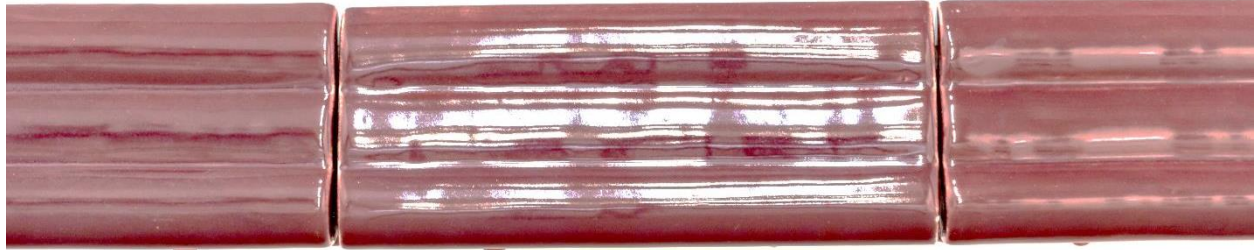


## FrameWork 12/19

Josi Smit on Katie Bethune-Leamen

### **LIVING, THROBBING MISCELLANIES (LOOSELY FRAMED)**



*A harmonious dip into a blue porcelain bathtub surrounded by blue and white checkered tiles*

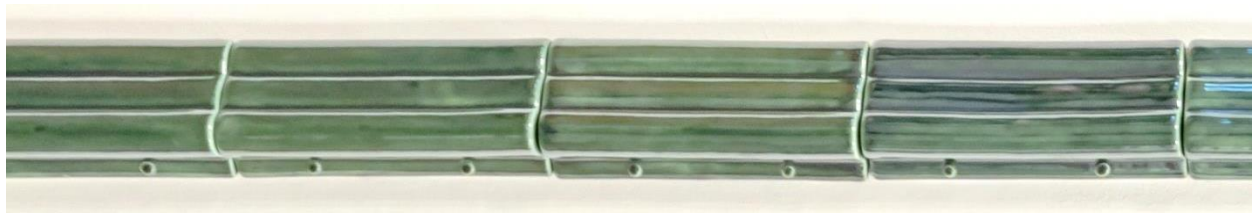
My bathmat either hates me or loves me obsessively. I either hate my bathmat or love it beyond logic. It won't stay clean; I can't keep it clean. It drives me crazy but it matches the tiles so perfectly: a rectangle of softly speckled sky blue and ivory. I refuse to replace the mat with something less lovely and less stainable, so we've entered into a tango. I wash it in scalding hot water and OxiClean. "Isn't it wonderful to be a beautiful object again?" I drape it over the bathtub edge. The mat finds its way back to the floor during baths and showers. It absorbs soapy spills and dribbly drips and shed skin. Within a week the edges begin to yellow. I fixate.

They stare back. The hair in the drain stares back. There are eyes in the sea sponge under the sink. That one's both a tryphobic shudder and a *Goosebumps* episode (*IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SINK! A toothy alien sponge blob terrorizes a brother and sister and German Shepard until they discover the sponge is incapacitated by compliments and love songs*). I was obsessed with the *Goosebumps* TV show as a kid. I even had an audio cassette of "The Haunted Mask II." I remember listening to the story of the boil-ridden spider-eared Halloween mask that merges with a boy's face while I sat on the toilet in my grandparents' cottage (which didn't have full plumbing, so the "toilet" was really just a trap-door shit receptacle that my dad would dump into the outhouse every day. And yes, dump was a stoopid pun).

Another memory from that cottage: watching crushed Crush soda cans lick up blue-green flames at the base of the campfire. I roasted skewered marshmallows above them until they got dragon-skinned and melty.

***Game proposition: only step on the evergreen tiles at Place d'Orléans mall***

I always loved the useless trinket store across from Cinnabon. It was stuffed with the sorts of things you'd gift to a great-grandmother or see in the background of a period film or collecting dust in a diorama. Brass bells. Bronze baby shoes. Porcelain ladies with layer-cake crinolines and gold-tipped parasols. I was delighted to discover on a recent trip to Costco, my first in maybe fifteen years, that I hadn't dreamt up the locked display case of bougie Royal Doulton figurines. I was extra delighted to find them beside stacked value packs of cotton underwear.



***Jade and Shell Pink; the regrettably unchosen colours were too low in supply***

They called the original TTC Yonge line the world's largest bathroom (who's they? A valid question, but you know what they say). Each station was tiled with lustrous Vitrolite in three alternating colours: Primrose, English Egg Shell, and Pearl Grey... otherwise known as Butter Yellow Union, Minty Blue King, Dove White Queen, and then they'd repeat all the way to Eglinton. Overnight janitorial crews washed the walls and scrubbed the floors. The glass-faced tiles gleamed and reflected light, making the underground brighter and softer. I imagine it was like the TIFF Lightbox bathrooms, where the vanity lights bounce off the pristine counters and eyes look extra saturated and sparkly and skin looks extra smooth and rested. Any edges are rounded. So luxurious.

The Vitrolite was fragile and prone to cracking and shattering. It was too difficult to maintain, so ceramic tiles paved over them in the 1980s. Bile Yellow Dundas, Diarrhoea Brown College. Questionable colours to say the least, cynical even, and dirty by default.

A few years ago, while waiting at College Station, I noticed the renovations on the billboard frames uncovered sections of Vitrolite, English Egg Shell caked with decades of soot and grime. Handprints and finger doodles cut through to a vibrant, minty blue.

***The Fernleaf Crescent kitchen with a lily (daisy? orchid?) accented backsplash and fern green trim and fern green chairs***

*Just Heat It 'n' Eat It!* A red spine exclaims from the shelf where all my red-spined books are arranged. It's a book of mid-century food advertisements taken from the pages of *Life* and *Reader's*

*Digest.* The photographs and illustrations are alluring and repulsive. A bowl of Dole Fruit Cocktail glitters like a trove of rubies, citrines, peridots and pearls. A recipe for SPAM “Hawaiian Skillet Supper” captions fleshy slabs resting on pineapple chunks and a rice cloud. The ads’ colours are so rich they’re obscene. A Popsicle drips blood red like crows’ beaks and Tippi Hedren’s wounds. Jell-O salads at the centre of *Good Housekeeping* spreads seem to be the offspring of The Blob with celery and tuna fish and olives suspended ominously in their green slime.

But what a vibrant green! A bouncy jiggly wiggly spectacle! Finger be damned, I want to poke it!

***The front bathroom with the Rococo women kicking their slippers beyond oval frames and the tiles that seemed slightly yellow after the toilet overflowed but maybe that was just psychological***

There’s a certain marble I had when I was a kid that was supremely satisfying. It was the size of my palm, opalescent, pockmarked, and dented. I liked to put it down my pants to feel its cool surface on my skin. The dent curved against my leg like it was embedded. I’d pretend it was part of my body as it warmed.

