

Amy Lam:
Make-Believe Bathroom

Exhibition Text, Annotated Bibliography,
Public Programs, and Biographies

SEP 15 - DEC 3 2020

SFU GALLERY

Exhibition Text

With *Make-Believe Bathroom*, Amy Lam creates a virtual space that provides an opportunity for escape or anonymous exchange, acknowledging the many ways in which the private and the public touch. In her artistic practice, Lam works within various modes of community to examine present political conditions. Her work often invokes humour to support constructive discourses that challenge imperialist systems and connect complex, often underrecognized, narratives to a broader public.

Bathrooms are places of retreat and unsanctioned sociality, especially within institutional spaces. Inspired by her own experiences in academia and at various workplaces, Lam addresses the need for semi-seclusion and anonymity, and how these contingencies can enable other kinds of relation to develop. *Make-Believe Bathroom* is a website that functions as an idealized place where one can go for a short break during online classes or lectures, work hours, or family gatherings on Zoom. Modelled after the actual campus bathroom near SFU Gallery in Burnaby, users of *Make-Believe Bathroom* can talk to people in stalls next to them, check a phone, view graffiti, leave a message for others, and flush the toilet. Some queueing may be necessary. *Make-Believe Bathroom* provides a possible reprieve, a place to wait, reflect, or complain, gesturing towards how retreat is often undervalued as an activity that enables personal and political survival.

The spaces of public bathrooms have been historically contested, with class, gender, race, and ability determining who gets access to what. The shut-downs of the pandemic have made it especially difficult to find dignified public places with privacy, where one can take care of one's intimate needs. In this time of crisis and change, *Make-Believe Bathroom* presents a space for possible community that is simultaneously non-functional, a public toilet that both misses and exceeds its purpose.

Curated by Jenn Jackson

Web developer: Naomi Cui
3D Renderings: Emerson Maxwell
Soundscape: Vic Cheong
Audio descriptions: Aliya Pabani

This project includes contributions from Jon McCurley.

Resources Selected and Annotated by
Amy Lam, HaeAhn Kwon and Jenn Jackson

Allan Antliff, "Adrian Blackwell's Anarchitecture: The Anarchist Tension," in *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, vol. 2010.1, 2010, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/allan-antliff-adrian-blackwell-s-anarchitecture-the-anarchist-tension>

The artist installed a porta-potty with a two-way mirror as a door, at a busy intersection in downtown Toronto, "where street people cleaned car windows for money. Local businesses had been agitating for the corner to be cleared, and one of their strategies was to deny access to washrooms."

— Selected by Amy Lam

Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," in *Men in the Off Hours* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1999)

Carson writes about the female in Greek mythology as wet, without boundaries, contaminating. She begins the essay by describing the everyday "crisis" of contact, which is the difficult human activity of "touching each other — whether the touch is physical, moral, emotional, or imaginary."

— Selected by HaeAhn Kwon

Laura Demers, "Makeshift privacy and pissing bodies: in conversation with HaeAhn Kwon," in *Public Parking*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.thisispublicparking.com/single-post/2019/05/01/Make-shift-privacy-and-pissing-bodies-in-conversation-with-HaeAhn-Kwon>

A conversation between writer Laura Demers and HaeAhn Kwon about Kwon's artistic methods and exhibition *Get Around to How* (2018). With attention to the idea of the "make-shift," chance, authorship, feminism, and urinating in public.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

HaeAhn Kwon's website, *Get Around to How*, exhibition presented at ESP (Erin Stump Projects) in Toronto, August 10 – September 1, 2018, <https://www.haeahnkwon.com/Get-Around-to-How>

HaeAhn Kwon's exhibition in which several women piss.

— Selected by Amy Lam

Simon Leung, "Squatting Through Violence," in *Documents 3*, no. 6 (1995): 92 – 101, https://advancedvideoart.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/leung_squatting-through-violence001.pdf

An artist's text about squatting as it relates to borders and sovereignty. Leung

made a public art project consisting of posters with a squatting Asian figure (with their back turned to the viewer) in Berlin, in the context of the mass expulsion of Vietnamese refugees by the German government.

— Selected by HaeAhn Kwon

Lezlie Lowe, “Why Are Canada’s Public Bathrooms So Inadequate?” in *The Walrus*, July 8, 2020, <https://thewalrus.ca/why-are-canadas-public-bathrooms-so-inadequate/>

An article on the crucial role of access to clean, safe facilities during a pandemic with attention to the relationship between public bathrooms and public health. Lowe is also the author of *No Place To Go: How Public Toilets Fail our Private Needs* (2019).

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Harvey Molotch and Laura Noren, “Only Dogs are Free to Pee: New York City Cabbies’ Search for Civility,” in *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing* (New York: New York University Press, 2010)

About the relationship between labour and the taboo of defecating in public, and how this defines status between the poor and the rich, the human and the non-human.

— Selected by Amy Lam

Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer’s Fecopoetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Selfhood is predicated upon sterilized proprietorship, in that a self owns and controls one’s own body, and waste is already an out-of-place by-product. Morrison’s research examines how women and filth start to be identified with each other, and how this relates to the power of the state to remove filth.

— Selected by HaeAhn Kwon

Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Civil Inaction* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2020)

A book about looting that I started reading in the context of the June uprisings and is relevant to considering what’s deemed permissible in the western liberal imagination around property, public space and the imperative to work.

—Selected by Amy Lam

Perruque (French noun), wig, periwig, peruke, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/perruque>

The official definition is “wig,” but it is also used colloquially to refer to the practice of doing other (non-sanctioned) work or activity while at a job. Michel de Certeau describes this in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (p. 24).

— Selected by Amy Lam

Joe Pinsker, “Slanted Toilets and the Curse of Productivity,” in *The Atlantic*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/12/slanted-toilet-standardtoilet-productivity/603898/>

An article on how a merciless new toilet design aims to cut down on the time workers spend away from their desks.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Alessandra Renzi et al, “Universities can squeeze out low-income residents in cities like Montréal,” in *The Conversation*, March 8, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/universities-can-squeeze-out-low-income-residents-in-cities-like-montreal-131834>

A short intro article about how the University of Montreal campus in the Parc Ex neighbourhood of Montréal is causing gentrification, and how universities often move into — and then displace — low-income neighbourhoods. This applies in Vancouver with the SFU downtown campus and the DTES, and in Toronto with the University of Toronto and Chinatown.

— Selected by Amy Lam

Emily Nadene Scoular, “Pissing in Public: The Role of Public Washrooms within the Context of a Neoliberal City” (master’s thesis, UBC Library, 2019), <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/graduate-research/42591/items/1.0378573>

A thesis dissertation on the role of public washrooms as excluded from civil discourse on public amenity provision within the City of Vancouver. The research highlights historical and contemporary conditions of privatized-public space with attention to public washroom design and civic policy.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Robin Simpson, “Histories and Setups: Interview with Life of a Craphead,” in *C Magazine* 142 (Summer 2019), <https://www.cmagazine.com/issues/142/histories-and-setups-interview-with-life-of-a-craphead>

A conversation between writer Robin Simpson and Life of a Craphead (conceptual

art duo consisting of Amy Lam and Jon McCurley) about their body of work and artistic methods. With attention to their series of memorial works, where they map how trauma and echoes of western imperialism in Asia remain prevalent in Canadian art today.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Stalled! (website), <https://www.stalled.online/>

A research collective and platform that addresses urgent social justice issues around the need to create safe, sustainable and inclusive public restrooms for everyone regardless of age, gender, race, religion, or disability.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee*, 2008, three videos with a duration of 13:52, PowerPoint presentation, keycard, letter, <https://pilvitakala.com/the-trainee>

A performance where the artist did nothing while “at work” at the accounting firm Deloitte for a month.

— Selected by Amy Lam

TO Toilet Codes (twitter), <https://twitter.com/totoiletcodes?lang=en>
Toronto Toilets (website), <https://torontotoilets.org>

A project for sharing access codes for locked public bathrooms in Toronto, as well as a map of all public washrooms in Toronto and Hamilton.

— Selected by Amy Lam

The Death Panel, hosted by Beatrice Adler-Bolton, Artie Vierkant, Vince Patti, and Phil Rocco (New York: NY), <https://www.deathpanel.net/>

A podcast about disability and health care in America. Especially worthwhile for its sharp and funny criticisms of how capitalism dictates responses to the Covid-19 pandemic: the imperative to keep working, keep universities going, keep students paying and in class, et cetera.

— Selected by Amy Lam

Kim Tingley, “How Architecture Could Help Us Adapt to the Pandemic,” in *The New York Times Magazine*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/09/magazine/architecture-covid.html>

An article on the intersections of the global pandemic, public space and design.

— Selected by Jenn Jackson

Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (website), <http://www.vandu.org/>

From 1997 – 2010, Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) was a group who advocated for bathroom access in Oppenheimer Park and the Downtown Eastside. They ran a program where members of VANDU would maintain public toilets in Oppenheimer Park on Sundays and Mondays, when the facilities were not otherwise maintained by City staff. This program was discontinued in 2010 when Oppenheimer Park was redesigned with new washroom facilities and a field house staffed by the Carnegie Community Centre.

— Selected by Amy Lam

“Water,” in *We Are Not the Virus*, produced by Aliya Pabani, Encampment Support Network, September 1, 2020, 40:18, <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/we-are-not-the-virus/id1530051155>

A podcast with the voices of residents who live in Toronto’s encampments. It addresses how the City has deliberately cut them off from access to toilets and hygiene facilities, and how the residents have come up with makeshift solutions in order to be able to live where they want.

— Selected by Amy Lam

“Where Do We Go From Here?,” in *99% Invisible*, Episode 41 produced by 99pi, September 8, 2020, 36:58, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/where-do-we-go-from-here/>

About the innovation of segregation of bathrooms by sex, as stemming from the 19th century idea of the “separate spheres” — where women belong in the home and men control the public — and how that continues to severely affect transgender and non-binary people, and their access to public life.

— Selected by Amy Lam

Biographies

Amy Lam is an artist and writer. She was born in Hong Kong and lives in Toronto. Lam collaborated with Jon McCurley as the artist duo Life of a Craphead, in conceptual art, performance, media art, and curating. Their work will be presented at the Seoul MediaCity Biennale in 2021. Lam is a founding member of Friends of Chinatown Toronto, a grassroots group working against displacement in Toronto's downtown Chinatown, and she is also currently working on poetry.

HaeAhn Kwon is an installation artist. She was born in South Korea and lives on the land of Tkaronto. Her practice recombines and transforms everyday objects, highlighting a tension between a culture of excess and the resourcefulness born of crises. She often collaborates with Paul Kajander as Haeahn Paul Kwon Kajander. Threading given and family names together, their practice challenges identificatory constructs such as gender, ethnicity and patriarchal lineage. She is represented by Franz Kaka (Toronto) and her works have shown internationally.

Jenn Jackson is a curator, writer and researcher. She has held positions at a range of public and private organizations. Jackson has written on contemporary art for catalogues, books and journals, and is co-editor of *Haunt*. She is a guest co-curator, with Phaniel Antwi, Jeneen Frei Njootli, Christian Vistan, and Grant Arnold, of the next civic triennial at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Public Programs

Talk: Amy Lam in Conversation with HaeAhn Kwon
about Bathrooms
Saturday, October 24, 12pm PDT
Presented on Zoom

Public opinion permit[s] canines to pee on sidewalks, buildings, garbage bags, fire hydrants, trees, cars, and most anything on the street. People are prohibited from peeing anywhere. Violators are subject to apprehension and prosecution.^[1]

Western-style sitting toilets are designed to hide the movement of bodily waste. This need for concealment extends to outdoor space, where public urination and / or defecation are seen as shameful (even when there's no other choice). Women-identified people are especially susceptible to reproach and must find shields or screens, like a friend holding a coat, or an open car door. In this conversation, artists Amy Lam and HaeAhn Kwon will talk about toilets, the lack thereof, and the relationship between civility and necessity.

^[1] Laura Norén, "Only Dogs Are Free to Pee: New York City Cabbies' Search for Civility," in *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing*, eds., H. Molotch and L. Norén (New York: New York University Press, 2010)

Gathering: *Go Together*
Saturday, October 24, 11am – 12pm PDT
Friday, November 27, 12 – 2pm PST
www.sfu.ca/makebelievebathroom

Join the artist for group visit hours in the *Make-Believe Bathroom*. Bring your friends and use the chat rooms to vent, ask questions, give advice, gossip, et cetera.

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