Amanda Boulos (she/her) is a visual artist and educator based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Engaging with national narratives from Palestine, Lebanon, and Canada, Boulos explores how oral histories undergo constant metamorphosis and take on different purposes and meanings. Boulos received her MFA from the University of Guelph in 2017 and BFA from York University in 2013. She has shown at Richard Rhodes Dupont Projects (Toronto, ON), Arsenal Contemporary Art (New York, NY), Galerie Nicolas Robert (Montréal, QC), and Anna Leonowens Gallery (Halifax, NS). Boulos is the winner of the 20th RBC Canadian Painting Competition and was recently the Isabel Pope Artist in Residence at NSCAD University (Halifax, NS). She is a member of the Toronto-based project space the plumb and a programmer for the Toronto Palestine Film Festival.

Shannon Garden-Smith (she/her) is an uninvited settler of Scottish, Irish, and British heritage and an artist living and working between Tkaronto/Toronto and Stratford, Canada. She completed an MFA at the University of Guelph (’17) and a BA at the University of Toronto (’12). Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Garden-Smith’s recent projects focus on the surfaces that clad contemporary built space and their material-social impact. She has recently shown work with Front Kaka (Toronto, ON), Gallery TPK (Toronto, ON), and the Institute for Endotic Research (Berlin), and she will participate in an upcoming two-person project at the Oxygen Art Centre (Nelson, BC).

The domestic manufacture of Garden-Smith’s blinds, from storebought gelatin powder, draws out an articulation of the domestic as a prism for the separation of private property from the commons, and a necropolitics of housing as exclusive of the human right to shelter. At the same time, the blinds’ materiality invokes the various uses of gelatin as a sealant, for example in boots and gel capsules. The modular shuttering function of the blinds is at odds with the impermeability of its gelatin material, complicating the architectural threshold with something perhaps epidermal.

Dotting the exhibition like little fugitives are Boulos’s small cast-glass date sculptures, encaustic old Palestinian coins from before 1948. These sculptures, which double the bunches of dates in some of Boulos’s paintings, refer to a family story about Boulos’s great-grandmother, who smuggled gold coins encased in a condom inside her body when she was fled from her family home during the Nakba. Their presence in Boulos’s work is a way of thinking through the conflicted afterlife of incarceration and torture under Israeli occupation. In Boulos’s words, “In 1941, architectural historian Sigfried Giedion celebrated the modernist triumph of the curtain wall, describing it as ebb and flow—‘street level’ and ‘interior’ separated by a semi-permeable surface. However, there is behind this wall, I no longer know there is a wall, I no longer know this wall is a wall, I no longer know what there is behind this wall, I no longer know there is a wall. I no longer know there is a wall.”

Here the uncanny, or unheimlich, is ‘unhaimlich’ in its invocation of both the familiar and the strange. The gallery is an event as it is time- and space-based: there is an active void in the house, a transitory potentiality... Or, perhaps, not a void at all, but a continuous present, an active void taken up by the viewer’s gaze as it sees itself through the wall while also employing it as a cover. As the paintings ask us to focus on what obscures our view—‘inverting the solid, built environment into “negative space”’—we also see our point of view reflected back at us, safe, at least momentarily, within the architecture, hidden from the surveillant gaze.

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Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith

April 28 – July 2, 2022
The Bows
Makhintsiis (Calgary, Alberta)
View Loser
Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith

View Loser, a collaborative exhibition by Tkaronto/Toronto-based artists Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith, is an intersectional conversation between the forms of displacement at the heart of their practices: respectively, the politics of land and politics of housing. This conversation came together over several years of collaborative practice built on the artists’ shared interest in architecture’s ability to sustain lack and loss. Together, Boulos and Garden-Smith explore how architectures can be deployed in the disappearance of certain people and their histories.

Boulos’s paintings depict family memories of Palestinian life, and of her family’s journey fleeing from Palestine to Lebanon in the late 1940s, and its subsequent flight from Lebanon due to the Lebanese Civil War. From Boulos’s millennial perspective, a defining characteristic of the Israeli occupation is the existential logic of the wall. In her paintings, walls often appear in shallow relief of the picture plane—space is punctuated, views are lost. The interruptive function of these walls reverses their solidness, rendering them in the paintings as something akin to voids: ambivalent holes in the viewer’s line of sight.

Garden-Smith extends this project of refusal, reversal, and voiding to the hidden politics of our living spaces, and, by extension, the background conditions of everyday life and its economic underpinnings. Taking décor as her point of entry, Garden-Smith exerts stress on interstitial bits of architecture—its thresholds and margins—and places accents on our habitual experiences of these interstices. Staged as an architectural intervention, Garden-Smith’s arched, threaded rock façade and eccentric window blind sculptures mirror, double, reflect, and reverse the walls, arches, and edifices in Boulos’s paintings. In their precarious dramatization of controlled spaces, they also amplify the paintings’ sense of fugitivity.

Notes from the essay
Jared Yates Sexton quote from his Twitter, April 22, 2022, 6:56 AM (MST).
The domestic manufacture of Garden-Smith’s blinds, from storebought gelatin powder, draws out an articulation of the domestic as a prism for the separation of private property from the commons, and a necropolitics of housing as exclusive of the human right to shelter. At the same time, the blinds’ materiality invokes the various uses of gelatin as a sealant, for example in boots and gel capsules. The modular shuttering function of the blinds is at odds with the impermeability of its gelatin material, complicating the architectural threshold with something perhaps apertural.

Dotting the exhibition like little fugitives are Boulos’s small cast-glass date sculptures, encasing old Palestinian coins from before 1948. These sculptures, which double the bunches of dates in some of Boulos’s paintings, refer to a family story about Boulos’s great-grandmother, who smuggled gold coins encased in a condom inside her body when she fled. Here, the resilience of fatex bespeaks an intimate threshold, beyond the reaches of the occupation’s looting hands. But there is something astonishing, almost miraculous, here about the fugitive condition: beneath bare life, another threshold.

These date sculptures hide in the architecture. In an unstable mise en abyme, they aspire to a state of viewlessness that hides, in order to ensure life, nestled within walls that hide bodies. As themselves a precarious abutment, Boulos and Garden-Smith’s works in View Loser enact “rights of thresholds, commenting on each other.”

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The artists acknowledge the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Council in making this project possible.
View Loser
Amanda Boulos and Shannon Garden-Smith

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The last quote is stolen out of context from Bernhard Siegert, Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 199.