

Diapause

By Oliviana Cinco, Guest Curator

Diapause is an exhibition of new and existing works by Workman artists Paula John, Mustafa Khan, Coley, Brittany Newlove, Kat Singer, Tina Guo, Jan Swinburne and Asma Sultana. The term, meaning dia- 'through' + pause (noun), describes a period of suspended development exhibited as a result of unfavorable environmental conditions. Formally assigned to insects, invertebrate and mammal embryos, the artist's interpretation of this physiological state has been adapted in correlation to their own personal experiences, to encapsulate 'process' as a means for reflection, grief, self-preservation, identity, introspection and break-through. The exhibition consists of works made from various media ranging from painting, drawing, glass, textiles, digital and mixed media.

Diapause is a concept that was guided from considering how artists utilize practice as a means for understanding environmental affections through both internal (introspective) and external (creation) processes. Within this concept, both literal and metaphorical interpretations are attributed to the "delay in development" and the physical manifestations that exist and have emerged. In ***Sonic Flight (Hover)***, Jan Swinburne uses soundscape to create pattern recognitions by materialized audio visualizations. The work interprets captured audio of a war jet that transforms into a feather-like bird form in seamless motion, appearing as though it is waiting to move.

The works exhibited also combine a proscribed and collaborative approach to expressing the 'self' through each of the artists' interpretations and motifs. In such form, pre-existing works have also taken on a new orientation within the theme(s) explored. In ***Paula John's I Don't Know Why This Happened But It Did***, the artist offers hindsight to her experience with mental illness. Through a handmade quilt containing silk-screened documents from her adolescent psychiatric file, the artist expresses the comfort and validation in the evidence contained in their medical records. Through process, documentation and transcription, John informs the "indiscriminate and often unexplained nature of mental illness", emerging with a different perspective and cognizance of herself, after over two decades since the events documented in the piece.

This documenting of personal narrative is shared among the works exhibited including **Asma Sultana's** hair and textile piece ***Alchemy of Losses***, and **Brittany Newlove's** photo series ***Towards the Light***. Where the subjects capture a particular timeline, experience or occurrence, the works feel eternal to the identity of the artist, even if their context is ever changing. ***Towards the Light*** presents photographs that showcase the artist's personal space and the feeling of timelessness. **Newlove** uses photography as a way to document and self-reflect on her observations through this period of isolation. Similarly in an autobiographical form, **Sultana** captures new found perspectives of her own identity in ***The Alchemy of Losses***, to express the nature of physical and emotional displacement.

Several works in the exhibition directly question time and the unenforceable future in such a way that is optimistic and indistinct. In ***Maybe I Was Here Before, Maybe This Is Where I'm Going (Nothing Is Ever Truly Static, Anyway)***, Coley reflects upon the past, the present and the things that are yet to come through a multi-step process that incorporates their own writings within the glass works. The artist uses a variety of techniques to express transformation, perseverance and healing.

Kat Singer's ***What Dreams May Come*** explores the synthesis of hurting and healing, grief and growth experienced by the artist during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rendered in soft felt, the reclining figure representing the artist themselves melts into the monstrous shapeshifting couch. It slumbers peacefully in its macabre cradle, untroubled by its apparent disintegration. The unusual context of the figure elicits confusion and invites curiosity: what is meant to happen next is unclear, and thus even more intriguing. Singer's diapause included, in their own words "gifts born out of losses, and possibilities afforded by dead ends".

Incorporating natural environments, Tina Guo presents two themes; ***Breaking the Ice*** which expresses a vulnerability and openness to the world, followed by ***Warming the Seeds*** suggesting a new beginning. Mustafa Khan's series is inspired by the realm of sleep and the ways in which humans use sleep as a form of restoration and slowing down time. The elements of sleep are metaphors used as a way to process challenges brought on by self doubt and self critique. The artist encourages the necessity to make time to rest and to carve out spaces where time can stand still.

Considering that people's behavior and motivation to act is hugely determined by the quality of our environment, the gallery functions as an incubator in which these works are held. Therefore, the 'Diapause' the viewer is interacting with—whether physical, physiological, psychological or a combination of these—is witnessed in a cocoon-like setting within the white walls of the gallery space. At the same time, acknowledging the vulnerability of our global (external) environment and our survival serves as a quality of agency, particularly during this time of global crisis and isolation as we transition into a new state of normalcy.

In a paradox, the works in *Diapause* exhibit movement and stillness, affliction and restoration, ritual and mundane, with temporal coordinates informing past, present and future. Through the dissemination of such works, the hope is to create awareness and gain insight into one's own process of identity, to provide greater understanding of self and others.