

Beyond the Curatorial Frame:

Arts for Equity, Justice, Representation, and Belonging.

Curatorial Essay by Bruno Vinhas

When I was invited to curate the **Arts for Equity** exhibition, I came with an understanding that curating is never neutral. It is a practice shaped by power, by proximity, and by responsibility. Delving into the art works and the history of the project, my heart skipped one or two beats when I realized that this was one of the most touching projects I have worked on in the last few years; not just because of its scope or for the beauty of the works, or for passion I have for curatorial projects, but because this was (IS!) a project that will live beyond the gallery walls, that voices will be added to it as the audience walks through the space, that it's about people, for people and with people. Beyond the curatorial frame proposed in this exhibition, Eastern Edge's project did not begin with a thematic declaration or a predetermined aesthetic framework; it emerged instead through listening; listening to artists, to communities, to histories that are too often sidelined, and to the quiet urgencies that surface when people are finally given space to speak on their own terms. What unfolded was not a singular narrative, but a gathering of voices that insist equity must be lived, practiced, and continually renegotiated rather than merely declared.

At its core, **Arts for Equity** resists the idea that equity can be achieved through inclusion alone. A statement that is dear to my heart, as I have lived experience of the barriers and transmutations a queer-foreigner-artist has to go through to be accepted in new spaces, to exist. As Sara Ahmed has argued, institutional gestures toward diversity often leave underlying structures intact, allowing inequity to persist under the appearance of progress (*On Being Included*, 2012). This exhibition instead understands equity as a transformative practice; one that asks how power circulates, whose knowledge is valued and how, and what conditions are required for artists to exist without having to translate themselves into dominant, colonial-centric or extractive frameworks. The works presented here do not perform identity for recognition; they assert presence, complexity, and autonomy.

The artists gathered in this project come from a wide range of lived experiences: Indigenous, diasporic, migrant, racialized, queer, disabled, emerging, established...and yet what connects them is not identity alone, but a shared refusal to be flattened, dismissed or gentrified in order to fit in institutional narratives or be tokenized to fulfil requirements. Their practices engage land, body, memory, labour, joy, grief, repair, and futurity. Together, they form a constellation that reflects what Bell Hooks describes as the margin as a site of radical possibility rather than deprivation (*Yearning*, 1990). In this space, art becomes not an object of consumption, but a method of world-making, a wake-up call, a collective of voices not willing to be silenced.

Questions of land and belonging surface repeatedly throughout the exhibition, particularly in works that challenge who is seen as part of the landscape and who is rendered invisible within it. **Aiden Payne, Brian Ahmadi, Ernest Boateng** and **Nasim Makaremi Nia** explore the land relationship and belongings in symbolic and captivating ways, inviting the viewer to reflect on their places and roles in the social, physical and cultural fabric of society. Boateng's *Black in Beothuk* unsettles the romantic neutrality often ascribed to Newfoundland's iconic terrains. By placing Black figures in these spaces, dressed in traditional African attire and meeting the viewer's gaze, Boateng reframes the landscape as neither empty nor singular, but layered with contemporary Black presence and agency. These images do not ask whether Black bodies belong in these places; they assert that they already do. In doing so, the work echoes Doreen Massey's understanding of place as a "meeting up of histories" rather than a fixed or static entity (*For Space*, 2005), an evolving ground to be seen, lived and respected.

Movement, departure, and becoming are also central to **Ginok Song's** *Night Departure*, a painting that captures a woman walking alone along a road at night. The scene is quiet yet charged, filled with uncertainty and resolve. The darkness here is not simply a space of unknown, a void, but one where the possibilities are hiding: a place where decisions are made, and paths are chosen despite the absence of certainty. For many diasporic and migrant communities, leaving is not a single act but an ongoing negotiation between memory, cultural shocks and survival. Song's work speaks tenderly to that moment when staying is no longer possible, and moving forward, however unclear, becomes an act of courage.

The body, throughout **Arts for Equity**, appears as both a site of endurance and a site of resistance. **Aldo Cincio's** *Serene Sleep*, cast in concrete, transforms a material associated with labour and infrastructure into a meditation on fatigue, resilience, and quiet perseverance. The sculpture's weight mirrors the emotional and physical pressures carried by students, workers, and those navigating institutional systems that demand constant productivity. But within that heaviness, there is also rest, a moment of stillness that acknowledges the necessity of pause.

Linh Phan's *Untitled painting* and **Leah Osmond's** textile work *Stretching and Shrinking* confront the commodification of women's bodies, fatphobia and misogyny as they circulate through the capitalist digital and social spaces. While Linh developed a striking emotional painting with an iconic image, Osmond used techniques of what has for centuries considered women's work, hidden in the domestic atmosphere. With folds, embroidery, and affirming language stitched directly into fabric, Osmond reclaims the body as a site of worth rather than shame. The work refuses the patriarchal demand to take up less space, instead asserting that presence itself can be a form of resistance. Sara Ahmed writes of feminism as a practice of becoming "willful" in spaces that demand compliance (*Living a Feminist Life*, 2017); Osmond's work embodies that willfulness through softness, tactility, and care.

Care itself emerges as a radical and recurring gesture across the exhibition. **Pete Barret's** *Positive* explores the connection between water and familial ties in a simple yet complex way. **Melissa Samms'** repaired garments foreground mending as both love and survival. These works resist the disposability

that defines capitalist systems: of clothing, of labour, and of people. By inviting viewers to touch the garments, Samms collapses the distance between fine art, contemporary craft and everyday life, reminding us that care is not abstract but deeply embodied in gesture, generations, patience and love. Joan Tronto argues that care is a political practice that reveals how societies distribute value and responsibility (*Caring Democracy*, 2013). In this context, repair becomes a quiet but powerful refusal to let what is loved be discarded, to believe in the continuity of tactile traditions and story sharing through the simple act of mending.

Indigenous continuities are asserted throughout the exhibition not as remnants of the past, but as essential secular lessons and meditative moments for the living, breathing adaptive practices of today's world. **Emily Andrea Best's** *Happy Drummers*, **Jessica Brown's** video installation *Runway On The Rock* and **Jennie Williams' Nalujuk Night** document cultural traditions in Labrador and the island of Newfoundland with intimacy and respect, resisting ethnographic distance and emphasizing presence and cultural importance rather than preservation. **Megan Samms' powerful** video installation *remember Peace & Friendship in Ktaqmkuk*, draws attention to important spaces, places, and times; remembering and making memories; and reminding us that we and our places are whole, even with the gaps, holes, and interruptions in our experiences. The work is about calling the spirit of the agreement made in Peace & Friendship back; it's about calling our spirits; it's about emotional knowledge, land and water memory, and interstitial spaces (*remember Peace & Friendship in Ktaqmkuk*, Artist Statement, 2025).

Stephanie Brant's Miriam Annugâk carries the quiet authority of Inuit women's knowledge, woven through a garment that understands clothing as both protection and expression. Drawing on traditional elements such as the ulu motif and the pouch construction, the work speaks to systems of care, labour, and ingenuity shaped by land and climate, and passed from hand to hand, body to body. These forms are not decorative echoes of the past, but living gestures; reminders that Inuit clothing has long functioned as a technology of survival and belonging, holding memory, skill, and relational knowledge within its seams. In a history where Indigenous dress was regulated, dismissed, or stripped of meaning, the continued making of such garments becomes an assertion of presence: a declaration that culture endures through use, adaptation, and care.

Miriam Annugâk does not fix tradition in time; it allows it to breathe forward. By bringing functional Inuit design into a contemporary fashion context, Brant affirms tradition as a living practice: responsive, resilient, and generative. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, Indigenous resistance is rooted not only in opposition, but in the everyday acts of kinship, creativity, and futurity that sustain life (*As We Have Always Done*, 2017). The garment becomes a meeting place of past and future, where Inuit women's strength is neither symbolic nor historical, but present and unfolding. Each stitch insists on continuousness, not as preservation, but as becoming.

Representation in this exhibition is not requested: it is reclaimed. In **Hadiza Bello's** portrait work, the visual language of Renaissance painting, long associated with power, refinement, and exclusion by white upper classes, is unsettled from within. Black women, rendered with dignity and intention,

occupy a canon that historically denied their presence. Painted on Ankara fabric, the portraits refuse neutrality; the surface itself carries memory, movement, and cultural specificity. What emerges is not an act of insertion, but a shift in authorship; an insistence that beauty, authority, and visibility are not inherited privileges, but claimed positions.

These works do not ask permission to belong to westernized art history narratives; they remake it. By centering herself and women from her community, Bello engages in what Kobena Mercer describes as a re-visioning of the archive - an act that does not merely recover what was omitted, but actively reshapes how history is seen and remembered (*Welcome to the Jungle*, 1994). The portrait stands as declarations rather than correctives, asserting Black presence as foundational rather than supplementary. In this gesture, representation becomes a form of refusal: a refusal of erasure, of marginality, and of the limits imposed by inherited visual traditions.

Anne Cortez's *Despite Everything, It's Still You!* offers a deeply personal meditation on inner and outer selves, migration, and self-recognition. Through contrasting palettes, Cortez visualizes the tension between societal expectation and inner truth, affirming that even within muted or hostile environments, an inner vibrancy persists. **Ismael Gomezcana Cuevas' Untitled** installation similarly critiques the commodification of women's bodies under the lenses of the western world; by creating a shielded armature shaped as a beautiful couture dress, this work reveals and protects the wearer, shedding light on the endurance women and gender diverse people need to have to survive in society. These works remind us that respect and visibility alone are not liberation; the true terms of that respect and visibility matter.

So many other sublimely powerful works are interwoven in the narrative of this exhibition, each with a history, a story and a strong voice. What ultimately binds **Arts for Equity** together is not consensus, but relation. This is not an exhibition that seeks resolution or closure; it sits with tension, allowing difference, contradiction, and uncertainty to remain visible rather than reconciled. To move beyond the curatorial frame is to recognize that equity, justice, representation, and belonging cannot be fully articulated through exhibition-making alone. They exceed the gallery/museum institutional rules, unfolding through lived experience, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Equity, in this sense, is not a final outcome but an ongoing practice, one shaped by listening, proximity, and care. Paulo Freire encouraged his students and community to understand what bounded them to the social rule and how to use that to assert their voices, he reminded them that liberation is never delivered from above; it is built collectively through dialogue and action, through the slow and necessary work of becoming accountable to one another (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970) a perspective that is very much intrinsic to today's reshaping of spaces and institutions where art inhabits. **Arts for Equity** opened the door to reimagine the art spaces, the art presented in them and the artists behind the work; it does not offer answers so much as it creates a space where difficult, necessary conversations can take root and continue.

Being invited to curate this project's exhibition has demanded a rethinking of the curatorial role itself; a simple but yet powerful exercise that I have done throughout my curatorial practice to break down the barriers of art spaces with the understanding that inclusion is more than a word on a grant application and equity is a basic living right in and outside of the white cube. Working beyond the curatorial frame required me to listen to the artists and their work more than speak, to remain attentive to the relationships that formed the foundation of this exhibition. I am deeply grateful to the artists who trusted this process, who shared their work without compromise, and who insisted on being seen on their own terms. Their practices do not merely respond to theory; they generate knowledge, grounded in lived experience and collective memory. My role has been to hold space for that knowledge to surface, to remain accountable to the artists and communities involved, and to resist the impulse to contain meaning within a single narrative. In this way, the exhibition becomes less a finished statement and more a network of relationships: sustained through trust, care, and mutual responsibility.

If **Arts for Equity** offers at least one thing to the art world, it is an invitation forward. An invitation to institutions, audiences, and curators to reconsider how power is held and shared, how representation is shaped, and how belonging is practiced beyond symbolic gestures. To move beyond the curatorial frame is to accept that equity is never complete; it must be practiced again and again, imperfectly and collectively. Justice, representation, and belonging are not outcomes secured by an exhibition, but commitments that extend beyond it. This project closes not with certainty, but with possibility, with the hope that what has been held here might continue to unfold elsewhere, carried forward through relation, accountability, and care.

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Mercer, K. (1994). *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. Routledge.

Samms, M. (2025). *remember Peace & Friendship in Ktaqmkuk Artist Statement*

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press.

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About the curator

Bruno Vinhas's journey as a curator, arts administrator, and cultural connector has always been shaped by curiosity, collaboration, and care. With a background in Cultural Tourism and Cultural Economy, and Textile Craft & Apparel Design, he has found purpose in using creative work to bridge communities, spark conversations, and shift narratives. He brings to his practice a combination of resilience, curiosity, and care; qualities shaped by his experiences as a queer, Latin immigrant living and working in Atlantic Canada. He learned to turn difference into strength, using his positions to elevate others and to question who has access to cultural spaces.

Bruno started in the arts through theatre and dance, he directed and designed sets, costumes and light for over 30 plays in his home city in Brazil. After travelling and living in Ireland and New Zealand, he settled in Canada in 2015 to continue his textiles studies. From 2017 to 2024, Bruno served in progressive roles at the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, including as Gallery Director (2017-2022) and later Director of Events and Outreach (2022-2024). He has installed and curated over 110 exhibitions at the Craft Council of NL, The Rooms, Eastern Edge Gallery, Lawrence O'Brien Arts Centre, Shaw Centre and the Quidi Vidi Artisan Village to name a few. One of his projects to develop emerging craft voices was the creation a partnership between the Craft Council Gallery and the College of the North Atlantic Textile's program, in 2018, to exhibit their graduation show in a professional gallery space with mentorship components to the students and was a consultant on the development of the Emerging Curators Program for the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, 2025. He also implemented large-scale programming such as the Craft Conversation series during the pandemic, and worked on national initiatives such as the Northern Lights, in Ottawa, Made in Canada: Sustainable Fibre Arts Conference 2024, hosted in Gros Morne, the Baffin Chamber Trade Show (Iqaluit, Nunavut) and Labrador Expo (Happy Valley Goose Bay, NL). He developed new programs for accessibility during his time at the Craft Council of NL aiming to break down the barriers for the "white cube", such as the Whisper Program, a dedicated program for blind and visually impaired patrons to enjoy the gallery exhibitions; dedicated sensory aware time for patrons in the spectrum; SENSORIUS—the first local exhibition focusing on work created for the disabled-identified community with their support along the curatorial process.

At the heart of his work is the belief that craft can be a tool for empowerment, healing, and cultural continuity, especially in underrepresented or rural communities. Much of his practice has centered around creating accessible, collaborative spaces for artists to grow, share knowledge, and celebrate identity. His practice focuses on the promotion and development of the craft community and makes room for diverse cultural narratives.

His curatorial work expanded internationally with Collect Art Fair's exhibitions Here + Now: Collected Works from Canada's Atlantic Coast and Connecting Culture + Landscape Through Water, The Power of Objects: Voices of Contemporary Craft, held at Somerset House, London in 2024/2025/2026, respectively, showcasing Atlantic Canadian craft on a global stage through Craft Alliance Atlantic Association. In 2024, he was appointed Manager of the Export Program at Craft Alliance, where he continues to support craft artists in accessing international markets. He has also contributed to the craft sector development through Canada Council peer assessments and authored articles in Studio Magazine (Canada) and Unsustainable Magazine (Australia).

Recognition such as the 2023 Mary MacDonald Award from VANL/CARFAC affirms his impact in championing craft practices and cultural equity. Receiving the Mary MacDonald Award was a powerful affirmation, but what matters most to him is the network of artists, cultural workers, and communities that he has supported and learned from." Their trust and collaboration are the real rewards, and they are what fuel my continued commitment to work in the cultural craft sector".