

OPENING RECEPTION / TOUR WITH THE ARTISTS MATT ROGALSKY AND KYLA MALLETT

Thursday 10 January, 7 PM

Join artists **Matt Rogalsky** and **Kyla Mallett** in a walk-through of their respective exhibitions beginning at 7 PM, to be followed by the opening reception in celebration of their solo shows.

IN STUDIO / MARLA HLADY

Tuesday 5 February, 7 PM

Free and guaranteed to Sustaining Members on RSVP to york@mercerunion.org
Refreshments will be served.

This season's featured IN STUDIO artist is **Marla Hlady**. Hlady draws, makes sculpture, works with sites and sounds and sometimes makes video. Her kinetic sculptures and sound pieces often consist of common objects (such as teapots, cocktail mixers, jars) that are expanded and animated to reveal unexpected sonic and poetic properties often using a system-based approach to composition. She completed her BFA at the University of Victoria, and her MFA at York University. She currently lectures at the University of Toronto. She has shown widely in solo and group shows; and has mounted site works in such places as the fjords of Norway, a grain silo, an apartment window, a tour bus, the Hudson's Bay department store display window, an empty shell of a building and a roof top. She will have work on view in the exhibition *Volume: Hear Here* at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto, from 16 January–10 March 2013. Marla Hlady lives and works in Toronto and is represented by Jessica Bradley Gallery.

IMAN ISSA WINS THE 1ST HAN NEFKENS FOUNDATION-MACBA AWARD

Recently exhibited artist **Iman Issa** has been unanimously named winner of the first Han Nefkens Foundation-MACBA Award for Contemporary Art, an initiative of Barcelona-based Dutch writer and arts patron Han Nefkens and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). The award consists of a prize of €50,000 to be used towards the production of a new work that will be presented in the city of Barcelona in 2013.



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Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM
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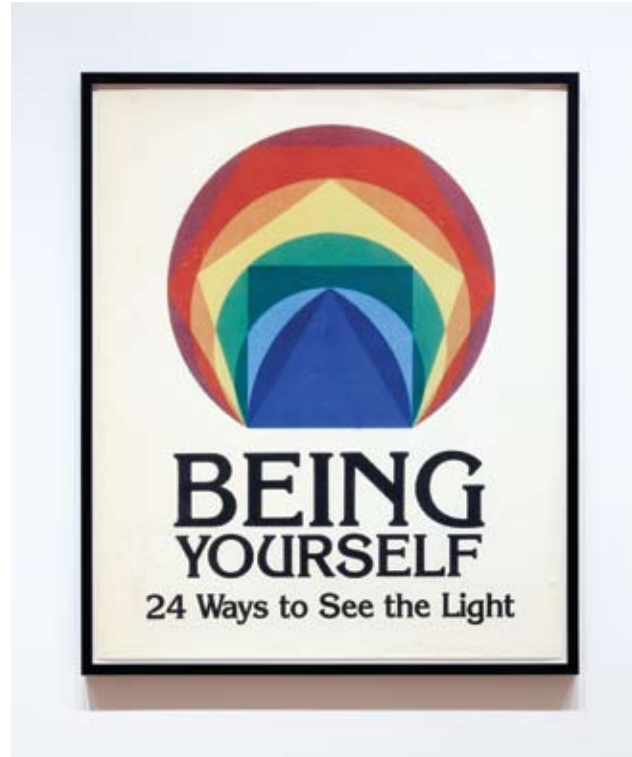
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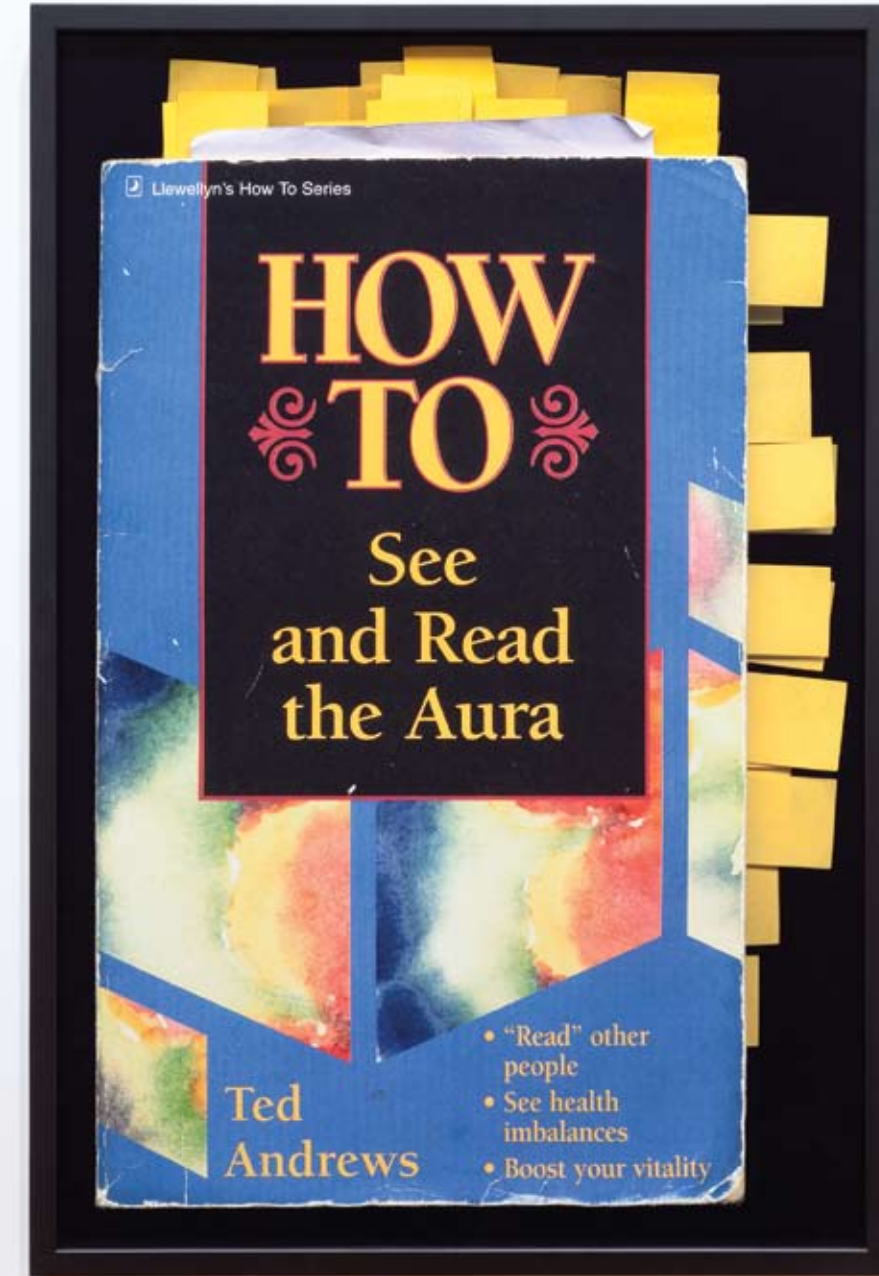
BIOS

Matt Rogalsky's activity as a performing and exhibiting composer and media artist often focuses on exploration of abject, invisible/inaudible, or ignored streams of information. Recent pieces includes *ANT/LIFE/ART/WORK*, a site-specific installation listening in to the sound world of thatching ants, and *Memory Like Water*, a series of installations and concert pieces exploring the "ow and malleability of memory. His work has been presented in galleries and concert venues throughout North America and Europe. Rogalsky teaches electroacoustic music composition at Queen's University, plays guitar with Canadian alt-folk group The Gertrudes, and is also known for his audio engineering and production work, most recently with Polaris Prize-nominated noise-pop band PS I Love You. Matt Rogalsky lives in Kingston Ontario Canada.

Kyla Mallett completed her MFA at UBC in 2004, and her BFA at Emily Carr in 2000. Working primarily in photography, text and print media, her practice engages with the intersection of culture and language, using archival and statistical research to examine transgressive activities in such cultural arenas such as adolescence, feminism, academia and art. Past works have examined schoolgirls' notes, girl bullying, gossip, marginalia in library books, hauntings and aura reading. Current projects involving parapsychology and self-help materials focus on marginal and devalued forms of language and communication. Mallett's work has been exhibited widely, including the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), Vancouver Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton), Modern Fuel (Kingston), Canadian Cultural Centre (Paris), and The Power Plant (Toronto), with solo exhibitions at Artspeak (Vancouver), Catriona Jeffries (Vancouver), Access (Vancouver), ThreeWalls (Chicago), Mount St. Vincent University Gallery (Halifax), and The Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge). Mallett is Assistant Professor in Visual Art (Photography) and Graduate Studies at Emily Carr University.

Clive Robertson is a media artist, curator and publisher. He is an Associate Professor teaching Art History, Performance Art and Cultural Studies at Queen's University, Kingston.

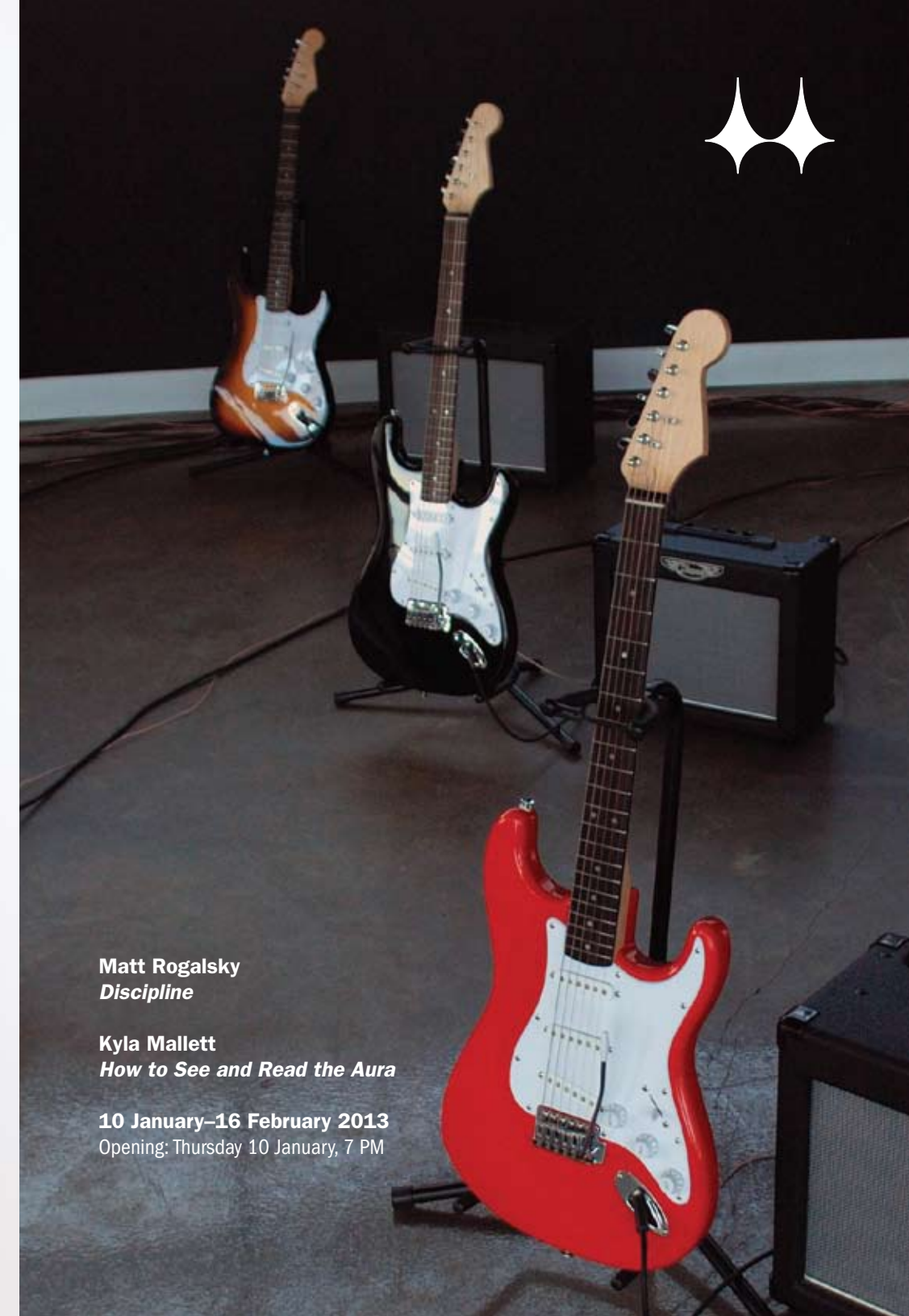
Sarah Robayo Sheridan is Director of Exhibitions and Publications at Mercer Union.



Matt Rogalsky
Discipline

Kyla Mallett
How to See and Read the Aura

10 January–16 February 2013
Opening: Thursday 10 January, 7 PM





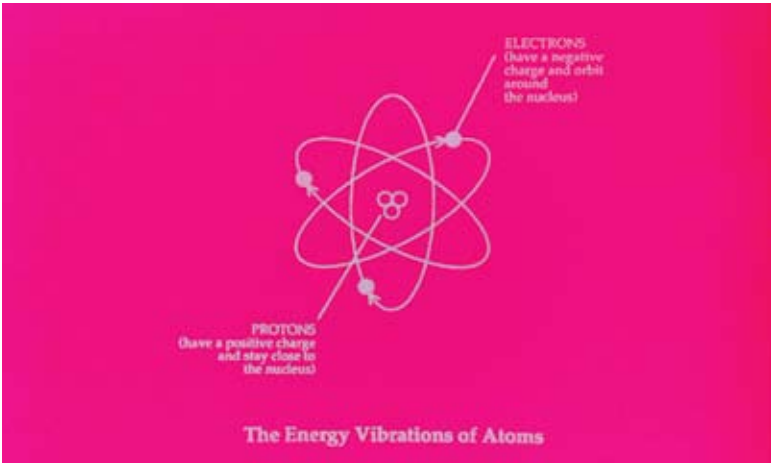
Matt Rogalsky, *Discipline*, 2011. Installation detail. 12 Fender Stratocaster guitars, amplifiers, computer and custom software, FM radio signal.



Matt Rogalsky, *Discipline*, 2011. Full installation view.



Kyla Mallett, *How to See and Read the Aura*, 2010. 44 framed screen prints with UV-sensitive ink (each 28 × 35 cm) and 1 lightjet print (84 × 127 cm)



Kyla Mallett, *How to See and Read the Aura*, 2010. Detail.

Front Gallery

Matt Rogalsky: *Discipline*

Rock Idolotry, Singing in Unison, and Bypassing the Bands

Objecthood. The upright choir of twelve candy-coloured guitars (with amplifiers) “reverently and obediently following the canon of classic rock” is the visible part of Matt Rogalsky’s sculptural, back-handed homage, *Discipline* (2011). The brand identification has been removed from the headstocks to aid the intentional minimalist configuration of this famous electric solid-body guitar as both an iconic collectible and now a banal or literal object. The model design—its body-hugging contours and neck shape, its pickups and pickguard—is instantly identifiable as a Stratocaster. Leo Fender began manufacturing the American Stratocaster in 1954 using paints echoing Dupont car colours of the era e.g. the blue of a Cadillac, the red from a Ford T-Bird, the foam green from a Buick.

The *Discipline* guitars are coloured Black, Fiesta Red, Artic White, Brown Sunburst, and Daphne Blue. Their “ready-made” look belies the fact that like most guitarists before him, Rogalsky spent many hours customizing these guitars—rewiring the electronics and changing the pick-up configurations for performance purposes. And this is one of the tensions that *Discipline* creates for the viewer: a visible grouping of idealized, desirable, industrial objects whose general appearance has been a stable form for almost sixty years, yet has also been frequently altered by the creative end user.

If it were an art history timeline, the American Stratocaster of the 1950s personified the masculinities of pop and later Arte Povera (the weathered/beaten look), to what now becomes more postmodern—the Stratocaster as an affordable gender-equal multiple that is now much cheaper to trash or kick around the block.¹

Pick-up Lines. The sound source that drives the guitar installation is an anonymous local FM radio station. The resulting shimmering sound that in turn has a gamelan music quality is like the calming end result of noise-cancellation headphones where, for this listener, the FM station at full compressed strength is also the unwanted noise of “rock gods.”

So how is the sound we hear in the installation produced? Firstly it relies upon an application of “backwards electronics”² which means that audio transducers can have their functions reversed. The guitar pick-ups become speakers whose amplitude in turn is amplified by adding a contact piezoelectric microphone to the bridge of each guitar that in turn is plugged into its visible guitar amplifier. Each of the twelve guitars (metaphorically the disciples) is tuned to one of twelve semi-tones or pitch classes. Each guitar is tuned in unison with the three upper strings tuned to a high octave, the middle string to a middle octave and the bottom two strings to a low octave. This unison open tuning of the guitars, as Rogalsky explains, “makes for a richer sound.”³

Bandpassing or Treating the Radio as a Performer. Rogalsky describes the chain of radio energy fed to circuits that select when the guitars are to be driven:

“The set-up uses a cheap radio that is plugged directly into the input of the computer so you don’t hear the radio sound directly. The computer runs a bit of Super Collider code that I wrote that does a very rough analysis of where the strong frequencies are. I did this using an old technique that I know David Behrman used years ago in his early computer music where if he wanted to detect the strong presence of a certain pitch he constructed a bandpass filter that would be focused on certain frequency. And if there is energy detected in that frequency band, if it passes a certain threshold, then it would be an indication that something is going on in terms of melody to do with that pitch. Behrman was pretty successful in designing these small hardware bandpass filters that allowed him to trigger other electronic sounds. In my design of the software patch there’s a bank of analysis frequencies that are all focused around the low fundamentals of each pitch and then there’s a bunch of detector code that sets a threshold for each one. If the signal in each frequency band goes above the threshold then I know that there is something on the radio that’s going on in that area. If any of the twelve threshold circuits or bandpass filters is triggered, then the corresponding guitar will ring all its strings at once and it does that through the computer sending a blast of sine waves at the guitar. So the guitars don’t get a signal from the radio itself. The sine waves are all slightly detuned so I’m just trying to create a blast of fuzzy energy around one frequency to make sure the strings really get activated. At sufficient volume the guitars really respond fast. The computer has twelve different outputs (each guitar is like its own isolated sound system) and on the output of each of the amplifiers that goes to the guitar pickup I have a step-up transformer that greatly boosts the voltage. My little (offstage) amplifiers are 40 watts with transformers wound 35:1 so it’s a huge boost in signal strength.”⁹

What Do We Hear in Translation? The program variabilities of the radio source produce a resulting response from the guitar strings that can be very active or reasonably quiet. What is going on?

“From song to song on the radio you can hear patterns that come from the guitars that represent the structures in the melody of the songs, or the chords. It’s quite distinct as you can hear a melody emerge and disappear and return like a refrain. Setting the thresholds lower or higher affects whether or not the radio pitches will activate the guitars more or less frequently. Not every song played on the radio is recorded in concert pitch, my pitch detection analysis works but is somewhat crude and the guitar response can be quite messy. When it gets really messy is when the radio changes to talk or advertisements that are played louder than music. When the radio songs return the guitar choir settles down.”¹⁰

—Clive Robertson

¹ In the U.S. in 1954 a Fender Stratocaster cost the equivalent of \$2,136.00 USD in 2012. In the UK where the average weekly wage in 1954 was £7.50, the Stratocaster cost £90; at the time a cheap used car might cost £30. Today pre-owned Stratocasters can cost \$40,000 USD or more and the magazine *Guitar Afficionado* publishes stories about and for those collectors purchasing guitars, cars, wine “& the Deluxe Life.” www.guitarafficionado.com. The current Squier Bullet as used in *Discipline* can be purchased for \$130 CAD.
² Nicholas Collins, “A Brief History of the Backwards Electric Guitar,” 2009. http://www.nicolascollins.com/texts/BackwardsElectricGuitar.pdf
³ All artist’s quotes from an interview conducted on 8 December 2012, Kingston.

Back Gallery

Kyla Mallett: *How to See and Read the Aura*

In the series *How to See and Read the Aura* (2010), Kyla Mallett trains her eye on a second-hand self-help manual written by Ted Andrews in 1991. Published by Llewellyn, an early North American purveyor of Astrology annuals, the book is an artifact, a physically contained repository of knowledge from the subset we might term “pop paranormal.” It joins titles in alternative healing and UFO spotting, which emulate scientific publishing yet disregard any of the empirical checks and balances of bona fide scientific inquiry. A common aspect of this genre is a whimsical application of schematics and diagramming techniques to illustrate unproven theories. Mallett delves into this iconography by isolating the line drawings that pepper *How to See and Read the Aura* and placing these against ground colours that represent the spectrum reported in the book. In extracting the pure forms, she invites consideration of the aesthetics of evidence, demonstrating how easily the authority of a well-traced line seduces.

Mallett has similarly explored graphic treatments of esoteric motifs in her *Self-Help* series (2010–ongoing), in which she mines how-to literature—spanning from the interpretation of body language to conquering the fear of flying—to excise diagrams that she restores to standalone shapes. In *How to See and Read the Aura*, she adds an extra material process, accentuating the subject of the source book by rendering the drawings in UV-activated inks that fluctuate in visibility, echoing the book’s aspiration of sensitizing the reader to altered perception. The doctrine of aura reading concentrates on the recipient’s ability to discern the otherwise invisible through a process of attuning the psyche to this mode of extra perception. In a like manner, we can describe the process of learning to read contemporary art as an exercise of codification and sensitization to certain motifs. Thus we can compare the degree of suggestibility for which we might fault the consumer of paranormal literature to the associative, even far-fetched, ways in which we also constitute meaning in art.

The spread of colours across the forty-four framed prints in *How to See and Read the Aura* plays with the well-established cognitive link between colour and feeling in visual art. Going by the wisdom of Joseph Albers’s treatise on the interaction of colour, we know that “in visual perception a color is almost never seen as it really is—as it physically is. This fact makes color the most relative medium in art.” Indeed in Mallett’s series, the lightest of the shades make the contrasting UV-inked lines difficult to discern, whereas they pop against the darker tones. Fluctuations in ambient light also allow for the work to change noticeably in appearance. All of this instability in the image accentuates the degree to which the interpretation of the visual is a precarious exercise.

The use of light-sensitive material underscores Mallett’s interest in light-based media’s particular veracity in producing false evidence. Her previous series *Spirit Photos* (2008) directly addresses the hoax tradition that emerges simultaneously with the invention of photography. When advocates of aura perception are hard-pressed for evidence of their claims, they often point to Kirlian photography as visual proof. Named after Russian electrician who pioneered the process, the technique consists of placing objects on an electrified photographic plate to produce a halo effect around the item. Semyon took a phenomenon governed by known physical principles—pressure, electrical grounding, humidity and temperature—but then extrapolated that what he was observing was a direct translation of a supernatural energy field which could be used as a barometer for illness. Likewise, in Mallett’s photograph of the cover of *How to See and Read the Aura*, we see a long tradition of false hopes and exaggerated promises extended with the bold claims “see health imbalances, improve your vitality.”

In past works such as *Notes* (2004) and *Legendary Teens* (2000), Mallett has explored adolescent culture, looking at the importance of self-expression amongst individuals at this transitional period of subjectivity. The same desires mapped in these previous works—identity formation, ego development, social prestige, relationships, and existential quandaries—are also the desires addressed in DIY manuals such as *How to See and Read the Aura*. Mallett’s attraction to self-help literature is perhaps shaped by her generation’s uneasy regard for the 1960s counterculture’s failed promises—revolutionary aspirations diluted down to as a pathetic form of narcissistic self-searching.

Born in the late 1970s, Mallett would fall into the tail end of Generation X, or the “Bust Generation” as Canadian economist David Foot calls the cohort born between 1967 and 1979. Though purportedly rebelling against values of the baby boomers, willing reprisals of hippy culture are rolled into the cultural tastes of these subsequent generations. Take for example the short-lived 1991 fad of the Hypercolour T-shirt, a throw-back to the tie-dye shirts which enjoyed wild popularity amongst North American adolescents. The heat-sensitive dyes used in the fabric were manufactured by the same corporation who makes the UV-inks used in Mallett’s prints. Ironically, in an inversion of the 1960s generation’s hope for transformative personal liberation, the more common use of reactive inks and dyes today is as a regulatory device, used for security purposes in currency and passports. The fluctuating appearance of the lines in Kyla Mallett’s brightly coloured prints serve as a register of just such change through time.

—Sarah Robayo Sheridan