

Video Walkthrough | Evidence

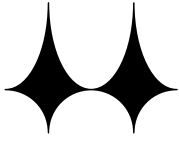
Guest curator Amy Zion gives a virtual tour of Evidence, a group exhibition featuring the work of artists Brian Belott, Petrit Halilaj, Ulrike Müller, Oscar Murillo, and Alanis Obomsawin. Speaking to each project in the exhibition, Zion reflects on the artists' foregrounding of art by children in their practices, and the profound insights that children's art can offer about the world we live in.

Watch the walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:
<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/evidence>

Amy Zion: Whenever you deal with a subject like child art, which for a lot of people makes them think of like a school gym with, you know, hundreds of drawings taped to a wall, is to counterbalance that. So, the title Evidence was one way to do that. So Evidence is a survey of contemporary artists who are interested in the work of children, but unlike their modernist forebears, they are interested in the work in and of itself. So modernist artists would collect troves of art by children, which they would emulate or appropriate and take as inspiration for their work. But what distinguishes these artists is that they're actually interested in children's voices, children's ideas and children's mode of expression, and that the work itself maintains its integrity within the framework of their practices.

In her research for the wall drawing, Ulrike was really interested in public art murals from the Works Project Administration era, where artists were being commissioned to make socially relevant but often just abstract artworks for public space in the United States. So the color palette specifically, and also the kind of modernist flatness of her work is inspired by that period. And we've paired the mural with drawings that were actually made in a similar period, but on the other side of the world during the Spanish Civil War. They were done by children who were separated from their parents in displaced persons camps in France. And the children had escaped the war either through train tunnels or, as they illustrate in some of these drawings, also through boats. What's really remarkable about these drawings is that they are some of the first representations that we have of aerial bombings of civilian targets, and that we have these representations through the eyes of children.

So this work by Petrit Halilaj is called *Abetare*. For this exhibition he made a version of *Abetare*, which is an ongoing work. *Abetare* is a series that began with a visit to the artist's hometown, a village called Runik in Kosovo, where the artist grew up and went to school and found out his school was being demolished to create a modern building. So he went there with the camera and he followed the school children around and they led him specifically to this pile of desks, and they showed him all the drawings and the history that was sort of layered upon these desks, the same ones that he used when he was a student there. He realized that this was something that needed to be preserved. So, he basically recovered the drawings from the desks, some of which were just etched into the desk itself. He took the



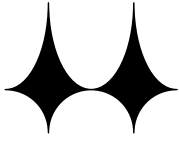
drawing, he enlarged it to a desired scale, and then he used that enlarged drawing as a template to bend and weld these large-scale steel sculptures.

So this is *Christmas at Moose Factory*. It's a film by Alanis Obomsawin that came out in 1971 through the National Film Board of Canada. It was a work that came about after Alanis traveled to a residential school in northern Ontario, on the shores of James Bay on Moose Factory Island. After a while, my father went in a bush with a gun, and he shot a muskrat. She became acquainted with the children who lived there and started telling them stories. And I think once trust was built, she began to collect their stories first through recordings and then through these illustrations that make up the bulk of this film. This film is, of course, her first film, but her engagement with children and her commitment to telling first-person narratives and letting people speak for themselves through the medium of documentary filmmaking was something that then carried on through over five decades of film practice.

Dr. President Kid Jr. is an installation by a Brooklyn based artist named Brian Belott who has been obsessed with the work of Rhoda Kellogg, a child psychologist who amassed a collection of over three million drawings by children and used the drawings themselves as a kind of material for her study of early graphic childhood expression. And so these are drawings that come from her archive directly, which we've loaned through the help of Brian Belott, who has become a kind of champion of the collection and of Rhoda's work. And this kind of idea that children have an innate ability to draw, and that actually the role of adults is just to get out of the way as much as possible. There are finger paintings by four-year-olds from the 1950s and these are drawings by a two-year-old child over the course of one year and they're paired with drawings and paintings by Brian that are based off of works in the same collection, but that he copies and also calls them failures or forgeries as a way to acknowledge that they'll never live up to their original but that they're also taken specifically from a direct reference.

Oscar Murillo is known primarily as a painter, but he's had a project called *Frequencies* that he started over ten years ago, where he will go into schools and he will cover the desks in the school with canvas and allow children to draw on it completely freely for the course of the school year. So you'll have drawings by many students on one desk, and at the end of the year he collects the canvases and sends them back to his studio in the U.K. We have this book that came out in 2015, which sort of starts to document the first schools and the students that were involved in the project. It's really staggering that he's collected, you know tens of thousands of canvases from over 40 countries around the world, but that wasn't something that we could easily represent in this exhibition. So we decided that this exhibition instead would be an opportunity to formally bring the project to Canada and to have Canadian students be part of this very impressive project.

In choosing these artists and putting the show together, I think what was really important was that we approached the space in such a way that would allow the kind of freedom and lack of inhibition that is so interesting to these artists, but not to kind of replicate the preconceived ideas that people have about child art and to sort of flip this idea of children's art as something that you throw away at the end of the school year into something that actually can tell you something very profound about the world, and can tell us something that that we



don't know. It can show us things that we actually lose when we become adults. It's evidence of our own origin story.