

August 26 - October 18, 2026
Spadina Museum

In Broken Light

Curated
by
Adrien
Sun Hall

Ry Van
Der Hout

A solo
exhibition
by

Light enters Spadina in fragments. It gathers in mirrors, shines on portraits, and lingers in rooms shaped by a century of domestic life. Beneath the house lie traces of earlier worlds; within it remain the stories, losses, and echoes of those who passed through its doors.

Spadina

Many lives have unfolded at Spadina, named from the Anishinaabemowin word *ishspaadina*, meaning “to go uphill,” describing its position atop the escarpment along a route once known as *Gete-Onigamig*, or “old portage.” Still visible in the basement are the fieldstone foundations and archaeological fragments of a house built in 1818 by Dr. William Warren Baldwin. In 1866, James Austin purchased the estate and built the grand Victorian house that stands today. Three generations of the Austin family and their domestic staff lived at Spadina until 1982, when the house was acquired by The Ontario Heritage Foundation and the City of Toronto, from Anna Kathleen Thompson and her son Austin Seton Thompson. It opened as a museum in 1984.

The house we encounter today reflects these layered



histories. Its architecture and ornamentation combine Italianate, Victorian, and Edwardian influences, while its restored ornate interiors capture the interwar era of the 1920s and 1930s as inhabited by the Austin family. Vivid colours and patterns, carved wooden furniture, taxidermy, painted portraits, and family photographs offer glimpses into the personalities of its past inhabitants. Here, objects and architectural spaces become vessels for memory, inviting us to look closely at the lives they represent, and at those left unrecorded.

Ry Van Der Hout: *In Broken Light*

For *In Broken Light*, interdisciplinary artist Ry Van Der Hout sketches five stories inspired by inhabitants past, present, and future. Five chapters unfold through five sculptural interventions across four storeys. Drawing on research and conversations with spiritual leaders, family descendants, historians, guides, and conservators, Van Der Hout traces 400 years of human and non-human presence at Spadina.

Van Der Hout's artworks begin with rupture. Glass and mirror are deliberately shattered into fragments, then painstakingly repaired using Tiffany stained-glass techniques popularised during the Austin era. This physical transformation of material serves as a poignant metaphor for the transformation of the self. Drawing on concepts of queer becoming, the artist treats the breaking of the self not as destruction, but as a necessary opening: fragments are not returned to their original state, but fused into something new.

The process of rupture and repair also invokes the historical lineages of stained glass and the reliquary in Christendom, sacred vessels made to preserve and honour holy remains. Van Der Hout fuses shards of glass into elaborate containers for absence as much as presence, the sculptures becoming contemporary reliquaries for stories remembered and overlooked. In other sculptures, mirrors act as portals, offering paths towards alternate futures.

Central to Van Der Hout's work is the idea that identity, memory, and experience become embedded in objects and space. Suspended and freestanding among the rooms of Spadina, the sculptures are less interventions than temporary inhabitants, making visible the emotional residue of lives lived within it. Their fractured surfaces reveal traces of rupture and repair, where cracks become apertures through which forgotten stories emerge. Moving between deep histories, the present day, and an imagined future, *In Broken Light* traces connections across time, where fragments persist, reflections multiply, and the boundaries between past, present, and future remain open.

Adrien Sun Hall, August 2026

PREQUEL:

The Shattering

[Before Time]



Ry Van Der Hout, *The Shattering*, 2026
Mirror, solder, copper, stainless steel, sound, light, 28" Diameter

Audio in collaboration with Rav Jericho Vincent;
Fabrication support: Lucy Marning and Gemma Esp

How do we live in a broken world? I think so many of us have this sense that what we had was whole or more whole before, and then everything broke. We suddenly entered this historical era where everything we thought we could count on fell apart. I think there's some truth to that. But I am also reminded of the story of Shevirat haKeilim, the breaking of the vessels. This is a myth from the Kabbalists, the Jewish mystical tradition, and it's their story of how the cosmos came to be...

- Rav Jericho Vincent, July 2026

So begins the audio for *The Shattering* in the basement of Spadina, now a preserved archaeological dig site of the Baldwin's former home. Interspersed with sonifications of black holes produced by NASA, Rav Jericho Vincent tells of the Kabbalistic cosmology of creation, in which the Creator withdrew Her primordial energy and spirit into ten vessels to create the universe. Unable to contain its intensity, seven vessels shattered, and shards of spirit flew all over the cosmos. Engaging with the idea of humanity's beginning in brokenness, Van Der Hout gathers these fragments in the form of a spinning disco ball, a recurring symbol of queer utopia and safety that presides over spaces of gathering and desire that transcend place and time. Casting fractured reflections across its surroundings, the sculpture transforms the barren space into a shifting field of light in which no two reflections are the same. Rather than restoring a lost wholeness, *The Shattering* embraces fragmentation as a condition of becoming.

CHAPTER [I]:

[1836-1858]



Ry Van Der Hout, *Orpheus Twice*, 2026, mirror, solder, copper, stainless steel, zinc, 27.5" x 76.75" x 1" each

Fabrication support:
Gemma Esp

Orpheus, Twice

*His shade passed underground; he recognized
the places he had seen before...*

*Here now they walk together side by side,
or he will follow her, or walk ahead—
and Orpheus can look back at his Eurydice,
now safely, without fear of losing her.*

- Ovid, 8 CE

Metamorphoses, Book XI, lines 61-66.

Translated by Allen Mandelbaum, 1993

In *Orpheus, Twice*, Van Der Hout traces the story of Robert and Eliza Baldwin, married first cousins who inhabited the second house built at Spadina, whose fieldstone foundations remain in the basement today. Following Eliza's death in 1836 after complications from a Caesarean section, Robert entered a profound, lifelong grief. Upon his death in 1858, his written instructions were fulfilled: an incision was made posthumously across his abdomen - a duplicate C-section - so that he might enter heaven bearing the same mark as his late wife.

Van Der Hout's sculpture of two nearly identical shattered and soldered mirrors standing side by side examines this desire for bodily resonance in death as an act of ultimate longing. Its creation required two distinct acts of breaking: one mirror shattered by a hammer, and a second painstakingly cut to replicate the first's fractures before being reassembled and soldered together.

The title references Felix González-Torres' 1991 work of the same name, where duplicate, untouched mirrors embody the idea of Felix and his late lover Ross sharing image, time, and consciousness while marking the impossibility of becoming one. Where González-Torres leaves the glass intact, Van Der Hout's act of shattering introduces another layer of doubling, an exercise in the futility of becoming like the other. Read alongside Robert Baldwin's desire to merge with his beloved wife, the artwork destabilises rigid gender binaries, reinforcing the fact that once reassembled, both mirrors become indistinguishable from one another.

CHAPTER [II]: *After* -



breath [1888-1913]

Ry Van Der Hout, *After - breath*, 2026,
Glass, UV Print on Glass, Solder, Steel Tin Coating, Flowers, 71" x 71" x 12"
Fabrication support: Lucy Marning, Luke McCutcheon, Leah Rew, and Stefano Pagani

*I wake up cold, I who
Prospered through dreams of heat
Wake to their residue,
Sweat, and a clinging sheet.*

- Thom Gunn, 1992

Excerpt from *The Man with Night Sweats* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

After - breath centres on Albert (Bertie) Austin, the shatter at the core of the Austin family. Pressured to live in his father Albert's image and take over the family businesses, Bertie was sent to New York as a stockbroker but contracted tuberculosis and returned home. Seeking recovery and leisure with friends abroad, he succumbed to the illness in Cairo in 1913 at the age of twenty-four. On the voyage returning his body to Canada, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle reportedly held a séance over Bertie's remains. His loss cast a lasting shadow over Spadina, where his memory is preserved in portraits throughout the home.

Van Der Hout creates a standing reliquary of shattered and repaired glass to honour the presence of Bertie's absence, confronting the body's inability to withstand expectations beyond its limits. The outline of lungs forms a vessel for fresh-cut flowers from Spadina's gardens, while the glass is printed with colourful images of moths whose shattered lines mimic the delicate patterns of their wings, bringing beauty to a creature mostly seen as a pest. Sited in the Drawing Room, an elaborately decorated space for receiving elite society, *After - breath* exposes a quiet friction. Where the room strives to project status and resist decay, the moths and fractured glass reveal the futility of such preservation, echoing the tragedy of a body breaking under the weight of social and familial expectation.

CHAPTER [III]:

Tiber

[The Present]



Ry Van Der Hout, *Tiber*, 2026, Glass, UV Print on Glass, Solder, Steel, Wood, 16" x 47" x 8"

*Spellbound,
he stares at his own face, motionless
as a statue carved of Parian marble.
He marvels at all things for which he is
himself admired: unwitting, he desires
himself; he praises and is praised; he seeks
and is the sought; he feeds the flame and burns
within its fire.*

- Ovid, 8 CE

Metamorphoses, Book III, lines 418-426.

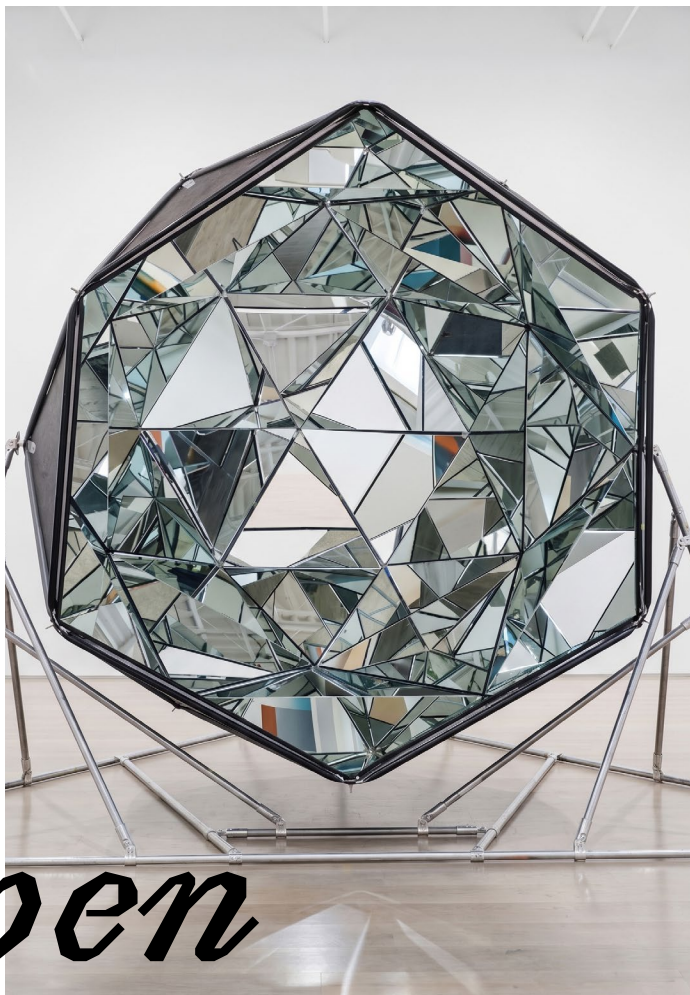
Translated by Allen Mandelbaum, 1993

The passage above captures the moment Narcissus falls in love with his reflection in a clear pool. Prophesied to live “only if he never knows himself,” Narcissus is transfixed by the beauty of his self and cannot leave the pool – a desire and despair that leads to his eventual death and transformation into a flower. In *Tiber*, Van Der Hout rejects this as a cautionary tragedy, instead reframing the myth through the lens of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz into a narrative of self-love, self-knowing, and queer becoming.

Tiber, a Historical Interpreter at Spadina, collected antiques from a young age, acquiring an ornate Victorian bedroom set online at age thirteen. Years later, they made an astonishing discovery: their furniture was the long-lost twin to the set in Mary Austin’s second-floor bedroom that had left Spadina decades prior – a magic instance of objects drawing us to where we belong.

In the stained-glass sculpture *Tiber*, glass printed with photographs of Tiber and the bedroom set is shattered and reassembled using the Tiffany method. Framed by borders inspired by Gothic cathedral windows, Tiber’s doubled image creates an infinite loop of reflection. The glass rests on a Victorian mirror stand found by Van Der Hout outside their studio, another serendipitous encounter with a historic object. Here, metamorphosis into a daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) is no curse, but a return to nature – a radiant affirmation of being seen, known, and reflected.

EPILOCUE:



Open Wing Death [A Future]

Ry Van Der Hout, *Open Wing Death*, 2026,
Moths, Butterflies, Mirror, Coated Steel,
Wood, Silicone, 12' x 9' x 12'

Fabrication support: Lucy Marning, Luke
McCutcheon, and Stefano Pagani

*Once
I found a butterfly's wing on
the sidewalk.
I wanted to keep it but I didn't. I
knew there were things I should never
find beautiful.
Like death.
And girls.*

- Andrea Gibson, *Take Me With You*,
p. 71 (Plume, 2018).

Installed on the unrestored third floor of Spadina, *Open Wing Death* occupies a space defined by vulnerability and labour. Added by Albert Austin in 1913 as a sunlit, airy sanctuary to treat his son Bertie's tuberculosis for a brief period, this floor primarily housed the estate's domestic staff – women whose unrecorded labour kept the grand house from decay. Today, this quiet labour continues through museum conservators, whose preservation work is a constant battle against moths and the decay of organic materials.

Van Der Hout's sculpture takes the form of an ovoid geodesic dome, reminiscent of an early satellite probing the infinite. Its mirrored interior houses over a hundred moths and butterflies with wings fully spread. The work contrasts human preservation with the unseen labour of moth larvae digesting organic matter in the dark. Imagining a speculative future in which moths supersede human conservation efforts, Van Der Hout frames entropy not as destruction, but as nature's own act of care.

Inside, the many mirrors fragment and multiply the moths and butterflies, the viewer, and the surrounding room, refusing a singular perspective. By placing moths and butterflies side by side, the work collapses the boundary between entropy and rebirth, decay and beauty, revealing both creatures as twin agents of the same continuous cycle. Turning toward that which cannot be held, the sculpture acknowledges that our efforts to preserve what is temporary are not rendered meaningless by death, but made profound by it.

Biographies

Ry Van Der Hout (b. 1987, Canada) is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice investigates transformation through fragmentation and reflection, using glass and mirrors as both material and metaphor for queer experience and becoming. They create works that challenge how we see ourselves and our environment, inviting viewers to witness how breaking can reveal new possibilities.

Van Der Hout holds an MFA from Parsons at The New School and a BFA in Photography from Toronto Metropolitan University. Their work has been featured in Time Out NY, NBC News, E-Flux, Chelsea Times, and CBC. Recent solo exhibitions include "Mending Shards" (United Contemporary, 2024) and "To Reflect Everything" (Toronto Sculpture Garden, 2023).

They have created public art for NYC Parks, the City of Toronto, and Nuit Blanche. Van Der Hout is the 2026 recipient of the Barbara Spohr Fellowship at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and has been awarded residencies at La Napoule Art Foundation (France) and Mass MoCA. They have been supported by the Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts, and were awarded the Emerging Artist Award by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Adrien Sun Hall is an independent curator based in Dish with One Spoon Territory (Toronto, Canada). Recent curatorial projects includes Queer Asynchronies at United Contemporary, Toronto (2026), and Works in Practice, CONTACT Photography Festival, Toronto (2023). Adrien is also Director, Exhibitions and Projects at Kent Monkman Studio, where he has overseen the planning and execution of nearly twenty major museum exhibitions since 2018. Adrien received his MFA in Visual Art from the University of Pennsylvania, and his BLA from the University of Guelph.

EXHIBITION DATES

August 26 – October 18, 2026

Wednesday through Sunday, 11am-4pm

Exhibition viewing is offered as a part of regular museum tours only.

Spadina Museum
285 Spadina Road
Toronto, ON
toronto.ca/spadina

ARTIST / CURATOR GUIDED TOURS

Thu, September 17, 6pm

Sat, September 19, 5pm

Sat, October 3, 4pm

Thu, October 15, 6pm

Thank You

Rav Jericho Vincent, Tiber Wilcox,
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