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## How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Visual Arts

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## Abstract

This dossier, a companion to my MFA thesis exhibition, communicates research on climate anxiety and contemporary art's engagement with the Climate Emergency. It gathers contemporary art and fiction, graphic novels, environmental philosophy, Indigenous literature and theory, and feminist theory. The Comprehensive Artist Statement articulates how I process and respond to my own climate anxiety through my contemporary painting practice. A material commitment is elucidated, and a collaborative painting strategy outlined, both in the service of better connecting my tangible studio output with my research to form a cohesive whole. These experiments influenced the images and art materials that I worked with, to bring to life the series of paintings shown in the Practice Documentation chapter. The final chapter is an experimental exhibition review of *BioCurious*, curated by Jennifer Matotek and Julie Rae Tucker. Autoethnographic sections are interspersed throughout these chapters to document my reflections on living through climate change.

**Keywords:** climate anxiety, Climate Emergency, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, materialism, discontinuous collaboration, painting, plein air, relationships

## Lay Summary

This dossier tells the story of how my climate anxiety inspired me to return to university after a significant break. During my time working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree in Visual Arts, I researched current climate issues and possible solutions as addressed in contemporary art and fiction, graphic novels, environmental philosophy, Indigenous literature and theory, and feminist theory. These studies influenced the images and art materials that I worked with, to bring to life the series of paintings shown in the Practice Documentation chapter. The last chapter is an exhibition review that experiments with different writing styles to analyze an art exhibition titled *BioCurious*. Throughout all chapters, I have recorded my thoughts and emotions related to the experience of living through climate change.

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## Content Warning

One artwork and one graphic novel, both referenced in this writing, contain mentions of sexual assault. These are alluded to, but not described in detail on pages 18, 56, and 57.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Lay Summary .....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Content Warning.....	vii
Table of Contents .....	viii
Introductions .....	1
1: How did I get here?.....	1
2: Structure .....	4
Comprehensive Artist Statement.....	8
Paintings are alive .....	8
Mount Pleasant Cemetery.....	11
Materialism.....	14
Artwork in dialogue.....	17
Looking at the world.....	20
Future/Imagination .....	23
Conclusion .....	25
Practice Documentation.....	26
Completed paintings .....	27
Site-specific documentation .....	39
Process .....	41
Exhibition Review: “Curious about <i>BioCurious</i> ” .....	42
Bibliography .....	59
Supplemental Reading.....	62
Curriculum Vitae.....	64



## Introductions

### 1: How did I get here?

“Or maybe we do look—really look—but then, inevitably, we seem to forget. Remember and then forget again. Climate change is like that; it’s hard to keep in your head for very long. We engage in this odd form of on-again-off-again ecological amnesia for perfectly rational reasons. We deny because we fear that letting in the full reality of this crisis will change everything. And we are right.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2019, as part of an informal two-person book club that began while we were undergraduate students in Concordia’s Studio Arts program, a close friend encouraged me to read Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (2014). In the introduction, Klein cites many reports. One, by the World Bank in 2012, warned Earth was on a trajectory toward four degrees Celsius of warming, a level that would reach or surpass humanity’s capacity for adaptation.<sup>2</sup> Two others predicted six degrees Celsius.<sup>3</sup> I believe most people are now familiar with the consequences these four to six degrees imply: heatwaves, floods, droughts, crop failures, fires, and out-of-control

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<sup>1</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, Penguin Random House, 2014, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 14-15.

carbon feedback loops that will disrupt any semblance of stable human existence. Klein's major argument throughout the book is that humanity's obsession with deregulated capitalism is the biggest hurdle to slowing climate change. My friend who recommended it assured me that the later chapters are hopeful, but I did not get that far. Later in the introduction, Klein quotes the International Energy Agency (IEA)'s then-Chief Economist, now-Executive Director, Dr. Fatih Birol, who in 2011 said, "The door to reach two degrees is about to close. In 2017 it will be closed forever."<sup>4</sup> Reading this in 2019, two years after the door had 'closed forever', and not witnessing anything remotely close to the radical social change for which Klein had argued so passionately in 2014, I was terrified. I repeated, from memory, the statistics of the first three chapters of the book to every person with whom I interacted that week (many people, as I was working in hospitality at the time) and the only outcome I perceived was that I felt more scared and miserable, and so did they.

So, I stopped reading the book.

In the summer of 2021, I managed an artisanal French bakery in Montreal, and I biked to work while the sun rose. My route took me over a bridge and down a long slope, from my neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce into Saint-Henri, and along the Lachine canal to Griffintown. Biking over the bridge in the early morning allowed me to see the sun rise over the historically industrial neighbourhoods. For a period of several weeks the rising sun was cherry red, the only visible evidence of wildfires raging in Northern Quebec and Ontario.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

I enjoyed my full-time job and studio practice in Montreal, and it afforded me comfort and financial stability. But I sensed a growing unease and felt increasingly disconnected from what was happening elsewhere in the world. A younger coworker's passion for environmental action reminded me of how I felt at her age: disappointed in the lack of adequate adaptation by previous generations and trapped by the consequences of their poor planning. I vividly remember looking out of the bakery window and imagining a possible future with people jogging by in leggings like everything was normal while the neighbourhood was on fire. I thought that local public response would increase proportionally to the threat of the Climate Emergency and I felt that to expect others to adapt their lifestyles, without transforming my own, was hypocritical.

The first painting that I made during my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) studies is a ten-foot-tall self-portrait titled *Fuck :(* (image 1). It is built by hand(s) (mine and Andrew Silk's) out of new pine wood, new heavy weave cotton canvas, and new paint. It features my full body, clothed in summer-appropriate activewear shorts and a Metric band t-shirt (for their 2022 *Doomscroller* tour), sitting on the last two steps of an interior staircase, by a window through which a haloed red-orange sun in a lavender-grey sky can be seen. My pose references Rodin's most famous sculpture, *The Thinker*, with my head leaning into the palm of my left hand, supported by my elbow resting on my bent knee. In my right hand, (temporarily) abandoned, weighs Klein's book. Where the edges of my body should meet space, is a glowing outline that varies in colour from pale yellow to bright safety orange and bubble-gum pink. The painting has three focal points, (arguably secondary to the looming red sun), organized in a triangle, the peak of which is my gaze. My gaze is piercing and unfocused,

acknowledging the presence of the viewer and engaging them in a personal moment of emotional defeat.

## 2: Structure

I entered my MFA with the intention of collaborating with local Indigenous artists to foster conversations on the topic of settler responsibilities in the context of the evolving Climate Emergency. I would use my painting practice as a means to listen, process, and respond. This idea appealed to me because of my admiration for Indigenous environmental activism. At the time, I did not understand the specific demands that it would make of my imagined collaborators, nor was I aware of how much learning awaited me. I asked Indigenous artists to take time away from their own artistic practices to help me, a settler artist new to the area, complete my project. Continuing as intended would have meant requesting that collaborators educate me, instead of taking responsibility for my own learning, which I know now was a misguided expectation. After contacting several Indigenous artists, I realized I should instead focus my project on my experience of climate change, including in my research the already publicly available work of Indigenous scholars and artists, such as those cited throughout this writing.

This dossier contextualizes my painting practice and research leading up to my thesis exhibition, *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?*, opening in the artLAB Gallery of Western University's John Labatt Visual Arts Centre on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Herein, I combine autoethnography with academic analysis to share my climate story with you. In *The Activist Humanist: Form and*

*Method in the Climate Crisis* (2023), Caroline Levine argues that the time has arrived for the aesthetic humanities (i.e. visual arts) to move from open-ended interrogations of existing systems into the study and creation of models to catalyze ‘collective continuance.’<sup>5, 6</sup> Therefore, it is my intention to learn from such interrogations and to provide, through this dossier and my thesis exhibition, written and material examples of how I might wield that learning to reduce environmental harm in pursuit of collective continuance.

Within the Comprehensive Artist Statement, I articulate research and formal techniques developed during my studies; influential conversations had during studio visits are included, as well, as I could not have arrived at this iteration of my project alone. To understand the utility of painting as a means to facilitate active engagement with the Climate Emergency, my research has included contemporary art and fiction, graphic novels, environmental philosophy, and Indigenous and feminist theory. Referencing these sources, I explain how my painting practice has evolved in tandem with my understanding of the privilege my positionality affords me, during the current stage of the Climate Emergency, and the responsibility I feel to leverage this privilege. Posthumanist theory has challenged me to reconsider dichotomies, such as: human/nonhuman, inanimate/animate, figure/ground, and self/other. Visually exploring this shift in thinking required redefining my role as an artist as one that

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<sup>5</sup> Caroline Levine, *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis*, Princeton University Press, 2023, 6-13.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte coined ‘collective continuance’ in “Food Sovereignty, Justice, and Indigenous Peoples: An Essay on Settler Colonialism and Collective Continuance.” (2018) He defines collective continuance as “a society’s overall adaptive capacity to maintain its members’ cultural integrity, health, economic vitality, and political order into the future and avoid having its members experience preventable harms.” Caroline Levine uses this term throughout *The Activist Humanist* as a replacement for the ubiquitous and annoyingly unspecific ‘sustainability.’

imposes rigid authority over paint and canvas and, instead, collaborate with my materials. The resulting decision to eliminate newly purchased materials from my studio practice provoked creative endeavors related to processes of salvaging. Acquiring materials from other artists in the Visual Arts department, for example, led me to what I have termed *discontinuous collaborations*, in which I repurpose discarded projects. All of this has culminated in a body of work that spans materials and forms, held together by my love of painting and my trust that it will lead me toward the next right action.

The second chapter, Practice Documentation, unfolds the visual components of my thesis work, providing documentation of my studio practice throughout the last two years. It includes in-progress and site-specific documentation, as well as professional photographs of my thesis exhibition.

Finally, I have included an exhibition review of *BioCurious*, curated by Jennifer Matotek and Julie Rae Tucker, held at Art Windsor Essex from March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, to September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

*BioCurious* gathered works by 19 Indigenous and Canadian artists exploring the intersections of science, art, and materiality. Maggie Groat's challenge to think differently with my materials<sup>7</sup> inspired me to research the work of other artists with ecologically considerate material commitments, and I was fortunate that the timing of *BioCurious* allowed me to study this kind of artwork in person. The exhibition review continues the autoethnography that began in the "How did I get here?" section, while examining diverse ways that contemporary artists work in, and with, ecologies. The

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<sup>7</sup> See "Materialism" section.

unconventional form plays with interiority and exteriority in a way that reflects my research concerns and complements formal experiments within my paintings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Whereas in the Comprehensive Artist Statement, italics are used for emphasis, I employ them differently in the Exhibition Review. The italicized sections sometimes function as commentary, sometimes as internal monologue, and sometimes as secondary narrative. The unitalicized sections form a conventional exhibition review. This experimentation with form was inspired by Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016) and Sheri Osden Nault's written thesis, *Kin* (2017).

## Comprehensive Artist Statement

### Paintings are alive

For a painter there is certainly tremendous pleasure in working out a thought in paint. It is a complete process in terms of brain function: an intellectual activity joining memory, verbal knowledge, and retinal information, is given visible existence through a physical act. But the value of painting cannot rest on any individual artist's private pleasure. Painting is a communicative process in which information flows through the eye from one brain, one consciousness, to another, as telemetric data speeds from satellite to computer, without slowing for verbal communication. Incidents of paint linger in the working mind of the painter as continuous thrills, as possibilities, like words you may soon use in a sentence, and—in a manner that seems to exist outside of spoken language—as beacons of hope to any human being for whom visuality is the site of questions and answers about existence.<sup>9</sup>

I make paintings. Or, paintings *make themselves known* through my work. In the above excerpt from her groundbreaking feminist essay on painting, “Figure/Ground,” Mira Schor does not specify the actual process by which paintings translate information so quickly, so I will: paintings are (non-verbal) storytellers. They are alive—whatever energy is in them calls to the painter to be translated into material form, a form whose energy then seeks to infuse the viewer like a candle warms a room. The energy does not lessen through the process of infusion, it gathers, and both the painting and viewer are bi-directionally infused with story and meaning. Contemporary figurative painter, Corri-Lynn Tetz, describes her process thus, “within the first few layers of painting is kind of where the energy is created, and there’s a [moment] or interaction that happens, and then the whole painting is me trying to

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<sup>9</sup> Mira Schor, “Figure/Ground,” in *Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture*, Duke University Press, 1997, 155.



maintain that and not to lose that.”<sup>10</sup> I interpret this description as the process of a painting asserting its agency, that this happens early, and that it is the painter’s job to fortify its storytelling faculties. My creative process is often like what Tetz describes. However, certain paintings assert their agency even before I touch brush to surface, appearing in my mind as completed works that persistently ask to be materialized.

Timothy Morton’s concept of ‘fuzzy sets’ was instructional in the development of the paintings gathered for my MFA thesis exhibition. In *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016), Morton describes the human being as “an ecosystem of nonhumans” that may be thought of as “weirdly *less* than the sum of [its] parts, contra the usual rather theistic holism where the whole is always greater than its parts.”<sup>11</sup> Paintings are made up of materials that may be thought of as ‘nonpaintings’: wood, cotton, glue, pigment, oil, dust, emotions, ideas, stories, observations, images, etc., all united by the variably conspicuous artist’s hand to maintain a tangible form for a period of time.

Paintings are contradictory: although they function on one level as static images, they may pictorially and conceptually be filled with movement and change. Thinking about paintings as living bodies means conceiving of their matter and concepts as in constant development. For example, in

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<sup>10</sup> Corri-Lynn Tetz and Brian Alfred, “Episode 394 / Corri-Lynn Tetz,” November 2, 2023, in *Sound & Vision: Conversations with Artists and Musicians*, podcast, 1:27:25, <https://www.soundandvisionpodcast.com/blog/2023/11/2/corri-lynn-tetz>.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=4427983>, 71.

their drying process oil paintings form skins and, throughout their lives, they are susceptible to light and humidity levels. They have lifetimes, which the discipline of art conservation aims to extend as far into the future as possible. During their lives paintings may be known by few or many viewers, and each resulting interpretation creates a new relationship with the power to transform a painting's meaning over time.

Many, since Modernism, have argued that 'painting is dead,' so often that the person reading this line is probably rolling their eyes. Me too. Asserting the death of painting is as absurd to me as saying 'fiction writing is dead' or 'guitar is dead.' As long as *beings* spend their time mixing particles with fluids and moving them around, resulting in images, painting will be alive and evolving. Schor says, of painting's supposed death: "But may not the daughters (and for daughters read all Others in this system), so long denied, now freely roam the 'cemetery' (museum), mining the ore of the past, forging different narratives (narratives of difference) on the anvil of painting?"<sup>12</sup> Schor's question gestures to what I see to be the current 'movement' in painting, which could be called Pluralism, but, that I like to think of as *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*.<sup>13</sup> Schor's question does away with the tradition of striving to identify a linear chronology of categorizations and, instead, empowers contemporary painters to 'take what they like and leave the rest' in the conventional painting canon.

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<sup>12</sup> Schor, "Figure/Ground," 153.

<sup>13</sup> The title of a 2022 A24 film directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert and starring Michelle Yeoh, which explores the topics of love, family conflict, and interdimensional multiverses.

Paintings are not immortal, but they are likely to outlive me, possibly by centuries if they are well cared-for. My paintings might operate as my own multitude of headstones. They might be the last trace of ‘me’ to exist. Mortality, my own death, and the deaths of everyone and everything I love, are the heart of my climate anxiety.

## Mount Pleasant Cemetery

Outside has always been a refuge for me. Any place that allows me to feel as though I have left behind the city and its demands (although, in recent years, these places have often been within city limits) is restorative. Visiting these same places regularly, throughout the seasons, puts me in touch with the present moment in a way that is difficult to access when surrounded by asphalt and people. Finding my ‘spots’ and visiting them also gives me a sense of continuity. There, I will probably see the same plants, or their relatives, emerge around the same time yearly. The trees will grow taller as I age. In the spring, the robins will return. These trees, plants, and critters are part of my community. They belong, I belong. There is something safe and healing about these cycles—they are not stagnant; they are alive, they die, are reborn, and persist.

Virginia Woolf describes, in *To The Lighthouse*:

She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself [...] It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994, 46.

Being with plants and animals brings me a deep sense of peace and respect, gives me joy, and (sometimes) makes me laugh. Though Woolf poetically communicates the way I feel, I would have urged her to choose a different word than ‘inanimate’ because trees and flowers are inarguably alive and, many would argue, streams are, too. Further, I believe that the feeling she describes is a *rational*, rather than irrational, tenderness: the recognition that humans have much in common with trees, streams, and flowers, however strongly Enlightenment era thinking pushed us to believe otherwise.

I access Woolf’s sense of *being oneself* in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Though I currently enjoy access to a backyard, and have befriended the many beings therein, the cemetery provides a satisfying walk. It has long curving roads that branch off and meet up with each other in expansive loops. The headstones are in varied states of decay, demonstrating the multiple generations whose bodies have been (and continue to be) interred there. It is home to a collection of more than 200 species of trees, many of which are rare in Canada, including cucumber magnolias, copper beeches, and catalpa trees. My human neighbours spend time there visiting the burial sites of their loved ones, walking their dogs, learning to ride bikes, and using it as a shortcut between Riverside and Oxford streets. On my walks I have come across bees, butterflies, moths, bats, squirrels, skunks, raccoons, and deer. For a short time, before I arrived in London, the cemetery even had a beekeeper.

For a period, spending time in the cemetery became my praxis. Karen Barad writes, “Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world.”<sup>15</sup> Thinking about the agency of matter, in the context of the cemetery, provided me concrete symbols to which I could attach my understanding of Barad’s theory. To think about death not as a cessation of existence but, instead, as transformation into a new configuration of matter is comforting, if one can believe in the continued integrity of these cycles. Without making any claims about where or what the matter and energy that animates our bodies goes or does when we die, I consider the laws of conservation of energy and mass. Whatever we are made of does not *ever* cease to exist, it lives on—in this universe, in an untraceable (for now) series of configurations. In the cemetery, despite practices which attempt to prolong or delay the inevitable, it is reasonable to assume that the people interred there have, over time, become the grass, the dandelions, the trees, and the critters that pollinate and/or consume them.

To further my ‘becoming with’<sup>16</sup> the cemetery, I began a series of small watercolour and gouache paintings *en plein air*,<sup>17</sup> depicting scenes and stories I witnessed there. Decaying headstones drew my attention as icons of ‘ongoing reconfigurings’ because they, more than any other elements of the cemetery, are built to maintain their original forms for centuries. Despite this, many of the stones in Mount Pleasant Cemetery are being eroded by rain and colonized by lichen. To me, these scenes are hopeful because they are tiny remediation stories, and they show the power of water, wind, and plant

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<sup>15</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter,” in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 135.

<sup>16</sup> See first paragraph of “Looking at the world”.

<sup>17</sup> A tradition of landscape painting performed outside, from direct observation.

life to break down old structures and generate new fertile soil. Tree stumps stood out as motifs signifying human dependence on plant life, and the parallel lives and deaths of humans and trees. Spending time painting the cemetery was also personally therapeutic, working outside of my studio and breathing fresh air scented with fragrant terpenes while soaking up sunlight increased my sense of wellbeing. Working on my project outdoors focused my attention on the life all around me, which was a welcome contrast to my reading on climate anxiety.

## Materialism

Maggie Groat is an interdisciplinary artist who works with salvaged and repurposed materials. At the beginning of 2023, she gave a public artist talk for, and conducted studio visits in, Western's Visual Arts Department. My visit with her was challenging and inspiring. She recognized that my paintings were (at that time) made from new materials and likened this to Edward Burtynsky's practice. Burtynsky is a prolific Canadian photographer who takes monumental photos of environmental hazards globally. His practice necessitates the regular use of helicopters,<sup>18</sup> and, to Groat, it seemed hypocritical that he would use tools that cause environmental destruction to make work about environmental destruction. She asked me whether I needed to "enact my vision at any cost" or if I could find a way to be more flexible with my materials. I remember her saying that she thought she

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<sup>18</sup> Raffi Khatchadourian, "The Long View," *The New Yorker*, December 19, 2016, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A474720897/AONE?u=lond95336&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=414a2044>.

would not know what to do with a blank canvas—that the stories of her materials create the framework of her practice.

This studio visit, alongside visits with Professor Sheri Osden Nault, led to a material shift in my studio practice. Professor Nault introduced me to Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s collection of essays, *Material Feminisms*, as well as other theorists focused on the material and ecological. Prior to these visits, I had predominantly considered the materiality of my paintings in the context of a future archive to which they might belong if human activity does not end within the next century, though I perceived irony and felt guilt when purchasing ten-foot-long sections of new wood to build what could be seen as a shrine to my climate anxiety. Working with archival materials and processes to make the long-term conservation and continued existence of my paintings possible had been a hopeful gesture, catalyzing optimism about a future in which there would still be people to care for my paintings.

I considered working with atypical or found materials to reduce the extractivism present in my studio practice. However, many existing paintings made this way prioritize the novel qualities of the materials over what I seek from my paintings. Robert Rauschenberg’s *Monogram* (1955-59) exemplifies what came to mind when I considered the possibilities of working with found materials. The list of materials conveys the artwork well: “oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber shoe heel, and tennis ball on canvas with oil and rubber tire on Angora goat on

wood platform mounted on four casters.”<sup>19</sup> My intention for my paintings is that they be personal, with as few unrelated mediations or barriers for viewers as possible.<sup>20</sup> Visibly found objects are ‘too much themselves’ already, communicating their own stories too explicitly to fit into my personal reckoning with the current ecological moment.

In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009), Jane Bennett asks, “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?”<sup>21</sup> and I have re-strategized my formula for constructing paintings accordingly. My paintings come into being because I take seriously the stakes of our present moment and my responsibility, as a human and as an artist, to adapt to it. So, for the foreseeable future, I am committed to working with no newly purchased materials in my studio practice unless strictly necessary. Developing a personal ethic of production or, rather, transformation, is a form of resistance against deregulated capitalism and it has enriched my paintings with new depths of meaning.

As a result of this commitment, my most recent paintings are constructed more unconventionally, while I continue to explore my attachment to their material persistence by

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, “Monogram,” <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/artwork/monogram>.

<sup>20</sup> Throughout this writing, I have found it difficult to find the right language to describe what I will call the ‘relational dynamics’ between myself and my paintings. For example, writing “My intention for my paintings is that they be personal [...],” does not feel quite right, because it places too much emphasis on myself as a ‘director’. I make decisions while painting, but those decisions tend to be in response to what I believe the painting, itself, wants to be. Woolf’s quotation in the previous section, in reference to trees, streams, and flowers, draws near to describing the way I perceive my relationship to my paintings: “[one] felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one;[...]”. (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 46.) My paintings contain so much of me: my ideas, my emotions, the trace of my hand, and my history, that I cannot see them as fully separate from myself.

<sup>21</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 9.



following archival best practices to avoid premature degeneration, to varying degrees. That I am situated in a university art department has made this process easier than it might be otherwise; the learning process generates so much waste, it is simple to access materials to repurpose. Many of my small paintings are built using single pieces of leftover wooden molding, divided into four sections and glued together in squares or rectangles, covered with canvas and gesso remaining from my pre-commitment studio purchases. The different styles of molding result in paintings of varying profiles. In the woodshop's scrap bin, I found an abundance of gorgeous sections of birch panel, which became the surfaces for my watercolour and gouache plein air paintings, created in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Over time, the paintings that emerge from my practice will evolve materially (and so, formally), as determined by the supplies and tools I access by salvaging, inheriting, purchasing second-hand, or trading.

## Artwork in dialogue

My research on Climate Emergency has included a diversity of sources, from the work of theorists and academics to graphic novels and novellas. One such source, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* (2022), an award-winning graphic novel memoir by Canadian cartoonist, Kate Beaton, impacted my practice formally. Through Beaton's work, I came to wonder how my paintings might operate as a page would in a graphic novel, strengthening the conceptual and narrative connections within and between individual paintings. This led me to begin to create *diptychs* (pairs of paintings) and has carried into the subtle but robust material dialogues taking place within my work. *Ducks* is

particularly striking to me because of Beaton's experimentation with form. While working in the Alberta oil sands, the author survived at least two sexual assaults and a constant buzz of sexual harassment. She depicts her experience of the resulting psychological consequences with pages that interrupt the otherwise ongoing narrative. These pages stand in for dissociative moments and flashbacks. Some are simply printed in full black or grey while others depict detailed drawings of beautiful scenery from her hometown that she is missing. One such page is a simplified drawing of a zoomed-in night sky, scribbled white dots on a black background. The pacing of these interjected pages resists allowing the reader to advance too quickly and invites them to empathize with the author by creating room to reflect on the violence of the plot.

Like sexual abuse, many people find climate change to be a difficult topic to consider deeply for extended periods. It is an overwhelming subject. Finding ways to ask viewers to consider climate change without causing them to emotionally shut down is the most significant challenge of my Master's research project. I have aimed to do so by creating work that is personal and by following Beaton's example of creating room for reflection within the artwork.

*No matter is created or destroyed / only transformed* (image 5), is a strong example of how I have adapted Beaton's method within my work. It is an oil painting diptych representing a scene from Mount Pleasant Cemetery. In the early summer of 2023, I cultivated the habit of jogging there. On one of these jogs, I spotted some newer, highly polished tombstones. They were so smooth they acted as mirrors, reflecting the abundance of vibrant dandelions around them. This pairing so clearly signified the constant cycles of life and death in this place that I felt compelled to paint it. This scene is

the lefthand panel of the diptych. The second, righthand panel is an abstract expressionist rendering of the light of early spring. It is primarily painted using a mix of two transparent pigments (Indian Yellow and Phthalocyanine Green) with an unmatched luminosity, and a hue that drastically shifts in appearance according to lighting. In artificial light, the painting's hue recalls spring sunlight shining through newly opened deciduous leaves. In natural light, the warmer tones of the Indian Yellow are activated, and the pigment mix appears to be a golden olive green. The painting is bordered by a frame applied in Gamblin's Torrit Grey. Torrit Grey is a colour that changes with every production, because it is produced using excess pigments harvested annually from all the air filters in the manufacturing location. The batch featured in this painting is an opaque cool grey that enhances the luminosity of the transparent pigments found elsewhere in the composition. Overall, this panel is intended to allow a pause for mental rest. It is alluring, vibrant, possibly utopic.

The narrative impulse to create interwoven conversations between paintings, as inspired by *Ducks*, took a material and formal turn in my most recent paintings. Upon completing her MFA degree at Western University, artist Rylee Rumble left several paintings in my care, to repurpose or transform their materials—to give them another life. *What is hidden, remains* (image 3), for example, is painted directly over one of her existing paintings. These paintings are now palimpsests, or *discontinuous collaborations*, where Rumble's original paintings are never fully obliterated. Pre-existing textures and values penetrate the layers of my paintings from underneath, disrupting or enriching their imagery, as determined by whether I choose to work with or against them. This interplay makes visible the ways in which materials assert their agency during the creative process. Through these collaborative

paintings, I seek material answers to an urgent existential problem: What can I do with what I am given?

Discontinuous collaborations broach concerns of authorship: one might choose to see the paintings whose becoming I facilitate as *mine*, but the materials I am working with are not neutral, and they do not arrive at my studio without pre-existing stories. Working with repurposed canvases makes material history explicit; recognizing that Rumble's paintings carry their own stories, prior to my own, draws attention to the fact that the other materials (wood, canvas, gesso, paint) do, too. Crediting Rumble as a collaborator is one way to draw attention to this. How and when to credit other artists will be an ongoing negotiation in my practice. This time, it is simple, because Rumble and I have remained in contact; I obtained her permission to transform these paintings in the way I have, and we will share credit when they are exhibited.

## Looking at the world

I have come to paint the way that I do because the transmutational properties of doing so allow me to hope that current practices that cause ecological harm might eventually be shifted through intentional action. Painting allows me to transmute the emotions provoked by *looking*—rage, hopelessness, despair, heartbreak, and fear—into purpose. It is a practice that encourages me to keep looking at the world instead of away from it. Looking is painful, and pain is a signal that something needs tending to. When witnessing terrific injustice, I try to let those feelings fill me up, paint to process, and, later, in a calmer state, take optimistic action. Donna Haraway instructs, “If we

appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming with—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.”<sup>22</sup> At the same time that I am making the paintings, the paintings are making me; it is a process of mutual becoming.

Painting continues to be how I understand and process my interconnectedness to the world without distancing myself through dissociation or analysis, which have historically been my most effective coping mechanisms. But contemporary activists argue that allowing oneself to *embody* difficult feelings provoked by injustice is a way to be closer to our own humanity and therefore understand what is at stake in violent and oppressive situations.<sup>23</sup> Desensitization is a protective mechanism for people who benefit from violence (colonizers, capitalists) because it allows them to maintain a status quo that favours their material prosperity. Emotions are pre-analysis, therefore less distanced from the thing provoking them. The physical act of painting allows me to ‘be with’ the difficult emotions I feel in response to the current state of the world, without potentially harming myself or others.

In the context of the Climate Emergency, Britt Wray argues that, “The worst outcomes are not inevitable, and much can still be healed—but as emotions get bulldozed by world events and scientific predictions, the ability to create a more just and healthy world depends largely on how these difficult feelings are tended to.”<sup>24</sup> In a lecture given at Western University on February 29th, 2024, Wray

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<sup>22</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 244.

<sup>23</sup> Britt Wray, *Generation Dread: Finding Purpose in an Age of Climate Anxiety*, (Penguin Random House Canada, 2022), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Britt Wray, *Generation Dread*, 2.

referred to climate anxiety as a ‘crucible,’ through which one passes and is thereby changed. Framing my experiences with climate anxiety in this way allows me to imagine that instead of passing through the crucible, I have, up until now, been walking back and forth within it. I have benefited from climate privilege—the position of being able to choose how deeply I engage with climate change, and of having the option to *look away*. Liz Toohey-Wiese’s *I’m sorry you’re scared but I want you to feel it* (2023), a sign featuring the title’s text painted in a font designed to include native and invasive flowers, comes to mind.<sup>25</sup> How can my personal process of coming to terms with what I once feared was the ‘end of the world’ provoke change in myself and my viewers? According to Barad’s *onto-epistem-ology*, “Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering.”<sup>26</sup> To me, Toohey-Wiese’s painting communicates the power of fear to motivate humans to adapt. Avoiding negative emotions (looking away) allows people to perpetuate the lifestyles to which they are accustomed, but not indefinitely. The research I have done in the last two years has introduced me to communities of people invested in creating collective continuance and these introductions have emboldened and empowered me to continue nurturing my activism.<sup>27</sup> Painting is part of this, because art influences culture, and culture might influence policy. But, if I have

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<sup>25</sup> Liz Toohey-Wiese, “I’m sorry you’re scared but I want you to feel it,” <https://liztoohey-wiese.com/im-sorry-youre-scared-but-i-want-you-to-feel-it>.

<sup>26</sup> Barad, “Posthumanist Peformativity,” 144.

<sup>27</sup> The specific groups to which I refer are The Coves Collective and the Climate Crisis Coalition, and there are so many more people engaged in ongoing ecological action in London, Ontario.

learned anything from Naomi Klein and others that have been engaged in climate activism longer than I, it is that there is an urgent need for as many people as possible to join collective action for both climate and social justice. So, my work as an artist must continue expanding beyond the studio.

## Future/Imagination

Raising awareness of ecological fragility is not the mission of my paintings. That work has been and is still being done. People are, and have been, aware, regardless of attempts (mine and theirs) made to dodge or avoid that awareness. If my paintings have a mission, it is to help me become the kind of person I need to be to reckon with the ongoingness of my world's troubles in a good way, and to invite others to do the same.

How does imagination function within ecological movements? Imagined *futures* affect the material choices people make *now*. The 'apocalyptic imaginary' pictures our worst fears and then tells us that to resist them is pointless, because a trajectory has already been set.<sup>28</sup> This belief can affect every choice, from the types of relationships one enacts, to the level of financial risk one is willing to withstand. Apocalypse trajectories have been over explored. Like evil, apocalypse is banal. Capitalism is boring. Individualist doomsday prepping is all the same.<sup>29</sup> I would rather put my energy to wondering:

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Arnold, "Urban Decay Photography and Film: Fetishism and the Apocalyptic Imagination," in *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 41, Issue 2, 2015, 326–339, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144214563499>.

<sup>29</sup> In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway references Hannah Arendt's analysis of the Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann, and specifically his thoughtlessness. She writes, "here was a human being unable to make present to himself what was absent, what was not himself, what the world in its sheer notone-selfness is and what claims-to-be inhere in not-oneself. Here was someone who could not be a wayfarer, could not entangle, could not track the lines of living and dying, could not cultivate response-ability, could not make present to itself what it is doing, could not live in consequences or with consequence, could not compost." (p. 36) Although Arendt's analysis has recently been brought

What does a just, healthy future look like? How do we get there together? What will we need to traverse the ugly middle between here and there? How can we be good to each other in the meantime?

Through my paintings, I blend reason and intuition to access a version of myself resilient enough to imagine and enact these more curious, multifaceted possibilities for the future. Building the needed skills begins with learning to think together, differently. In *Dark Ecology*, Timothy Morton argues for ‘a logic of future coexistence,’ to disrupt traditional dualities and dichotomies and perceive reality more truly. Binaries, hierarchies, dichotomies, and dualities are ‘easy,’ *surface-level* models of understanding.<sup>30</sup> Contemporary life demands more rigor, and more play, a belief there is more depth and other stories to be found. *Dark Ecology* is a well-crafted blend of academic writing and poetry that practices this new logic. In my thesis exhibition, I have tried to do the same—through paintings that ‘say something,’ emanate, and lure.

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into question (<https://theconversation.com/is-it-time-to-reconsider-the-idea-of-the-banality-of-evil-216737>), one might still think of Eichmann’s obsession with an inherited ideology and lack of will to consider other ways of life as (more) morally valid to be a type of ‘thoughtlessness,’ and, certainly, a lack of curiosity. In *Dark Ecology: A Logic for Future Coexistence* (2016), Timothy Morton criticizes “Easy Think” models and their inability to extend deeper than the surface of a substance or concept. These are the frameworks I am considering when qualifying the Apocalypse as banal.

When I write of apocalypse trajectories, I mean those explored by countless Hollywood films on the topic, not the apocalypses that people all over the world are already experiencing. These plots often focus on individualist ideologies and hero narratives, and technological or scientific solutions instead of sociopolitical ones.

<sup>30</sup>Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 31-32, 71-77.



## Conclusion

Although Earth reached two degrees Celsius of global warming for the first time in recorded history at the end of last year (2023), the news is not all bad.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Fatih Birol, whom I referenced in the introduction, is now the executive director of the International Energy Agency and he wrote an article last year, ahead of COP28 (the 28<sup>th</sup> annual United Nations meeting on climate). It states, “The door to 1.5 °C is closing rapidly, but COP28 can keep it open.”<sup>32</sup> This, from the same person that Naomi Klein quoted as having said that the door to two degrees would ‘close forever’ in 2017. This tells me two things: Dr. Birol is consistent with his imagery, and there is still hope. My hope is that my climate story will inspire you, and others, to think (uneasily) about your position and its implied responsibilities in the years to come because the ways we choose to enact relationships now have the potential to shape the future.

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<sup>31</sup> Seth Borenstein, “UN report says world is racing to well past warming limit as carbon emissions rise instead of plunge,” *CTV News*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/un-report-says-world-is-racing-to-well-past-warming-limit-as-carbon-emissions-rise-instead-of-plunge-1.6652377>.

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Fatih Birol, “What does COP28 need to do to keep 1.5 °C within reach? These are the IEA's five criteria for success,” *International Energy Agency*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/what-does-cop28-need-to-do-to-keep-1-5-c-within-reach-these-are-the-iea-s-five-criteria-for-success>.

## Practice Documentation

This chapter is divided into three sections: documentation of completed paintings, site-specific documentation of selected paintings, and process documentation. Together, the sections provide insight into the varying methodologies I used to produce my paintings during the period of my MFA.

Completed paintings



**Image 1** *Fuck :(*, Gamblin Reclaimed Earth Colors and conventional oil paint on canvas stretched on new wood, 84 by 120 inches, 2022.



**Image 2 / *the dance of concealing and revealing***, discontinuous collaboration with Rylee Rumble, oil on repurposed painting, 48 by 60 inches, 2023. (See image 22)



**Image 3** *What is hidden, remains*, discontinuous collaboration with Rylee Rumble, oil on repurposed painting, 48 by 60 inches, 2023.



**Image 4** *Shimmering, flickering, sparkling, quivering /*, discontinuous collaboration with Rylee Rumble, oil on repurposed painting, 48 by 60 inches, 2023. (See image 22)



**Image 5** *No matter is created or destroyed / only transformed (diptych)*, oil on canvas stretched on new wood, 36 by 48 inches each, 2023.



**Image 6** *I know feelings can kill*, Gamblin Reclaimed Earth Colors and conventional oil paint on canvas stretched on new wood, 20 by 20 inches, 2023.



**Image 7** *We inherited landfills*, oil on new canvas stretched on new wood, 24 by 24 inches, 2023.



**Image 8** *Left behind*, discontinuous collaboration with myself, oil on repurposed painting, 16 by 16 inches, 2012-2023.





**Image 9** *The end of an imagined future*, watercolour and gouache on repurposed birch panel, 9 by 13 inches, 2023.



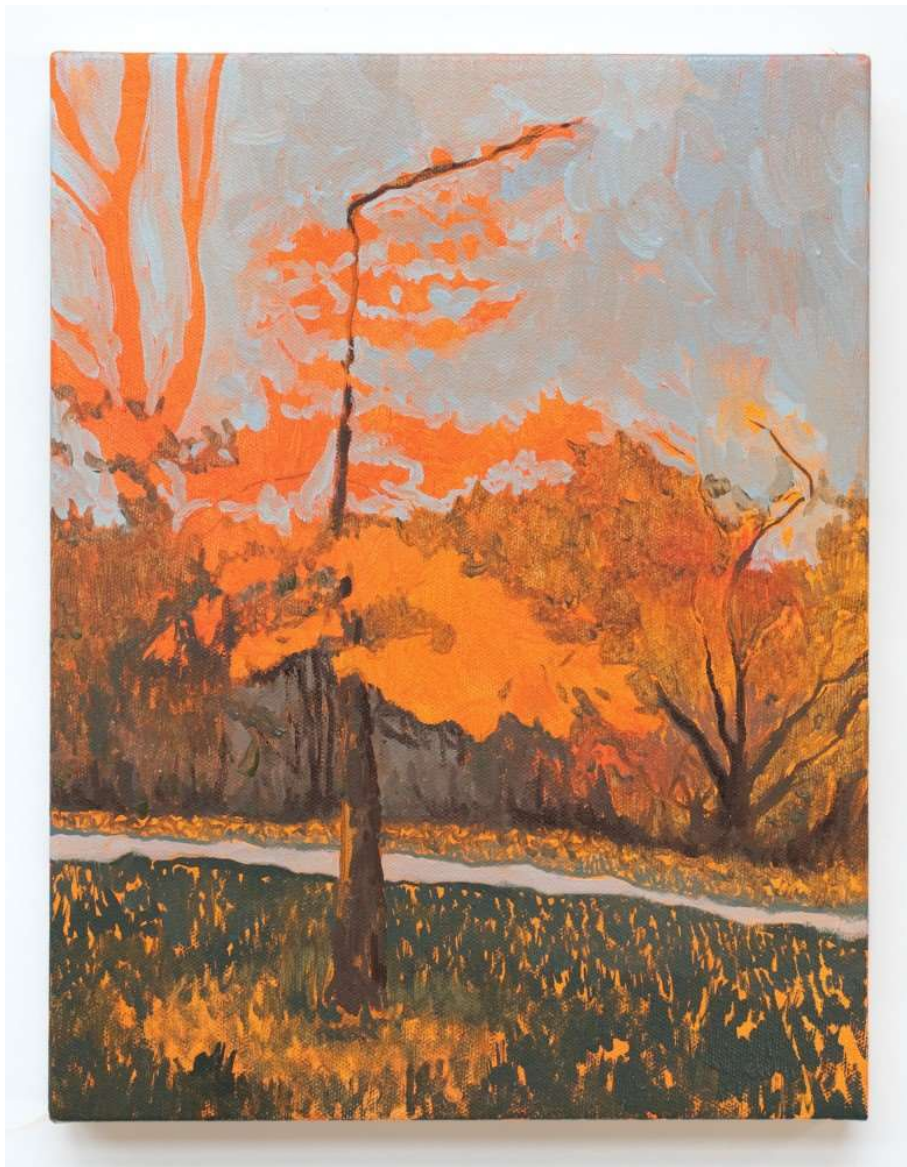
**Image 10** *The space between us*, watercolour and gouache on repurposed birch panel, 8 by 10 inches, 2023.



**Image 11** *Forgotten vessels*, watercolour and gouache on repurposed birch panel, 4 by 12 inches, 2023.



**Image 12** *Parallel lives*, watercolour and gouache on repurposed birch panel, 4 by 12 inches, 2023.



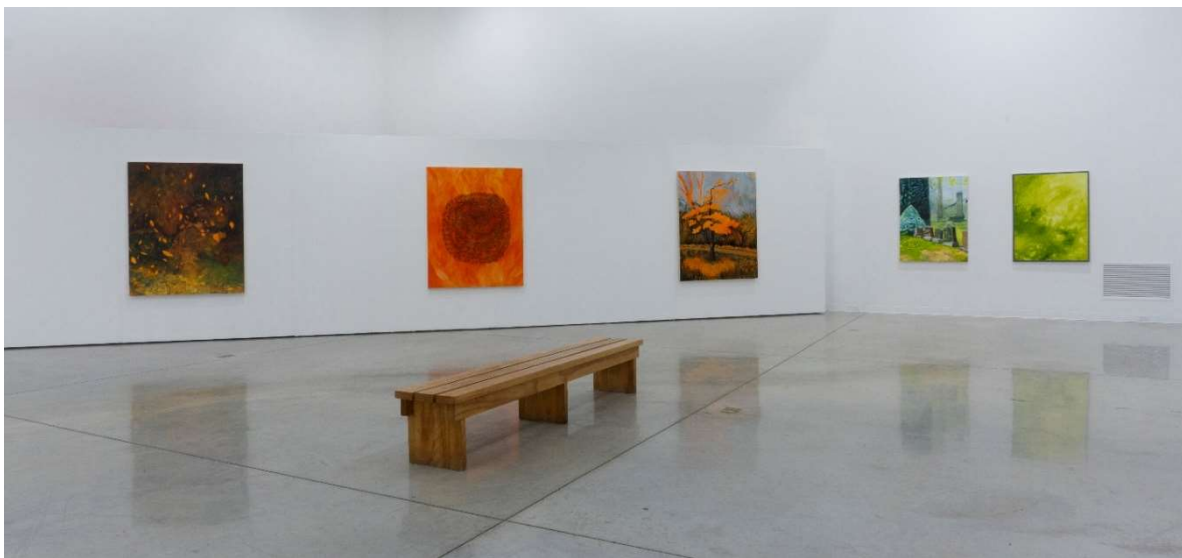
**Image 13** *Little friend*, oil on repurposed canvas stretched on repurposed molding, 9 by 12 inches, 2023.



**Image 14** *Don't look too closely*, oil on canvas stretched on repurposed molding, 16 by 19 inches, 2024.



**Image 15** *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?* Installation view, artLAB Gallery, 2024.



**Image 16** *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?* Installation view, artLAB Gallery, 2024.



**Image 17** *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?* Installation view, artLAB Gallery, 2024.



**Image 18** *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?* Installation view, artLAB Gallery, 2024.

## Site-specific documentation

The following images show the above plein air paintings where they were produced, in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, London. This site-specific documentation shows the paintings in the environments that inspired their compositions, my plein air painting set-up, and the effects of fluctuating seasonal light. The paintings function differently in the context of a gallery than they do in their original setting, and I believe the inclusion of these images provides context that might enrich the reader's experience of the works. The paintings once removed and recontextualized on white walls, act as a humble collection of scenes that drew my attention for their capacity to speak to my climate anxiety. When seen in the location of their production, these microcosms fit together, making up the larger whole of the cemetery. Seen as such, one might more easily imagine themselves in my position there.



**Image 19 Site-specific documentation, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, 2023.**



**Image 20 Site-specific documentation, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, 2023.**

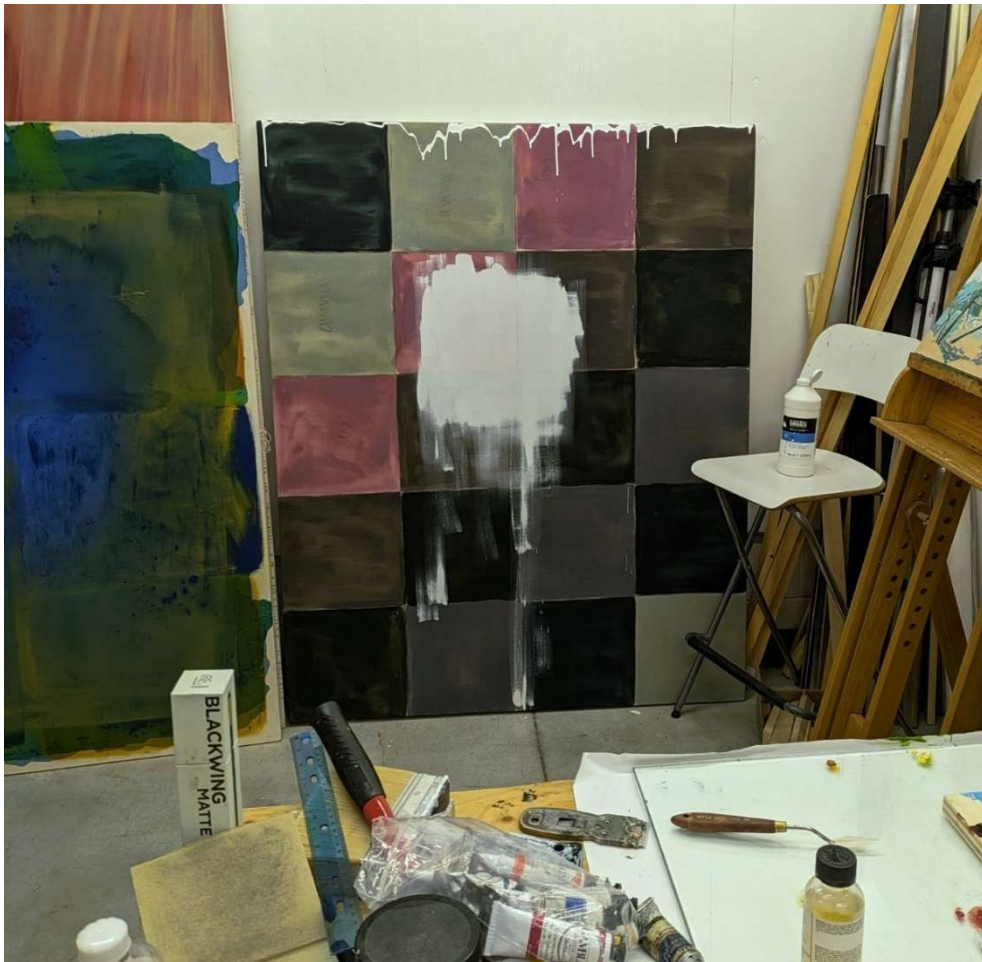


**Image 21 Site-specific documentation, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, 2023.**



## Process

This photograph, taken in my studio, shows the beginning stages of transforming two of Rylee Rumble's paintings. To achieve the glowing, transparent orange underpaintings, I applied three coats of acrylic gesso over the existing imagery. Her paintings are thus obscured, their textures and values only penetrating the layers of my paintings in select areas.



**Image 22 Process documentation**, transforming Rylee Rumble's paintings into *Shimmering, flickering, sparkling, quivering / the dance of concealing and revealing*, 2023. (See images 4 and 2)

## Exhibition Review: “Curious about *BioCurious*”

I took a train to my hometown, where I was met by my mother in her wine-coloured twenty-year-old Toyota Echo. The car is charmingly small and efficient on gas. It has roll-down windows and the air conditioning works about as well as a child’s paper fan. She lent it to me for a month, earlier in the summer, to practice driving. I am thirty-two years old, and my mother craves independent movement for me. *No movement is independent. Every cell and microorganism in my body cooperates to move me.* One night, I drove to pick up a friend to bring her to my house and cook her dinner. It was only a seven-minute drive, but she was on edge the whole way because of the loose driftwood resting on the dashboard. I forgot to mention that my mother’s car is filled with objects. Along with the driftwood, and a compass that is super-glued to the dashboard and reflects exactly in the driver’s focal point on the windshield, there are dried branches of cedar behind the steering wheel and feathers, bones, and rocks in every other compartment of the vehicle. The obsolete ashtray is filled with safety pins and coins for parking. This is the car that conveyed us to Art Windsor Essex (AWE) to visit *BioCurious*.

On July 5th, 2023, the third consecutive hottest day on global record, the Weather Network told me that it was 31 degrees Celsius plus humidity all across Southwestern Ontario. By the time we reached the gallery in Windsor, my mother and I were both damp with sweat. It was too hot to have an appetite, so I had not eaten anything. Walking into the gallery was first a shock and then a relief. Sweet, frigid air conditioning raised goosebumps on my skin and my mother donned a sweater.

Upon entering the first room of the exhibition, my eyes were immediately drawn to the intricately fabricated *Bower* (2021) by interdisciplinary artist, Jennifer Wanner. Although the piece is located in the entrance to the second room, its place on the wall is perfectly framed by the black outline of a doorway, drawing the viewer in like moss on a cave wall and beckoning to look closer. *Bower* is a large, lacy collage of meticulously cut out botanical photographs arranged in a multi-referential shape on a white paper background. From a distance, its silhouette could be an extravagant bouquet and its shape also calls to mind a pair of lungs or an arch. Upon closer inspection, all of the plant stems lead to a single root cluster in the centre of the arch, suggesting many different beings spliced together into one.

I am an oil painter, not a botanist, but I think of myself as being more familiar with local flora than the average person. *My mother did her Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science at the University of Waterloo.* I cannot immediately identify many of the species in the assembly. The flowers are a wild explosion of colour: sunny yellow, pastel periwinkle, deep magenta, and waxy sage green. AWE's audio guide elucidates that *Bower* "features [151] at-risk plant species that grow on Canadian soil, but also live beyond Canadian borders." The plant whose roots are centered is Bolander's Quillwort, an aquatic plant native to Wanner's home province of Alberta, and several places in the United States. In Canada, Bolander's Quillwort has dwindled to a single grouping in one lake. A 2006 report by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada states that the population is one event (leakage of toxic material or extreme weather system) away from obliteration because the

plant is very sensitive to water quality and temperature.<sup>33</sup> *Hottest day on global record*. The collage's bower-like structure is born of a radically imagined adaptation that would allow the plant to recruit other plant species to form a shelter for itself. The playful naivety of its fantasy bower highlights the fragility of life and prods at a tender spot, my own vulnerable hope for a livable world.

*I split paths with my mother, explaining to her that in my heart, I would prefer to experience the exhibition in conversation with her but that my brain is conscious of the University's unease with collaborative work—how to know to whom which ideas belong? My mother planted the seeds of all my thoughts, should I trace back the record of growth to find exactly where my individual cognitive processes branched off from hers? For that matter, should I keep a record of every conversation I have had with any other being, in case my thoughts are really theirs? None of these ideas are mine alone and it is a colonial fallacy to believe they exist individually.*

Before entering the second room fully, I turn around to explore the first. I want to respect the intended flow of the exhibition, so I next pay a visit to Amanda White's *A Breathing Room* (2015-2023). It is an igloo-like structure built of polygons that glows from within with a cool light. The asymmetrical entrance is very small, requiring adults to crouch or otherwise lower themselves to cross

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<sup>33</sup> Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), *COSEWIC assessment and update status report on the Bolander's quillwort *Isoetes bolanderi* in Canada*, Ottawa, 2006, vi + 21 pp, [https://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual\\_sara/files/cosewic/sr\\_bolanders\\_quillwort\\_e.pdf](https://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/cosewic/sr_bolanders_quillwort_e.pdf), 12.

the threshold. Inside, roughly 300 plants dwell in plastic nursery pots and household glass jars on white shelves. The artist designed the piece to reflect the approximate number of plants needed to recycle the carbon dioxide present in the exhalations of one human back into oxygen. At least one third of the plants seem to be struggling to thrive. Several look to be long-dead and whether this is an intended consequence of the installation is unclear. Seeing their crispy leaves makes me want to water them with the still half-filled reusable tumbler I am carrying, but my gallery manners prevent me from interfering. Thinking about the calculations involved in the production of the room, I wonder how slim the margins are; if the room were sealed, how long would I be able to breathe with the surviving plants?

Situated on the polished concrete floor, placed as an obstacle en route to the alternate entrance to the second exhibition room, Kara Springer's *Do I Have to Build You a Fucking Pyramid?* (2021) demands my attention. Although the title and placement of the installation are confrontational, the objects refuse to disclose themselves at first glance. They are four triangular wooden armatures, larger than human size but miniscule if compared to the pyramids in Egypt. The armatures have supporting beams of varying sizes, giving them the appearance of sinking into the concrete floor like it is made of quicksand. They are sinking at variable speeds—one is almost upright, while another is 'submerged' by more than half its volume. Attached to the armatures are enigmatic photographs, all of the same unrecognizable subject. My first guess is that they are macro photographs of objects dipped in tar sands oil because the texture is black but reflective with slickness and there is a noticeable peaked grid-like pattern. Another possibility is poplar buds, sticky with dark resin. This seems plausible as the

armatures themselves are constructed from poplar wood—an unconventional and therefore seemingly intentional material choice. In an artist talk, Springer reveals that the objects were created in the early days of the pandemic, during a fellowship in Houston, Texas.<sup>34</sup> The experience was, in the artist’s own words, “very much funded by oil money.”<sup>35</sup>

*It is August 12th at 4:45 pm and I am writing the first draft of this review. In the time that has passed since I visited the exhibition in July, my beloved has had a serious accident while on vacation in Spain. He has been hospitalized there for three weeks. I have not been sleeping well and have been spending most of my days talking to him on the phone. His morning starts at 6:00 am CEST, which is midnight (my usual bedtime) here in London, Ontario. Between calls from him, our travel insurance company, and our friends and family, I have consistently answered phone calls at all hours of the day and night, so every time the phone rings, my body experiences a surge of adrenaline. Today, to counteract this, I changed the default ringtone for incoming phone calls and maintained it for Whatsapp calls to be able to differentiate his calls from everyone else’s. My phone rings, a gentle classical melody bereft of panic—a number from Montreal, my city of residence for the previous twelve years. Usually, I do not answer phone calls from strange numbers, but our travel insurance office is in Montreal, so I do now. “Hi, I would like to speak to Jessica Joyce,” says Harpreet from the David Suzuki Foundation. “Did you*

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<sup>34</sup> Kara Springer and Joanne Lee, “Studio Coordinator of Ceramics Joanne Lee and Visiting Artist Kara Springer,” Snowmass, Colorado: Anderson Ranch Arts Center, streamed live on July 2, 2023, YouTube video, 1:02:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEkfhdhfmwA>.

<sup>35</sup> Springer, “Studio Coordinator,” 43:34.

*know that in the first three months of 2022, the top 20 oil and gas companies made a combined total of more than 100 billion US dollars?” I could not have imagined this synchronicity if I tried. Except, yes, I could, because the Climate Emergency is everywhere, an unavoidable part of daily life now. Is it really that strange to receive this call while writing a paragraph on extractivism? Although I decline to increase my monthly donation, Harpreet offers to read me more facts from the organization’s website, in case that is helpful for my writing. They say, “I wish I knew more so I could help you.”*

In the artist talk, Springer goes on to say this about her pyramids:

In the earlier days of my practice, I was always thinking of this idea of the possibility of ‘How do we mend these broken structures that we live inside of? What are the ways that we might agitate a system? What are the ways that we might heal a broken system?’ and more recently, I feel myself moving towards the idea of ‘What are the possibilities of extricating ourselves from these broken systems? What would it look like to build new structures?’ And for me, this was kind of a point of transition, and again during the [Covid-19] pandemic, it felt like there was all this possibility of transformation and of working in other ways and of working collectively in other ways.<sup>36</sup>

The photographs on the pyramids depict oil that the artist spread on plates and left to thicken under the sun. I have never seen pure black oil in person, so the thick consistency (like that of oil paint) was disorienting. For those not working in the fuel industry, confusion is a predictable reaction to depictions of crude oil. Heather Davis, in her essay “Iridescent Surfaces: Reflections on Art and Oil” (2021), cites climatologist, Paul N. Edwards, in writing, “The attempt to visualize oil is one strategy in

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<sup>36</sup> Springer, “Studio Coordinator,” 44:34-45:18.

responding to the ubiquity and invisibility of oil. The repetition of various forms of infrastructure helps us to see what is often deliberately situated far from the gaze of people, especially wealthy and white people. Part of what constitutes infrastructures, their definitional quality, is that they permeate the world in a manner in which they are rendered invisible.”<sup>37</sup> Later in the essay, Davis wonders about the unintended harms of making beautiful art about a destructive industry. As an artist, I wonder about the ethical dilemma of accepting a fellowship funded by oil money. Springer is brave to ‘bite the hand that feeds’ and her pyramids highlight a historical and ongoing paradox for artists: how may we use our work to morally critique systems upon which we rely to fund our livelihoods?

Springer’s discussion of her pyramids and the systems they interrogate inspire me to examine the differences between structures, systems, and relationships. Is a relationship a system or a structure? Are systems and structures built of relationships? Is it a matter of scale? According to Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “[t]he act of extraction removes

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<sup>37</sup> Heather Davis, “Iridescent Surfaces: Reflections on Art and Oil,” Essay, in *Oil: Beauty and Horror in the Petrol Age*, Wolfsburg, Germany: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2021, 343.



all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning.”<sup>38, 39</sup> In an interview with the Canadian author and journalist, Naomi Klein, about the Idle No More movement in 2013, she offers a clear definition of extraction.

Extracting is taking. Actually, extracting is stealing—it is taking without consent, without thought, care or even knowledge of the impacts that extraction has on the other living things in that environment. That’s always been a part of colonialism and conquest. Colonialism has always extracted the [I]ndigenous—extraction of [I]ndigenous knowledge, [I]ndigenous women, [I]ndigenous [P]eoples [...] The alternative is deep reciprocity. It’s respect, it’s relationship, it’s responsibility, and it’s local. If you’re forced to stay in your 50-mile radius, then you very much are going to experience the impacts of extractivist behavior.<sup>40</sup>

To begin to understand reciprocity, one might consult Danielle Taschereau Mamers’s concise summary: “Reciprocity is how the lives of different beings (including plants, animals, and humans)

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<sup>38</sup> As a settler scholar, I felt it was important to refer to Greg Younging’s publishing style guide, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* (2018) for guidance on my editing process. Younging recommends that Indigenous Peoples always be asked for permission before writing about them is done, and that they be given final editing rights. Following this instruction would mean reaching out to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson to ask whether she consents to my referencing her words in this review. After speaking about the practicalities of doing this with other settler scholars, I decided that requesting that she (an incredibly prolific writer whom I imagine already has many demands on her time) perform labour to read and review my writing would not be the most respectful path forward. That being said, I feel it is important to note that I have included her thoughts here without permission. I feel a significant discomfort leaving it this way—especially because her words that I am quoting directly reference settler-colonial extractive practices. I am using Simpson’s intellectual property, without consent, to make my own arguments that will become part of a document used to defend my MFA degree. The same principle applies later in this document, where I have written about Christi Belcourt. For the reader’s information, I will continue to question my (and academia’s) colonial sense of entitlement to knowledge by next reading Dylan Robinson’s *Hungry Listening* (2020).

<sup>39</sup> Naomi Klein, “Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More’s Leanne Simpson,” *Yes! Magazine*, March 6, 2013, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2013/03/06/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

make one another possible. Reciprocal relationships are unique to place and time.”<sup>41</sup> In the plant world, reciprocity does not seem to require altruism or even consideration. Amanda White’s *A Breathing Room* is a microcosm of the relationships that people share with plants every day. Simply by existing, plants nurture human life.

*I care for you by caring for me. I care for me by caring for you. .*

*What am I trying to say?*

*On a daily basis, if I think about my position as being in relationship with everything with which I interact, instead of as part of a system or a structure, is it easier to think in terms of reciprocity? My apartment is a physical structure. I am conditioned to see the apartment I rent as an object that exists to shelter me. If I choose instead to think of my apartment as a being and our connection as a relationship, would I treat it differently? Would I be more likely to think about its needs and tend to them? By tending to the needs of the apartment, would I be increasing my own quality of life? The first need that comes to mind is treatment of the mildew problem in the bathroom. There is no fan so all of the humidity from the shower builds up within the room and creates conditions for it to thrive. Protecting the structure means eradicating the organisms that constitute the mildew. What are the ethics of harming one type of being to protect another? If I care for the structure by eradicating the mildew, the air quality in the*

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<sup>41</sup> Danielle Taschereau Mammers, “Reciprocity,” February 28, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.22215/stkt/td25>.

*apartment would likely improve and as a result, so would my health. Does the mildew exist in reciprocal relationships with other beings of which I am not aware? Is it my prerogative to remove it because I am an apex predator and it is inconvenient for my apartment and myself?*

The second entrance to the main exhibition room is framed by two complementary artworks: on the left side, a wall installation by Jennifer Willet and on the right, a small painting by Christi Belcourt.<sup>42</sup> Belcourt's signature style is easily recognizable, as her paintings are exhibited frequently throughout Southwestern Ontario and beyond. She paints the natural world in a manner that blends Traditional Knowledge with biology and physics, often focusing on reciprocal relationships between plants and animals. Belcourt's style of pointillism mimics First Nations and Métis beadwork and "represent[s] the cycle of life, the parts that make up the whole, molecules and stars."<sup>43</sup> Of her painting practice, she says, "it's not a simple transferring of the beadwork patterns onto the canvas; it has to have the meaning behind it. So there will be certain plants or symbols in the painting that have a specific reason or coding behind them. It's always a message about the respect for lands and waters: the respect we need to have for the earth and everything that is around us. As human beings, we are mistaken if we think we are superior to other species."<sup>44</sup> The painting shown in this exhibition is titled

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<sup>42</sup> See footnote 38.

<sup>43</sup> Wilfred Laurier University, "Christi Belcourt Exhibit at Laurier's Robert Langen Art Gallery Challenges Observers to Take Only What You Need," September 14, 2022, <https://www.wlu.ca/news/news-releases/2022/sept/christi-belcourt-exhibit-at-lauriers-robert-langen-art-gallery-challenges-observers-to-take-only-what-you-need.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Becky Rynor, "From the Heart: An Interview with Christi Belcourt," *National Gallery of Canada Magazine*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/artists/from-the-heart-an-interview-with-christi-belcourt>.

*Frogs Sing Loudly in Spring* (2021) and it represents a cross section of a pond or marsh, featuring cattails, American yellow lotus, coneflowers, thistles, grasshoppers, spiders, northern leopard frogs, redwing blackbirds, and swallows. The ecosystem is represented as a grouping of interdependent relationships. The only human presence is the artist's hand that painted each tiny dot that makes up the whole.

On the left side of the entrance to the main exhibition room, Willet's explosive mural, *When Microbes Dream* (2023), sensationalizes the microbial world and brims with radical imagination. As the title suggests, the piece prioritizes and makes visible beings that are not usually accessible to the human eye. Giant squiggly strips of vibrant coral-coloured wallpaper represent fantastically overgrown bacteria while actual bacteria are presented in transparent plastic globes attached to the wall. Gallery lights are diffracted through the globes into arbitrary geometric shapes onto the wall beneath them. Willet's microbial dream is fertile, sexual, alive, and more than ten feet tall. It also conspicuously lacks any representational human presence, although that depends on one's definition of human.<sup>45</sup> There are many interesting comparisons to be made between Willet's expansive mural and Belcourt's elegantly contained painting, not the least of which is scale. In the natural world, the microbes represented in Willet's mural are so small as to be invisible to the human eye, but her creativity has allowed them to grow to monstrous heights. Belcourt's subject is an entire ecosystem, encompassing

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<sup>45</sup> On page 71 of their 2016 book, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Timothy Morton argues that "[a] human being is an ecosystem of nonhumans, a fuzzy set like a meadow, or the biosphere, a climate, a frog, a eukaryotic cell, a DNA strand." This logic is elaborated on pages 71 and 72.

multiple life cycles and by extension, the universe. Although it is clear that humans currently belong to each of these cycles, Western colonial behaviour does not respect that knowledge in an embodied way. Together, these two artworks might speak to that gap between knowledge and practice.

I was lucky to have the pleasure of speaking about *BioCurious* with one of its co-curators, Julie Rae Tucker. When I asked whether she could agree with ecological philosopher, Timothy Morton's, definition of art as "thought from the future, thought that we cannot explicitly think at present,"<sup>46</sup> she referred to the aforementioned pieces by Christi Belcourt and Jennifer Willett as being cyclical. Tucker suggested that both pieces depict probable pasts and possible futures, each conspicuously lacking a visible human presence. Morton refers to humanity as a geophysical force because people are no longer simply individuals interacting with and within our environments, instead contemporary lifestyles are contributing to the restructuring of our planet on an unimaginable scale.<sup>47</sup> About our current predicament, they write, "We 'civilized' people [...] are the narrators of our destiny. Ecological awareness is that moment at which these narrators find out that they are the tragic criminal."<sup>48</sup> It is important to mention here that certain ways of living, specifically those encouraged by settler colonialism, contribute to climate disaster much more than other ways. Lifestyles that rely heavily on resource extraction and benefit from distance from it (whether that be physical or psychological distance) are doing the most harm. The artwork collected for *BioCurious* offers many visual warnings

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<sup>46</sup> Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

about the consequences of human actions and provides an abundance of material to help plan careful paths forward.

In complement to the busy worlds represented in Belcourt and Willett's pieces, *Atmosphere is Always Still Being Made* (2023) by Lisa Hirmer offers a moment of pause as I move farther into the main exhibition room. Eight minimally textured concrete discs are affixed to a pale blue wall in a seemingly random pattern. The colour palette exists in quiet balance with the joyful hues of the microbial mural around the corner. The arrangement of the circular objects on the wall mimics air-dispersed particles in a way that hints at the *intra-active* quality of the sculptures. The term *intra-action*, as conceived by the posthumanist philosopher and physicist, Karen Barad, differs from *interaction* in that it does not presuppose entities as separate. Intra-action defines entities as relationships between matter that allow their own becoming.<sup>49</sup> The relationships between matter present in this sculpture may not be visual but material. I see this artwork as a journey of relationships, beginning when Earth came into being and continuing into the present day and beyond. To be concise, one can decide to begin (without forgetting that this beginning is only a link in a limitless chain of relationships) with the artist, Lisa Hirmer's, relationship with the minerals and fibres that she gathered together to make forms. Those gathered materials then entered into a relationship with one another, and with Hirmer's gloves or hands, and the air, dust, and maybe even cat hair, present in the room at the time of their meeting. The meeting may have been more of a reunion, as all of this matter

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<sup>49</sup> Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 129-136.

(including Hirmer) may have previously coexisted in different configurations. From the studio, the matter was transported to the gallery, encountering, and because of its nature, absorbing carbon dioxide along the way. Currently, the matter exists in theoretical and material relationship with every being that has visited the gallery in which it is housed. Every viewer that encounters the piece allows it to continue becoming.

Although the installation appears static, it is *always still being made*, as the title suggests. As viewers may be transformed by the aesthetic and conceptual gifts the artwork offers, the artwork is transformed by the gift of the viewers' breaths. It was made using lime concrete, an ancient construction material that is now being researched as a climate-friendly option.<sup>50</sup> As lime concrete hardens, it enacts a process called carbonation, which stores and traps carbon dioxide. The concrete recipe used in Hirmer's piece includes olivine, a mineral which has been shown to increase the capacity for carbonation, meaning the concrete can store more carbon dioxide.<sup>51</sup> Like Amanda White's *A Breathing Room*, this artwork transforms exhaled carbon dioxide. Instead of recycling it back into oxygen to be inhaled anew, here the carbon dioxide reacts with the lime and olivine to form dolomite, a type of limestone. This process is slow and could require centuries to be completed.<sup>52</sup> In this artistic application, the concrete represents passive collaboration between artist, material, and viewer. It also

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<sup>50</sup> G. Cultrone, E. Sebastián, and M. Ortega Huertas, "Forced and Natural Carbonation of Lime-Based Mortars with and without Additives: Mineralogical and Textural Changes," *Cement and Concrete Research* 35, no. 12 (2005): 2278–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cemconres.2004.12.012>.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Westgate, Richard J. Ball, and Kevin Paine, "Olivine as a Reactive Aggregate in Lime Mortars," *Construction and Building Materials* 195 (2019): 115–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conbuildmat.2018.11.062>.

<sup>52</sup> G. Cultrone, "Forced and Natural Carbonation".

gestures at potential in two ways—the piece as displayed is a work-in-progress by nature, as it requires an ongoing relationship with air to reach a state of ‘completion’. It also acts as a reminder that the state of our carbon-altered atmosphere still has the potential to be transformed and is a suggestion of a material that could be used to do so on an infrastructural scale.

The work of art that pulled me in most strongly during my visit and left me with the most emotional aftershocks is *Blue* (2019) by Laura Magnusson. Shown in an intimate screening room at the left side of the back wall of the main exhibition room with a bench only large enough for two or three viewers at a time, *Blue* is a 12-minute long silent film in which Magnusson plays the only human character. The film is shot underwater, resulting in a monochromatic aquamarine palette. In it, Magnusson tries to walk the ocean floor, dressed only in polka-dot panties, a parka, and winter boots. She half-carries, half-drags a heavy oxygen tank behind her. It is connected to the simplest breathing apparatus, just a small mouthpiece, by a long black tube. Although her clothing and the tank weigh her down enough to mostly keep her boots connected to the ocean floor, the currents are so powerful that she is continuously tossed around, lightly as a leaf caught by the wind. There are spans where she stops trying to move forward and sits still, huddled with the oxygen tank, to rest. The tank is both a lifeline and a hindrance.

Magnusson wrote about the process of making *Blue* for the “More Just, More Sustainable Futures” virtual symposium at the University of Plymouth in 2021. The film is grounded in the artist’s lived experience of sexual assault, and she writes that it evolved through a research method that explored multiple intersections of embodied human experience and violence to land. Magnusson



highlights the solidarity she feels with Hafrún, a 507 year-old ocean quahog clam that was removed from the water in Iceland by humans in 2006. Hafrún was killed by researchers who wanted to use the growth rings on her<sup>53</sup> shell to study climate variations during her lifetime.<sup>54</sup> The design of the parka that Magnusson wears in *Blue* is inspired by Hafrún's shell, drawing a parallel between Magnusson's body and Hafrún's internal organ. Magnusson's lived experience of sexual assault is communicated through the descriptive language she uses to recount the end of Hafrún's life, "Scraped from the seabed, 262 feet beneath the surface, pulled up through water, and into stark light [...] First, they removed her soft tissue. Then, they unhinged her valves, encased them in clear blocks of resin, and sliced them into thin sections for observation under a microscope."<sup>55</sup> Magnusson describes parts of the process of making *Blue* as healing, although in the conclusion she specifies that this healing is an ongoing project that she does not predict will ever be fully resolved. Reciprocity is for the living, so how can Hafrún heal now? This question highlights the impossibility of returning what has been extracted and emphasizes the importance of forethought rather than hindsight.

Reciprocity and local relationships were important to the conception of *BioCurious* from the beginning, according to co-curator Julie Rae Tucker. In our conversation about the show she said, "Yes, [it is] ecological but also community-centered, people-first. We wanted to find another way to support local artists." Even the exhibition's branding cautions against distant, extractive relationships.

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<sup>53</sup> I am using Magnusson's chosen pronoun for Hafrún.

<sup>54</sup> Laura Magnusson, "Trauma, Embodiment, Water: A Story about the Making of Blue," University of Plymouth, 2021, <https://morejustfutures.art/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ebook.zip>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The curators asked local artist, Julie Hall, to hand paint the title wall with the loose directive of “a local paradise in contrast to the tourist-driven paradises as shown in *White Lotus*.”<sup>56</sup> Julie Hall has had an ongoing relationship with AWE, including the construction of a monarch butterfly garden on one of its rooftop terraces. For the title wall, she drew a direct contrast, using the American yellow lotus plant as a repeated symbol. This plant was originally transported to North America and used as a food source by Indigenous Peoples.<sup>57</sup> It is also depicted, along with its prodigious edible rhizomes, in the aforementioned painting, *Frogs Sing Loudly in Spring* (2021) by Christi Belcourt. Near the end of our phone call, Julie Rae Tucker said that she believes the exhibition provides something for everyone, and wondered what viewers would leave with. I left the show curious about structures and relationships, those in which I consciously participate and the subtler ones in which I am implicated without my knowledge or consent. What structures does my life support and maintain? Whose lives make my life possible? How might I expand my awareness of and nurture reciprocity in these relationships to support collective continuance?<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> A dark satire tv show about wealthy tourists who travel to all-inclusive resorts, and their relationships with locals.

<sup>57</sup> Carol Gracie, *Summer Wildflowers of the Northeast: A Natural History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691203300>.

<sup>58</sup> See footnote 6.

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## Supplemental Reading

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## Curriculum Vitae

Jessica Irene Joyce

b. 1991, Chatham, Ontario

### Education

2024 **MFA**, Visual Arts, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2015 **BFA with Distinction**, Studio Arts, Concordia University, Montreal, QC

### Awards

2024 **Departmental Exhibition Award**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2024 **Graduate Research Scholarship**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2024 **Departmental Travel Grant**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2023 **Graduate Research Scholarship**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2023 **Departmental Travel Grant**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2022-23 **Ontario Graduate Scholarship**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2022 **Departmental Travel Grant**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2022 **Chair's Entrance Scholarship**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2022 **Graduate Research Scholarship**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2017 **Community Partnership**, Notre-Dame-des-Arts, Montreal, QC

### Selected Exhibitions

2024 **Solo Exhibition**, *How can I be OK with the e/and of the world?*, artLAB, London, ON

2024 *Temporal Palimpsests*, Cohen Commons, London, ON

2024 *Are you buying these with loonies or toonies?*, Tom Thomson Gallery, Owen Sound, ON



- 2024 *Eternal Now*, Satellite Project Space, London, ON
- 2023 *Static Unearthed*, artLAB, London, ON
- 2023 *Petit et Intime*, Belgo Building, Montreal, QC
- 2023 *Brain Art*, University of Western Ontario, London, ON
- 2022 *Future Perfect Members Show*, Forest City Gallery, London, ON
- 2020 **Solo Exhibition**, *Portraits of NDG*, Virtual Exhibition, Montreal, QC
- 2018 *Wintertide*, The Kraken Art Gallery & Studio, St John's, NL
- 2018 *Release The Kraken!*, The Kraken Art Gallery & Studio, St John's, NL
- 2017 **Solo Exhibition**, *Artist of the Month*, Co-op Maison Verte, Montreal, QC
- 2017 **Solo Exhibition**, *Not Your Fantasy*, Galerie V, Montreal, QC
- 2016 *Framing It*, Wellington Centre, Montreal, QC
- 2016 **Solo Exhibition**, *At the heart of it*, Mate Latte, Montreal, QC
- 2013 *Reflection*, Gallery X, Concordia University, Montreal, QC

#### Performances

- 2023 **Assistant to Sheri Osden Nault**, *A Performance Artwork: An Indigenous and settler artist engage in the careful and collaborative process of turning salvaged, mass-produced, mini-Canada flags into a twine rope*, Building Reconciliation Forum, London, ON
- 2012 **Assistant to Shelley Miller**, *Throw Up*, Nuit Blanche, Toronto, ON

#### Professional Experience

- 2023 **Research Assistant to Soheila Esfahani**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON
- 2023-24 **Teaching Assistant**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON (SA1601: Foundations of Visual Arts, Fall 2023 & Winter 2024)
- 2022-23 **Teaching Assistant**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON (SA2504Y: Art Now!, Fall 2022 & Winter 2023)

2022 **Oil painting demonstration**, University of Western Ontario, London, ON (SA 2620A: Introduction to Painting, Fall 2022)

2012-17 **Studio Assistant**, Shelley Miller Studio, Montreal, QC

### Selected Memberships and Volunteer Experience

2024 **Chair**, Visual Arts Graduate Students' Association, University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2023 **Volunteer**, Confluences Symposium, Museum London, London, ON

2019 **Volunteer**, Notre-Dame-des-Arts, Montreal, QC

2016 **Event Organizer**, Café Coop, Montreal, QC

### Publications

2024 “[On Colour, Movement, and Connection: Replicating the Work of Tom Thomson](#)” in *Are you buying these with loonies or with toonies?*, Essay and photographs, Owen Sound, ON

2023 *Dystopia: A Visual Anthology*, reproductions of watercolour paintings, London, ON

2023 [Sustainability of Playgrounds](#), co-researcher contribution to catalogue, London, ON

2023 *Diner Witch*, self-published graphic novel, London, ON

2020 *Portraits of NDG Calendar*, Notre-Dame-des-Arts, Montreal, QC

2015 *Issue 2014-15*, Spectra Journal, reproductions of oil paintings, Montreal, QC

2014 *Issue 7*, Interfold Magazine, reproductions of oil paintings, Montreal, QC

### Commission

2018 Private Commission, [Reading with Austen](#), series of watercolour illustrations based on research compiled on the life of Jane Austen, McGill University, Montreal, QC