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Looking at art in Toronto

May 5, 2024



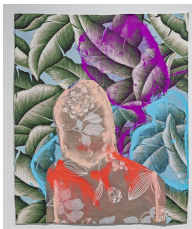
DECADE: 10 Years of Creation at Youngplace

Beleaguered, in decline, challenged, crumbling, struggling.... These are some of the words used in the [local press](#) and [social media](#) to describe the current state of the Toronto art scene. There are many reasons: the pandemic screwed everything up, capricious corporations pulled funding, everything is turned into a condo tower, money just keeps flowing upwards, and a glass of wine costs twenty dollars. But is there something more fundamental going on, could it be the nature of [Late Stage Capitalism!](#)?



Assemblage by Ruth Adler from "DECADE" at Koffler Centre for the Arts

In this context, seeing the exhibition at [Koffler Center for the Arts](#) was not just fun, uplifting and hopeful, but also illustrative of the importance of artist's spaces in this city. The Koffler Center is housed in the [Youngplace](#) building, which opened as a cultural center in 2014 and is currently one of the [Artscape](#) facilities *in* **Receivership**. All the artists in the show are, or were, until recently, part of the Youngplace community. The stated goal of the exhibition is to shine a light on Youngplace: "this iconic arts hub."



Assemblage by Ruth Adler

Lining the wall of the entrance to DECADE are fabric and paint assemblages by [Ruth Adler](#). This artwork strikes me as generous, open and approachable. It's all about surface and shape, colour, pattern and movement. It feels light-hearted and celebratory, and I really like the way this artist repurposes materials.

Ruth Adler has had a studio at Youngplace for 10 years. This fact reminded me of the documentary about [Brian Eno](#) I saw this week, at the annual Hot Docs Film Festival. (Actually it was more of a *film experience*, created using [generative technology](#).) Toward the conclusion of this event Brian Eno talked a lot about the importance of *creative ecologies*, as opposed to the myth of the solitary genius. I assume this idea of creative community applies to all the artists in this show.

Although she works with many different kinds of materials, Ruth Adler thinks of herself as a painter. [Matthew Schofield](#) is another painter in the show. Whenever I see paintings by this artist it feels like he's tapping into my own memory banks. That's because he delves into the arena of quirky personal snapshots, family pictures, keepsakes, memorials that are entirely personal, and yet, universal.



Painting and detail by Matthew Schofield

These beautiful paintings are tiny, some just 4"x 4." They are identical in size to the original snapshots. They have a glittering, gemlike quality which is quite mesmerizing. I want to get closer and closer to them, and peer into the captured moments.



Painting by Matthew Schofield

It was very exciting to see the work of [Midi Onodera](#). This artist has some interesting relationships with machines.

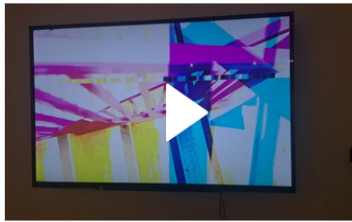


Excerpt from Soliliquy by Midi Onodera

The excerpt above is a hilarious interaction between the artist and a chatbot named Faux Midi.

There is a lot of literature on line these days about how chatbots and GPT entities are prone to all kinds of malfeasance. They are liars, people pleasers who will say anything just to keep talking. They are prone to [hallucinations](#). They can easily be [hypnotised](#) to spout misinformation. In other words, these things can't be trusted! Some of the exchanges between Midi Onodera and Faux Midi make this fact abundantly clear.

The other piece by Midi Onodera was produced especially for the exhibition and weaves together colorized, moving images of the corridors and stairways of the Youngplace site at 180 Shaw Street. It was wonderful to look at until I started feeling seasick.



Excerpt of 2397 by Midi Onodera

Speaking of weaving, textiles played a big role in the DECADE show.

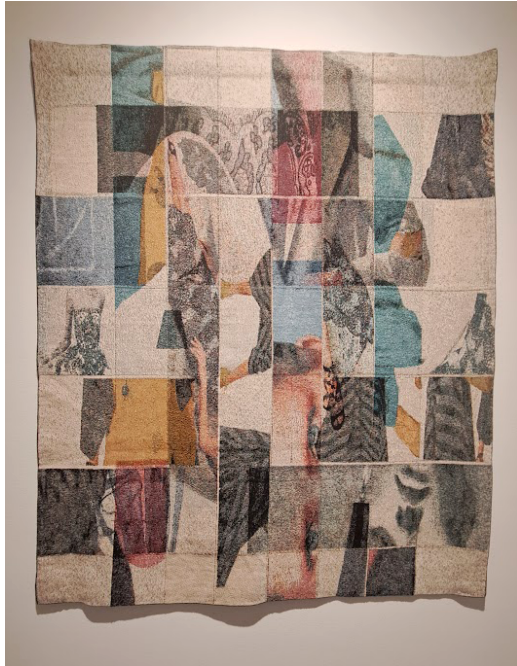
I was obliged to read the catalogue to know what I was looking at when I viewed the elegant, attenuated weavings by [Shabnam K. Ghazi](#). In fact, these wall hangings are composed of shredded paper which has been woven into a fragile, delicate fabric. The recombined paper contains screenprinted depictions of the artist's writings, describing her earliest memories.



Artwork by Shabnam K. Ghazi

In this convoluted, painstaking process the artist has found a way to physically manifest her language and her earliest recollections.

Two pieces by [Barbara Astman](#) are in the show. One is a lovely tapestry in muted tones. It takes a while to recognize the fragments of contemporary glamour, fashion and advertising imagery in this piece. The form of tapestry, a traditionally female pursuit, originated in Ancient Egypt. Tapestry weave pieces, using linen, were found in the tombs of both Thutmose IV (d. 1391 or 1388 BC) and Tutankhamen (c. 1323 BC.)

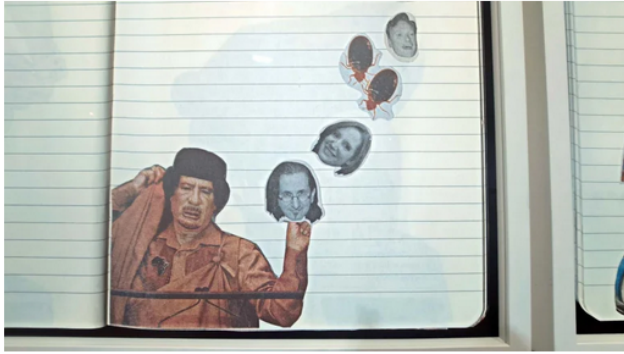


Tapestry by Barbara Astman



"Daily Collage" by Barbara Astman

The other piece by this artist is a collage using news feed type imagery. I really like the way Barbara Astman uses the pictures we are *relentlessly bombarded with everyday* and repurposes them for her own amusement.



Detail of "Daily Collage" by Barbara Astman

Massive quilts by [Carolyn Murphy](#) are on display. They take quilting, another so-called feminine art, into the realm of spare and airy abstraction. These quilts have a Russian Constructivist vibe. The very appealing texture is created by the dense stitching which ambles every which way in curving patterns. It was a good move by the Koffler gallery to place a large sign nearby, stating the obvious: Do Not Touch.



Quilt by Carolyn Murphy

Among my favourite artworks in this show were the paintings by [Gillian Iles](#). She has created a sprawling installation composed of about eight separate paintings, produced on [Tyvek](#) and other materials, tied and stretched haphazardly. The installation resembles a temporary dwelling or encampment, ramshackle, derelict and unsafe.



All or Nothing by Gillian Iles.



Detail of installation by Gillian Iles

Within this structure, Gillian Iles has strewn intense images: Light blasts a tiny, vulnerable tent under the arch of a heavy black night sky; a wrecked, abandoned vehicle is overgrown with random vegetation; a fire nearly out of control towers over onlookers; and — is it dawn or more flames? — something is blazing fiercely through a hidden path in the woods.



Detail of "All and Nothing" by Gillian Iles

David Liss, the esteemed founder of MOCCA, curated the exhibition. In a [video loop](#) playing in the gallery he talks about how interacting with art — not on line but in real life — is essential to the human experience. He invites visitors to the show to celebrate Artscape Youngplace and the decade since it was founded, and to “consider and imagine what the next decade will look like.”

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This blog is all about looking at art in Toronto now. [View all posts by ssnbrttn](#)

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