Cybèle Young

KAMIPHONY

Curated by Zoë Foster

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KAMIPHONY | Cybèle Young

In the title of this exhibition, **Kamiphony**, Cybèle Young introduces the conceptual core of her show through a portmanteau that combines its key elements: **kami** and **phony**.

The Japanese word **kami** has a dual meaning, translated as both “paper” and “god” or “deity.” Having found her artistic voice through paper early in her career, the medium continues to remain central to Young’s practice. Paper appears in a multitude of forms across the exhibition.

At the heart of the exhibition is a *Machine Pantheon* of intricate, kinetic paper machines that animate and activate over time. Taking on a life of their own, these sculptures transform into a collective chorus within the gallery space. They shift in scale and form through lighting, movement, shadow and sound, all choreographed by the artist. In doing so, they invite the audience to witness a metamorphosis that has echoes of animism.

Crucially, these fantastical machines serve no practical purpose, aligning them with a rich historical lineage that champions the concept of “uselessness”. From Aristotle to Baroque automata, and from Bruno Munari to Jean Tinguely’s anarchic sculptures, philosophers and artists have long returned to this idea. Sketches for Young’s *Machine Pantheon* have echoes of the fantastical machines that appear in Leonardo da Vinci’s sketchbooks. Through the connections with these wide historical references, Young invites viewers to reflect on our present-day predicament.

The “uselessness” of the machines is also deeply personal for the artist, reflecting her own personal experiences with dealing with long-COVID and menopause while making this new body of work.

Music and sound are equally vital components of the installation, connecting with the **phony** (or phonic) element of the title. While researching mechanical movement in 1930s experimental film, chance led Young to discover the work of her great uncle, composer Colin McPhee. McPhee spent the 1930s in Bali, absorbing ritual traditions which he perceived through his sonic experience and animism - concepts that resonated deeply with Young’s own creative pursuits. The installation is imbued with his presence, and the ‘ostinati’ (layered repetitions) of the gamelan he so championed lives as life-affirming rhythm in the machines. Usefulness is not measured by output or progress but by duration and presence.

The *Machine Pantheon* that sits at the core of the exhibition embodies this. With a nod to *Mechanical Principles*, the film that led the artist to McPhee, twelve elements make up the installation. Over time, each activation creates a metamorphosis and different relationships are revealed. Forms shift from static to movement and scale is challenged through shadows and filmic evocation. Sounds emanate from unexpected places. This animation of the installation, a nod to stop motion or zoetrope that appears through Young’s practice, is a thread that runs through the artist’s work, allowing us to absorb the transitions. Though *The Machine Giveth and the Machine Taketh Away*, the beauty remains.

Young encourages visitors to spend time in the space—to listen, look, and discover the unexpected. By lingering, they can cultivate their own chance encounters with this mechanical chorus as it activates and transforms.

Zoë Foster

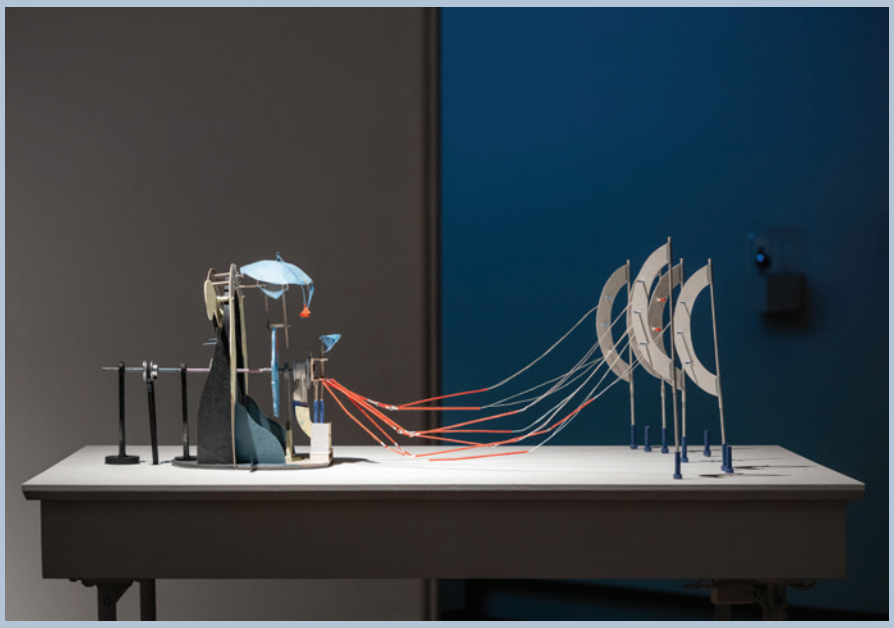




Machine Pantheon, 2026



Machine Pantheon: Ettore, 2026



Machine Pantheon: Giveth, 2026

Threshold On entering the exhibition, visitors pass through *Threshold*, a complex paper installation that marks the transition ahead. Vestiges of Jean Tinguely can be felt immediately in the sounds that emanate from the sculpture. Young was inspired by his 1959 lecture *Art, Motions, and Machines* at the ICA in London (UK), where Tinguely sat in total silence while his manifesto *Für Statik (For Statics)* was delivered via two tape recorders. This performative statement highlighted the artist's belief in kinetic sculptures subverting traditional industrial utility into chaotic, unpredictable and beautiful art and as well as his belief that stability does not exist. Equally, in *Threshold* a cacophony of hidden voices emanates from the sculptural elements. Within the composition, two conversations are overlaid, with their monologues repeating, fusing and intertwining, like an aural Dada work. Titled *Dispersal and Consolidation*, the monologues are about knowing and unknowing and the slippage between the two. Chaos and confusion abound as we try to grasp for meaning.



Threshold, 2026 (detail)

Threshold represents an important space for Young as a transition and resetting of the senses, preparing visitors as they move into the world of *Kamiphony*.



Threshold, 2026

I DON'T KNOW, I DON'T KNOW.

I DON'T KNOW.

NO, IT ALL LEFT.

THE WHOLE THING: IT'S GONE, IT WENT AWAY, EVAPORATED, OR I DON'T KNOW WHAT.

YES, NO, I HEARD THAT, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT IT.

I DON'T KNOW.

WELL, LAST I HEARD, IT HAD SHOWN UP ALL AT ONCE, AND NOW ALL AT ONCE IT'S GONE AWAY.

I DON'T KNOW, BUT I HEARD "ALL AT ONCE."

"ALL AT ONCE."

I DON'T KNOW, BUT IT'S AS THOUGH IT WAS TURNED OFF? AS THOUGH IT WAS DISMANTLED?

AS THOUGH IT UNRAVELED? BROKE DOWN? WAS FAULTY IN SOME WAY? I GUESS I COULD SAY,

"IT MAY HAVE BEEN FAULTY IN SOME WAY." BUT I WOULDN'T –

NO, I WOULDN'T GO ANY FURTHER THAN THAT

BECAUSE I'M NOT GOING TO COME OUT SUDDENLY SOUNDING AS IF,

IF I START SOUNDING AS IF I KNOW WHAT BECAME OF IT?

WHAT, THAT IT BROKE? THAT IT SHATTERED?

BUT THEN IT'LL SOUND -

BUT I CAN'T CONFIRM FOR CERTAIN THAT IT WENT TO PIECES.

I DON'T KNOW THE NUMBER.

IS IT STILL DIVIDING? I DON'T KNOW.

NO, WHAT I HEARD WAS: "COLLAPSING IN ON ITSELF."

"COLLAPSING IN ON ITSELF"

BUT THAT'S ONLY PART OF IT: THAT'S ONLY ONE SMALL PART OF IT, AND THEY'D ALL NEED TO BE FIT TOGETHER IF I'M TO BEGIN SOUNDING –

THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYING.- AFTER "COLLAPSING" I HEARD "PROLIFERATION."

"PROLIFERATION" IS ALL I HEARD.

SURE, THAT MIGHT SUM IT UP, BUT I DON'T WANT TO START SOUNDING PARTIAL TO ONE PARTICULAR DESCRIPTION - NOT IN A MESS LIKE THIS,

WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY MOVING PARTS -

THE LAST THING I WANT IS TO START SOUNDING PARTIAL.

HOW ABOUT - HOW ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE:

"IT SOUNDS AS IF THEY AREN'T MEANT TO STAY TOGETHER."

DOES THAT -?

I'LL SAY - I'LL SAY:

"DEFINITELY NOT INDEFINITELY, AND CERTAINLY NOT FOR NOW."

DOES THAT SOUND -?

NO,

BEYOND THAT, I WON'T GO ANY FURTHER.



The Shape of Wind, 2025

The Shape of Wind In *The Shape of Wind* we see the artist exploring more personal themes. While long-COVID and menopause were catalysts for the work, the imagery within the frame references memories and events from her personal life. Conceived during the pandemic, it is Young's first work on this monumental scale. The work originated with the video works projected through gypsum crystals. The stop-motion film imagery is echoed in the surrounding sculptures as objects metamorphose and shift form. There are traces of Muybridge's photographs of sequential movement, with Young testing the boundaries between the static and movement within the picture frame.

Young took inspiration from her materials, surroundings, and lived experience, responding through paper form in an instinctive and immediate way, akin to the tradition of automatic drawing.

The Shape of Wind also introduces shadow play. The butterfly-to-human metamorphosis depicted at the heart of the work mirrors the artist's own transitional state at that time. For Young, the work embodies the place between two states. It acts as a kind of bridge to the more formal metamorphosis of the kinetic machines in *Machine Pantheon*.



Cannons - film, 2026 (stills)

Cannons Representing one of the twelve elements that comprises *Machine Pantheon*, the paradox that is humanity lies at the heart of *Cannons*. Young explores the coexistence of opposites through the work, where creation and destruction, or love and violence, are constant bedfellows. Though static on the table, there is an underlying violent motion and energy behind each of the cannons. Every clay cannon has been detonated by the artist, firing its own projectile. The projectiles are caught as though mid-projectile, while taking on the lightness of levitation.

The act of destruction is a crucial element of the piece. Close inspection of the projectiles reveals scorch marks from the ignition, with some of the projectiles showing signs of destruction from the detonation.



Cannons, 2026

The tension between the static and motion is at play again. Yet this moment of violent movement also leads to metamorphosis, forcing the projectiles to take a different shape. The detonation is captured in the film, which acts as both documentation of the performance and a record of the action. The work is imbued with tension - and humour. The erasure of sound heightens this tension.

Movement is reintroduced into the work through the shadows, which become an integral trace of the life of the machines.



Cannons, 2026



Kamiphony installation (*Kamiphony - film and The Shape of Wind*)

Kamiphony - film In the *Kamiphony* film, the small kinetic paper machines are transported into vast, imagined landscapes, where their scale shifts from intimate object to something monumental and deified. Moving slowly through atmospheric worlds of sky, water, rock and vegetation, they appear less like machines than strange presences - ancient, futuristic, or perhaps belonging to another place altogether. A mysterious soundscape is threaded with voice-over written and performed by Jonathan Young, whose particular language of otherness, slippage and unstable meaning further unsettles where - or when - the viewer might be, extending the film into an epic parallel world in which these fragile forms have become its monuments, inhabitants, or deities.



Kamiphony - film, 2026 (still)



Cybèle Young is a Toronto-based artist and author. She has worked with Japanese paper for more than thirty years, using it to test the boundaries between object and living thing, miniature and monumental, play and ritual. Recent works bring these investigations into kinetic installation where paper forms move, make sound and seem to take on lives of their own.

Her work has been exhibited internationally in both gallery and institutional contexts, including Hudson River Museum, New York and the Cheongju International Biennale in Korea. Residencies and fellowships have taken her to Paris, Banff Centre for the Arts and, most recently, across Japan to study the traditions and contemporary culture of washi papermaking.

Governor General's Literary Award winner Young is also the author and illustrator of numerous books, including *Ten Birds* and *Nancy Knows* (winner of the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award).

Young's work extends into public art and interdisciplinary collaboration, including a permanent work for the Toronto Transit Commission and video design for Crystal Pite and Kidd Pivot's Assembly Hall.

Zoë Foster has curated extensively internationally - past exhibitions include projects with artists Adrien Ghenie; Serban Savu; Jesús Rafael Soto; Paz Errázuriz. She has worked with artists on key institutional exhibitions internationally - the Venice Biennale (Grazia Toderi; Claudia Fontes), Tate Britain, MoMA. Alongside her curatorial work, she is co-founder of Canada<->International - an organisation that promotes Canadian art and culture internationally.

Zoë has extensive experience in the International Art World, both as owner of her own galleries (f a projects, London, UK & Chung King Projects, Los Angeles, USA) and for other organisations (including Anthony d'Offay, London; Christie's, London; and other private foundations).

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Curated by Zoë Foster

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