

EMMA WALTRAUD HOWES

The Time it Takes

The Time it Takes is the first solo museum exhibition by the artist Emma Waltraud Howes. It aims to highlight the many lines of inquiry that run through her recent practice by presenting a selection of works from between 2012 and 2024.

When Howes was a child, her mother would tell her a version of the story of Sedna, the Inuk goddess of the sea. According to legend, members of a village fled famine in kayaks in search of new hunting grounds. Sedna's father, seeing her as one too many mouths to feed, threw her overboard. Sedna managed to hang onto the sides of the kayak, but her father struck her frozen fingers with a paddle. Her hands then split into pieces and turned into fish and marine animals as Sedna sank to the bottom of the sea. Since then, she has reigned over all of the ocean's creatures and seeks vengeance by creating storms that terrorize mariners and influence the yield of their hunting and fishing trips.

Early on, Howes experienced the rigid and formatted universe of classical dance, where subjectivity and personal opinion are unwelcome. And although her fingers weren't cut off, in some sense, her tongue was. When we lose the ability to speak, how can we be heard? How can we protest what is happening to us? What can we do when we are haunted by the ghosts of the past? The body becomes a space of resistance, the medium through which everything is expressed, and the source of a new language. Howes makes sense of small and great histories by transforming them into fantastic, prolific, and fertile narratives.

In her most recent project, titled *Bang Bang Baroque* (2024), Howes uses a maximalist aesthetic to compose her own mythology where everything is related: the personal and the political; the relational and the social; the vegetable, animal, and mineral; the imaginary and the tangible; histories and History. Dust from the Sahara desert made from the fossils of thousand-year-old fish is carried by the wind over the ocean and into the Amazon, where it nourishes the forests. In much the same way, we carry in our bodies today the trauma of our ancestors.

For several years, Howes's work has reflected this interconnection. Her multidisciplinary projects often take root in drawing and speculative choreographic notation before evolving into three- and four-dimensional form. These then perpetually feed off of each other. This intermedial translation process extends over a long time, *the time it takes* to give shape to movement and life to form.

Howes's projects generate many kinds of traces. Her libretto for the film *Bang Bang Baroque* (the aria's lyrics and choreographic indications) is heavily annotated. A selection of footnotes from this document is included in the labels so that the story of the exhibition can extend the story of the artist's practice.

Charlotte Lalou Rousseau, Guest Curator

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EMMA WALTRAUD HOWES

Toronto, Ontario, 1976

1. *Shivering Giants Great Lounge,* from the series *Bang Bang Baroque*, 2024

Graphite on nylon textile, air pump, 105 x 380 x 195 cm

Property of the artist

xvii. The “Ghost Army” was an American tactical unit during the Second World War whose sole purpose was to mislead Hitler’s German forces regarding the size and location of the Allied army. The tools for this deception included inflatable tanks and artillery. The plan worked, but the story came to light only when it was declassified in 1996. Many of the men in this unit, including Bill Blass, Ellsworth Kelly, Arthur Singer and Art Kane, were artists hired specifically for the purpose of designing these soft sculptures.

Like a whale in a natural history museum, this strange organ hangs over the museum’s foyer. Inside the glass, steel, and concrete chest cavity, it has a life of its own. A cross between a chaise longue and a psychoanalyst’s couch, this inflatable chair invites us to leap into the void. When deflated and shivering, it seems to wither away, like a strange fruit or a worn-out parachute. When inflated, this giant evokes self-elevation, baroque opulence, even Russia’s Catherine the Great (and her erotic furniture). But this imposing presence is fleeting, and like Sisyphus, the whole endeavour must always begin again.

Here, Howes refers to the psychoanalytic process of *durcharbeiten* or “working through,” whereby an individual works to accept elements of their unconscious to free themselves from a repetitive compulsion; that is, the recurrence of problematic behaviour. This awareness allows the person to act on negative patterns in their life rather than suffer from them.

2. *Ankyloglossia (n. tongue-tie)* | score, 2012

Graphite on paper, 59.5 x 42 cm

***Ankyloglossia (n. tongue-tie)* (excerpt), 2014**

HD video, colour, sound, 3 min 53 s

From the series *Ankyloglossia (n. tongue-tie)*

Property of the artist

xviii-2. "The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits."

—*Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, 1942,*
trans. Justin O'Brien

This series is based on Samuel Beckett's mute play *Quad*. Written for television, it was broadcast for the first time in 1981 and published in 1984. In this "piece for four players, light and percussion," four anonymous performers dressed in coloured robes pace around and across a square stage. The choreography is precise, jolty, hypnotic, and cyclical.

Ankyloglossia is a condition in which the tongue's movements are limited, most often due to a malformation of the frenulum, which can lead to difficulties in elocution. In *Ankyloglossia (n. tongue-tie)*, Howes revisits *Quad* by incorporating choreographic elements inspired by protest strategies such as call and response. A specific movement (pile, curl, shake, free, base, foot, fold, and stack) is assigned to each performer (that is, parts of her body). The drawing presented here constitutes the first draft of the final piece: eight videos integrated inside as many black towers installed in a space inhabited by reverberating phantom steps. The final, full-length choreography lasts seven hours, six minutes, and thirty-nine seconds, and the score is written on a 230 x 42 cm sheet. The video shows dislocated body parts that, like insects in an entomology box, seek to express their identity despite the restrictions imposed upon them.

3. Note: Movement Mouth, 2024 (2016)

Inkjet print on cotton paper, 118.9 x 84.1 cm

Stage Directions for a Mouth, 2014

HD video, colour, sound, 7 min 15 s

***pst, pscht ... hush, shhhhhh!!!*, 2016**

Pewter impressions of the interior of a mouth, acrylic panels, nylon wires, 11.4 x 48.3 x 38.1 cm

From the series *Stage Directions for a Mouth*

Property of the artist

xxxiiiib-4. "In order to ghost on the binary body, to abandon it as a failed idea, we must step back and look at the world as a body, an assemblage that has been constructed. The body, like the world, is a tool in and of itself."

—*Legacy Russell, Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto, 2020*

This installation is based on Samuel Beckett's play *Not I* (1972), translated into French by the author in 1973 (*Pas moi*). A disembodied mouth spews a torrent of nearly unintelligible words from a height of about three metres above an otherwise pitch-black stage. Both free and dissociated, Mouth insistently narrates her stream of consciousness in the third person ("who? ... no! ... she! ...") as she recounts the origins of her muteness, her stifled suffering, and the buzzing of her incessant thoughts.

The series *Stage Directions for a Mouth*, of which select elements are presented here, is a choreography for a mouth that manifests resistance. Howes offers alternative modes of agency when verbal expression is impossible, lost, insufficient, or repressed. Metal fills the void of this mouth's deaf cry. Tangible, observable, heavy objects are among the physical manifestations of this silence. Could they be used as weapons?

Howes is inspired by non-violent forms of protest such as banging on pots and pans, a tradition that dates back to 19th century France. More recently, the practice was performed during the Algerian war (1954–1962), in Latin America in the 1970s (*cacerolazos*), and in Québec during the student strike of 2012.

4. *Children For or Against the Destruction of Birds series*, 2014

Graphite on paper, 42 x 59.9 cm each

Property of the artist

xviii-1a. During China's socio-economic Great Leap Forward period of 1958-1962, led by Mao Zedong, citizens, as part of the infamous Four Pests campaign, were encouraged to bang pots and set off fireworks in order to exterminate sparrows. The noise created deterred the birds from resting, forcing them to fly until the point of exhaustion, where their tiny hearts burst from pure physical exertion.

The sixteen drawings from this series, seven of which are presented here, are based on a single photograph from the 1930s or 1940s of children protesting against the extermination of birds in the Soviet Union. Information on this image has been misplaced or lost in translation... Was it an annual celebration as part of Birds' Day? A school activity to distract themselves from Stalinist repression? A way to denounce famine and war by bypassing censorship? One thing is certain: these bird masks are a plea to humanity. This series is part of Howes's research on masks and elements of disguise as strategies of embodiment and empathy through mimesis. These signs don't need words. Sometimes we make noise to kill birds; other times, it's to save them.

The eradication of a species can upset an entire ecosystem, one in which humans—as we tend to forget—are an integral part. The extermination of sparrows in China caused an ecological imbalance that led to the Great Famine, killing over thirty million people. Humans suffer from the destruction of their environment, and will continue to do so. How much longer will the canary in the coal mine sing?

5. *Artichoke VII: Essential Goo*, 2022

***Artichoke IX: Optimistic Incrementalist*, 2022**

***Artichoke VIII: Assume Generous*, 2022**

From the series *Manageable Matter: Maces I-IX*

Glass, variable dimensions

Property of the artist

xiva-1. "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."

—Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016

The series *Manageable Matter: Maces I-IX* is composed of nine glass sculptures representing artichokes in three different stages: closed, in the process of blossoming, and in full bloom. Referencing Simone Weil's posthumously published *La pesanteur et la grâce* (1947, translated into English as *Gravity and Grace* in 1952), Howes explores notions of gravity and grace through the figure of the artichoke. She alludes to the two definitions of the word "mace": as a ceremonial sceptre and a club-like weapon, which are both symbols of power. The actual structure of the artichoke—a tender heart hidden under several thorny layers—reflects this duality. The fragility and delicacy of these glass artichokes is matched only by their weight and destructive potential. Grace is a strength that should be protected.

Howes imagined these objects as the interweaving of several stories. A 16th century manuscript describes the Schembart carnival in Nuremberg during which participants whipped themselves with herbal bouquets loaded with fireworks as part of a fertility ritual. There is also Ciro Terranova, "The Artichoke King," a mobster who controlled the artichoke trade in New York in the 1920s and 1930s. He used explosives to intimidate vegetable producers, from urban markets in New York to farmers in California. Bertold Brecht's play *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* (*The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*), written in 1941, was presented for the first time in 1958 in Germany.

Inspired by New York's Artichoke King, it is a satirical allegory of the rise of Adolf Hitler set in Chicago's criminal underworld of the 1930s, where Arturo Ui sows terror in a bid to control the cauliflower market.

6. *Separate the Tears from the Water: Cornucopia, Narcissist, Battle*, 2024

Graphite on nylon textile, approximately 135 x 180 cm each
Property of the artist

lviii-1. "You do not expect an insect colony to be transfixed with grief at the destruction of a neighboring anthill, but you do assume a certain degree of empathy in human nature, and to that extent there is indeed something alarmingly absurd and shocking about continuing to drink coffee in the normal way on Hamburg balconies at the end of July 1943, rather like the sight of Grandville's animals, in human dress and armed with cutlery, consuming a fellow creature. On the other hand, keeping up everyday routines regardless of disaster, from the baking of a cake to put on the coffee table to the observance of more elevated cultural rituals, is a tried and trusted method of preserving what is thought of as healthy human reason."

—W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 1999, trans. Anthea Bell

xb-1a. During the Second World War, the parachutes of Allied paratroopers were collected and sent home, where possible. The parachutes were made out of precious silk, and many women and widows would use the material to sew clothes, undergarments and, in some cases, new wedding gowns.

xva-1. The humpback anglerfish has a small organ on its head that contains millions of bioluminescent bacteria, so that it can see at ocean depths where there is no light to speak of.

Take a seat.

7. *Bang Bang Baroque*, 2024

3-channel HD video (original 4K), colour, sound, surtitles, 65 min 43 s
Property of the artist

xxvic. "Respect and love for those who thrive in narrow places, the in-between spaces of change. Gratitude to those who have made movement their method, upheaval their home. And who, without even a whistle, know when to get in line, when to make a circle, when to spin the ocean. And know it with the drum of their whole bodies. Who have so practiced merengue that they know just when to turn. Whose bomba call and response has become seismic now. Impossible to ignore."

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, 2020

This *hyper-glitch opera* is a disjointed fable for seven characters where one finds bird-fingers, chalice-hands, and artichokes-grenades. All are welcome to the party to witness a confrontation between the inflated heads of *Energetic Pessimist*, *Let All Canons Fall*, and *The Narcissist*, also known as, respectively, Cornucopia, Battle, and Narcissist. As the personalities of a single individual, distinct people, or characters from society as a whole, these three figures live in precarious balance. If one falls, the other rises, with potentially catastrophic results. In fact, it *will* happen. There will be hits below the belt, and we'll have to start all over again. The figure of Aria Monumental sings a requiem for destructive egos. Metronome Timekeeper, the eternally wise whale, watches us from the depths of the ocean, on an entirely different wavelength. Meanwhile, ball chasers make sure everything goes smoothly.

Referencing the codes of opera, ballet, heavy metal, techno, and *baguazhang*, among others, Howes leads us through several acts, from calm to chaos, until the dust settles. The libretto's text and indications, presented as surtitles, transform themselves in sync with this epic story. Howes calls on us to celebrate our flaws, frictions, and complexities rather than sweeping them under the carpet. This work (and it most certainly is) requires humility, intention, and depth. And a bit of magic. Soon, you will witness a transformation; incremental of course, but a transformation nonetheless. Repeat.

Credits

A film by: Emma Waltraud Howes

Production Manager and Assistant Director: Marie Glassl

Production Assistance: Elena Popova, Anna van der Veen

Performer, Co-Composition and Vocals (*Aria Monumental*): Kinga Ötvös

Research (*Aria Monumental*): Jess Gadani

Performer (*Metronome Timekeeper*): Jao Moon

Performer (*Scorekeeper I*): Joni Barnard

Performer (*Scorekeeper II*): Annalise Van Even

Performer (*Battle aka Let All Canons Fall, or Aktualneurosen*): Eli Cohen

Performer (*Cornucopia aka Energetic Pessimist (after Kristeva)*): Chia-Ying Chiang, Sonya Levin

Performer (*Narcissist aka The Narcissist, or Elsa's Muse*): Przemek Kamiński

Director of Photography: Kleber Nascimento

Camera Operator: Lena Krenz

1st Assistant Camera: Boyko Panayotov

2nd Assistant Camera and Data Wrangler: Adela Asavei

Gaffer: Alexander Kain

Electricians: Lewin Berninger, Marcel Ruddies

Grip: Marlon Koppelkamm

Technician (DMX Operator): Marc A. Bodenbach

Still Photography: Nicholas Ash

Sound Recording and Design: Adam Asnan

Technician (Extinct Audio BM9 microphone): Stewart Tavener

Composition: Jacob Stoy

Composition Research: Ethan Braun

Costume Design (*Baroque(n) Tethers*): Studio Marta Martino

Costume Design (*Scorekeepers*): Don Aretino, Muyao Zhang

Hair and Makeup Special Effects: Caterina Veronesi

Hair and Makeup Assistant: Fu Okamura

Costume Assistance (*Metronome Timekeeper*): Cristina Nyffeler, Caterina Veronesi

Costume Assistance (Inflatable sculptures): Rosa Czernin, Ursula E. Klein (Schulteswien)

Glass Assistance: Rudy Faulkner (Berlin Glas e.V.)

Graphic Designer: Daniel Neubacher

Co-production: Ludwig Kameraverleih, SUMOLIGHT

Project Manager (Ludwig Kameraverleih): Thomas Buchholz

Lighting: Klaus Hamlescher (SUMOLIGHT)

Additional Gratitude: Big Image, TLT
Catering: Farrah Hammadou (TableFarrah)

Postproduction manager: Philipp Maurice Raube
Editor: Elisa Purfürst
Visual Effects: Lars Ledebur
Post Production House: The Post Republic
Color grading: Maren Henke, Gregor Pfüller
Sound mix: Henry Uhl

Surtitles layout and design: Belén Ríos Falcón, Franziska Morlok (Rimini Berlin)
French translators: Marie Glassl, Charlotte Lalou Rousseau
French copy editors: Bernard Bohbot, Chloé Gagné Dion
English copy editor: Mark Soo

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8. Energetic Pessimist (after Kristeva):

Performer I, 2019

The Narcissist, or Elsa's Muse:

Performer III, 2019

Let All Canons Fall, or Aktualneurosen:

Performer II, 2019

From the series *Bang Bang Baroque*

Graphite on paper, 70 x 50 cm each

Property of the artist

ic-3. "The monster is one who lives in transition. One whose face, body and behaviours cannot yet be considered true in a predetermined regime of knowledge and power."

—Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 2020, trans. Frank Wynne

These drawings are inspired by baroque caricatures that poke fun at people's wigs. Exaggeratedly voluminous and teeming with life, these wigs were designed, in part, to hide hair loss caused by syphilis. The works also pay tribute to the illustrator Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard, also known as Grandville (1803–1847), who specialized in human satyr figures with animal heads. He illustrated La Fontaine's *Fables* (1838 edition), and the Surrealists considered him a precursor to their movement.

These three monstrous, delicate, mutating beauties are exquisite corpses. Swallowed by their extravagant wigs and absorbed by their inflated egos, they carry both the grace and weight of their inner universe. Together, they represent the central characters of the mythology of *Bang Bang Baroque*: abundance, confrontation, and egocentrism. *Energetic Pessimist* is the attentive, (over)compensating protector; *Let All Canons Fall* is alert, confident, and provocative; *The Narcissist* is nervous, boastful, and haughty. One bird brings you every harvest in the world; the other, a battlefield. The third shows off its mirrors and its beauty mark. It also wears Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), which, for a time, was falsely attributed to Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Howes envisions a history of art in which a woman has created this iconic work, and a man, her muse, has appropriated it.

9. *Bang Bang Baroque: Base Score, Performer I, II & III and Guests*, 2022

***Bang Bang Baroque: Performer Score I*, 2022**

***Bang Bang Baroque: Performer Score II*, 2022**

***Bang Bang Baroque: Performer Score III*, 2022**

***Bang Bang Baroque: Base Composer Score, Performer I, II & III and Guests*, 2022**

Glass gobos, laser-cut chrome, 8.8 cm diameter each
Property of the artist

iva-1a. "Do not pray exclusively to the ancestors of the land; make room also for the spirits of the fault line, the new gods that scream through cracks with the first musical notes of worlds to come."

—Bayo Akomolafe

A gobo is an engraved metal or glass plate that is placed against a spotlight to create illuminated designs on a surface. They are mainly used in theatre, music and light shows, and commercial events. Howes had several choreographic scores from the *Bang Bang Baroque* project cut into gobos for the shooting of the film. More than simply utilitarian, these objects are presented here for their aesthetic and mystical aspects: as cryptographic talismans carrying a new kind of language, the mythology of *Bang Bang Baroque*.

10. *Bang Bang Baroque: Base Score, Performer I, II & III and Guests*, 2021

***Bang Bang Baroque: Base Composer Score, Performer I, II & III and Guests*, 2021**

Graphite on vellum and paper, 85 x 60 cm each
Property of the artist

xxxiii. "All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. [...] Grace fills empty spaces but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void."

—*Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, 1947, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr*

For Howes, the choreographic score is often first step in materializing her vision toward a new alphabet. The drawing acts as a sketch, a working document, a work in itself, and its documentation. Used both by performers to learn the choreography and by the composer to write the music, the score also becomes a scenographic element in the film.

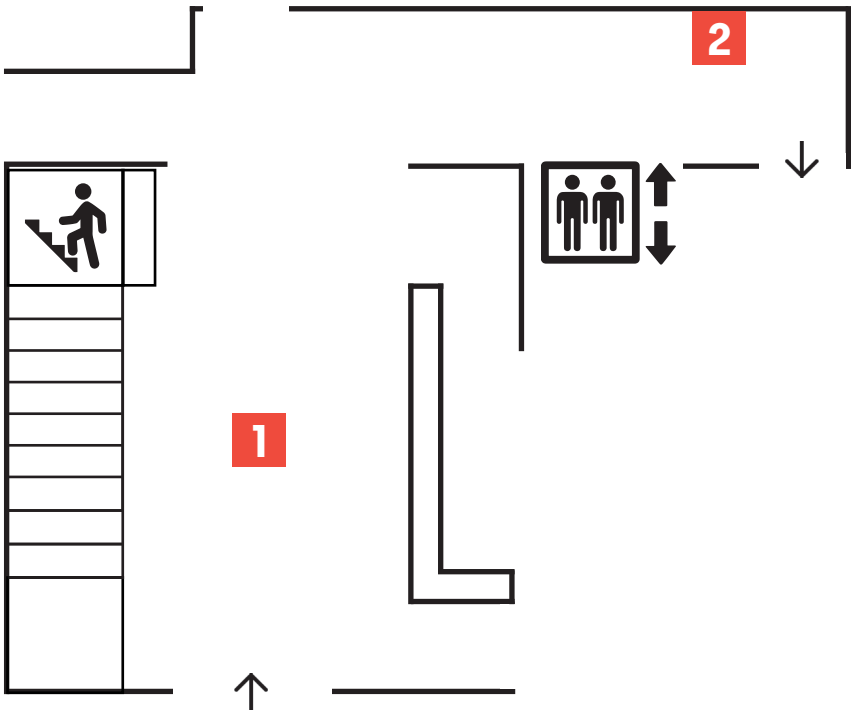
This choreography for seven performers is inspired by *baguazhang*, a traditional Chinese martial art form. It is chiefly characterized by its circular movements, which provide internal stability and the capacity to outmaneuver one's opponents. The murmurations of starlings, in which flocks of thousands of these birds instinctively fly in sync, also play an important role in Howes's choreographic vocabulary.

The scores are based on Beauchamp-Feuillet notation (1700), a system of movement notation developed under Louis XIV and still used by baroque dance enthusiasts. Here, the composer's score takes the form of a hieroglyphic palimpsest. In the performers' score, a cross-section of an artichoke can be perceived. Or are these markings on a gymnasium floor where a decisive game is about to be played?

FLOOR PLANS

1st floor

Hall Famille Jacques Martin



FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle EBI

