

RICHMOND ART GALLERY



FALL 2023



SONJA AHLERS

Classification Crisis

September 9 – November 5

Curated by Godfre Leung

Since the early nineties, Victoria-based artist Sonja Ahlers has been making books in her distinct visual idiom that is equal parts collage and poetry. Best known for her books *Temper, Temper* (1998)—a compilation of her black-and-white, photocopied zines from the nineties—and *The Selves* (2010)—the precursor to her work with the influential teengirl magazine *Rookie*—Ahlers’s work has been a touchstone for multiple generations of feminist culture. *Classification Crisis*, a retrospective survey of her three-decade career, highlights the compulsive collecting and organizing of images at the heart of Ahlers’s work.

Classification Crisis also follows Ahlers’s life, from her early career in Victoria, where from afar she participated in the Riot Grrrl network, producing some of that subculture’s most legendary zines; to Vancouver after the turn of the millennium, where she spent an unhappy near-decade working in an uncomfortable grey zone between the city’s artist-run centre and outsider alt-craft scenes; to a stint in Whitehorse, where she largely unplugged from the art

world and for a time worked at the Yukon Archives, while also serving as *Rookie*’s visual mastermind; and back to Victoria to care for her ailing mother in their family home where she would ultimately become the custodian of her mother’s belongings and affairs.

Alongside her care work duties in Victoria, Ahlers has spent the last half-decade tending to and preparing her own archive, a project that is ongoing. Revisiting and organizing the documents of her career also led Ahlers to produce a new bookwork, *Rabbit-Hole*, which she describes as a “feminist memoir/scrapbook/confessional commentary on the art world and my place within it.” Adapted for the exhibition as an installation, *Rabbit-Hole* retells the story of her career as a mystery narrative. From the hindsight of the #MeToo reckoning, Ahlers thematizes the collecting and reassembling that sustains her art as a search for “clues” and “evidence” left behind by her former selves.

The exhibition also features Ahlers’s nineties zines; her increasingly experimental and colourful books of the

ensuing decade; the handmade angora *Fierce Bunnies* that first became an underground sensation in the early aughts; one-of-a-kind chapbooks spanning thirty years; a decade of unseen work after she “quit art” in the wake of the Vancouver art boom; and ephemera from a long career of collecting images and scraps of language.

The exhibition is accompanied by a major publication co-published with Conundrum Press, featuring a comprehensive survey of the artist’s career by the curator; thematic texts by Tavi Gevinson, Kathleen Hanna, Doretta Lau, and Lisa Prentice—contemporaries of Ahlers from throughout her career—a methodological essay on Ahlers’s archive by scholars Alexandra Ali-sauskas and Jennifer Douglas; and *Rabbit-Hole* in its original 160-page book form.

Richmond Art Gallery and the artist acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts.



Biographies

Sonja Ahlers is a visual artist and poet based in Victoria, on the unceded territories of the ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) speaking peoples, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. Since the early nineties, Ahlers has worked primarily in book and book-adjacent formats, in a medium that she calls visual poetry. She is the author of *Temper, Temper* and *Fatal Distraction* (Insomniac Press, 1998 and 2004), *The Selves* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2010), and *Swan Song* (Conundrum Press, 2021), and was a key contributor to *Rookie Mag* from 2011 to 2015.

Godfre Leung is a critic and the curator at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and səliłwətaʔ Nations. In the last few years, his writing has appeared in *ArtAsiaPacific*, *ASAP/Journal*, and *C Magazine*, and he has organized exhibitions by Pao Houa Her, Christopher K. Ho, Sesemiya, TJ Shin, and Soomaal House of Art.





Collecting and Reassembling

September 9 – November 5

International Mail Art Exhibition and Fundraiser,
coordinated by Kathy Tycholis

In-Person Live Auction: November 18

Online Auction: November 19 - December 15

Artists from all over the world have contributed post-card-size artworks for the 2023 Mail Art Exhibition and Fundraiser. Organized in tandem with the exhibition *Sonja Ahlers: Classification Crisis*, this open call exhibition invited artists to mail in one original piece of artwork in response to the theme of “collecting and reassembling.”

Also known as postal art and correspondence art, mail art is an artistic movement centered on sending and sharing small-scale works through the postal service. Based on the principles of equal, one-to-one collaboration between artists, mail art has become a worldwide cultural movement for artists to share visual art, poetry, or any other artistic form through the postal system.

Through the 2000s, Richmond Art Gallery hosted regular mail art and artist trading card exhibitions that over time have included thousands of artists from all over the world. Given Sonja Ahlers’ engagement with mail art and mixed tape exchanges throughout her career, it seemed fitting to revive the Mail Art Exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery, ten years after the last one in 2013.

To continue the democratic tradition of this art form, all mailed-in entries received by the gallery are featured in this exhibition. Once the exhibition in the Gallery closes, these artworks will be auctioned off to raise funds in support of our public programs.

We thank all the artists involved in this exhibition for their generosity in donating their artworks, and to all of those who will purchase their artworks. All funds will go towards the Gallery’s future public programming.

UPCOMING

ArtRich 2023

November 24 – December 31

Richmond Art Gallery is delighted to once again partner with the Richmond Arts Coalition (RAC) for the fifth bi-annual juried exhibition. This dynamic exhibition celebrates local talent by providing an opportunity for emerging and established artists from Richmond and nearby communities to present their work.



PACIFIC CROSSINGS RESIDENCY

Pacific Crossings is an ongoing conversation and public presentation series that features participants from various regions across the Pacific Ocean. This collaborative project works to bring together perspectives in an evolving and dynamic exchange, instigating events and activities that can increase public awareness of the multitude of traditions, histories, and practices across Asia. Pacific Crossings is currently programmed by Jesse Birch, Allison Collins, Shaun Dacey, Makiko Hara, and Henry Heng Lu.

Nikita Yingqian Cai

September 25 – October 9

Pacific Crossings hosts Nikita Yingqian Cai, Deputy Director and Chief Curator at Times Museum (Guangdong, China) for a curatorial residency in Richmond and Vancouver. Cai will give a public lecture during her visit (date to be confirmed).

Nikita Yingqian Cai has curated such exhibitions as *Times Heterotopia Trilogy* (2011, 2014, 2017), *Jiang Zhi: If This is a Man* (2012), *Roman Ondák: Storyboard* (2015), *Big Tail Elephants: One Hour, No Room, Five Shows* (2016), *Pan Yuliang: A Journey to Silence* (Villa Vassiliev in Paris and Guangdong Times Museum, 2017), *Omer Fast: The Invisible Hand* (2018), *Neither Black/Red/Yellow Nor Woman* (Times Art Center Berlin, 2019), *Zhou Tao: The Ridge in the Bronze Mirror* (2019), and *Candice Lin: Pigs and Poison* (2021). She runs the series and the research network of "All the Way South," and is the co-editor of *On Our Times* and the podcast host of *Rolling Congee*. She was awarded the Asian Cultural Council Fellowship in 2019.





OFFSITE

PUBLIC ART ON THE CANADA LINE

On view until February 28, 2024

Curated by Maria Filipina Palad

In partnership with Richmond Public Art, Capture Photography Festival, and InTransit BC, Richmond Art Gallery presents artworks by artists Jaspal Birdi and Faune Ybarra on the Canada Line. Don't miss this chance to visit their artworks featured at Lansdowne and Aberdeen Stations.

Capture

Jaspal Birdi

11h02m

Lansdowne Station

Jaspal Birdi's *11h02m* harks back to the early days of the pandemic, where she simultaneously felt a sense of helplessness and isolation, and an elevated state of creativity and hope. Photographed with her iPhone from a window in her Toronto home, *11h02* resembles a painting of a blue sky lined with low-lying clouds. More interested in the imperfect image than the faithful duplication of her shots, Birdi overrides the settings of her printer, which would typically cease printing when the toner runs out. She scanned and enlarged the print, then transferred the image onto a gold rescue blanket—a lightweight, portable material that is both delicate yet strong. The result is this ethereal abstracted work offering a window into how the artist navigated a time of unprecedented collective uncertainty.

Faune Ybarra

Iceberg Stranded in My Bed

Aberdeen Station

Originally from Mexico, Faune Ybarra moved to St. John's, Newfoundland, where she lived for four years, and then to Vancouver. While in St. John's, Ybarra became interested in Robert E. Holloway's seminal book, *Through Newfoundland with the Camera* (1905), now part of the Digital Archives Initiative.

During the pandemic, Ybarra used this digital archive as a point of departure for *Iceberg Stranded in My Bed*. Enshrouded in a blanket, she stands on a mattress in her apartment in Vancouver. Projected onto her is an image of the Holloway photograph "Iceberg Stranded Outside St. John's Harbour for Three Weeks." Through this performative act, she changes the archival image's original identity, creating a new one in the process, one of intimate connection and confinement.



UPPER ROTUNDA GALLERY

The Return of Art School

August 28 – September 25

Richmond Secondary Teacher Exhibition

Experience the enchanting world of art, as teachers and staff from the Richmond School District highlight their own creativity in this captivating group art exhibition. *The Return of Art School* celebrates their diverse talents and passion for the arts, showcasing a wide range of styles and mediums. Get ready to be inspired as these educators redefine the boundaries of teaching and artmaking.

Joint opening reception with *Sonja Ahlers: Classification Crisis* at 2:00–5:00 pm on September 9 at Richmond Art Gallery

CITY HALL GALLERIA

Located just across the street from the Richmond Art Gallery, City Hall Galleria is an off-site exhibition space. As part of its outreach to the local community, Galleria highlights artists primarily from Richmond and/or artworks with a close connection to Richmond and its communities in terms of themes and subject matter. Galleria is currently accepting submission for its 2024 programming.

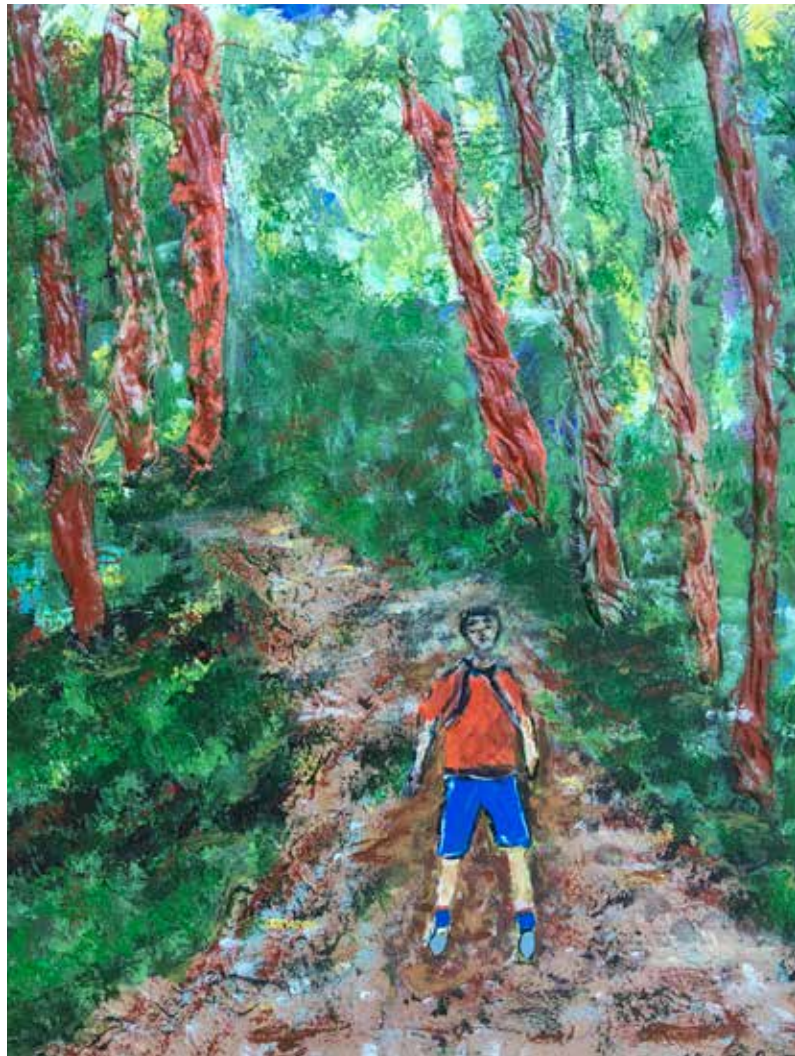
Submission deadline: September 22 for 2024
Info: Visit richmondartgallery.org for details.

Aspire Richmond Exhibition (formerly Richmond Society for Community Living)

Treasure Hunt

September 19 – November 7

The featured artists in Aspire Richmond's Avenues program have many amazing skills and talents hidden beneath the surface. These are revealed in this exhibition that celebrates the unique treasures in everyday moments and everyday spaces. Aspire Richmond takes great pride in celebrating October as Community Inclusion Month. This movement recognizes that everyone has a valued place in the community, and deserves the opportunity to share their unique gifts with those around them.





PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

Tour and Opening Reception with Sonja Ahlers and Godfre Leung

Saturday, September 9

Artist and Curator Talk & Tour: 3:00 – 4:00 pm

Opening Reception: 2:00 – 5:00 pm

Join our exhibiting artist and guest curator for an informal tour of *Classification Crisis*. Opening launch to immediately follow.

Art Forums Talk: Sonja Ahlers & Godfre Leung

Wednesday, September 20, 4:00 – 5:30 pm

Join artist Sonja Ahlers and curator Godfre Leung as part of Art Forums Speaker Series at ECUAD.



Location: Online

Info/registration: ecuad.ca/events



Culture Days

September 22 – October 15

Culture Days is a national celebration of arts and culture, with free participatory arts and culture events happening all across the country. Visit the Culture Days website to see what events are happening throughout Richmond. culturedays.ca/en



Let's Make Mail Art!

Saturday, September 23, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Free drop-in for all ages to cut and paste and draw postcard-sized artworks. Learn more about the history of mail art and how you can start to share artworks through the postal system. All materials provided. Limited seating.

Location: Art Gallery

More info: richmondartgallery.org/cdmailart

Chinese Language Tour

Saturday, October 14, 2:00 – 3:00 pm

Meet the Gallery's Curatorial Assistant Rebecca Wang 王晨鈺 for a tour of the current Richmond Art Gallery exhibitions in Mandarin.

免費中文導覽

10月14日 星期六, 下午2-3點

歡迎與列治文美術館策展助理王晨鈺一起參觀當前展覽。通過國語導覽與輕鬆的對話更多地了解展覽主題。提供茶水, 位置有限, 需預約。

Location: Richmond Art Gallery

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/tour

Book Launch & Zine-Making Party

Saturday, November 4, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Join artist Sonja Ahlers and curator Godfre Leung for the launch of a major publication, followed by hands-on art-making inspired by the work of Sonja Ahlers and live musical performance with The Necking. This lavishly illustrated book features a comprehensive survey of the artist's career by Leung; thematic texts by Tavi Gevinson, Kathleen Hanna, Doretta Lau, and Lisa Prentice, a methodological essay on Ahlers' archive by scholars Alexandra Alisaukas and Jennifer Douglas; and Ahlers' new artist book, *Rabbit-Hole*.

Location: Richmond Art Gallery

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/ahlers-book

Panel Discussion:

D.I.Y. Across Generations (Online Event)

Artist Sonja Ahlers leads an intergenerational conversation about zines and do-it-yourself (DIY) culture.

Location: Online

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/panel-d-i-y

Collage Party: Mixed Media Making

Thursday, October 19, 6:00 – 9:00 pm

Drop in to the gallery for a social hands-on art-making party for adults. Using imagery inspired by the Mail Art Exhibition, participants are invited to cut and paste and draw while you chat, listen to music, and experiment with simple art materials. Registration required and participants are encouraged to arrive on time to ensure their spot. Open to ages 16+.

Location: Richmond Art Gallery

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/mixedcollage





ONGOING PROGRAMS

ARTIST SALONS

Designed for visual artists of all levels, this program features guest artists, curators, and arts workers leading talks or workshops for visual artists to professionalize and grow their art practice.

View past sessions online:
richmondartgallery.org/ragathomevideo

Artist Salon Webinar: Peison Ding on Working as a Newcomer

Wednesday, September 27, 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Artist Peisen Ding shares his experiences as a newcomer to Canada, and how he found work and community in the arts. He will share some of his past projects, and the type of work he currently does to build artist connections and opportunities in his new home in Vancouver.

Location: Online

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/peisending

Artist Salon: Sonja Ahlers on Going Down the Rabbit-Hole

Wednesday, October 25, 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Artist Sonja Ahlers details the process of revisiting her career to prepare her archive, and how it led to the creation of *Rabbit-Hole*, the new work at the heart of her exhibition *Classification Crisis*. Sonja discusses how collecting, archiving, reorganizing, and collage have always been continuous activities over her 30-year career, from her beginnings making punk zines in the nineties to her current work that directly stems from the archive.

Location: Online

Info/registration: richmondartgallery.org/salonahlers

Exhibition Tours for Groups

Monday – Friday, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Free exhibition tours can be booked with your group or adult class of up to 30 participants. Gallery Staff will provide insight and discussion on the artworks, adapted to the needs of your group.

Location: Art Gallery

Info: richmondartgallery.org/tours-group-visits



YOUTH & CHILDREN PROGRAMS

YOUTH ART + CULTURE LAB - Art Course for ages 12–15

October 15, 2023 – March 10, 2024, Sundays, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Youth Art + Culture Lab is an exciting partnership between Emily Carr University and Richmond Art Gallery, providing youth aged 12 to 15 an opportunity to build confidence and develop diverse creative skills through behind the scenes, hands-on, and interactive sessions with local and international artists, art gallery professionals and Emily Carr instructors. Visit Emily Carr University website for course dates, cost, and registration details.

Location: Richmond Art Gallery & Emily Carr University
Info: ecuatd.ca/academics/teen-programs/y-a-c-lab or email teens@ecuatd.ca

RAGA School Art Program Tours, Workshops & Teachers Resources

The School Art Program introduces students and teachers to the exciting world of contemporary art. Led by professional art educators, our programs teach inquiry-based art-viewing strategies that encourage students to make personal connections with art while developing visual literacy. For the 2023/24 school year, we are offering classroom art kits for rent, and in-person gallery tours with hands-on workshops for K to 12 students. Please book your visit or classroom art kit at least three weeks in advance. Info/register: richmondartgallery.org/schools



PERMANENT COLLECTION

Discover our collection digitally! Richmond Art Gallery has launched a new digital database of our permanent collection. Containing nearly four hundred works of art in a variety of media collected from 1982 to 2020, our collection is representative of the history of our exhibitions and a broader history of artistic production in British Columbia and beyond. The permanent collection includes works by established BC artists such as Anna Wong, Wayne Ngan, Susan Point, Greg Girard, and Gu Xiong among numerous others. Our collection tells the story of local artists, ambitious exhibition projects, and a dedicated community. Most works were donated by artists who exhibited at the Gallery, while others were purchased by the Gallery or donated by members of the community. richmondartgallery.org/ragcollection

BECOME A RAGA MEMBER

Members are an important part of the Richmond Art Gallery Association and contribute to the Gallery's growth and vitality by supporting our educational and outreach programming. Join our growing membership and become a supporter of the visual arts.

Members enjoy the following benefits:

- Invitations to members-only events
- 10% discount on Gallery programs and events
- 20% discount on Gallery publications
- And much more!

Cost: Memberships start at \$25.00

Info: richmondartgallery.org/membership

VOLUNTEER WITH US

Richmond Art Gallery Association (RAGA) is currently seeking volunteers aged 18+ to assist with our Public Programs and School Art Program. Join our volunteer team to meet new people, learn more about contemporary art practices and to help RAGA keep our programming free and accessible.

Info: richmondartgallery.org/volunteer

RAG RICHMOND ART GALLERY

Richmond Art Gallery (RAG) is a non-profit municipal art gallery established in 1980. The Gallery produces an array of exhibitions and programs that connect, empower, and provoke conversation with our diverse Richmond, BC communities. RAG actively contributes to Richmond's cultural communities through our commitment to supporting artists via its exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and permanent collection.

We acknowledge and thank the First Peoples of the hən̓q̓əməniəm̓ language group on whose traditional and unceded territories we work and live.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: [richmondartgallerybc](https://www.facebook.com/richmondartgallerybc)

Twitter: [rag_gallery_bc](https://twitter.com/rag_gallery_bc)

Instagram: [richmondartgallerybc](https://www.instagram.com/richmondartgallerybc)

Youtube: [richmondartgallery](https://www.youtube.com/richmondartgallery)

Tag us: [#richmondartgallerybc](https://twitter.com/hashtag/richmondartgallerybc)

GALLERY HOURS

Monday – Friday: 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

Saturday – Sunday: 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm

More info: richmondartgallery.org/visit-us

Admission is free or by donation

LOCATION

Richmond Cultural Centre

7700 Minoru Gate

Richmond, BC V6Y 1R9

ACCESSIBILITY

- 4 accessible parking spaces in the Cultural Centre parkade
- Cultural Centre and Gallery spaces accessible by ramp
- Automated entrance and interior doors
- Accessible washrooms in the Cultural Centre with wide stalls and grab bars



CONTACT

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604-247-8363

richmondartgallery.org



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia



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Credits — All images courtesy of the artists unless otherwise noted. Cover: Sonja Ahlers, *Manhandled Bunny*, 2023; p. 1 (left): Vancouver Workspace, 2007, Photo: Ted Bois; p. 2 (top): Sonja Ahlers, *Blown Out*, 2019; p. 2 (bottom): Sonja Ahlers, *Bust*, 2020; p. 3 (top): Photo: Sonja Ahlers; p. 3 (bottom): Photo: RAG Staff; p. 4 (top): Pacific Crossing Delegation (Makiko Hara, Karilynn Ming Ho, and Shaun Dacey) visiting Minatomachi Art Table, Nagoya, Japan, October 2022, Courtesy of Pacific Crossings; p. 4 (bottom): Nikita Yingqian Cai; p. 5: Jaspal Birdi, *11h02*, installation view, Photos: RAG Staff; Faune Ybarra, *Iceberg Stranded in My Bed*, installation view; Photo: RAG Staff; p. 6 (top, left to right): Allison Shelling, *Clay Collage 6*, 2023; Dale Eklund, *Forrest Energy*, 2023; Kim Swanson, *The Places in Between*, 2023, Courtesy of teachers and staff from the Richmond School District; p. 6 (bottom): Photo: RAG Staff; p. 7 (top): Photo: Ted Bois; p. 7 (bottom): Photo: Michèle Bygodt; p. 8 (top): Courtesy of Victoria Lum; p. 8 (bottom): Photo: RAG Staff; p. 9 (top): Courtesy of Peison Ding; p. 9 (bottom): Sonja Ahlers, *Rabbit with Boom Box*, 1997; p. 10: Photos: RAG Staff