

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Suzanne Lemberg Usdan Gallery



Photo: Peggy Ahwesh, still image from "Nocturne" (1998)

Queer Paranormal (an exhibition concerning Shirley Jackson and *The Haunting of Hill House*)

Curated by Jillian Brodie, Cindy Smith and Rachel Stevens of *Two Chairs*; and Anne Thompson, director of Usdan Gallery

October 29-December 7, 2019

[Halloween Opening Party](#) | October 31, 6:00 pm

[Screening of *The Haunting*](#) | October 31, 8:00 pm

[Lecture by Patricia White](#) | November 5, 7:00 pm

[Artist Talk and Screening](#) | November 19, 7:00 pm

[Queer Paranormal \(an exhibition concerning Shirley Jackson and *The Haunting of Hill House*\)](#) presents a range of artistic practices “haunted” by historical, political, and sexual difference. Taking Jackson’s gothic horror classic and its 1963 film version as jumping-off points, the exhibition identifies queerness in themes including witchcraft, the uncanny, the stranger, and the haunted house as undiscovered country and object of desire. Site-specifically located in North Bennington, where Jackson wrote *The Haunting of Hill House*, Queer Paranormal installs artworks in locations across the Bennington campus, including the Jennings music building—a former mansion believed to be haunted and said to have partly influenced Jackson’s portrait of Hill House. Works in mediums including painting, sculpture, film, video, and sound are spectral in their subject matter and occasionally positioned to otherworldly effect, such as pieces by Senem Pirlar and Sasha Wortzel that perform sonic hauntings of everyday spaces.

In conceiving the idea for Queer Paranormal, [Two Chairs](#) saw connections between scholarly writing about queerness—specifically, the potential for subversion and social change in thinking and experiences “other” than normal—and the supernatural encounters of the main female characters in Jackson’s novel. The contact between Eleanor, emphatically single, and Theodora, identified as lesbian, takes a queer turn in a scene in which Eleanor reaches out in the night for Theo’s hand only to find that the hand she was gripping was an apparition manifested by Hill House. In their exhibition statement, Two Chairs writes: “Jackson has provided a masterful ghost story that embodies for us what José Esteban Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia*, characterizes as the way something ‘might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening.’”

Also significant to the curators is the writing of feminist film theorist Patricia White and her essay “Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: *The Haunting*,” which addresses the 1963 film adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House*. In addition to [screening *The Haunting*](#) on Halloween, Usdan Gallery is delighted to bring White to campus for [a lecture](#) about her scholarship and its relationship to Queer Paranormal themes. Other events include a [joint screening](#) with artists Peggy Ahwesh and Susan MacWilliam, followed by a conversation moderated by filmmaker and Bennington visual arts faculty [Mariam Ghani](#).

Artworks are located [across Bennington’s campus](#) in Usdan Gallery, the Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA), Jennings music building, and nearby sites in the landscape.

Participating Artists

Peggy Ahwesh, APRIORI (techno-botanical coven), Anna Campbell, Tony Do, Lana Lin, Susan MacWilliam, Senem Pirlar, Macon Reed, Zoe Walsh, and Sasha Wortzel.



Culture Ireland
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Queer Paranormal is made possible in part by a grant from [Culture Ireland](#).

About Usdan Gallery

With exhibitions of contemporary artists and ideas, Usdan Gallery engages and advances the College’s history of innovation in the arts while addressing the wider community. The 3,200-square-foot space is located on the main level of the Helen Frankenthaler Visual Arts Center. Director and curator: Anne Thompson

[Driving directions](#)

The College is close to other notable art and culture destinations, including [The Bennington Museum](#) (10 minutes); [The Clark](#) (30 minutes); [The Williams College Museum of Art](#) (30 minutes); and [MASS MoCA](#) (40 minutes).

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Helen Frankenthaler Visual Arts Center
Bennington College | One College Drive
Bennington, Vermont 05201-6003

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