

coded image

// coded text

hoda afshar // vernon ah kee

june 3 / july 25, 2026

curated by liz ikiriko

Coded Image/Coded Text

June 3 - July 25, 2026

Hoda Afshar and Vernon Ah Kee

Curated by Liz Ikiriko

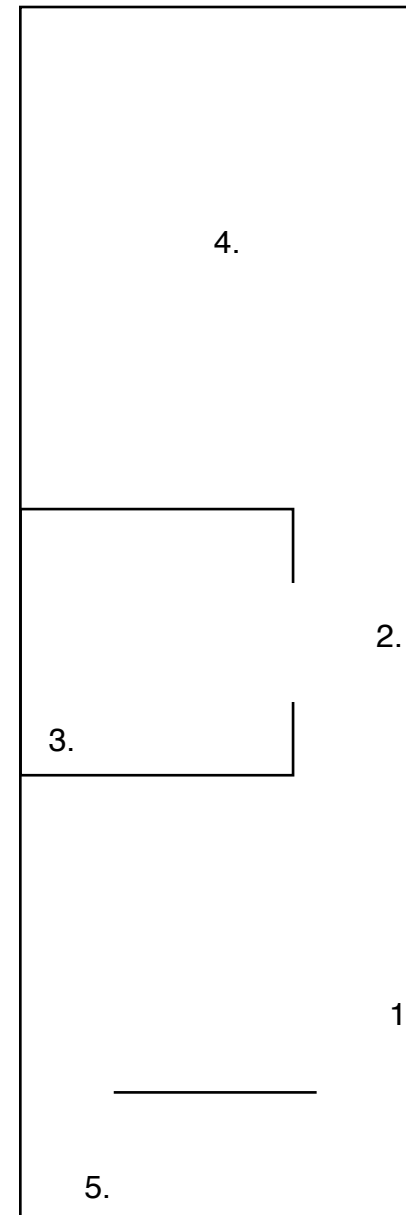
In partnership with the 26th annual imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival and the Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA).

Coded Image/Coded Text centres on a four-channel film - *Code Black/Riot* - developed by Vernon Ah Kee, Hoda Afshar and Behrouz Boochani, originally commissioned for the 2026 Sydney Biennale. Created in collaboration with the advocacy organization Change the Record, the work confronts the crisis of mass incarceration of First Nations youth in Australia. Through collective storytelling, *Code Black/Riot* amplifies the voices and experiences of incarcerated Aboriginal young people while highlighting the power of cross-cultural collaboration. Its presentation on Turtle Island for the first time underscores shared colonial histories affecting Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Aotearoa), encouraging a tri-nation dialogue on justice and sovereignty.

The exhibition also features Ah Kee's striking text-based paintings and Afshar's film *Remain*, which documents the lives of stateless men who stayed on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, after the closure of the immigration detention centre in 2017. Together, these works use photography, film and language to explore image making, collaboration and the enduring importance of narrative storytelling.

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Coded Image/Coded Text is supported by National Show Systems, ShowTex and Smokestack.

gallery map



lobby (centre)

1. Vernon Ah Kee
Code Black, 2026.
27'x 8', acrylic paint and vinyl text.
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

lobby (west)

2. Hoda Afshar
Code Black/Riot (portraits), 2025.
33" x 26", framed colour inkjet prints.
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

small gallery

3. Hoda Afshar
Remain, 2018.
Two-channel digital film, audio, 26mins.
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

main gallery

4. Hoda Afshar, Vernon Ah Kee and Behrouz Boochani
Code Black/Riot, 2025.
Four-channel digital film, audio, 33mins.
Courtesy of the artists and Milani Gallery.

TD Vitrine

5. Ernesto Cabral de Luna
Tirando Polilla, 2026.
36" x 24", emulsion lift on stained glass.
Courtesy of the artist.

artwork descriptions

1. Vernon Ah Kee

***Code Black*, 2026.**

27'x 8' acrylic paint and vinyl text.

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

Vernon Ah Kee's new work, *Code Black* presents his largest and most colourful work to date. Drawing from dialogue in *Code Black/Riot*, Ah Kee's text-based paintings highlight the use of emergency codes (Brown, Yellow, Pink, Olive, Purple, Green, Red, Blue and Black) used in Australian youth detention centres. These bold text panels deceptively refer to disturbing alerts, underscoring the manipulation of text, frequently used within the detention centres.

2. Hoda Afshar

***Code Black/Riot (portraits)*, 2025.**

33" x 26" framed colour inkjet prints.

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

Working collaboratively with Aboriginal youth in Australian detention centres, Afshar invited the youth to choose how they wanted to be represented in her portraits. Obscuring their likeness provided a form of agency over their personhood.

3. Hoda Afshar

***Remain*, 2018.**

Two-channel digital film, audio, 26mins.

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery.

Through *Remain* (2018) Afshar brings to light the Australian immigration detention centre that existed on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea between 2001-2017. Notorious for its human rights violations, and a high death rate for asylum seekers, the detention centre was closed in 2017. Afshar travelled to the island to follow a group of stateless men, including Iranian Kurdish journalist, writer, and human rights defender - Behrouz Boochani who remained on the island following the closure.

4. Hoda Afshar, Vernon Ah Kee and Behrouz Boochani

***Code Black/Riot*, 2025.**

Four-channel digital film, audio, 33mins.

Courtesy of the artists and Milani Gallery.

Visual artists Hoda Afshar and Vernon Ah Kee, along with journalist, writer Behrouz Boochani collaborated, with the support of First Nations advocacy organisation [Change the Record](#) on this four-channel film. Developed through a series of community visits, conversations and time spent with Aboriginal youth, the film addresses the crisis of mass incarceration of First Nations young people in Australia. *Code Black/Riot* is an exemplary project expressing the value of documentary storytelling as a creative and poetic form of advocacy and offering agency for the undervalued.

in the TD vitrine

Ernesto Cabral de Luna

***Tirando Polilla*, 2026.**

32"x24" emulsion lift on soldered glass.

Courtesy of the artist.

Tirando Polilla continues a series of stained-glass-inspired works begun during a Spring residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Through close framing, Cabral de Luna isolates details that might otherwise go unnoticed, allowing new compositions to emerge out of his family's archives. By the acts of cutting, omitting, and rearranging the vernacular photographs by splitting them into fragments across multiple pieces of glass, Cabral de Luna then carefully mends the pieces back together. In their new and brittle state, the resulting objects become fragile containers for memory—simultaneously delicate yet resilient.

"When I pick up a memory, I become hyper-aware of the dust in the air, and am conscious of the fingerprints I leave behind."

artist bios

Hoda Afshar (b. Iran) is a visual artist whose practice explores the complex interplay between politics and aesthetics, knowledge and representation, visibility and violence. Her work interrogates the ways in which image-making can both reinforce and disrupt dominant narratives.

Vernon Ah Kee, a member of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji, and Gugu Yimithirr peoples, whose conceptual text pieces, videos, photographs and drawings form a critique of Australian culture from the perspective of the Aboriginal experience of contemporary life.

TD vitrine | artist bio

Ernesto Cabral de Luna is a Mexican lens-based artist working in Toronto. His work explores the fragmentary nature of memory—individual and collective—by manipulating alternative histories and printing onto found scrap materials through digital and analog experimental processes. Interested in narratives of migration, his practice examines the interplay between memory, dislocation, and displacement, particularly in the context of exile. His work centres around altering perception – providing new ways to experience recognizable imagery in unconventional manners and outside of their intended purpose. Ernesto received his Honours BFA in Photography from OCAD University in 2024.

public programming

imagineNATIVE Art Crawl
Thursday, June 4th, 2026
Gallery TPW
5PM-5:40PM

Join us for the imagineNATIVE Art Crawl at Gallery TPW, as part of the exhibition opening for *Coded Image/Coded Text*.

Every year, imagineNATIVE collaborates with established and local artist-run galleries in downtown Toronto to present national and international exhibitions featuring Indigenous artists who push the boundaries and expectations of what Indigenous storytelling is.

Exhibition Opening
Thursday, June 4th, 2026
Gallery TPW
6PM-9PM

Please join us for the opening of *Coded Image/Coded Text* featuring the works of Australian-based Vernon Ah Kee (Kuku Yalandji/Waanji/Yidinji/Gugu Yimithirr) and Hoda Afshar (Iran).

Image Codes
Panel Discussion with Vernon Ah Kee, Jason Baerg and
Melissa Johns, moderated by Jesse King
Saturday, June 6th, 2026
Gallery TPW
6PM-9PM

Gallery TPW, in partnership with the Indigenous Curatorial Collective (ICCA) hosts *Image Codes*, a panel discussion with artists Vernon Ah Kee, Jason Baerg and Melissa Johns, moderated by Jesse King

Gallery TPW

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 Indigenous
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