In January 2020, mere weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic took over the entire world, I presented the first iteration of Mystic Toolkit. This was an exhibition informed by the spiritual renaissance of the late 2010s and meant to shed light on the potential that lies therein to influence the practice of working artists.

Two years later, in a radically altered global context that has left no one untested or unshaken, Mystic Toolkit picks up the conversation again. In this new context, it is perhaps not surprising that alternative spiritual practices have achieved an accrued prominence. Bringing together the work of seven artists working across a variety of mediums ranging from sculpture, painting, photography, and performance, Mystic Toolkit is a quiet invitation to celebrate daily rituals of coping, healing, and grieving that have become indispensable in recent times. Despite their own idiosyncratic visual vocabulary and practice, the artists included in this exhibition all share the recognition for the mystical forces that affect our daily lives and pay tribute to the daily rituals and repeated gestures that keep us wholesome.

The exhibition conceptualizes the home as a sanctuary, a place of recollection and refuge. Our home is at once a haven of comfort and self-care, but during lockdown it has also held us captive. As our lives are increasingly scattered into both physical and virtual spaces, some of the artists in the exhibition have reached out to find a spiritual space online. Social media has allowed a sort of “being together” despite strict social distancing mandates. Other artists refer to tarot games as a means of making sense of the world, while others turn to charms and trinkets as tokens of hope. Some have imbued their work with a punctual and regular practice as a way of making order at a time of chaos. Despite the variety of approaches, all of the artists participating in Mystic Toolkit attempt to navigate through what is unquestionably one of the most disruptive crises in modern history via a genuine recognition of the mysterious forces that orchestrate the world.

–Anaïs Castro, Guest Curator

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alicia Adamerovich
Alicia Adamerovich is a Brooklyn-based artist interested in the psychological effects that built or imagined environments have on the human psyche. She draws from visions, memory, and dreams to compose surrealistic scenes that act as vehicles for desire, fantasy, anxiety, or fears.

Vanessa Brown
Vanessa Brown is a Canadian artist living and working in Berlin (Germany). Working across a variety of materials, from steel to glass or even textile, her multidimensional sculptural works seem suspended between consciousness and a chimera. Resolutely feminine, her work further recontextualized the domestic space as an empowering refuge, but also a fertile space for creativity and inspiration.

Jennifer Ling Datchuk
Based in San Antonio (Texas), Jennifer Ling Datchuk is an artist of mixed American and Chinese heritage focused on deconstructing racial and gender stereotypes by revealing their manufacture. In her work, the artist is interested in how appropriation of Eastern symbols in popular culture are often used to convey ideas of comfort, spirituality and/or healing.

Erika DeFreitas
Erika De Feitas is a Toronto-based artist working across different mediums, from photography to performance, video, and sculpture. Arising from a deeply personal perspective, the artist is interested in researching questions pertaining to identity, generational grief, memory, and communal experiences of healing.

Julian Yi-Zhong Hou
Julian Yi-Zhong Hou is a Canadian artist whose methodology stems from the fields of divination, hypnagogia, and tarot reading. His work is deeply informed by personal experiences, grief, and healing.

Rachael Starbuck
Rachael Starbuck is an artist, educator, and organizer based in Austin (Texas). Deeply interested in the notion of distance, she produces work that nonetheless subtly evokes intimacy and even eroticism between bodies. In her work, Starbuck reflects on how bodies move through space, as a distinct or indistinct form, as a presence or an absence.

Shanie Tomassini
Shanie Tomassini is an artist based between Montreal (Quebec) and Austin (Texas). In her practice, the artist researches the transitory nature of things. Dabbling with various materials, including ceramics and incense—both of which require firing to reach their definitive state—Tomassini is committed to a craftsmanship that requires practice, commitment, and rigor.
Mystic Toolkit
Curated by Anaïs Castro

FEATURED ARTISTS
Alicia Adamerovich, Vanessa Brown, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Erika DeFreitas, Julian Yi-Zhong Hou, Rachael Starbuck, Shanie Tomassini

ABOUT CURATOR
Anaïs Castro is a curator and writer based in Montréal and Berlin. She holds a BFA in Art History from Concordia University and a Masters in Contemporary Art: History, Curating, Criticism from the University of Edinburgh.

Over the past few years, she has curated a number of exhibitions in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and China, including Moving Still | Still Moving at Art Mûr Montréal (2015), #self for Art Souterrain (Montréal, 2016), Self-Abstractions at Canada House (London, 2017), Over My Black Body at La Galerie de l’UQAM (Montreal, 2019), and at Spike Art Quarterly (Berlin, 2018). She is one of the founding members of the curatorial collective The Department of Love, which presented its first project in Shanghai in December 2018 and commissioned four performances by Debora Délmar, Jade Montserrat, Alvin Tran, and Steven Warwick as part of the Open Programme of Art Night London 2019.

She participated in the inaugural Shanghai Curators Lab (2018), was a Curator-in-Residence at Art in General (Brooklyn, 2019), TitaniK (Turku, 2017), and a Visiting Critic at BCA (Burlington, 2016). She is an editorial member of Daily Lazy and publishes regularly in esse art + opinions, Espace, and this is tomorrow.

ABOUT ARTPACE
Artpace San Antonio is a nonprofit residency program which supports regional, national, and international artists in the creation of new art. As a catalyst for artistic expression, we engage local communities with global art practices and experiences.

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