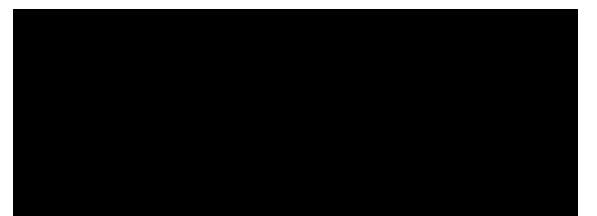
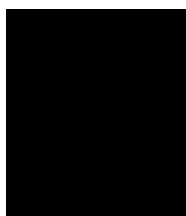
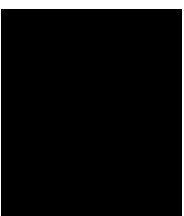




**Intrusive thoughts galore**

**By Philip Leonard Ocampo**

**YYZ Artists' Outlet**



On James Rollo's *I let the intrusive thoughts win* at YYZ Artists' Outlet

I'm interested in silence as an essential linchpin to humor. While obviously never as entertaining as the punchline itself, quietness surrounds humor like an infrastructure: The buildup of a joke sets up all the necessary components of its thesis, and that brief moment of thought coalesces every variable into alignment before the roaring laughter fills the room. Memories of humor that hold resonance with you can disrupt the flatter moments of daily life so abruptly that the random laughter you'll break into will slice through the monotony of the morning train, the dullness of your dull workplace workday (sorry if this is resonant) or the quiet void of your lonesome apartment (sorry again). Days, weeks or even years after the fact. Comedic timing can wield silence as the punchline itself, inciting laughter by emphasizing its negative space.

There's an intuitiveness intrinsic to humor that my brain can only name as a dynamic between silence and noise, and thus, absence of presence. I've gotten acquainted with this peculiar relationship through the works unleashed in James Rollo's beguiling and totally wit ridden, *I let the intrusive thoughts win*.

So how does one write descriptively about humour in art? Does it kill a joke to explain it to death or is that its own kind of funny... Exhibition texts sort of need to tell you what the work is about though, so what gives? I've come to realize that erring on the side of just *shutting up* and tracing the affective silence of Rollo's works could write about the work in the spirit of it. In this space, remnants of the artist's hand are evident in the works even though Rollo's physical body is no longer on site, setting the dominos up. What we're left with is a peculiar set of happenings whose quiet humor lingers to deliver punchline after punchline after punchline.

Employing a number of tactics, this assortment of installations occurs across the square footage of the gallery space, adorning its walls with experiential anomalies that chop and screw the function of everyday objects. The result of this practice is like a house of mirrors, warping and distorting a perceived reality into a new space of kinetic potential. Using objects in ways so counter or hyper-appropriate temporarily frees them of their due service, activating them so horizontally that Rollo describes the practice as a *queering* of sorts: These objects are no longer confined to a baseline, binary use-logic anymore. They become something newer and stranger. The smoke machine is good at blowing fog, but the vacuum is really *really* good at sucking it up. And by *God* how worn-in are these high heels? The lives of these anti-objects extend past the feet that wear the shoes or the hands that set the timers.

While the moments of peculiar specificity that define situational irony are typically kismet alignment, Rollo's works riff on viewer expectations to expand on the familiar with their intervention lingeringly present in altering expected outcomes. Squeaks that are an iconic staple of 401 Richmond activity go from sounding like possibly a work party? happening upstairs to a straight-up remixed audio track. A 30-minute compilation featuring moments of iconic movie magic are re-released with a new score. Here, the producer is the artist, the trickster, and spectre. From earnestly entering a gallery at 401 Richmond to look at some art, then spiraling into this? Someone is indeed messing with you.

*I let the intrusive thoughts win*. This statement underscores a deep seeded chaotic impulse to indulge thoughts so out of pocket, one usually won't act upon. It's also a sentiment that encapsulates the desire to crystalize the innovative theses integral to experiential, situational humor. The exhibition, titled as such, sees Rollo chasing the *a-ha* moments that make humor in general so deeply satisfying. It permeates throughout every work in the exhibition but is most apt among the artworks that lean into its own irreverent provocativeness. The reanimated corpse of a dead Christmas tree? After the holidays *just* ended? The broom that sweeps up useless leaves? The thirsty speed in which this vacuum sucks up the smoke just released from the smoke machine reminds me of this stupid bit I used to do to friends in 2021 (not even that long ago) wherein if they'd burp, I'd try to suck it up while it was in the air so desperately it made them uncomfortable. In *I did not half-ass this*, Rollo offers prints of their colon signed by stamping the works by sitting on them alongside a garbage can if you think that's gross. James and I are both usually waiting for the stage manager to yank us offstage with the hooked cane. I am the right person to write this exhibition text.

Fitting your humor into a container is not a simple task. 280 characters on Twitter, 6 seconds on Vine, or even the square footage of a gallery. Working within the parameters of space necessitates resourcefulness, creativity, and wit. Not unlike a traffic jam of sorts, seven separate installations gather at the fixed point that is James Rollo's *I let the intrusive thoughts win*. Sound-bleed and all, these moments perform at once, with Rollo's presence as the orchestrator of these reality-glitched moments looming spiritually in their physical absence. The negative space of these altered objects teems with the humor of emancipated possibility. Rollo is bold enough to make good on the promise of intrusive thoughts, crossing the threshold of established logic to guide these hijinks as they wash over you.

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**PHILIP LEONARD OCAMPO** is an artist and arts facilitator based in Tkaronto, Canada. Ocampo's multidisciplinary practice involves painting, sculpture, writing and curatorial projects. Exploring worldbuilding, radical hope and speculative futures, Ocampo's work embodies a curious cross between magic wonder and the nostalgic imaginary. Following the tangents, histories and canons of popular culture, Ocampo is interested in how unearthing cultural touchstones of past/current times may therefore serve as catalysts for broader conversations about lived experiences; personal, collective, diasporic, etc. He holds a BFA in Integrated Media (DPXA) from OCAD University (2018) and is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xpace Cultural Centre and one of the four founding co-directors of Hearth, an artist-run collective based in the city.

**JAMES ROLLO** is a multidisciplinary artist and educator living in Toronto, Canada. They have recently exhibited at: the plumb, Toronto, Ontario (2024), Casa da Dona Laura, Lisbon, Portugal (2024); Groaming Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2022), Emalin Project Space, London, UK (2021), and was commissioned by the Canadian National Exhibition for a site specific socially engaged public artwork, Toronto, Ontario (2022). They received their MFA from UCL's Slade School of Fine Art (2017), their BFA from OCAD University (2015), and their BSc from Queen's University (2008).