

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: June 2023



SAM'S EDEN

**ARTISTS: SUDS MCKENNA | MICHAELA RAZAFIMA NASH | YARLI
ALLISON**

CURATOR: THOMAS WELLS

OPENS SATURDAY 1 JULY 2023, 7-9PM

CCA DERRY~LONDONDERRY

Curated by Thomas Wells, *SAM'S EDEN* features newly produced and pre-existing work by artists Yarli Allison, Suds McKenna and Michaela Razifima Nash launching on Saturday 1 July 2023 and running until Saturday 9 September 2023. The exhibition will investigate three different responses to the queer body occupying the physical and virtual realms, and reflect on the importance of *sanctuary*.

The theme of sanctuary references the need for queer bodies to seek safety in community; this is evident throughout history with physical spaces; clubs, bars, ball rooms, cottages, but also in the virtual realms through social media, online gaming and others. Queer spaces are often found in the marginalia of books, in the lyrics of music and in the symbolism of film. Queer spaces have historically been of great importance for a community often shunted from domestic and workplaces, finding solace and security elsewhere. *SAM'S EDEN* refers to Derek Jarman's prospect cottage - *eden* - based in Folkestone, England as a space of queer sanctuary for the artist and filmmaker. *SAM'S EDEN* began as a queer arts publication founded by Thomas Wells in Belfast in 2020; this exhibition sees the move out of printed matter into the physical realm, forming the exhibition at CCA Derry~Londonderry with new and reimagined work by Yarli Allison, Suds McKenna and Michaela Nash.

Suds McKenna is a multidisciplinary artist born in Belfast and currently based in Glasgow. Suds is part of Bonjour, a club and community space in Glasgow that prioritises underrepresented groups in the LGBTQ+ community. Suds developed the work shown in *SAM'S EDEN* following their participation in the Array Collective workshops during the CCA Derry~Londonderry & UK New Artist Weekender in 2022. This work was originally shown in the exhibition *a familiar plough into the knot of a tie* Intermedia Gallery at CCA Glasgow and is reimagined for *SAM'S EDEN*. Suds' work includes three airbrushed works on painters' canvas suspended from the ceiling, alongside framed ink drawings and plaster works and airbrushed text.

Artist Michaela Razafima Nash will reflect on their contribution to issue 1 of *SAM'S EDEN* - a collaborative essay in the form of half interview and half creative writing with Yarli Allison, framed around their shared experiences and referencing the queer body as a propagated flower through their history of migration.

Michaela presents a new work, creating an archipelago made using pigments developed from rock and mineral samples. This work refers to the timeless experience and collective nature of the queer community globally. Michaela's practice intersects visual art and writing as they explore the queer body in time and geography in particular across the island of Ireland. They are part of Irish based collective Lucinda Collective and have collaborated on projects with Kilkenny Arts Centre and Catalyst Arts Belfast.

Artist Yarli Allison is based between the UK and Hong Kong and builds upon experiences of

displacements, composing 'what-ifs' fictitious scenarios as methodological playgrounds that explore "how humans/things live" in utopia/dystopia systems. These speculative worlds seem hopeful and functional, yet are on the verge of falling apart: either lurking with mythological creatures or personas striving to survive in absurd conditions, or consisting of Yarli's invented *coping mechanisms* that futilely heal collective grief.

Current themes in Yarli's work include digital humanities, border systems, datafication are explored, along with skinships and affect, powered by thought processes such as queering history, belonging remapping, cognitive restructuring and emotional geography studies.

This exhibition is a legacy project of Jerwood Curatorial Accelerator, a curatorial and leadership development programme for UK-based visual arts curators from working class/low socio-economic backgrounds that CCA was a host organisation for in 2022/23.

ENDS

Centre for Contemporary Art Derry~Londonderry

10–12 Artillery Street, Derry~Londonderry, BT48 6RG, Northern Ireland

+44(0)2871 373538 | ccadld.org | info@ccadld.org

Opening times: Tuesday–Saturday noon–6pm. Free admission

About CCA Derry~Londonderry:

The Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) is a publicly funded space within the historic city walls of Derry~Londonderry. CCA creates opportunities for audiences to experience ambitious, experimental and engaging art and for emerging artists to develop successful careers. CCA fosters a wide range of artistic, curatorial and critical practices through five programme streams: research and production, exhibition-making, public programmes, publishing and residencies.

CCA was a Finalist in Art Fund Museum of the Year 2021, the largest museum prize in the world. CCA was recognised for its resilience and adaptability throughout the pandemic, and their continued effort to support audiences and artists including creating paid opportunities for artists and freelancers when they needed it most.

CCA is a member of Plus Tate: Plus Tate is a network, which comprises 35 cultural institutions – including the Tate galleries – that have strong artistic vision, a focus on contemporary art, outstanding public programming and a commitment to local community engagement through art. Plus Tate aims to support the development of the visual arts across the UK.

Safety: CCA has a range of safety measures to ensure staff and visitors can enjoy exhibitions with the knowledge that every precaution is taken. This includes hand sanitisers at entrances and exits and heightened cleaning schedules. All who are able to wear a mask are invited to do so and a dedicated isolation room is available in the event of the onset of symptoms.

About the Artists:

Yarli Allison (she/they) is a Canadian-born, Hong Kongese art-worker based in the UK/Paris with an interdisciplinary approach that traverses sculpture, installation, CGI (VR/AR/3D modeling/game), moving-images, drawings, poetry, tattooing, and performances. Graduated in 2017 with an MFA first-class honour in Sculpture from The Slade School of Fine Art, University College London (UK), Yarli was granted the entry award of the year's Yitzhak Danziger scholarship.

Yarli's recent works (2021–22) were exhibited at Tai Kwun Contemporary, (HK), LINZ FMR (Austria), FACT (Liverpool), Barbican Centre (London), Institute of Contemporary Arts: ICA (London), V&A Museum (London). Recent grants include Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grant, and Canadian Council for the Arts Travel Grant.

Yarli was selected as one of the Canadian artists to be presented at The State Hermitage Museum's Young Artists Program in St. Petersburg and *30 Under 30* at The Gardiner Museum, Toronto (2014). In 2017, Yarli co-curated a collective digital installation pop-up *MEMEMEME* in The Crypt Gallery in central London with 42 emerging international artists.

Their directed queer-porn *Elephant the Allison* (2018) explores obsessions, imagined identity formation, and digital dating experiences as queer ESEA folks in the "West", which has screened internationally across multiple Queer Film Festivals (2018–2022). Yarli's work was reviewed by Deborah Levy in Ivan Juritz Prize (2017), and featured in The Guardian, Evening Standard, and [beyond](#) (2022). They were invited as a guest speaker of Sotheby's Institute of Art, London (2022), Academic of Visual Arts, HKBU and The Arts Show, BBC Radio Ulster (2018).

They are a working member of [Asia-Art-Activism](#) and [Asia Forum](#) with different capacities.

Yarliallison.com

Suds McKenna (he/him) is an artist from Belfast, currently based in Glasgow. McKenna presents work across drawing and sculpture that depicts both individual and social bodies in the address of ideas surrounding selfhood, performativity and commonality. Through the citation of popular media and figurative forms, the work seeks to describe referentiality as an act of outreach and connectedness, while understanding the performative as a gesture of boundlessness; of queer autonomy, reclamation and recovery.

Suds graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 2016. Recent work includes *a familiar plough into the knot of a tie* CCA Intermedia Gallery, Glasgow. *A many-voiced argument with life* Market Gallery, Glasgow and *Platform:2019* at Edinburgh Art Festival. His illustrations have also featured recently in *SAM'S EDEN 2* (cover art) in 2023, *Assynt 2* (2021), *Communal Leisure 4* (2021) and *Elephant Magazine* 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42 (2017–2021)

Suds is a member of Bonjour! A club, event venue and community space in Glasgow that prioritises underrepresented groups in the LGBTQ+ community: People of Colour, Trans and Non-binary people, Sex Workers, Queer people with disabilities and Queer women. Bonjour! is a Queer worker owned co-op that believes in working collaboratively. It is not driven by profits but by the urgent need to provide space to the city of Glasgow.

Suds-McKenna.com

Michaela Razafima Nash (she/they) is an artist and arts writer, born and based in Belfast, NI. She is queer and of multiracial origins including Northern Irish, French and Merina Malagasy.

She is a member of Lucida collective and graduated from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin in 2020 as well as the Node Centre for Curatorial Studies in Berlin.

Her writing takes shape through hybridized and experimental forms, often incorporating prose, poetry or personal essay with criticism. These texts form an ekphrastic layer to an artwork or exhibition.

Her individual art practice is conceptually driven. She works through painting, photography, projection-mapped video and installation. Both her writing and her artwork are attuned to ideas of mixedness, belonging, place, kinship and interconnection. Her current ongoing projects explore imaginary homelands and belonging through the body.

They have exhibited across Ireland and created texts for institutions nationwide. Their recent texts and publications include; *Salt Cartographies III* on Elvira Santamaria-Torres' work for the Northern Irish Art Network (2023). *Half Way Out Of The Dark* an exhibition text for RE-VISION festival of performance and live art (2022). *Painting to See the Skies* as part of 'The Window Project' with CCA Derry/Londonderry (2022) and *Methods of Root Propagation* on Yarli Allison's work, for SAM'S EDEN 1 (2021)

Michaelanash.com

About the Curator:

Thomas Wells (he/they) is a multidisciplinary artist and curator based in Belfast. Their work is based in socially engaged practice involving spaces of collective experience. These are often situated in the intimacy of domestic settings and use layered imagery to elicit feelings of nostalgia. Originally from Manchester, they have been working in the north of Ireland since 2017.

Thomas graduated from King's College London in 2014 and The Glasgow School of Art in 2009. Alongside their independent practice they are a member of Array Collective in Belfast. Made up of eleven independent practitioners, their large-scale interventions challenge the political and social climate of Northern Ireland through a mix of mythological and pop-cultural imagery. In 2021 Array Collective were the recipients of the Turner Art Prize at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry. Most recently Wells is a Jerwood curatorial fellow as part of the Jerwood Arts Curatorial Accelerator programme (2022–23), they are an UPHOLD commission artist through Household Belfast and from 2019–2021 were a Freeland's Foundation emerging artist fellow.

In 2020 they founded *SAM'S EDEN* a queer arts publication in Belfast, this project seeks to work with LGBTQ+ artists, writers and activists in looking at our shared history and experience of queer spaces in history whether physical or virtual. *SAM'S EDEN 1* launched in 2021 with the support of Catalyst Arts and Art Fund and in 2023 the second issue was launched as a commissioned project by The MAC supported by Belfast City Council and the Paul Hamlyn foundation with The Rainbow Project. In 2022 queer arts festival OUTBURST supported the

commission of an interim edition taking the form of a limited edition handkerchief and pamphlet.

Thomas' upcoming projects include *Never-Landz* for OUTBURST 2023 and *SAM'S EDEN : Bent Over Straight Lines* in 2024.

[Thomaswells.me](https://thomaswells.me)

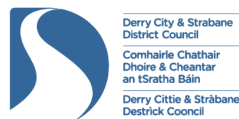
Image:

Suds McKenna, *a familiar plough into the knot of a tie* (2022). Ink on paper. Courtesy the artist

For media enquiries:

Cecelia Graham, Marketing and Digital Programmes Coordinator for CCA Derry~Londonderry
10-12 Artillery Street, Derry~Londonderry, BT48 6RG, Northern Ireland cecelia@ccadld.org |
+44(0)2871 373538 | [@CCADLD](https://www.ccadld.org)

CCA Derry~Londonderry is supported by:



Art Fund_

