

living library of becomings

March 1 – April 10, 2024

Paloma Ayala, Nikita Yingqian Cai, Kyungrim Lim Jang &
Hannah Sakai, Tina Omayemi Reden, Salma Shaka,
Kanakano Tada, Sophie Utikal, VOLUMES Archive
and diverse publishing practices

Curated by Miwa Negoro
Exhibition/Table design by Shi Yin

Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs (VBKÖ)
Austrian Association of Women Artists

“A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”

– Gloria Anzaldúa

living library of becomings is a group exhibition derived from a performative library project dedicated to multiple narratives of intersectional, decolonial, queer feminist spirits. Started as a digital platform, the library project has been collecting artistic publications, zines, and publishing practices, exploring tactile ways of knowledge transfer—how can feminist spirits, thoughts, writings, and voices be shared while embracing bodily sensations as ways of knowing and sensing the world?

In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the necessity of amplifying marginalized voices in the face of persistent “citation” of Eurocentric heteronormative patriarchal canon as a (re)productive mechanism of knowledge. At the same time, “citation” is a guidance of collective resistance and empowerment to nurture genealogy, as she writes, “[c]itation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow.”¹ This politics of citation is not only relevant to the academic realm of writing, but it is importantly a survival strategy in everyday life. Guided by Ahmed’s articulation, *living library of becomings* is a portal of encounters, bridging the past, and the present, to the future of intergenerational and transcultural feminist imaginations. Taking a library, as a living archival practice of diverse voices, it transfers and shares the process of (un)becoming through the acts of knowing, listening, and sensing, as something plural.

A group exhibition at the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ) delves into such bodily knowing. It draws inspiration from influential writings Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTEE* (1982), and Audre Lorde’s *Uses of the Erotic* (1978) that challenge the binary confines of destructive colonial modernity to transcend geopolitical, linguistic, and spiritual boundaries while nurturing an emancipatory power from within.

Self-described as “chicana dyke-feminist,” Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the invisible borders of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion through the structurally imposed intersectional struggles and lived experiences of Chicanas in the sociopolitical context of the MX/US border. She envisions a new consciousness as beings in the border life, speaking in tongues, and reconnecting with indigenous knowledge of the lands. Her autobiographical approach and conscious-raising in gender and colonial entanglements show a parallel in the writing practice of Korean-American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982). Using various mediums such as concrete poetry, videos, and performances, Cha explored and embodied the state of in-betweenness and displacement of the exiled, diasporic, and migratory subjects. Despite her short lifetime falling victim to gender violence, Cha left a diverse body of works, addressing marginalization, compartmentalization, and erasure of one’s language and agency, blurring the boundaries of distinct categorizations. *DICTEE* (1982) is composed of seven stories of female figures, known and unknown, historical and mythical, and articulates the aftermath of colonial wounds caused by the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula.

*in between the one actual
to the another actual present.
how many present. how many. simultaneous.
alternate.*

– Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

While Anzaldúa and Cha both address the multilinguistic “wild” and “untamed”² tongues against the colonial hierarchy of orders, they seek to embrace spiritual and shamanistic reconnection with the world, land, place, and entities, within the act of reclaiming and sensing the self. Their perception resonates with Audre Lorde’s understanding of the erotic, as a power within oneself that is rooted in a spiritual plane and unrecognized feelings. The use of erotic is to sense own body and pleasurable satisfaction, unfolding an emancipatory potential.

*“I speak of [the erotic] as an assertion of the
lifeforce of women; of that creative energy
empowered, the knowledge and use of which we
are now reclaiming in our language, our history,
our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”*

– Audre Lorde

Weaving together the resonating voices, the exhibition features the works by seven artistic positions that explore the shape-shifting bodies of water, thoughts, languages, and feelings as the fluid, transformative agency. Their works embrace the margin, the liminal, and its relation as an assemblage, recognizing the affects of proximity, displacement, and (dis)orientation in the moment of grief, loss, and liberation. Many of the works in the exhibition refer to various feminist writings as anchors that overlap and cross each other, one after another.

The exhibition begins with a dive into Borderlands/Mestiza through a video by **Paloma Ayala** which revitalizes Anzaldúa’s poems into a karaoke-style. This “queerified and mexified” version of the poem, titled **Karaoke Readings** (2019-) in collaboration with musician Luna León, invites the audience to sing along, read, and dance together. As part of the series, her video **Canción Caníbal** (2020) further explores Anzaldúa’s understanding of the “adapting body” of womxn seamlessly merging into environment. Simultaneously, it addresses critical ecological concerns on biotas in border rivers – both Río Bravo/Río Grande and the Rhine River where the artist lives – which are affected by ongoing extractivist capitalist activities. Drawing Anzaldúa’s take on adapting and the Aztec moon deity Coyolxauhqui as a woman cut-in piece, the work guides us to reimagine and rehabilitate the body as a hybrid into biota, soil, and earth, and to re-articulate the self and body to coexist in the ecological violence. Echoing Anzaldúa’s words, the work asks, “Why would you consume who you love?”

Embracing one’s own feelings becomes an empowering act, particularly for marginalized bodies that are affected by racialized and gendered representation. **Sophie Utikal**’s figurative textile **THE OCEAN IN ME** (2021) depicts various poses of female bodies of Color, each expressing various emotional states. It encourages the acceptance of feelings such as grief, isolation, vulnerability, or togetherness as the cycle of larger ecologies of a watery landscape. As the artist puts it, it is about feelings of “sadness, connectedness, erotic, and letting go.” Utikal’s use of a soft, tender gesture of collaging and stitching, along with the pastel tones of light fabrics, evokes intimacy and texture of skin. At the same time, the visible black thread is influenced by her Colombian familial culture of hand-sewn tapestries made by women intergenerationally, called *arpilleras*, which also serve as a symbol of feminist resistance.

Anzaldúa criticizes the constructed objectivity of Western ontology and epistemology that have been oppressing the “touch.” As she says, the Western binary logic makes “objects of things and people, distancing itself from them, and “thereby losing ‘touch’ with them.” Exploring the politics of listening through her polyphonic audio mixes, **Tina Omayemi Reden’s *Abstract of Recollections of Touch*** (2020) recounts the sense of touch on the skin as a locus of shared memories. Inspired by a variety of feminist theories on touch and untouched, this speculative storytelling unravels the historical implication embedded in the skin in the racialized, gendered, sexualized dichotomy of the Anthropocene. At the same time, it suggests another reading of “touch,” which creates the effect transferred between bodies to bodies, human to non-human – something permeable, fluid, and plural relationalities of what Astrida Neimanis calls hydrocommons.³ Another sound mix, ***Ain’t I a Woman*** (2020), reclaims the influential eponymous speech in 1851 by Sojourner Truth, an American abolitionist and women’s rights activist who deliberately articulated the systematic erasure of the intersectional struggles of Black women.

In contrast, **Salma Shaka’s** installation, ***Preserving / Persevering: Food Containers*** (2024), unfolding preserved foods in jars, exposes the borders as well as the fragility of the material and culinary culture and its existence. It questions what is reachable and proximate, particularly in the time of ongoing systematic violence in Palestine, which devastates the traces and memories of life, food, knowledge, and people. The artist expresses, “The preservation of food, and ultimately, of life, becomes a vessel for their continuity and memory.”

The ambiguous feeling of displacement and alienation in various tongues, in stretched time and space through migration, is expressed in **Kyungum Lim Jang’s** poem, ***mouther tongue*** **입 있는 혀** (2022/2024). Displayed on the windows in the

exhibition space, designed by her collaborator **Hannah Sakai**, here, a tongue is stuck on a glacier. It is a feeling of puzzling, frustration, or wounds. At the same time, it may be a longing for comfort and love in a state of disorientation, while negating, resisting, blurring, or liquidating the essentialized “mother” tongue. Responding to Jang’s poem, **Tada Kanako** creates a series of textile collages ***A Journey of Mouther Tongue*** **母系詩 誰旅** (2024) as narrative and visual poetry. With her interest in exophonic writing as a foreign language learner, the relation between characters, words, shapes, sounds, and meanings are shuffled as a wordplay of alphabets and hieroglyphic characters. Their collaboration and conversation cross paths in the vein of Gloria or Cha’s exploration of experimental and creative writing.

Re-imagining and drawing feminist genealogy and artistic dialogues within and beyond the Asian context is crucial, given the existing gaps and absences in art historiographies. In her video statement ***Neither Black / Red / Yellow nor Woman*** (2020), curator **Nikita Yingqian Cai** imagines the fictional encounter of three important figures: Pan Yu-lin, one of the pioneers in Chinese modern art, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose artistic life and path navigated through and resisted the process of Othering and the Otherness in the toss of global politics and colonial condition.

As an attempt at decentralized library-making, the publications in the exhibition space include the selection from **VBKÖ Archive, Kunstraum Niederösterreich Library, VOLUMES Archive**, and **Mai Ling Library**. Questioning the gaps within the archival politics, the Zurich-based collective VOLUMES shows part of its collection of publications, selected from the intersectional feminist perspective for this occasion.

Lastly, the purple-colored bookshelf and tables in living library of becomings are designed by **Yi Shin**, incorporating the

concept of fluidity and continuous moving stream, as a design language. The visitors are invited to spend their time reading the publications. During the exhibition, the space will be activated by a talk, performative interaction, somatic reading session, and reading performance.

Quotes by

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Exilée*, 1980.

Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, 1978.

1. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017, 15-16.
2. Gloria Anzaldúa, "How To Tame a Wild Tongue," *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, 1987, 53-64.
3. Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

VOLUMES Archive

The VOLUMES is a non-profit organization and collective created in 2013 in Zurich that supports the various facets of independent art publishing. Its VOLUMES Archive is a collection of zines, artist books, and publications, which exists thanks to the many donations received annually since 2013 for the International Open Call exhibition and Book Awards.

Archives are normally understood as a coherent form of organization, having as objectives to unify, identify, and/or classify the elements within a determined body of documents, objects, etc. The VOLUMES collection is, on the contrary, a diverse collection of material that has been mostly donated. Therefore, it presents a challenge to the classical idea of archival categorization because there hasn't been any systematic process of selection and articulation. Taking this library as a site of investigation, the Volume Archive questions how to activate and organize its content: it researches new forms that take differences, associations, interstices, and gaps as categories to re-think the paradigm of the archive and explores how to deal with the issues of classification and conservation, permitting a constant flux between different temporalities. Since 2015, collaborating with artists, historians, and curators, the VOLUMES Archive looks at what is already there, drawing connections and/or frictions; but also looks at what is not there and how to invite new gazes and voices. Each section curated by the invited guests compiles and activates content from VOLUMES's existing collection while suggesting new acquisitions to complement and expand this curated constellation of publications. The VOLUMES Archive is a project initiated and run by Anne-Laure Franchette for the VOLUMES collective.

living library of becomings presents a selection from the VOLUMES Archive, including publications from the two sections:

S-motion, curated by an artist collective M.Paradoxa, brings together publications on interdependence, collectivity, and feminist solidarities, addressing translation and working with different languages. M.Paradoxa is a collective of Ziqi Jiang, Linda Strähl, Balca Ergener, Esther Schena, and Lisa Biedlingmaie.

MEXA!, curated by Adriana Domínguez and Paloma Ayala, is a collection of independent publications from Mexico, commissioned by the VOLUMES Archive in 2017. Since then, it has been activated with a focus on the feminist agenda. "MEXA! the feminist online takeover" is a collaborative archive of #feministhashtags that articulate the concerns, struggles and demands of feminism in recent times, including the problematics.

PROGRAMS

Wednesday, March 13, 7 – 8:30 pm

Online talk “Decolonial Curatorial Practice as Collective Care and Solidarity” by Kathy-Ann Tan

[Hybrid via Zoom and onsite, in English]

In a global moment where intersectional forms of systemic oppression, racism and social injustice continue to be the norm, decolonial strategies of resistance and self-empowerment in/through art and performance are ever more imperative. This interactive talk will discuss and expand upon decolonial artistic and curatorial practices that are anchored in practices of narrative, archival retrieval, storytelling, critical fabulation and practices of collective care and solidarity. How can anti-colonial narratives be collectively composed and articulated by the body as a living archive of tacit knowledge, erotic power (Audre Lorde) and resistance? Within the spaces of the dominantly white western art academy/ university, how can one develop a critical practice that challenges whiteness as the unmarked given? We will dwell on these questions in order to create a space for discussion and conversation around the notion of decolonial curatorial practice as a practice of collective care and solidarity.

Kathy-Ann Tan is a Berlin-based independent curator, writer and founder of Mental Health Arts Space, a non-profit project space that centers the mental health, knowledge, histories and narratives of BIPOC and minoritized artists and cultural workers. She is interested in alternative and sustainable forms of art dissemination, cultural production and institution-building committed to social justice and decolonial practice beyond a merely representational model of identity politics.

Thursday, March 21, 7 – 8:30 pm

Activation “Preserving / Persevering: Food Containers” by Salma Shaka

[in English]

How do we allow ourselves to eat from the food of people who are being systemically starved and erased? This question confronts the famine and ongoing crisis in Palestine, particularly in Gaza. Conversations on perseverance are not easy to stomach as people feed from the scraps of what remains. The preservation of food, and ultimately, of life, becomes a vessel for their continuity and memory.

The integration of food containers within the exhibition space witnesses two moments: one of preserving them in a stagnant state through installation, and the other of persevering with them through activation. During activation, the containers open up to reveal the textures, smells, and tastes of what was gazed upon, dismantling the border between the observer and the maker. How much can we then digest what has been revealed to us?

Tuesday, March 26, 6 – 7:30 pm

Somatic Reading Session by Daliah Touré

[in English]

The focus of this movement workshop will be an enquiry into touch and listening, as a way of tuning into our own stories and inner landscapes. We invite you to come together to find comfort in and return to an embodied sharing of knowledge. Through a gentle warm up, group impulses and individual exploration, we find strength in our embodied self as a key source of making sense of what surrounds us.

Daliah Touré is a dance artist based in Vienna. Her practice as an artist focuses on enquiries into the centering the body as a tool for investigating the abstract and making those tangible and a felt experience for participants. Her curiosity as an artist stems from the vast experience as a dance practitioner, bringing her into contact with a variety of spaces, artists and multi-disciplinary projects. Her enquiry into collaborative practice became the basis for her MA project, which she completed at the University of Leeds (UK) in 2013. Daliah performs, teaches and works in art education, which enables her to apply her skills as dance maker and facilitator in establishing new formats and approaches to engaging with the wider field of arts.

Monday, April 8, 6 – 7 pm

Reading Performance of Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Work by Auro Orso, with an Introduction by Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

[in German, English]

“Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza” is a semi-autobiographical book by Chicana writer Gloria E. Anzaldúa that explores the borders – in geopolitics, languages, spirituality, gender, and sexuality – as a liminal terrain where multiple identities and cultures converge, clash, and blend. Through an interweaving of prose and poetry in both English and Spanish, along with personal stories, historical reflections, and theoretical insights,

her experimental writing offers a critical perspective on the systems of oppression and injustice, calling for a new consciousness that embraces hybridity, multiplicity, and fluidity against colonial binaries. In connection with the exhibited work, Auro Orso will read the German translation of the book, translated by Chaka Collective, to share and engage with Anzaldúa's significant work in the contemporary German-speaking context.

Auro Orso (MEX/AUT) is a Berlin-based dancer, choreographer, performer, and activist who identifies as Trans and Two-Spirit. He has presented his work in many different venues in Berlin including Dock11, HAU, Sophiensäle, and Ballhaus Naunynstraße, and performed in several other countries around the globe. His artistic research explores decolonizing practices in all aspects of life as well as questioning the Western/colonial illusion of universality, binaries, and “the appropriate”. His work includes a spectrum of topics along with Indigenous futurism and imaginative gender-riots. Reclaiming/remembering/redoing/relearning as well as gentleness, humor, and centering care, intimacy, and pleasure as a radical political posture are omnipresent in his performances. He gives workshops and develops projects to empower Queer and BIPoC communities, to enhance sensibilities, and to heal.

Verena Melgarejo Weinandt is a German-Bolivian artist, curator, educator, and researcher. The focus of her practice is building bridges to the work and legacy of Gloria E. Anzaldúa through artistic, pedagogical, activist, and theoretical approaches. From 2019 to 2021 she curated a transdisciplinary program with District*School Without Center in Berlin to collectively engage with the propositions and movements that Anzaldúa's work and life continues to nurture. She is a project manager and artistic researcher of the REPATRI-ATES Project at the Central European University and has taught at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin, and the HZT of the Berlin University of the Arts.

Paloma Ayala is a visual artist interested in empowering the relationship between domestic living strategies and political contexts. Her work takes the form of publications, videos, installations, reading/cooking sessions, and workshops. Paloma's projects nourish visions of connection, and dreams of emancipation and emphasize practices of care. Her favorite spaces to work range from kitchen to river shore, from international crossing bridge to agricultural land, from community meetings to *aquelarre*. Paloma's work is rooted in her home, Matamoros, Mexico, and the eastern MX/US border landscapes, simultaneously blooming in her current base in Zurich.

Nikita Yingqian Cai, lives and works in Guangzhou, China, where she is currently working as Chief Curator at Times Museum in Guangdong. She has curated many exhibitions and her writings have appeared in a number of publications and magazines. Her recent research focuses on diasporic imagination, postcolonial modernity, and non-state collaboration between the Souths of the world. She is the awardee of the Asian Cultural Council Fellowship in 2019.

Kyungrim Lim Jang & Hannah Sakai are initiator of the collective Slug and Saliva with Hannah Sakai. They work with spoken and written expressions to materialize the gap between sound and meaning. Kyungrim Lim Jang explores how unspoken agreements are maintained and broken through performative speech and silence. She often observes what is happening at the crossroads of borders, identifications, and the narratives that carry these distinctions. What is amplified, deleted, and distorted during the recording/translation process of a narrative and the motives of the programming are also of her keen interest.

Tina Omayemi Reden is a multifaceted artist, activist, teacher, and cultural and community worker based in Zurich. Her artistic practice employs sound installation, storytelling, and performance to explore the potential for communal exchange and transformation. She mixes, remixes, and quotes bodies, sounds, and voices into polyphonic assemblages and fictive or actual collaborations. The artist seeks to question Western cultural codes and accepted wisdom by paying homage to the ones who have shaped and inspired queer and Black feminist thought and practices. The artist is an active member of Bla*Sh (Black*She), a Black feminist network from German-speaking Switzerland, and the collective FUBU (For Us By Us) in Zurich.

Salma Shaka is a Vienna-based multi-media artist and writer raised between Palestine and the UAE. She received her BA from the University of Applied Arts Vienna with her thesis "Heirloom," which explores seed conservation efforts in the West Bank. Ancestral knowledge and indigenous land back movements are central in her practice, as she provokes conversations through an assemblage of different terrains.

Kanako Tada is an artist based in Vienna. She works in various media such as drawing, painting, textile, writing, curation, and collaborative projects. Her work, besides being a skillful celebration of vibrant colors and textures and their composition, often reflects exophonic life and phenomena of living outside of one's mother tongue, experiencing the organic fluidity of linguistic fluctuation. With the idea of polyphonic grammar/s in space and time, she explores how one's linguistic milieu shifts in the micro and macro cosmos of cultural mobility.

Sophie Utikal is a textile artist, living and working between Berlin and Vienna. She was born in Tallahassee, US, and grew up in Mainz, Germany. She studied contextual painting with Ashley Hans Scheirl at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2014-2019) and is a co-editor of the book *Anti-Colonial Fantasies/Decolonial Strategies* (2017). Her artworks have been shown throughout Europe, including Kristinstads Konsthall (2022), Kunsthalle Vienna (2021), *Mediterranea Biennale 19* in San Marino (2021), and *Museion Bolzano* (2018). Her most recent solo show was at *Kunstraum Innsbruck, AT* (2023) and at *Galerie im Turm, Berlin, Germany* (2020). Her work is part of the public collection of the Federal Republic of Germany and the private collection of *Museion, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Bolzano, in South Tyrol, Italy*.

VOLUMES is a non-profit organisation and collective created in 2013 in Zurich, run by Anne-Laure Franchette, Patrizia Mazzei, and Gloria Wismer. The collective aims to support the various facets of international art publishing and introduce it to a larger audience in Switzerland through series of events and an ongoing research agenda.

In every field where society is predominantly white, **Shi Yin** sees an opportunity to bring unfamiliar perspectives closer to the gaze, whether it's in DJing (Hotpotposse, That Good Wibe Collective), in the male-dominated construction industry (as an upcoming architect), or in community-strengthening endeavors (Perilla Zine, Wandapanda & Tiger). Shi Yin finds motivation in realizing her personal trinity through subtle, interdisciplinary approaches, expanding conventional habits of seeing and living realities.

Mai Ling, founded in Vienna in 2019, is an anonymous artists' collective and association committed to fostering dialogues on racism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice, specifically targeting Asian FLINT* individuals (women, lesbian, inter, non-binary, and trans). The group challenges the Western heteropatriarchal gaze, confronting and dismantling ingrained racist stereotypes about 'Asia' through diverse artistic and discursive methods while seeking collective resistance and pleasure.

Miwa Negoro is a curator and researcher based in Berlin and Vienna at the intersection of visual arts and performing arts. With her interests in the discourse of performativity, decolonial thinking, modernity, and re-narration of stories, Negoro's curatorial practice aims at encouraging the fluidity of transcultural, non-binary conditions in the global present. Her practice varies from exhibition-making, artistic research, dramaturg, art management, editorial, and translation. She also writes about gender, space, and architecture. She was a curatorial board member of OnCurating Project Space in Zurich (2019–2021) and a curatorial research assistant at the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich (2017–2021).

Install Support: Hiroshi Takizawa

Special thanks to: Giovanna Bragaglia, Aki Lee, Mika Maruyama

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Opening: Thursday, February 29, 7 pm

Opening times: Wed–Sat 14:00-18:00

and by appointment (info@vbkoe.org)

Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs (VBKÖ)

Austrian Association of Women Artists

Maysedergasse 2/28, 1010

The performative library started in 2020 (formally as the “inter:archive”) and its research phase is supported by the School of Commons (SoC), a community-learning space, located at the Zurich University of the Arts, in 2023-2024.

The exhibition is supported by Culture Moves Europe, a project funded by the European Union.