

Sun Moon Stars is the first institutional solo exhibition in Canada by Berlin-based Canadian artist Rochelle Goldberg.

Rochelle Goldberg would like to acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

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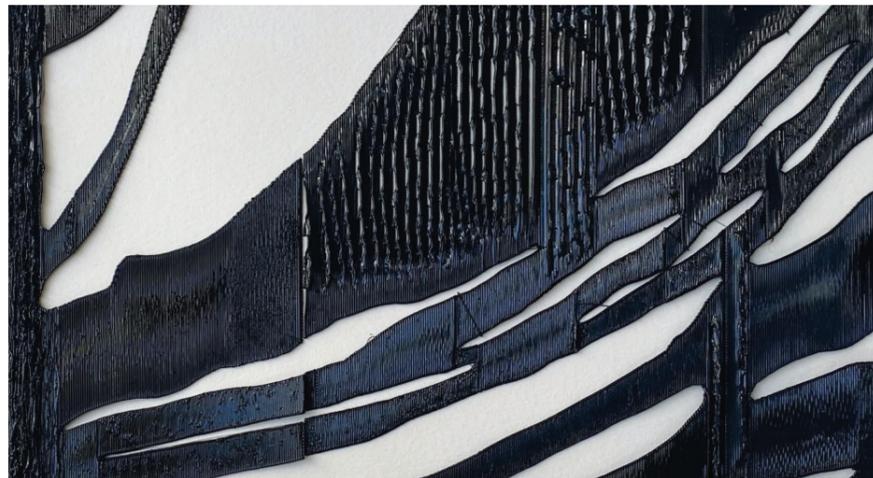
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SPACE: Sukaina Kubba | *Jealousy: Now the Shadow*
9 September 2023 – 12 January 2024

Mercer Union's SPACE billboard commission has invited artist Sukaina Kubba for its 2023–24 season for a yearlong series titled, *Jealousy*. Working with materials such as photo emulsion, plastic filament, and various sheer fabrics, *Jealousy* looks to the history of Mercer Union's building as a cinema to present three sculptural works as adverts for a fictional premiere: a new film adaptation of Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1957 novel *La Jalousie*. Read the artist's note on the first edition: *Now the Shadow* (2023), along with an accompanying text written by Natascha Nanji at mercerunion.org

Sukaina Kubba is an Iraqi-born Toronto-based artist who explores narratives of cultural and material assimilation and appropriation. Kubba's work has been included in recent exhibitions at the plumb, Toronto (2023); The Next Contemporary, Toronto (2023); Art Gallery of Ontario (2019); Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (2017); Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2016); and Glasgow International (2016, 2014). Recent residencies include International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York; and La Wayaka Current, Atacama Desert, Chile. Kubba is a sessional lecturer in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, and previously served as curator and lecturer at Glasgow School of Art (2013–2018).

SPACE invites one artist to produce a yearlong series of images for a public-facing billboard located on the east façade of Mercer Union.

Image: detail from Sukaina Kubba, *Jealousy: Now the Shadow*, 2023. Courtesy the artist. Commissioned by Mercer Union, Toronto. Photo: Omar Kaltrachian

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BIOGRAPHIES

Rochelle Goldberg works across sculpture and installation to produce complex ecologies and narrative conditions. Her works destabilize the boundaries between entities and objects, elaborating the states of emergence and decay at the site of encounter.

In 2021, Mercer Union invited Rochelle to develop a site-specific installation for her first institutional solo exhibition in Canada. The artist's commissioned body of work undertakes novel material explorations, combining historical wax-working, organic matter, and metal casting toward evocations of extraction, contamination, and instability. At Mercer Union, these hybrid forms develop new grammars and symbolic motifs of the ecological body in a sprawling installation titled, *Sun Moon Stars*.

Mercer Union's collaboration with Rochelle emerges from our long-held commitment to commissioning new work, and creating milestone opportunities for artists to bring their visions to fruition in Toronto. Through our commissioning platform *Artist First*, we invest in the lifecycle of a project from conception to realization, cultivating discovery, risk-taking, and artistic development through long-term support and dialogue. To learn more, visit mercerunion.org/support



Rochelle Goldberg is a Berlin-based Canadian artist. Recent exhibitions include Kunsthalle Lingen, Germany (2022); Gallerie delle Prigioni, Treviso, Italy (2022); Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California (2021); Centre international d'art et du paysage de Vassivière, Beaumont-du-Lac, France (2021); Oakville Galleries, Canada (2019); and The Power Station, Dallas (2019). She was Artist in Residence at The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (2018); and was selected to present for the inaugural Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center, New York (2019). She holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College, New York.

Image: Detail from Rochelle Goldberg, *Intralocutor: can you trigger the switch?*, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: SITE Photography.



Rochelle Goldberg:
Sun Moon Stars

9 September – 11 November 2023

Enter Mary

by Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Collective feeling is habitual and structural. We might even say that it acts like a swarm, buzzing furiously through the atmosphere before descending upon a gallery of favoured archetypes to deify or ravage, turn into saints or demons, elect as scapegoats or sacrificial lambs. Religion is one way to organise this swarm of affect; art, regardless, submits as material.

At the centre of Christian iconography, of course, is Jesus; singular, as man also is. Desire for Christ happens in one fell swoop, the blink of an eye, a stir too quick for consciousness. But the swarm is volatile and multifarious, it cannot rest there long, it moves on, in search of more subjects, demanding further sacrifice. Enter Mary, multiplied into several homologous figures: wife, whore, outcast, mother of Jesus, mother, even, to herself. Here, there is the mystery of childbirth, lust and its punishment, devotion, self-sacrifice—the whole pantheon of emotion. Through Mary, the allure of female sexuality plays out at glacial pace and across wide expanses; projected onto vast landscapes: woman as forest, sea, desert.

Looking at Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (c. 1501-19), Camille Paglia remarks that the figures—almost identical—are like “photographic superimpositions, two images seen simultaneously, eerie and hallucinatory... These divine twin sisters are one archaic personality that has parthenogenetically cloned itself. Life is an endless series of self-replicating females,” and the theme of Leonardo's painting: “the male eye and psyche flooded with female power.”¹ Paglia names this an instance of “allegorical repletion,” a type of oxymoron because allegory—a palimpsest, one text read through another—is always already in excess. Simply, the image of woman cannot be depleted. Woman is always plural and she resurrects not by miracle but by popular demand, hives droning impatiently in the sky.

In *Sun Moon Stars*, Rochelle Goldberg presents an installation of silver baguettes and tins of cat food connected by metal wires. It is electric. Its function is that of a lightning rod—it attracts the swarm. We might say that it is alive because it is hosting an invasion. We might say that Goldberg sets out to redirect the swarm: like a conductor with a baton, the sculptor wields her materials. What else might it land on? What other structures can we create for it? Goldberg has chosen aluminium,



bronze, bread, bulbs of celeriac; she has chosen Mary of Egypt as a body that hosts its own “allegorical repletion.”

Mary of Egypt was the bombshell whose path was rerouted into the desert. Upon encountering an icon of her virgin namesake in Jerusalem this nymphomaniac Mary was struck by remorse and decided to repent. Through living ascetically for forty-seven years, she transcended out of her sex, even out of humanity—when she died, her body did not decay, and with that she achieved a special recalcitrance, perhaps even a kind of singularity. As was common in the hagiography of the time, Donatello's *Penitent Magdalene* (c. 1440) is a composite of several Mary's, though, unusually, he went closest in spirit to Mary of Egypt. His haunting and intricate wood sculpture established a visual language of deprivation and survival that has become archetypal for this Mary: she appears feral, more repulsive than Jesus even at his most torn and bloody. Her entity is

compressed against his subjectivity, the essence of her form dispersed. It is a sculpture to which Goldberg returns again and again. Donatello's Mary has become one with the landscape. Like the desert, she is infertile. And still, in her transcendence, how her body floats and remains, we witness her small rebellion.

In the twentieth century, the swarm has made repeated visitations on the blond bombshell, endlessly self-replicating versions of Mary, sexed-up, in Egypt. But rather than ejecting her to a metaphorical desert as in the tradition of Catholic sainthood, secular modernity would stake Mary on a bonfire of camera flashes, unredeemed. Take Jean Harlow, clothes stitched directly onto her body, dead at 26; Marilyn Monroe, in Joyce Carol Oates' mammoth novel, haunted by childlessness, denied reproduction, doomed to replication; Princess Diana, the troubled mother-saint, killed by a swarm of paparazzi, who shared her funeral song with Norma Jean; and, most recently, Britney Spears, her teenage image frozen in time, her childrearing body only narrowly escaped. Madonna—starting with her name—attracted the swarm wilfully, and in doing so forged a witch-like iconicity that circumvented her own sacrifice. She dressed up as Marilyn, she kissed Britney. She managed, at certain high-pitched moments, to control it. The price, perhaps, is her current ostracisation into monstrosity. The archetypes chosen by the swarm never survive unscathed. All these bombshells committed the crime of *wanting*—they were not prepared, like Mary in the desert, to self-eradicate. They remained human.

In Goldberg's installation we find two bronze pin-ups; Marilyn playing Mary, or Mary playing herself. They are fragmented and hollow, as if returned from the bottom of the sea, like figureheads, survived by apotropaic magic, they float. They are also, it would seem, pregnant, and with that the story has contorted, twisted off its own path. In any story, there is a line that is crossed. In Mary's it was the border out of Egypt, out of Jerusalem, into the desert. But Goldberg's exhibition is made up, not of narrative, but its flotsam; the parts of it, like Mary's body, that will not sink. This repudiation of narrative is also an erasure of self, or the creation of a floating, multiple “I.” Here, almost everything has gone through a transformation, been melted and recast, reduced: aluminium, bronze, bread. There is no stable sort of being to be found—there is no subject to forgive. This is the Mary who is *not*—might she also be, for that reason, the Mary who survives? Louise Glück writes:

Machine of the family: dark fur, forests of the mothers body.
*Machine of the mother: white city inside her.*²

Maybe Goldberg has conjured the machine room of iconicity; a place in which the constituent parts of the self and its image are atomised and refigured, made to catch the light. Bodies making parts of bodies, dissolving into allegorical infinity. It is a thesis on the materiality of being nothing, or an open structure for non-selfhood. Suspended from the wires are seven vanity lights framing this absence of self, and yet providing a scaffold for it. The allure of female sexuality demands wide expanses. “It takes a village,” they say, but what of a forest, a white city? Imagine the force, the furious buzz, of a swarm descending.

1. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, New York: Vintage, 1991, p. 156.
2. Louise Glück, “Mother and Child” in *The Seven Ages*, New York: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 8.



Kristian Vistrup Madsen is a writer based in Berlin. He is the author of *Doing Time: Essays on Using People* (Floating Opera Press, 2021), and has published his writing on art and culture with magazines such as *Artforum*, *Harpers*, *The White Review*, and *Frieze*. In 2021, he curated the exhibition *As I write, I am lying, I hope* at Art Hub Copenhagen which presented works by artists Tolia Astakhishvili, Rochelle Goldberg, and Vera Palme.

Image Above: Detail from Rochelle Goldberg, *Bread Garden*, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery. Photo: Stephen Faught.

Image Left: Rochelle Goldberg, *Intralocutor: someone will always pay*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: Roman Mensing

Cover Image: Rochelle Goldberg, *Gift from Daphne Silber*, Berlin, 2023. Courtesy the artist.