



**CURTIS  
TALWST  
SANTIAGO  
LIMING**

**CURTIS  
TALWST  
SANTIAGO  
LIMING**

Art Gallery of Alberta

October 24, 2020 - February 14, 2021

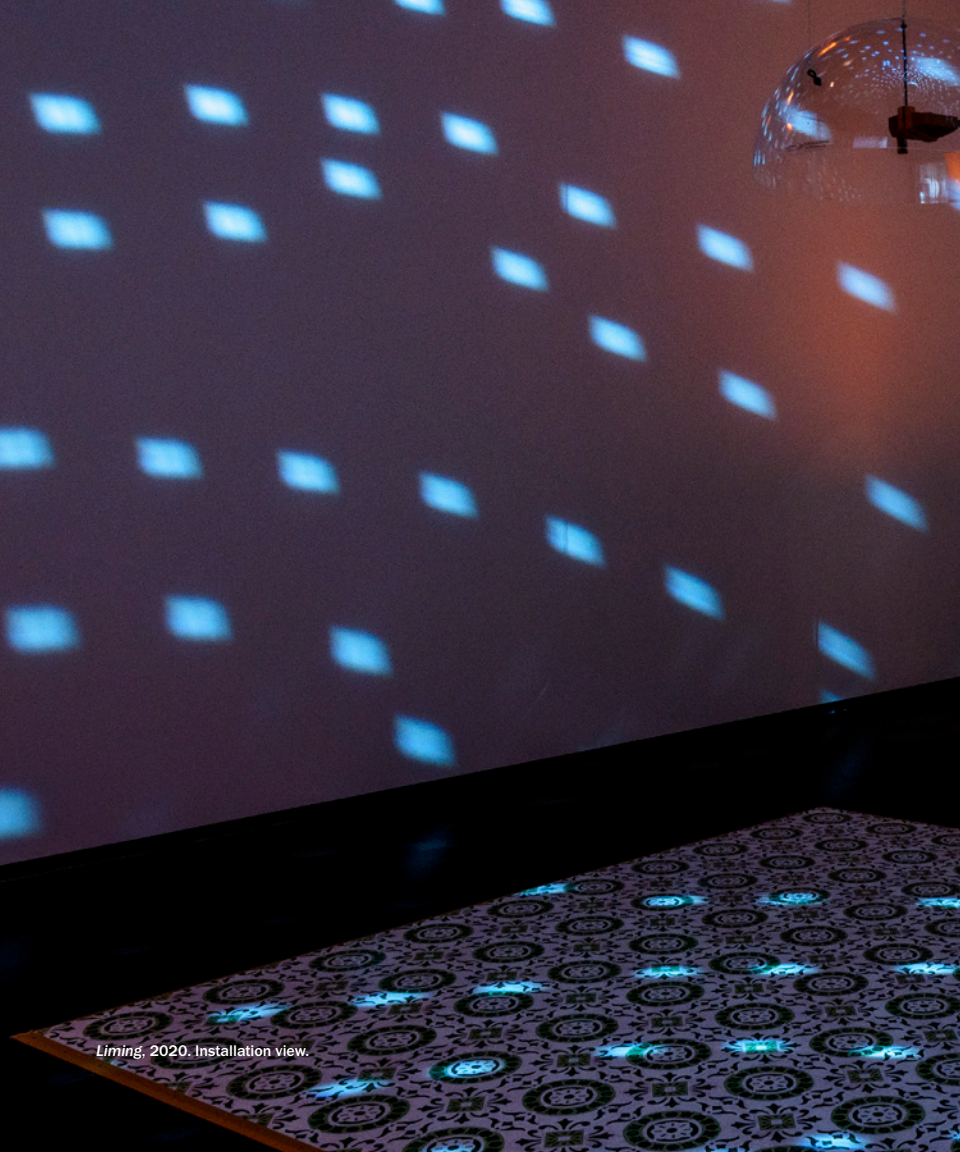
## **CURTIS TALWST SANTIAGO: LIMING**

Liming is Trinidadian slang for getting together and socializing. For Curtis Talwst Santiago this is an exhibition that celebrates spending time with loved ones and is an homage to his family and his upbringing in Sherwood Park, Alberta. Gathering and hanging out can manifest in many ways from formal scheduled events or annual celebrations like Carnival, to happenstance, mundane meetings with friends or neighbours. Since the spread of COVID-19 and the threat of coronavirus, gathering has taken on an entirely new meaning. For this exhibition, Santiago has created joyous and celebratory gatherings that cast aside a simultaneous fear of and longing for being together. These works dream of, fantasize about, maybe even fetishize being physically near friends, family and strangers and offer visitors to the exhibition a platform to create shared memories.

Curtis Talwst Santiago has transformed Liming into a 1970s nostalgic refuge. The basement or rumpus room of the '70s and '80s oscillated between sovereign youth space, family hideaway and the place for all-night parties set before a backdrop of shag carpeting in hues of browns and oranges and maybe even a floral sofa. For Santiago, his rumpus room sanctuary even included a Naugahyde bar with vinyl orange stools and an avocado-green dance floor. With references to wood panelling and linoleum flooring, the exhibition uses hallmarks of a middle-class suburban rumpus room to create an environment of joy and love surrounded by the embrace of family and close friends.

Inside the exhibition, nestled in jewellery boxes and set atop wood panelled altars are tiny intimate scenes. Within these dioramas are Santiago's family and friends lounging, at ease, spending time together, undistracted—except perhaps by plates of food. Within these scaled down versions of the Santiago family home are raucous get-togethers that are the embodiment of security, comfort and domestic bliss. Adults linger around the bar and lounge on the family sofa. Some figures hold drinks, in some scenes the dance floor is abandoned, in others it overflows. A sleepy or curious child wanders in from time to time to drink up the sights or be scooped into the arms of an adult.

Each of these scenes are tucked away within ornate boxes that once held gifts of earrings, necklaces, watches or rings. To both protect and reveal, these boxes imply the value of the luxury items they once carried that were likely given as tokens of affection. The jewellery box itself becomes a stand-in or reminder of the human love



*Liming*, 2020. Installation view.



those gifts represent. By replacing the token of connection with the connection itself, Santiago replaces the monetary with what it is meant to symbolize. Under capitalism, non-productive time is often seen as without value. Liming is often described as “chilling” and at times used synonymously with “doing nothing,” which minimizes or dismisses the real value of creating shared experiences with others. The time spent to create connections with people is often forgone in adulthood, save for a romantic partner. For Curtis Talwst Santiago, liming, hanging out and taking time to build relationships is highly valued. This notion has clearly been reinforced in him by his family and through his upbringing. Santiago’s jewellery box dioramas seek to elevate and honour those relations and despite their diminutive size they can be read as monuments to social bonds.

Intimacy runs through every aspect of the dioramas. There is the intimacy implied by the past lives of the jewellery boxes and the gifts they once held; an intimacy of the familial scenes they now hold; and their scale requires intimate encounters between artwork and viewer. The dioramas featured in the exhibition are miniature. Their size makes them portable and they could easily fit into the palm of your hand. Although our own hands have come to signify a threat and the spreader of viruses, Santiago is able to convey, even reclaim, the hand as something that cherishes and protects. Furthermore, they allow and require a physical closeness that is no longer encouraged between people and has long been discouraged with artworks. Because of their size they can only really be experienced by one person at a time, undermining the *respectful distance* from which most artworks are viewed. The works are hand-held miniature monuments to connecting with other humans and like memories they can be carried with you and held tightly.

While peering into these miniature worlds one cannot help but feel a tension between being an observer or voyeur of these scenes and being simultaneously within the life-sized diorama that Santiago has created within the exhibition. Most notably, a scaled-up dance floor is provided by the artist for visitors to use. Although liming or hanging out has changed dramatically in 2020, the artist has envisioned a new way to celebrate together. Like the dioramas, which are viewed best by one person at a time, the dance floor is also specifically created for one. However, actions on the dance floor should not be thought of in isolation but in concert with all those who have already used it. Energy left here, too, can be considered an offering, a legacy to be picked up and embraced by those who come after. Even if we are not sharing the exhibition space at the same time,



*Gu Nu Gu*, 2020. Diorama. Courtesy of the Artist.







*Prelude: Sir Dingolay* (video still), 2019. Video, 1 minute. Courtesy of the Artist.



*Dat DJ Real Nice Yes?*, 2020. Diorama. Courtesy of the Artist.

just being there and leaving enjoyment in the space will connect to others who have also enjoyed themselves in *Liming*.

Music has been ever-present in Santiago's life. Working as a DJ and musician before he was a visual artist, it is easy to see how music not only informs but is infused into Santiago's art practice. Playing on repeat in *Liming* is the soca song, "Gu Nu Gu" by Mighty Sparrow. Soca, and this song specifically, offers a snapshot of Trinidad and Tobago and bears traces of the people who live there. Soca speaks to the multi-colonial history of Trinidad and Tobago, blending Calypso—originally brought to the islands by the African slaves of French plantation owners—with the beats of music from India—brought to the Islands by the indentured servants of English colonists. "Gu Nu Gu" also incorporates lyrics in an Indigenous Carib language that fascinated Santiago as a child. Santiago describes this song as a sort of family anthem that would be playing often in his childhood home. In one particular family video, Santiago as a toddler dances and sings this song at the encouragement of his parents. While soca is commonly performed in Trinidad around Carnival, in the Santiago household this music was played year-round at the family's numerous fêtes. Santiago's father, as well as many of the men from his community growing up, worked in the oil and gas industry. Like in Canada, oil and gas is a major industry in Trinidad and Tobago and many skilled workers, including Santiago's father, immigrated to Alberta to work in this industry in the late '60s and early '70s. The rotational working schedule of the oil patch meant Santiago's childhood was marked by a perpetual cycle of celebration and ever-present excitement for family reunions upon the return of fathers and husbands.

The music of Mighty Sparrow, and soca in general, is a blending of social critique and political satire with humour and sexual innuendo. In "Gu Nu Gu" a woman goes to Africa to seek out a witch doctor to give her everlasting youth. In the end, the witch doctor sexually satisfies her better than anyone else has ever been able to. Although much less explicit, Santiago also gives the solution for everlasting youth, pointing viewers to joy, family and the music that brings people together. Santiago is preparing for the birth of his first child, and as the artist starts his own family it is not surprising that he is looking back upon and thinking about his own childhood. In looking to emulate the joys and successes of his parents, the artist has created an homage to family, a recreation, a preparation for new life, and a perpetuation of family bonds. *Liming* is a timely reminder of the necessity of community, social bonds and the need for shared experiences.



*Party Can't Done*, 2020. Diorama. Courtesy of the Artist.

## ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY **CURTIS TALWST SANTIAGO**

Curtis Talwst Santiago (b. 1979, Edmonton, Alberta) studied as an apprentice of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. Santiago has exhibited internationally at venues such as The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY; The New Museum, New York, NY; The Eli and Edythe Broad Museum at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI; the Institute of Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA; the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada; The Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada; and the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA; among others. The artist was included in the SITE Santa Fe SITES Lines.2018 Biennial, Casa Tomada, in Santa Fe, NM and was featured in the 2018 Biennale de Dakar in Dakar, Senegal. His work is in the permanent collection of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY.

## WRITER'S BIOGRAPHY **LINDSEY SHARMAN**

Lindsey V. Sharman is Curator at the Art Gallery of Alberta. She has studied Art History and Curating in Canada, England, Switzerland and Austria, earning degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and the University of the Arts, Zurich. From 2012-2018 she was the first curator of the Founders' Gallery at the Military Museums in Calgary, an academic appointment through the University of Calgary. Her primary area of research is politically and socially engaged art practice. Curatorial projects of note include *TRENCH*, a durational performance by Adrian Stimson; *Felled Trees*, an exhibition deconstructing national identity at Canada House, London; *Gassed Redux* by Adad Hannah; and the nationally touring retrospective *The Writing on the Wall: Works of Dr. Joane Cardinal Schubert*.

## LIST OF WORKS

<i>Dat DJ Real Nice Yes?</i> , 2020 Diorama Courtesy of the Artist	<i>Gu Nu Gu</i> , 2020 Diorama Courtesy of the Artist	<i>Mighty Sparrow</i> , <i>Gu Nu Gu</i> Audio, 6 minutes 14 seconds Courtesy of the Artist
<i>Party Can't Done</i> , 2020 Diorama Courtesy of the Artist	<i>Lovers Rock</i> , 2020 Diorama Courtesy of the Artist	<i>Prelude: Sir Dingolay</i> , 2019 Video, 1 minute



*Party Can't Done* (detail), 2020. Diorama. Courtesy of the Artist.

The RBC New Works Gallery features new works by Alberta artists. Initiated in 1998 and named the RBC New Works Gallery in 2008, this gallery space continues the Art Gallery of Alberta's commitment to supporting Alberta artists.

Organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta.



© Art Gallery of Alberta 2020  
ISBN: 978-1-77179-030-7

Editor: Danielle Siemens  
Design: Charles Cousins  
Photography: Charles Cousins, cover, pp 2-3, 8; Curtis Twaist Santiago pp 5, 6-7, 10, 12  
Essay: Lindsey Sharman  
Printing: Burke Group  
Printed in Canada

Presented with the support of the RBC Emerging Artists Project.



Foundation

The Art Gallery of Alberta is grateful for the generous support of our many public and private donors and sponsors, as well as the ongoing support of the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Arts Council, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Canada Council for the Arts.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



RBC  
NEW  
WORKS  
GALLERY