

Reflection of a window

Ella Gonzales

Curated by Carina Magazzeni

Window Gallery



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

“I’m interested in how paintings can hold and carry multiple meanings; paintings that can create a volume that is not inhabited, but one that is imagined and exists on the surface.” — Ella Gonzales

Reflection of a Window can be understood as a site of many dwellings. Ella Gonzales’ practice involves a layered and complicated narrative of migration. Her paintings are deeply rooted in familial memory and lived experience, yet waver between abstract and representational in their composition. Gonzales’ ongoing process involves imagining combinations and altered architectural features of houses and spaces that she and her family have lived in since migrating from the Philippines to Saudi Arabia to Canada.

While referencing family photos and home videos, her paintings resemble the tricky nature of memory: where the spaces that feel so familiar can suddenly fall out of focus, or gradually bleed into one another, over time. Painting on thin and semi-transparent jusi and piña silks, the light travels through the artist’s thin layers of paint, diluted and soaked into the surface and creating a mirror image on their reverse. Scenes of “home” become abstracted into empty rooms that no longer resemble their referential counterparts.

The materiality of Gonzales’ paintings is also wrapped in memory. The deep crease in her suspended painting *Light gather* (2022) acts as a reminder of the fabric being folded, packed and shipped from the Philippines by the artist’s aunts. Gonzales continues this process of folding, creasing, draping and stretching the fabric in order to create an adaptable surface for her paintings that can be packed and presented in multiple ways—folded, restretched, visible from both sides or held by different support structures.

The surfaces of Gonzales’ paintings do not exist in a permanent state. Instead, they offer the potential to change and compose altered images over time. Positioned here, in a windowed gallery, they linger in a space caught between coming and going; resting and pausing. Through her (dis) assembly of memories and disruption of permanence, Gonzales considers how the spaces in between can act as a dwelling place for memory to exist and resist forgetting.

ABOUT THE ARTIST & CURATOR

Ella Gonzales is a Filipina-Canadian artist working between painting and ComputerAided Design programs, as led by her interest in space making. Her paintings and installations are inspired by narratives of migration that inform the Filipino Diaspora. She has shown work with Galerie Nicolas Robert (Toronto), the plumb (Toronto), Patel Brown (Toronto), Pumice Raft (Toronto), Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre (Kingston), and Zalucky Contemporary (Toronto). Gonzales holds a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Studio Art from the University of Guelph and was the recent recipient of the 2021 Nancy Petry Award in painting.
gonzalesella.com

Carina Magazzeni is an independent curator and currently the Director of Union Gallery at Queen's University. She is a femme settler of Italian-Scottish descent, born and raised in Onguiaahra/Niagara and based in Katarokwi/Kingston, Ontario. Magazzeni is a co-founding member of various artist collectives, including Small Potatoes Press, think tank, and the Hysterics Collective.
carinamagazzeni.com

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A WINDOW IS A SURFACE IS A FOLD

Exhibition text by GHY Cheung (2022)

Reflection of a Window—Ella Gonzales, Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre

There is a passage in Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis* in which the Roman author recounts a painting contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Zeuxis paints some grapes, rendered with such realism that nearby birds fly over to peck, fruitlessly, at the cluster. His skill validated, Zeuxis approaches his rival and demands that he draw the curtain so that his painting can be seen.

One-and-a-half millennia later, Leon Battista Alberti, in his 1435 treatise *De Pictura*, codifies an approach to image-making practiced by his contemporaries in which painting as a way of seeing is an open window.

Zeuxis concedes to Parrhasius when he realizes that the curtain, painted, cannot be drawn. The story makes a point about *trompe l'oeil*, a visual illusion that tricks the eye through a virtuosic verisimilitude, and its place in painting, or at least that's how it's usually read.

Light gather (2022) is the central work in Ella Gonzales's solo exhibition at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre. Suspended by 21 fabric tabs along its top edge, the painting hovers off the wall. It never hangs taut. The painting holds something of an interior—proposals of walls with cut-outs, a staircase open on one side, a pillar (or is it a column?)—that has the feel of an amused sketch, as when you follow a stone-grey doorway down to find a frail-thin jamb. A paper architecture that props the feeling that reading it as spatial with a stale seriousness is beside the point.

Parrhasius's painting of a curtain does not survive or might not have ever existed. This makes me wonder why we take for granted its superior realism (and, for that matter, why we are so ready to underrate the assessment of those hungry birds) as the source of its deceptive power. From this slant, the story also says something about entitlement to and the expectation of disclosure as a way of seeing.

In 2009, I spend one night at a hostel, where my friend is staying, in Chungking Mansions. Looking around the space, he's upset that it's smaller than the room he pored over in pictures on the booking site (a bait and switch, he moans). A closer examination of the photos reveals that he can

only be upset that the room is smaller than it *appeared* on the internet, that it is in fact the same room, narrow enough for a twin bed-side table unit to span from wall to ceramic-white wall, with a wet bathroom rounding out the amenities. Stacked at the foot of the bed there is a window air conditioner above a curtain.

Ella's painting folds and opens in turn across a length of dowel. A prominent crease bisects it, indifferent to the depicted lines and shapes. Elsewhere, shorter creases pucker the floors. They cut through what at first look like monochrome planes and converge into indented shards shades darker than the surrounding area, variegating and otherwise intervening in the imagined architecture.

The curtain's material qualities are in almost every way the inverse of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "Untitled" (*Loverboy*) (1989)—a set of diaphanous baby blue curtains that take on the dimensions of their windows at each new site, which in 2021 is installed at Para Site on the opposite shore of Victoria Harbour from the hostel where it registers the passing by of visitors to the art centre, rippling the hazy view of Quarry Bay through the glass curtain wall behind it. Back in the hostel, pressed inside a few square metres of room, I draw the curtain to find a wall.

In a photo I took one night during the summer of 2017, a pair of overcoats like two bodies float in a window, backlit and blurred behind a gauzy curtain. The coat-figures are decapitated by the window's head casing. Looking at the picture after, I'm reminded of so many horror movies where shadows on a curtain index ghosts and amplify tensions, only for both to dissipate when the curtain is drawn.

Nothing looks quite solid in *Light gather*. Colours bleed along the fibres of the fabric and its unhemmed edges are left unpainted. A shadow cast by the dowel is visible through the painting, teasing the possibility of a reveal.

In 2018, I spend a second night at a hostel in Chungking Mansions. The room is identical to the first one I stayed in, with the same air conditioner stacked above a curtain. This time, I stare at the curtain, sober and heavy with pleats.

Approaching *Light gather*, against the urge to peek behind the curtain, I see already on its surface the prospect of a view, an entrance and an exit, the suggestion, shared with Felix's work, of an opening.







Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre is a non-profit organization facilitating the presentation, interpretation, and production of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences. As an advocate for contemporary art, as well as for artists' rights, we pay professional fees to artists in accordance with the CARFAC fee schedule.

Modern Fuel is situated on the unceded ancestral territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples. We acknowledge the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We also recognize the Métis peoples and other nations from across Turtle Island who have called Katarokwi / Kingston home for generations upon generations. We are grateful to be able to live, learn and make art on this land and be in such close proximity to the waters of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. To acknowledge this traditional territory and waterways is to recognize this city and country's longer history pre-dating confederation and the work that must still be done in decolonizing our spaces and relations. We at Modern Fuel strive towards respectful relationships with all of our communities in hopes of walking a good path together.

We at Modern Fuel want to state unequivocally that Black lives matter, Indigenous lives matter, and that the lives of People of Colour matter. Modern Fuel strives to ensure that members and visitors feel safe and welcome in our space and at our events. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or violence including but not limited to ableism; ageism; homophobia and transphobia; misogyny; racism and white supremacy. It is also important to us that Modern Fuel not only continues to present works and programs that support Black and Indigenous artists, members and visitors, but invests in the work of becoming an inclusive, anti-racist organization. We feel it is only then that Modern Fuel can advocate for artists and foster community with care and respect.

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Gallery Hours
Tuesday-Saturday
12-5PM

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