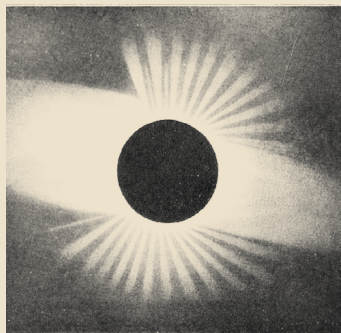
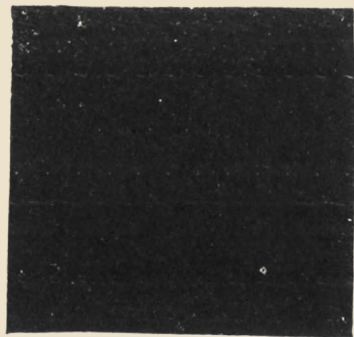


PHILIP LEONARD OCAMPO . ANDREW HARDING . YAN WEN CHANG

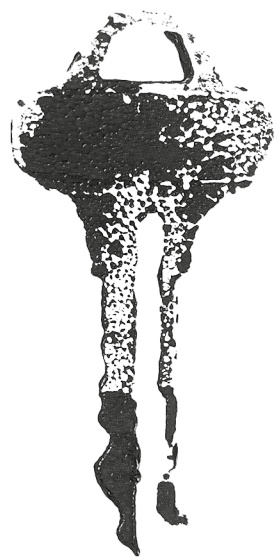
BRANDON FUJIMAGARI . JOSI SMITH

MILESTONE NERVE



MAY 17 - AUGUST 31, 2025

VISUAL ARTS CENTRE OF CLARINGTON

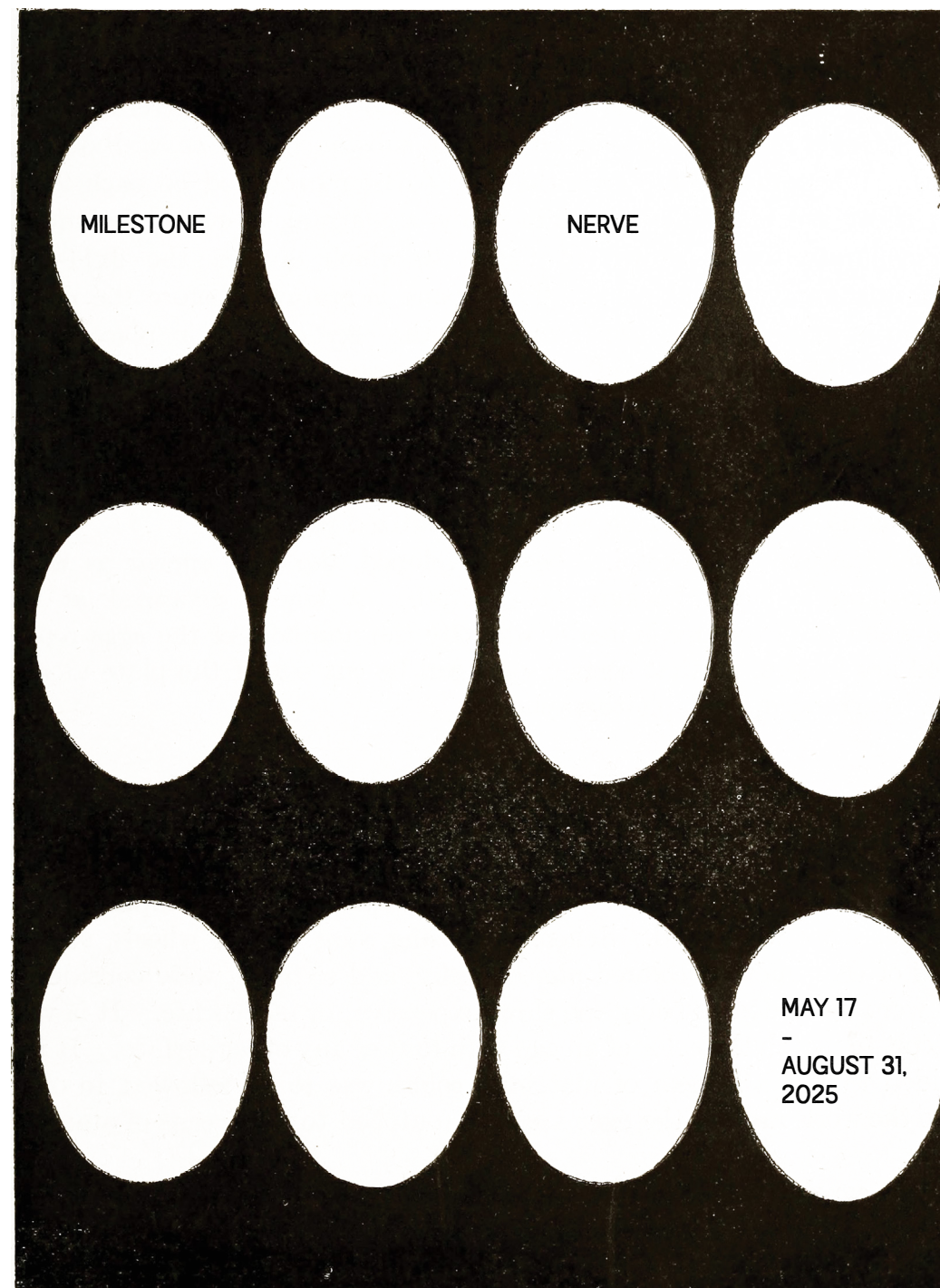
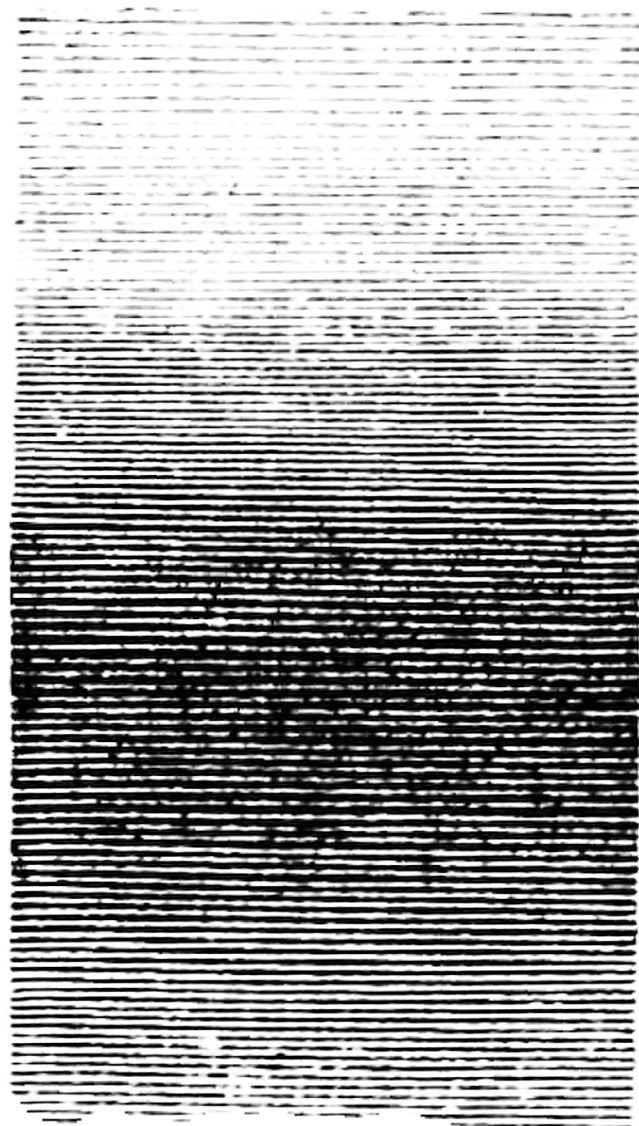


CURATORIAL TEAM

Philip Leonard Ocampo
Megan Kammerer
Samantha Lance

ARTISTS

Philip Leonard Ocampo
Andrew Harding
Yan Wen Chang
Brandon Fujimagari
Josi Smit





1.

FOREWORD

In 2018, I pursued an independent curatorial project at Xspace Cultural Centre; an artist-run centre based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The subsequent year was spent working within a collaborative, deeply personal framework that defined a core value of my work as an artist-curator. An idea forged introspectively then refined, broadened, and even challenged by way of artists whose work orbited similar interests. Each collaborator expanded the scope of ideas that were initially rooted in my own experiences. Their work, viewed through a different vantage point, cultivated through open dialogue. A lattice of creative efforts in pursuit of a common objective: A world we made the active choice in constructing together.

The Bald Eagle's Claw in 2019 included work by Brandon Fujimagari, Yan Wen Chang, Josi Smit and Andrew Harding. Separate remnants from a performance evening brought artists Dorica Manuel, Madelyne Beckles, and Marissa Sean Cruz into the fold as a fifth artist of sorts. Philippe Pamela Dungao and Ana Morningstar's publication contributions gave shape to explorations in words and phrases. The show sought to feign romantic optimism as a method for atomizing the "American Dream" as a globalized ethos.

The foreword from *The Bald Eagle's Claw* that preceded this foreword fixated on the eyes of my father, staring into the unknown distance with his dreams in hand. More than half a decade has now passed, and my own eyes have weathered amidst life's challenges as I knew it eventually would: I didn't know grief or loss as well as I do now. My teeth clench restlessly at the things I cannot control. Love guides my life in ways that continuously surprise me. I know my peers would agree, especially off of the heels of how this decade began.

While we could not invite every single collaborator back into the conversation for this iteration, *Milestone Nerve*, as a spiritual successor to *The Bald Eagle's Claw*, brings its exhibiting artists back together at a new space, in a new time. After a shift in my own practice towards making, I join the exhibiting roster. Curatorial sensibilities are now exercised as a unit of individuals: Curator Megan Kammerer, whose season of programming this project folds into, Samantha Lance, who provides curatorial oversight to the VAC now, and myself, as a nod to its context and history. Kayla Ward streamlines information and text into printed matter, just as I did with the first show.

This time around, we are focusing on cultural shifts in a widespread, globalized context instead of exploring the scope of a single nation's influence. All done with the newfound understanding of change that time inevitably endows. Just as the scope of this core idea widens, so must the task of continuing this conversation forward: There is much more work to be done. While reading through the materials of *Bald Eagle*, I am taken aback by the confidence the artists and I displayed in expressing a similar sentiment so long ago, without knowing anything about what the future would hold for us. Here and now, I want to wield my own parting words as firmly as I did before:

Milestone Nerve will return.

Philip Leonard Ocampo
2025

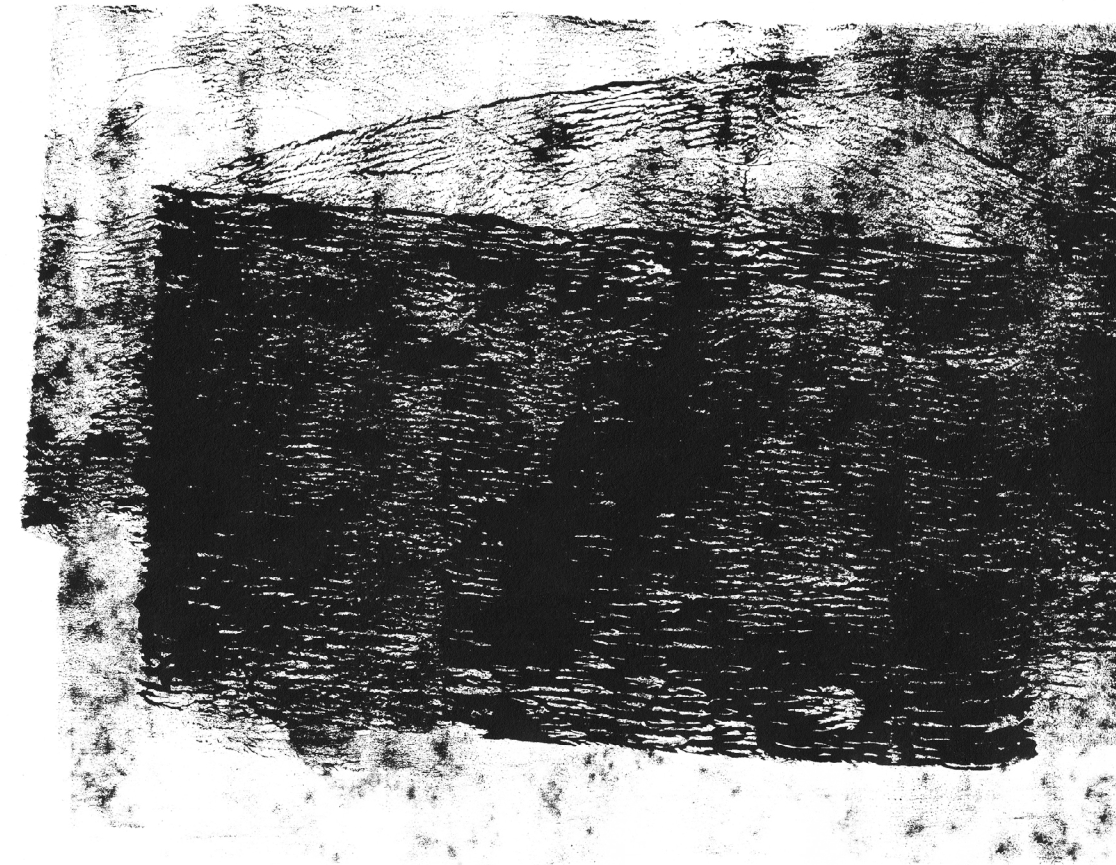
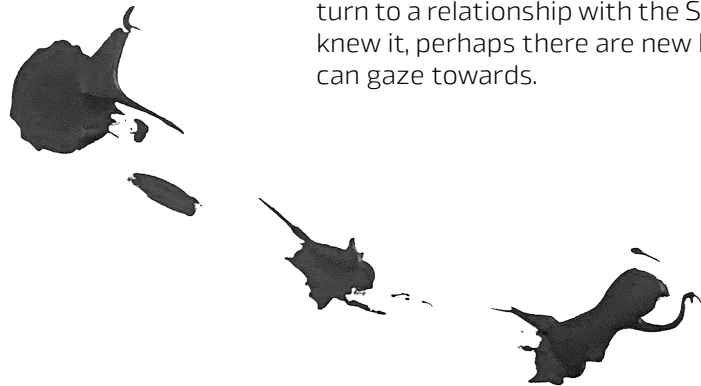
¹ Spectators gather to witness what would become Space Shuttle Columbia's launch into the unknowns of outer space before its tragic crash upon its return on February 1st, 2003. (CCO)

WALKING BAREFOOT ON THE SUN

Dear Reader,

Are we living in a dystopia or an alternate universe? When I see another news update pop up on social media or YouTube, it seems like there is a new “earthquake” erupting every day. How do we keep ourselves on solid ground when a step forward feels like walking on hot coals? As the world around us has been fuming, boiling, and simmering with tension, I think we, as spectators, have become pressurized to the point of exhaustion. I find myself running out of oxygen when I try to keep up with the sporadic pace of our current political climate. So, before we accidentally burn ourselves on the frying pan, let’s sit together and salvage what sanity we have left for today.

The artists in *Milestone Nerve* offer dramatic and subtle entry points for us to reflect on acts of defiance and radical forms of thinking in the face of the “American Dream” that continues to permeate our day-to-day realities. Some of the artists make a salute to sunsets and simpler times without keeping us daydreaming for too long. Other gestures in the exhibition capture a moment of standstill, as if the future is caught between a gasp or an applause. When our own sense of control seems to be hanging by a thread, the artists in *Milestone Nerve* call us back to encounter different lines of communication and resistance. Even though we cannot return to a relationship with the States as we once knew it, perhaps there are new horizons that we can gaze towards.



27 PORTALS

According to numerology, the number 27 is often associated with completion and may represent cycles of endings and new beginnings. From an astrological perspective, 27 marks an important time called a “Saturn Return,” in which the planet returns to the same position in the sky it held at the time of a person’s birth, typically occurring around the ages of 27 to 29.¹ Some see this sign as a milestone moment in which a person transitions from youth to adulthood. Philip is interested in approaching time holistically since he and the other artists were born around the same period. Although they were young when pivotal events like 9/11 and the 2008 recession happened, they all experienced the COVID-19 pandemic as adults. With a desire to revisit ideas with new insight, Philip sees *Milestone Nerve* as an opportunity to see how he and the artists have grown as people and in their artistic practices since their first exhibition together, *The Bald Eagle’s Claw*, in 2019. His reflections on how, “Keys open new doorways and new ways of thinking,” come to my mind when I saw his early rendition of his murals, *Key Dawn* (2025). With twenty-seven keys on each keychain, I wonder what psychological blockages Ocampo is inviting us to come to terms with. Do we lock ourselves away in a nostalgic utopia when we are unwilling to face the current political climate? Or has doom-scrolling made us a product of our circumstances? Despite this, Ocampo’s images of sunsets onto the keychain with an overlapping horizon line gives me encouragement that we, in fact, are the key and the portal to a future we envision.

¹ Lisa Stardust, “What Is a Saturn Return and Why Is It Such a Mental Struggle?” Wondermind, February 5, 2024, [https://www.wondermind.com/article/saturn-return/#:~:text=This%20happens%20when%20you’re%20between%2027%20to,trip%20around%20the%20sun%2C%20according%20to%20NASA\).](https://www.wondermind.com/article/saturn-return/#:~:text=This%20happens%20when%20you’re%20between%2027%20to,trip%20around%20the%20sun%2C%20according%20to%20NASA).)



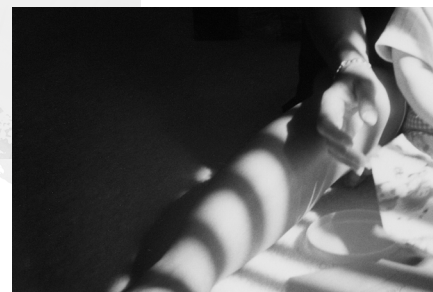
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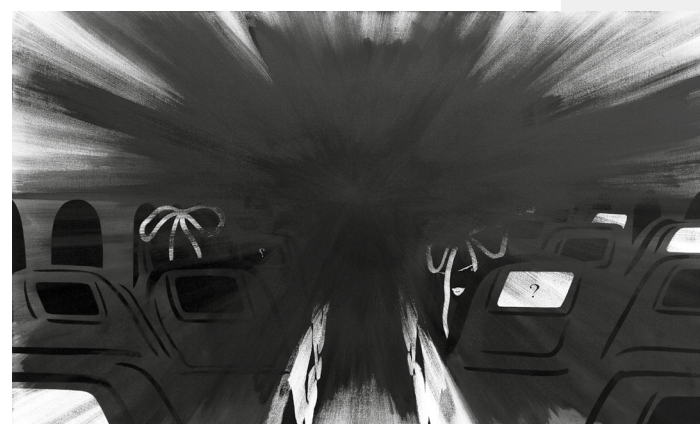
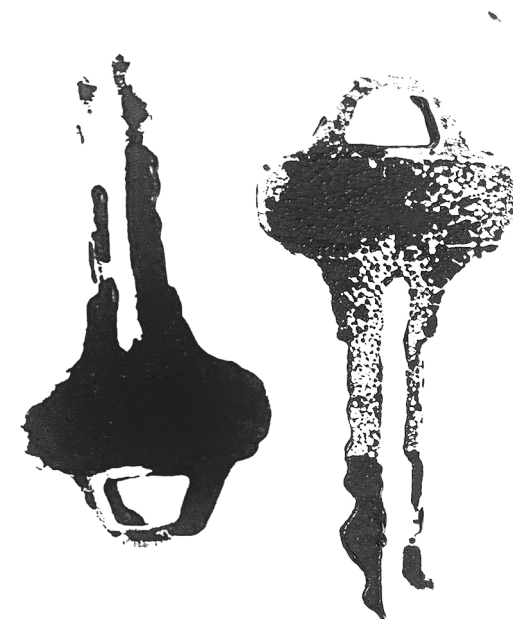
2.

1. Brandon Fujimagari, *CARCHARIAS*, 2025, clay, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

2. Andrew Harding, *Pieces of you*, 2025, aluminum, printed vinyl photographs, aircraft cable, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.



3.



4.

3. Josi Smit. Detail of *Rows and floes I may never know*. 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

4. Yan Wen Chang, *Gillian's Conspiracy (Portrait of Selves at Final Destination)*, 2025, oil and gouache on canvas, 49.5 x 82.75 inches, courtesy of Susan Hobbs Gallery. Photo documentation by Catherine Chan.

AIRING OUT THE MEMORIES

With every step towards tomorrow, a piece of your past begins to fade. As a nostalgic person who loves looking through old family pictures and organizing them into binders with clear sheet protectors, Josi Smit has an unexpected approach to preserving, cherishing, and letting go of sentimental memories. Her tender photographs printed onto soft fabrics dance in the wind and soak up the elements while hanging on her clothesline in the courtyard. Rather than letting her childhood photographs collect dust in storage, Josi chooses to keep some pictures out where she can look at them often. Yet, she reminds us that, "The more you revisit the memory, the more weathered and faded it gets." Even our recollections of family and home alter as time goes on. Although we cannot preserve these personal mementos in their original state, perhaps we can spare a moment to reach inside that musty storage closet and look back at the time capsules from long ago.

"HONEY, HAVE YOU SEEN MY PLATFORMS?"

Can you remember the last time you went dancing? After being hunched over a computer screen day after day, I forget how it feels to move my body without a care in the world. I confess, dear reader, that I sometimes get caught in a habitual pattern of scrolling through other people's outings on social media when loneliness starts to creep in. When this wishing well of overstimulation leads to nowhere, I think back to my mother saying, "We used to go dancing" whenever she reminisces about the fun she and my dad had while they were dating. Josi makes a throwback to this bygone era of underground parties by printing parts of disco album covers onto balloons. Interestingly, she has photographs of her mother getting ready at home before going disco dancing but has no records of her mother at the event. These people and places can become lost to time, existing only in memory, but it must have felt freeing to be too busy experiencing the moment rather than documenting it. So, the next time you get a WYWH (Wish-You-Were-Here) text or feel like you're coming down with a case of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), let's go to Dollarama, buy and blow some balloons, and dance like nobody's watching.

AGAINST THE PULL

Written by: Megan Kammerer

Space is like a sheet of fabric pulled tight above the ground. Celestial bodies sit atop this sheet. The bigger and heavier the object, the more it presses down and bends the fabric. Stars create the biggest dents, and planets are able to roll around each star in a perfect dance that we call orbits. That's basically how gravity works.

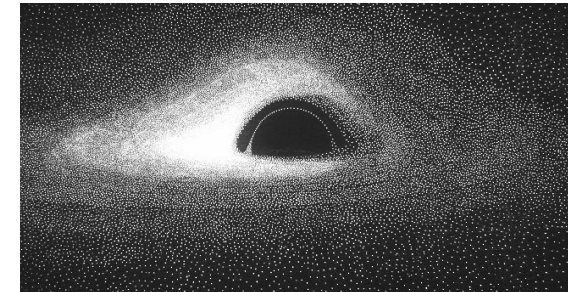
Now, a black hole is like if someone took a massive bowling ball and pushed it down so hard it ripped through the sheet entirely. It's pressure is immense. Instead of just bending space and forming orbits, it creates a hole where nothing can escape.

Black holes form when a huge star runs out of fuel and collapses under its own gravity. The core gets so insanely dense that its gravitational pull becomes unstoppable. It draws inward and inward. If you get too close to the edge, there's no coming back. Not even light can escape the pull, which is why they appear as dark black voids.

Inside a black hole? We don't really know. Some think it's a singularity—a single point where gravity is infinite and physics breaks down. Others think there might be wormholes or portals to alternate dimensions. Basically, it's one of the biggest mysteries of the universe.

The edge of a black hole is known as the Event Horizon. It's the point of no return. The pull of gravity begins to get its strongest here. Once anything crosses that boundary, it's gone forever. If you're still outside of an Event Horizon, you can escape it. It takes A LOT of fuel and energy to pull away, but you could, in theory, turn the ship around and escape the blackness. If instead you push forward and enter the darkness, you may discover new and terrible worlds.

Sometimes, I wonder if we are approaching our own Event Horizon.



The first image of a black hole, a simulation obtained using the international network of EHT telescopes by Jean-Pierre Luminet in 1979 © CNRS Photothèque

This lingering thought—half-wonder, half-warning—captures the essence of *Milestone Nerve*. Like the gravity of a black hole, the allure of the American Dream exerts an almost inescapable pull: seductive, monumental, and, at its core, potentially destructive. Western exceptionalism and its romanticized ideals stretch the cultural and political fabric until it begins to tear. The artists in this exhibition occupy this threshold where optimism gives way to harsh realities, and escapist fantasy threatens to obscure the violence it floats above.

Each collaborator involved stands at that boundary, refusing to be pulled in entirely, instead using iconography and reassembled nostalgia to navigate this tension for meaning. If we once looked upward to imagine outer space as a frontier of hope, then *Milestone Nerve* asks: what happens when that hope is threatened to collapse under its own weight? Is there possibility in imagining something otherwise.

Philip Leonard Ocampo's latest work *Key Dawn* reimagines a punk rocker's keychain as a symbol of transformation and possibility. Drawing inspiration from mid-1970s to '80s glam punk and queer subcultures, Ocampo layers personal and collective memory through everyday objects—keychains, ticket stubs, and iconic punk motifs—reframed as portals to new ways of thinking.

Instead of traditional image transfers, Ocampo uses a matte application, similar to wheatpasting, to adhere archival prints directly to the surface, preserving their rawness and immediacy. A horizon line—evoking a sunrise—threads through the work and across the gallery, hinting at hope beyond rebellion. In Ocampo's hands, humble keyrings that hang from belt loops outside of local punk bars become not just an accessory, but a metaphor: an invitation to unlock alternate futures for the communities that carry them.

Yan Wen Chang reimagines the moment of a plane crash in her latest work *Gillian's Conspiracy (Portrait of Selves at Final Destination)*. The viewer experiences the imminent wreckage, not from the outside, but from the visceral, interior perspective of the passengers. Rather than plummeting toward familiar terrain or a discernible destination, the scene hurtles into a black, unending abyss. The work abandons traditional narratives of catastrophe and arrival, suspending the viewer in a liminal space between impact and nothingness. Across both paintings, Chang explores the fragmentation of identity—the split between a self that bears witness and a self that is undone; doppelgangers. Layers of paint are manipulated to mirror this psychological rupture: thick, visceral applications collide with translucent washes, echoing the instability and struggle between cohabiting realities. The surface of the canvas acts as both a skin and a screen—holding, obscuring, and revealing at once. In these suspended moments, we wonder what it means to be caught not just in catastrophe, but within the multiplying and contradictory selves that such moments can expose.

Brandon Fujimagari focuses the scope of his mixed media installations on 1970s California, exploring themes of tragedy and revisionist history in film and television. Creative liberty upholds speculative fictions and dreaming in Hollywood. It confronts the horrors of the past, like the lives and deaths of late famed starlets. *Carcharias* pairs primitive clubs and clay weaponry alongside familiar iconic names, like Sharon and Pamela. Seemingly violent objects are reimagined with a sense of naivety and optimism. When paired with figures like Sharon Tate, the work gestures not toward tragedy, but toward the

unrealized possibilities of blooming success and an alternate future. His use of slasher motifs mirror a Western culture that glamorizes violence and spectacle, suggesting that the nation confuses destruction for transcendence. Through this lens of revisionist history, Fujimagari transforms the abject into something tender and redemptive, offering glimpses of what might have been and reclaiming space for new, more hopeful narratives to emerge.

Andrew Harding invites viewers into a space of suspended gestures—acts of mourning, celebration, resistance—held in delicate tension above their heads. Drawing from the cultural ritual of shoe-tossing, *Pieces of you* repurposes this familiar action into an arrangement of hanging sculptures: wire-wrought bouquets, weathered baseball caps, and common shoes float on a taut metal wire that cuts across the gallery. These objects recall rites of passage, public protest, or moments of personal rupture—throwing your cap in celebration, flinging a bouquet in a wedding ritual, or marking absence with a pair of shoes left hanging in the wind. By placing the work overhead, Harding shifts the viewer's physical orientation—forcing a craned neck. Suspended in air, floating in a space between letting go and holding on. They mark personal and collective thresholds—weddings, funerals, protests—where the body expresses what words cannot. Harding's installation is not just about looking up, but about what it means to witness something just out of reach.

Josi Smit's *Rows and floes I may never know* gently hangs like a breath—light, suspended, and delicate. Cropped family photographs are printed onto sheer silks, transforming fleeting personal moments into translucent veils of memory. Draped along a simple clothesline, these images—glimpses of hands and feet, shadows playing across carpeted floors—gesture toward the ephemeral nature of intimacy and the slow drift of time. Smit's work embraces the fragility of memory, not as something to be frozen, but as something subject to the haziness of recall, the softness of fading detail. As the fabrics sway gently in space, the works seem to air out the past: cared for not by holding on too tightly, but by letting it breathe. The act of

hanging them becomes a quiet ritual—one of tending to time's passage the way one might tend to laundry or wounds. In this gesture, remembering is made precious—thread by thread, shadow by shadow, something fleeting yet miraculous.

Milestone Nerve is a series of musings from the Event Horizon—a last clear glimpse before the fall, or the escape. It's a collective dispatch from a generation of makers raised on the flickering glow of Windows Vista screensavers, footage from doomed wars on terror, and the promise of a "Yes, We Can" future that never quite arrived. We grew up in the modern era's aftershocks—too young to understand the collapse in real time, but old enough now to carry its debris. Violence continues to be ambient. Hope has to be rebuilt from the scraps.

This exhibition doesn't aim to resolve anything. Instead, it holds space for the fracture—for terror and tenderness, satire and sincerity, collapse and community. Each artist gathers remnants of memory, myth, or spectacle, and asks what's worth holding onto when a dream begins to fail. What rituals can we still perform? What language can we invent? What new futures can we hope for?

Sarah Rose Etter shares this poignant thought in her recent novel *Ripe*, "Doesn't it overwhelm you sometimes—To be alive? Don't you sometimes feel like at any moment you could be torn away from yourself? From your life?"¹ I think a similar unease pulses beneath every piece in *Milestone Nerve*. And yet, none of them turn away. Instead, they dig in. They mark the ground. They throw a shoe over the powerline. They hang silk on the line to dry. They hold the key in their palm and imagine what door it might still unlock.

In the end, maybe that's what this show offers: not a way out, but a possible way through. A way to stand at the edge of the abyss, and still find each other.

¹ Etter, Sarah Rose. "family." In *Ripe: A Novel*, 51. New York, NY: Scribner, 2023.



ARTIST BIOS

Philip Leonard Ocampo

Philip Leonard Ocampo (b.1995) is an artist and arts facilitator based in Tkaronto, Canada. Ocampo’s multidisciplinary practice involves painting, sculpture, writing and curatorial projects. Exploring worldbuilding, radical hope and speculative futures, Ocampo’s work embodies a curious cross between magic wonder and the nostalgic imaginary. Following the tangents, histories and canons of popular culture, Ocampo is interested in how unearthing cultural touchstones of past / current times may therefore serve as catalysts for broader conversations about lived experiences; personal, collective, diasporic, etc.

He holds a BFA in Integrated Media (DPXA) from OCAD University (2018) and is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xpace Cultural Centre and one of the four founding co-directors of Hearth, an artist-run collective based in the city.

Andrew Harding

Andrew Harding is an artist who works across sculpture and installation and explores themes of hybridity through found imagery and fabricated forms. Harding completed his MFA at York University and has recently exhibited in Toronto at Blouin Division and Hearth, and in Chicago at Weatherproof. Harding’s projects have been supported by the Toronto Arts Council and Ontario Arts Council.

Brandon Fujimagari

Brandon Fujimagari was born in San Francisco, California and lives and works in Toronto, Ontario. He worked in corporate retail marketing prior to receiving his BFA from OCAD University in 2018. He is a recipient of the Mercedes Benz Drawing and Painting Scholarship and has exhibited at Art Toronto and Xpace.

Yan Wen Chang

Yan Wen Chang (b. 1993) received an MFA from the University of Guelph in 2022, and a BFA in Drawing and Painting at OCAD University in 2015. Solo exhibitions include *Gillian*, Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto (forthcoming, Sept 2025); *Jillian*, Hawkins Headquarters, Atlanta (2025); *Nympho*, A.D. NYC, New York (2024); *Odile’s Notorious Magnum Opus Of Thirty-Two Fouettés*, Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto (2023); *Four Hollywood Paintings*, X in Residency, Toronto (2022); and *A. Dream*, General Hardware, Toronto (2022). Two-person exhibitions include Yan Wen Chang and Níall McClelland, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery (forthcoming, 2026); and *Auto Dealer Dream*: Yan Wen Chang and Andrew Harding, Weatherproof, Chicago (2024). Select group exhibitions include *what worked for me I never paid into, what I worked at never paid off*, Hearth, Toronto (2024); *1,300,000,000 - 4,000,000,000*, Hawkins Headquarters, Atlanta (2024); *Unreliable Narrator*, A.D. NYC, New York (2024); *Piers*, Legacy Art Gallery, Victoria, (2022); and *The size of a credit card*, the plumb, Toronto (2022). Her 33 ft. public billboard entitled *same problem my father had and what he dreamed* was on display at Hamilton Artists’ Inc. from 2022 to 2023. Chang is represented by Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.

Josi Smit

Josi Smit is a multidisciplinary artist who works in sculpture, installation, photography, and text. Some of her current curiosities include: the blurred borders between memories and dreams; photographs fading in the living room sunlight; dance floor reverberations; shifting winds and clouds and breath.

Smit holds a BFA in Sculpture/Installation from OCAD University, and is currently based in Tiohtià:ke/ Montréal, QC.





Milestone Nerve

Philip Leonard Ocampo
Andrew Harding
Yan Wen Chang
Brandon Fujimagari
Josi Smit

May 17 - August 31, 2025

Curatorial Team
Philip Leonard Ocampo, Megan Kammerer, and Samantha Lance

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