
Xiao Han is an instructor at the University of Saskatchewan. Han received her MFA (USask) in 2016 and BFA (TRU) in 2013. Originally from China, Han imaginatively investigates the results of China's One-Child Policy on her generation regarding gender and identity. Using herself as an actor, she performs scenarios of birth control, familial judgment, and psychological disturbance.

Kelsie Balehowsky is Educational Coordinator and Administrative Assistant at the Vernon Public Art Gallery as well as an editor for the Okanagan Review. She has also worked as Gallery Assistant and Art Instructor for Kelowna Art Gallery. With numerous shows throughout the Okanagan region, she has a BFA from UBCO and is the 2016 winner of the Okanagan Arts Awards in the Emerging Artist category.

Harmony Raine's interdisciplinary artwork and research are grounded in her keen interest in the human and social condition, straddling the tentative boundaries between corporeal phenomenology and the socio-political realm. She holds a Master of Arts in Integrated Studies with dual specializations in Cultural Studies and Equity Studies, a Bachelor of Arts, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Raine is an artist, union and disabilities activist, popular educator, and lifelong learner. She enjoys spending time with her beautiful family, works, volunteers, writes, and makes art in Kamloops BC. kalenaraine@hotmail.com



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Arnica gratefully acknowledges the financial support of:
The Province of British Columbia

JAN 7–FEB 18

Arnica Artist-Run Centre

XIAO HAN **THE ONE**



Clinic Scene

KELSIE BALEHOWSKY **COLLECTIVE ISOLATION**



Alone Together

The surface similarities between Kelsie Balehowsky's and Xiao Han's bodies of work make for a cohesive two-person exhibition. Both artists use large-scale photographs to create psychologically-loaded modern-day tableaux in which the artist plays the entire cast of characters. This strategy is not narcissistic; neither is it merely autobiographical, narrative, or personally cathartic. Here, Balehowsky's and Han's bodies stand in for the socio-political body and as sites for the production and communication of cultural meaning. It is notable, and by no means incidental, that in one series viewers are confronted by the protagonist's stoic, dispassionate, and riveting gaze—while in the other, the gaze is either deflected or completely absent. Pairing these particular works highlights critical differences in the use of the gaze and the important role the gaze can

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have upon the creation of meaning and readings of the works.

For *Collective Isolation*, Kelowna artist Kelsie Balehowsky constructs scenarios wherein characters exist alone/together through the ubiquity of technological interfaces. Unlike Xiao's subjects, who confront viewers, Balehowsky's cast

seems oblivious to the camera and each other. Each character is seen interacting with their technological device regardless of context, and viewers are left to speculate whether group members are engaging with each other, someone else, or nobody at all. Are the subjects distant, disengaged, self-absorbed, socially awkward, socially connected, bored, or deeply engrossed in some important task? Reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's eerie predictions made in the 1960s that the internet would become an “extension of consciousness,”¹ viewers of this series cannot help but question whether social media and virtual reality have become so normalized that they have replaced participation in real life—and at what cost? We are virtually forced (pun intended) to examine radical changes in our personal and social behaviour, and seriously interrogate the potential impacts of

technological saturation and dependence upon our sense of self, family, community, and belonging. Oscillating between sharp-witted critique and relatively innocuous observation,

Collective Isolation may indeed be viewed as a cautionary tale of sorts for the current and future state of communication, not to mention of human relationships.

¹ The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (1962)

The *One* by emerging Saskatoon artist Xiao Han is a critical examination of the gendered consequences of China's one-child policy—a regime that, according to the artist, not only affected the development of the People's Republic of China but also substantially altered the life course of her parents' generation and her own. As an only child born into the regime, Han draws upon

“...the gaze engages viewers, generates empathy and deconstructs unequal power relationships...”

her fragmented memories and fantasies to create poignant visual narratives. The work illustrates her unique perspective of the one-child policy as well as her desire to be unhindered by unexplained political ideologies, government cultural propaganda, and bureaucracy. Han's large-scale photographs replicate 'stills' from a fictitious movie set in late 20th century China—after the suppression of the Tiananmen Square Protest and the inauguration of the one-child policy. The artist plays multiple roles in settings that are both gendered and institutional, successfully exposing the population control laws as unjustly having far greater consequences for women.

Like other significant works of this genre (such as those by pioneering feminist artists Frida

Kahlo, Jo Spence, and Hannah Wilke), at least one character in each of Han's scenarios confronts the viewer. The choice to take control of the gaze is more than stylistic and represents more than just the subject's empowerment. In this way, the gaze engages viewers, generates empathy, and deconstructs unequal power relationships. As a result, any assumptions a viewer might have about the character's supposed victimhood, oppression, or marginalization are overturned in favour of a genuine desire for understanding and dialogue.

Together, Balehowsky and Han challenge hegemonic discourses by disrupting the subject-object viewing relationship, and provoke a broad range of questions concerning how certain contemporary practices are shaping our individual and collective experience of belonging, social life, and the ever-changing construct of “family.” When shown together, these works effectively highlight how different, purposeful treatments of the gaze not only demonstrate the artist's technical choices and point of view but also exert a powerful influence over the construction of meaning itself.

~Harmony Raine