

Rosamunde Bordo
May 2 — Jul 25, 2026



Western Front
303 E 8th Ave
Vancouver BC V5T 1S1
Canada

Magic Show

Western Front is pleased to present *Magic Show*, a solo exhibition by Vancouver-based artist Rosamunde Bordo. The exhibition brings together new metal-cast, woodworked, glass blown, and sewn objects, alongside video. These forms resemble clues or magical instruments, positioning the figures of the detective and the magician as corresponding frameworks for making meaning through intuition and association, iteration and sleight of hand.

Magic Show builds on Bordo's ongoing project *The Denise File*—an interdisciplinary work of serial detective fiction written through physical space and material form. Since 2018, *The Denise File* has evolved from Bordo's interaction with a collection of found postcards addressed to a woman named Denise. With each chapter, Bordo responds by materializing objects, sourcing found items, and constructing installations. Paradoxically, through this, Denise becomes increasingly real, even as the same process of artistic invention renders her ever more fictive.

In *Magic Show*, ritual and investigation unfold in parallel. The works function as talismans holding material, linguistic, and supernatural resonances, while also acting as evidence of Denise's existence. Together, they constitute the dispersed ingredients for a "potion" within the gallery space, one that corresponds and communes with Denise, conjuring her presence.

Working across craft- and time-based processes, Bordo approaches material practices as a reciprocal action between inner reality and the external environment. By learning to work with her hands in new ways, Bordo uncovers further aspects of the enigmatic Denise, who continues to emerge through tactile forms. Drawing on esoteric knowledge traditions, the works operate as conduits for sympathetic transference—where objects and their traces act upon one another, and upon us, across distance. In doing so, relationships between part and whole, microcosm and macrocosm, come into focus, opening onto speculative encounters that extend beyond empirical perception.

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW: A NOTE ON PROPERTIES

Kiel Torres

Over the course of his career, Czech occultist Franz Bardon (1909–1958) authored a series of instructional texts offering practical, step-by-step guidance for aspiring magicians. His second book, *The Practice of Magical Evocation* (1956), outlines key ritual tools within Hermetic practice for preparing a space to summon spirits. Bardon emphasizes that successful evocation depends on carefully attuning the atmosphere to the spirit being called, identifying three essential devices—the circle, triangle, and mirror—as channels for communication within this constructed environment.¹ In *Magic Show*, the shapes and materials across Rosamunde Bordo’s work activate Bardon’s principles, structuring both the narrative and spatial experience of the installation.

For Bardon, colour is also vital in calibrating the space to the spirit being called. The gallery window is treated with a purple filter that recalls iolite, a stone known as the “Viking’s compass” for its wayfinding properties. This association with travel recalls the postcards at the centre of *The Denise File*, while alluding to the psychic movement between corporeal and spiritual realms, visible and invisible thresholds, and waking and dream states.

While pursuing ritual magic, Bardon also worked as a stage magician under the alias of Frabato. His shows involved mentalist acts and demonstrations of psychometry, the ability to read energetic traces held within objects through touch.² In Bordo’s video *Tarot in D-Minor*, psychometry is performed on a “Denise” nameplate necklace. The necklace not only bears Denise’s name but takes the same cursive form as her signature, lifted from a postcard sent by Denise from La Rochelle, France to Golden Meadow, Louisiana. In the gallery, it reappears adorned with a star-shaped charm set with a peridot gem. Through the transmutation of handwriting into metal, Denise’s forged silver signature becomes both a document and conduit: a material trace that carries the lingering presence of transmission. The necklace is a tether, a devotional loop where identity becomes entangled into a shared fiction.

In the process of developing *Magic Show*, Bordo worked from the guiding proposition that a lock of hair or shred of garment taken from a person are fragments of their reality, and could be evidence in a detective’s case or ingredients for a potion. Within this framework, psychometry becomes both a magical technique and a conceptual framework for Bordo’s artistic process that reenchants everyday life and objects. Balancing precision with an openness to coincidence, affinities, and resonance, Bordo embodies the magician’s pursuit: to attune to the subtle currents that animate things in the world. To send and receive.

Notes

1. Franz Bardon, *The Practice of Magical Evocation: Instructions for Invoking Spirit Beings from the Spheres Surrounding Us*, 2nd ed. (Dieter Rüggeberg: Wuppertal, 1991).
2. Franz Bardon, *Frabato the Magician* (Dieter Rüggeberg: Wuppertal, 1979).

M / A / G / I / C S-P-E-L-L

for Lyn Hejinian

Lara Mimosa Montes

My favorite trick is the one where the magician pulls the rabbit out of a hat. My other favorite trick is the one where the woman is sawn in half, or so it would appear. Is it more impressive to disappear a thing or to make it reappear. Magic = the unknown, or: it's not possible until it is, and in some sense, defies explanation. We're galloping, spellbound. When I describe J. as "a magical person," what I mean is that his very existence, which is as unlikely and improbable as it is factually indisputable, seems to defy what I think I know of the world, so our friendship is my good fortune. When we are together, our togetherness is an unpredictable and highly combustible form of alchemy. To speak of magic then is to refer to a constantly shifting state of spiritual and creative affairs—chemistry—because it contains an element of the unforeseen: *magique-circonstancielle*. If it does not befuddle what you know about the world, or more likely what you think you know, then it's probably not magic. When I passed by a sign in Westgate mall that read: DREAMS BECOME US : CRYSTALS + STUFF I thought I had come upon a secret communication, like the world was actually porous and overflowing with meaning. But no such crystal was to be found. The editors of *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (2006) caution that "Performing rituals alone does not guarantee the success of ritual magic." Elsewhere they espouse, "Mirrors train the inner eye to perceive the unseen." When I asked V. whether or not I should get a rabbit, she replied, "Rabbits aren't pets." The rabbit in question was hypothetical. In his theory of communicating vessels, André Breton speculated that dreams were the link between the visible and the invisible, the actual and the possible. Poems are made of the same metaphysical material as dreams, albeit they are more finely tuned, and/or similarly governed by forces that are incalculable and irreproducible. Also: infinite. I'm not sure if I believe the celebrity magician who insisted that learning how to communicate with snakes is a form of magic. To charm a snake you have to first study its movements and then let the connection between you and the snake work its magic. Reading about how to charm a snake is nothing like learning how to charm a snake. And yet it is this cusp of life and death experience that draws me to writing to the degree that I have sought out support groups for those who have survived "near-death" experiences. Sometimes I feel like a fool and a naif for acting as if the internet is the most contemporary form of magic because of the ways it allows one to conjure almost immediately the object of desire, or, in lieu of that, suggest new objects. Vintage orange angora sweaters, tinsel, and the like; forums on the internet that debate whether or not it is possible via ritualized sex magick to propel oneself into an alternate dimension, and from there, alter the events of the past. But maybe now is not the right time. After a near-death experience, life, which was once so vivid and singular, is threatened by a more foreboding feeling—that the world is not full of wonder or possibility, but aloof, and indifferent. What makes writing magic is that it takes place in the mind of the beholder. You may not realize it, but I am relying on you to pour yourself into this object in order to make meaning, because the poem is a vessel, a receptacle and a cue for a self that is still in the process of becoming. That you cannot help but do this—become—is not tragic. Or maybe it doesn't work quite the same if one

discloses the secret during the act. Fear not: I cannot explain to you what has reappeared if you did not first witness it vanish into thin air. So much for the unseen. Master technique, and yes, you too can be so precise that the brutal reality of what you just did and all that it took to get there can elude even the most watchful eye. When I first encountered my cat on the internet, underneath her photo was some language that suggested she was “shy, but affectionate,” which I understood to be a euphemism for some aspect of her persona that does not go unnoticed. Being that she is a cat, and I am a person, that we have come to understand each other is a kind of magic. Once when I forgot to refill her water dish I observed her trying to communicate with me in a new language similar to charades. Without sorting through all the details, I feel relatively confident in confirming that my cat knows—which is not to say she *understands*—that SHIP has something to do with WATER. In Leonora Carrington’s novel *The Stone Door* (1977) the protagonist describes a dream that features “a creature wearing a shaggy skin” who smells of “dust and cinnamon.” In her waking life, she is determined to summon “this man, animal, vegetable, or demon” and so places several sticks of cinnamon under her pillow. In the tradition of sorcerers and alchemists, she hopes “to hack away the crust of what we have forgotten and rediscover things we knew before we were born.” Let it rip. When writing you’re surrounded by chaos and swirling forms. And from that maybe we divine something true. But when I turn to writing, I feel small and fearful, like the force of the universe is so immense, and if I dare summon it, I will surely be crushed. Clark Coolidge: “What could flash before one must not be left / out in the sun.” Perhaps the world is not duplicitous so much as it is full of mellifluous undertones and meandering birdsong. And mystery begets accident, magic (–chance!). Granted not all communications that pass between the visible and the invisible merit testament; I’m not indifferent to the ways that magic and poetry share in common the ability to set off some inaudible bell whose chime ripples out and into the Real. It can’t all just be tricks and technique; magic mirrors, clafoutis...

Notes

Quotations from Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (Infobase Publishing, 2006), André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (1932), Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door* (St. Martin’s Press, 1977), and Clark Coolidge, *The Crystal Text* (The Figures, 1986).

Biographies

Rosamunde Bordo is an artist based in Vancouver, Canada. Working through the logic of the detective genre, her practice collapses fiction and reality to probe how meaning, subjectivity, and belief are constructed relationally through material encounters. Her research unfolds through free association, analogy, and hands-on experimentation to question the assumed boundaries of the everyday. Her past projects have comprised handmade furniture, gemstones, intercepted letters, unrequited love, astrology, a stranger's to-do list, magical alphabets, bread, wool, carrot tops, life drawing, table salt, tarot, television, small trees, hand-knitted sweaters, and a missing housecoat.

Kiel Torres is a writer, editor, and curator based in Vancouver, Canada. Her work focuses on performance, poetry, correspondence, and criticism. She is assistant curator at Western Front.

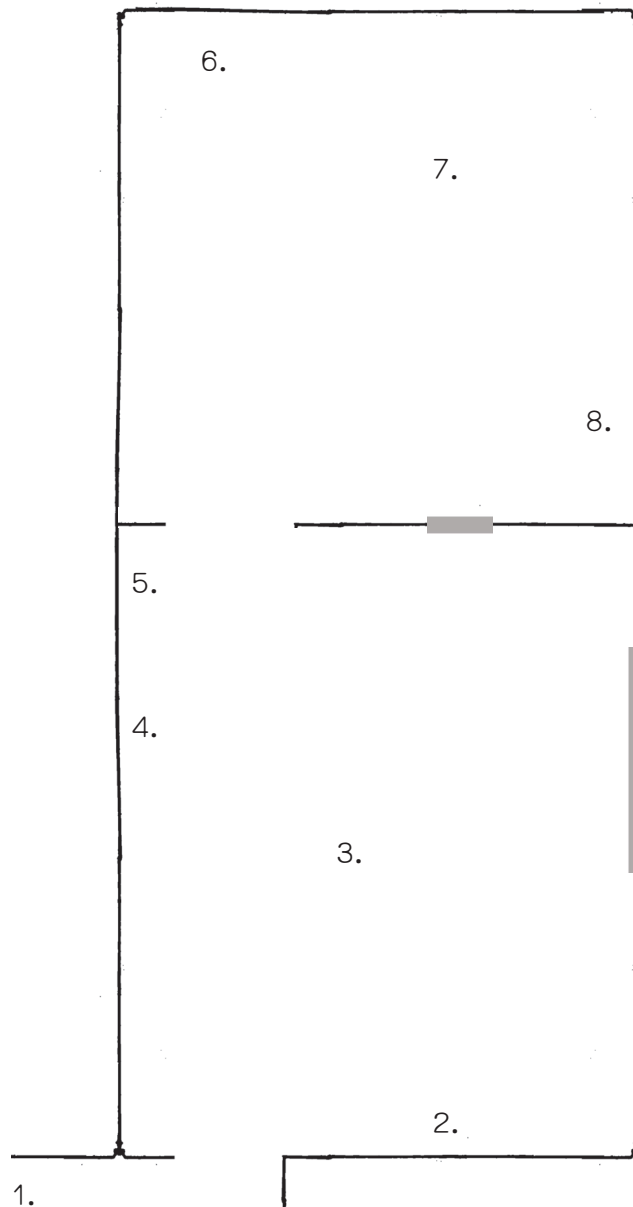
Lara Mimoso Montes is a writer, editor, and teaching artist whose practice and experiences span the fields of alternative publishing and experimental writing. She is most recently the author of *The Time of the Novel* (Wendy's Subway, 2025).

List of Works

All works by Rosamunde Bordo, dimensions variable, and courtesy of the artist unless otherwise specified.

1. *Karmic Cleanse* (2026)
Single channel HD video, borosilicate glass, lock of wig
14 min. 5 sec. loop
2. *Shred of Garment* (2019/2026)
Denise housecoat, cherry wood, shellac
3. *Communicating Vessels* (2026)
Borosilicate glass, uranium, cobalt, vodka, chartreuse, velvet
4. *Sleight of Hand 1* (2026)
Maple wood, basswood, wax, shellac, silver chain, lost-wax cast silver charms
5. *Sleight of Hand 2* (2026)
Maple wood, cherry wood, stain, wax, madder-dyed silk scarf, lapped beach stones
6. *Nameplate Necklace* (2026)
Lost-wax cast silver charms, peridot gem, silver chain
7. *Tarot in D-Minor*, 2026
Single channel video
13 min. 25 sec.
Performer: Tara Travis
Camera: Eva Anandi Brownstein
Sound: Alex Shamku
After Agnès Varda, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)
8. *Burnt Offering* (2022-2026)
Bronze organic burnout casting of salt dough

Floorplan



Project Team

Curator: Kiel Torres
Graphic designer: Line-Gry Hørup
Technicians: Csaba Laszlo, Hannah Rickards, Ben Wilson
Copyeditor: Trey Le
Video post-production: Eva Anandi Brownstein
Fabrication support: Brian Ditchburn, Richard Forbes, Sophie Slater

Magic Show is commissioned by Western Front, Vancouver. Presented with support from the Audain Foundation.

Western Front gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada, the BC Arts Council, the Province of British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Supported by the Province of British Columbia

THE AUDAIN FOUNDATION