

**WHY
AM
I
AFRAID**

Cheryl Pope: Objects for Listening

June 8 to July 4, 2016

IN COLLABORATION WITH OCAD U COMMUNITY

Curated by Lisa Deanne Smith

**FREE and open to
the general public**



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OBJECTS FOR LISTENING

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To listen, one must actively concentrate — take the time needed to hear not only what is being said, but how it is told. A good listener needs to be empathetic, resist jumping to conclusions and be willing to suspend judgement long enough to consider things from another's point of view. A listener must also have ample confidence in the speaker, and be careful to not take over the conversation before the speaker has finished. Listeners need to listen — not reply — in order to hear. Unless asked for advice, a great listener will help a speaker figure out a solution to her problem just by listening. Perhaps the most important feature of listening is giving focused attention — a difficult thing to do when there is so much going on in our high-speed, high-stress, unstable world.

Artist Cheryl Pope designs objects and situations for listening. Through sculpture, installation and performance, she creates works that explore often uncomfortable issues concerning power, inequality, race, gender, identity and violence. Pope frequently makes her art in collaboration with others. When working in this manner, the pieces she designs set up a framework addressing a specified topic. Such frameworks bring forward the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the people she collaborates with — often youth or, in the case of this exhibition, OCAD University students and staff, as well as people from the broader Toronto arts community.

PRIDE, THE SELF, EACH OTHER

Pope created *Objects for Listening* to bring forward and complicate the conversations our students and communities are having that tie in to Pride Toronto's aim of "Uniting and empowering people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions."¹

"I WANT TO BE PROUD"

"I BELONG HERE"

"WHY AM I AFRAID"

"I DON'T TRY HARD ENOUGH"

These are four of the texts printed on the ten varsity-style champion banners produced for this exhibition. The texts were developed in carefully designed workshops in which I was privileged to participate. At the beginning of each workshop, Pope utilized a technique called "bowing in," which she learned at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. After introducing ourselves, we stood and silently spent time looking every other person in the eyes, quietly acknowledging them. It was an intimate, powerful experience. Pope told us a bit about her background, her involvement in boxing, her artistic practice and some of the different ways she has collaborated with people in the past. It was comforting to know that at every stage of the relationship there were exit and entry points, and that we were in control of when we took part.

Pope then led us through different exercises, each one bringing us deeper into our private personal thoughts and perceptions. We sewed and chatted. We wrote for ten minutes while looking at ourselves in round

¹ Pride Toronto. "About us." (Toronto: Pride Toronto, 2016). <http://www.pridetoronto.com/about-us/> (accessed May 17, 2016).

I
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**NO
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OBJECTS FOR LISTENING

Cheryl Pope, NO ONE SEES US ANYWAY, 2016. Text by OCAD U workshop participant.
Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.
Cheryl Pope, I WANT TO BE FORGIVING, 2016. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.

**I
WANT
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mirrors. Some people read their writings aloud to the group, or had Pope read them to us; and then we chatted some more. Our conversations covered many topics, including what Pride Toronto celebrations mean to us (many had conflicted feelings); where we felt safe and unsafe; how queer communities have changed over the past 35 years; how to empower ourselves and others; and more. It was an honour to be with each other in this manner. The writings and voice recordings produced from the workshops became one of the main materials used to create the pieces in *Objects for Listening*.

Pope instills every aspect of the creation process with intention. The form of varsity banners is easily understood by the OCAD U community, as the majority of our students attended high schools in which similar-looking banners celebrated sports achievements. But sports culture in high schools is often a dividing line for certain types of people; it's frequently a deciding factor in the formation of one's position in a school community.



I
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ME
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For one of the workshop exercises, Pope asked us to write one truth and one lie about ourselves. From these writings, she selected the texts for the banners. The exercise consciously positioned each voice as self-referential in each banner. As the audience views the banners, although they know each voice came from an individual person, they can still identify with the texts and insert themselves in them. They don't spend a lot of time thinking about who wrote them; they don't really need to know. The texts were positioned as generic voices, but ones that speak strongly. Finally, the banners in *Objects for Listening* were produced by a professional manufacturing company in order to remove the makers' hands. This constructed approach helps viewers to understand the object differently as it successfully, and subtly, shifts what they expect to see when looking at a varsity banner in a school.

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CHERYL POPE

Cheryl Pope, *I DON'T SEE ME AS YOU SEE ME*, 2016. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.
Cheryl Pope, *I AM UNSURE OF MY PLACE*, 2016. Text by Lizz Klian. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.



I
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LISTENING STATIONS

Voice recordings composed of workshop writings were also used to produce sound works for this exhibition. Toronto DJs Cozmic Cat (Paula Burrows) and Mary Mack (Mary Tremonte) were commissioned to mix a selection of the recordings with music forming listening stations for the main elevators at OCAD U's Sharp Centre for Design (100 McCaul St.).

The layering of the combined voices in these works was complex. First, Pope set up the exercises participants responded to in the workshops. Each person in the workshop then dug deep and shared intimate thoughts and feelings. Next, Burrows and Tremonte responded to these personal expressions and combined them with the rhythms and moods of music that moved them. But the work itself is completed only as an audience listens. The amount of trust involved in this shared authorship is an important aspect of *Objects for Listening*. The setting and audience are vital as well, as the works need to be completed in the public realm. For the month of June, riding up and down in the Sharp Centre elevators will become much more interesting as all these voices invite us to listen and create.

Below are a few examples of writing from the workshops sampled in the sound works:

"One fruit went bad."

"I set myself free of you. Skin, tapering off, sliding like slices of meat, tiered and slippery. Out of your grasp. How you carry hateful slurs in your pores that whirr into sebaceous pustules of disease. Our face carries memories of desire and greed and hate and need. Our bodies are notebooks of all the things you were told that you now tell yourself. So do you walk heavy? Or will you free yourself? They did a study on fruits and plants — specimen A was praised, specimen B was scorned and told awful things. One plant blossomed and the other did not grow. When you look within, the skin, all

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CHERYL POPE

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OBJECTS FOR LISTENING

Cheryl Pope, *I DON'T TRY HARD ENOUGH*, 2016. Text by OCAD U workshop participant. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.



those truths and secrets show like rotten blisters or a radiant glow. You think you're the only one who knows, but everywhere you look, it shows. Face yourself. Face yourself."²

"I notice how vulnerable I look from behind."

"I don't fear."

² Amanda Robertson-Hébert. "Face Yourself." (Cheryl Pope Workshop Writing, March 18, 2016)



I BELONG HERE

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OBJECTS FOR LISTENING

THIS LIVING MATERIAL

The creative process specific to the *Objects for Listening* exhibition builds upon Pope's experiences of working on other collective projects. It is a sensitive business for an artist to come to a new community and to engage with individuals to produce intimate works to be shown in a public space. The manner in which interactions take place, thoughts are shared and people are listened to sets the tone and contributes to the artworks. Pope successfully managed those delicate steps and created rewarding situations in which we were able to listen to ourselves, listen to each other and be heard while discussing sensitive, timely topics.

All the people involved — Pope, the workshop participants (acknowledged at the end of this essay), the gallery staff (Linda Columbus and me) — inform the work. It is challenging to incorporate people who have diverse characteristics, personalities, histories and opinions as part of material that makes an artwork. But the formats Pope employed allow enough room for the flexibility and strength of this living material.

In our current paradigm, many people are stressed by unstable market forces, power imbalances and environmental issues. These pressures historically breed atmospheres in which our political spectrums become less grey and more intensely black and white. Day-to-day pressures on individuals increase. Human rights are threatened — it becomes difficult to even propose beyond-the-human rights. In this climate, focusing attention and connecting with each other are challenging. These artworks slow us down, demand we listen and, when successful, increase empathy for each other and ourselves.

LISA DEANNE SMITH
Curator, Onsite Gallery

Objects for Listening was created in collaboration with Paula Burrows, Tyla Crowhurst-Smith, Atticus Edwards, Anam Feerasta, Rita Camacho Lomeli, Lizz Khan, Tori Maas, Khadijah Morley, Sophie Paas-Lang, Tak Pham, Debora Puricelli, Amanda Robertson-Hébert, Claudio S. Santander, Sean Sandusky and Mary Tremonte.

Chevy Pope / *BELONG HERE* 2016. Text by OCAD U workshop participant. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.

EVENTS

Wednesday, June 8, 2016, 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

OPENING RECEPTION

Featuring: DJ Mary Mack, DJ Cozmic Cat
House of Monroe mini-Ball and performance

ASL provided for opening remarks and to interpret the works

Wednesday, June 15, 2016, 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.

PROTECTION WORKSHOP WITH CHERYL POPE

Meet and join Chicago-based designer and artist Cheryl Pope and create a protection necklace, unique to you and for you to keep. Complimentary workshop supplies are provided.

Wednesday, June 15, 2016, 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

YOU CAN SHOW WITH US! DIGITAL IMAGE SLAM

Fast + furious, bold + curious! An open, non-curated digital image sharing event where anything goes. Celebrate and empower our diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.

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OBJECTS FOR LISTENING

Cheryl Pope, *I AM MYSELF*, 2016. Text by OCAD U workshop participant. Nylon and tackle twill, 3 x 5 ft.



CHERYL POPE received her BFA and MD from the School of the Art Institute Chicago, where she is a full-time Professor in the Fashion Department. She is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery in Chicago, Galleria Bianconi in Milan, and Spinello Projects in Miami. In 2015 she was the DCASE Artist in Residence at the Chicago Cultural Center and recently exhibited at the Kunsthalle Osnabrueck (Germany), The Poetry Foundation (IL) and Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art (CO). Pope studied under the artist Nick Cave for 12 years. She was a teaching artist at the Museum of Contemporary Art for seven years and has worked in multiple community-based organizations throughout Chicago since 2003.

LISA DEANNE SMITH is the curator of Onsite Gallery. She is engaged in a cultural practice that explores issues of voice, experience and power. Recent curatorial projects include *Uncanny Worlds; Generations of Queer: Robert Flack, John Greyson, Elisha Lim and Kiley May; Biological Urbanism: Terreform ONE; No Dull Affairs: Karen Lofgren, Vanessa Maltese and Jillian McDonald; Ads for People: Selling Ethics in the Digital Age* and *I Wonder: Marian Bantjes*. She earned an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art (Michigan) and an AOCA from Ontario College of Art (Toronto).

Onsite Gallery is OCAD University's experimental curatorial platform and professional gallery of art, design and digital media. Serving the OCAD U community and the general public, Onsite Gallery aims to foster social and cultural transformations. In preparation for the launch of Onsite Gallery's new location in June 2017, our 2016 ONSITE/ programming imagines and creates what a public gallery can be.

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All images courtesy of the
artist and Monique Meloche
Gallery, Chicago.

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Design by: OCAD University, Marketing and Communications, 2016.

Location

OCAD University's Great Hall
100 McCaul Street
Second Floor

Gallery Hours

Monday to Thursday,
7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.
Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Onsite Gallery Contact

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Presented by Onsite Gallery as part of OCAD U's
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