

**TACTICS
FOR
STAYING
HOME
IN
UNCERTAIN
TIMES**



TACTICS FOR STAYING HOME IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

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March 15 - May 16, 2021

MSVU Art Gallery

Curated by Liuba González de Armas

Director's Foreword

In March of 2020, when daily life at MSVU Art Gallery changed as drastically as is possible, we could not have predicted that our very next in-gallery exhibition would be organized entirely via remote work and amid constant public gathering restrictions. Nor could we have fathomed that such an exhibition would be accessed in person by nearly no-one.

Now, over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, we reveal into what has borne of that time: *Tactics for Staying Home in Uncertain Times* is a testament to the potential in adaptability, perseverance, and the fruits of careful and situational specificity. Curated by Liuba González de Armas, this project and the five artists represented within it came together in innovative ways under trying circumstances.

Liuba joined MSVU as Halifax's Young Curator in July 2020, initially from a distance and while social isolating. It makes sense that the project she took up during her time in the position should address, in some way, the context of its creation. That she has done, and aptly

enough to be more than a COVID-19 show—the artists in the *Tactics* exhibition and accompanying catalogue show us how we come together, near or afar, through our collective and respective needs to be nurtured in place. That home, whether with us where we go or made by us where we are, may be our only safeguard against global crises, biological or societal alike.

We are grateful to our partners in stewarding Liuba's work term: Canadian Museums Association, Dalhousie Art Gallery, and Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. And to Liuba, who exuded grace and thoughtfulness in her commitment to truly relating while apart, we document here our encouragement to keep making home wherever you may be.



Laura Ritchie
Director
MSVU Art Gallery

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Faint text on the floor, possibly a floor plan or map.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, now in its first full year in Canada, has radically centered home as the site of daily life for many. The age-old question of home (namely "what and where is home?") is made no simpler by this reality. Indeed, this crisis has brought attention to a broad spectrum of inequalities in housing access. Co-opting the language of public health directives to stay home and shelter in place, *Tactics for Staying Home in Uncertain Times* invites viewers to consider the meanings of home through the lens of diaspora. This exhibition asks, how do we stay home when home is away? How do we make here feel like home?

Tactics brings together five emerging diasporic and racialized artists living across Canada whose works articulate ideas of displacement, domesticity, and the limits of belonging. Their works draw on craft and sculpture-based practices, with pieces that are three-dimensional, modest in scale, and thereby portable. These artworks are grounded in the fabric of lived experience, often recreating familiar objects of utility and comfort. Conversely, the works also unsettle the ordinary by using novel materials and unexpected forms, rendering, for instance, a ripening vegetable in hard polymer and a tea set in crumbly earth. By inventively blending the familiar and the unfamiliar, the artists trace connections between present

and past homes. Each work thus suggests an array of tactics through which an individual adapts to a new home. In this sense, the artists share a common concern with the diasporic condition.

Tactics interprets its constitutive artworks through the notion of hometactics as conceived by Latina feminist philosopher Mariana Ortega. Namely, these are "practices that allow for a sense of familiarity with and a particular sense of 'belonging' to a place, space, group, or 'world' while avoiding the restrictive, exclusive elements that a notion of belonging may carry with it." In brief, the exhibition seeks to present these works as anchors in the process of home-making.

The overall exhibition design alludes to the intimacy of a kitchen, which is a site of culinary diplomacy, of culture shock and comfort, and crucially, of community organizing and coalition-building. In recreating a domestic space that is unique yet familiar, and assorted and yet cohesive, *Tactics* reveals common ground in the artists' experience of making home as diasporic people in times of global crisis. Where each artwork suggests tacit everyday gestures of individuals adapting to a new environment, they collectively make visible dialoguing tactics for belonging, making home, and cultivating solidarity with others.

As a whole, the exhibition argues that the act of making can itself be a crucial tactic for staying home.

'Mariana Ortega. "Hometactics: Self-Mapping, Belonging, and the Home Question," *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014); 174.

rudi aker

topographies of a homeplace II

Glass beads, beading thread, fishing line, adhesive black vinyl
2020-21

rudi aker's *topographies of a homeplace II* (2020-21) is a series of abstracted, three-dimensional bead weavings accompanied by introspective, poetic texts, installed on adjacent walls in vinyl lettering. The works map intimate, interior physical spaces of the artist's life. As both souvenirs and objects of contemplation, these handheld maps seek to haptically capture the experience of domestic spaces as they are remembered.



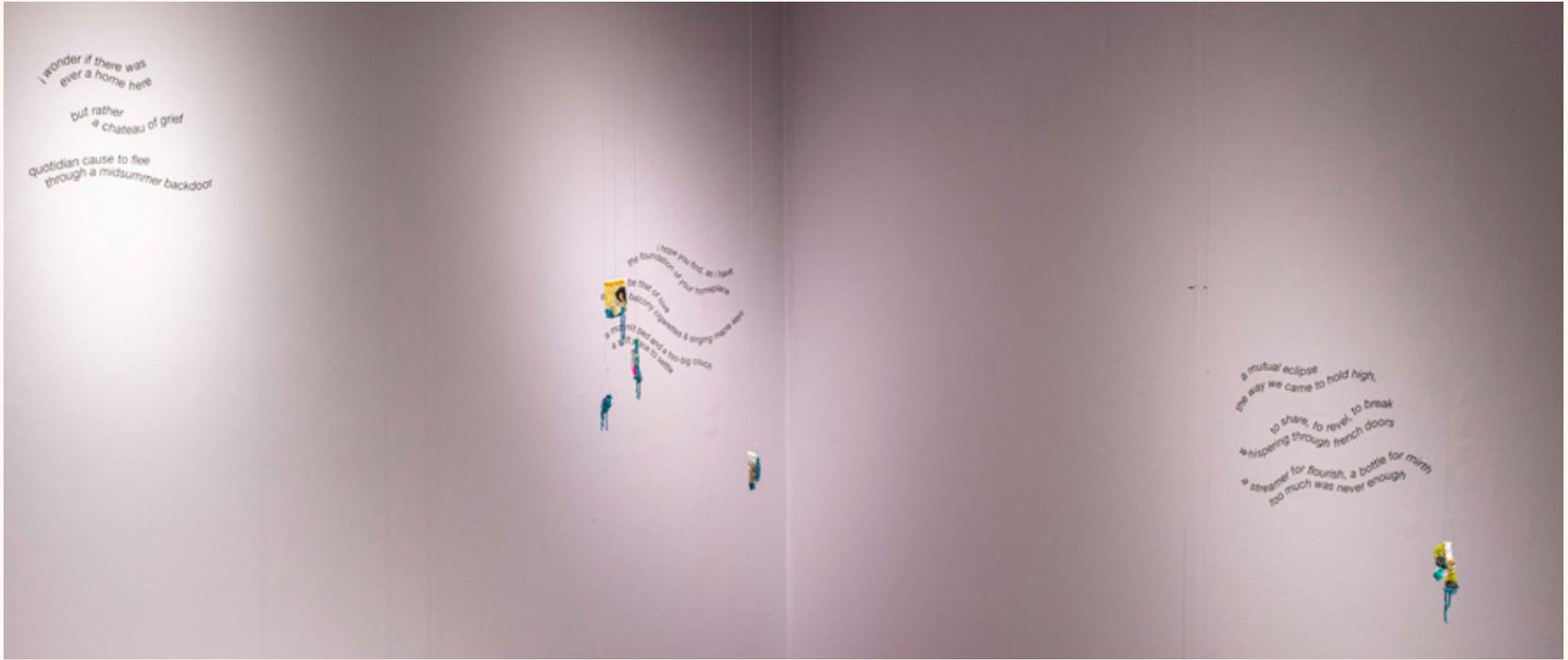
topographies of a homeplace II (2020-21)

*reset the course
or, a new becoming*

*this is where i learned to love
the gateway, a wooden hill*

*a door to anywhere, to nowhere
leaving as we had come*

topographies of a homeplace II (2020-21)



topographies of a homeplace II (2020-21)

By surveying their various homes in both Sitansisk/Fredericton and Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyaang/Montréal, aker speaks to their experience of mobility and temporary diaspora: of leaving home to seek out education and creative pursuits, and of the uncertainty of making a home as an uninvited guest in new territories. As a collection of past and present dwellings, these maps articulate the act of creating comfort in transit.

rudi aker is a Wolastoqew artist, organizer, writer and curator from St. Mary's First Nation in Sitansisk/Fredericton and, for now, a guest on Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. Their artistic practice centers kinship, placehood, visibility, and traverses (un)colonized space(s) through counter-cartographies.

Bishara Elmi

Salt of the Earth

Molded earth
2017



Salt of the Earth (2017)

Bishara Elmi's *Salt of the Earth* (2017) is a handmade tea set created with soil collected by the artist from previous homes. Each piece is cast by carefully pressing the soil into mold forms made from a tea set. The resulting objects are texturally and symbolically rich. Each piece serves as an index and archive of the place from which it originates, bearing a unique array of mineral and bacterial life, scrambled into the familiar forms of a teapot, teacups, saucers, and spoons.

The form of the tea set speaks to the warmth of home and an ancestral culture of hospitality. The chosen material makes these objects particularly delicate, and this fragility means that abrupt movement poses a risk of rupture and loss. The dispersion of sediments from the work's immanent erosion formally echoes the process of diaspora – of spreading out over space and time. In this sense, the work speaks to intermingling notions of mobility, memory, and the complex dynamics of maintaining cultural continuity and connection to the lands that sustain us.

Bishara Elmi is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and educator working in a range of art forms, materials, and creative processes. Elmi's work focuses on Black geographies and exile. Elmi is currently based in Tkaronto.



Salt of the Earth (2017)



Salt of the Earth (2017)

Cinthia Arias Auz

Ta-da! (sin manos)

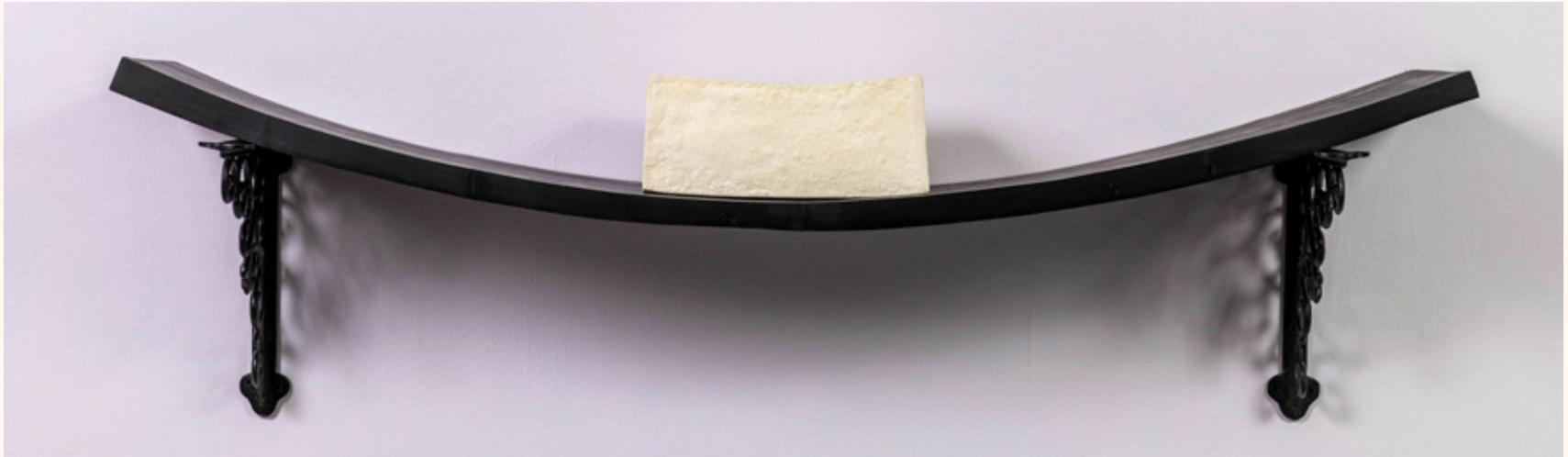
Ta-dah! (without hands)

Wood, salt crystals, cast iron brackets
2020-21

Cinthia Arias Auz's *Ta-da! (sin manos)* (2020) is a sculpture composed of a solid brick of salt which sits atop a warped shelf supported by baroque-style cast iron brackets. The semiotic openness of these three elements makes for a wealth of interpretations of this work.

For instance, in the artist's childhood home in Guayaquil, salt was inextricably linked to her grandmother's syncretic rites of domestic protection. Salt behind a doorway guards a home from perceived evils. In the North Atlantic region that hosts this exhibition, salt is instead commonly bound with the realms of Maritime life and food preservation. Both views share a concern with protection and preservation, and a knowing viewer may weigh these two interpretations simultaneously.

How do these two worldviews shape one another? The wooden shelf appears to be warping under the weight



Ta-da! (sin manos) [Ta-dah! (without hands)] (2020-21)



Ta-da! (sin manos) [Ta-dah! (without hands)] (2020-21)



Ta-da! (sin manos) [Ta-dah! (without hands)] (2020-21)

of the dense salt block. But the salt block, too, bends to bear the curve of the shelf. In this sense, the work explores the potential of blending cultural codes and speaks, with certain playfulness, to the experience of misunderstanding and being (mis)understood without attributing a negative valence to it.

Cinthia Arias Auz is an Ecuadorian artist and writer based in Kjipuktuk. Her writing has been published in *Visual Arts News*, *Public Parking* and *Billie Magazine*. She has exhibited in spaces such as Otorongo - Laboratorio Creativo in Cuenca, Multinacional in Quito and Museo Antropológico y de Arte Contemporáneo in Guayaquil.

Michelle Campos Castillo

la comida en casa

the food at home

Hand-painted 3D printed polymer
2020-21



la comida en casa [the food at home] (2020-21)

Michelle Campos Castillo's sculpture *la comida en casa* consists of a handful of 3D-printed, hand-painted polymer plantains. Despite their outward similarities, plantains are distinct from bananas, though both are firmly associated with the tropics and the global south. In being so easily confounded with bananas, these sculptures of plantains hint at the tension between blending in and being misread by external observers.

Campos Castillo depicts plantains at various states of ripeness to suggest the variety of uses this global culinary staple has in cultures spanning the Americas, Africa, Asia, and their diasporas. A plantain transmutes from starchy vegetable to saccharine fruit as it ripens and this fundamentally impacts how they are prepared and consumed. By depicting this staple in a durable medium, the work pays homage to and modestly monumentalizes the plantain as a familiar, sustaining food.

Michelle Campos Castillo is a Salvadoran visual artist living in Amiskwaciwâskahikan/Edmonton. She has been the recipient of several public art commissions from the City of Edmonton, including *Plátanos*, a set of three sculptures on permanent display at Belvedere Transit Centre. She is currently writing a graphic memoir about her experience of immigrating to Canada as a child.



la comida en casa [the food at home] (2020-21)



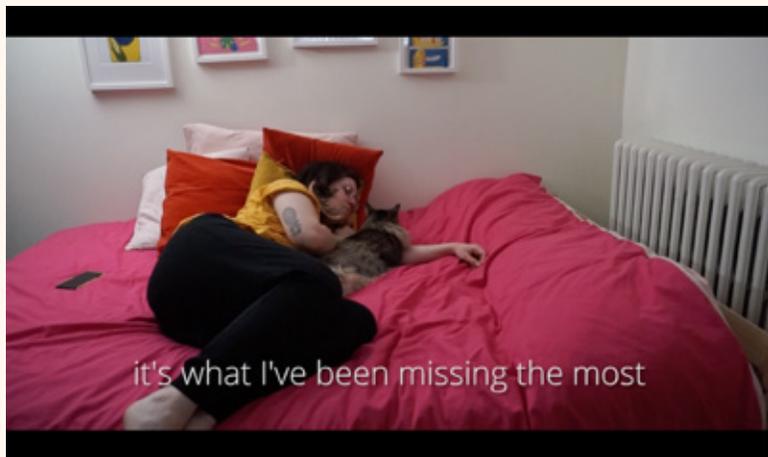
la comida en casa [the food at home] (2020-21)

Camila Salcedo

tu (mi) mejor amiga
your (my) best friend

Closed-loop video with audio
2020-21

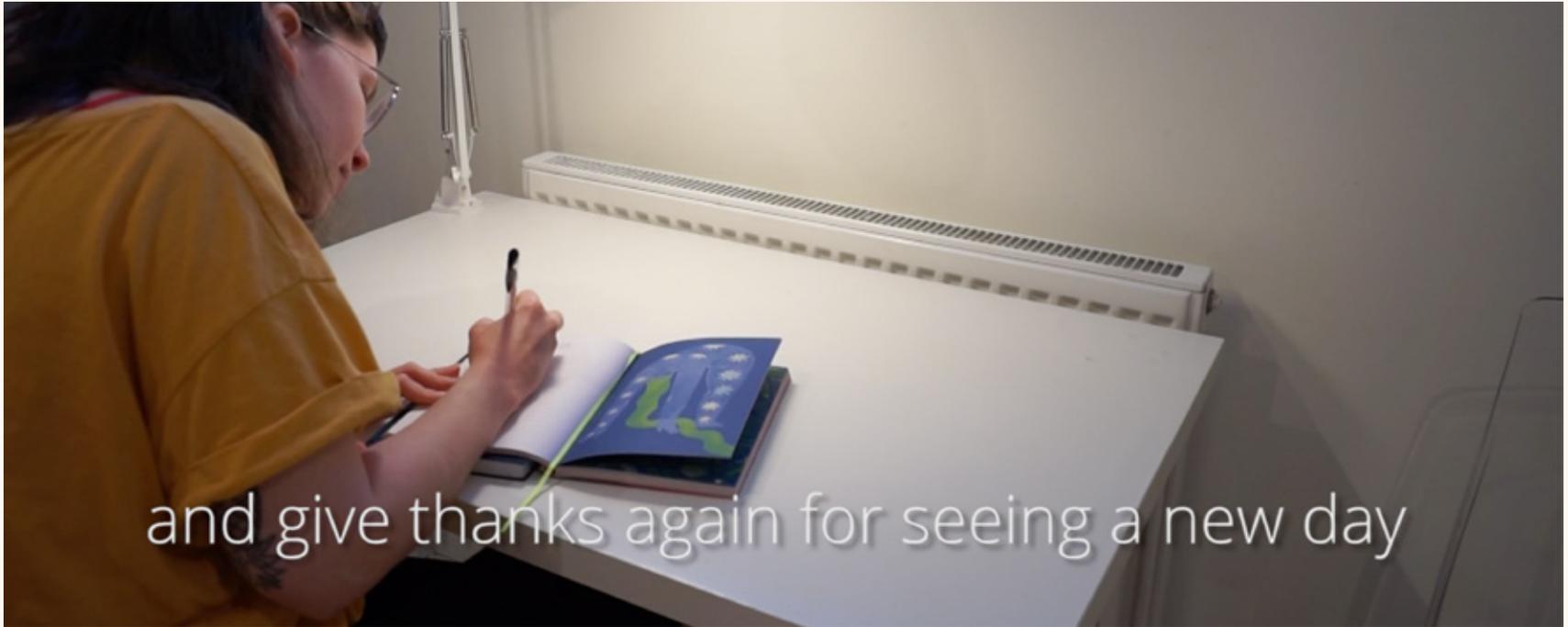
Camila Salcedo's *tu (mi) mejor amiga* is a closed-loop video with audio narration. The artist records herself performing daily tasks in her new home. This routine is enriched by the voice of her abuela (grandmother) - who moved to Canada in recent years and has spent much of the pandemic living in isolation - narrating a typical day in her life.



tu (mi) mejor amiga [your (my) best friend] (2020-21)



tu (mi) mejor amiga [your (my) best friend] (2020-21)



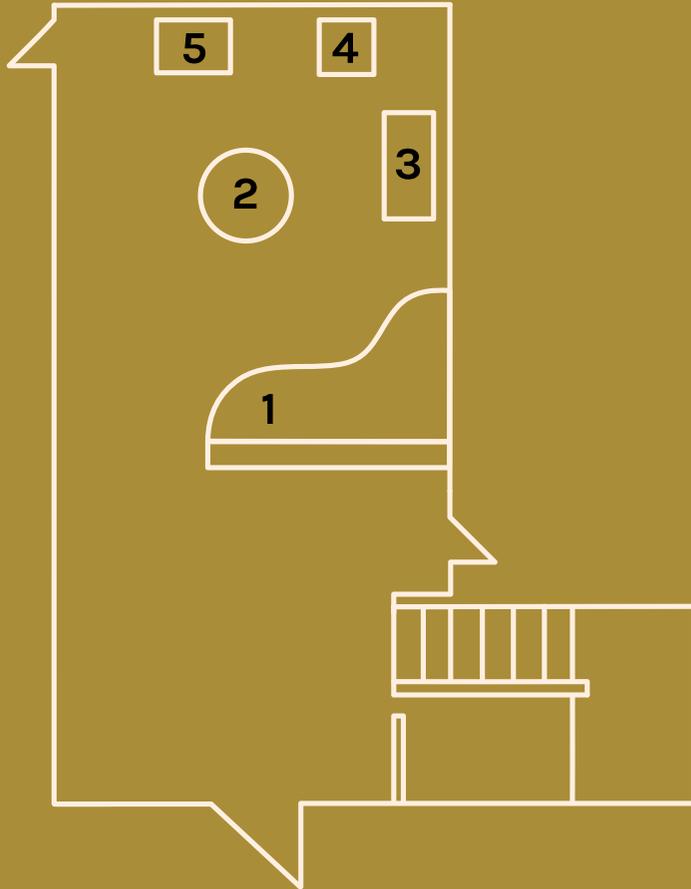
and give thanks again for seeing a new day

This juxtaposition of lives seen and heard in the video speaks to the surprisingly collective experience of living alone. There is a quiet intimacy in the video's recognition of domestic habits passed down through three generations, albeit modified by shifting contexts and values. Subtextual to this work are the sounds and textures of diasporic connection. After all, phone and video calls with family and friends are a reality of diasporic life that long precedes the COVID-19 pandemic.

tu (mi) mejor amiga [your (my) best friend] (2020-21)

Camila Salcedo is an artist, curator and community organizer who explores art-making via performance, video, and textiles and is interested in questioning institutions that seek to categorize in terms of nation, politics, and migratory status. They were born in Caracas, Venezuela and currently live in Tkaronto.

Exhibition Layout



List of Works

1 • rudi aker

topographies of a homeplace II, 2020–21.
Fishing line, beading, adhesive vinyl.

2 • Bishara Elmi

Salt of the Earth, 2017.
Molded earth.

3 • Cinthia Arias Auz

Ta-da! (sin manos) [Ta-dah! (without hands)], 2020–21.
Wood, salt, brackets.

4 • Michelle Campos Castillo

la comida en casa [the food at home], 2020–21.
Hand-painted 3D printed polymer.

5 • Camila Salcedo

tu (mi) mejor amiga [your (my) best friend], 2020–21.
Closed-loop video with audio.

Acknowledgements

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Liuba González De Armas

Halifax's Young Curator

2020-2021

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Liuba González de Armas is Halifax's Young Curator, a position made possible by funds from the Canadian Museum Association's Shirley L. Thomson Award for Young Curators, and hosted at MSVU Art Gallery in partnership with Dalhousie Art Gallery and Saint Mary's University Art Gallery.

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msvu art gallery

Mount Saint Vincent University
166 Bedford Highway
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3M 2J6
www.msvuart.ca

Writer: Liuba González De Armas
Editor: Laura Ritchie
Photography: Steve Farmer
Design: Cecilia Salcedo

