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Images courtesy of **Henry Chan**.



Weather To Store

KRISTINA
GUISON

Notes on a Warehouse A Mythology of Rote Rearrangements

AADITYA AGGARWAL

In this fairy tale, there are no morals; there is only a warehouse holding varying contexts, and a dizzying, nocturnal backache.

This initial iteration resembles the innocent satire in Danish author Hans Christian Andersen's 1835 fairy tale *The Princess and the Pea*.

This narrative is based in Supply Depot, a large warehouse located in Toronto's Downsview Park.

For the purposes of this telling, it suffices to claim that Supply Depot was once the original aristocratic residence where the characters of *The Princess and the Pea* performed their motivations.

Also home to the Canadian Forces Base Downsview, Supply Depot is an exemplary warehouse; one that is now effectively dead, and serves the purpose of inviting a unique customer

base to its farmer's market, cast and crew to its film studio, and a targeted audience to the Toronto Roller Derby, a women's flat-track roller derby league.

The warehouse was once designed to store items and conceal them from customers. The warehouse prepared items in secret so they could publicly accommodate the aisles in a retail outlet. It's a known charade, the loss and transfer of goods is tepid.

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Once upon a time, the warehouse was only attended to by its workers.

The workers were stationed in a human chain, from the entrance towards the inside, each dotting a point perpendicular to the wall, which is coarse and washed in grey cement. This is a large space, but it can also feel quite full when the turnaround of goods is high.

A worker focusing on “order-picking operations” complains of a severe ache in the small of her back.

This is an old, surging pain. This is parcel-induced. Today, she is complaining.

Parcel: *a thing or collection of things wrapped in paper in order to be carried or sent by mail.*

Who knew parcels could be injurious?

All claims to injury are possibly untrue here. The warehouse is rapt with deceit.

Material Handling Operations, as a department, is like this.

A legend, however, spikes the tedium of Supply Depot’s labouring figures.

“Did you know, what this warehouse once was?”

The famous, funny, charming tale where a pea picked a royal match?”

There is no time to ramble so the workers strategize the telling during their breaks.

“Once upon a time, a prince was dissatisfied with all his suggested candidates for marriage. He sought a princess with a physiology so tender, so vulnerable.”

“One night, a woman, wet from the rainy outdoors, sought shelter for the night in his residence.”

“The woman claimed she was a princess.”

“The prince’s mother arranged her bedding. The structure was a unique assemblage.”

“First, the chambermaid assisted in carrying twenty mattresses, one after the other. It was all her, the bulk of the load. These mattresses were laid on a pea, placed on the ground.”

“Atop these mattresses, a stack of twenty featherbeds of eiderdown.”

“These were dusty. They were hefty and flimsy. They were too small to be from the pantry. Yet somehow, they always made room for themselves. Pantry was home.”



“After laying in bed, the houseguest felt restless. Her back was killing her.”

“While tossing and turning all night, she sensed a dent in her slumber. The mattresses were shifting, and the structure felt tense around a miniscule pivot.”

“Come morning, she expressed her distaste of last night. How overworked her shoulders felt, how beaten her back.”

The workers must get back to their shifts. For now, this telling is held in the imagination as pre-climactic.

They are yet to renarrate to one another, the ultimate ruse: the prince’s mother’s sly arrangement to test and confirm the houseguest’s identity as princess.

Only someone with monarchical origins can have bodily responses so refined, so tremulous.

—

Kristina Guison activates a warehouse in the present day.

Her materials—household possessions; newly purchased, still-packaged kitchen appliances; raw materials in the form of wood and sheet metal—clutter the room, her base of operations.

The centre is somewhat bare: an area, measuring ten feet by ten feet, is boundaried by black tape.

This is a makeshift warehouse, where the black metal shelving units she built stand, facing each other. They carry hoarded air.

Amid the weightlessness, a few empty cardboard boxes are scattered on the shelves. This is a warehouse's working emptiness—the anticipation of being stacked on, of being temporarily populated—that Guison conjures.

Guison has constructed an inventory in a black folder, documenting each item's dimensions in appropriate detail.

She muses on these objects mathematically, which also means she extends her care to each good in equitable increments. These are beings, it seems, yet to die, expecting a wondrous afterlife.



INVENTORY OF STORAGE CONTENT (BY MATERIAL CATEGORY)

METAL SHEET

1. COPPER - NO. OF SHEETS: 1
 DIMENSIONS: 2 X 4 FT
2. BRASS - NO. OF SHEETS: 3
 DIMENSIONS OF BRASS 1: 2 X 4 FT
 DIMENSIONS OF BRASS 2: 2 X 1 FT
 DIMENSIONS OF BRASS 3: 1 X 1 FT
3. STEEL - NO. OF PIECES: 9
 DIMENSIONS OF STEEL 1: 1 X 1 FT
 NO. OF STEEL: 13
 DIMENSIONS OF STEEL 2: 2 X 1 FT
 NO. OF STEEL 2: 6
 DIMENSIONS OF STEEL 3: 31 1/2 X 16 INCHES
 NO. OF STEEL 3: 1
 DIMENSIONS OF STEEL 4: 4 X 1 FT
 NO. OF STEEL 4: 4
 DIMENSIONS OF STEEL 5: 2 X 2 FT
 NO. OF STEEL 5: 4
4. GALVANIZED STEEL - NO. OF PIECES:
 DIMENSIONS OF GALV STEEL 1: 24 1/2 X 24 1/2 INCHES
 DIMENSIONS OF GALV STEEL 2: 22 X 24 INCHES

In Guison's speech is a notation on the wakefulness of these objects.

"I like talking them to sleep."

She is enthralled, in part, by dimension; as well, by the crumbling or recovering monetary valuation these packages will undergo during a night's rest.

"They are dreaming, remembering what their lives were before they ended up in storage."

What did the princess-houseguest dream of in her restless slumber? Was hers a labour of arrangement, as well?

Physiology plagued by a stored pea, resting twenty mattresses and twenty featherbeds below.

In their introduction to *Animacies*, Mel Chen initiates discussion on the semantic subjectivity of objects. The phrase, "the hikers that rocks crush," they elaborate, places the "hiker" as passive, a being that is enacted upon by an agent workforce of "rocks."

There is anxiety around the correctness of this saying, indicating a "conceptual order of things, an animate

hierarchy of possible acts."

The workers continued to recite the infamous ending of *The Princess and the Pea*:

"The prince finally finds a match in the fragile houseguest who has proven she is a princess through her depth of bodily sensorium."

This is unexciting for some of the workers telling the story. Many are already familiar with the absurd logistics of back pain.

The ending that never loses steam is this: the pea—uncrushed and literally foundational to the princess's discomfort and hence, the resultant royal union—was finally displayed in a museum for veneration.

"The princess and the pea. Not the princess and the prince."

The object, the thing-ness of it, its measured dimensions, slept with the houseguest.

"She was underneath her, still but lumbering."

By virtue of its ability to occupy position, this object peripheries the prince. This object values labourer, the tasked, quotidian worker.

Order-picking (the lifting and cataloguing of parcels) was routine in Supply Depot, which allegedly was once the household where the pea made contact with the princess.

In Supply Depot, workers were encouraged by management to lift boxes using the Golden Zone Strategy, where products must be held at a height between the waist and the shoulders of the “pickers.”

Before these goods become products, they are pulsing. Products pulse, too.

Guison’s careful yet rote rearrangements essay both pulse and the packaging of it.

The studied faith in the written inventory; back aching from first contact.

Kristina Guison is a Manila-born, Toronto-based, Filipino-Canadian artist. She works in the realm of sculpture, installation, performance, social practices and tattoos. Her practice is an investigation of themes relating to globalization and transnational identities across geographical spaces and time (Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial) as they culminate in the 21st socio-cultural landscape. She is interested in identifying elements and patterns in this landscape, particularly ones that behave as catalysts and residues that simultaneously extend and limit human experience. She holds a BFA, major in Sculpture/Installation with a minor in Integrated Media, from OCAD University (2016).

Aaditya Aggarwal is the festival programmer at Regent Park Film Festival. He was the 2016 Online Editorial Intern at *Canadian Art* and the Sid Adilman Mentee at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival and *Screen Daily*, an industry news publication. Aaditya has also contributed writing to online publications like *The New Inquiry*, *The Review* and *The Ethnic Aisle*.



FADO Performance Art Centre and **SAVAC** co-present **Weather to Store** by **Kristina Guison**. Precarity renders the acquisition, care and disposal of an object into an emotionally loaded, calculative problem. The lifecycle of an object depends on its size, utility, affective potential and value. Where do you store grandma's fine china in a tiny rented apartment? How long do you hold on to the unique piece of metal that you dumpstered for an art project ten years ago? Does your sculpture have more value sitting on a plinth in gallery, or on a shelf in storage?

Weather to Store is a durational performance in three acts, purposely presented in no particular order. In each act a collection of objects is arranged and manipulated in a different way, and in three distinct spaces: a gallery, the outdoors and a self-storage container. The sequence of time, the utility of the objects and the designated spaces that these objects and actions occupy are displaced and dis-jointed, mediating on and revealing how context influences their shifting and impermanent value.



Act II Storage May 2018

In the second act of *Weather to Store*, a gallery space is reframed as a typical storage locker. The artist and her exhibition take up residence in the gallery and perform 'storing' in situ. The artist stacks, re-orders and rearranges the art objects in the gallery-turned-storage over the course of the residency. The various configurations reveal the process through which objects are ascribed value in storage. Audience is invited to come and go during gallery hours.

Act I Gallery 23 May 2018

Weather to Store continues outside. The artist converts a patch of space outdoors into a gallery and mounts an exhibition, delineated by tape lines drawn on the ground. The dimension of the designated space corresponds to a typical medium sized self-storage space. The exhibition is comprised of unfinished, raw materials presented and sold as art objects along with functional objects hindered from exercising their potential utility.

Act III Outside October 2018

Weather to Store ends in a self-storage facility. The artist moves her objects for the last time into a storage locker. Opting out of preservationist logics of climate-controlled storage spaces, the artist performs the laborious process of weathering them artificially as an additive and depreciating performative gesture.