

A speculative sci-fi exhibition set in the year 3000 where habitable space is limited and touch is forbidden.

Artists critique surveillance capitalism and find hope in queer BIPOC performance of cultural rituals.

Nancy Lee 李南屏
Kiran Bhumber ਕਿਰਨਦੀਪ ਕੌਰ ਭੰਬਰ

UNION

April 24 – June 5, 2021

Richmond Art Gallery and Cinevolution Media Arts Society are pleased to co-present a new body of work created by interdisciplinary media artists Nancy Lee 李南屏 and Kiran Bhumber ਕਿਰਨਦੀਪ ਕੌਰ ਭੰਬਰ. *UNION* is a speculative sci-fi exhibition centred around a narrative of two beings discovering their ancestral memories through the longing for touch and the rituals practiced in their post-apocalyptic wedding ceremony. Upon entering the gallery the viewer is transported into a future time.

Set in the year 3000, *UNION* imagines a world in which the nation state has collapsed, and viral air pollution limits habitable space and physical contact. Following a year-long worldwide blackout resulting from airpocalypse induced cyber warfare in 2024, all digitized information has been lost, and most print materials have been used for fuel. Humans seek refuge indoors, physically isolated but connected via the new cyberworld. Cultural memory, stored in genetics, is a construct of the spiritual and ancestral past. Passed down from generation to generation, it remains dormant until accessed through sacred ritual of spiritual union, such as weddings, and physical intimacy. Visitors will become immersed in this new world via a series of experiences including a 2-channel video installation, 3D printed sculptures, propaganda messages, two futuristic bridal dresses, 16-channel interactive sound and visual projection map installation reflecting the multiple worlds where *UNION* is set, and a web XR virtual environment that can be experienced online.

The creative process behind *UNION* has been a deeply personal experience for both artists, each confronting the expectations born from cultural norms. Bhumber explains, "I have felt like a stranger to many aspects of my Punjabi heritage. Only in the last few years have I explored creating works interrogating this estrangement. I want to experience the feeling of belonging to culture by performing rituals that connect me to my ancestral past – rituals that, due to familial circumstances, are not available to me." Lee adds, "I wanted to challenge the conservative gender expectations of women within East and South Asian cultures. The story *UNION* tells is set in a distant, post-apocalyptic future precisely because my experience as a Taiwanese, non-binary femme



Ian Nakamoto, Nancy Lee and Kiran Bhumber, *engraving at the cusp*, 2020, white-light scan and digital render. Courtesy of the artists.

in the present feels so constricted that I felt it necessary to abandon the present world entirely. Weddings are such a big part of both our cultures, but homophobia, sexism, classism, and the challenge of growing up in single parent households complicate our access to this tradition. As the pandemic developed, the scope of *UNION* expanded to address particular challenges experienced during lockdown. As many queers and BIPOCs rely on their chosen families for support that is often unavailable in their immediate bubbles, the pandemic has created a heightened sense of isolation, further explored throughout *UNION*."

UNION is the Featured Artist Exhibition for Cinevolution Media Arts Society's *Digital Carnival Z*, a festival of cutting-edge media focusing on artworks that explore alternative understandings of the relationship between bodies, gestures, culture and society. "Each year, the Featured Artist Program highlights an artist who has contributed significantly to the media art landscape in Canada, and we are thrilled to partner with the Richmond Art Gallery to premiere Nancy and Kiran's first solo exhibition," says Yun-Jou Chang, Executive Director of Cinevolution. "Amidst the clamorous anxieties of a world in crisis, *UNION* is resolutely bold, sensitive, forward-looking and – odd though it may seem for an exhibition set in a post-apocalyptic future – ultimately hopeful."

Nancy Lee 李南屏 is a Taiwanese-Canadian interdisciplinary media artist, curator, filmmaker, DJ and cultural producer. Their work stimulates and enlivens space, making a provocative statement about how inescapably interconnected we are with our surroundings. This notion of staging is a constant in Nancy's work and underpins their projects, from their early work as a filmmaker, through their conception of live events, and into the realms of XR, new media performance and installation, where their art practices continue to coalesce and evolve. Nancy is a co-founder and co-producer of CURRENT Symposium, an intersectional and multidisciplinary initiative featuring programming for and by women, nonbinary artists and artists of colour.

Kiran Bhumber ਕਿਰਨਜੀਤ ਕੌਰ ਭੁੱਬਰ is an Indo-Canadian interdisciplinary media artist, composer, performer and educator. Her practice considers the mediation of memory through emerging technologies and how the body reinscribes memory into the present. Her work results in constructing interactive installations and performances that examine movement, touch and cultural memory. As a composer, Kiran's practice centers around multichannel and spatial arrangements and how the choreography of sound can influence the listener's notion of space, time and narrative. Kiran is a co-director of INTER/MEDIATE, a media art educational festival focused on cultivating growth within Vancouver's media art communities and empowering marginalized communities with access to workshops, artist talks and collaborative opportunities.

Cinevolution Media Arts Society is a grassroots, women-led, migrant-driven non-profit arts organization based in BC. Our mission is to promote innovation and critical discourse through film and new media, bring new ways of thinking and expression into cross-cultural communication, and foster creative exchange and collaboration among media artists in Canada and around the world. Founded in 2007, Cinevolution has been committed to making experimental film and media art accessible for all since its inception, with a particular focus on connecting and empowering immigrants and other historically marginalized communities through community festivals, participatory projects, screenings, workshops, and events.

UNION is made possible with support from Canada Council for the Arts, Government of Canada, BC Arts Council, TD Ready Commitment, and Sundance Institute's New Frontier Lab Programs.



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Special Digital Event

Artist Talk with Nancy Lee 李南屏 & Kiran Bhumber ਕਿਰਨਦੀਪ ਕੌਰ ਭੰਬਰ
Saturday, May 15, 2:00 pm

In conjunction with *UNION*, the artists will share the impetus for the exhibition, the core themes that shaped the world of *UNION*, their history of creative collaboration, and their experience developing the project. The talk will be moderated by Cinevolution Media Arts Society Executive Director Yun-Jou Chang.

The event will be presented on Zoom. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and interact with one another in real time. ASL interpretation and closed captioning in English will be provided.

Media Inquiries

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About 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 exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and a permanent collection.

Visit richmondartgallery.org for more information about *UNION*, gallery hours and COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

CONTACT

richmondartgallery.org
gallery@richmond.ca
604-247-8363

GALLERY HOURS

Monday–Friday: 10:00 am – 6:00 pm
Saturday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
Admission is free or by donation

LOCATION

Richmond Cultural Centre
7700 Minoru Gate
Richmond, BC V6Y 1R9

SOCIAL MEDIA

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