

Collaboration, or Cooperation with the Enemy

Akem

A woman in the audience screams, “ewww!” as Aaron, a black man, kisses Tamora, a white woman, on the movie theatre screen.

We are watching Shakespeare’s *Titus* at the old Granville Street theatre by Robson Street. The theatre is packed and the woman goes on long enough for me to turn and stare at her.

She is older, white, and when she notices me staring, she starts berating me with glee. No one else says a word through her tirade, or in the silence afterward.

My face feels like it’s been slapped. I stand below deck in the narrow hallways of the cruise ship to Alaska, just steps away from my room.

“Does she look like she works here, grandma?” The young, blonde girl casts her grandmother an exasperated look then falls silent, looking at me.

“Yessss,” the old, white lady drawls out with relish. She smirks up at me, confidently blocking my path.

I’m in a colourful summer dress and I’ve just been disrupted, obstructed, reminded that I do not have a right to be oblivious, happy. Everyone that works on the cruise ship wears a uniform. I cannot be mistaken for anyone other than a passenger.

I step around her in silence and walk away.

“You go first.” The tall, blonde, white woman gestures at the elevator buttons with an encouraging smile. She makes it seem like an elegant, old-fashioned gesture of respect—ladies first, or something like that—but she got in first, so the gesture seems odd.

I tap my fob against the elevator panel and press my floor number, trying all the while to puzzle it out. In the end, I decide to let it go. I'm tired, it's late, and I'm almost home.

It isn't until I've left the elevator and am busy jiggling my keys into the door of my apartment that I realize exactly what has taken place: I've become Suspicious While Black in the home I've lived in for over nine years.

My Supervisor is new—a young, white woman with a first name stolen from a First Nations language. She has a cross tattooed on one knuckle and a swastika on the other. “Buddhist,” she says, when I get up the courage to ask, though she says she follows neither religion.

“You shouldn't be so prejudiced,” the white, middle-aged Manager says to me confidently in a private meeting afterwards. We're sitting in a glass-walled meeting room, on full display.

I stare back at him, stunned. I had applied for another position within the company and been advised by my Supervisor that “she just didn't see me” in that position. Without her support, my application was dead in the water.

While I'm still stunned, he follows up with, “You shouldn't make your Supervisor uncomfortable.”

Later on, I'm invited into another meeting by the Manager. HR joins us. I feel ambushed, unheard, dismissed. I am advised not to jump to conclusions. I wipe away my tears and put my glasses back on sometime after they leave the meeting room.

I leave the large communications company that I've been with for five years. Soon after, I'm on disability.

It's always unexpected, the collaboration with an enemy that interrupts my life without warning. What am I to say to the guy with the thick Texan accent who tells me to speak English when he hears my name over the phone, though I speak no other language? How am I to respond to the teacher who assumes that I have cheated—that I couldn't have done my homework on my own—when I bring it to class?

I wonder how my silence and confusion in these moments serves as an act of encouragement and makes me complicit in my own diminishment.

Dariush Alexander Ghaderi Barrera

Myth and folklore, the real and the imaginary, the told and the untold. As an artist coming from a mixed Mexican and Iranian background whose experiences and perceptions of the world have been shaped by the many places in which I have lived, I want my work to create a constant dialogue, beginning from my cultural heritage and moving beyond it. Spanning the disciplines of drawing, painting, printmaking, publishing, and sculpture, I am inspired by themes found in surrealism, magic realism, and metaphysics. Music, as a carrier of knowledge and culture, is a major influence on my work.

Se Murió de Amor is a series of etchings drawn from magic realist themes found in Mexican art and literature.

Every print in the series emerged from a previously written poem, and every poem emerged from a bolero. The title of the series, *Se murió de amor*, translates to “they died from love.” *Se murió de amor* is also a song by Tex Mex star Bobby Pulido.

Hana Amani

Growing up in Sri Lanka, art and folklore have always been important aspects of my life. Stories centred around South Asian women and goddesses are primary influences on my work, and in particular, those taboo stories about women with rebellious natures and unpopular opinions. The works featured here, from my series *Scheherazade's Dream*, draw from powerful women found in Islamic mythology, specifically highlighting those elements of their sexuality, feminism, curiosity, and desires that are too often left out of mainstream accounts.

My interest in history and surrealism likewise informs my work, and I am interested in creating images that can be shared timelessly but which nonetheless refrain from revealing all of their secrets at once. The intaglio techniques I use allow me to depict stories at a large scale and in fine detail, using a traditional form of printmaking to raise issues about contemporary culture and politics.