

S I M O N E B A I L E Y

R A V E N C H A C O N

G R A C E C L A R K

J O H A N N A H E D V A

LIKE MAGIC

G E L A R E K H O S H G O Z A R A N

C A T E O ' C O N N E L L - R I C H A R D S

R O S E S A L A N E

P E T R A S Z I L A G Y I

T O U R M A L I N E

N A T E Y O U N G



CO — STAR

5m ago

Your day at a glance

Ask the more beautiful question.

In recent times of chaos and uncertainty (including the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, and during the COVID-19 pandemic) I've noticed many people who I hold close turning towards astrology, tarot, charms, spells, altars, and other forms of practice for solace, coping, healing, and strength. I became interested in talking with folks, including artists, about what draws them to what they variously described as witchcraft, shamanism, ritual, divination, and magic.¹

The ten artists in *Like Magic* explore their own relationships to what I think of as technologies of magic²—including devices, talismans, rituals, and incantations—and the points at which technology and magic converge. These technologies are not the props used for stage magic (rabbits in hats, scarves hidden up sleeves) but rather are tools created by humans to help them survive and thrive in a chaotic world.

Johanna Hedva describes divination in particular as a form of speculative magic that is “a tool for articulation.” They explain, “You tell the future as you tell a story as you tell time as you tell me your name. All forms of language are, to me, attempts at divination. Divination is nothing but an articulation of the future. And the future does not exist as such, but is a shimmering cast off by the past and present.”³ Hedva and their fellow exhibiting artists Simone Bailey, Raven Chacon, Grace Clark, Gelare Khoshgozaran, Cate O'Connell-Richards, Rose Salane, Petra Szilagy, Tourmaline, and Nate Young use divination, healing earth, witches' brooms, AI, and more to imagine care-full and joy-full futures into being despite the peril promised by the past and present. As employed by these artists, technologies of magic are ways of believing despite—and even because of—questions and uncertainties.

The title *Like Magic* is a bit of a pun: it can be read as an affinity for magic, or as an effect that seems to be, but perhaps isn't actually, magical. (The science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke hypothesized that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”⁴) When we say something is “like magic,” it is a way of articulating that its operations are beyond the scope of our comprehension, or even ultimately unknowable. For people whose lives are surveilled because of (for example) their race, sexuality, gender identity, indigeneity, or immigration status, the opacity

1 Deep thanks to Holland Andrews, Horace Ballard, Meghan Clare Considine, Osman Khan, Elliot Krasnopoler, Denise Markonish, Jason Moran, Victoria Papa, Nina Pelaez, Sam Waterbury, and most especially the artists in this exhibition, for your time, wisdom, and conversation on this topic over the past few years.

2 Artists throughout history have engaged with technologies of magic, and have proposed parallels between art/artmaking and magic/witchcraft. In the 20th to early 21st centuries alone, Hilma af Klint, Marjorie Cameron, Leonora Carrington, Joseph Cornell, Georgiana Houghton, Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Betye Saar, Renée Stout, and Remedios Varo come immediately to mind for me as examples, though there are many more.

3 Johanna Hedva, “How to Tell When You're Going to Die: Astrology for Writers,” Lecture at The Studium Generale at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, 2020. Cited in Johanna Hedva: *Care in End Times*, Care Syllabus, 2021. <https://www.caresyllabus.org/care-in-end-times>

LEFT: The author's Co-Star “day at a glance,” March 6, 2021

BELOW: Flyer offering psychic chakras healing, palm & tarot cards reading, \$10 special, New York, NY, Fall 2021



lent by magic's unknowability can function as a refusal of a system's efforts to know, categorize, and control their lives and stories.

The type of magic that the artists in *Like Magic* address is akin to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's theory of the undercommons—a space that rejects organized religion, nationhood, imperialism, and demands for knowledge production. Writing of the rippling impact of the slave hold, Harney and Moten note: "The hold's terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common, to create a new feel in the undercommons. Previously, this kind of feeling was only an exception, an aberration, a shaman, a witch, a seer, a poet amongst others, who felt through others, through other things."⁵ This feeling through others—rather than as an individual or as a collective—centers on touch, on love. The artists in *Like Magic* similarly employ technologies of magic towards love, care, pleasure, and healing, subverting systems that would traditionally deny them access to these.



A dandelion in a brick wall at MASS MoCA, November 2016

Rural spaces—like the Berkshire mountains and Hoosac Valley that are MASS MoCA's home—have historically been sites of wildness and magic. Jack Halberstam rightly notes the undercommons' affinity for wildness, describing it as a "wild place that continuously produces

its own unregulated wildness."⁶ Systems designed with an imperial, white supremacist desire to control and categorize break down in the face of wild logics like the cyclicity of seasons, the rhizomatic natures of mushrooms and birches, the growing things that push through the cracks of the built grid, thriving in defiance of rigid structures.⁷ Perhaps this is why MASS MoCA has always had a bit of wildness and magic about it: space for mess, for sprawl, for experimentation and questioning rather than certainty, for an embrace of the poetry that grows up in the cracks.

The artists in *Like Magic* combine technology and magic in a speculative manner that shares in an impetus to question, to dismantle, to study, to believe.

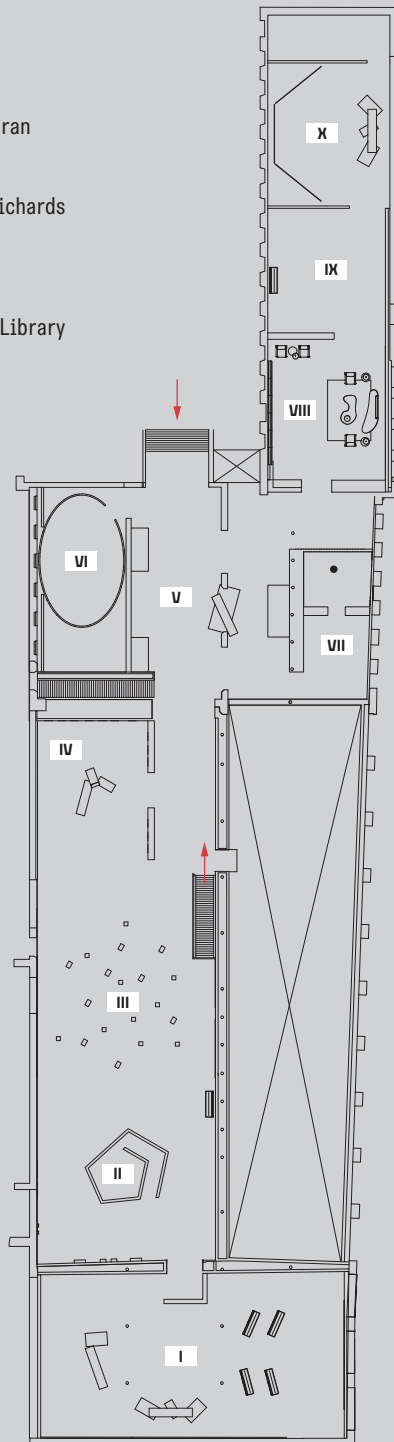
4 Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, revised edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1958/1973), 21. Decades before, James Frazer predicted in *The Golden Bough*, "The dreams of magic may one day be the waking realities of science." [James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (second edition), 1900, as quoted in Josephson-Storm, Jason A, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 140.]

5 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 97–98.

6 Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: with and for the Undercommons", in *The Undercommons*, 7.

7 With gratitude for Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013) and Homay King's *Virtual Memory: Time-based Art and the Dream of Digitality* (2015).

- I** Tourmaline
- II** Nate Young
- III** Gelare Khoshgozaran
- IV** Raven Chacon
- V** Cate O'Connell-Richards
- VI** Petra Szilagyi
- VII** Grace Clark
- VIII** Johanna Hedva + Library
- IX** Rose Salane
- X** Simone Bailey



- 1 Commissioned for ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS, Visual AIDS: Day With(out) Art, 2017.
- 2 In 1730, 42% of the population of New York enslaved other people—the second largest proportion of enslavers of any city in Britain’s American colonies except Charleston, South Carolina. [Sylviane A. Diouf, “New York City’s Slave Market,” Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, June 29, 2015. <https://www.nyp.org/blog/2015/06/29/slave-market>
- 3 See Tourmaline, ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS Artist Statement, Visual AIDS, January 29, 2018. <https://visualaids.org/blog/aerb-tourmaline-statement>
- 4 Lucille Clifton, *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions Limited, 2012), 267.
- 5 Tourmaline, ALTERNATE ENDINGS, RADICAL BEGINNINGS Artist Statement.
- 6 Of the rippling impact of the slave hold, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney note: “The hold’s terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common, to create a new feel in the undercommons.” Previously, this kind of feeling was only an exception, an aberration, a shaman, a witch, a seer, a poet amongst others, who felt through others, through other things.” The magic of this feeling “through others, through other things”—rather than as an individual or as a collective—centers on touch, on love, on “hapticality.” This hapticality, they write, takes place in the dark, at night, in spaces like bedrooms, bars, and clubs. [Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 97-98.]

Tourmaline’s short film *Atlantic is a Sea of Bones*¹ begins with performer Egyptt Labeija standing in the swanky Whitney Museum in New York, looking out over the Christopher Street Piers from high above. Playing a part that both is and is not herself, Egyptt reflects on her time living in a hut on the piers below, murmuring “The memories. People should never forget where they came from.”

Decades before their gentrification, the Christopher Street Piers were a longtime gathering, cruising, and living place for queer and trans folks targeted by violence and pushed to the city’s margins because of their sexuality, gender identity, or HIV status. The site is surrounded by the Hudson River, on which, centuries ago, ships bearing enslaved people across the Atlantic from Africa traveled to colonial Manhattan.² Tourmaline’s film draws parallels between these intertwined histories of oppression via their shared relationship to water.

Fantasy and sci-fi narratives about the Middle Passage have long interested Tourmaline.³ *Atlantic is a Sea of Bones* is titled after a poem by Lucille Clifton, which considers the mothers and babies who leapt or were thrown overboard during that forced migration. Clifton writes, “maternal armies pace the atlantic floor.”⁴ Music group Drexciya has also crafted a “mythology of people who jumped and were thrown overboard in The Middle Passage starting underwater colonies and cities.”⁵

In Tourmaline’s film, in the darkness⁶ below the surface lies an opulent, fantastical place inhabited by those pushed out to the Christopher Street Piers and down to the Atlantic’s floor. In the sacred space of the dance floor, Egyptt—alongside her younger self—weaves a spell, dreaming mythologies of Black, queer, femme, and trans leisure and liberation into being.



Tourmaline, *Atlantic is a Sea of Bones* (video stills), 2017. Video. Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York



Nate Young's artworks in *Like Magic* examine the story of his great-grandfather's escape on horseback from North Carolina to Philadelphia¹—a journey which Young hopes to reenact with his own horse, Jackson (the name adopted by Young's ancestor after arriving in Philadelphia).²

These works are particularly shaped

by Afro-pessimist thinker John Murillo III's theory of Black untimeliness. Murillo argues that as a result of the violence that characterizes Black existence, "Death must interminably interrupt Black life, creating repeating, unpredictable lapses in Black experiences of temporal continuity and coherence. [...] And death must ceaselessly void Black life, causing losses of time."³

This understanding of Black temporality—characterized by loops and aporias shaped by violence—runs counter to what is often called "Newtonian time,"⁴ rooted in Isaac Newton's theory that time flows linearly, uniformly, and progressively. Young has said, "I think it's important for us to think about it and not take Newtonian time as a given. For me this opens up a space of possibility that the past is not only something we can visit in our memory, but it is actually something we construct in the present time and maybe could in turn visit."⁵

LEFT: Nate Young, *A Horse*, 2020. White oak, horse bone, spray enamel on tinted acrylic, LED. Collection of Dr. Robin Gallardi, Chicago

When he arrived in Philadelphia, Young's great-grandfather, Jackson, felt compelled to kill his horse in order to avoid capture. In a letter written before attempting suicide, he cited this as one of his life's greatest regrets, relating the location of the horse's entombed bones. In Young's works in *Like Magic*, horse bones are used to divine looping (hi)stories, and are enshrined in reliquaries inscribed with stories

of relationships between Black people and horses. Jackson's recorded breath fills the dark interior of a faceted black monolith; without light, the putative distinction between human and horse breath blurs. Who is breathing? Who *can* breathe? Young recalls:

"In an address to the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association in 1873, Frederick Douglass refers to the mule, the ox, and the horse as kindred beasts of burden. And at

a certain point he essentially says that when slaves are free—when Black folks are free—we should remember the other beasts of burden and not treat them as subjugated beasts. I started thinking about the potential of a world in which that happened. Would that world not have the same kind of climate change situation if we thought of ourselves as collaborators with the rest of the mammals or beasts or even plants and life, the life that's on earth? I was interested in the potential that Douglass was in a way a kind of anachronistic climate change activist."⁶

From the text inscribed on *Fugue*: "x.ii great-grandfather: flight under threat of arrest resulting from dubious accusation. relocation to alternate region and introduction of new name (U.S. 1920's)"² From the text inscribed on *Divination 3*, recounting a conversation with Young's grandmother: "She did not have the same kind of story about him, the story about him was just that. There was no story. He had fled the south. She didn't know from where. He had changed his name to Jackson. She didn't know who he had been before that. He had another life somewhere else maybe another family."³ John Murillo III, *Impossible Stories: On the Space and Time of Black Destructive Creation* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2021), 55. This understanding of time resonates with recent research regarding the impact of trauma on experiences of time, suggesting that traumatic experiences result in nonlinear storytelling of memories and discontinuous understandings of self. See, for example, Sujata Gupta, "Trauma distorts our sense of time and self. A new therapy might help," *ScienceNews*, Feb. 24, 2023. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/trauma-distorts-time-self-new-therapy>. While Gupta's reporting suggests therapies aimed at "fixing" experiences of nonlinearity by moving traumatized people towards continuous notions of time and self, Murillo and Young suggest that nonlinear experiences of time can themselves be the seeds of creation.⁴ Murillo, 34. ⁵ Nate Young interviewed by Pia Singh, "Beyond the Void: Nate Young on Recreating History and Making Art Anew," *Newcity Art*, May 23, 2022. <https://art.newcity.com/2022/05/23/beyond-the-void-nate-young-on-recreating-history-and-making-art-aneu/> ⁶ Nate Young, email to the author, September 28, 2023.

Since 2013, Gelare Khoshgozaran has collected the yellow, corrugated plastic boxes mailed to them by their mother in Iran. These packages were often opened and examined (as evidenced by the tape resealing some of them) by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. One imagines strangers running their hands over Khoshgozaran's carefully collected research for upcoming projects and mementos from childhood.

The parcels were subject to search under Public Law 107-210. Passed in the aftermath of 9/11, 107-210 is a putatively preventative measure against illegal activity including terrorism. In practice, the law allows the search of packages coming into or leaving the U.S. without a warrant, so long as a Customs officer believes that a package's contents could be suspicious. It is not a leap to conclude that suspicion in this case comes dressed in the guise of homeland security. Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the relationship between the

Gelare Khoshgozaran, "U.S. Customs Demands to Know," ongoing. LED lit packages (corrugated plastic).
Photo by Gelare Khoshgozaran & Karen Asher

1 In 2019, then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told CBS News, "Things are much worse for the Iranian people [with the US sanctions], and we are convinced that will lead the Iranian people to rise up and change the behavior of the regime." (Quoted in Tara Sepehri Far "'Maximum Pressure': US Economic Sanctions Harm Iranians' Right to Health," Human Rights Watch, October 29, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/29/maximum-pressure/us-economic-sanctions-harm-iranians-right-health>). The U.S. has maintained some degree of sanctions against Iran for more than 40 years; Khoshgozaran will continue to add to "U.S. Customs Demands to Know" as long as U.S. sanctions against Iran remain in place.

19 USC 1583.

U.S. and Iran has oscillated between tentative détente and violence. The U.S.'s fluctuating laws and policies have shaped the lives and relationships of both countries' citizens in myriad ways: from Donald Trump's executive orders comprising the "Muslim Ban"; to sanctions that make food and essential medicine prohibitively challenging to obtain for people living in Iran¹; to routine invasions of privacy, like opening and searching packages at the border, or the forms that Khoshgozaran must fill out detailing what is inside packages to their family in Iran, in order to exempt their contents from U.S. sanctions.

The title of Khoshgozaran's installation, "U.S. Customs Demands to Know", points to the quotidian but painful intrusions evidenced by the customs forms and text-laden tape attached to each box. This scrutiny is born from a desire on the part of the U.S. government to maintain control and strength by demanding knowledge. In Khoshgozaran's hands, these plastic boxes are transmuted from sites of violation into glowing lanterns scattered across the gallery's floor. The boxes sprout from the ground like bioluminescent mushrooms, seeming to proliferate rhizomatically, the intertwined, invisible electricity of their relationships to one another hidden below our feet. Sealed against peering gazes, the boxes' incandescent contents are rendered unseeable—sovereign, in defiance of external demands to know.

"SEC. 583. EXAMINATION OF OUTBOUND MAIL.

"(a) EXAMINATION.—
"(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of ensuring compliance with the Customs laws of the United States and other laws enforced by the Customs Service, including the provisions of law described in paragraph (2), a Customs officer may, subject to the provisions of this section, stop and search at the border, without a search warrant, mail of domestic origin transmitted for export by the United States Postal Service and foreign mail transiting the United States that is being imported or exported by the United States Postal Service.



For Raven Chacon, musical scores—like rituals—can “take you to another place, or get you outside of the reality that you’re stuck in.”¹ In the U.S., ritual (i.e. Christianity) and music (i.e. Western music/staff notation) have been employed by colonizers to control the spiritual lives and cultural production of Native American peoples. Chacon composes graphically notated scores which “resist the history of Western notation, and with that can eliminate normalizations and assumptions of time that influence how we see the universe and whoever created us.”²

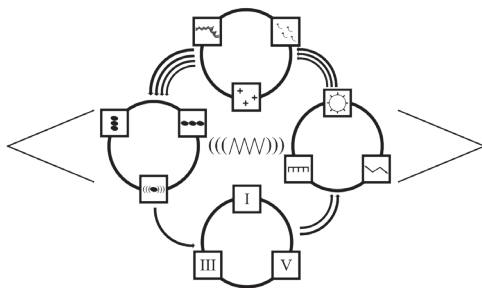
Chacon’s *Compass* and *For Zitkála-Šá* reject conventions of Western notation, which prioritize the composer’s authorship by controlling performance variables including duration, pitch, and volume.³ Of his scores, Chacon asserts: “The idea was not to restrict anybody from doing anything.” That Chacon’s work begins with this generosity is evident in *Compass*, a conversation between composer, score, environment, and performer. While the score is presented inside the galleries, the work must be performed outdoors, shaped by chance elements including the performer’s mood and surroundings.

For Chacon, chance, duration, and repetition are ways of learning—a methodology partially shaped by Navajo theories of time and movement as cyclical, repetitive.⁴ He specifies, “I’m not talking about repetition within a song, but rather repeating a song all night, and being too shy or unfamiliar with the song, or even Navajo language, to participate. If you can’t leave the ceremony and you’re there all night, you’re going to know the song by the morning. This idea of repetition—something happening over and over, maybe slightly changing each time, where everybody is working together—ends up in a lot of these pieces.” Chacon notes that this type

of music is “not about hierarchy. It’s about the people underneath learning from the person who has the so-called ‘top line.’ Eventually, they might be in that place.”

A related approach to leading and learning is evident in *For Zitkála-Šá*,⁵ a suite of score-portraits of contemporary Indigenous performing artists, composers, and scholars who identify as women. Chacon’s introduction to the series states: “in these scores, one may see a map, guiding us to worldviews that never doubted that women could be leaders. [...] On these pages, there is a filtering, a decoding, a mediating of speed, and a regenerating of what was lost.”⁶

Raven Chacon, *Compass*, 2021. Score. Courtesy of the artist. Commissioned by United States Artists for New Suns. ©2021, Raven Chacon



1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from: Raven Chacon, in discussion with the author, August 11, 2023.

2 Raven Chacon, introduction to *For Zitkála-Šá* (Art Metropole, Toronto & New Documents, Los Angeles: 2022), 8.

3 In Western staff notation, notes and rests placed on each staff’s five horizontal lines dictate the pitches to be played or sung and their durations relative to one another (taking into account clef, key, and time signature or beats per measure). Such scores typically also include tempo markings to indicate speed.

4 See Nancy C. Maryboy and David Begay, *Sharing the Skies: Navajo Astronomy* (Tucson, AZ: Rio Nuevo, 2010), 16.

5 Zitkála-Šá was a composer and Indigenous rights activist active in the 19th century, whose name translates to Red Bird, was also known by the white name of Gertrude Simmons and a married name of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. (*For Zitkála-Šá*, 7)

6 *For Zitkála-Šá*, 8.

A Partial Glossary of Terms Pertaining to Witches and Their Labor

The tools of the home and the earth have long been associated with witchery and rebellion. Weapons of the unheard, they connect the ground to the skies, the familiar to the spiritual.

Axis Mundi (*noun, Latin*) –

A central pillar or axis connecting the higher, spiritual world with the lower, earthly plain. Concept credited to religious historian Mircea Eliade.

Broom (*noun*) – A tool for cleaning and ritual consisting of bound, stiff fibers (often broomcorn/sorghum, a type of cereal grain) at the end of a stick. Predated by the besom. An object associated with witches.

Craft (*noun*) (*Argued*) – Processes of making things by hand using specific materials. Often associated with creating utilitarian objects. Engaging with a historical tradition of making. Also, the use of magic.



Distaff (*noun*) – FIG. 1

A short staff which holds raw fiber (such as flax or wool) for spinning. An object associated with both women and witches.

Grain Flail (*noun*) – FIG. 2

A tool made of two connected sticks, used for threshing—separating the edible grain from the straw of a plant.

Labor (*noun, verb*) –

Work, especially that which is physical, difficult, or required.

Maypole (*noun*) –

European folk tradition of erecting an adorned pole for festivals, often for May Day or Midsummer. Maypole ceremonies can involve decorative garlands, ribbons, dances, and parades.

Nonbinary (*adjective*) –

Not falling within a binary system; that is, a system of 2. Example: Art/Craft, Man/Woman, Precious/Quotidian.

Queer (*verb*) – To consider or interpret something from a perspective that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality.

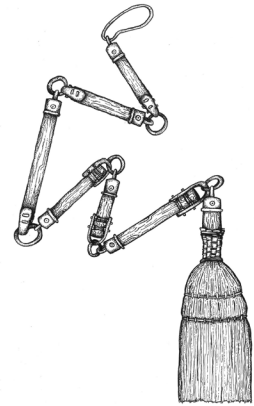


FIG. 2: Flail, Broom illustration by Cate O'Connell-Richards

Sticking Tommy (*noun*) –

Iron candleholders with a pick and hook, used by miners and sailors. Could be worn or removed. Can be held by hand or stuck into a surface.

Tilberi (*noun, Icelandic*) –

A creature in Icelandic folklore which steals milk. Made by a witch wrapping a rib bone in wool and placing it between their breasts. Also known as a “snakkur.”

Witch's Mark (*noun*) –

Marks on the body thought to be inherent in witches. Examples include extra nipples, moles, warts, birthmarks. Seen as proof positive by witchfinders.

Yoke (*noun*) – A wooden bar slung over the shoulders of a human or animal. Used for distributing heavy weight evenly for transport.

Bless Your Hard Drive

Biologist Dr. Shivas Amin has described how the internet and its accompanying technologies meet the “7 characteristics of living organisms” with humans as a mutualistic host.¹ Hearing this, I thought of the Leonard Cohen lyric from “So Long, Marianne”: “I forget to pray for the angels / And then the angels forget to pray for us,” and wondered: should I pray for the internet? What effect might prayer have on the trajectory of the internet as it grows and reproduces at an exponential rate? How might prayer for the

internet spark ideas around digital conscience?²

Bless Your Hard Drive is a body of research and interactive installation focusing on the convergence of spiritual belief and digital technology. The project is part of my ongoing research into the aesthetics of revelatory experiences. Active participation in institutional religion is declining in the U.S.³ The tools and visual content of many major religions are fraught with concerns around abuse of power, while alternatives

often raise concerns around cultural appropriation. Meanwhile, an increasing percentage of people in the U.S. identify as spiritual but not religious.⁴

With *Bless Your Hard Drive*—a space for prayer for the redemption of the digital soul—I am interested in creating a prayer room that might facilitate a spiritual experience for a wide variety of people and belief orientations. At the center of the adobe⁵ prayer room are six pieces of prayer furniture drawing on the visual languages of gaming chairs and computer technology, science fiction aesthetics, and designs and practices associated with traditions of belief including Islam, the Shakers, Buddhism, and Catholicism. The kneelers are designed to accommodate a variety of bodies and practices of prayer. On the walls are sculptural wood V/R headsets, created in the style of ritual masks. The installation’s soundtrack is a binary code prayer for a benevolent future for the internet written by Chat GPT and sung by gospel singers from Virginia Union University. The installation’s materials are largely organic, in contrast to the internet itself.

¹ Dr. Shivas Amin, “Is the Internet Alive?”, TEDx | University of St. Thomas- Houston, Texas. July 14, 2015. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/Lxi4ziInOxi> ² Research has suggested that prayer has numerous benefits for the person praying, but remains inconclusive about the impact on those who are subjects of prayer. For example, a 2009 paper hypothesized that as a special form of meditation, prayer has many of the same benefits for the practitioner, including reduced stress and blood pressure, higher levels of melatonin and serotonin, and boosted immune response, among others. Source: Chittaranjan Andrade and Rajiv Radhakrishnan, “Prayer and healing: A medical and scientific perspective on randomized controlled trials,” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, October-December 2009, 247-53, via <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2802370/> ³ The majority of Americans say they seldom (28%) or never (29%) attend religious services, according to a 2022 study by PRRI (Public Religion Research

Institute). This points to a decline in religious participation outside of weddings and funerals over the past decade: 43% of all Americans reported attending religious services at least a few times a year in 2022, down from 54% in 2019 and 56% in 2013. Source: “Religion and Congregations in a Time of Social and Political Upheaval,” PRRI, May 16, 2023. ⁴ According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2017, 54% of Americans consider themselves to be religious (down from 65% in 2012); 27% consider themselves to be spiritual but not religious (up from 19% in 2012); 18% consider themselves to be neither spiritual nor religious (up from 16% in 2012). Source: Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans now say they’re spiritual but not religious,” September 6, 2017, Pew Research Center. ⁵ A material pun, referencing both the ancient building method using clay, mud, and straw (from which the installation’s walls are constructed), and an allusion to the Adobe suite of design and creative computer programs.



Petra Szilagyi, *Prayer Room*, 2019. Photo by Terry Brown

ALEXANDRA FORADASI

What ideas, traditions, and experiences inspired your work in Like Magic?

GRACE CLARK]

I'm interested in creating a space to reflect on the fragility of life, the desire to heal, and the inevitability of loss.

My practice is often diaristic and these works draw upon a time when I was severely injured while working as an art fabricator at MASS MoCA. After fruitlessly seeking care for over a year, I fell into a deep depression. During that time, a friend serendipitously introduced me to El Santuario de Chimayó, a Catholic chapel to which people pilgrimage for its healing dirt. I was struck by visitors publicly claiming their pain by rubbing dirt on their bodies. Abandoned crutches and canes line the walls, attesting to the dirt's miraculous power.

El Santuario, which inspired this installation, combines Catholic ritual with an appreciation for the earth. I was raised with Catholic rituals, but after my grandfather's

ALEXANDRA FORADASI]

You're welcoming visitors to participate in In a new light (healing dirt) by applying charcoal to places on their bodies that need healing, similar to your experience at El Santuario de Chimayó. Why did you decide to use charcoal, rather than dirt?

GRACE CLARK]

I chose charcoal for many reasons. It has a rich history in art. There's recently been a resurgence of charcoal in the health industry. It reminds me of the ashes on Ash Wednesday (which precedes Easter in Christianity):

traumatic death when I was young. I struggled to trust them. A relative's assurance that "He's in the stars now" comforted me in the wake of his death, and ultimately helped me to lean into the belief that the natural world works wonders, and the earth is my church.

When I visited El Santuario and rubbed the dirt on my body, I tried to open my hopeless heart to anything that could help me: maybe God, nature, my own public claim, or my belief. In that choice, I didn't find a cure. But I did find, within myself, a little higher power.

Grace Clark, *In a new Light (Healing Dirt)*, 2021. Wood, lime wash, paper mache, charcoal powder, glass. Courtesy of the artist



Scan for the schedule of activations of Grace Clark's *In a new Light (Healing Dirt)*

a time of mourning and hope. And it's made of carbon, like our bodies and stardust, which endlessly amazes me. But what makes charcoal *feel* good is that in just the right light, it shimmers as if something magical could happen.

Who *Listens and Learns* presents the latest philosophical journey into artificial intelligence (AI) by the Korean-American writer, artist, and musician Johanna Hedva. Combining audio with a new handmade book of their text, the artist invites us to fall into the work by reading as we listen.

The new work continues Johanna Hedva's inquiry into the aesthetic, political, and mystical implications of AI technology, including its links with magic and divination. It centers around Hedva's short story set in Berlin during lockdown, narrated by a lonely protagonist who interacts with two characters: Coconut the AI-Enhanced Virtual Companion, and The Woman Who Carves The Tree.

A handmade artist's book created with Vivian Sming (Sming Sming Books) and Matt Austin (For the Birds Trapped in Airports) brings the story to life. Each book is tied with human hair and illustrated inside with Hedva's *Wart Paintings*, a series of drawings inspired by research into different modes of magic throughout history. Hedva accumulated these drawings daily during the pandemic, with each orb of pooled ink holding fragments of their research practice, processes, and ideas.

The accompanying audio is created with "Arid," an AI vocal clone developed for Hedva's installation and video game, *Glut (A superabundance of nothing)* (2020), presented as part of the exhibition *Illiberal Arts* at HKW Berlin. Disturbed by the unethical use and sale of human voice data, Hedva attempted to deceive the vocal cloning software program, training it with their own voice disguised through multiple speech synthesis processes. Arid reads the story aloud to us in this digitally altered version of the artist's voice, which Hedva describes as "not human but not *non*-human." Hearing Arid's AI voice reading a tale about the story's AI character, Coconut, is, for Hedva, a surprising moment of intimacy: "Not a satire of the narrator's need for connection," they suggest, "but the real messy thing."



Visit massmoca.org/likemagic to listen to *Who Listens and Learns* read by Arid, and to access a digital copy of the designed book, and the book as a word document.

This text is an edited version of Salane's essay "The Feedback Loop of Belongings" (2022) written as part of a digital fellowship with Pompeii Commitment. <https://pompeiicommitment.org/en/commitment/rose-salane/#02>



Rose Salane, *Confession 1*, 2023. Framed c-print. Collection of Lois Plehn. Returned fragment of Pompeii, courtesy the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. Framed. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs. Image © Rose Salane 2023; courtesy the artist, Carlos/Ishikawa, and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, in the context of Pompeii Commitment. *Archaeological Matters*

In the long-term wake of a catastrophe like the volcanic eruption that concealed Pompeii for 1,500 years, researchers use forensic methodologies to uncover and verify the **remains** of bodies and objects that have lain for centuries, irretrievable and invisible, underneath the ground. The sudden disappearances and returns experienced by the objects recovered from the site invite us to consider structures of loss and recovery. An object can be lost under innumerable circumstances: a natural disaster or a simple misplacement, an act of theft, or the violence of warfare or censorship. Regardless of the circumstances of the loss, each recovered object retains embedded notions of chance, purpose, and human efforts that across time rupture loss towards a perpetual **recirculation** of sentiments.

Most objects that survived Mount Vesuvius' eruptions were made from gold, bronze, iron,

stone, and glass—all capable of surviving incineration. The intimacy and familiarity embodied by jewelry in particular provide data about the personal taste, aesthetics, and class of those who resided in Pompeii. Present-day **accumulations** of lost jewelry parallel those that have resurfaced in Pompeii. *60 Detected Rings (1991–2021)* shows a collection of rings found through one woman's routine metal-detecting on the shorelines of beaches in Atlantic City, New Jersey. In each case, the time of loss is generally unknown, and the object is newly marked through the memory of the individual who discovered it, reinforcing the ageless **repetition** and causal disengagement that precious objects of sentiment have (this is also true of archaeological finds).

Contemporary human emotion and memory motivate another recent circulation of extracted objects. Letters holding fragments of Pompeii from previous visits are mailed to the archaeological park as apologetic **returns** of stolen material. According to the letters that accompany each object, their initial thefts had come from a desire to physically own pieces of history. The guilt they felt from having removed something sacred from where it belonged in some cases led to a belief that they had been cursed as punishment, or would experience bad luck if they did not rectify such wrongdoing. In these acts of restoration, little pieces of volcanic rock, stones, and bits of marble from mosaics turn into magnets that find their way back to their point of origin.

In her 3-channel video *Hometraining*,¹ Simone Bailey considers the history of “Crann Tara,” also known as the “fiery cross”—an ancient Scottish practice that was later adopted as a symbol of white nationalist terror. Bailey seeks to unpack this ritual in *Hometraining*, the cast of which is comprised of Black Americans with Scottish ancestry. Bailey asks: “What social training do black Americans receive from our larger cultural home, the United States, and how do we respond? How has the United States’ home training for black Americans helped shape our unique, hybridized culture when specifically looking at our responses to centuries of systemic oppression and injustice?”

The Gaelic term Crann Tara literally means “a beam of gathering.”² An early 19th-century Scots-Celtic dictionary explains the practice as “a piece of wood half-burnt and



Simone Bailey, *Hometraining* (video stills), 2023. 3-channel video installation. Co-commissioned by Southern Exposure and MASS MoCA, with additional support provided by the San Francisco Arts Commission and Headlands Center for the Arts

dipt in blood, anciently used as a signal of distress, or communicate an alarm, summoning the clans to arms.”³ A Crann Tara was often a small piece of wood brought by messengers from one allied clan to the next, or occasionally a large wood beam mounted and burnt on a hillside as a beacon.

By the 19th century, the fiery cross had migrated across the Atlantic ocean alongside Scottish immigrants⁴ and merchants. Many Scottish merchants profited directly or indirectly from the Transatlantic slave trade, whether by trafficking enslaved Africans into chattel slavery in the British Empire and the U.S., or through the purchase and sale of goods cultivated by enslaved people, including sugar, cotton, and molasses. While the slave trade was abolished in the British Empire in 1807 and in its colonies in 1838,⁵ it persisted in the U.S. until 1865. In the decades since, white nationalist groups including the Ku Klux Klan embraced cross-burning as a symbol to rally support for racialized violence, and to threaten and terrorize generations of Black and Jewish people.⁶

Hometraining is situated in a hybrid space and time⁷: at once the ancient past, when the cast’s Scottish ancestors might have seen the Crann Tara as a symbol of aid; and a hoped-for near future, when the fiery cross’ potency as a symbol of white supremacist terror has been neutralized.

- 1 “Hometraining,” a word from Black American vernacular English, means the social training (including manners and customs) that one learns at home, or from one’s family.
- 2 When a cross-shaped piece of wood was used, the practice was termed “Crois Tara,” literally “cross of gathering.” [The Highland Society of Scotland, *Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and London: T. Cadell, 1828), 284–285.
- 3 *Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, 284.
- 4 The “fiery cross” was purportedly used during the War of 1812, when Scottish immigrants in Ontario were called to fight invading U.S. forces. [See Archibald Forbes et al, *Battles of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2. (London, Paris, and Melbourne: Cassell, 1897), 236.]
- 5 Historians including Stephen Mullen have observed that the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire and its colonies was due more to its declining profitability than to humanitarian concerns. See Stephen Mullen, *It Wasn’t Us!, it wasnae us*, and *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775–1838* (London: University of London Press, 2022), 1–28.
- 6 The adoption of the fiery cross by the KKK was popularized by Thomas Dixon Jr.’s 1905 novel and play *The Clansman*, on which the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* was based. In it, a Klan leader describes “the ancient symbol of an unconquered race of men [...] The Fiery Cross of old Scotland’s hills,” used “in olden times when the Chieftain of our people summoned the clan on an errand of life and death”—a ritual which he reenacts to summon support for an extrajudicial act of violence against a Black man. [Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1905), 326.]
- 7 This uncertain temporality is further underscored by the soundtrack for *Hometraining*: a tune in Latin sung by a solo singer, lamenting the betrayal of the dawn’s light and the dissolution of dreams, and a rendition of AC/DC’s “Back in Black” on the bagpipes—a song celebrating escape from the threat of death.

1 Tahar Djaout, *The Last Summer of Reason*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager, Saint Paul: Ruminator Books, 2001, 119.

Tahar Djaout's posthumously published allegorical novel *The Last Summer of Reason* tells the story of Boualem Yekker, a bookseller in a nation overtaken by fundamentalists restricting citizen creativity. Yekker finds not only refuge in books, but also an alchemical tool kit to face his dire circumstances. When his bookstall is shut down, the narrator laments:

Books have been the compost in which Boualem's life ripened, to the point where his bookish hands and his carnal hands, his paper body and his body of flesh and blood, very often overlap and mingle. Boualem himself no longer sees a clear distinction... It was little through contact with life and a great deal through contact with books that ideas germinated in him, that ideals took root, that voluptuous feelings and waves of pleasure or anger ran through his trembling body, leaving lasting traces behind.¹

In these reflections, the boundaries between body, object, and imagination become porous. For Yekker, and for any lover of the written word, a book is a portal—a technology that enables a reader to cope in an unjust world. Books structure rituals; books bring back the dead.

In preparation for this exhibition, curator Alexandra Foradas and I have spent several years assembling texts that speak to the intersection of magic, art, and technology. The resulting library represents myriad intellectual legacies, from Black and Indigenous Studies to Queer and Feminist Studies; from primary source anthologies to Science Fiction. We have invited exhibiting artists, museum staff, and other members of our community to share their recommendations. Each book features a short introduction from its recommender inside the front cover.

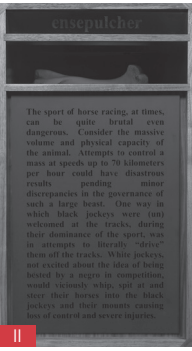
Unlike the Dewey Decimal System, which structures many libraries and endeavors to organize knowledge both hierarchically and comprehensively, the *Like Magic* library embraces incompleteness and celebrates the fact that so much knowledge is born out of conversation. We placed these books associatively, following impulses and charting loose ties and attachments. Over the course of the exhibition the library will grow and change, offering a place of rest, discussion, and study.

To view the current list of books in the library, scan the QR code on the right.

If you would like to suggest a text for inclusion in the library, we invite you to submit a recommendation using the form linked on the library list and in the gallery.

— Meghan Clare Considine





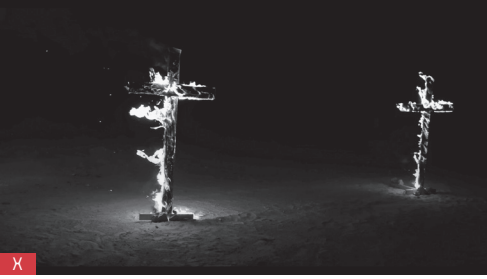
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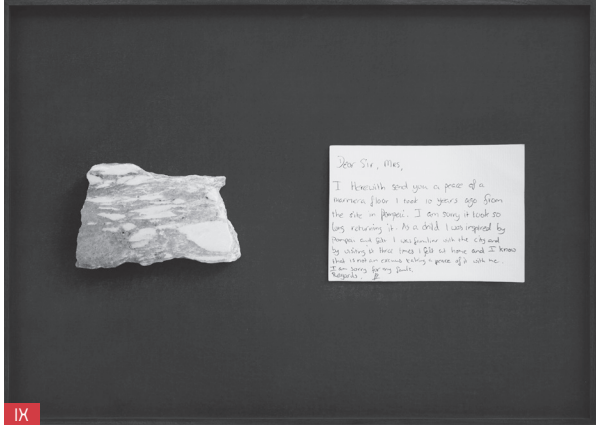
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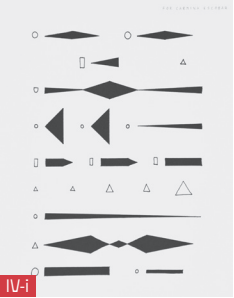
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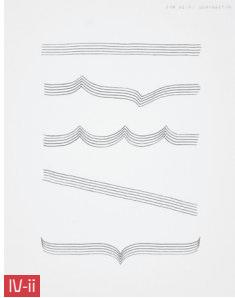
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IX



IV-i



IV-ii



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VIII



VI



III

- I Tourmaline, *Atlantic is a Sea of Bones* (video still), 2017. Video. Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY, New York
- II Nate Young, *Ensepulcher*, 2018. Walnut, horse bone, plexiglass, gold leaf, spray paint, LED. Collection of Gary Metzner and Scott Johnson. Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery
- III Gelare Khoshgozaran, “*U.S. Customs Demands to Know*,” ongoing. LED lit packages (corrugated plastic). Photo by Gelare Khoshgozaran & Karen Asher
- IV-i Raven Chacon, *For Carmina Escobar (For Zitkála-Šá)*, 2017–2020. Courtesy of the artist and Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts
- IV-ii Raven Chacon, *For Heidi Senungetuk (For Zitkála-Šá)*, 2017–2020. Courtesy of the artist and Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts
- V Cate O’Connell-Richards, *Miner’s Crown with Sticking Tommies*, 2019. Sterling silver, leather, rabbit fur, handmade beeswax candles. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Jim Escalante
- VI Petra Szilagyi, *Untitled (Rabbit V/ Ritual mask)*, 2022. Red oak and leather. Collection of Nicolas Atkins. Photo by Jenny Gorman
- VII Grace Clark, *He’s in the stars now*, 2021. Wood, acrylic, paint, vellum, LED lights. Courtesy of the artist
- VIII Johanna Hedva, *Who Listens and Learns*, 2022. Paper, hair. Courtesy of the artist
- IX Rose Salane, *Confession 8*, 2023. Framed c-print. Private collection. Returned fragment of Pompeii, courtesy the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist’s proofs. Image © Rose Salane 2023; courtesy the artist, Carlos/ Ishikawa, and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, in the context of Pompeii Commitment. Archaeological Matters. Photographer: Eva Herzog
- X Simone Bailey, *Hometraining* (video still), 2023. 3-channel video installation. Co-commissioned by Southern Exposure and MASS MoCA, with additional support provided by the San Francisco Arts Commission and Headlands Center for the Arts

SIMONE BAILEY
RAVEN CHACON
GRACE CLARK
JOHANNA HEDVA
GELARÉ KHOSHGOZARAN
CATE O'CONNELL-RICHARDS
ROSE SALANE
PETRA SZILAGYI
TOURMALINE
NATE YOUNG

Like Magic

October 29, 2023 - August 2025

Curated by Alexandra Foradas, Curator, MASS MoCA

Like Magic Library curated by Meghan Clare
Considine, Curatorial Assistant, MASS MoCA
and Alexandra Foradas

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Front cover inspired by: Johanna Hedva, *Wart
Painting*, 2021. Ink, watercolor, and metallic
dust on paper. Courtesy of the artist