Im/perfect Slumbers

February 11–August 20, 2023

Rachel Breen, Sayge Carroll, Amoke Abele Kubat, Shanai Matteson, Molly Parker Stuart, Anat Spiegel, Rotem Tamir, Yuko Taniguchi, Gwen Westerman, Peng Wu

Guest curator and artist-in-residence Katya Oicherman
Curator Laura Joseph
In late 2022, Katya Oicherman interviewed each *Im/perfect Slumbers* artist about their works in the exhibition, artistic inspirations, and how they’ve been sleeping. To read these interviews, visit mmaa.org or use the QR code.

**How did you sleep last night?**

In a series of window installations and events, the M addresses sleep, a multitude of complex physiological, psychological, social and political phenomena. Human cultures and behaviors of sleep differ, yet the very necessity of sleep is shared by all people. Everyday objects and practices of sleep and being in bed are a window into this shared necessity. The project features diverse voices of local artists, poets, and cultural activists reflecting on sleep in the context of the recent experiences of the pandemic, ecological crisis, and political upheaval. Through the soft aesthetics of textiles and associative imagery of dreams, the project reflects on health, gender, home, labor, and race, enlivening the significance of sleep while envisaging alternatives to the frenzied rallies of modern productivity. Most of the works in the series are new commissions. In part they are based on the history of the M’s building as the home of the first local newspaper, *The Minnesota Pioneer*, turning the building itself into a “dreaming-back” machine that brings to life the imperfect slumbers of people from more than 100 years ago.

**Katya Oicherman**

Katya Oicherman is an independent artist, researcher, and educator working with textiles, based in Cleveland, OH. Looking for stories in textiles and in domestic rituals, she reflects on the emergence of family mythologies. Examining cloth in contemporary art, Oicherman emphasizes its overlooked role in civilization, and significance in Jewish ritual. Her historical research focuses on the material culture of sleep. She studied textile art (Shenkar College, Israel) and modern Jewish studies (University of Leeds, UK). Her practice-based PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London addressed 19th century German Jewish ritual textiles, imbuing historical craft artifacts with contemporary relevance through creative research. Currently she is an artist in residence at the Minnesota Museum of American Art in St. Paul. She recently taught visual art at the St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists and in the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. In the past she has taught textile design and history in Shenkar College, Israel and chaired its department of Textile Design. 

**Rachel Breen**

*I Wish This Was a Nightmare*

A hanging installation made with second-hand pajamas. 

This work juxtaposes the seductive allure and softness of polyester sleepwear with mounting textile waste, ecological damage, and exploitation of workers. These low-quality, synthetic textiles require petroleum to produce and are tied to the insatiable consumerism of our time. Composed of many pajamas joined together, this ghostly work hints at the dystopian possibility of interconnected sleep and shared nightmares. 

“I think there’s an irony there, that people think about putting pajamas on to help them have a good sleep, to stay warm at night, just to be comfortable, while in fact, these pajamas should be making us very uncomfortable.”

**Rachel Breen**’s work has been shown widely, both in Minnesota and across the country, including a solo exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art in 2020. Her solo exhibition, *The Price of Our Clothes*, at the Perlman Museum, was included in the top 20 best of 2018 exhibitions in the US by *Hyperallergic* (December 20, 2018). Rachel was the recipient of a Fulbright award to India in 2022. She has been awarded an artist residency at MacDowell and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Rachel is an inaugural recipient of the Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, has received four Minnesota State Arts Board grants and a fellowship from the Walker Art Center Open Field. Rachel holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota and a BA from The Evergreen State College. She lives in Minneapolis, MN, maintains an active studio practice and is a professor of art at Anoka Ramsey Community College.

**Sayge Carroll**

*mourning quilt*

A sculptural installation consisting of a quilt-like object made from black earthenware and white porcelain tiles and a porcelain illuminating vessel.

The work was inspired by an album of family photographs compiled by the artist’s grandmother in Dothan, Alabama and a cotton quilt created by her. The tiles bear photographic images of the artist’s ancestors. The work is a tribute and memorial to the family’s generations and their efforts as African Americans to survive and aspire for dignified life for their descendants despite the grim realities of slavery and later segregation in the American South.

“This is my essay form. As I make these things, I am meditating on all of the obstacles that my ancestors had, and were still able to create these beautiful pieces that are lasting in the world longer than they would. With ceramics, that’s going to last for a long time.”

**Sayge Carroll** has been tending the soil of community through art for more than 20 years. Carroll is a recent graduate of University of Minnesota MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts and Social Practice and holds a BA from the University of Minnesota. Carroll is also currently enrolled in the Master Gardener program at the University of Minnesota. Through visual art, sound design and civic engagement Carroll has devoted their career and life work to connecting
Amoke Kubat
Night Mothering

A reconstruction of a bedroom in which the artist spent the difficult time of the pandemic and social unrest.

Following the murder of George Floyd, the bed became a safe microcosm for the artist, offering her recuperation and solace in the face of grief. It became a place to house the artist’s physical and spiritual body, represented in this installation as a handmade fabric doll. Kubat has surrounded her surrogate with strong protective and inspiring symbols, playful portraits, hand-made tapestries, and bundles of branches. The installation also speaks to the imperfect quality of her sleep during this time. The artist recalls, “My daughter and I were literally doing day and night shifts to protect our family. Hence the bullhorn and machetes.” She offers the bed as an altar of joyful perseverance in the face of menacing reality.

“I’m going into the depth of my human development, right into the cellular level, into the stringiness of muscles.”

Amoke Kubat is a HeARTIST* and Spiritual Culture Bearer, who remains curious about self, the natural world, and the Sacred. She reclains an African Indigenous Spiritual sensibility to reconnect herself and Black people to earth and water as practice for holistic wellness. Self-taught, she uses artmaking (weaving, doll making and clay) and writing (essays, short stories, poems, and plays) to continue to define herself and hold a position of wellness in an America sick with inequalities and inequities. Her plays, ANGRY BLACK WOMAN & Well Intentioned White Girl and Old Good Kit Kat and Good Old Kit speak to this. Her current work explores the impact of extreme political and ecological climate on aging and disabilities and the medical gaslighting of Black women’s bodies.

Amoke is the creator of YO MAMA’s The Art of Mothering Workshops and YO MAMA’s House Cooperative. YO MAMA’s philosophy and practice is to empower mothers by disrupting the devaluation of women’s visible and invisible labor and increasing the recognition of the ART of Mothering by encouraging mothers to grow as artists, activists and healers.

(*Open Heart centered artwork.)

Shanai Matteson
Severed Right

Textile story maps created with used fabrics, stitching, and printing with natural dyes.

The maps are a response to local histories and contemporary reality of natural resources extraction, displacement of Indigenous peoples, and protest against it. For the artist, personal and collective work with textiles is a vehicle to communicate and actively produce reflection and resistance to the established order of domination and extraction.

“What is beneath our concept of safety? Who has a right to safety or to clean water? And who is sacrificed?...
How do people sleep at night? It is another way of asking that same question. Honestly, I’ve been losing a lot of sleep. I feel like I’m constantly thinking about my next steps, or finding my path.”

Shanai Matteson (she / her) is an artist, writer, environmental activist, and cultural organizer. She lives in rural Palisade, MN, where she grew up.

Shanai is currently working to help organize cultural and community space at the Water Protector Welcome Center, a pipeline resistance camp and community established by Indigenous women leading the movement to stop the Line 3 oil pipeline. As a non-native woman whose family settled in this region, Shanai sees her cultural organizing work here as a form of service and repair, as well as a way to encourage a just transition to a healthier culture and economy.

Shanai works with a variety of rural and urban communities to create collaborative public art projects, documentaries, creative writing and print work, and social or political spaces.

Her larger goals are to recognize and deepen her own relationships with people and the places they inhabit together. Through slow and emergent arts activism, Shanai strives to create a more caring and reciprocal culture — shifting narrative, challenging hierarchical power structures, and helping her collaborators reimagine and transform the systems these shape.

In her work as a public artist and writer, Shanai documents the people and places that move her, creating visual and literary artwork to honor the complex and interdependent nature of identity, place, material, and memory.

Molly Parker Stuart
An Act of Pure and Unrelenting Beauty, Yawn and others

A series of dream-like animations that abstract digital data.

In this series of films, the artist manipulates digital data, ranging from hate speech directed at trans people to images of modernist paintings to videos of people yawning. What
results are abstract, dream-like animations that transcend narrative, aiming to appeal to emotion and experience beyond speech. Parker Stuart’s multi-layered abstractions move both literally and metaphorically, and reflect the artist’s practice as a painter of complex compositions with playful interchange between background and foreground.

"Even in the smallest details, you’ll see individual pixels moving in directions different from those of the larger motion objects. Everything is working against itself, but together. I think it really serves to calm down the rational voice that wants to describe what’s happening as a story."

Molly Parker Stuart is an artist and experimental filmmaker living with bipolar disorder. Sleep is often treacherous for people with bipolar disorder. Using software and algorithms of her own design, Molly works to push the bounds of digital filmmaking by using both the social and digital structure embedded in data to create abstractions that evoke physical experiences. Originally trained as a painter, her curiosity was piqued by conceptual works by artists such as Joseph Kosuth. Molly sought to create a digital environment that encapsulated concepts. Through these experiments, she found her way to the moving image.

Anat Spiegel

and Katya Oicherman

With: Matt Rahaim (voice), Liz Draper (cello), Theo Langason (voice), and Kevin Walton (voice)

The colonizers’ dream press revisited

A collaborative experimental sound installation presented in three different locations around the museum based on stories reflecting sleep and rest from The Minnesota Pioneer from 1849.

Each location has its own text and theme including sleep medication, advice on healthy sleep regiment, and sleeping rough. The compositions create a sonic frame around the experiences of sleep. Thematically, these sound works are connected to the artwork featured on the 4th Street windows by Peng Wu.

“For me, the voice is the key. I wanted to feature very specific elements of the voice, to pull the listener into a ‘dream state’, to break or cast a spell on them.”

Anat Spiegel (IL/NL/USA) is a composer and vocalist specializing in cross-platform performance. Her work stems from a vocal perspective and focuses on the endless expressions of the human voice. In the juxtaposition of jazz, theater and contemporary classical music, Spiegel’s compositions consider the cultural gravity of singing itself and the connection between written language and its sounding expression. Spiegel is a member of the composer’s collective Monotak and the spoken word duo Noon and Ain. Her recent works includes the opera Medulla (La Monnaie), the electronic opera Before Present (National Dutch Opera and ADE), the online opera The Transmigration of Morton F (Holland Festival) and the chamber quartet My Four Mothers (Cedar Commissions). Spiegel is a recipient of the 2020 McKnight composers fellowship.

Rotem Tamir

Pu’ah

A tower of handmade pillows with fragile hand-blown globules inhabiting its soft folds.

The artist has created a surreal, visceral, and sensuous dream-object, reimagining a utilitarian, domestic, feminine thing gone astray, and multiplying into a monstrous, excessive formation. Combining weight and softness of wool and cotton with pliability and fragility of pine resin bubbles containing air, the tower presents a breathing, dreaming body on the verge of waking up.

“I grew up on tales about a princess who lives in a tower, waiting for something to happen. I imagined this woman who sleeps, and as long as she sleeps then all the people who are important to her, her family, kids, husband, her job, they are ok, her life runs smoothly. But the day she wakes up, it all will collapse.”

Rotem Tamir’s art focuses on traditions of object making and how they morph as they travel with their bearers through time and space, echoing the complex stories of relocation and shuffled identities. Although removed from their particular histories and geographies, her objects nonetheless pay homage to the traditions from which they emerged, revitalizing those as products of contemporary enquiries about places, belonging, and politics. Rotem Tamir immigrated to the United States from Israel in 2011. Currently she serves as the Assistant Professor in Sculpture at the Department of Art at the University of Minnesota. Her work has been exhibited at venues including Law Warschaw Gallery, MN; Locust Projects, Miami, FL; the Harn Museum, Gainesville, FL; Kav 16 Community Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; BCA Center, Burlington, VT; Artists’ House, Tel Aviv, among others. Tamir has been awarded residencies at Sculpture Space, Utica, NY; Francoise Sculpture Park, MN and Art OMI International Arts Center, among others. She received the Toby Devan Lewis Fellowship award; the Arts Exhibition Grant from artiscontemporary.org, New York, NY, and recently the 2021 McKnight Fellowship for Visual Artists.

Yuko Taniguchi

The Weight of Sleep

A window installation visually interpreting a poem that describes how differently people in one family experience and relate to sleep.

The poem originated as a reflection on these differences and suggested the “weight of sleep,” or the difficulty of easing a person asleep, through different materials. The background of the work is the artist’s long-term role leading creative writing workshops for adolescents struggling with mental health challenges. Personal experiences of immigration and negotiating deep cultural
Yuko Taniguchi is the author of a volume of poetry, *Foreign Wife Elegy* (2004), and a novel, *The Ocean in the Closet* (2007), both published by Coffee House Press. Her awards include the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Kiriyama Prize Notable Book, the Gustavus Myers Center Outstanding Book Award Advancing Human Rights, and the McKnight Artist Fellowship. Her poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Sycamore Review, The Examined Life, Cider Review Press*, and *Touchstone Literary Magazine*. She is an assistant professor of Medicine and Arts at the Center for Learning Innovation at the University of Minnesota Rochester. She also provides creative writing and art classes in psychiatric units. Taniguchi regularly collaborates with artists and healthcare professionals to explore how creative activities lead to self-discovery and healing.

**Gwen Westerman**

*A Place for Dreams*

Window installation introducing a poem dedicated to the artist’s memories of her grandmother, who was a quilter.

The installation aims to recreate the childhood experience of sleeping outside on a pallet and quilt as an alternative to the contemporary reliance on technology for managing our rest. Restful time in nature, allowed simply for the sake of it, graces with a different kind of reflection and listening.

"You can get answers to questions that are running through your mind. The questions that are bothering you, you can get answers to those questions from dreams. But if we

*Have no place to sleep, no place to dream, how will we ever find any answers at all?*

A poet and visual artist, **Gwen Westerman** lives in southern Minnesota, as did her Dakota ancestors. Her roots are deep in the landscape of the tallgrass prairie and reveal themselves in her art and writing. She was named Minnesota’s third Poet Laureate in 2021.

**Peng Wu and Katya Oicherman**

*Imperfect Slumbers; Lethal Lullabies; A Fresh Supply*

A series of window installations based on stories and advertisements from 1849 issues of *The Minnesota Pioneer*.

One pair of windows presents the contents of a pharmacy in St. Paul as advertised in *The Minnesota Pioneer* and reflects on the use of opium to medicate small children. The second pair tells a story of a woman frightened by a homeless person sleeping outside of her house. Visually, these designs were inspired by an applique quilt dating to the 1820s–1850s representing Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, held in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

"It feels like we talk about visual art as a way to make the invisible visible, right? That’s true. This is exactly what the project is about: identifying those period ghosts and giving them a form, making them be seen."

**Peng Wu** is a social practice artist. Born and raised in China, he creates public art installations and participatory events to reflect on societal yet personal struggles, including immigration, sleep deprivation, and mental health issues.

Wu has lived and worked in Minneapolis since 2011 as a temporary foreign worker—as defined by his visa status. His art of searching for a sense of home and rest is deeply informed by the decade-long impermanence. To earn a longer legal status of staying in this country he has to work day and night restlessly. At one point he suddenly found he couldn’t fall into sleep at night. “How’s your sleep?” became the way he often greeted his immigrant friends. With no health insurance coverage, he couldn’t afford the insanely expensive hospitals here. So he proposed to create an art project to cure his sleep disorder as his residency project at Weisman Art Museum. In collaboration with sleep researchers and doctors, he created large architectural installations to facilitate numerous public events to examine the cultures and politics of sleep.

He was forced away from his home in Minnesota for two years due to visa issues. He returned to his long-gone home in Minneapolis last year and got married to his partner whom he couldn’t legally marry in their home country. Being together, they sleep better now. On the dinner table of their home, he continues to host art-making events that hopefully create a sense of home for all to sleep and rest.

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**For more information**

To learn more about *Im/perfect Slumbers*, explore photos of the exhibition, and read extended interviews between Katya Oicherman and each of the artists, visit mmaa.org/imperfectslumbers or use the QR code.
How to make Sleep Refreshing.

1. Take sufficient exercise in the open air, during the day.
2. Eat light suppers, always two hours before retiring.
3. Avoid tea and coffee and all unnatural stimulants.
4. Retire early! All animals, except those that prowl at night, retire to rest soon after the sun goes down. The early hours of sleep are the most sweet and refreshing.
5. Eschew feather beds; sleep on hair or cotton mattresses, with light covering of bed clothes.

It is well known that the Duke of Wellington, now a half old man, is accustomcd to sleep on the hard narrow pallet. It is reported that the Duke justifies the narrowness of his resting place, on the plea that when a man wishes to turn, it is then high time to turn out. We seldom hear the laborious peasant complain of restless nights. The indolent, pampered epicure, or the man who overtasks his brain and denies himself bodily exercise is liable to sleeplessness.

July 1849

To the Editor of the Pioneer:

dear Sur. I take my pen in hand to inform You that it is confidently Suspected in some of the cirkles of Saint Paul? That is a man about Town.

this fact I Am sure sur need not excite envy. Alarm but my Timers neighbor Mrs Smelletts is so Much concerned about Soe misterius an excite enny Alarm but my Timerus need not Suspected in some of the cirkles to inform You that it is confedently

just received from the east a fresh supply of Drugs, Medicines, Paints, Oils, Glass, Varnishes and Dye-stuffs, which will be sold at the lowest prices. The principal articles are as follows:

**DRUGS AND MEDICINES**

Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Just received from the east a fresh supply of Drugs, Medicines, Paints, Oils, Glass, Varnishes and Dye-stuffs, which will be sold at the lowest prices. The principal articles are as follows:

**April 28, 1849**

**DRUGS**

- Acid Benzoic
- Tartaric
- Murattic
- Sulfuric
- Ammonia, aqua
- carb.
- Anisic
- Aces, Cape
- Barbados
- socoricina
- Alcohol, aquafortis
- Ailaum
- Antimony black
- Adhesive plaster
- Arrow root
- Asphaltum
- Mercury pitch
- Blue pill
- Bark, wild cherry
- Balsam, refined
- crude
- Balsam filtered
- Bismuth, ox.
- Bayberry bark
- Cinnic ext.
- Cream tartar
- Coppya, balsam
- Chalk, white
- red
- Cinnaroid
- Crosscan, Clove
- Composition
- Camella alba
- Doser powders
- Digitalis
- Emui, No, 1—8
- Ergot, Episum white
- Eye water
- Elixir vitric
- Tamarindis
- Tapioca
- Turmeric
- Terra Sonna
- Tar, Barbados
- Digitalis
- Aloeos
- Senna & Jalap
- Caratharids
- Camphor
- Huxum
- Camp and Op
- Calomel
- Colombo root
- Cyanene pepper
- African
- Carth, ferris
- persis
- Coriander
- Carnos sub.
- Ool Harim
- Olive
- Anne
- Juniper
- Spike
- Linseed
- Clones
- Rosemary
- Saffraus
- Cinnamon
- Hemlock
- Lemo
- Pennroyal
- Bengamot
- Wintergreen
- Wormseed
- British
- Nux Vomica
- Quinine
- Guatracum
- Rhubarb root
- Saffraus
- Guatracum
- Uva Ursi
- Valeriant
- Rutten stone
- Vermillion, Chinese
- Seneca snakeroot
- Chinese Vermillion. Ar
- Ua. snake root
- Vital, all sizes
- Salp. zim.
- Salm. Waders
- Sponge
- Whiting
- Sealing wax
- Wax, white
- Sand, black
- Skins, white & split

**FAMILY MEDICINES**

Anti-bilious, cathartic, vegetable, and aque pills, Coxe's hyde syrup, Stoughton's bitters, Burgundy pitch, Liniment — volatile, nerve and bone, poor mark and annoyance; Amn. Thompson's eye water opodolced, paragogic, castor oil without taste or smell, rheumatic drogues, together with many article in the Drug line for sale cheap for cash.

DEWEY & CAVILIER.

Saint Paul April 27, 1849.
“Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.”

My dear friends—now look at the man who has been in the habit for years of putting on his nightcap at an early hour. If he isn’t actually loaded down with the “rocks”, or in other words the glittering dust that buyeth every thing but the ticket to heaven and happiness upon earth, he is at least well to do in the world. With a joyous heart, and spirits as light as the down of a thistle, he goes forth to greet everything but the ticket to heaven with a joyous heart, and spirits as light as the down of a thistle, he goes forth to greet the early riser! The rose of health blooms upon his cheek; his eye sparkles with the fire and glow of youth; his step is as elastic as though his legs were set on wire spiral springs, and his body composed of India rubber. He is strong, two, aye, stronger than last winter’s butter—stronger than an argument. He can out-jump, out-walk, out-run, and out-live any human that never leaves his bed-chamber till nine o’clock, I don’t care where you bring him from—whether from hardy Greenland or from the soft, sunny clime of the equator. He is inflexible. He is not to be fried in his own fat by the melting heat of a mid-summer’s sun; and he can bear his bosom to the bitter northern blast, with no more sign of a shake or a shiver, than the Bunker Hill Monument in a snow storm.

Oh, you puny, sickly saffron-skinned sluggards, that never see the sunrise! You lose a glorious site and exhibition that affords more pure delight to both eyes and soul then all the shows ever presented to mortal view, the Northern lights and the American Museum not excepted. I can’t paint the picture. When I think of it, discouraged Fancy drops her pencil at once, says it’s no use. Try to get up and take a peep for yourselves, for once in your life; then if you think it is a humbug, go to bed and snooze till the day of judgment, for aught I care. But how do you feel this morning? You do, while others are accumulating wealth, happy and marri as larks, you lie as dead as so many logs, intellectually degenerating, morally rotting, and corporeally consuming. Arise ye! arise ye!—shake off your sloth, even as the lion shakes the dew from his mane; go out and behold the beauties of the morn in almost visible abundance—while the feathered choristers are singing spontaneous haléuhaléu, as though they must do it or burst their gizzards. Look at that man, the early riser! The rose of health blooms upon his cheek; his eye sparkles with the fire and glow of youth; his step is as elastic as though his legs were set on wire spiral springs, and his body composed of India rubber. He is strong, two, aye, stronger than last winter’s butter—stronger than an argument. He can out-jump, out-walk, out-run, and out-live any human that never leaves his bed-chamber till nine o’clock, I don’t care where you bring him from—whether from hardy Greenland or from the soft, sunny clime of the equator. He is inflexible. He is not to be fried in his own fat by the melting heat of a mid-summer’s sun; and he can bear his bosom to the bitter northern blast, with no more sign of a shake or a shiver, than the Bunker Hill Monument in a snow storm.

My little sister slaps at her sleep. Her sleep is as light as a mosquito. Flying by her face, her sleep searches for a place to sit, and when it lands, the soft sensation on her skin bothers her. Don’t fight, our mother commands. Be still and listen to it. How else would you become friends with your sleep, with anyone?

My sleep is the heaviest of all. The first layer of the sky slowly comes down and covers my face, torso, legs, and feet. Even on a hot humid day, the weight of the sky is what I need to be safe, grounded, to fall asleep.

2022

May 31st 1849
The M acknowledges that we are within the territory of the Dakhóta, here in Imnizaska, also known as Saint Paul, a place name which refers to the white bluffs along the river.

About the M

The M (Minnesota Museum of American Art), based in St. Paul, has evolved and adapted over the course of its history dating back to the 19th century. Recognizing that art is a tool for facilitating understanding across difference, the M is dedicated to amplifying the power of art and artists who represent diverse perspectives, identities, and lived experiences.

First introduced as an innovative way to present engaging exhibitions while remaining closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the M continues to exhibit work in its window galleries as well as in the skyway, virtually, and at partner facilities, in anticipation of commencing construction work on the final phase of the M’s facility.

The M’s indoor galleries are reopening in fall 2023 with a retrospective exhibition, Hazel Belvo: For Love.

Illustrations by Peng Wu, graphic design by Curtis Bjerke