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## Special Works School Bambitchell

» Opening on **November 14** at 7 pm

» The gallery is open from Tuesday to Saturday from noon to 5 pm, and until 7 pm on Thursdays

**In colourful or even wacky worlds, in which both objects and beings apply themselves to personifying abstract ideas or moral concepts which are difficult to depict, the works brought together here by Bambitchell, Julia Feyrer and Mikhail Karikis offer another way of telling the world and make allegory a form of activism.**

*Special Works School* was the code name used by the British War Office during the First World War, for a group of artists – painters, textile artists, scenographers, designers, sculptors and scenic painters – tasked with developing camouflage techniques. Astonishingly, at a time when an artist's quality was often measured by his or her ability to give a keenly realistic rendering, the artists brought together in this military unit worked to make things disappear. Bambitchell's piece, which appropriates the name of this special unit, functions as a counterpoint to camouflage by offering up a contemporary equivalent mise-en-scène of surveillance and asks what aestheticizing surveillance in this way makes visible, or conversely, invisible. As an experience which truly involves all the senses, *Special Works School* develops a historical trajectory of surveillance – one which defies the idea that it is an intrusion founded for the most part on the visual.

Glasgow, *Special Works School* moves through an abstract narrative in which three colours – sand, cyan and purple – tackle the aesthetics of surveillance through engaging with each of the five senses. The work therefore offers the visitor a multi-sensorial and physical experience of the state, and of dominant power structures. A poly-vocal chorus complicates this narrative suggesting that the ultimate method of surveillance is becoming invisible – the dissolution of self.

Under the name Bambitchell, Sharlene Bamboat (1984) and Alexis Mitchell (1983) have been collaborating since 2009 on artistic projects based on research that seek to re-imagine nationalist histories by the playful recycling of state documents and institutional archives. Mercer Union (Toronto), Gallery TPW (Toronto), articule (Montreal), the Art Gallery of Windsor and Images Festival (Toronto) have recently presented their work, along with festivals such as the



© Bambitchell, *Special Works School* (2018)

Created in collaboration with  
the sound artist Richy Carey of

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5455, avenue de Gaspé, espace 109 Montréal (Québec) Canada H2T 3B3  
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Berlinale (Berlin) and the BFI London Film Festival. Bambitchell have held residencies at the Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart) and the MacDowell Colony (New Hampshire). Their work is also included in the anthology *Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture*, published in 2017 by Routledge.

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An exhibition prepared by France Choinière for Dazibao, in collaboration with the artists. Dazibao thanks the artists for their generous collaboration as well as its advisory programming committee for its support.

Dazibao receives financial support from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts de Montréal, the ministère de la Culture et des Communications and the Ville de Montréal.

Dazibao acknowledges that we are located on unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá: ka Nation and that Tiohtiá: ke / Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations, and today, is home to a diverse population of Indigenous as well as other peoples.

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Arts

## Art as activism: personal and collective histories

by Lorenza Mezzapelle | November 19, 2019



### Taking a look at Dazibao's new exhibitions

I open the door to Dazibao and, with the exception of colour-changing neon lights emanating from the far corner of the space, it is dark. A cacophony of voices engulfs the room. As I make my way to the first video installation, I am immediately drawn into the abstract nature of the film and I tune out the other sounds.

Dazibao, an art center in Montreal's Mile End, dedicates itself to circulating contemporary image practices, be it through exhibitions, video programs, films or public artworks. In an effort to create a space where individuals can experiment, reflect and share ideas, Dazibao collaborates with artists, curators, critics and researchers.

Their mandate, which is to promote cultural diversity as a means of enabling art to assert itself as a knowledgeable and intellectual field, is further reinforced via their three current exhibitions on view, *Special Works School*, *New Pedestrians* and Mikhail Karikis.

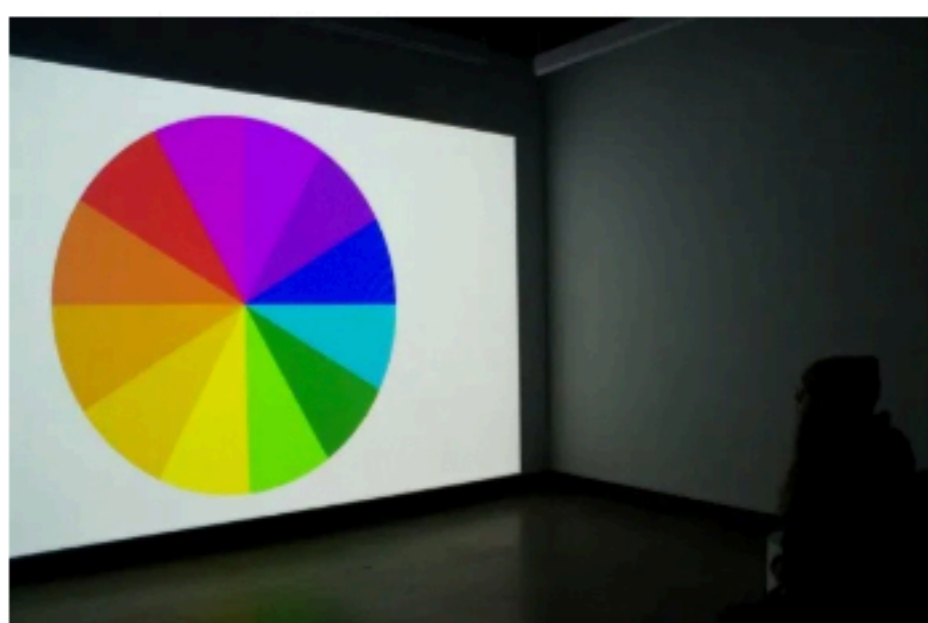
*Special Works School* by Bambitchell explores surveillance and military camouflage techniques by way of reflecting on the interconnection – activity of artistic practice and surveillance technologies. The work, which consists of an installation and a film, considers surveillance as an artistic practice, invites the viewer to reflect on the various aspects of surveillance in both society and art.

Bambitchell's work has video and sculptural components – the source of the colour-changing neon lights – which offers a multi-sensory experience. Sand appears to be rippled in a box, as lights change from cyan to purple, and back to its natural colour, the box and its contents camouflage to the colour of the lights. This offers a metaphor for surveillance and its visibility, or rather, invisibility.

Bambitchell is the artistic collaboration between artists Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Mitchell. Since their conception in 2009, they have established their practice around notions of surveillance and nationalism, using archives and state documents as part of their work.

*New Pedestrians* by Julia Feyrer uses everyday objects to explore the body's connection to various materials. As the name suggests, the film observes pedestrians as they walk. However, they are not your average pedestrians. Body parts are composed of wooden rulers, scissors and other everyday tools and objects, merging sculpture and film into one. The abstract nature of the film brings out in the viewer the sort of uneasy feeling that would arise from a bad dream.

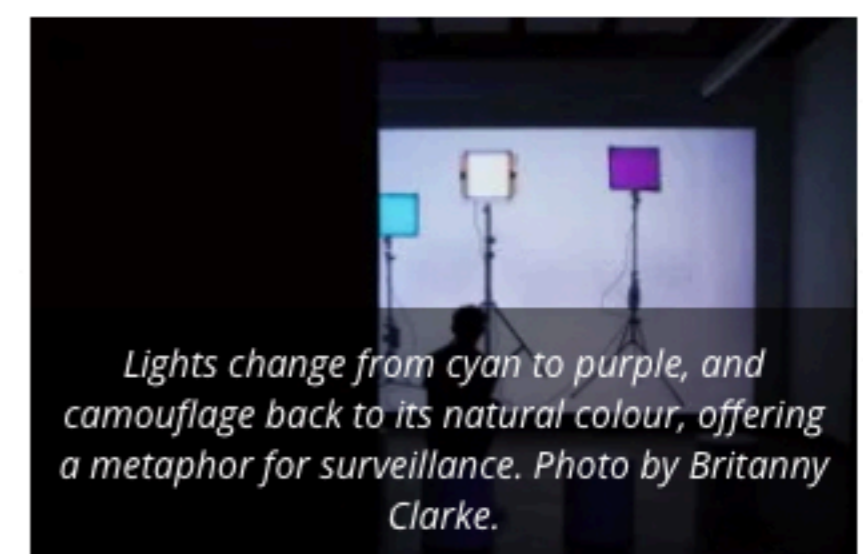
Similarly, *Children of Unquiet*, *Ain't Got No Fear* and *No Ordinary Protest* by Mikhail Karikis use this same type of bizarre construction. Although separate entities, the three films, when viewed in order, form an allegory. In *Children of Unquiet*, children clad in colourful masks sing at the top of their lungs as they reclaim a village that was built for workers at a geothermal power plant. Whereas *Ain't Got No Fear* demonstrates the alternative vocation given by young people to a power plant, as a means of defying authority. Finally, along the same lines, *No Ordinary Protest* explores themes of activism enabling children's voices to be heard.



Karikis uses sound and media to create immersive installations. His practice explores primarily the notion of the voice as a socio-political agent, as well as themes of solidarity in action, which he further develops by collaborating with various communities such as youth groups.

Although the works exhibited are very different in their conception and determination, *Special Works School*, *New Pedestrians* and Mikhail Karikis' works share similar perseverance, enabling them to share personal and collective histories in abstract ways, and ultimately offer a form of activism. By making a statement about various conventional aspects of everyday life, such as surveillance, the works assert themselves and demonstrate how artistic practice can be political.

***Special Works School*, *New Pedestrians* and Mikhail Karikis are on display at Dazibao, at 5455 de Gaspé Ave. suite 109, until Dec. 21. The gallery is open Tuesday to Saturday, from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m., and Thursday from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m.**



Lights change from cyan to purple, and camouflage back to its natural colour, offering a metaphor for surveillance. Photo by Brittany Clarke.

Photos by Brittany Clarke.

