

August 8, 2015

# Local Gems: "You Are When You Sleep," "Peels," "labile affect"



All photos via Co-Lab Projects, SUMMERSCOOL

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*Words and Interview by Jane Claire Hervey*

One show. Three exhibitions. Seven artists.

Seem impressive?

It is.

create and curate a cohesive vision.

Their collaborative show (which opens today, August 8 at 7 p.m. at [CANOPY](#)) comes to life in three parts: **YOU ARE WHEN YOU SLEEP**, a video installation by Reeber, **PEELS**, a mixed media exhibition by Jones and Byrd, and **LABILE AFFECT**, a group of works exploring girlhood and feminism by Wilson, Hill, Kam and Bradford.

The artists were selected and paired to work with each other through [SUMMERSCOOL](#), a program developed by [CO-LAB PROJECTS](#) for artists between the ages of 18 and 25. The program serves as a bridge for young creators into the professional world—from lessons on shipping art to working within a space to personal development as an artist. At the end of the month-long program, the students have real-world experience, and their own art exhibitions, to show for it.

I had the chance to sit down with Reeber, Byrd, Kam, Bradford and Wilson to discuss the show, their summer in training, being an artist in Austin, working with other females and the context of gender in art.



**REEBER:** I'm Brittany Reeber, and I'm a filmmaker and I do video art, and I have I guess a solo piece exhibition within this group show.

So, there's three different pieces in this one thing. Mine's called "You Are When You Sleep," and just a few different video art installations.

**BYRD:** I'm Lily Byrd, and I'm doing a collaborative show with Kayla, who's not here, but Kayla Jones. We're doing mostly sculpture, and I have a few paintings I'm putting in. It's kind of like a dialogue about how texture speaks to reality and sets a tangibility. What she's doing is a lot of digital representations of texture, where it's imitated by digital processes, and what I'm doing is focusing on the raw materiality. I have a sculpture that's made of these peels that I took off with all these different natural materials out of latex that then brought the material with it, and it's sort of like this anamorphic, like, blob thing... kind of... yeah.

[laughs]

**BRADFORD:** I'm Natalie Bradford, and I'm in the collaborative show with Kate, Tsz and Whitney. I mostly do painting and print-making, so I have a large mural piece in there, which is accompanied by a sculptural work that we're all working on. Additionally, we have all collaborated with one another. I think everyone's worked with at least two people in the group, like I have a collaborative work with Kate and a little sculpture with Tsz.

**KAM:** My name is Tsz Kam, and I'm in this group show. I started off as a painter and started doing more multimedia work. In this show, I have mostly fiber art. I've made two pillowcases and another collaborative work with Natalie that involves vinyl and used clothing, and then three pieces that are embroidery. I think that's about it for me, right?

**EVERYONE:** Your film? Your videos...?

**KAM:** Yeah, videos! [laughs]

**WILSON:** She has five videos.

**KAM:** They're short. One video is like a minute.

building on my background in anthropology, kind of a faux ethnography of the people who are around in me in art school. I noticed a huge demographic trend where I was overwhelmingly surrounded by only female artists, so this work is a series of sculptural pieces—there's a sound piece, there's collaborative works that we've done, but it's kind of a commentary on female artists working with each other and then also trying to stake their own place in a competitive art market.

And then Whitney Hill is a fellow UT grad with us, and she's got some sculptural pieces in the show that she's been working on, and her work has been drawing on her experience working for the mothers' milk bank, where she's been working in the lab processing breast milk, and also a piece that she's been working on since she's been in art school that is related to domestic craft and her family's tradition of craftwork.

**KAM:** Like women passing down things to women.



Pictured: Tsz Kam. All photos via Co-Lab Projects, SUMMERSCOOL

**JC:** So, the way Brittany explained it to me was that everyone applied to be in this group and then seven women were selected, right? Which is

**prior? Have you worked with each other before? Collaborated like that?**

**REEBER:** I think everyone knew each other but me?

**KAM:** Yeah, other than Brittany, we all went to UT, so yeah, we're all UT studio art majors. I think most of us have been in classes together, one way or another.

**BYRD:** I applied on my own, and Kayla applied on her own, and then they put us together because our proposals were similar.

**WILSON:** So, we had noticed a trend that Co-Lab does like to pair you up as artists for this program. So, we went ahead and applied together just to make sure we were working with people that we were excited to work with, and it was a conceptual thing.

**JC: So, there was some intention?**

**WILSON:** Yeah, so at least the four of us knew going into it that we would be working with each other if we were accepted.

**JC: So, if you had to explain what SUMMERSCOOL is to someone who had no familiarity with it, how would you describe it?**

**KAM:** It's a program that gives people professional experience—how to be professional artists, how to hang your work properly, how to handle your work, how to send it off and ship it off properly. I think that's what SUMMERSCOOL has been helpful with is that they teach us things like that—how to prep a space properly, how to prep it back for people after us.

**JC: So, it's very much a learning experience.**

**WILSON:** Absolutely. It's a series of evening classes where we would meet a couple of times a week off and on, and then there would be breaks for intense art-making. Usually, it's a month, month-in-a-half program. It's always a group of young artists, recent graduates. I know they came to UT and recruited from there and told us about the program.

**BYRD:** It's not specifically for UT, though.

**REEBER:** Yeah, just gets the word out there.

as its own gallery.



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**JC:** I'm assuming there is some anticipation, then, for this show. What has that journey looked like?

**KAM:** It's been rushed, because of all of the changes that we've had to deal with. We thought the show was going to be at one location for the entirety of SUMMERSCOOL, and then it changed, so a lot of rushing.

**WILSON:** This week for our group has been a lot about working on this main installation. We've gotten different people in there doing their different things.

**BRADFORD:** I sleep in there a lot. [laughs]

**WILSON:** Yeah, Natalie's been a vampire in there.

**BRADFORD:** I have been in there late at night, several nights in a row, getting this piece down. It's been a great learning piece—it's a big mural piece. I've been learning how to put up a faux wall to paint on and take it down later. I've never made something this big before. SUMMERSCOOL is good for that.





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**JC: Let's dig into the collaborative process. What have been some of the personal and group discoveries about how to collaborate between artists?**

**BYRD:** I would say that in my situation me and Kayla are coming from completely different conceptual points, and we're trying to meet in the middle. I think we

**BRADFORD:** I've known my three group partners through school and seen their work and critiques and seen their process, but never gotten to collaborate because in school everyone makes their own piece for their own grade. You're evaluated individually. So, it's been really cool to break away from that and sit with everyone and talk about concepts at the coffeehouse...

**WILSON:** So many hours at Spiderhouse.

**BRADFORD:** ...going deeper and deeper into what we're all thinking about, and I've realized a lot about my work by talking with them and seeing how it intersects. It's been really helpful to learn more about how I work with other people.

**WILSON:** So, my work especially is about how I feel when I work with other people, specifically other female artists. So every interaction that has been going on as a part of this has fueled what I'm thinking about in my work anyway. That is part of what our show is hung around, so it was nice to figure out that there were going to be other female artists in the space with us. Regardless of the aesthetics or the commentary they might be bringing, it works with ours because it's about what it is like to be in the space with these people and recognize those different voices.

**KAM:** For me, it's a lot of different voices coming together, and basically we are saying the same thing ultimately. I enjoy trying to find that.

**REEBER:** Yeah, and then my videos are about my own personal experience in different spaces. It's a societally induced identity crisis, like the ways in which I perform in a private, intimate space with one person and the ways in which I perform in a public space and in like a fantasy space, and all of the different ways that your identity can manifest itself, and it can be a little overwhelming. It's naturally going to be feminine, because I identify as a woman.

**WILSON:** There will be an element of surprise at the show, because we've all been meeting with Co-Lab independently in our groups.







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**JC:** Everyone's touched a bit on the feminine aspects of putting this show together. Coming into the show and doing all of this together, has it addressed any taboos you've seen about women working together? Some people have ideas about that. Even though it wasn't intentional for seven women to be in this show together, is there anything indicative in this process?

**KAM:** So, art school is mostly female. We've been around feminine people all day long. It's been a matter of getting things done, and we've been very straightforward with each other.

**REEBER:** I didn't know that art school was mostly women. RTF isn't. I'm used to working with men, so I thought it was incredible that it happened to be seven women working together. Co-Lab didn't set out to make a show that was feminine.

**WILSON:** I feel like UT is a great place to meet and develop a community, but it's not necessarily a place where you're going to walk out of there with a collective set up that is full of supportive female artists. I feel that Austin is small enough that it is still very DIY in terms of the scene you try to participate in. Also, there is a question to be asked here. If there are so many female undergrads in fine arts that aren't necessarily ending up in grad school or as art administrators, there is a gap between the people who are coming out with BFAs and the people who actually have sustainable careers in the Austin art scene. So I feel this

**JC: I really like this description for the show labile affect. “A world without gender...” The fact that the show is not gendered, but there are seven women working together—it reinforces this should be more of a natural thing.**

**REEBER:** That comes up for me in my work. I don’t want to make gendered work. I don’t think the art that I make is gendered, but it becomes gendered, because the pieces are really personal. I’m not trying to say anything universal or political. So, it’s hard as a female artist to say I’m making something that isn’t gendered, and I’m a feminist, but not everything I make needs to be inherently tied to it. I’m not saying something for all women or for feminism, but it’s a lot of responsibility.

**JC: It’s more than being female.**

**BYRD:** There is always part of you that is reflected in everything you make. If you are a feminine woman, that will come out. Same for men.

**JC: Not everything a woman makes pushes a feminine agenda.**

**BYRD:** Although it can seem like that.

**KAM:** I think our show pushes a feminist agenda.

**WILSON:** I’ve had that same impulse that Brittany has had where I sometimes feel that if I look at my art next to other people’s on the wall, will someone know a girl made that? If it is overtly, “Yeah, a girl made this,” you’re inviting a preconceived set of judgments, and that’s a conversation we all get tired of having at some point. Or it may just not be what we’re talking about, at the moment.

But at least for our show, I think all of us have been embracing that part of ourselves and the ways that it does come out. I’ve been off-put by various parts of our show as we’ve made it, but I’ve liked that feeling of being uncomfortable... like, there’s way too much pink. There’s way too many soft, fuzzy, cliches of girlhood involved in it, but I’ve realized as we’re making it that it’s about so many thornier issues. In the end maybe it’s good to be uncomfortable about that a

know how to word that without being irritated with myself.



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**JC:** I think it's also the lens in which art is presented, sometimes. I think a lot of the times when you look at art...or at least in my experience as a writer, it's like, "A woman wrote that," and then knowing that frames the way you read it. I don't know if the same applies to art.

**KAM:** Well, yeah, all of the things that y'all are talking about, I don't even think about that. I think that women make better or equal art to men.

**JC:** It fits into the fabrics of people's lives differently, for sure. So, the pop-up is at Canopy, and I know I would be really excited to be in a space like that, so how does it feel? You've been collaborating together all summer, and it's coming to an end.

**KAM:** Well, the AC is great, because at first we were in a warehouse that wasn't going to have AC. [group laughs] And Canopy is a space that already has an audience, and there are studios around it, so art people are there everyday. So, we're very happy about that.

**KAM:** Well, I already feel validated.

**WILSON:** It's true, though, you'd be making what you are making, regardless.

**BRADFORD:** I'm still a little terrified. We've gotten feedback along the way, and they've been very supportive and helpful with criticism.

**BYRD:** They've been very honest, sometimes brutally honest.

**WILSON:** It's both validation and a challenge. There's a certain level of professionalism that's been drilled into us, and a part of it has been trying to meet that expectation and exceed our own imagination for what we saw it as.

**KAM:** So, we're trying to bring our work into the real world... other people's understandings versus our professors'.

**JC: So how much of the work you create is public versus personal? What is that like for you as artists?**

**REEBER:** For me, Co-Lab has been an incredible opportunity. I graduated from film school almost two years ago, and I work in the film industry for a living, and it's really intense. You go through two to three months of surrendering your life to someone else's work. It takes a lot of effort and a lot of persistence to continue making my own work. I'm exhausted during my time off, and to have a space like Co-Lab to continue to work... I cried when I got in. I want to keep making things. Filmmaking is so collaborative and expensive; it's not something I can do in a private setting alone at home. It takes a lot of effort and people to say, "Yeah, let's do this." It's like this little factory. Not all of the time, but in the capacity that I work, it's a well-oiled machine and lots of human beings making one person's work. For me, Co-Lab was a great opportunity to keep making work and to not take that job.

**BYRD:** It's been really good to also meet people in the community. For the public versus personal work, I'm trying to break my art away from this object preciousness, and I'm going to let people touch my sculpture. I want people to mess with it, and I think that's important to the aspects of why we have this idea of permanence and to make it more of an interesting thing and less of a fetishized show.

**WILSON:** There's some very personal inspiration, and our own beliefs, ethics, experience and ethnic background, that forms our specific voices within our own shows. I think that the work that we make, no matter what, is meant to be a personal expression, but this show is an opportunity to make more public, interactive works, as well. We made a zine that we plan to distribute at the show that has different works from all of us. I mean, we could make a zine with no audience, but I think it's the fact that we have an audience to speak to that has made us want to reimagine our pieces in a way that is more social and maybe more democratic.

**JC: Have there been any unexpected results from this summer?**

**KAM:** I've never made fiber art before. I did three pieces of embroidery for this show, on top of the videos I already knew I was going to make, so before I painted and made sculptures, and that was a surprise.

**WILSON:** You also made some changes in regards to using Chinese language.

**KAM:** So, I used my own language on a piece for this show, and in school, I never contemplated using my own language, because I don't want people to go to cliché places with it. Especially in academic settings, people start breaking it down very seriously, and it's like, people just speak different languages.

**JC: So what's the importance of programs like Co-Lab? For collaboration? For the art world?**

**KAM:** Without Co-Lab happening, we wouldn't have come together and had a show. I'm sure we could have organized things on our own, a lot of people do apartment shows and house shows these days, but showing at Canopy is a Co-Lab connection. This is a great opportunity for emerging artists.

**BRADFORD:** Yeah, like I'm still a student, but this is that step from going to school and then showing in Austin and working frequently. It's a special step into that that wouldn't happen otherwise, just going directly into it.

**KAM:** This is showing us that this can happen this way.

**BRADFORD:** It's so much easier to fathom, because you're learning from people

seem so much more do-able.

## **JC: Final comments on the show?**

**KAM:** It's going to be awesome, with a lot of different view points.

**REEBER:** Come!

**BRADFORD:** I'm really excited; everyone's been working on this for so long.

**WILSON:** I'm proud of us, I think?

**KAM:** You think? I'm proud of us. [group laughs]

YOU ARE WHEN YOU SLEEP, PEELS and LABILE AFFECT will be on display at CANOPY through August 29. For more information on Co-Lab and its SUMMERSCOOL program, PLEASE VISIT THEIR WEBSITE.



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