, you see that the porcupine quills have been dyed, flattened, folded back and forth in a zigzag pattern, forming a line that has been drawn into a circle. Dion Fletcher dyes quills using edible plants such as hibiscus, onion, and blueberry. "Watching porcupine quills absorb colour... I don't have words to describe the feeling," she has said in an online Tangled Art Talk, co-presented by the gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario. "I can understand the physical and chemical process that is happening... There's still something about it that's beyond my comprehension."

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed writes, "Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward." *Undeliverable* is disorienting in many ways. The exhibition is being held in two locations, Tangled Art + Disability and the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (RMG), with different opening and closing dates and different works on view. Interdisciplinary artist, musician, and writer Chandra Melting Tallow is included only in the RMG show, for example. Their installation, *Blood Count* (2021), features four dresses decorated with beadwork of graphic scores illustrating a lifetime of memories. The work is inspired by a dress that Tallow's great-grandmother made for Tallow's mother. Ahmed writes that bodies and spaces inhabit each other, and you see this happening in a tactile way—both what is there,

as with Karuhanga's vibrating sash that asks you to feel, and what is not, as with Thomas's sculpture, which asks you to notice that you don't smell any scent. These sensations are also affective: you have a feeling of joy seeing others play ball or string games, for instance. Ahmed also suggests that becoming (dis)oriented is a matter not only of space but of time—the time we take and the time we give up. For example, Thomas's sculpture and Karuhanga's soundscape are created with you in the present. Tension is felt here. The music will play for thirty-seven minutes. Will you stay in the gallery, listening, vibrating, for thirty-seven minutes? With its demands and desires, *Undeliverable* is a space and time that holds the messiness of your embodiment, where new bodies of knowledge are formed.

Jennifer O'Connor

Tangled Art + Disability, Toronto
September 17, 2021—October 29, 2021

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa
September 18, 2021—February 13, 2022