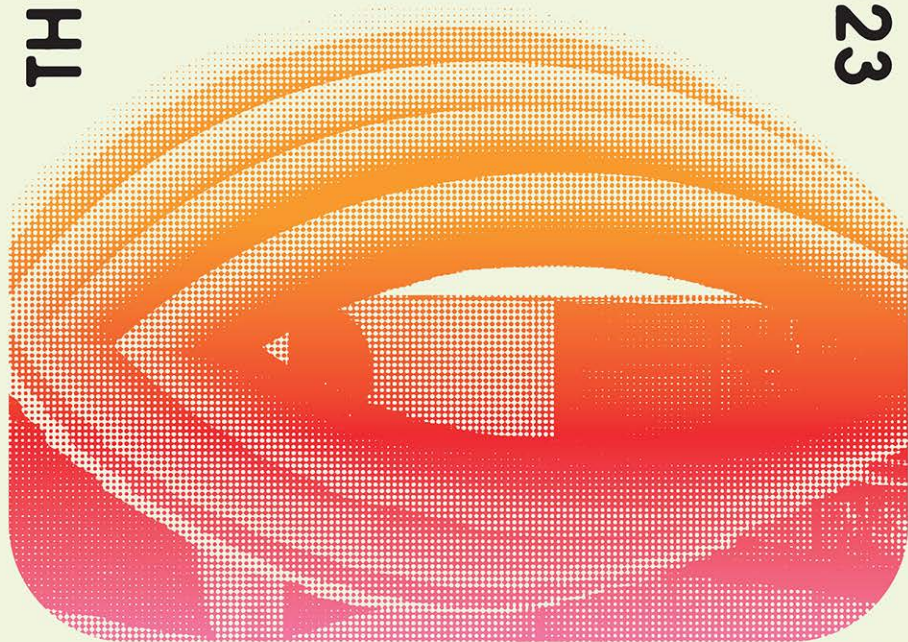


THE UNCONTAINABLE COLLECTIONS RESEARCH PROJECT 2023

PERMANENCE/
IMPERMANENCE

Vanessa Kwan

Interview Transcript



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Hugh LeRoy, *Rainbow Piece*, 1972, York University

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Art Gallery of York University

Uncontainable Collections Research Project 2023
Permanence/Impermanence: The Life of Public Art

Interview with Vanessa Kwan by AGYU (Allyson Adley & Jenifer Papararo)

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The following interview with artist and curator Vanessa Kwan is part of the Art Gallery of York University's Uncontainable Collections Research Project, an annual workshop series initiated in 2022 as part of our drive to make York University's art collection more accessible for research purposes and to the public. It is a program in which we are learning in public, wanting to make our process of research and knowledge-gathering transparent and in the present with our audiences and colleagues.

This second edition is developed under the theme *Permanence/Impermanence: The Life of Public Art*, which aims to learn from involved arts practitioners the challenges and importance of public art, addressing the very concept of 'public' and 'publicness' and re-evaluating how to engage with communities and record histories. Time is a key motif we draw through this interview — time as it relates to histories, particularly who and what gets represented and the power structures that control these decisions. The following conversation re-orienting our understanding of how public art can function and exist as an alternative to traditional practices. Most notably, it turns away from historic and commemorative monuments and grand formalist gestures that demand space and define time as permanent.

This interview is one of four engagements with curators and artists who conceive of and present counter-models to the conventions of public art. We engaged a series of practitioners who understand public art as a form that emerges with an acknowledgement of the time in which it was produced, and with an understanding of the possibility of accepting impermanence: **Allison Glenn** (US), **Vanessa Kwan** (Canada), **Mohammed Laouli** (France, Germany, and Morocco), and **Raqs Media Collective** (India).

These interviews were conducted in preparation for an online panel discussion, addressing the principles and ideals of democracy in how public space is inhabited; how decolonial acts of resistance de-centre monuments that glorify settler-colonial histories; what role communities can play in the commissioning of public art; and the limitations and risks of working in public spaces.

Six interview questions form the basis of these conversations. Each participant received them in advance of a virtual meeting, which is transcribed below. Preliminary questions were workshopped with York University graduate class ARTH 6000, led by professor Anna Hudson including Abbey Humphreys-Morris, Kimberley Rush-Duyguluer, Jamie Cameron, Zachary Scola-Allison, Bahareh Rostakiani, Isabelle Segui, Julia De Kwant, and Rana Khattab.

AGYU: Your artwork in the public realm is often ethereal, toggling between performance and sculpture, between having presence and being in the present and to having not existed at all. Your works have the ability to be visible one moment and vanish the next. They make me think of an echo, how it embodies space, forming and responding to the particular structure of a space but also fading away as if nothing is there. Your works capture the theme of the current iteration of the Uncontainable Collections Research Project, which explores the concept of “permanence/impermanence.”

To begin, could you please describe one of your more recent public works, *Speaker A*? I had the good fortune to experience it, but I would appreciate if you could take a few moments to describe the work, your ideation process, and how you anticipate audiences encountering it.

Vanessa Kwan: Yes, thank you for that introduction. It’s really lovely to hear. You have focused in on a couple of things I think about often, things like visibility and time. *Speaker A* is a piece that was created in collaboration with Theatre Replacement, an experimental theatre group in Vancouver. My collaboration was mainly with two members, the artistic directors Jamie Long and Maiko Yamamoto.

Public art often comes through an application process, wherein you generate an idea that you may have been thinking about for a while and coalesce it into a proposal. I remember when I got the opportunity to pitch for this project, which is on 2nd Avenue and Main Street in Vancouver, I was questioning my interest in being a solo artist making public art. I lost my mojo in terms of wanting to make a big individual statement through public art as a singular person. Instead, I was interested in working with a group engaged in performance, rather than permanent public art, so I invited Jamie and Maiko to consider how we could approach the site. We developed a premise that was built from stories based on past, present, and future and also included notions of restlessness, anxiety in the city, and care for the things around us.

At that point in my life, I was feeling very restless, and I was very anxious. This was in 2018 or 2019, so pre-pandemic. But I was really thinking about what it means to live together, and the anxiety that gets created in the city, but then also the ways that we attach ourselves to different things. In the end, we established three audio streams, each dealing with this idea of a past, a present, or a future. So, one was *speculative past*— things that may have existed in the past or may not have, but you could speculate as to whether they did or not. Another was *anxious futures*, asking “what about thinking about the future makes you anxious?” The *present* piece was instructions for care—caring for a pair of boots

that you love, or your toolkit, or something inanimate you felt that you loved and wanted to care for.

We also wanted the piece to have a multiplicity of voices, something that would represent, to some degree, the fact that there are many different perspectives on all these ideas. So, we constructed a framework—3 different audio streams. We worked with a programmer to create a cycle of these files that remix the different narratives together in real-time, so audiences would never really hear the same set of stories twice.

We invited a number of different writers, fourteen in total, to write multiple short narratives for each speaker with prompts we gave them. The first prompt was to write something speculative about the past. The second was to give ten instructions for care. And the third was “what makes you anxious about the future?” We got some beautiful, rich, and weird responses, and some straightforward narrative pieces. We worked to ask a range of folks who we thought would respond with different approaches to each of our prompts.

We then designed a sound shower with speakers. The work is in this breezeway or passageway where people enter from Main Street and can pass through to the back alley or to parking. The public has access to walk through the building, so we wanted to use the speaker to create an encounter. The speakers use motion sensors to start the sound when people walk under them. The Holosonic speakers we used are directional, the sound they produce resonates like the sound is inside one’s head.

So, we created this framework and invited artists to respond to our prompts. Then the pandemic came along, and suddenly anxiety in the city really shifted and changed. It was an interesting moment because the artists we invited to respond to the prompts were already at work on their narratives. We asked if they could also speak about different perspectives they were experiencing at that moment. So, if you do a certain amount of listening, you’ll notice that a lot of the artists are speaking about a certain time and place, which is the very early pandemic during the initial lockdowns.

The artwork is essentially the audio streams from the different writers and artists we invited to participate. To me, it’s nicest just to put the audio streams on, even on a pair of headphones, and listen to them for as long as you like. They just cycle through, and they give you a tone. There’s some beautiful, poetic stuff; some incredibly mundane things as well, but in listening over time, the accumulation offers a cumulative experience.

On-site, it is a very different experience when you're trying to listen. There's traffic and everything, and it's much more difficult to sustain one's attention. That experience captures one tension of public art—between the artist's intention and what the artist can actually manifest in space.

AGYU: In terms of thinking about space—this work is in a breeze-way, which is a liminal space and a space of passage, and through the prompts (Speaker A, B, and C), you guide people through the space; you give them directions. I want to add that the narratives are also accessible on a dedicated website.

VK: For me, the idea that it's available in one time and place, that you have to stand in this one spot to experience it... it's really nice to think that public art is present in those narratives, but that public art can also travel to wherever you are, which I appreciate.

AGYU: Thank you, we'll move on to the more general set of questions we're asking all the invited participants to address.

The following are a few more generalized questions from students in the Master of Art History program at York University. Allyson Adley and I presented on the work of all our participants (you, Allison Glenn, Raqs, and Mohammed Laouli) included in this iteration of the Uncontainable Collections series. After the presentations, we developed and workshopped some questions that we refined for the interviews and the online conversations. We tried to bring out what we thought were some urgent questions that seems very specific to this time.

We thought we should unpack some of the vocabulary surrounding public art. With this in mind, we highlight the word public, and ask you, what is your understanding of publicness as it relates to public art, the public sphere, public space, or the public? How does your understanding of public inform your approach to curating and producing art within this realm?

VK: I spent a little bit of time thinking about this question this morning. And maybe it is useful for me to think about how I first started doing public art. It was when I was working with a group called Norma, which is a performance art group; we met when we were all students at Emily Carr. It was this collaborative group that I hold very dear to my heart—we worked together for thirteen years. One of the first pieces we did together was called *Dog Day Afternoon*, which was a sort of performance art project. It was an eight-hour-long project where we performed looping dialogues in a park. At that time we were really looking at this

idea of public space—these idealized sort of spaces that, more often than not, are also (privately) owned. We think of these spaces as public, but they've been constructed to be public by developers or civic bodies, or landowners, or whatever. This is very much couched within this idea of "co-ownership"—public/private collaborations—which really is a false concept. Public space has all the same regulatory conditions that property does. And, so, we were using our bodies—or our performance, or ideas—to generate something that I would say acted like friction. I think at that point, as young artists, what we thought we could do was provide an interruption. I don't know if it was totally successful, but what we were trying to do with *Dog Day Afternoon* was to create this weird loop—an interruption or a double-take, pushing at the boundaries of what was allowable or desirable in public space. Friction.

So, when I was younger, that was what I thought making public art was like. There was a sense of publicness, but there is always something that is desired or allowed in that space, which is not defined. It is not truly public—it's not actually wild or anything, it's actually incredibly controlled, especially within our cities. For me, growing up in Vancouver, this place that is like, not completely unlike Toronto, or wherever you might be reading this... everything is speculative here, in terms of value and property and ownership, which defined how I think public art should function. It should always be slightly resistant, but operating within the bounds of the built environment and asking, what are the power structures that are at play?

So you know, over time I ended up working with a group called Other Sights for Artists' Projects, which was also concerned with regulatory conditions. Really pushing up against regulatory conditions in public space, thinking through loopholes, and asking how you can use public space in different ways. It was about providing an alternative view to how people assume you should be or operate in public space.

And then lately, and this is where it gets more nascent for me—I think about space that is shared, and we tend to think of that as spatial or architectural, as places where we put ourselves and then are allowed to interact in different ways. But this morning, I was thinking, okay, well what else could be shared? In an internal sense, I mean. If you think of it not as architectural, but embodied—what are the things we share in humanity? If we turn inwards, maybe those things might change how we think about shared spaces. If we were to make them more internally defined, what would that mean? That thought takes me out of the sense of resisting an existing and overarching dominant structure and starts defining what I know is shared amongst my community, or with myself and the people that I love, or even people that I don't love. You know,

like, how do we return to a different sense of what is shared? And I think a key question is how we start acknowledging different world views, different timescales, different embodiments, and begin thinking through things differently. How do we start drawing attention to those shared spaces, instead of these defined, physical spaces, which is where most artists do their (public) artwork. Maybe now I'm looking for something else; I think, at this point in my career, it's been a long time that I've been working in the arts, and I'm more curious now about these more nebulous publics.

AGYU: Yes, it does. This perspective leads well into the next question, which we hope unpacks preconceived notions of public space, the principles and ideals of democracy, and how public space can be inhabited. *When art is placed in civic spaces, can it reveal, interrogate, and disrupt the takeover and monopoly of public space by private capitalist interests? What role can public art play in expanding and amplifying our claim to public spaces?*

Public art and the interests of capital do sit well together, as you articulated so well. Could you give us a more specific example of what role public art can play in challenging this relation to capitalism, expanding and amplifying public space away from economic ties?

VK: There's one project by Cedric, Nathan, and Jim Bomford, called *Deadhead*, that Barbara Cole curated and produced. It was a floating project, it existed on the water, and one of the reasons that I believe Barbara curated this work is to counter the many regulatory conditions of public space on land. There's a lot of gray area on the water because the jurisdictional boundaries and legalities are murkier in many ways—it's not as tightly controlled. So, Cole was working with the Bomfords, and they were really interested in trying to find different loopholes for where you could place this artwork. It ended up being on the water—registering as a “pleasure craft” allowed you to circumvent different regulatory conditions. And so they were able to create a work that you couldn't do on land, provide all this different programming on it, and really use the water as a place of possibility. It was really exciting because it was circumventing the property lines that exist on land.

There is another work that I worked on with Reed H. Reed and Hannah Jickling, *Big Rock Candy Mountain*. The public art project was to create a candy factory in an elementary school. Reed and Hannah wanted to explore how a public artwork could circulate; for example, how a chocolate bar created by children could circulate in the world and could circumvent all these questions around property and ownership and jurisdiction.

The last example I think I'll talk about is a project called the *Blue Cabin*, which is a cabin that I worked on while I was at grunt gallery. It was a collaboration between Creative Cultural Collaborations and Other Sights. It was essentially a squatter's shack that was located between the low tide and the high tide lines at Cates Park, which is also on Tsleil-Waututh territory in Burrard Inlet. It was there for the better part of a hundred years, as a place that had never been owned. Carol Itter and Al Neil lived there on and off since the sixties and seventies, and in 2014 it was slated for demolition. So there had been this structure which was a place of art, and a place that had never been owned and was never going to be owned. Three arts organizations came together to try and save this cabin, which was about to be removed because of development. Together it was envisioned as an artist residency, and so it became what is now called the Blue Cabin Floating Artist Residency. It's located on a barge and there's a deck house which was built by Germaine Koh, and then next to it is the cabin, which was completely remediated and heritage restored by Jeremy and Sus Borsos. So both are located on a barge; one is the studio and the other a living area. It exists essentially like public art, as well as a site for artists to create work and ideas in relation to this place and these waters. It will never be sold or owned, which enriches the imaginative potential of that space. Its initial year of programming was working with Indigenous artists and weavers from the host nations, the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh. Through those residencies, some really beautiful things happened that question what ownership means and what art means. I think specifically about the work of Angela George who did a residency at the Blue Cabin called *Weaving Governance*, where she wove a governance document for Tsleil-Waututh. She talked about the cabin as a portal, and the water as a portal—within Tsleil-Waututh worldview, the Inlet was a place where you could know past and present, where mystical human beings would meet. These are things that I hold with me. I was like, oh, that's the potential of what we're doing, you know? It's like, we can create platforms where these things happen. They all of the sudden explode your idea of what time and space should mean. And that's super exciting. Nobody who was on the organizing committee, and there were many of us, could have predicted these outcomes, as artists, producers, or arts workers.

AGYU: All three of the examples you gave certainly have transformed how art in public space could exist while also questioning what is public space.

In recent years, we have witnessed a global public reckoning centring around monuments that represent and glorify settler-colonial histories.

Decolonial acts of resistance have in part focused on the defacing and dismantling of these signifiers of imperial domination. How have these recent developments impacted understandings and attitudes towards public art, and how have they impacted the field? Does the backlash speak to the obsolescence and futility of monuments, or can new monuments be reimagined through a decolonial lens? Who and how do we decide who or what gets commemorated?

VK: That's a big question, which I'll approach from a couple of directions. What I'm noticing from commissioning bodies—and this is the official channel through which public art gets made, how it gets commissioned—is that there is a much more active desire to include and acknowledge the colonial history of monuments, and to invite all sorts of different resistances into the process, to a point. There's a much more rigorous engagement with what we might call *equity*, including Indigenous artists, BIPOC artists, queer artists, and immigrant artists. There is a desire that I am experiencing when I sit on public art juries now to encourage new voices into the fold. It's very exciting.

However, I think that doesn't functionally change how that art gets built, or the strictures and difficulties in making it. It is the ultimate statement of putting a permanent piece of art in a particular place in time that we haven't changed. That's still happening everywhere where there's money. And that's ultimately what developers want when they are looking for public art commissions. They're envisioning a permanent public artwork that is mark-making of a place. I think we need to re-evaluate this colonial mark-making. So that is still foundational, whether or not the system underneath it is shifting and changing in definite ways.

I also want to acknowledge people who run Host Consulting: Jade George, Salia Joseph and Faith Sparrow-Crawford—who are young, emerging voices from each of the host nations. They are doing a lot to create opportunities for host nations and artists, making sure that the processes of commissioning acknowledges of the specific needs and requirements of an Indigenous artist working within colonial structures. So, they are overseeing some harm reduction in the process. There are some really important questions being asked about how informed these structures are, and how capable they are of holding different voices, which is important work.

In terms of my own thoughts about the clashes that happen during monument removal and other societal conflicts, I believe it's important to ask questions and challenge what we've always believed. It's healthy to do so. But what I'm really interested in is not this side or that side, but what happens after the conflict, what happens in the space that we

create through the conflict?

There's something really valuable that happens when we look something as enormous as colonial history in the eye and confront it. But then I wonder, what if we look to the side and realize that the whole time these colonial things have been happening, there's been a richness in cultures that weren't reflected in the built environment, that hasn't been resourced properly. There have always been communities doing incredible work, and knowledge that exists in this other public. Do you know what I mean?

I want to know what happens when we turn our gaze and our desires toward that different publicness. Not just "this sucks," which I totally agree, but can we also reorient and realize there's huge potential in this other space that has yet to be defined? And that maybe shouldn't be. But I think it's there, and I think that's what I can always feel, and that's what I'm excited about.

AGYU: Yes, and I think you opened up a segue into this next question, which is: *how can community play a role in public art, and what happens in the public realm in terms of art as it relates to and defines a community? Should the community be part of the consultation process with artists? What does meaningful community input and engagement consist of and look like? Do the processes of community involvement and the integration of community voices matter as much or more than the resulting artwork?*

VK: Yes, we need a broad range of practitioners on selection committees. It's going to be metrics; it's going to be who's being represented. Those things are important. And then there are the more radical questions that we can ask, like, what is public art in the first place, and where should this money go? And what constitutes impact? Impact is not going to necessarily come from a physical monument, but it might be, like you say, putting resources into the community. Those resources might dissipate and resonate in ways we might not be able to see or feel or understand as a dominant culture. I think we just have to adjust our eyeballs to understand what the impact could be.

I was having a discussion with someone who is working on a bunch of stuff around an artwork at the new St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver. We had an interesting conversation asking, what if part of this artwork for the hospital is actually working with healthcare practitioners to think about what an ethics or standard of care within public art would look like? There are ethics and standards of care within healthcare—whether or not they're fully at work or whether they're fully manifested is an-

other question. There is a question amongst healthcare practitioners of how to provide a good standard of care for gender-diverse humans that reflects and reacts to what is happening in the medical community and the healthcare community—can we borrow from that terminology to talk about an ethics of care within public art? What are the standards of care within commissioning processes or art projects? These are questions that I have had with my colleagues at Other Sightings as well, and other people—what would it look like? Culturally, we need to look for other expertise and realize that we have things to share across our disciplines.

AGYU: What I'm drawing from your response is a potential and general shift in the way we view artists who beget a process, not necessarily an object. I think this goes back to where you started, when you expressed that you are not interested in asserting your ideas as a singular artist in an individualistic manner in the public realm, as an individual making a stance. Drawing in health practitioners could make sense in terms of how the artist's role can shift, making art that combines expertise and acknowledges the artist's role, and creating artworks that could have multiple stakeholders.

VK: Yeah, I think people tend to look at artists as window dressers, you know, like, we're supposed to just make things prettier. But I think we're selling artists short as only having a vision, and disregarding that they have incredible skills of solidarity, resistance, and resilience. I guess—although I'm very skeptical about this word these days—but there are so many things that artists can provide leadership in. And it will not look like leadership in conventional ways; it will look very different. And that's the point.

AGYU: Thank you. The next question is, *do you see limitations to working in the public realm, which often carries material restrictions, platitudes of accessibility, and inferences to permanence? What are the risks involved in public art? As it can be an unsafe space, how can you mitigate the risk of harm to yourself while also challenging conventions, norms, and presumptions?*

VK: I see a lot of limitations to working in the public realm; it's partly why I personally want to be involved in it. I love working with other people, but I can't put myself through the stress of trying to make a permanent public artwork all by myself, and it's never all by yourself anyway. You're always working with people, but often the artist is the only one who's given credit, and I can't do that anymore. As a mature person (I can't even imagine what it is like for young humans to be thrown into public art at this point), it's so stressful, and it isn't necessarily safe, and

you don't necessarily get paid. And you also might feel terrible after the process. Public art is really hard. And I have to say, there have actually been two projects that I started doing and then pulled out of, either because the container couldn't hold what we wanted to do, or where I felt I didn't need to be the voice represented there.

Leaving those two projects speaks to how challenging it is to make big statements in public space and to be supported in that. I think about the potential for harm to artists who are not used to working at this scale, and who may have been invited because they are queer, racialized, Indigenous, or Black, because they are serving this incredible desire for more diversity in public space, which again, I think is positive, but also really quite dangerous at different times. And so I think that one of the ways through for those artists is to know they don't have to be alone when they do these things. To know they can ask for help—it's important to know that they can. There are people out there, even if sometimes you feel alone in that process. I have to again give a shout-out here to folks like Host Consulting who are doing a lot of work to create conditions that will support Indigenous communities, and who create calls for commissions with integrity according to Indigenous protocols; who pressure commissioning bodies to have more appropriate calls for submissions, more appropriate budgets or timelines, and to have more cultural competency before they do so. This work is happening, but not exactly everywhere, so I do feel that it's really critical. And I think in Vancouver, or at least in this region, we are quite lucky to have people who have been working for a long time in public art who really care and who are trying hard to make some changes. I have to say there is good work happening, an opening up of expectations around what public art should do and how it should look. But I think you have to be able to pick and choose and know that not every opportunity is a good one.

AGYU: Thank you. I appreciate you sharing that you've pulled out of different public art projects for different reasons. I want to flip the coin, to re-orient us to audiences and publics, because most often as art practitioners when we say unsafe space, we are often thinking of the artist—or even the subject or content of the artwork being expressed—put into a hostile environment. But I'd like to redirect us to think about an audience that's not necessarily consenting to encounter difficult public art. When you're in a gallery, or when you're in a space, you enter knowing you will potentially be challenged. So, what happens inversely, when you're putting something out into the public realm that is challenging, and potentially triggering? There are complexities with that, but I do think it starts with thinking about consent.

VK: That's a great question. We talk a lot about spaces that you can

control, like gallery spaces or museum spaces. Places where you can put a content warning and make sure that there are considerations for the audience in place. But in public space, it's a different consent process. The process isn't one that we understand, and this is certainly a problem with monuments to colonial figureheads. Those monuments were creating harm for many communities for a long time without us as a dominant culture ever really understanding that. And so, we are redefining our consent around public art, and I don't have an answer. There are no universal aesthetic criteria or cultural criteria anymore. Is there an artwork that you know, that has successfully done something like that?

AGYU: I worked on a project by Abbas Akhavan in Winnipeg that brought the drag community into a public performance space in a public square. Abbas wanted to turn a fountain into a stage. We found a site that had an empty plinth in the centre of a water fountain near an old cruising ground, which became the stage for a series of bi-weekly drag performances over three weeks. The performers were picked up in a limousine, we had security guards for them, and we tried to create a safe space for them even though we couldn't predict the audience. But the audience was celebratory and grew quite a bit over the duration of the piece. The performances started out as fairly conventional drag performances, with performers in elaborate gowns lip-syncing anthems by female vocalists. And then the performers started to play for the audience, which contained both regulars and some children. By the end, the drag performers were playing the *Little Mermaid* soundtrack for the community. When it began, the work was all about the drag performers and creating a safe space for them, but it started to change, to become as much about the audience as the performers themselves.

VK: I think it's about giving an invitation that is not a confrontation, that doesn't solicit "Oh, I don't like what I'm seeing," or, "I hate it." But how do you make a statement? An invitation is a statement that allows the public to feel included, even if they don't initially love what they're looking at or feel an identification with the artwork initially. I think we get too stuck in identification, as if I have to identify with something to like it. That's really not true.

AGYU: The fact that the work was durational allowed a relationship to grow, to a point where it became decentered from the artist's original idea. It became first about the performers, and then by the end about the audience.

VK: People say, "Going at the pace of trust." The pace of trust looks very different from a traditional timeline.

AGYU: Last question: *How does the body or organization that commissions and/or owns a public work of art affect the public's perception of the work, and/or their investment in maintaining it, and seeing its value?*

VK: This is similar to the conversation we were just having about pacing, and the invitation process, and how artworks are introduced to and placed within communities. This is about the commissioners and the organizers. It's like the difference between jumping in a freezing cold pool and easing into it. We need to better understand what good hosting is as commissioners. Same with galleries. I think about this all the time now that I work as director of a gallery. How do we host this artwork properly? How do I host the artist properly? And also, how do I make sure the audience knows what to expect? Public engagement is difficult, and it relies on a whole set of anticipatory skills that no one talks about when you go through school or training. How do you host something? And how do you introduce artwork in a beautiful way, or at least in an adequate manner?

Currently, we're trying to figure this out because people are truly and legitimately unhappy, and we have to find ways of introducing opposing viewpoints, or even just dissimilar viewpoints, into spaces together. I think ultimately the question of hosting takes time and engagement. I do not mean consultation in the way cities and developers do consultation. I understand that we have limited tools, but I don't want to put any more sticky notes on a board. There are other ways, Angela's work, for example, or looking to communities of colour, Indigenous artists, and all sorts of artists who have those skills and knowledge. How would you adapt some of those protocols or skills to institutional contexts? Is the institution willing to put the resources into trying and potentially failing? I think as institutions—and I am absolutely part of one now at Emily Carr—we have to try and we have to fail, and that's that.

AGYU: Let's come back here to this notion of time, which is part of the concept of this series, thinking about permanence and impermanence. Permanence, which is wrapped up in who and what gets the right to occupy space in a solid way, and then impermanence as a possible reaction against that. But how do those two things meet in the middle? Perhaps in thinking of the end of the artwork with equal intensity as thinking about its initial presentation.

VK: Yes. We have been trained in the cultural sector to focus on these big moments of presentation. It's the same with exhibitions—we focus on getting the exhibition up and then we're done, like, "We did it!" But the care and responsibility to the artist and the artwork continues long after the exhibition comes down. That care could be through the archive

and thinking through the audiences of the future. I learn a lot from archivists because they think differently about time. One of the concerns I am working on developing is, how do you support a long-term conversation with an artwork?

Vanessa Kwan is an artist, producer, and curator with a focus on collaborative, site-specific and cross-disciplinary practices. They are currently Director + Curator, Gallery and Exhibitions at Emily Carr University on unceded x̣ʷməθḳʷəỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̣lilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) territories (Vancouver, Canada). They have worked in programming roles since 2003, contributing to organizations such as grunt gallery, the Vancouver Art Gallery, Other Sights for Artists' Projects, Access Gallery, Powell Street Festival and Out On Screen. They regularly write, speak and publish on art and culture, and since 2017 have been producing residency projects across the Pacific Rim (Vancouver, Seoul, Melbourne and Sydney) exploring artist-led creative exchange. In addition they have produced significant public art works including *Geyser* for Hillcrest Park (with Erica Stocking), *Speaker A*, a permanent sound installation co-created with Theatre Replacement (Maiko Yamamoto and James Long) and *Curtains*, an upcoming collaborative performance work.

The Uncontainable Collections Research Project presented by the Art Gallery of York University is a series which aims to serve as a pedagogical tool for faculty, students and arts practitioners while also informing the development of collection policies that promote ethical and current practices of collections care as our gallery expands and transitions into the Goldfarb Gallery of York University. This transformation will include the renovation of our current spaces into a Visible Vault for the University's art collection which includes over 1700 works. Each workshop in the Uncontainable Collections series is anchored by a small selection of works from connected streams through the collection, as well as topics pertaining to contemporary strategies for collections management such as: acquisitions, community engagement, conservation, education, interpretative planning, repatriation, and the ethics of museological care.

This iteration *Permanence/Impermanence: The Life of Public Art* of the Uncontainable Collections series was conceived and produced collaboratively by AGYU staff Allyson Adley, Liz Ikiriko, and Jenifer Pappararo.