



Nocturne 2017 Curators:
Anna Sprague + Emily Lawrence

2017 Curatorial Premise

“The modern opposition between tradition and revolution is treacherous. Tradition means both delivery — handing down or passing on a doctrine — and surrender or betrayal. Traduttore, traditore, translator, traitor. The word revolution, similarly, means both cyclical repetition and the radical break. [...] Preoccupation with tradition and interpretation of tradition as an age-old ritual is a distinctly modern phenomenon, born out of anxiety about the vanishing past.”¹

In 2017, as we usher in a year punctuated with centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations of significant moments in Canadian history, it is important to take time to reflect on the complex nature of cultural remembrance. While much of this year’s focus will be on finding ways to collectively mark the one hundred and fifty years that have passed since Canada’s confederation, or the hundred years since the tragic Halifax Explosion, there are many more histories that will continue to slip further into obscurity.

Vanish seeks to re-envision familiar public spaces throughout Halifax / Dartmouth as phantasmagoric alternative realities. In an attempt to decolonize our collective imaginations, Nocturne: Art at Night provides participating artists and audiences with opportunities to re-experience and re-imagine these sites as a means of creatively disrupting the dominant narratives that have come to define the city’s complex history.

Nocturne audiences have a desire to express agency over their commonly shared civic surroundings and to infuse their communities with the wonder, surprise, and beauty of art. As a curatorial premise, the term Vanish relates to both the temporary nature of the Nocturne experience as well as the shifting focus that occurs as new or forgotten memories are transposed over prevalent narratives and pasts. Vanish, in all of its iterations (vanquish, vanity, v nus vanitas), is a term that implies an active state of disappearing. It is not erasure or removal, but a form of distancing or blurring. Vanish is an act of slow magic — a camera lens slowly adjusting its focus. It is the present in the act of becoming the past.

For many, Nocturne signifies a break from the conventions of habitualized movement through urban spaces, and results in momentary fissures that have a lasting effect on our understanding of cultural pasts, architecture, and psycho-geography. Shaped by magicians disguised as artists, this carnival space that invites audiences to temporarily surrender to the power of illusion for the sole purpose of generating real memories.

¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2001