



# JESSICA GIRARD

FOURTH YEAR, BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS

# Intimacies, Shared: Finding Selves in Jessica Girard's Pieces

by Juliette Karmel

Moments before starting our interview, I get nervous. How do you get a feel for someone who isn't really there—each moment of your interaction mediated by the internet, screens, and perhaps less-than-ideal audio? It seems difficult to gain much insight into a person at a first meeting, let alone one that has to occur remotely. But when the cameras come on, Jessica Girard and I fall into an easy dialogue, laughing about late discoveries of artistic communities in university and shared reservations about upcoming graduations. She explains to me that she's always been an artist but hasn't always accepted the term, grappling with its complexities as she got older before feeling completely comfortable calling herself so. This word—"grappling"—seems to describe much of the conversation that follows. I ask her about her process, and she tells me how she pulls from the everyday: the things she sees and hears, media she consumes, bits of daily life that for one reason or another stand out to her. Sometimes, she uses these as a part of a longer labour: a project she sets out to pursue. Other times, these bits end up as notes in her phone or as parts of a mood board until they trigger an itch. It's this itch that motivated her to create *Chopin's Bath* (2019), *Kisses I shouldn't have given* (2019), and *Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall* (2020). As we parse out these pieces, Girard

seems to continue to wrestle with them, looking at them retrospectively and realizing new things about them as she speaks. She listens to my experiences viewing each artwork and doesn't hesitate to mention others' readings; she enjoys the dialogue that occurs between her artworks and their viewers.

As we begin to discuss her work, I feel increasingly that there is something inherently private about it. Each piece seems to contain an element specific to Girard: a song she chose, her saliva, her neighbourhood. I ask Girard about the intimacy of her pieces; they seem personal, even on first view. *Chopin's Bath* lasts six minutes, and for about five of them, Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu in C sharp minor, Op. 66* plays out beautifully and smoothly, all while the stereo it emanates from becomes increasingly submerged in bath water. I recall my first viewing of this piece: the sound is crisp and I begin to get lost in it. I'd never heard this piece before, and the melody's alternation between impossible speeds and relaxing calm—sharp inhale, slow exhale—captured me, until suddenly there's a jolting pop and diminishing fizz and all I am left hearing is the water faucet, insisting on drowning the stereo even after the latter had already apparently given in. I ask about

the composition, *Fantaisie Impromptu*, and Girard recounts a nostalgic connection felt in a thrift store, sifting through old cassette tapes left behind.

She grew up playing the piano, an instrument and skill important to her identity for many years. Girard describes this chapter of her life as if it is a faraway memory. There seems to be a certain distance between who she is now and the version of herself she is remembering. Though she doesn't go into detail, it's clear that Girard doesn't really play anymore, and stumbling upon this cassette tape—a more complex version of something she herself had played—felt nostalgic and fitting, personal and meaningful. When I ask why she chose to destroy such a piece, she tells me that at the time, her primary goal had been to experiment within her artistic practice and that she hadn't considered all the aspects of *Chopin's Bath*. These aspects revealed themselves to her later, many of them unexpected, through retrospective examination and others' readings of the work. She now believes it may have been a revelation of her subconscious: "Maybe it's my way of making peace with the fact that that's not really a part of my identity anymore." In this way, the work feels more intimate to her. She discusses her interest in entropy, the process of degradation towards death and disorder, and entropic threshold, the point of no return; she talks about "the struggle that humans have knowing that we're not going to exist at some point." Several other students had apparently read *Chopin's Bath* as a snuff film of a suicide.

As I continue to press her on the personal nature of her work, she takes a moment and reflects on the irony of this intimacy: some intimacies she prefers to distance herself from and uses these works to externalize them, ultimately making them visible through her art. This intimate externalization is visible in *Kisses I shouldn't have given*, a clear jar nearly half-filled with Girard's saliva. We

laugh about how relatable this work is, how it would prompt any viewer to remember love given that they themselves regret. Girard tells me that she enjoys mixing things in her work that are pleasing with things that are repelling, blurring the line between the two. *Kisses I shouldn't have given* is a physical record of Girard's own past experiences that, in her memory, have soured. By spitting into the jar, the memory is simultaneously purged and documented, rejected and preserved. I ask Girard if she still has the jar and if she's added to it since she took these initial photos. She laughs and tells me she hasn't experienced anything recently that she feels she needs to purge, but that she still has the jar and may gradually add to it moving forward. *Kisses I shouldn't have given*, then, is not yet really complete. Rather, it is a living archive, a forever-performance with no predetermined end date.

As we come to the end of our conversation about *Kisses I shouldn't have given*, I begin to think about the differences between the previous pieces and the final one, *Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall*. Earlier in our conversation, I'd noted to Girard how it seemed that *Chopin's Bath* and *Kisses I shouldn't have given* were made in what seems like a completely different world. *Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall* stuck out to me as the only one out of the three made in 2020. I point this out to her, wondering about how artistic creation might manifest differently in what seems to be a year like no other. I ask what made *Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall* come about, and she tells me about artistic standstills almost universally felt among her peers and herself. "How am I supposed to make art in a pandemic?" Girard relates to me the newfound importance of daily walks, and the intimacy she's come to feel for her neighbourhood. She knows there are people living in the surrounding houses and yet the pandemic has forced a deep disconnect between ourselves and those around us.

Restrictions, lockdowns, and necessary safety precautions have made it impossible to knock on someone else's door, to say hello to a stranger, or to get to know new people.

Daily walks therefore create a superficial closeness to our environment, while ritually reminding us of the impossibility of any true connection. To reflect this dichotomy of closeness without connection, she began by taking about two hundred photos of the homes in her neighbourhood. These snapshots capture fractions of South Cambie houses boasting large windows, balconies, and hedges, a perfect blue sky serving as the clean backdrop to each suburban family home. But there is something subtly secretive—off—in the cleanliness of each photo, and Girard divulges that they have all been retouched to perfection, no hedge left untrimmed and no house blemished. Indeed, the images look at once like photographs and digital drawings, too perfect to be the former but too realistic to be the latter. I ask why it matters that the images appear so artificially perfect and she discusses her grappling with feelings of entrapment in a suburban dystopia. The images play on the uncanny real-not-real, reflecting our seemingly sophisticated world that came crashing down within weeks. She dwells on the value of communal efforts of encouragement between herself and her roommates—the word “communal” here is strange; Girard's images are evidence of a burden shared, but shared at a distance from one another; a universal weight carried separately.

Communality seems to be a defining feature of Girard's practice: though her artworks are expressions of personal thoughts and experiences, the viewer easily relates to her, the pieces touching on universal struggles and emotions. At the end of our interview, Girard tells me of the significance of relatability in her work. It is important to her that her works engage with audiences

of multiple levels of art literacy while also encouraging them to engage with theory on a deeper level. I think about this aspiration in relation to the works we discussed. Nostalgia, mortality, intimate relationships turned sour, feelings of estrangement and disconnect—beyond individual experiences with such things, these are elements of the general human experience. Indeed, each piece touches on one or more of these elements; in externalizing the negotiating she must do with her own intimacies, Girard allows for a shared experience of personal contemplation between herself and the viewer, triggered by her artworks. The pieces are not just legible or relatable—they are a reflection of the viewer's intimacies too, pulling us in and forcing us to grapple with our own experiences, and ultimately with ourselves. \*

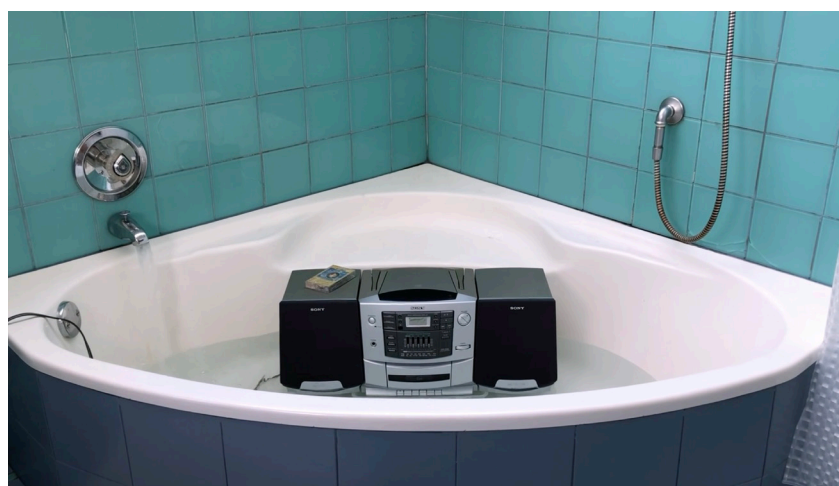
# Chopin's Bath, 2019

video,  
6 minutes  
looped,  
dimensions  
variable.

ARTIST PROFILES

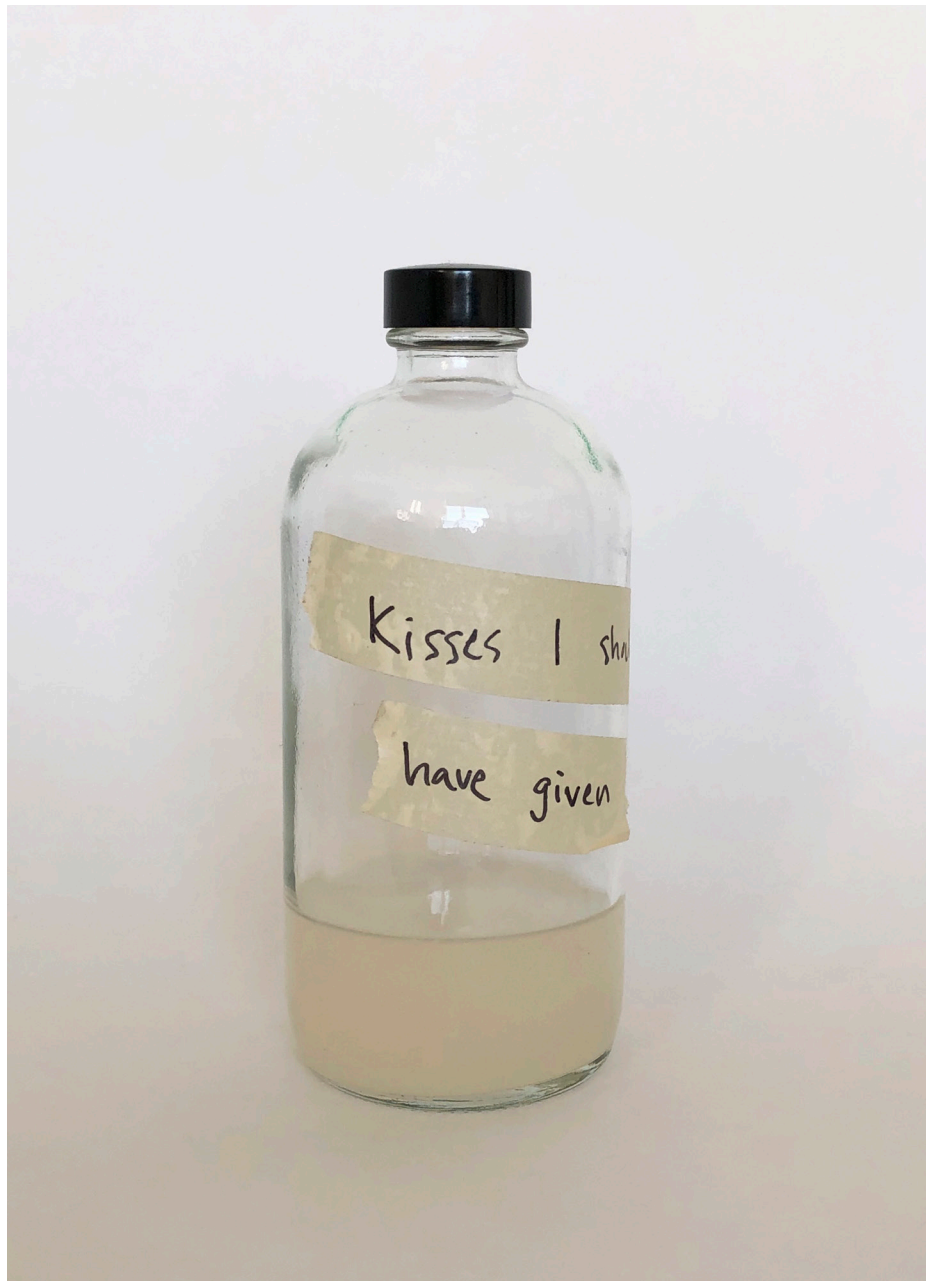
Entropic threshold was a strong theme in the development of this work. I consider notions of destruction, technology, and entropy in discussion around me. How does this relate to the morality and mortality of our interactions with people, objects, and the non-physical? Unfolding this through approachable yet personal materials, Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu in C sharp minor, Op. 66* serves as an appropriate soundtrack to its own tragic disorder.

–JG

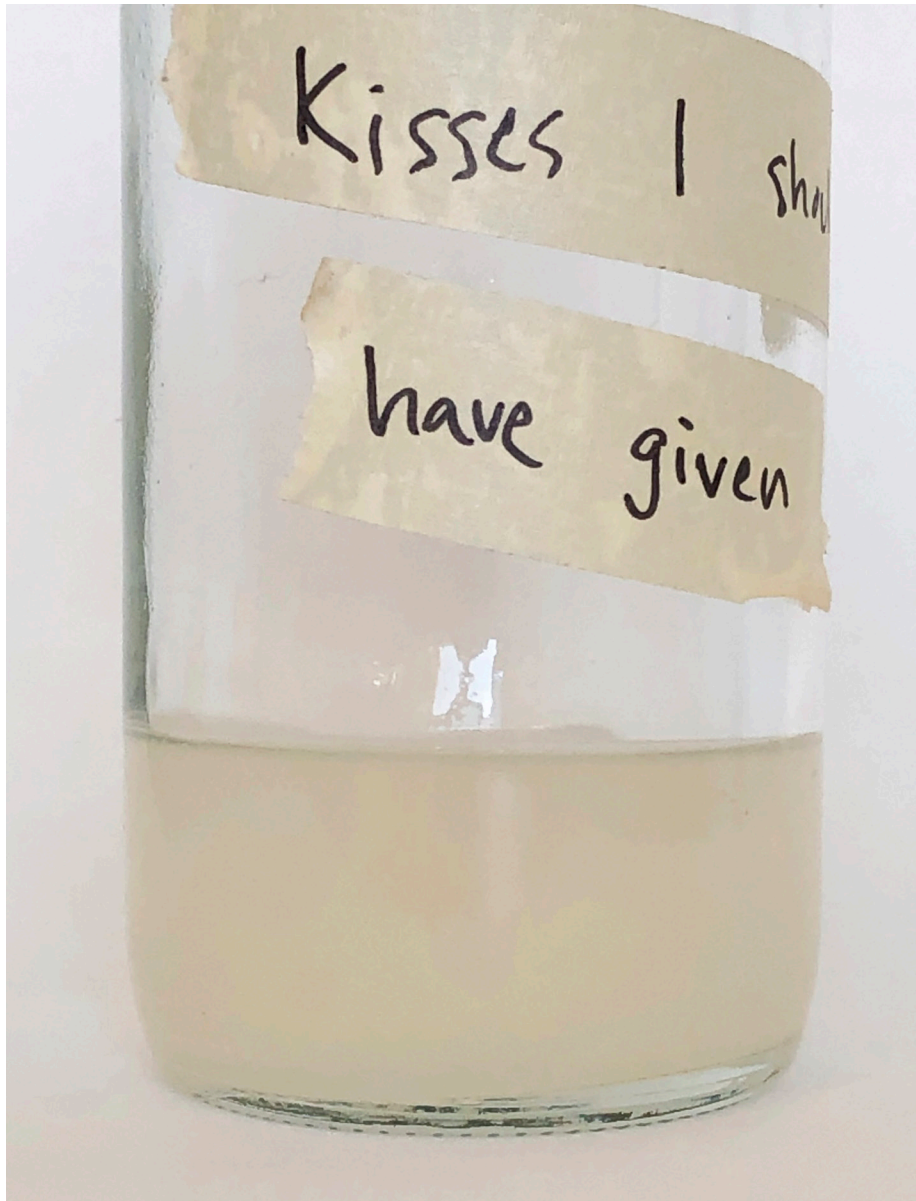


# Kisses I shouldn't have given, 2019

ARTIST PROFILES



bottle, masking tape, black  
Sharpie, artist's saliva, duration  
variable.



Growing out of an interest in the reflections that many people have about past personal events or experiences, this performance explores the mental noise that can emanate from deliberate silence and contemplation. Twisting an intimate act of love into a crude reversal gestures at how affection becomes warped when a pleasant memory

sours. The work will expand in significance and physical volume throughout the artist's life. It can be performed and exhibited continuously; as the contents of the jar rise, so do the memories accrued within it. This accumulation could be, jointly, an abjection of unwanted thoughts and a morose preservation of them. —JG



# Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall, 2020

ARTIST PROFILES



digitally retouched iPhone photos,  
8.5 x 11 in. each.

Responding to this moment, *Spatially grounded in temporal free-fall* looks at the intimate relationship I've grown to have with my surroundings. The images capture the spatial and temporal contradictions we feel. A simultaneous sense of near/far, grounded/free-fall manifest in this suburban dystopia. All of a sudden, I experience depth in a new way. Daily rituals and habits mean everything and nothing at the same time. Long walks can be almost as soothing as dissociation. How long will we be here? We don't know, so we speak into temporal unknowns. Speaking into the future or into infinite, saying, "When this is all over ..." —JG



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