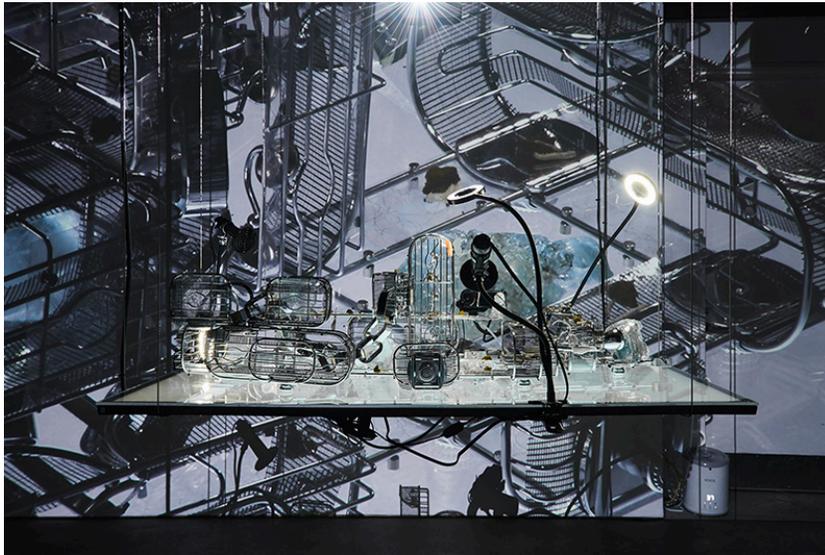


In Practice: Another Echo
By Phillip Griffith — March 5, 2018



Jon Wang, *Gardens of Perfect Exposure*, 2018. Installation view, Sculpture Center, New York, 2018. Chromed bath fixtures, silkworms, roof repair fabric, laminated hair, glass gobs, TV, selfie ring lights, plexiglass, earrings, HD camcorders, rehydrated mulberry leaves, silk, magnets. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

In the wake of the #MeToo moment, time's up as they say. As accusation and confession give voice to new power dynamics, the cultural spasm promises to reverberate throughout our cultural, business, and political worlds. The stories of those whose voices were previously devalued to the point of silence may even give us a framework for re-reading some of the foundational myths of our culture. If that's the case, time's up, too, for Echo's pining for beautiful Narcissus, who can only pine for himself. What does Echo have to tell us that we haven't heard before?

Organized by current **curatorial fellow Allie Tepper**, the new works by emerging artists in **SculptureCenter's In Practice: Another Echo** recuperate Echo as a powerful, if sometimes ambivalent, figure of witness and testimony. Two installations that make use of video place the viewer as intruder or eavesdropper between the artist and the artist's subject. In **Carey Denniston's** three digital videos of FaceTime chats with her teenage niece Avery, we see the young woman at the familiar off-kilter angle typical of smartphone cameras. Nestled into one of three denim-upholstered nooks along a narrow hall, a sort of teenage grotto outfitted with a speaker in the ceiling, you're surrounded by Denniston's disembodied voice and the voice of Avery, whose face fills the iPad screen affixed to the wall opposite your seat. I left one video as my attention for Avery's ruminations on the "popular" kids at her high school waned. Another of the videos kept my attention longer as Avery gave a video tour of her elementary school playground, with meticulous descriptions of which grade levels were permitted to use which jungle gyms. So close in time to the ages she reflects on, she appears at once to be a child and a young woman, caught somewhere on the rubber band of her lifetime. And then my attention dropped again as Avery marveled at a new chain-link fence that cut off the once-open path to the woods behind the school.

Jon Wang's installation *Gardens of Perfect Exposure* surrounds you, too, but leaves you little comfort like that found in Denniston's cushioned denim alcoves. Two video projections light the room, cast on walls opposite one another. At the center of the room, a chrome contraption hangs from the ceiling. It is assembled from the kind of metal caddies and other accessories that hang from showerheads but looks, on first glance, like a sinister hamster maze under too-bright lights. With hindsight, it recalls, too (and perhaps more in line with Wang's intentions), an architectural model of ancient hanging gardens, complete with pendant earrings dangling as decoration whose jewels rhyme with what the official description calls greenish-blue "glass gobs" scattered on the hanging platform. The earrings provide a visual echo, or prediction, of another component of the installation: silkworms—some writhing with life, some deathly still—and bits of mulberry leaves to feed them on the journey of their lifecycle from larva to worm to dangling cocoon. Leaning in to get a better look at the silkworms (are they living? are they dead?) and the strands of hair that also litter the platform, your own head appears, larger than life-sized, in one of the video projections. All is under surveillance in this model garden, and the telescoping of scale from chrome model garden, to human, to video projection is vertiginous and subjects us to a hyperawareness of our own psychological and perceptual transformations while looking.



Courtney McClellan, *Midlands (Part 1)*, 2018. Video still. HD video. Courtesy the artist.

Baseera Khan stages a different kind of address, one meant to be overheard by the viewer of her videos. Installed in a specially designed karaoke lounge with benches covered in pleather, her own underwear, prayer rugs, and other fabrics, these videos record Khan's karaoke performance in one of her "acoustic sound blankets," a sort of black poncho made of acoustic dampening material with an opening for the head embellished by gold embroidery. Sometimes she wears these blankets with her head through the embellished opening, but in these karaoke videos her body and voice disappear beneath the blanket, though we still see her in part as the camera allows us to peer through the blanket opening. Like Echo, and karaoke singers the world over, she only repeats the words of others: in this case, she performs to music borrowed from Rihanna, Bibi Bourelly, and Kevin Abstract in a defiant address to a Richard Serra sculpture and the tradition it represents.

In **Courtney McClellan**'s video of a stately mock trial courtroom, the floors and seats are upholstered in a plush bright red fabric. The effect is solemn and ecclesiastical, down to the red robes worn by a judge in a portrait on the wall. Entitled Midlands (Part 1) after the fictional setting where all mock trial cases take place, McClellan's silent recording of the courtroom space is prefaced on screen by a summary of the rules of engagement for mock trial justice. They appear on screen following a computer cursor line by line: Midlands is governed by U.S. Federal Law...In Midlands, there is no gender, race, or ethnicity...In Midlands, all evidence must be believed to be true...All evidence in Midlands is fabricated...Witnesses must pretend. The first-person perspective of the video as it moves through the courtroom space, similar to the perspective of a video game, inspires a reverent inner quiet. I first came upon the video in the middle of the piece and so read the preface after following McClellan's camera through the courtroom. Viewing the video in this way, out of sync with its beginning and end, only heightened the arbitrary logic of the rules: the fantasy utopia of a world without gender, race, or ethnicity. Here, justice deflates into a parlor game; it's nothing more than an old white man parading in an oversized red robe.

While McClellan's austere video questions the assumptions made about (mock) justice, **Juliana Ceroweira Leite**'s two sculptures give material form to the visceral gestures of witnesses seeking an outlet and an audience for their testimony. Leite, whose practice regularly involves a performative element in the work she produces, has cast her form in clay by imitating the movements of reporters and civilians in the midst of humanitarian crises. Her long titles capture some of the words that supplement these gestures: "they ridiculed and belittled," "a mindset that does not see it as a crime," "Who speaks English?" "Did you at any point ask them why."

Echo's traditional fate is to repeat the end of the last sentence she has overheard, threatened by eternal silence or misunderstanding. Leite has translated this kind of misunderstanding, of words falling on uncomprehending ears, into clay by casting sections of her arms and torso in the poses taken by the journalist and civilian witnesses she studies in the media. The treatment of the clay is at times turbulent, with deep ruts running into it where Leite has worked it into smooth rib-like constructions, or with multiple forms seeming to extend outward at once. Leite's cast hands feature prominently; in one, a thumb lightly joins with the tip of an index finger, almost as if to indicate OK; in the other, the hands join together, pushing out from the main heft of the sculpture with fingers interlaced at their tips. This second sculpture is the most affective. It has the emotional impact of a chest opening out (its colorful striations and ridges again evoke ribs) or of a torso sprouting wings, painfully but impressively. In these sculptures, Echo becomes someone other than the nymph we knew. She has metamorphosed and has her own story to tell.