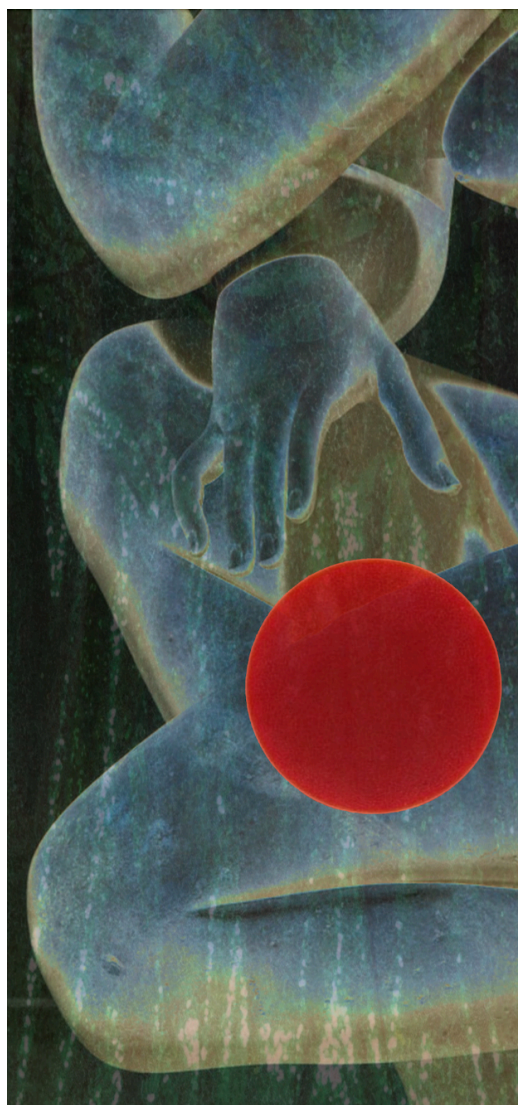


# Vanessa Brown

Artist meditates on voids both real and imaginary.

by Yani Kong

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Vanessa Brown, “The Sun,” 2022  
digital collage on textile, 144” x 60” (courtesy the artist and Patell Brown, Toronto)

“I used to think that holes, like words, were empty,” says Vanesa Brown, in her video, *That Other Hunger*. “But now I think they are full, full, full.”

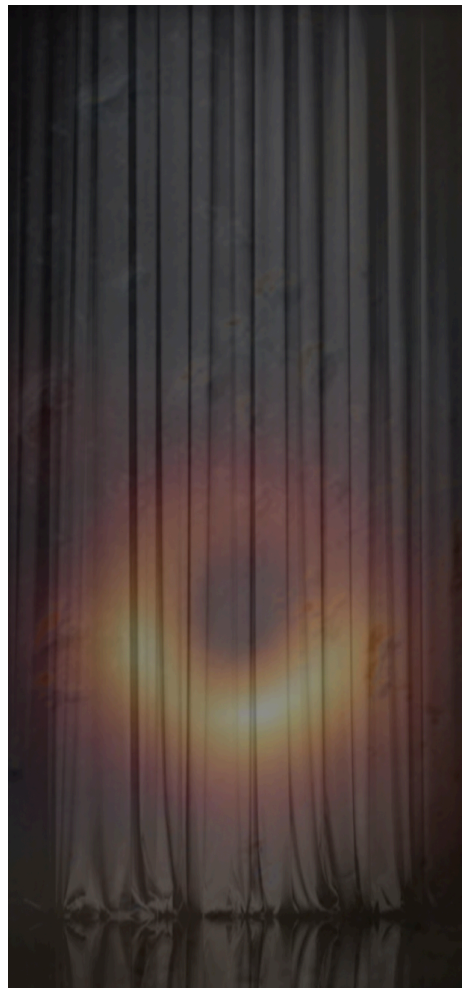
The video is part of Brown's solo exhibition of the same name, on view until Nov. 6 at the Richmond Art Gallery in Metro Vancouver. Brown, who grew up in Richmond and is based in Europe, meditates on the hole as portal or escape hatch, as well as a source of unsatisfied desire – a place of longing as much as a site to hide something unfinished.

Her work has a humorous edge, taking as one of its starting points the portable hole from Looney Tunes cartoons. In that animated world, a hole can be made from anything, placed anywhere at any time, and can be carried around like a super-tool to use when you want to vanish or make someone else disappear. In this way, her works channel a childhood fascination with secret passages.



Vanessa Brown, “>>>000 / Gravity,” 2022  
three-channel video, detail (photo by Vanessa Brown, courtesy of Richmond Art Gallery)

Brown's three-channel video, *>>>000 / Gravity*, is distributed around the gallery's central room. The divided screens offer an opportunity to pass through gaps between them, another type of chasm. On one screen, a pulsing purple void engulfs the eye, drawing viewers in to watch Wile E. Coyote chase the Road Runner. The clever bird sends its predator down a black hatch seemingly pulled from nothing. Other screens look out toward nature or the cosmos, helping us consider passageways not as magical portals, but as thoroughfares already present in the universe.

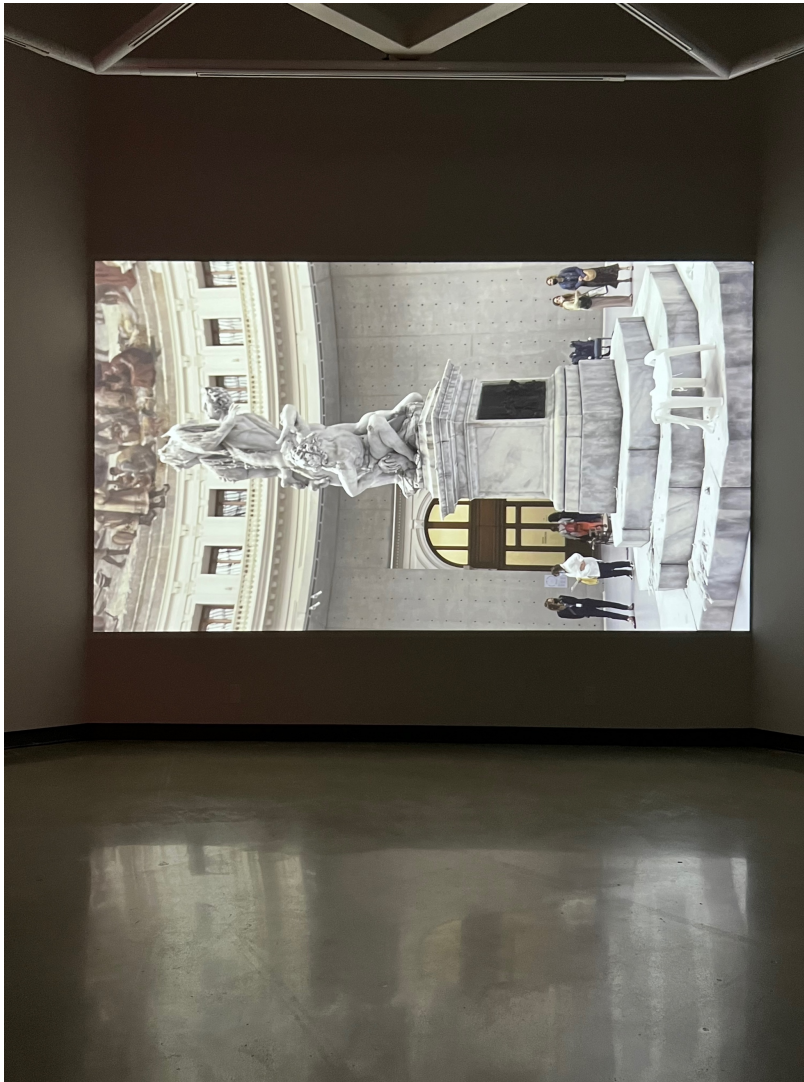


Vanessa Brown, "Hole Drama," 2022  
digital collage on textile, 142" x 68" (Image by Vanessa Brown, courtesy of Richmond Art Gallery)

Two digital collages made earlier this year, *The Sun* and *Hole Drama*, offer yet another perspective on the void. Here, the medium of the works is vital: they are printed on gauzy

fabric perforated by tiny holes. Viewers are invited to look directly into the sun in one, and a star as it expands into a supernova in the other. But rather than meet this image as the limit of the gaze, the diaphanous material elongates the field of vision, allowing you to look through these cosmic events and out toward something else.

Brown's work asks abstract questions but is demonstrably figurative. There is no mistaking the subject of her inquiry.



Vanessa Brown, "That Other Hunger," 2022  
video at Richmond Art Gallery (photo by Vanessa Brown, courtesy of Richmond Art Gallery)

The video *That Other Hunger*, located at the far end of the gallery, caps this show and refines its artistic aims. As different images of voids, both real and imaginary, intersect, transform or transition into each other, Brown voices questions about desire, time's relativity and the place of humanity in the wider cosmos, leaving one with existential disquiet, itself a metaphorical hole.

In the narration, Brown identifies the hole as the threat of pleasure, placing a finger on the kind of psychoanalytic anxieties holes can produce: What if this hole has no bottom? A beautiful soundscape by Brown's collaborator, Michelle Helene MacKenzie, warmly cushions such unanswerable questions, serving as a balm for any fears the hole may provoke. ■

**Vanessa Brown, *That Other Hunger*, at the Richmond Art Gallery in Richmond, B.C., from Sept. 9 to Nov. 5, 2022.**