



Z'OTZ* COLLECTIVE
HABITS OF THE SPEAKING SHADOWS

Arts collectives are not particularly unusual in the world of visual art, but the truly shared approach that **Z'otz* Collective** takes is quite unique. The group is known for creating collaborative work using a system of rotation where each artist begins a piece and then passes it to the next artist for continuation. This may result in a totally different or unexpected direction and/or final effect. A considerable aspect to this kind of creation process is *detachment*. This sometimes esoteric concept of 'letting go of one's ego' (or desired result) is not frequently part of the creation process or methodology for most artists, and it lends an intrinsic sense of playfulness to their work.

It is also possible that this willingness to let go is the very thing that has kept the group working together consistently for more than 18 years. (Artists are not always known for their 'egoless' personalities.) Keeping any relationship alive and thriving- artistic or otherwise- often requires this willingness to surrender one's attachment to a pre-conceived outcome. Many collective ventures fall apart due to one strong personality or ego taking over to the detriment of the others and essentially ruining the delicate group dynamic.

Z'otz* Collective has committed to a weekly collaborative creation process in a shared studio space for the better part of two decades now, which is separate and in addition to their own personal artistic practices. The group uses several mediums such as painting, collage, sculpture and site-specific installations, with their primary expression continuing to come from collaborative drawing. The process essentially remains the same for any medium, with all the materials for a particular project or piece placed in the centre of their circle, each artist taking some time with it, making artistic decisions with it and then passing it along to the next artist to do the same.

This collaborative rotation practice allows each artist to affect, and indeed literally *re-shape* the others' work. This can take some adjusting to from an artistic- ego perspective but it is also a wonderful way to banish the inner judge which so often stands in the way of pure creation. It allows the chance to learn from and be supported by the others' choices. It takes pressure off, removes the 'tyranny of the blank canvas' and allows the artists to simply try things, often taking more risks in the collaborative process than in their solo practices.

Z'otz* Collective was formed in 2004 when three artists with Latin American roots (Nahum Flores from Honduras, Erik Jerezano from Mexico and Ilyana Martinez from Mexico and Canada) met in Toronto, decided to try collaborating

in this way and then very quickly got their first exhibition as a collective. It was a touring show that involved artists from all across Canada exhibiting in several different Canadian cities, culminating with the final stop here at the Odd Gallery in Dawson City! This current show then is a reunion, a crystallization of sorts, a nostalgic moment harkening back to the very beginning of their work together.

The name Z'otz comes from the Mayan word for bat and signals the innate storytelling interwoven throughout ancestral Latin American traditions, connecting myth with reality and beings from many mythological realms. Through their exhibition titles, the collective often references the mythical themes or tales within the show, careful however to always allow space for the viewer to make own interpretation, thereby inviting them to be part of the collaborative process.

Although the creation process and work is so shared, each artist does of course bring their own particular style and feeling to the group dynamic and also to the shared creations. For instance Ilyana brings a more minimalist aesthetic with a sense of order while Nahum likes to conjure a sense of chaos and Erik's style perhaps fuses both. The artists acknowledge that over time, people can recognize each of the three artist's particular style, although they continue to work against this inevitability.

There are of course plenty of drawings and projects that each artist might feel quite differently about, one liking, another disliking and often pieces that all three artists feel are 'not quite right' in some way are adored by audiences. One thing they can all agree on though is that if nobody in the group likes a particular creation, it gets filed away in the *roast chicken box*, the name given to their box of rejected pieces!

This current show is called **Habits of the Speaking Shadows** and is presenting mixed media on paper; pastels, graphite, charcoal and collage on the walls; as well as cardboard, found objects and ceramics for their "niches"- small structures adhered to the walls. All works in this show have been created through the same shared collaborative process previously described.

Z'OTZ* COLLECTIVE | *Habits of the Speaking Shadows*

ODD Gallery, Dawson City, Yukon

October 22 – December 3, 2022

Z'otz* Collective is comprised of Nahúm Flores (Honduras), Erik Jerezano (Mexico), and Ilyana Martínez (Mexico/Canada). Since 2004, they have collaborated on drawings, sculptures, and site-specific installations. They have attended residencies in Croatia and Serbia, where they initiated work with ceramic sculpture.

In 2018, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts commissioned Z'otz* to create a series of ceramic sculptures for their permanent collection. The Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art invited the group to participate in a residency to produce work for a solo show this year.

In conjunction with Art Windsor-Essex, they lead a series of experimental drawing workshops with migrant agricultural workers, in Leamington, Ontario in summer 2022. They have received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. The three members were awarded grants for their individual practices from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation in New York City.

Z'otz* Collective has had over 30 solo exhibitions and over 40 group exhibitions in museums, galleries and artist-run centres in Canada, Mexico, USA, Serbia, and China. The Collective is currently working to integrate animation into their projects.

zotzcollective.blogspot.ca

[instagram.com/zotzcollective](https://www.instagram.com/zotzcollective)

image: Z'otz* Collective, Singularity of the Lake, mixed media on paper, 11 x 15 , 2022

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KLONDIKE INSTITUTE OF ART & CULTURE
Box 8000 | Dawson City, Yukon
(867) 993-5005 | www.kiac.ca



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