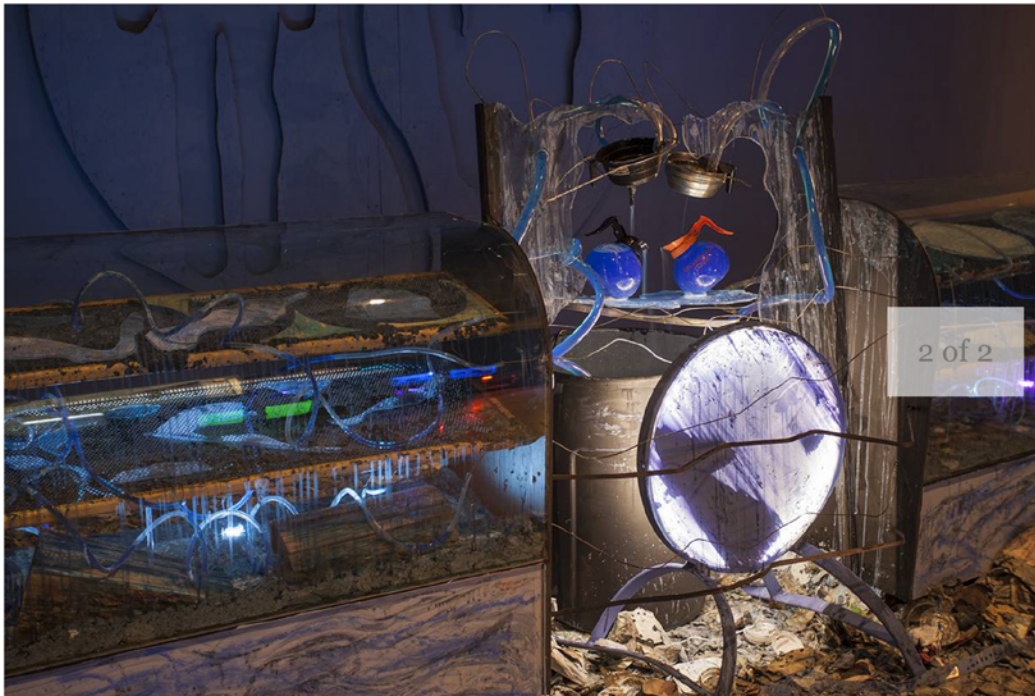


### VISUAL ARTS REVIEWS

# Julia Feyrer and Tamara Henderson plunge us into a world of dream logic

by Robin Laurence on September 14th, 2016 at 11:15 AM



Foil and paper “boots” with eggshell soles. A blue-lit fountain made of coffeepots. A scrim composed of old telephone cords and receivers, used coffee cups, and scuzzy Vitamin Water bottles. Another screen woven with seaweed, chicken wire, steel wool, and blobs of spray foam. Primitive wooden “hands” poking away at a dusty stenographic machine. A composition book threaded with stems and vines. Dangling and dancing strips of fabric. Glass vessels clinking on a shaking tabletop...

The experimental films and mixed-media installations of Julia Feyrer and Tamara Henderson plunge us into the often inexplicable world of dreams. Not daydreams or the conscious dreams that are personal aspirations, but the images and events that play across our minds during REM sleep. Interpreting the assortment of gritty, glittery, grubby, colourful, blackened, melted, and crushed objects and elements in these artworks is weirdly challenging. Dream logic prevails here.

In addition to their recent collaborations, both Henderson and Feyrer have established individual practices. An online blurb describes Feyrer as exploring “objects that relate to the human body”. Henderson’s work is characterized as committed to processes of the unconscious and as following “an oneiric or dreamlike structure”. Both artists’ predilections come together in their exhibition *The Last Waves*, on at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. This is the culminating third show of a series that has included *Bottles Under the Influence* at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff, and *Consider the Belvedere* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.

Henderson and Feyrer appear to subscribe to André Breton’s declaration of the “superior reality” of thought that dreams represent. (The show’s introductory panel mentions “the potent, transformative states between sleeping and waking explored by the surrealists”.) The work on view also makes an eclectic range of references, from historical connections between alchemy and glassmaking to the idea of the vessel as a symbol of the female form. Additional allusions are made, through various degrees of gravitas and absurdity, to literature, film, and Vancouver real estate.

The installations at the Belkin function as real and notional film sets and re-create, in a determinedly anti-aesthetic way, clichéd movie locales such as a bar, a hotel reception desk, and a laboratory. Each installation is filled with found and handmade objects, from the bricks made out of newspaper in *The Night Times Press Bar*, which is constructed in the form of an old apartment building (its windows revealing curious little tableaux), to the blown-glass beakers and tubes in *Communicating Vessels* (whose title is, again, a reference to Breton). *Mysteries*, of the noir and detective variety, shape many of the “characters” and shade their surroundings.



The most engaging works here are the duo's experimental 16mm films, projected hourly in the small gallery off the Belkin's lobby. *Bottles Under the Influence* (which alludes to the John Cassavetes film *A Woman Under the Influence*) drew its forms and some of its setting from the Historical Museum of Wine and Spirits in Stockholm. An obscure drama, enacted by a cast of glass bottles, climaxes in a series of wintry executions by an unseen sharpshooter. Each of the bottles explodes, spewing its varied and colourful contents, like blood and guts, across the virgin snow. *Consider the Belvedere* (the title riffs on David Foster Wallace's essay "Consider the Lobster") is a detective story set in Vancouver's old Belvedere Court apartment building. A subtext here is the regrettable fact that such character buildings, often housing artists, are disappearing from our city, replaced by generic condominium towers almost wholly owned by speculators. A third film, *The Last Waves*, is apparently being shot in the gallery during the run of the show.

It can't be accidental that Feyrer and Henderson's artworks are filled with detritus—with discarded objects and unattractive materials. Like the process by which sand is converted to glass—and glass is a recurring material and motif here—their art attempts something transformational. We're asked to believe in that magical moment when the gritty debris of rocks becomes radiantly transparent.