

Outside the Palace of Me



Shary Boyle

“A theatre is the most important sort of house in the world, because that’s where people are shown what they could be if they wanted, and what they’d like to be if they dared to and what they really are.”

TOVE JANSSON,
MOOMINSUMMER MADNESS, 1954

Introduction

Outside the Palace of Me explores the forces that create our inner and outer selves, both individual and collective. The exhibition unfolds across a series of scenes, delving into the myriad influences that help shape us. Critically interrogating colonialism, misogyny, racism, and other societal pressures, the works also underscore beauty, longing, a commitment to hope, and the human capacity for empathy.

Adopting the structures of theatre, the Palace functions as a metaphor for the construction and presentation of self. Entering by a darkened passage, you encounter a demi-lune glass and soon realize it is a two-way mirror. This is the first of many reversals: observed and observer trading roles in a volley of spectatorship. Emerging onto a stage, you become the performer, flanked by a chorus of exquisitely rendered figures with allusions and metaphor in full play.

Downstage, a coin-operated dancer holds the spotlight in a reverie of glamour. Offstage, you encounter figures from the miniature to the monumental, who give form to experiences forged by gendering, family dynamics, racial awareness, class systems, chosen alliances, and collective resistance. Wall painting and works on paper amplify these themes and expand a supporting cast of complicated narrators.

Completing the performance, you find yourself on the other side of the looking glass, with an invitation to peer closely into, and through, someone else’s eyes. Reflective surfaces conceal and reveal at once, evoking the gap between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

Each object in the exhibition draws from the artist’s lived experience, imagination, and carefully researched historical imagery. Thorough consideration of these sources is offered in the publication, programming, and media accompanying the exhibition.

Outside the Palace of Me asks viewers to hold complex, nuanced, and sometimes paradoxical understandings of human nature. Visionary, strange, and insightful as a dream, Shary Boyle’s art helps us witness aspects of ourselves we may not have realized are visible.

I The Dressing Room

Our mirrored gaze implicates us as subject, object, viewer, and viewed. The backstage is a space of private invention, where we create our public selves and prepare to be seen.



Pupils, 2019
Porcelain,
stoneware



Lens, 2020
Stoneware,
duo-view
mirror



Focus, 2020
Terracotta,
porcelain,
glazes



*Cephalophoric
Saint*, 2018
Colour lithograph
with opalescent
pigment

II The Stage

We are not just observers in society, we participate. Ten ceramic sculptures reference elite and popular ceramics to evoke the social factors that shape us: the lottery of cultural affiliation, global environmental crisis, gender non-conformity, rituals of attraction, and pleasure-seeking excess.

STAGE LEFT



Scarborough,
2020
Terracotta,
porcelain, lustre,
glazes, wood,
bronze,
Scarborough
Bicentennial silver
coin



*Buy My Image
(John Taylor/
Mary Anne
Talbot)*, 2019
Stoneware,
terracotta,
porcelain,
underglaze, lustre



The Sybarites,
2020
Porcelain, glazes,
lustre



The Sculptor,
2019
Terracotta,
porcelain,
china paint



Peacock Spider,
2020
Stoneware,
porcelain, glazes,
lustre, acrylic nails

STAGE RIGHT



The Potter II,
2019
Terracotta,
porcelain,
underglaze, china
paint, lustre,
brass rods



The Painter, 2019
Porcelain,
underglaze, china
paint, lustre,
enamel, mirror



The Warming,
2020
Terracotta,
stoneware, bronze



Bitumen, 2018
Stoneware, gold
lustre, brass rod



Oasis, 2019
Porcelain,
underglaze, china
paint, lustre

III

The Star

Fame, status, and our hunger for validation drive cultures of excess. Tweeted TikTok selfie influencers. Fate, addiction, glamour, celebrity, greed, the Fool. We are all at the centre of the universe.



Centering, 2021
Coin-operated pottery wheel, electronics, wood, textiles,
foot pedal
100% of coin machine proceeds go to Treaty Four's The
Comeback Society (thecomebacksociety.com)

IV

Puppet Show at the Wax Museum

A backstage tech rehearses various feminine archetypes: Judy (a dressmaker's dummy or Punch's long-suffering wife?), a freewheeling activist of the Movement, a witch . . . all while gently animating the maternal embodiment of anxiety. The colonial nuclear family loves yet distorts through patriarchy, misogyny, and defensive othering. Folk theatrics from the wax museum to amusement park, puppetry, vaudeville, and Saturday morning cartoons remind us of the reoccurring parts we play, both voluntarily and not.



Ventriloquist, 2017
Ink on paper



Misogyny + Misanthropy, 2018
Ink and gouache on paper



Punch, 2019
Ink, gouache, fineliner, and acrylic on paper



Me And The Dead Matter, 2018
Ink and gouache on paper



Judy, 2021
Wax, electronics, ceramics, and mixed media



Drag Show, 2019
Ink, gouache, and acrylic on paper



The Collaboration, 2019
Ink, gouache, and acrylic on paper



Baptiste Kills His Father, 2018
Ink and gouache on paper

Praise to the long human tradition of puppetry! The drawing *Punch* and hand-puppet *Judy* pay homage to the great Bill Baird's version of the classic couple. The little boy in *Ventriloquist* was inspired by Albercht Roser's beloved characters, while *Misogyny + Misanthropy* makes Sergei Obrastov's minimalist finger-puppets the central characters of a different set of preoccupations. Master puppeteer Margareta Niculescu directed the 1964 piece "I and Dead Matter," featuring the rope-woman puppet by Ella Conovici.

V

The March/Parade

Millions of people have taken to the streets to demand a more just world. Acts of protest are also celebrations of humanity and the hopeful possibility of change. Community happens when people act collectively to help the vulnerable and include the stranger. One person's parade is another's riot.



The Procession, 2021
Stoneware, acrylic, gold leaf, bronze

VI

Orchestra

Take a seat and choose a song from the artist's playlist assembled to score the exhibition. Consider how music changes everything. The artist pays her respects to all the lyricists and musicians who make our pain bearable, our lives euphoric, and illuminate our innermost thoughts through the glory of song.

VII Whiteness

The inheritance of Whiteness includes outsized privilege and legacies of violence. It presumes innocence while masking avarice. Guilt, denial, and confusion cause some White people to grow, some to grow angry, some to stay mute. Like body dysmorphia, the invented racial category of White has stretched meaning beyond sense, exaggerating power and disproportionately assigning value.



White Elephant,
2021
Aluminum, foam,
textiles, porcelain,
motor



Settler, 2019
Ink, gouache,
and acrylic
on paper



*Lone
Gunman*, 2019
Ink, gouache, and
acrylic on paper

VIII Fin

Returning to the *Dressing Room*, we find ourselves face to face to face to face, observer and observed. Lean in. See the world through another's eyes. Three shades of clay configure our collective mythologies, inviting us to imagine the private narratives of unique realms.



Pupils, 2019
Porcelain,
stoneware



Lens, 2020
Stoneware,
duo-view
mirror



Focus, 2020
Terracotta,
porcelain, glazes

About the Artist

Shary Boyle (b. 1972) is from the Scarborough area of Toronto. The recipient of a 2021 Honourary Doctorate of Fine Arts from her alma mater, Boyle graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1994, and soon developed a studio practice centred on figurative drawing, painting, and live performance. Creating deeply imaginative, idiosyncratic, and unsettling worlds, Boyle was an early innovator of live-drawing techniques using overhead projectors referencing shadow puppetry and cell animation. Boyle often collaborated with musicians and artists of other disciplines for these performances, activating her practice with a characteristically inclusive spirit.

Boyle began making sculpture in the late 1990s, modelling small polymer clay figures. Seemingly naïve and otherworldly, these flesh-like works incorporated fantastical imagery and often had an explicitly sexual aspect. She began working with ceramics in 2002, following a workshop on cast porcelain figurines and lace draping, approaches typically associated with elderly hobbyists. Boyle began researching the European history of the porcelain figurine, critically appraising its Enlightenment roots. The resulting works, exhibited at Toronto's The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in 2006, balanced highly refined and seductive surfaces with startling, sometimes disturbing imagery: a noblewoman holding her own bloody head in her hands, a lady consumed by delicate blossoms, a reclining damsel with an arching ouroboros of heads terminating between her legs.

Shary Boyle continues to work in sculpture, installation, drawing, and performance. Her multidisciplinary artworks were the subject of a major touring exhibition, *Shary Boyle: Flesh and Blood* in 2010–2011. She represented Canada at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 with *Music for Silence* and co-curated the collaborative touring project *Earthlings* in 2017. Boyle has performed and exhibited extensively, from Los Angeles, New York, Paris, and Icheon, South Korea, to remote communities such as Dawson City, Yukon Territory, and Inuvik, Northwest Territories. Her work is widely represented in private and institutional collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the Gardiner Museum.

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White Elephant is commissioned by Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area (CAFKA), 2021

*“Outside the palace of me” is a lyric fragment from UK musician and writer Kae Tempest’s 2016 song “Europe is Lost”

Credits

The Potter II courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. Purchase, Suzanne Caouette Bequest, in tribute to Michelle Prévost, 2020.42

Bitumen courtesy of Rosamond Ivey

Centering textile collaboration with Grant Heaps

White Elephant courtesy of the artist and the Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area (CAFKA)

Cephalophoric Saint collaborating printer: Jill Graham. Collection of E. Grace and S. Vella

Scarborough poison ivy and lily of the valley wood base hand-carved by Yorgo Liapis. Courtesy of Private Collection, Mississauga

Peacock Spider acrylic nails created by Justin Cappelletti at Pinky’s

The Warming courtesy of McMichael Canadian Art Collection

The Sybarites courtesy of Claridge Collection

The Collaboration courtesy of Pascal Desjardin & Roxanne Arseneault Collection

Peacock Spider courtesy Christine and Andrew W. Dunn

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Pupils, Focus, Lens Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Purchase, with funds from the Canada Council for the Arts and The Sculpture Fund, 2022 [2023/22,23,24]

Settler courtesy of Michelle Koerner and Kevin Doyle

The Sculptor courtesy Raphael Yu Collection

Misogyny + Misanthropy and *Lone Gunman* Collection of Elisabeth Preston and Peter Strickland

The Painter courtesy Ivanhoé Cambridge Collection

Oasis courtesy of Michel L’Heureux

Ventriloquist courtesy Private Italian collection

Artworks courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown Gallery unless otherwise indicated.

Studio Credits

A&D Woodturning – baluster, *Centering*

Alexx Boisjoli – ceramic casting, *White Elephant*

Caitlin Mullan – scenic painting

Ali Columbus – synthetic hair

styling, *Centering*

James Cooper – project studio

Heather Goodchild – trousers, *White Elephant*

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Colin Harry – mechatronic design, programming

Steven Lambke – everything

Yorgo Liapis – carpentry

Rex Lingwood – carpentry,

White Elephant

Alexa MacKenzie – sculpture and costume assistance

Andrea MacKenzie – costume

assistance, *White Elephant*

McWood Studios – lead carpentry, stage, and wings

Alexander Mergold – marionette

assistance, *Judy*

Nellie Milroy – ceramic assistance

Mirvish Family – Royal

Alexander Theatre chair loan

Nordic Artists’ Centre Dale –

research, space, and time

Evan Penny – silicone casting,

Judy

Rodrigues Art Steel Works – presentation welding

Roy Small – puppetry assistance,

Judy

Sointula Art Shed – research, space, and time

Dallas Wagner – synthetic hair

styling, *White Elephant*

John Wilcox, Vitreous Glassworks –

diamond cutting

Juliann Wilding – sweater,

White Elephant

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Michelle Koerner

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