

## TIAN CONTEMPORAIN

Originaire de Winnipeg, **Jeanette Johns** détient un baccalauréat en Printmaking de l'University of Manitoba et une maîtrise en Studio Arts (concentration Print Media) de l'Université Concordia. Elle a effectué de nombreuses résidences de production et de création, au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Finlande. En 2016, elle a publié le livre d'artiste *With Sufficient Distance*, réalisé en risographie par Parameter Press.

Le travail de Jeanette Johns se fonde sur l'observation et le regard, avec un intérêt tout particulier pour les représentations bi-dimensionnelles de l'espace. Par le biais du dessin, de la photographie et de la gravure, elle explore avec une extrême élégance les systèmes scientifiques de représentation du monde tels que les diagrammes, les jeux de perspective et les illusions d'optique. Également fascinée par le genre du paysage, Johns s'appuie sur des connaissances à la fois théoriques et empiriques afin de produire des images qui se situent au croisement des mathématiques, de la géométrie et du motif décoratif.

Ses oeuvres comptent parmi les collections de: The Crown Collection, Rideau Hall, Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec, Toronto Dominion Bank, Manitoba Arts Branch, Atelier Graff Archives, Manitoba Hydro art collection, et Open Studio Archives, Toronto.

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**Jeanette Johns** holds a BFA in Printmaking from the University of Manitoba, and an MFA in Studio Arts (Print Media concentration) from Concordia University. She participated in many production and creation residencies, in Canada, the USA and Finland. In 2016, she published the artist book *With Sufficient Distance*, printed in risograph by Parameter Press.

The work of Jeanette Johns is based on observation and the gaze, focusing particularly on two-dimensional representations of space. Through drawing, photography, and etching, she elegantly explores scientific systems of representing the world such as diagrams, perspective games, and optical illusions. Also interested in the landscape genre, Johns draws on theoretical and empirical knowledge to produce images that exist on the border between mathematics, geometry, and decorative design.

Her works are found in the collections of: The Crown Collection, Rideau Hall, Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec, Toronto Dominion Bank, Manitoba

# TIAN CONTEMPORAIN

Arts Branch, Atelier Graff Archives, Manitoba Hydro art collection, and Open Studio Archives, Toronto.

## **EDUCATION | EDUCATION**

- 2015 MFA, Studio Arts (Print Media), Concordia University, Montreal QC
- 2009 Foundation Mentorship Program, Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, Winnipeg MB
- 2008 BFA Honours magna cum laude, Printmaking, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg MB

## **EXPOSITIONS SOLOS ET DUO | SOLO AND DUO EXHIBITIONS**

- 2023 Change Ringing, Centre Clark, Montreal, QC
- 2022 Living Ground Cover, Centre culturel Henri-Lemieux, LaSalle, QC
- 2021 Of things as they happen to be, Fonderie Darling, Montreal, QC
- 2017 The Weight of the Earth's Curve, Arprim, Montreal QC  
To Step is to Rise, Lisa Kehler Art + Projects, Winnipeg MB
- 2015 Our Earthly Platform, MFA Gallery Concordia University, Montreal QC
- 2012 Elevation, Parlour, Winnipeg MB
- 2011 Retreating Agassiz, Alberta Printmakers' Society A/P Gallery, Calgary AB
- 2010 Where the Senses Fail Us, Gallery 803, Winnipeg MB
- 2008 Jeanette Johns: artwork, Martha Street Studio, Winnipeg MB

## **EXPOSITIONS COLLECTIVES | GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 2023 Seasoned Ground, Galerie Buhler Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
- 2021 Tout se confond, apparaît, puis s'efface de nouveau, Place Publique Hivernal, Montreal QC
- 2020 eXcentrer, Galerie d'art Desjardins, Drummondville, QC
- 2016 Exposition de la Relève du FJIM, Atelier Circulaire, QC
- 2015 Collision 11, Parisian Laundry, Montreal QC

## TIAN CONTEMPORAIN

- 2014 Actual Artists, Actual Gallery, Winnipeg MB
- 2014 Looking for Length, aceartinc., Winnipeg MB
- 2014 Perspectives from Above, Centre3 for Print and Media Arts, Hamilton ON
- 2013 Looking Up: Response to the Inuit art collection, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg MB
- 2013 International Contemporary Print Biennial, Trois-Rivières QC
- 2013 Infinity, Centre d'exposition, Val-David QC
- 2012 New Work, Galerie Alain Piroir, Montréal QC
- 2012 Sortie, l'Ancienne École des beaux-arts de Montreal, QC
- 2012 Open Studios, Concordia University, Montréal QC
- 2011/12 Personal Politics, Manitoba Arts Network, traveling show
- 2011/12 Hovercraft, Manitoba Craft Council, traveling show
- 2010 Open Studios, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg MB
- 2010 Mapping: Martha Street Studio, The Buhler Gallery, Winnipeg MB
- 2009 One Take Super 8, WNDX Film Festival, Winnipeg MB
- 2009 Winter Warmer, aceartinc., Winnipeg MB
- 2009 Craft: Culture/Counterculture, Outworks Gallery, Winnipeg MB
- 2009 Unbound, Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, Winnipeg MB
- 2008 All of the Above Members' Show, Martha Street Studio, Winnipeg MB
- 2008 Winter Warmer, aceartinc., Winnipeg MB
- 2007 Rub Scratch Cut, Gallery of Student Art, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg MB
- 2007 Art Hive, Folk Festival, Birds Hill MB
- 2007 Print Zero Exchange #5, Pratt Gallery, Seattle WA
- 2006 Etc.; Work From the Martha Street Studio, Wasagaming MB
- 2006 Year of the Dog, Ken Segal Gallery, Winnipeg MB
- 2006 Under Pressure-Prints from the School of Art, Martha Street Studio, Winnipeg MB

### **RÉSIDENCES | RESIDENCIES**

- 2024 Haystack Mountain School, Open Studio Residency, Maine USA
- 2024 Centre Sagamie, Alma, Quebec, Résidence de recherche/création

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- 2019-2023 Fonderie Darling, Montreal, Quebec
- 2017 St Michael's Printshop, St John's, Newfoundland (March 2017)
- 2016 Centre Bang, Chicoutimi, Quebec (April 2016)
- 2016 Atelier Circulaire, Montreal, Quebec (Jan 2016 - Dec 2016)
- 2015 Atelier de l'île, Val-David, Quebec (December 2015)
- 2015 Vermont Studio Center, Johnson VT (November 2015)
- 2015 Arteles Creative Centre, Haukijärvi, Finland
- 2013 Sol LeWitt Drawing Intensive, FOFA Gallery Concordia, Montréal, QC
- 2011 Guest Renter Residency at Open Studio, Toronto ON
- 2010 Summer Institute, Plug In ICA, Winnipeg MB

### **PUBLICATIONS**

- 2024 Escarpements, Self-published artist book at Centre Sagamie, Alma QC
- 2021 Of things as they happen to be, catalogue published by Éditions Quartier Éphémère
- 2016 With Sufficient Distance, Risograph book published by Parameter Press
- 2014 Portfolio of Images and Words, Hamilton Arts and Letters Magazine
- 2012 Conceptualisms Dossier, Matrix Magazine

### **PRESSE | PRESS**

- 2022 Exhibition review by Didier Morelli, Of things as they happen to be, C Magazine
- 2014 A Breathtaking View (Essay 19:4), a ceartinc Critical Distance Publication

### **COLLECTIONS**

Fidelity Investments Art Collection  
The Crown Collection, Rideau Hall  
Bibliothèque et archives Nationales du Québec  
Toronto Dominion Bank  
Manitoba Arts Branch

# TIAN CONTEMPORAIN

Atelier Graff Archives, Montreal  
Manitoba Hydro art collection, Winnipeg  
Open Studio Archives, Toronto  
Collections privées | private collections

# *Holding Knowledge*

Didier Morelli

Reviews      Webzine

Celia Perrin Sidarous

Jeanette Johns

Poline Harbali

Swapnaa Tamhane



**Celia Perrin Sidarous**

*Des éclats*, installation view, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal, 2024.

Photo: Alexis Bellavance, courtesy of Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal

**Stewart Hall Art  
Gallery**, Montréal

July 7–August 25, 2024

In a global economy of fast fashion and late-stage capitalism, the idea of the handmade has become reified and sought after. Marked by the global dreams of the information age—which is, quite contradictorily, still heavily reliant on the mass manufacturing of computer and phone parts—the embodied cultural knowhow that is transmitted between generations has become increasingly valuable.

The importance of maintaining and revalorizing practices rooted in traditional artistic and craft techniques of analogue photography, embroidery, textile work, and printmaking is at the core of *Holding Knowledge*, a group exhibition curated by Manel Benchabane at Stewart Hall Art Gallery. Featuring the skilled handiwork and conceptually concise practices of Swapnaa Tamhane, Poline Harbali, Jeanette Johns, and Celia Perrin Sidarous, the exhibition weaves together cultural and familial narratives that resist the contemporary urge for globalized rapidity, easily consumable goods, and thoughtless doomscrolling.

Proximity, patience, and repetitive care are but some of the many values espoused throughout the exhibition. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Harbali's series of five Syrian Aghabani tablecloths that belonged to her family, which she has marked with her own embroidery, representing a series of meals she would like to have with close ones, both imaginary and real. Highly graphic, brightly colourful, and above all else playful, the pieces in *Repas imaginaire ou passé* (2023) are wonderfully intricate and a treasure trove of poetic imagery and words. Embroidered sentences such as “j'avais une urgence dans le corps [i had an emergency in my body]” convey this central sense of multigenerational knowhow that ebbs and flows from the tablecloth, a precious family heirloom imbued with imagination, beauty, and history.

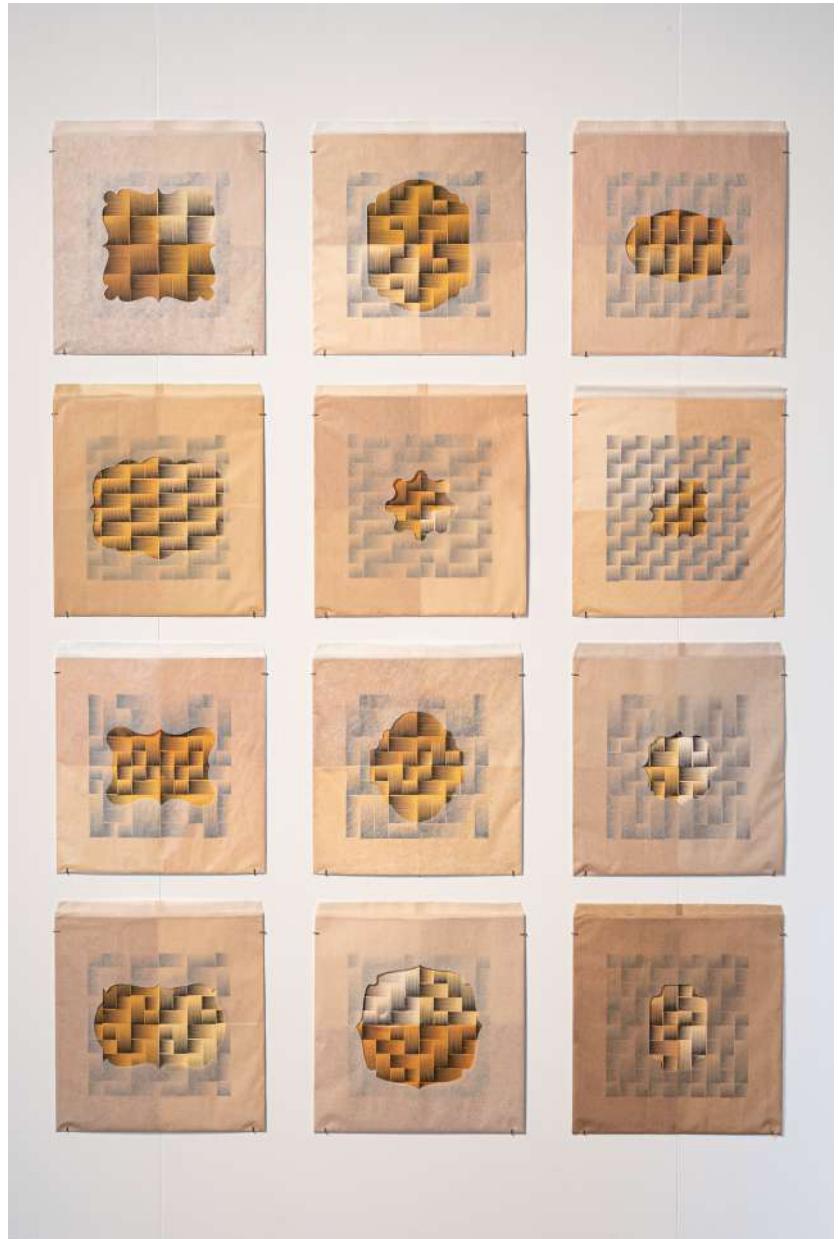
**Poline Harbali**

*Repas imaginaire ou passé*, 2023, installation view, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal, 2024.

Photo: Alexis Bellavance, courtesy of Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal

Whereas each of Harbali's tablecloths maintains an individualized, imperfect, and charmingly scribbly sense of the hand-embroidered, Johns's loom work adheres to a strict geometry and patternmaking that evokes other traditions of making. Using her grandmother's loom, Johns translates the creative logic of printmaking to textiles. In each of her dazzlingly mesmerizing patterned pieces, she explores the relationships between a shadow weave—which she found in a sample book of her grandmother's—and contemporary weaving software that has allowed her to complexify this original structure. Woven pieces such as *Start and end with a sample* (2024) and printed works such as *Test Weavings* (2024) push the boundaries





**Jeanette Johns**

*Test Weavings*, installation view, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal, 2024.

Photo: Alexis Bellavance, courtesy of Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal

It is in these moments of tension, between the irregularity of

Harbali's tablecloths and the serial perfection of Johns's patterns, that *Holding Knowledge* best relays the wide array of tactile and intellectual knowhow that is passed on across time and people. In Tamhane's *When was Modernism?* (2024), this clash between past and present, handmade and industrialized, is made explicit. Impressively stretching across the main gallery, the piece replicates the worktable of the artisan-designer Salemamad Khatri, which acts as a support for an *achadiya*, a protective drop cloth used during printing. Picking up on a process of transference—of colourful inks bleeding through countless projects to create new, unanticipated combinations—Tamhane's work speaks to cotton's legacy in India as an anticolonial tool. By asking women from the semi-nomadic Dhebariya Rabari community in the Kutch region of Gujarat state to apply embroidery and appliqué to specific areas of the drop cloth, Tamhane also recentres the work on the labour of women. Although not explicitly stated in *Holding Knowledge*, the ways in which women have predominantly held onto and transmitted these types of invisible and invisibilized knowledges is an obvious theme of the exhibition.



### Swapnaa Tamhane

(in collaboration with Salemamad Khatri (artisan-designer) & Jasuben Prabhu, Madhuben Vana, Jivaben Rupa (Dhebariya Rabari community, Qasab Kutch Women's Collective)  
*When was Modernism?*, installation view, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal, 2024.

Photo: Alexis Bellavance, courtesy of Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal

Moving away from the tactility of threads and textiles, from the abstraction of geometry and patternmaking, Perrin Sidarous's exploration of analogue photography brings a more figurative element to the exhibition. Creating a series based on archival documents, objects, and family lore—more specifically, reshooting her uncle's snapshots from the 1980s, family photographs from Cairo in the 1940s, and a 1907 book titled *Sepulchral Monuments of Ancient Egypt* borrowed from her aunt—she builds an archaeological missive that melds major, capital-H History with more personal and embodied histories. In her black-and-white images, the collaged and fragmentary nature of

the composition gestures toward a kind of incomplete knowledge.



**Celia Perrin Sidarous**

*Des éclats*, installation view, Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal, 2024.

Photo: Alexis Bellavance, courtesy of Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Montréal

These gaps speak to the difficulties, and sometimes the impossibility, of imparting knowledge, and to the inevitable loss that comes with the passing of time, immigration, disaster, war, and other humanmade phenomena that hinder transmission. With all this detail and delicacy, *Holding Knowledge* repeatedly asks its audience to step closer to the work, as though the knowledge on display might be transferred to those in the gallery. To quote Benchabane in her curatorial essay, these artists “revisit unknown or incomplete narratives based in memories, the quest

for knowledge, and dreams.” This act of openly sharing feels both cultural and political, addressing the fissures in the connective tissue that binds us while simultaneously seeking to mend it through practices rooted in familial and multi-generational bonds among women around the globe.

A Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Art History at Concordia University, Montréal, Didier Morelli holds a PhD in performance studies from Northwestern University. His writing has been published in *Art Journal*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *C Magazine*, *Esse arts + opinions*, *RACAR*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, and *The Drama Review*, among others.



## Suggested Reading

### Foire Papier

Dominique Sirois-  
Rouleau

**Sorel Cohen :**  
**Métaphores**  
**conceptuelles**  
**Créer à rebours**  
**vers l'exposition**  
**: le cas d'Art et**  
**féminisme**

Benoit Jodoin

**Marie-Claire**  
**Blais**  
***Être la porte qui***  
***s'ouvre***

Maude Johnson

90 - Feminisms

Reviews

Marie-Claire  
Blais

**Ragnar**  
**Kjartansson,**  
***Les sonorités***  
***explosives de la***  
***divinité (Der***  
***Klang der***  
***Offenbarung***  
***des Göttlichen)***

Véronique Hudon

# “Of things as they happen to be” — Jeanette Johns

by **Didier Morelli**

REVIEW 15 Dec 2021

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Jeanette Johns walks us over to the handloom in her studio at the Fonderie Darling, where for the past 15 months she has taught herself how to weave with the help of guidebooks, online tutorials, and local artisans. The horizontal wooden device sits adjacent to a large window, and we contemplate its arcane beauty under the sunrays in the sweltering summer heat as Johns explains her process in a short video produced by the contemporary art centre. The Montreal-based artist has applied her meticulous understanding of printmaking to pattern making with cloth and tapestry. “Of things as they happen to be,” her solo exhibition in the small gallery of the Fonderie Darling, displays the products of her research. Six woven pieces and one stamped ink- on-paper series of prints

hang across the gallery's white walls. Each work delicately balances the calculated art of interweaving threads with clear conceptual intent. The resulting pieces offer affecting explorations into the inner systems of architectural drawing, optical illusions, cartography, and science photography.

Focusing on the underlying landscapes of the perceivable world, the artist plays with our sensory limitations and blurs their edges to create different realities. Take, for example, the work *Shadow Windows* (2021), a diptych suspended at the back of the gallery, which the viewer sees from a distance immediately upon entering the space. Reproducing the shapes of the windows in Johns's studio, woven black-and-white cotton threads generate the illusion of an opening onto the exterior. The artificial portal appears to move, coming alive as the audience navigates the space. Unlike the transparent windowpanes they geometrically mirror, these opaque surfaces depend upon precise pattern making to deliver optical depth, dynamism, and the similitude of multiple perspectives. The environment Johns engineers with her rhythmic configurations forms an arrangement that never settles and is always in transition, similar to the changing daylight cast upon the red brick wall across her studio.

*Shadow Stairs* (2021) and *Shadow Stairs Reflected* (2021), situated one across from the other in the gallery, return to notions of mirroring introduced in *Shadow Windows*. In *Shadow Stairs*, the staircase

design is continuous, cascading from the top down and across the surface of the textile. This creates a seamless line of stacked steps moving from left to right, or is it right to left? The motifs evoke both unreal replications of an object and distortions of everyday structures by the obstruction of light. Johns uses a shadow-weaving technique, comprising alternating light- and dark-coloured yarns, to trace out an interwoven blue and pink staircase. Slight variations on vertical and horizontal lines working along a repetitive grid-like pattern allow for the effect of staircases in motion to emerge. Like a game of snakes and ladders, *Shadow Stairs Reflected*

offers a much more complex and winding pattern. Multiple breaks in rhythm and smaller grouped sections of prints contrast with one another. Equally mesmerizing, it pulses to another, vaguely wonkier, beat. Mounted a few centimetres off the wall with delicate brass poles and an anchoring system, these textiles take on the architectural gravitas of tapestry harkening back to 15th- and 16th-century European weavings. Far from the pictorial traditions of medieval scenes, Johns instead adopts a more modernist lexicon, recalling a drawing by artist Anni Albers: *Design for a Jacquard Weaving* (1926).

This juxtaposition of medieval and modernist aesthetics productively obscures the lines between arts and craft, figuration and abstraction, women's work and artistic labour, as well as technical prowess and conceptual rigour. By blurring these lines, Johns challenges the malignment of textile art as an outdated



métier, instead highlighting how working on a loom can be a thought-filled and embodied action.

All of the pieces on view continuously escape their flatness and reach out to the audience, refusing to only occupy their two-dimensional plane. *Folded Curtain* (2021) is a work of hand-woven cotton and linen that literally extends into the gallery with various brass brackets stretching it over three metres across the wall. In it, a black background with stacked thin white lines accordions its way horizontally, flowing in folds and flaps that echo the production rolls produced by the handloom. Unfurling itself, *Folded Curtain* re-enacts the gestural economy of hands dexterously aligning individual threads to complete a larger fabric. In doing so, it traces how textiles, historically categorized as a feminine form of labour and therefore excluded from "high art," carry their own genealogy of rituals informed by the physical labour of those who make them. Johns reminds us of the organic, imperfect rituals that weavers embody to achieve harmony in design. Scratching below the material surface of her unified patterns, she breaks apart the flawless and dazzling exterior appearance of a traditional weaving technique to create an object constituted of personal, individualized references and stories. This contemplative proximity to patterning also finds itself in *Linenfold for a Wall* (2021), an over five-metre long screen-printed frieze on linen directly tacked to the wall. Citing the medieval relief-carving technique used to decorate wood

panelling with a design that imitates folded linen, the artist plays with the veracity of her materials and traditions of trompe l'oeil in architecture.

The publication that accompanies the exhibition, with contributions by guest writer Emily Doucet and curator Milly-Alexandra Dery, is also an exquisite object that traces Johns's process and practice through photographs, prints, and close-up images of her different samples, experimentations, and patterns. In all of its facets, "Of things as they happen to be" offers new horizons for Johns to expand on an already well-established curiosity around built environments, the functioning of perception, and the tactility of real and imagined spaces. Throughout, the artist deploys the appeal of aesthetic order and harmony of symmetry, only to create uncertainty in the infallibility of vision. This ever-expanding and stunning universe is a statement of "things as they happen to be," of things as they appear to be, and of things as they could also become.

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"Of things as they happen to be" ran from 22 April to 22 August 2021 at Fonderie Darling, Montreal.

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