

a way, Davey uses pointed research and happenstance encounters as equally valid methods for selecting the content of her work. And while this material forms nothing as coherent as an argument, it converges around a grouping of themes all related to the multiple vectors of power within colonial histories—and in particular, Vallières’s problematic advocacy for the subjugated Québécois working class and appropriative comparison of this struggle with the historical and ongoing oppression of Black Americans.

For a work whose very title affirms the first person, it is notable that the “i” is constantly undermined (an aspect hinted at by its lower-case usage). Davey’s narration, stilted and full of unnatural breaks, continuously switches between first and third person. In part, these shifts temper the intimacy of what the viewer is shown or told, as when she describes the effect of Baldwin’s novel on her sex life: “For the first time in a long while, they’d had real sex. Fucking, licking, biting, 69...” References appear nearly always as quotations, for instance as YouTube videos playing on Davey’s desktop, or as photographs pinned around her apartment studio. While the personal at times leads the work to unexpected though illuminating entries and exits between diverse sources, it does not always succeed in sparking meaningful dialogue between distinct materials. With its wavering adherence to the “i,” *i confess* experiments seriously with the autobiographical as a method of “thinking” within the essayistic work, even as it considers its limits, bumps up against its failures and toys with the possibilities opened by fiction. —AMY LUO

## CREATION

Sylvia Nickerson, Drawn & Quarterly, 192 PP., \$24.95

The boundlessness of imagination and fantasy meet the restrictions of physical limits and socio-economic oppression in *Creation*. Based on Sylvia Nickerson’s experience as an artist and new mother in Hamilton, this graphic novel conveys multiple foreclosures of possibility and of property. It also evokes the twinned strangeness and concreteness of making life and love in a toxic, grief-filled landscape. Here, destruction and arts-driven gentrification pervade most shiny claims to the “new.”

“I used to know things. Things I learned from books. Things I read in school. Now what I know are our bodies, and these streets,” the narrator states, spending hours pushing a stroller to kill time. On long walks, the narrator starts to also know the mix of love and rage, emptiness and fullness, utopia and dystopia that make up both the city and the family of which she is part.

Nickerson’s detailed drawings copy activist street posters: “evict the scum,” “welcome to the art district,” “revitalization = gentrification = rising rents = displacement = class war.” One drawing reproduces a food bank’s hours sign, indicating how restricted access is to this community resource. Another spread illustrates Hamilton as “an urbanist’s utopian fantasy,” complete with “restored Victorian architecture,” “chandeliers,” “DIY art spaces,” “exposed brick,” “counter-cultural consumption,” “lattes,” “vintage fashion,” “Apple products,” “craft beer” and so on. That spread is followed by one illustrating a different reality collecting weekly on the narrator’s lawn: cigarette butts, loans-past-due notices, the ends of food-bank bread loaves, empty medication bottles.

In one of my favourite scenes, the narrator tries to soothe a crying baby in front of a store sign proclaiming, “You can do anything in Hamilton.” Apparently the sign’s creator never had to quiet a colicky child, or steal away from an art event to breastfeed (the latter being another scene depicted in the book).

Most of the characters in *Creation* are rendered as smooth, featureless figures. I read into them exhaustion, dissociation and loss of identity, and the sense of being a ghost unto one’s past self. But keeping visual detail focused on the settings, rather than the actors, adds useful emphasis on the phenomena Nickerson is trying to address, like structural oppression, addiction and poverty.

City landmarks repeat across many pages. This repetition evokes cycles of seeing the same sights every day while also pointing to how a landscape can become a spectre of itself, haunted by dreams and crisis, waterfalls and waste. A shattering of lit and unlit worlds, and a mixing of their shards, is another visual motif. The veil between life and death can be thin when one is the



Moyra Davey *i confess* (still)  
2019 HD video with sound  
56 min 46 sec



Sylvia Nickerson Page from  
*Creation* 2019



## REVIEWS



Clayton Windatt *Slaglines*  
(performance documentation)  
2019 PHOTO PAUL LITHERLAND



Candice Lin *The slow erosion of a hard white body (Chinese water torture)* (detail) 2018 Wooden structure, copper and plastic tubing, fired ceramics, unfired porcelain, glass distillation system, hot plate,

dried mushroom, welded metal, plastic buckets, vinyl flooring, pumps and timers Dimensions variable  
COURTESY FRANÇOIS GHEBALY,  
LOS ANGELES/WALTER PHILLIPS GALLERY  
PHOTO JESSICA WITTMAN

primary caregiver for a vulnerable human being—and the vulnerability of other folks, whether strangers or not, can resonate more intensely than too. “In loving, we give our power away,” observes *Creation*’s narrator. And power—social or individual, biological or psychic—remains a haunting element, for me, in this complex and richly ambivalent read. —LEAH SANDALS

## CLAYTON WINDATT

VIVA! Art Action, Montreal

Clayton Windatt’s recent performance began with them stripping down to their boxers, and making themselves completely vulnerable to the audience by doing so. Immediately, I recognized this vulnerability, of presenting one’s intimate self through artistic creation to industries rife with moods of scarcity, cancel and call-out culture, and lateral violence. Windatt proceeded to spread dirt from a bucket in a circle around the room. In my mind I could almost hear Nine Inch Nails’s *Hurt*—“And you could have it all / My empire of dirt.” Windatt’s kingdom is one of a Métis person who grew up in working-class, rural circumstances, spaces where prevalent racism and classism can inform trauma. This is the kingdom, the non-existent wealth, that Windatt has to sign over to others.

Windatt then brought out a papier-mâché “Indian,” cross-legged with long paper hair. The audience laughed. My heart broke. Windatt’s papier-mâché figure is a caricature of themselves. The figure is that of an Indigenous person, comprising shoddy materials and made of Windatt’s empire of dirt—this figure is them. Windatt mimicked the figure by first sitting cross-legged in front of it and stoically staring in its face. The figure, this stereotypical “Indian,” and what it represents, is what makes Windatt so vulnerable: the necessity to constantly perform one’s indigeneity (and identity generally) for an audience. Windatt rubbed their hands in a red substance and showed their red hands to the audience. They rubbed the substance on their body and, finally, on the figure in front of them. Windatt was painting themselves red to perform indigeneity. But they were also ruining the figure. Is there blood on their hands if they expose Indigenous identity politics for white spectators?

Windatt doused the figure in lighter fluid and set it on fire, and then squirted lighter fluid in their mouth and occasionally spit some at the figure. Every time Windatt spat they touched their moustache and beard to make sure they had not caught fire. If Windatt destroys the representation of an imaginary Indian, do they engulf themselves in flames as well? Do they destroy themselves? Once the figure was entirely burned, Windatt gathered some ash and pressed it into their heart. Windatt, this “imaginary Indian,” to quote Daniel Francis, never asked to be othered and to have to perform their identities for compensation. So Windatt must be gentle with it, and with themselves. Perhaps forgiveness is the only way out of the ethos of industries that can feel so cold and heartless. —LINDSAY NIXON

## CANDICE LIN

Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff

Although I’m generally a fan of natural history museums and their peculiar specimens, nature elicits a kind of curiosity that can hardly be contained. But in “A materialist history of contagion” Candice Lin did an admirable job of combing colonial histories to produce a material study of the plants, insects and minerals whose circulatory trade has left deep stains on global culture.

Four bodies of work, the earliest from 2016, demonstrated Lin’s remarkable facility presenting complex, research-based installations. Organized centrally, the works were connected by hanging tubes, repeated wooden structures, fake-marble-tile flooring, a musty, permeating smell and the looping soundtrack to *La Charada China* (2018)—a video demonstrating the relationship between the 19th-century Opium Wars and Chinese “coolie” labour in the Caribbean—