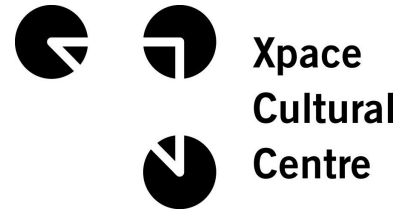


MAIN SPACE



***I scrub myself until my skin is raw***

Maddy Young, Patrick Stochmal, Wu Jing

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The home is a container for the rhythms of life, each anxiety and hope in its place, transitioning into each other through doorways that prompt the question “why did I come in here?”. New beginnings, activities and selves are encouraged and accepted by the design of the next space. Maddy Young, Patrick Stochmal, and Wu Jing reconfigure the Main Space at Xspace Cultural Centre in the image of domesticity, altering its design to accept and encourage behaviours that depart from the solitary analysis fostered by white walls and open space. Here, in this transposed bathroom, you are the world splitting open: you are grotesque, not a spectator of it. Their installation-based exhibition, *I scrub myself until my skin is raw*, explores the displacement of postmodern anxiety onto the body, finding an actionable form in the aspiration to an impossible and ephemeral purity.

As one enters the exhibition, Maddy Young’s shower curtains hang from the ceiling, dividing the room, printed with searching imagery: evidence of a virtual journey motivated by desire for truth/happiness/stability. The curtains welcome you to lose yourself in the indexical, in the complexities and overwhelming interconnectedness that

build the walls that contain our reality and frame what happens within it. Find yourself paralyzed by searching, but you must keep moving.

Young's first two printed curtains titled *form* and *sensation* anchor the series in the 1960s, a critical period for mass media and neoliberal policy, mixing symbols of technological progress and the expense of the rhetoric of neoliberalism. The third curtain, *perceptions*, expands from the astral projection imagery in *sensation*. It creates a connection between bodily maintenance and worship. Self-care becomes devotional, part of a narrative of connection through individualism, created through choices referential to one's own body. A fourth curtain, *formations*, calls in the physical and metaphysical to illustrate metabolic processes to digest fallibility in the face of complexity. Young charts the overwhelm of the present moment and the strategies for mitigating its god-like expanse and entanglement in her curtains.

Behind a curtain at the far end of the gallery, you encounter Patrick Stochmal's procedurally-focused advertisement for a rejuvenating cream. Its essence is symbolic rather than strictly medicinal. Using saplings from a nurse log—a fallen one that nurtures new growth in the forest—he processes this material into an abstracted image of itself: rejuvenation, creamed. The mediation of process between the unaltered saplings and their final product speaks to a discomfort that is soothed by evidence of processing. It has been made uniform for manipulation. Stochmal does not let you perceive the final product in a vacuum: he resists the aspirational sterility of the pharma-cosmetic, presenting the cream as alive with exchange.

Alongside Stochmal's ad, Young has hung a printed roll of toilet paper. Its imagery includes computation, digestion, and water processing diagrams. Its nature is that of a processed paper product designed for sublimation into the series of manipulations that is the sewage process. Its visual and material aspects share a common ancestor in the

messy materialism of process, obscured by the infrastructure built to conceal it until a finished product is achieved, whether toilet, skin, or hard drive.

Peeking back around the curtain towards the front of the gallery, Stochmal continues to explore interspecies exchange through the bacteria fed by his and his partner's blood that live in his bathroom cabinets, titled respectively *Slow Prolapse I* and *Slow Prolapse II*. His relationship to the bacteria is devotional in the way he surrenders his body to it. Keeping bacteria like a family, like a loved one that inspires sacrifice, also proposes an intense kinship. The continuum of energy from the blood to the bacteria is reminiscent of epigenetics, the study of experiences altering genomes that are then passed down through generations. The bacteria and blood are also tied through the parallel journeys of their matter: the bacteria originates from their swabs from their bodies and extended areas of contact for their bodies in their homes. Around these axes of connection, kinship between all parties emerges.

The blood could also be read as transformed by contact, itself the external interloper to the bacteria, its contamination understood as nourishment in the bacteria's own scale. The binary of help/harm is reframed over and over as the viewer shifts whose story they want to read: Stochmal's, his partner's, the blood's, the bacteria's. The cabinet's content casts doubt on the fixedness of the boundaries of the body and its acceptable uses. The blood-fed bacteria hold in simultaneity growth and degradation, wildness, opportunism, and control. These ever changing boundaries are symptomatic of queerness. Queerness can manifest as "symptoms"—feelings and acts that deny heterocapitalist hegemony.

Back towards the vitrine in the front of the gallery, exploring behind another curtain, lies Stochmal's sculpture, *(W)hole*. These conjoined shower basins can be read as calcified relational anxieties manifested physically to unburden the mind. Stochmal

uses dust from his childhood home in the basins' grout. It contains cells from his suburban nuclear family, creating a cellular salt ring around the basins as if to protect their heteronormative anxiety with a material that serves as a symbol tied to, by virtue of its origin and journey, heterocapitalist 'success'. The basins, conversely, serve as a nod to the bathhouse as they, visually, could be a graft to the gallery from part of a bathhouse floor. There, connection is expected to be transient: the open area allows for connections to arise and dissolve. The basins are only the base of a shower that expands into the gallery space, bounded by the shower curtains. The sense of privacy extends beyond the shower and can create accidental intimate spaces where viewers crowd or where a viewer is isolated in close proximity with a work.

Stochmal's paired cabinets located on the north gallery wall also reference the duality of "his and hers" bathroom accessories, especially when understood alongside the shower basins. Stochmal subverts this reference by filling each cabinet identically, visually rejecting the expectation of gendered objects in paired cabinets, and by inserting instead the contention of contamination into a simulated domestic space, mirroring the disruption of queerness in the nuclear family structure.

Turning one's back to the conjoined basins and looking past the curtain to the opposite wall on the north side of the gallery, Wu Jing's *Grooming Each Other* stretches in front of the viewer. It is made of steel, reminiscent of surgical surfaces. The objects displayed upon it contain disassembled corporeal matter (bone, fat, and hair), dressed up as familiar and intimate in their forms as foreign objects deemed safe to enter the body. Internal, external, with the promise of internality again. Jing's practice focuses on changing the use value of an object through symbolic intervention, underlining the susceptibility of affectual relationships to convention(al objects) to the power of symbolism, troubling the objectivity of standardized sites of behaviour.

Marking the entrance to the concise functional bathroom of the gallery, Jing's human hair mat makes the shedding nature of the bathroom palpable and explicit. (My bathroom floor is covered in hair. We all politely agree to not interrogate if it is pubic or not.) The materiality and design of the bathroom are inextricably bound with shedded parts of the human, all to conceal and contain waste without interrupting the flow of productivity.

Jing also denotes the bathroom as a site for "processing" with his bleached hair mat laying centrally on the south side of the gallery. Jing has processed the hair by bleaching it - he lingers at a turning point in preparation. The bathroom is declared as an initiatory site for change that is deeply intertwined with personal identity and its politics. Bleaching also depersonalizes the hair: the hair becomes standardized, the body becomes just material, stripped of its most legible connection to the person who grew it. Knowing there is an identity and story severed from this material, with its absence made glaring by the unnatural bleach colour, makes it uncanny.

The bathroom normalizes these uncontrollable aspects of the human experience: it is allowed to mix hair with its carpet and persist like that, its occupant knowing that the bathroom can never be contaminant free, despite cleaning. It is built to be contaminated and to process that contamination "away", into the void of the drain or behind its closed door. Jing activates the anxiety of being faced with lingering contamination in his basinless and drainless sink adhered to the centre column of the space. Together these pieces celebrate the permissiveness of the bathroom to not aspire to cleanliness.

Infinite change and the strategies for keeping its paranoia at bay define the postmodern era. Young, Stochmal, and Jing make this dense knot of experience parsable in the frame of the bathroom. *I scrub myself until my skin is raw* describes the character of the

activities staged in the bathroom for converting uncertainty to control, for navigating the pull of alienation, and interrogating our relationship to adulteration. It is so special that humans have a domestic cell dedicated to our fallibility, otherwise, it would be inescapable.

– Mason Smart