



How to Be 57

LUCIE CHAN



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EXHIBITION

How to Be 57

ARTIST

Lucie Chan

RESIDENCY

3-28 August, 2022

OPEN STUDIO

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EXHIBITION

3 September-1 October, 2022

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Sue Shon

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OXYGEN ART CENTRE

Based in Nelson BC, Oxygen Art Centre is a rural artist-run centre that provides space and programming for artists and the public to engage in the creation, study, exhibition, and performance of contemporary art. Founded in 2002, Oxygen is an integral and long-standing cultural hub for artists of all disciplines. Oxygen's annual programming includes an Exhibition & Residency program and Education program, as well as events, presentations, readings, and workshops.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS + GRATITUDE

Oxygen Art Centre acknowledges with gratitude that we are located on the tum xula7xw/ traditional territory of the sn̓ɬay̓ckstx/the Sinixt People. As uninvited guests we honour their ongoing presence on this land. We recognize that the Sinixt Arrow Lakes, Sylix, and Yaqan Nukij Lower Kootenay Band peoples are also connected with this land, as are Métis and many diverse Indigenous persons.

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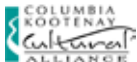
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CREDIT UNION >>> Logically. Locally.



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Drawing Together: How, To Be, 57

How

Drawing has been understood as an exceptional art form that provides unmediated access to the mind of the artist; presumably, drawing records how the artist's inner eye transfers to the acts of the hand. This definition of drawing and art in general affirms and reproduces the idea of art described from the position of human subject, a position formulated and universalized by "enlightened" aesthetics following Kant and other European philosophers writing in their contexts of transatlantic African slave trade, settler and territorial colonialisms in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and trade in the East Indies and China.¹ From the position of human subject, "art" has been conceptualized as object within terms of "who" and "why" (artist subjectivity), "when" (dates and timelines according to the narrative of Art History), "where" (studios, galleries, markets in respect to borders and citizenships), and "what" (media and materials according to the institutions of art).

If the prevailing aesthetic order has privileged the w's, *How to Be 57* attends to the aesthetics of the *how*. Denise Ferreira da Silva considers the "how" as a transformative sensibility that confronts the prevailing aesthetic order.² Black women do, that is, create, through the material conditions staged in

1 I develop a fuller account of these aesthetic contexts as condition of thinkability for the Western conceptualization of the human subject in "Runaway Slave Portraiture, Aesthetic Culture, and the Emergence of Racial Sense," *Media-N: The Journal of the New Media Caucus* 18.1 (Spring 2022): 6-30.

2 Denise Ferreira da Silva, "How," *e-Flux Journal* #105 (December 2019).

this order. Black women's doings yield material that da Silva describes as "at once a feat, a deed, a burden, and artifact."³ The prevailing aesthetic culture might recognize such doings as art. Doings elide the subject (artist) and object (art) feedback loop and describe instead the how of materials and matters. Handmade inks, pigments, and tools, mass-produced and high-quality papers, and donated and discarded clothing and textiles materialize Lucie Chan's doings in, of, and with the past and present configurations of dislocation, exile, and genocide. *How to Be 57* is doing socialities already made and is also doing socialities unimagined and infinitely possible.

To Be

Characteristic of Chan's doings are the short lines drawn with pen, paintbrush, and other tools. Some lines are hard and heavy, some are calligraphic and swift, and some are rubbed on. Lines build up on surface. Lines dissolve into stains. They appear in layers, clusters, scatterings, and waves. Lines cross and accumulate on crinkled surfaces into tight, heavy weaves. Lines direct the eye towards and away from and around images and texts. Lines overlay and ground images and words about bodies that are living, dead, and living in death. Lines emerge around figures and faces as streams and pools of sweat, hair, blood, and tears that merge into textures and abstract patterns on the page.

The lines that compose *How to Be 57* are not just deposits of ink and pigment onto surface. They draw, or pull together, ways *to be* in the infinitive: ways that were, have been, are, and could be. The grammar of the infinitive points to Chan's occupation with a form of consciousness, of *being*, that arises in the global structuring of "Black immanent and imminent death."⁴ Drawing puts the precluded lives of Sean Bell, 23,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Christina Sharpe theorizes this consciousness as Black being in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.

Kimani Gray, 16, Amadou Diallo, 23, and Malcolm Ferguson, 23 *into being* with anti-colonial peoples movements in Burma, Yemen, North Dakota, Syria, Congo, Puerto Rico, and British Columbia. Drawing puts the mass migrations of Rohingya peoples from Burma *into being* with migrant justice movements such as No One Is Illegal in Canada. In drawing together seemingly disparate spaces and histories, *How to Be 57* allows us to see what was meant to be concealed: structures of statist, imperial, and majoritarian powers that differentiate, classify, and immobilize subjects. The drawings do not so much reveal or represent but instead draw in and pull together what was supposed to be isolable. The drawings constellate relations among the structures imposed on Black, Indigenous, and migrant peoples. More importantly, they draw new ways for peoples *to be* together because of and also beyond these structures. The drawings make radical kinship where there was supposed to be none.⁵

These doings, which we experience as artistic feats, are actually the artifacts of relationalities activated by Chan in the communities of her everyday life and in the communities she seeks upon her arrival to new places, such as Nelson, British Columbia for the Oxygen Art Centre artist residency. Chan's doings often begin with meeting and interviewing the people in her community; the conversations initiated there continue in the form of drawings that will appear in future doings.

5 See Balbir K. Singh's theory of radical kinship in "'No Pigs in Paradise': Speculative Materialism in the Spirit of Black Constellation," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 36 (2020).

On May 5, 2003, Alberta Spruill, 57, was at home getting ready to go to work when New York police broke down her door and threw a concussion grenade inside. After the grenade exploded, and after the police realized they were in the wrong place, Spruill went into cardiac arrest and died of a heart attack.

Twelve years after Spruill's death, Chan arrived in Pompelonne, France for an artist residency. In her new community, Chan met a woman immigrant, 57, whose home was raided by the police. After interrogation and a search, the police realized they were in the wrong place. This time the 57-year old woman stayed alive.

How to Be 57 engages with age as measurement of the time of Black being in a world structured for Black non-being. Chan's work provides an account of "black age": the whole of Black life stages and lifespans of Black people in the diaspora.⁶ For Chan, the drawing together of Black lives—named, with age—explores the life stages, lifespans, and timelines that cannot be represented in the prevailing aesthetic order. *How to Be 57*, then, is not only artifact but deed that refuses the anti-relational forces of that order and creates the aesthetics that can imagine past, present, and future times of radical kinship.

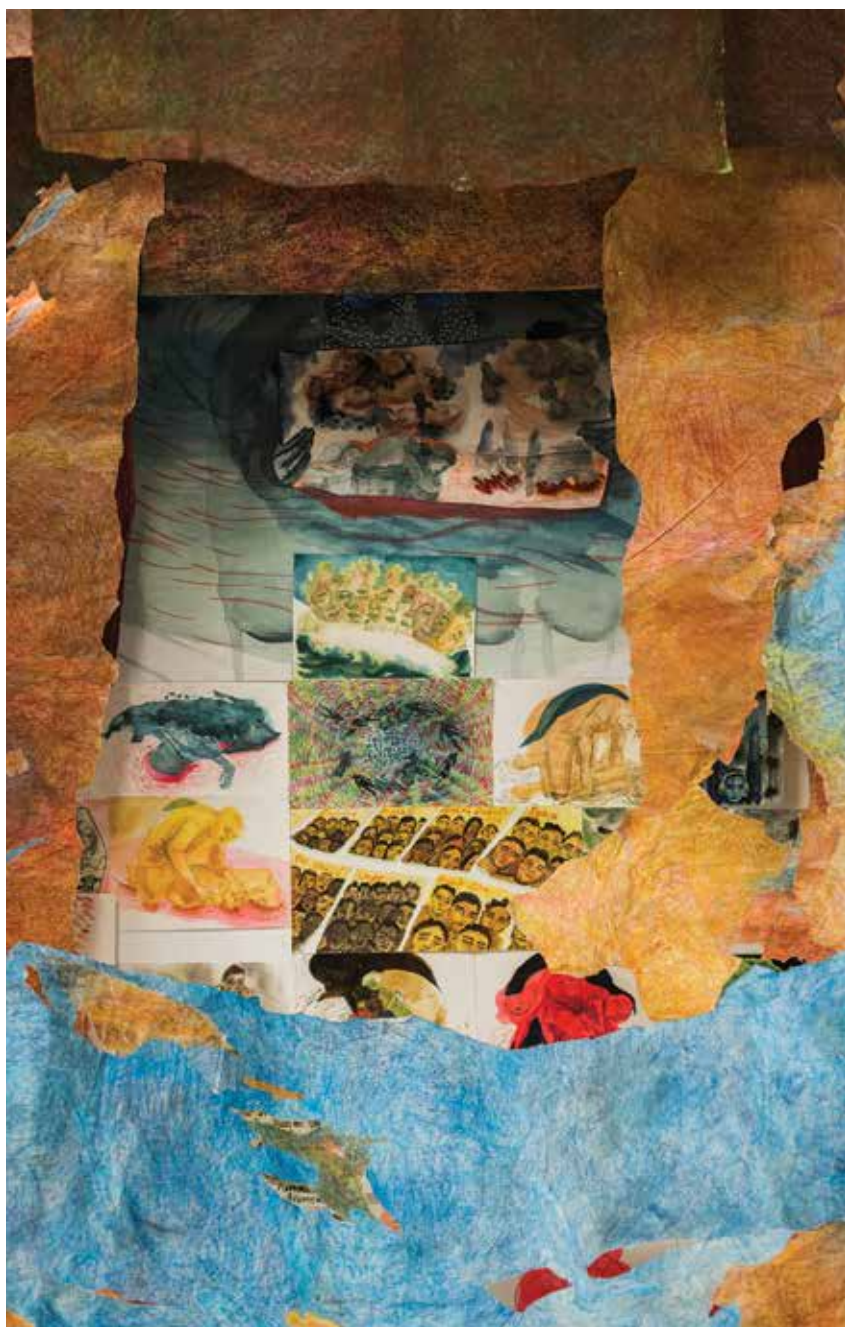
6 Habiba Ibrahim, *Black Age: Oceanic Lifespans and the Time of Black Life* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2021).



EXHIBITION PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS NOWACZYNSKI









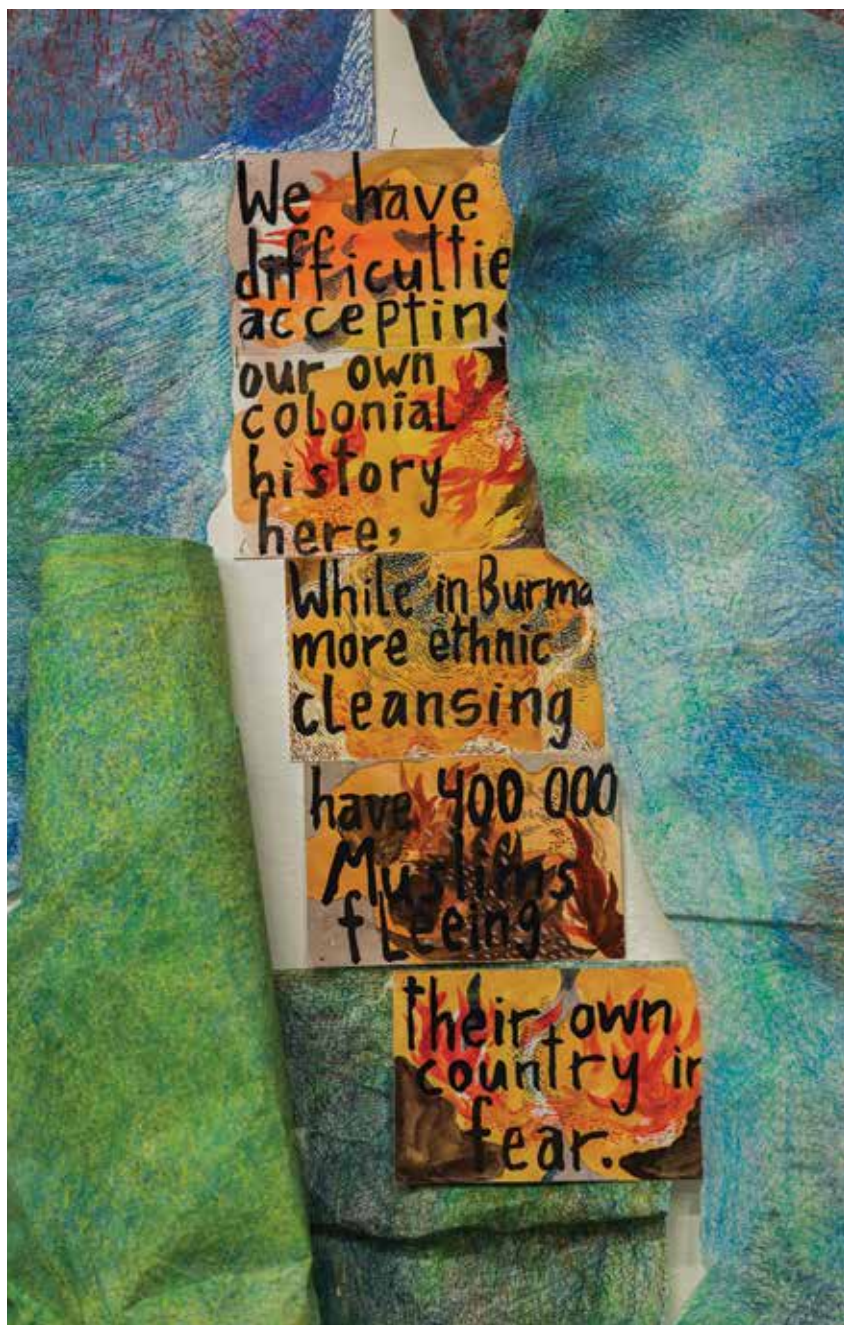




They know how to welcome you with open arms,
but they do not know how to close them." This
is something that E tells me and has seemed
to stay with me ever since. I am reminded
of it so often, I think it could probably be
universal, since I use that word.

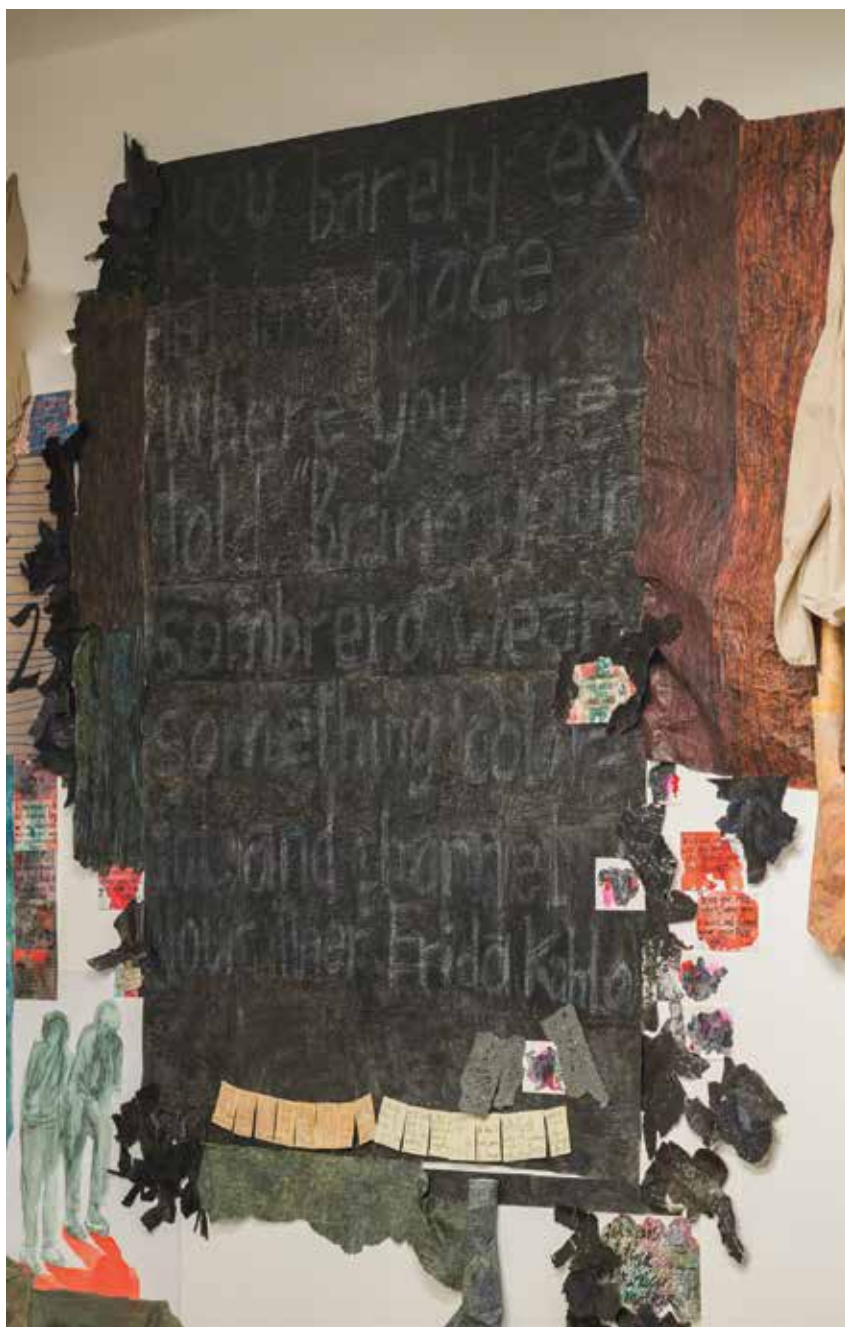
Maybe she does but I doubt that E knows
how much she is changing my life in the sixty
days we spend together over the last two
years. There are such subtle things that
resonate long after she has left the
room. I often stand still with a feeling

of immense gratefulness for her efforts to be
able to communicate profound things in a language which
is her own. Those feelings often bracketed with melancholia know-
ing that similar moments are difficult to find, replace, or just hold
onto.
What is it like to be this person and does she know the
effect she has on others? How observations which essentially are about
life, may not seem profound or complex and are actually so
difficult to apply. Sometimes you need to change your own position
and to something completely different; she announces she
to have never cooked the good meal twice, which is difficult
considering she is 38 and is always cooking.

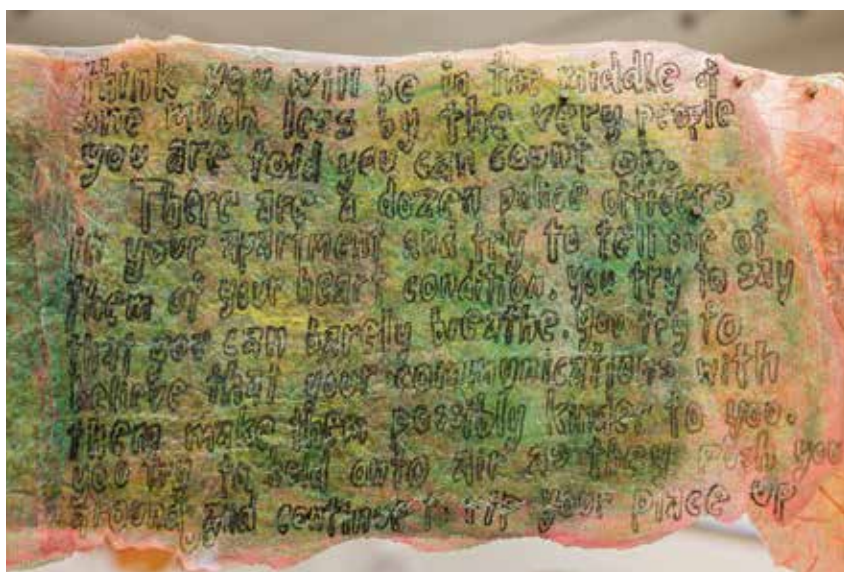
























ARTIST STATEMENT

My art practice is based on multi-layered drawing installations that may include text, audio, sculpture, video, animations, and content that often stems from dialogues with voluntary participants to discover potentially connected cross-cultural narratives between seemingly disparate lives.

For several years, my work continues to include ideas within personal stories through bridging of materials which result in questions. One of my interest lies in accumulating content that are seemingly unrelatable in tandem with the misunderstandings which often take place between people from different positionalities. I often converse with willing participants because of my curiosity around discoveries which will ideally re-shape things which expose the shared experiences around culture and identity.

Another focus is to use visual nonlinear narratives while raising questions around indirect and complex portraits on individuals. My aim is to provide a space for our contemplation on narratives which would not necessarily come together with ease and for the weight of feeling like a human spectacle, to find connections. My aim is to ask questions which do not necessarily alienate viewers but provide stepping some groundwork for those who wish to help complete the work through their embodied experiences and furthermore realize our shared experiences.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Lucie Chan (b. Guyana) teaches at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. She holds a BFA with distinction from the Alberta College of Art and Design and a MFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University with a specialization in drawing. She has shown nationally in various group and solo exhibitions and has undertaken artist residencies at ARTerra in Lobão da Beira, Portugal; the Ross Creek Centre for the Arts in Canning, Nova Scotia; Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff, Alberta; Museum London in London, Ontario; the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia; and the Foreman Art Gallery in Sherbrooke, Quebec. In addition to receiving numerous provincial and national grants, including the Canada Council for the Arts, she has been long-listed twice for the Sobey Art Award (2005, 2010) and was a recipient of the VIVA Award from the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation (2020).





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