



THE DELANEY
FAMILY
EMERGING
CURATOR'S
PRIZE

Presence in a past or an undetermined future.

Nabil Azab
Shannon Garden-Smith

GUEST CURATOR
Avalon Mott



ONSITE GALLERY

GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY
THE DELANEY FAMILY

**JAN 22
→ MAY 17
2025**

This publication accompanies the exhibition, *Fortitude/Fragile*, and *Presence in a past or an undetermined future.*, presented at Onsite Gallery, OCAD University, Toronto.

MAIN GALLERY

Fortitude/Fragile

JANUARY 22 TO MAY 17, 2025

Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St. W.
Toronto, ON M5V 0H4

SPECIAL PROJECTS GALLERY

*The Delaney Family
Emerging Curator's Prize:
**Presence in a past or an
undetermined future.***

JANUARY 22 TO MAY 17, 2025

Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St. W.
Toronto, ON M5V 0H4

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For the *Fortitude/Fragile* exhibition Onsite Gallery and Magda González-Mora thanks Sayeda Akbary, Omar Qureshi and Nicholas Sager and, of course, all the artists.

For the *Presence in a past or an undetermined future.* exhibition, Onsite Gallery thanks Lisa Deanne Smith and Marie-Josée Therrien for their participation as jurors for the Delaney Family Emerging Curator's Prize.

ONSITE GALLERY

ONSITE GALLERY EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Tim Gilbert (Ex Officio member), Ankesh Chandaria, K.J. McCusker and Ana Serrano

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ONSITE GALLERY STUDENT STAFF: Chinenye Aginam, Monica Anjos, Vanessa Chan, Ellie Corfield, Uzoma Ekpunobi, Haven Hughes, Shem Joslyn, Sabrina Ly, Víctor Medina Vázquez, Sally Nguyen, Chimemeli Okafor, Alex Power, Evan Prinos, Karani Puvanesan, Ji Qi, Jay Saltanatkhah, Angie Sanchez Garcia, Lion Sher, Cindy Soler, Anna Tran.

Cover images: Nabil Azab, *January 1, 2021* (detail), 2024. Image courtesy of the artist. Shannon Garden-Smith, *Blinds II (diptych for University College)* (detail), 2023. Image by Toni Hafkenscheid courtesy Art Museum at the University of Toronto.



Shannon Garden-Smith, *Blinds II (diptych for University College)* (detail), 2023, gelatin, image transfer, jewellery, dyed nylon strings, approx 73.25 x 212.5 in.
Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

Presence in a past or an undetermined future.

The present is fleeting. Every moment as it is realized becomes a past, a history. Every moment in anticipation of being realized acknowledges a becoming, a future. The present teases at the edges of memory, begging for a recalling of events or a time or a place that once was, but will never be again. All that memory can offer is a soft focus that privileges a feeling that provokes an unrequited desire to be able to recall specifics. But where memory fails, imagination picks up. It is boundless in its aspirational view of what is to come—unburdened by specifics of what may have been loved, lost, or erased. It is limitless in its nature. It is in this continual cycle of passage and shift that the present exists.

Nabil Azab
Shannon Garden-Smith

Presence in a past or an undetermined future. is a two-person exhibition featuring interdisciplinary artists Nabil Azab and Shannon Garden-Smith that endeavours to hold a moment of presence by calling on what came before it and giving space to think of what will come after it.

Nabil Azab's lens-based works *January 1, 2021* and *Untitled* harness abstraction as a way to move the viewer towards a space of contemplation. Azab highlights his family's North African lineage in the source imagery, both found and archival, that he has worked with for these pieces. By distilling his history onto the photographic plane and infusing it with his own mark making, Azab is imprinting history as it moves through the present and into the future.

As the viewer enters the gallery space they are immediately confronted with *January 1, 2021* adhered to the gallery wall as one encompassing wall-mounted vinyl-printed photograph. This image was made from a found photograph traced archivally to North Africa, which Azab serendipitously encountered in the snow on New Year's Day in 2021. At wall scale, the scratches and light marks from the original photograph take on a heightened life force. These characters carry with them the embedded history of the found photograph, energetically reaching towards the viewer and encouraging a prolonged gaze and space for reflection in the image.

On the opposite wall hangs Azab's *Untitled* series in one horizontal line. For this series Azab turned to a significant moment in his family's history. His great-grandfather migrated from Palestine to Egypt in the mid-late 19th century to work on the construction of the Suez Canal. Shortly after his arrival, the Egyptian Military claimed

the canal from the British, inciting a war between Britain, France, Egypt and Israel. Azab was drawn to an image that he found in the Archive of Modern Conflict that showed the demolition of a statue depicting a French developer of the Suez Canal during this time of war. What drew Azab to this particular photograph was its composition—the photograph focused on the plumes of smoke, dust, and debris from the destruction, more so than the statue itself. After physically manipulating the source image, Azab then created collage works from the abstractions before adding his own marks by drawing and painting on top of the images. This gesture conceptually speaks to Azab's honouring of a past, a history, and a context, along with an acknowledgement of a future to come involving his present.



This and previous page: Nabil Azab, *January 1, 2021*, 2024, vinyl printed photographic image, 9ft 5 1/4 x 14ft 6 1/4 in. Image courtesy of the artist.

Shannon Garden-Smith's free-hanging sculptural forms, *Blinds II (diptych for University College)*, taunt unabashedly at the act of looking. Hanging from the ceiling of the gallery space, these two sculptures mimic a pair of blinds and in doing so they dance with the viewer's vision. There is a false promise in these sculptures: that the act of looking will lead to a revealing through the blinds whereas when this act is performed it results in a refusal of clear vision.

Blinds II (diptych for University College) is constructed from gelatin which is a specific material consideration for Garden-Smith. Gelatin has direct references to a history of domesticity, reproductive labour, and sustenance as it was a common kitchen ingredient used to preserve. It is also a non-static substance and fluid—being able to hold the memory of its making and a sense of place. With this particular ability of the medium, Garden-Smith is able to suspend her patterns of marbling infused with a record of her touch in the work. The sculptures also hold their past in physical stasis. Because of the malleability of the gelatin, the structure of the individual slats are affected by the environment they are hung in. With each showing of *Blinds II (diptych for University College)* they respond to their environment and are primed with potential to shift in response to their environment's temperature, humidity, and atmospheric factors. A history, a life, recorded in the sways and bends of the slats with an anticipation of how future surroundings will make their mark.

Much like the life force apparent in details of Azab's images, Garden-Smith draws the viewer into an act of prolonged looking by placing small ornate pieces of jewellery in the slats for the viewer to discover. There is an act of unfurling that occurs as these ornamental



Shannon Garden-Smith, *Blinds II (diptych for University College)* (detail), 2023, gelatin, image transfer, jewellery, dyed nylon strings, approx 73.25 x 212.5 in each. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

Shannon Garden-Smith, *Blinds II* (diptych for University College) (detail), 2023, gelatin, image transfer, jewellery, dyed nylon strings, approx 73.25 x 212.5 in each. Photo: Toni Hafkenschied. Courtesy Art Museum at the University of Toronto.





details, which were used to adorn bodies and hair, come into view laid atop and embedded in the marbling pattern. The items hold multiple histories within them—of their original wearer, how they came to be in Garden-Smith's possession, and of their current use as points of inquiry in a work of art. In doing so, they provoke a narrative; a history that has brought them to their current place of rest and what their future may hold.

Through the immersive work of these artists, viewers are moved towards a space of affect. Histories of diasporic movement, colonialism, and labour exist alongside futures of multidimensional representation and progressive tradition. It is in this coalescing of history and future, the present emerges. ■

Avalon Mott
Guest Curator

Shannon Garden-Smith, *Blinds II (diptych for University College)* (detail), 2023, gelatin, image transfer, jewellery, dyed nylon strings, approx 73.25 x 212.5 in each. Image courtesy of the artist.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHES

Nabil Azab (he/him b.1994, Paris, France) is a multidisciplinary artist of North African descent. Nabil employs drawing, painting, writing, and researching as a starting point for abstract photographic works that resist the objectivity and disciplinarily of the medium in contemporary life. Often using public, private, and family archives, the softened contours of Nabil's work become a host for the affective frequencies of their origin. Nabil is currently an MFA candidate at the University of California, Riverside and is located in Los Angeles, California.

Shannon Garden-Smith (she/her) is an artist based in Tkaronto/Toronto, Canada, of Scottish and Irish settler heritage. Working across sculpture, installation, and expanded photo practice, Garden-Smith examines the material-social impact of the surfaces that clad our contemporary built world. Through a slow, repetitive process that re-visualizes how the day-to-day architectures of our lives become naturalized through repeated exposure, her work re-sensitizes us to the labour and material that sustain our everyday. Engendering slippages between surface and structure, her work examines labour, identity, and power in human-built architectures, seeking to intervene into capitalist, productivist modes of telling time and modes of relation. Garden-Smith is a doctoral student in visual art at York University.

CURATOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Avalon Mott (she/her) is a curator, photographer, and arts administrator originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, now calling Tkaronto/Toronto home. She graduated with her BFA in photography from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2013, and her MFA in Criticism + Curatorial Practice from OCAD University in 2023 as the recipient of the Presidential Scholarship and Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

Mott was a founding member and the co-director of *FIELD Contemporary* (Vancouver), and has curated for numerous galleries and festivals in British Columbia and Ontario. She has also curated public art installations for the City of Richmond, the City of Vancouver, and Capture Photography Festival. Alongside her current position as director at *Xpace Cultural Centre* (Toronto), she is a contributing member of *The Plumb* (Toronto).

Mott's curatorial practice is rooted in Exhibitionary Affect, and how this curatorial methodology can aid in fostering a relational experience between the viewer and the works on display in the exhibition space.

Free Public Events

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 4 TO 5 P.M.

Regina José Galindo Performs Oro/Gold

Onsite Gallery

Regina José Galindo's live performance *Oro/Gold* serves as both a critique and a call to action, raising awareness of the fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities impacted by extractive industries in Latin America and beyond.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 07, 12 TO 2 P.M.

Fortitude/Fragile Curatorial Tour with Magda González-Mora

Onsite Gallery

Join guest curator Magda González-Mora for an in-depth curatorial tour of *Fortitude/Fragile*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 6:30 TO 8 P.M.

Onsite Gallery's Delaney Family Curatorial Lecture

eunice bélidor: Handle with Care: Curatorial Practices After the Pandemic

MCA 190 (Main Auditorium) 100 McCaul Street, OCAD University

Onsite Gallery is thrilled to announce its annual Black History Month guest lecture featuring esteemed curator eunice bélidor. Co-presented with the Centre for the Study of Black Canadian Diaspora and Black Artists' Networks in Dialogue Gallery (BAND Gallery), this event highlights the vital role of fostering dialogues on Black history, art, and culture within and beyond our communities.

ASL interpretation will be provided for the lecture.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 12 TO 2 P.M.

Connecting Shared Experience Through Time & Memory

Virtual via Zoom

Join us for an engaging virtual event! Invited panelists will delve into the compelling ways they position time within cultural, socio-geographic, and familial histories. Through rich discussions of their artistic practices and creative works, panelists will explore how these layered narratives carry the power to transform, connect, and reveal deeper truths about our shared and individual experiences.

ASL interpretation will be provided for the event.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 5 TO 7 P.M.

From Community to Gallery: Exploring Contexts of Socially Engaged Art

Onsite Gallery

In Spring 2024, a group of emerging racialized artists came together in a creative research process to explore relationships to identities, both personal and collective. Learnings from their resulting exhibition, *Trajectories of Now*, will be placed in dialogue with the Onsite Gallery exhibit *Fortitude/Fragile*, in a panel discussion alongside other perspectives from the Toronto art community. A short documentary film highlights the research process stimulating discussion on socially engaged arts.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 10 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

Zishou Li Nature's Palette: Painting with Natural Materials

Onsite Gallery

Explore the intersection of art and nature as participants discover how to use living materials to create artworks that celebrate the beauty of the earth. This workshop emphasizes sustainable practices, encouraging participants to source materials responsibly and adopt eco-friendly processes. Through engaging, hands-on activities, participants will learn essential techniques for painting with natural materials, including crafting botanical inks and dyes, preparing solvent-free oil paint from mineral pigments, creating textural effects, and understanding the science behind these processes to achieve captivating, long-lasting results.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 1 TO 3 P.M.

***Fortitude/Fragile Onsite Gallery Tour
with Lisa Deanne Smith***

Onsite Gallery

Meet us at Onsite Gallery for a public tour of *Fortitude/Fragile* with Onsite Gallery's Senior Curator, Lisa Deanne Smith.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 5 TO 7 P.M.

***Presence in a past or an undetermined future.
Curator/Artist Conversation***

Onsite Gallery

Curator/Artist Conversation with Nabil Azab, Shannon Garden-Smith and Avalon Mott

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 6 TO 8 P.M.

Dyke Night

Onsite Gallery and Sweaty Betty's Bar (13 Ossington Ave)

Explore the *Fortitude/Fragile* exhibition through a dyke lens with a democratize-the-docent polyvocal tour for the 2SLGBTQ+ community at Onsite Gallery. Continue afterwards from 8 pm till late at Sweaty Betty's for an afterparty featuring DJs, readers, and special guests.

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 1 TO 4 P.M.

***Beyond The Line with Francisco-Fernando Granados
& Vessna Perunovich***

Onsite Gallery

Through the art of performative storytelling, *Fortitude/Fragile* exhibiting artists Francisco-Fernando Granados and Vessna Perunovich delve into the complexities of lived and diasporic experiences. Granados and Perunovich use their artistic practices to shed light on narratives often marginalized or constrained by dominant systems of power, creating space for critical reflection and dialogue. By intertwining personal and collective histories, they evoke a nuanced understanding of resilience and vulnerability, offering audiences an intimate exploration of identity, displacement, and belonging.

Also at Onsite Gallery

JANUARY TO APRIL 2025

***Coco Apunnguaq Lynge /
Up Front: Inuit Public Art @ Onsite Gallery***

Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St W (exterior windows)

Coco Apunnguaq Lynge's mural *Maliina* (2024) beautifully weaves together different, yet impactful versions of the Inuit circumpolar origin story of the sun and the moon.

Upcoming Exhibitions Summer/Fall 2025

MAY TO DECEMBER 2025

Rosalie Favell | Facing the Camera: TSÍ TKARÒN:TO

Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St W (exterior windows)

JUNE 18 TO DECEMBER 6, 2025

***Belonging: Rosalie Favell |
A Photographic Series Retrospect (1982 - 2023)***

Curated by Ryan Rice

**Please follow us on social
media and website to learn
more about additional events,
registration and programs
taking place throughout the
length of the exhibitions.**

**Onsite Gallery presents contemporary,
Indigenous, and public art and design to
advance knowledge creation and stimulate
local and international conversations on
the urgent issues of our time.**



199 Richmond St. W.
Toronto, ON, Canada
M5V 0H4

www.ocadu.ca/onsite
onsite@ocadu.ca
416-977-6000, Ext. 265



Wednesday
noon to 7 p.m.

Thursday - Saturday
noon to 5 p.m.



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YouTube: Onsite Gallery
at OCAD University



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