



Madelyne Beckles + Allyson Mitchell What Motivates Her?

Curator Pamela Edmonds
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Photography Frank Piccolo, GXZ Design Inc.

ISBN 978-1-928127-17-8

List of Works

1. *Close Proximities* (2019), digital video, 15:00 mins. Madelyne Beckles & Allyson Mitchell
2. *Buzzkill Emotional Gateway* (2019), disco balls, macrame hangers, variable. Madelyne Beckles & Allyson Mitchell
3. *Reading Eileen* (2018) digital video, 4:30 mins. Allyson Mitchell
4. *The Whole Woman, Womanism is a Form of Feminism, Theory of a Young Girl* (2016-2018), video 5:09, 3:48, 4:21 mins. Courtesy of Vtape. Madelyne Beckles
5. *Search Herstory* (2015 ongoing), archival paper and ink, 10 - 24"x24". Madelyne Beckles
6. *Venus of Chillendorf* (2018), plastic canvas and acrylic yarn, 36"x36". Allyson Mitchell
7. *Hung like a Hortic* (2012), digital print on canvas, 3 - 24"x36". Allyson Mitchell
8. *Splayed Landscape Sunrise* (2016), plastic canvas and acrylic yarn, 13.5"x10.5". Allyson Mitchell
9. *Splayed Landscape Sunset* (2016) plastic canvas and acrylic yarn, 13.5"x10.5" . Allyson Mitchell
10. *Skype Pussy* (2016) plastic canvas and acrylic yarn, 13.5"x10.5". Allyson Mitchell
11. *Pagina Ceramic Studies 1-6* (2016) raku ceramic, variable. Allyson Mitchell
12. *If It Makes You Happy* (2015) archival paper and ink, 24"x40". Madelyne Beckles
13. *Precious Little Tiny Love* (2003) digital video 3:00 mins. Courtesy of Vtape. Allyson Mitchell
14. *One Day I Get To Buy the Soup* (2018) digital video 10:30 mins. Madelyne Beckles
15. *I Love Pot* (1998-2017) photo edition of sculpture, 24"x78". Allyson Mitchell & Deirdre Logue
16. *Lesbian Abstraction* (2014-2018), plastic canvas and acrylic yarn, variable. Allyson Mitchell

Cover: *Venus of Chillendorf* (2018)



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Thames Art Gallery exhibitions and programs are generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.



Madelyne Beckles + Allyson Mitchell
What Motivates Her?

Intimacy and Intergenerationality: What Motivates Her?

Delilah Rosier

What Motivates Her? features a blend of works created collaboratively and independently by Toronto based interdisciplinary artists Madelyne Beckles and Allyson Mitchell. Both artists motion to, reference, and parody popular culture in their practices, through a framework of critical race, intersectional feminist and queer theory. The exhibition offers a nuanced, honest look at the ways in which both artists experience a white supremacist, misogynist world. We glean an understanding for a blending of sensibilities, for distinguishing binaries of darkness and light, irony and sincerity, humour and tragedy. We gain insight into their familial love, re-negotiations of shame, and a kinship in the documentation of what they do to get by.

On the ground floor, we are greeted with the artists' 2019 collaborative video work entitled *Close Proximities*. Depicted is an assorted archive: shots from apartments long since leased, and a house still vibrant. Close ups and cut aways of frying, steaming, pricking, circling, shining, scrolling. Gorgeous straddling of decadency versus health consciousness. An architectural intervention challenges the gallery goers expected experience of clasping one's hands behind their backs, shifting weight from foot to foot, for, instead, we are invited to become comfortable. We are welcomed to peep these close proximities, closer. To sprawl out and lounge on a mattress, with a colourful crocheted quilt tucked up laying like a paper-thin fried egg. To get mesmerized by the swirling of the bath water, Diet Coke bottle behind the scroll against backlit dream-girls.

When I think to ask her, Beckles informs me who films whom. Family films one another, but behind these acts, there lies no sense of urgency—no staging, no falsity or persuasion. Instead, we are privy to glimpses that could only be conjured out of safety, out of love. These women not only love each other, but also trust each other. I see this in their careful, gentle chronicle of mundane moments ripe with beauty, with space for still contemplation, for intimacy.

I look to Beckles and Mitchell standing together the night of the gallery's opening reception. I observe how they relate as adults, as artists, as aunt and niece, their inherited and inherent similarities despite blood, intertwined. They have built a connection as artists and as people; one that is both aesthetically and politically aligned. There they stand, coordinating in patterns without having to call first. Perhaps, at this point in time I should be transparent too, with my close proximities to them. I am close enough to have visited a nearby restaurant with them, pre-opening, where, at the table strewn with perch dinners and glasses of Chianti, Mitchell described the show as "an embracing of the dark sides, the candy sweet and the dark." She spoke to the archive of everyday, and the act of filming one another for the sake and the beauty of the moment. The nuance of the familiar layers. True acts of collaboration and the domesticity spoken of does not exist solely in a Dyson vacuum, but within the everyday, our everyday.

In Beckles' ongoing print series *Search Herstory* (2015 -), the artist exposes her unedited Google queries to the public, spanning from the elusive "nduja pronunciation" for the specialized salami to "bell hooks bill cosby comment" for the noted feminist's response to the actor's sexual assault charges (No results found for "bell hooks bill cosby comment"). These honesties and vulnerabilities are prevalent not just in *Search Herstory*, but in much of the



Madelyne Beckles, *Theory of a Young Girl* (2016-2018), video stills; courtesy of Vtape.



works in *What Motivates Her?* This systematic stripping of stigma functions to charge me with an immense sense of pleasure, all the while fulfilling the curiosities of that thirsty voyeur tucked up, napping in our collective bellies. At the opening, what I wanted to yell, waiting in line at the bar, was how I could cry under the macraméd moonlight (provided by the disco ball installation, *Buzzkill Emotional Gateway*, 2019). If one found oneself distraught by other means than this makeshift moonlight, the artists responsibly make space for discourse, outreach, and call-ins. This is made clear by didactic panel outside the media project room informing visitors that any controversies that might arise from the exhibition will be welcomed with space to process, a deceleration that demands a callused bravery.

In Mitchell's split screen video work *Reading Eileen* (2018), the artist reads. Sunbursts and plant shadows obscure some of the book's type (taken from Eileen Myles' 1994 autobiographical novel, *Chelsea Girls*). The author speaks to the character's honeymoon and how "she" was no artist, though a narcissist nonetheless. Mitchell is a masterful craftsperson, tongue and cheek with the medium, a self-proclaimed maximalist though so careful in detail. Three needlepoint pieces, one, a perfect self-portrait. What level of artistry or self-awareness does it take to depict oneself so accurately?

On the Mezzanine, Mitchell's video, *Precious Little Tiny Love* (2003) is juxtaposed with Beckles' found footage video-collage, *One Day I Get to Buy the Soup* (2018). *Precious Little Tiny Love* offers us a full 1970's core stop-motion highway. Is that a Bambi deer dragon snap? The muted palette makes me sad, happy, giddy, nostalgic for a time I can't and wouldn't know. Is this the "darkness and light" she talked about earlier? *One Day I Get to Buy the Soup* opens with billowing clotheslines; a landscape flooded with light. Tanned and toned white arms are sped, fed, and hunched with urgency, scrubbing, rubbing, urgently completing housework. I sit still and gander the assembly: the Triscuit haul, the wet sandwich life hack. Moist-n-damp, exposed are the gold fingernails of the folder, a large diamond ring set. Single bite. Recognizable CanCon among the good haul. The devilled egg finale. Finally. It feels like Betty Friedan elbows past to get a closer look, but next to her still, I sit with Daphne, the Mitchell matriarch. She directs the meal as we both squirm, we heckle: "use some butter! Some real food!" We talk about class dynamics, of the hierarchy and complexity of knowing better, of doing "better."

The Whole Woman (2018) from Beckles' video triptych opens with the artist struggling with the cardboard of a Dollarama box. Featured are quotes from the Australian writer Germaine Greer's 1999 book which shares a name with the video. "She has guts full of decomposing food; she has a vagina that smells and bleeds" honesty, stigma and the abject, (according to who?). Daphne patiently Instagrams the work in the gallery, diligently, proudly. She admires. I watch as the tail of Beckles' cat juts just out of frame, as the artist arranges and releases her wedgie, hikes up her undies and makes pancakes on a stovetop. Black feminist writer Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 72) defined the figure of the mammy as one who was "created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all black women's behaviour." In the video, Beckles subverts the trope of Jemima, one born out of minstrelsy, an inception of Christian Ludwig Ruff, who is credited with coming up with the recipe and name for Aunt Jemima pancakes. With each fry up and flip of the hot cakes, the artist asserts her agency.

The culmination of these works reveals a newly curated conversation. We gain a deeper understanding of the artists and are given glances of what moves them individually. However, what really seeps through the walls are the truly transformative tools. For, within this exhibition lies hope. What we may choose to take away are motives to conduct gentle, politically poignant conversations with those who have shaped us into who we have become, and to understand and challenge what motivates her.

Works Cited

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Delilah Rosier is an artist and writer living and working in Toronto. Her research deals with queer theory, race politics and intersectional feminism within the landscape of popular culture. She is a graduate of OCAD U's criticism and curatorial practice program, and York University's Theatre and Performance Studies Program. Rosier has been profiled in *C Magazine*, *Formally Known As Magazine* and was the recipient of the 2016 Won Lee Fine Art Award for her written thesis project.

What Motivates Her? Installation view (2019)

