



GardenShip and State







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Adrian Stimson	Mary Mattingly
Amelia Fay	Michael Farnan
Andrés Villar	Michelle Wilson
Ashley Snook	Patrick Mahon
Jamelie Hassan	Paul Chartrand
Jeff Thomas	Quinn Smalldoy
Jessica Karuhanga	Ron Benner
Joan Greer	Sean Caulfield
Lori Blondeau	Sharmistha Kar
Mark Kasumovic	Tom Cull

Guest Contributors

Andrew Kear	Nina Zitani
Joanna Kerr	Richard Fung
Nandi Bhatia	

Publication Team

Co-curators: Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas
Graphic Designer: Katie Wilhelm
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GardenShip Project

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October 7, 2021 – January 23, 2022

Museum London



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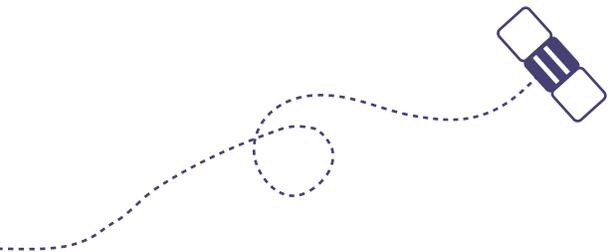
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Introductions



Foreword

Julie Bevan



The forks of Deshkan Ziibi / Thames River is a place that has always been a site of gathering, convergence, exchange and interconnection. Now, situated next to the river in the heart of Southwestern Ontario, Museum London's purpose is to honour and amplify our interconnections through art, history and ideas. Providing a home and helping to create a context for *GardenShip and State* has been a privilege—this community building is the kind of generative work that we are here for, and we are hopeful that this project, its themes so urgent and relevant, will resonate beyond our region and into the future.

Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to exhibition co-curators and artists Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas for their vision, their leadership, and for the love they infused into this project.

Ambitious in scope, and notable for the creative eco-system and collaborative framework that the project co-curators nurtured, *GardenShip and State* gathers many voices and embraces complexity, activating artworks and ideas through parallel programs, public events, and a major exhibition. This book, thoughtfully designed by Katie Wilhelm, with Managing Editor Ruth Skinner, includes installation photos, transcribed conversations, essays that document the exhibition and its programs, and experimental texts that reveal elements of process while extending dialogues further to invite curious readers into the project.

Much gratitude to the expert staff at Museum London who demonstrated care and persistence in helping to bring *GardenShip and State* to life under the uncertain conditions of the global pandemic. Thanks also to our Security staff, and our dedicated Volunteers who make visitors feel safe and warmly welcomed. For the exhibition, Museum London's Volunteers served as gallery attendants, recording the reactions of visitors in the *GardenShip Journal*, and facilitating engagement with several interactive elements. I personally won't forget the excitement and sense of wonder shared by the gallery attendants on my visit, before arriving in London to join the Museum team, particularly how they coached us to approach Sharmistha Kar's work *Soft Shelter—Walking Together*, encouraging us to choose and gently pull a strand of the pastel-coloured embroidery thread from the blue tarpaulin. I've kept the thread as an artefact from that interaction.

We are grateful to our funders who recognize the essential nature of the arts, including Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and the Indigenous Artist in Residence Program, and the City of London. Thanks also to the Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Western University and the Department of Visual Arts for their investment in this project.

Many people participated to realize *GardenShip and State*. Thanks to staff at the London Public Library, contributors from Western University, including Dr. Nina Zitani and Dr. Nandi Bhatia, Minga Café in Dunville, Ontario, Words: the Literary and Creative Arts Festival, and Community Project Hosts and Contributors including: Michelle Wilson with Brad Isaacs, Candace Dube, Atlohsa Family Healing Services, Reilly Knowles, and Shawna Redskye for The Coves Project; Brandon Doxtator, Environmental Coordinator of Oneida Nation of the Thames; Sweet Labour Art Collective, Antler River Rally, Support Gallery, and Embassy Cultural House. Our thanks to each of the artists and writers for being part of this work.

The generosity of this community and our collaboration makes everything possible.

Julie Bevan
Executive Director, Museum London
London, Ontario, January 2023



Sharmistha Kar, *Soft Shelter - Walking together* (detail view with thread pulling activation)

Introduction

Welcome to *GardenShip and State*!

This book represents the synthesis of the work of a three-year artistic project, *GardenShip and State*, which began as a collaboration involving a diverse group of 20 artists and writers from Turtle Island: from areas within Canada and the United States, and beyond. Through hundreds of conversations (in person and online), outreach to communities, and much creative work—comprising textiles, photography, sculpture, video, gardening, and installation, as well as writing—the group produced an ambitious exhibition in late 2021. Inhabiting Museum London’s upstairs Ivey Galleries, a site within its Community Gallery, as well as the Museum’s front lawn and main-floor atrium, the show invited the community to engage with issues of decolonial critique, environmental activism, and protest against government and industry complicity in the ongoing climate crisis. Fundamentally, the exhibition asked: How can we work together and create together as a global community to restore the planet, while respecting differences and seeking to repair divisions and address injustices brought about by colonialism?

Jeff Thomas and I first met more than twenty years ago on an Ontario Arts Council Jury in Toronto.

It was a singular meeting for me, helping to shape my recognition of the important role artists and curators have to play: if truths are to be told, creative and imaginative art is to be made, and meaningful change continues to be possible. Over the past three years (through sometimes daily Zoom calls!), Jeff and I have talked about *ways of meeting* and working toward a common purpose as artists and curators.

We welcome you into the fertile and challenging world of *GardenShip and State*. As our complex and rather poetic title may suggest, this is a space that makes room for expansive ideas, compelling engagements with art, and generative curiosity. Therefore, the publication is filled with rich conversations and essays by the project's participants, and by a host of friends and guests who have generously entered into *GardenShip's* terrain. They include scholar Dr. Nandi Bhatia, writer and artist Richard Fung, library professional Joanna Kerr, and zoological curator Dr. Nina Zitani. Museum London's Head of Programs and Exhibitions, Andrew Kear, has also contributed his insights on the exhibition to beautiful effect.

As Co-curators and project coordinators, we had the pleasure to invite award-winning Indigenous designer, Katie Wilhelm, and gifted arts innovator and editor, Ruth Skinner, to steer the publication into being. They have done so with consummate skill and creativity, making expansive room for the aforementioned texts, brilliant images of the exhibition by Toni Hafkenscheid, evidence of the Programming around the developing and presentation of *GardenShip and State*, and playful insertions by the project's writers, who collectively coined the title *Cross-Pollinators* for that component of their work.

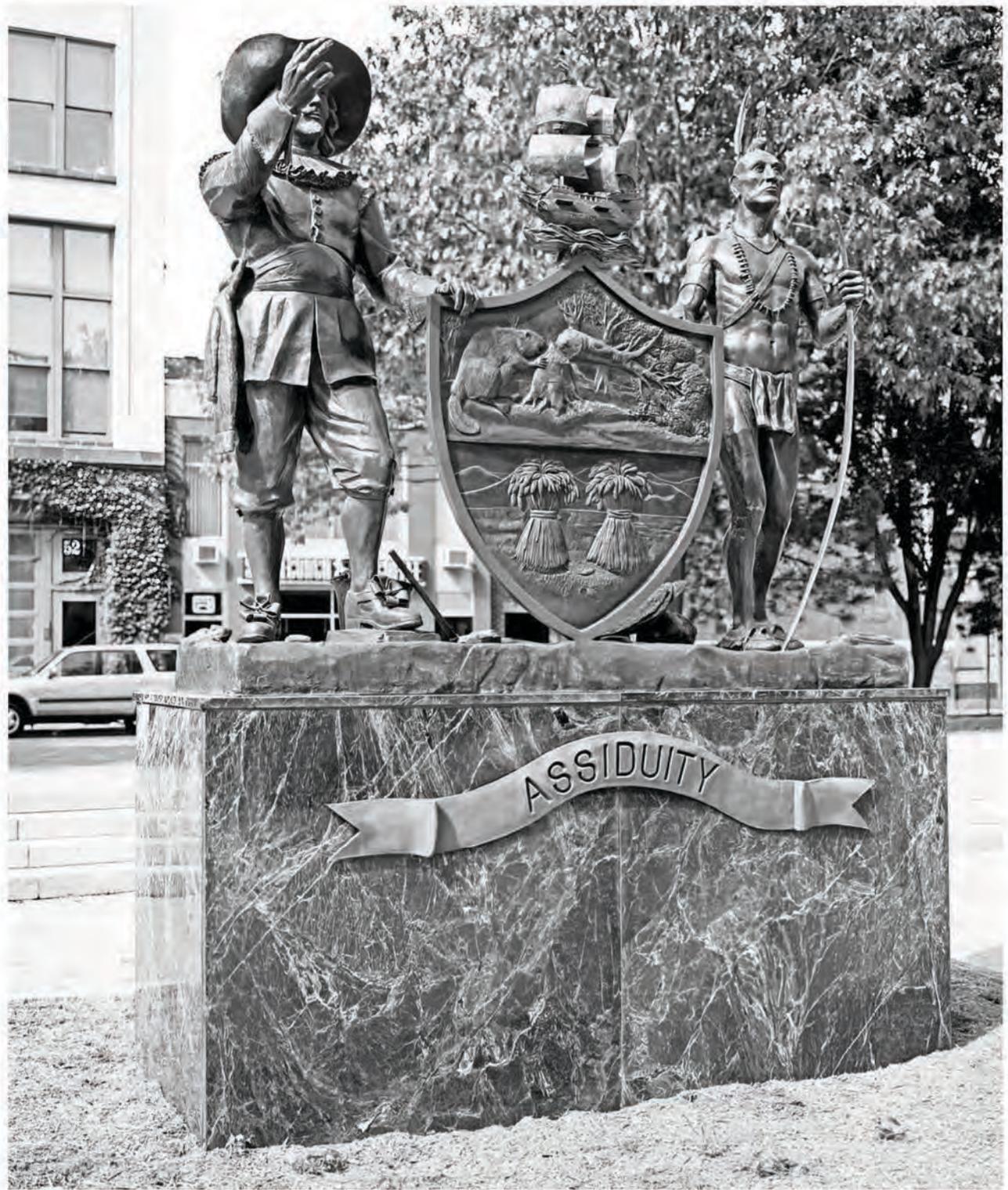
~ *Patrick Mahon*

In my role as Patrick Mahon's co-curator for *GardenShip and State*, I brought into our curatorial relationship the tenants of an ancient treaty known as the Two Row Treaty. In 1613 my Mohawk ancestors and the European newcomers (the Dutch) wanted to formulate an agreement of mutual respect for each other's society. Although the Dutch wanted to form a typical treaty with themselves recognized as the father, the Haudenosaunee insisted on being treated as equal partners and not positioned as children, formulating a template for respectful co-existence.

The Two Row wampum belt shows two rows of purple shell beads, representing the Haudenosaunee canoe and Dutch ship traveling along the same river; the row of white beads represents peace and respect.

The concept of peaceful co-existence is the curatorial pillar used for *GardenShip and State*. The treaty concept includes the phrase: as long as the grass is green, the rivers flow downhill, and the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, a living metaphor for today as well. The Two Row was passed to me by my elders and now to the artists, writers, Museum London, and the public.

~ *Jeff Thomas*



Jeff Thomas, *Albany, New York*. 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

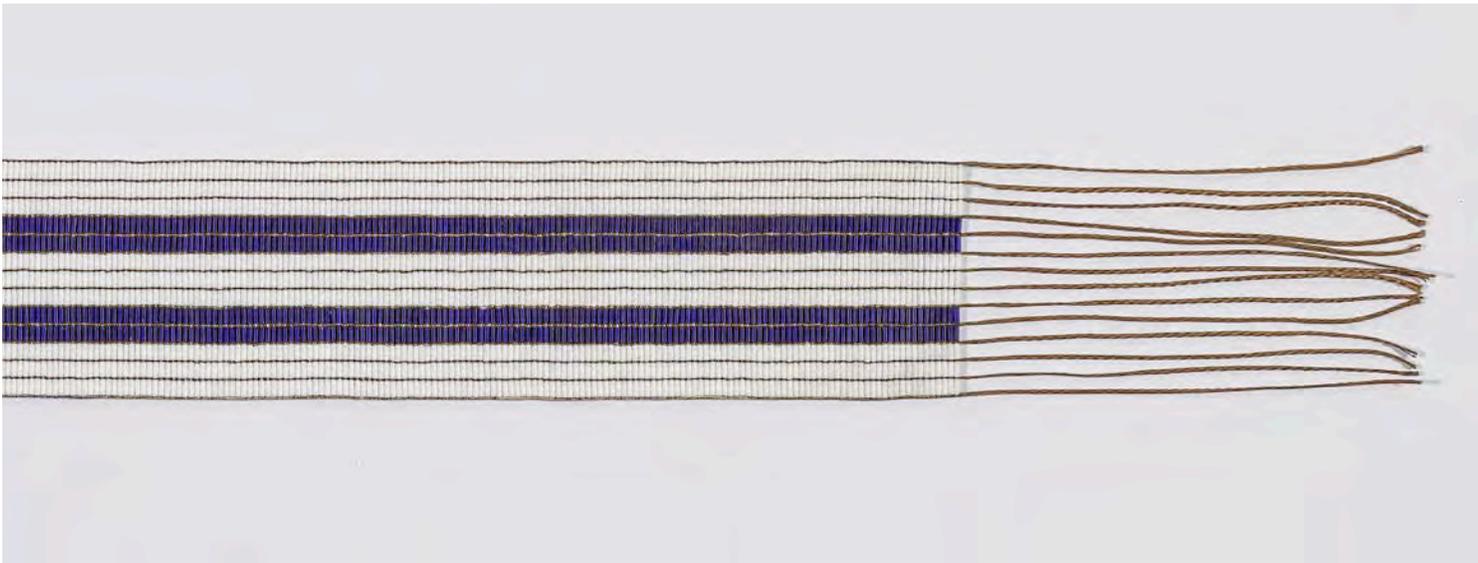
Gä•sweñta' (Two Row Treaty)

This information is from the Onondaga Nation, a member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. For more information, visit onondaganation.org

The Haudenosaunee and the Dutch agreed on three principles to make this treaty last. The first is friendship; the Haudenosaunee and their white brothers will live in friendship. The second principle is peace; there will be peace between their two peoples. The final principle is forever; that this agreement will last forever. The Dutch recorded this agreement on paper with three silver chains. Iron chains would not do because iron rusts and breaks over time. Silver, on the other hand, can be polished and renewed when the brothers meet. The Haudenosaunee and the Dutch agreed to call this the Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship.

The Haudenosaunee explained to the Dutch that they did not use paper to record their history. They would make belts made of white and purple wampum shells. The Haudenosaunee made a belt to record this agreement. The belt has two purple rows running alongside each other, representing two boats. One boat is the canoe with the Haudenosaunee way of life, laws, and people. The other is the Dutch ship with their laws, religion, and people in it. The boats will travel side by side down the river of life. Each nation will respect the ways of each other and will not interfere with the other. "Together we will travel in Friendship and in Peace Forever; as long as the grass is green, as long as the water runs downhill, as long as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, and as long as our Mother Earth will last."





This replica of the Two Row wampum was created for Museum London by Haohyoh (Ken Maracle) of The Wampum Shop, a faith keeper of the Lower Cayuga Longhouse and a member of the Cayuga Nation, Iroquois Confederacy, Deer Clan. Discussions of wampum, including the Two Row wampum, are now incorporated into Museum London's educational and public programming. True wampum is scarce today and only wampum strings are used. Many belts have been lost or are in the collections of museums. For more information, visit the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/wampum>. Image courtesy of Museum London.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University and Museum London are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research, cultural presentations, and community service.

Among the contributor biographies which appear towards the end of the book, you will find acknowledgements of the traditional territories that each of us was born on. Some of us are Indigenous folks, others are settlers, and a number are from other immigrant backgrounds. On our website (www.gardenship.ca) an interactive map shows our respective places of birth and current residences. This map was initiated by Jeff Thomas.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the concept of 'land acknowledgement' has underpinned much of our creative work and been explicit in many of our discussions. So, in assembling this book, we have wrestled with how to thoughtfully manifest those aspects of the *GardenShip* project and its history in order to speak with genuineness. We do not wish to be merely performative in this land acknowledgement. It would, in that spirit, be possible to list the ways the producers *GardenShip* demonstrate their commitments to just treatment of the land and its original inhabitants. After much reflection, investigation, and discussion we realize that such an approach would fail to embrace our commitment to land acknowledgement and restitution as a living, embodied, and continuing process. We are indebted to Sara Mai Chitty and Lauren September Poeta of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Western University. In thoughtful conversation, Sara Mai and Laura encouraged us to think of land acknowledgement less as a singular action to carry out, and more as an ongoing and personal reflection on our own individual relationships to the land. Acknowledgement of this relationship can be ever-present in our discussions, research, and production.

As artists and writers, we therefore commit to participate in the struggle for land justice as an ongoing, lived process with the goal that rightful stewardship of land will be accorded to the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

Notes on the Design Components & Cross-Pollinations

Readers of this book will encounter a number of intentional design elements that are meant to enliven the experience of the book, but that, we believe, will nevertheless be enriched by the following explanations:

The Be(e)ds, and the Two-Row Design on the Book's Fore Edges

Our publication's designer, Katie Wilhelm, has developed a uniquely active agent in the form of the Bee Bead, or Be(e)d: this playful and collaborative device unites the many examples of bee imagery present throughout *GardenShip* works with the individual beads that are woven together to form the wampum belt. The Be(e)d also enacts the activity of provocation so important to *GardenShip's* Cross-Pollinators, who take their name for the vital distributing activity that bees carry out. Katie's Be(e)ds travel through the elements of this book: they are both united and dispersed—they break into and interweave ideas where useful, and draw our attention to themes, questions and invocations that sustain the GardenShip project. As Katie describes in an essay toward the end of this publication, “the Be(e)d has become an interventionist element throughout this book, signifying the interventionist actions that need to be taken. Be(e)ds appear and disappear across the margins as symbols of this activity—prompting the viewer toward a particular idea, a potential action, a possible mindset—or state (of mind).”¹

.....
See Katie Wilhelm's essay, “Designing GardenShip,” in this book, pages 286-288.

Katie has also integrated the Two Row Treaty as a foundational concept for this publication's design. It appears in the design of the aforementioned Be(e)ds. The five separate sections of this book reflect the five bands of the Two Row, and the purple colours that adorn its cover and pages sample the quahog shell which is used in the creation of the purple beaded bands in the Two Row Wampum. The fore edges of the book are also designed to create a Two Row that enwraps and enfolds the entirety of this project.

The Cross-Pollinator's Provocations

As Co-curators, we had the pleasure to work with a large group of artists and a smaller selection of folks identified initially as our 'writers.' Even in the earliest stages of the collaborative development of *GardenShip*, we observed the evolution of some productive disciplinary-challenging work within the perceived discrete roles of the artists and the writers. In response, we invited those who had come in as writers to produce projects for the exhibition, and likewise for the art-makers to contribute writings and conversations at numerous points in the process, including for this publication.

Capturing the spirit of collaboration and play that our invitation had encouraged, four members of the GardenShip community came together to become collaborative agents of connection and playful provocation. Calling themselves the Cross-Pollinators, they have therefore inserted into the book (with the help of Katie Wilhelm) a set of provocations. Many of these appear on semi-transparent pages, adding layers of new and alternative content and commentary within the project's proceedings, and offering opportunities for immersive interconnections within the *GardenShip* world.



Adrian Stimson in collaboration with Lucille Wright Naamoi'stotoohsin - *Bumble Bee Regalia* (detail view)

Co-curator's Conversation: Patrick Mahon & Jeff Thomas



Patrick

To begin to speak as co-curators of *GardenShip and State*, I think it's important to talk about its genesis; how it originated. I guess it's fair to say that the whole thing began with my wanting to pursue doing an expansive project that would deal with decolonization and the environment. But, that's the more bookish way of talking about it. The real motivation came about from my life experience – as I think it did for both of us. And some of that goes to my having grown up in Winnipeg. There I had various kinds of interactions with Indigenous people, but I was only passingly aware in the 1970s of colonization, meaning not really very aware at all.

When I was around 16, I got a summer job working at the Manitoba Museum (which was called the Museum of Man and Nature at the time); it's on North Main in Winnipeg. There, I was working on what was essentially the 'refitting' of the Nonsuch: the Nonsuch was a replica of the little ship that had come to Turtle Island in 1670, bearing the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company.

When I worked on the boat, as a prairie-born person, it was all about making it ready for display to the public, in 'celebration' of the HBC's anniversary. It had been produced in England and had sailed around Plymouth where it was fabricated, and then been brought on its side on a big ship, and was sailed around the Great Lakes. Then it was taken out to BC and sailed on the Pacific – all in a very festive spirit. Then it was brought to Winnipeg, and they used a crane to place it on a giant concrete pad, and they built the rest of a museum building around it. I was a laborer, so I had to sand the hull of the ship and repaint it with varnish, and climb the rigging in order to put tar on it. As I've noted, there was definitely the sense that all of this was for celebration. Certainly, in Canada and perhaps in Manitoba in particular, "The Bay" was a big presence. And yet at the time, I think I was at least somewhat uncertain about what all this really meant.

That was the 1970's in Winnipeg, but it was over a long period of time in

my own life, that I started to not only reflect on that experience and then to look at the histories—with Indigenous people, in particular—of colonization. At more than one point when I returned to Winnipeg, having moved to the North for a period and then to the West Coast, I went to have a look at the Nonsuch. I remember that on one trip I visited with Amelia Fay – who is involved in our project now – she’s the curator of the Hudson’s Bay Company Collection at the Manitoba Museum. I did ask lots of questions – and she was very ready for them – about the collection and how it was thought of by the Company, and especially about how the model ship was thought about. So that was a kind of beginning point of thinking about these questions from an experiential standpoint, and also just thinking about the ship as a kind of metaphor, not only of colonization, but of movement – movement of peoples, etc.

I should add that, when the idea for a project was coming into focus, the environmental crisis was already becoming increasingly urgent, so it made sense to me to put the colonial critique together with the questions around the environment. Fundamentally, the notion that the environment and decolonization needed to be thought and worked on simultaneously, not as separate projects, seemed obvious. That’s also, in large part, because we know that Indigenous people, despite all the unbelievable challenges they have endured, have been stewards of the land for generations beyond measure. And so, to think about colonization, and not think about the stewardship of the land by Indigenous people would have been wrongheaded.

So, all of that brought me to the idea of a project that would involve a lot of artists, certainly Indigenous artists, as well as other artists who have experienced colonization; clearly all of us have a relationship to it in one way or another. So I knew I wanted to put together a project and apply for a grant to realize something special... though I didn’t know exactly what.

I think I’m going to stop there and say that’s when I came to you, Jeff; we’d known each other for a long time. At first you didn’t even necessarily know what I was asking because I didn’t necessarily know what I was asking! It was the beginning of something. In essence, my own way of thinking about curating is about asking questions. Oftentimes a “what if” question: what if *GardenShip and State* were something we could think about together?

Jeff

It’s kind of funny. When you first proposed it to me, I thought, “Okay. I’m not sure, but I’ll wait and see what happens.” Over a long period of time you finally received the grant, and then things started moving. I thought, “Oh no, I have to work with artists I was not familiar “with”. It was totally new territory for me. But the territory I was facing is what I had been prepared for by my elders when I was a kid. I wondered, during that time, if I was being prepared for something within the community, within the culture. I was disappointed when I realized that, no, it’s not: it’s for the outside world. When I look back now, I feel I was being trained as a kind of emissary, I didn’t know for what. My search began

by using photography as a stepping stone to a much broader issue of challenges that Indigenous people face in the city. In essence, how do we co-exist with non-Indigenous people?

Like you, I lived in Winnipeg for a number of years. I took advantage of that time to contemplate, to think about things, to watch and see how the city operates, with a very visible Indigenous population. When I went into the arts, I didn't see myself as an artist. I saw myself as something that hadn't been defined yet. So what was that? Winnipeg was the place where that all began to change for me. And of course, like your experience with the Manitoba Museum, I began my first research project at the Manitoba Museum. I met Katherine Pettipas, who was the ethnologist at that time, and we became friends and she showed me how the museum worked with Indigenous people. I remember looking out the research window in the Museum and I thought, it's interesting to think about the chasm between the collections in the museum and the people on the streets below. Many of the people were Indigenous and had suffered the worst effects of colonialism. When you think about residential schools, a lot of those people were probably former students. If you're doing a social experiment, or social study of Indigenous people in Winnipeg, that's one area that would be very important to understand and interpret. But what I knew at that time, the only thing, was to ask: how do you begin to bridge museum collections to people on the streets? I realized that it was going to take a lot of effort to figure that one out.

From the tours of the collections, I saw a lot of powerful objects in that collection. And I thought, some of the people on the street could have been descended from the objects in the collections. But the Museum also did a great job of instituting a program where they had elders come in and use a special room where they could bless the objects and take proper care of them. It was progressive in that way. It was a good place to be, and I wasn't surprised to find out that we had both been influenced by the Manitoba Museum.

I came to recognize my work with collections as unnatural resources—unnatural in a way that they're no longer in the care of the people they originated from. How do you begin to do that? When I left Winnipeg and moved to Ontario, that was my objective. When I moved to Ottawa, that was a course that I took with my work. And of course, here in Ottawa, it's a confluence of three rivers, as well, and the London Museum is at a confluence. That played a part in my work, because I was aware of that in Winnipeg: the confluence of the Red River and Assiniboine Rivers. What does that mean, as a metaphor or as a sign, and a history that you can build on? I saw everything as being built upon something else. And what I learned from my elders was the same thing. So, the Two Row Wampum became important to my work when I did a project at the Champlain Monument behind the National Gallery of Canada when the exhibition *Sakàhan* was at the NGC in 2013 (it's been a long time). My project was called the Two Row Portrait Project. Essentially, I brought people

up to the Champlain monument, posed them on the platform where the Indian Scout used to be, and would get people engaged in what was taking place and have more meaning in questioning the role of public monuments. This is one example of addressing my question, “How do you begin to build that bridge?”

When I received your email and request for participation in this project, I had to find my place and what I was going to bring as your co-curator. When I was remotely listening to the first artist gathering you had in London, is when I started to think about the Two Row Treaty. Why not? The Two Row was built upon conversations and co-existence, I could do that with *GardenShip and State*: I found a perfect opportunity for me, and the first time in my career that I worked on a project like this, and could say Two Row Treaty is a living document. The two purple lines of beads that run horizontally on the wampum belt represent two pathways (the Dutch and the Mohawk, at that time). Although the intent of the treaty was for both parties to live separately, today’s reality is very different, and with *GardenShip*, it was an opportunity to test the Two Row Treaty in a visual arts project. I was very impressed to see the effectiveness with arts and writers.

Patrick

That’s really, really helpful, Jeff. It also kind of goes along with my saying that when I came to you, and even went to the many other artists that we approached, it was with a kind of question... and I think the answer was the Two Row Treaty.

When you talk about being prepared, it got me thinking about something I’ve mentioned to you before. For a few years in the early 80’s, when I was in my early 20s, I worked in the inner city in Winnipeg in a school program. It was mainly with Indigenous students, in an alternative junior high program. There were so many things about that experience that were an amazing revelation to me. I shudder to make that old claim that, “I learned more than I taught,” but I think I did for sure. Regarding “being prepared,” I recall that I would go back to my middle-class family home for Sunday dinners (I was living with roommates by then) and I would tell them about what I was doing. My family were what I would have thought of as good, enlightened people. But when I would talk about racism and things that I was seeing, I could sense the resistance. Not that it was angry resistance on the part of my family, but when I think back to that I realize that was where I first understood the kind of privilege that I had grown up with that was just assumed. I think that experience did prepare the ground for me for a lot of things in my life, including this kind of project.

I’ve worked over the years as an artist with lots of different people, including many Indigenous artists. But I think to come to a project like this, and be ready to think about and work with the Two Row Treaty as a basis for engagement, has taken me a long time: to work in a way that honours a real conversation. Also, I think I was more ready to be imaginative and open enough to learn from you, Jeff, and also



“The Two Row was built upon conversations and co-existence, I could do that with *GardenShip and State*.”

learn from the process and to do it in a way that helped to really foster and encourage something creative and activist.

When you talked about working with artists, one of the things I think has worked with this project goes like this: with the Two Row Treaty and this project, we weren't working with a simple paradigm of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. The non-Indigenous artists involved in the project really represent quite a spectrum of race and cultural experience. I think that's where the work of the imagination came in, meaning that the Two Row Treaty could be a useful tool that wasn't hampered by the make-up of our group. And I would say, Jeff, that the imagination on your part in bringing it to the table, and seeing it as something that would be generative, but also malleable and could be played with a bit – worked with in a way that makes sense in the 21st century – allowed for tremendous possibility. I'd add that, in all kinds of situations in society today (including in the arts), we get nervous about overstepping or making inappropriate assumptions, which I think is important, but then often we don't take a risk.

I think this project was a risk. I mean, it was a risk for you and me, and it was a risk for all of the other people involved. And I think that introducing something such as the Two Row in a way that was generous and optimistic, allowed us to take the very necessary risks we needed to take. And treating it as a very open model, or proposition, or treaty, that we could adapt to

individually and as people in groups, turned out to be extremely beneficial – both to our exhibition, but also as a way of thinking. For me, that's been amazing.

Jeff

I'll add to that idea of preparation, too. When we first met on the Ontario Arts Council jury, I didn't like those juries because I had no background in other types of practice in the visual arts. I didn't go to art school and I was unfamiliar with probably 60% of those grant applications, but you seemed to know them all. So I was confident that when I looked at the *GardenShip* proposal and the list of artists that were on it, I knew you would be able to interpret for me. I felt that's what you're talking about, in terms of openness; for everyone to have an open mind and be willing to learn, and share information with the group. The writers you selected for publication were very important and part of the framework we were working with. I had confidence in you.

Learning from all of the artists led me to making my first installation work. With Ron Benner, something I had never attempted before this project. When I think about the process, one example is the soundscape, and whether the installation works with soundscapes would be overlapping each other in the gallery. In the end they blended with one another and fell into place in a very good way. The staid gallery had always felt so western and more like going to a funeral than a celebration. I have always thought, well, that's not me.

“I think that's where the work of the imagination came in: the Two Row Treaty could be a useful tool that wasn't hampered by the make-up of our group.”

Can we do something that is more along the lines of how I feel about the role of art for Indigenous people? That's what was interesting about this project. Even though I didn't get a chance to see the exhibition in person, I felt that there was no empty space. That's remarkable. I felt that once the process of collaboration had started, it would carry through with every element of the exhibition.

Patrick

There are a few things that you've said that I can pick up on. One is that I went to the annual general meeting for the Museum a few weeks ago and they were talking about volunteers. Andrew Kear, who we worked with from the Museum, mentioned the number of volunteer hours that they had among the people who worked with our exhibition, because we wanted somebody to be near the bison and we wanted somebody to be in the *Ecotopian Library*. We wanted people to be welcomed and also to make sure that they understood how to engage with the works, especially the ones you can touch. It was many 1000s of volunteer hours. It actually made me really happy, both because it means those people were very engaged, but also the idea that there were already people in the space to welcome people and to fill the space with human beings. One of them actually said to us that one of the things he liked the best about the exhibition was the overlapping sound. The fact that it had a sense of being really alive and welcoming, I think, was so amazing.

I also wanted to say something about communities and overlapping circles. When I did approach you,

eventually there was a moment at which I knew you were interested. I was also talking to Ron Benner and Jamelie Hassan, and I knew you had worked with them. There was already a sense of communities that were coming together again. Then I had some other communities that I was thinking about—some of them related to students that I taught. For example, Michael Farnan had worked with Adrian Stimson and Lori Blondeau, so there was a circle there. That was one of the things that made me trust what I was asking you to participate in, or help to lead and move forward with: it wasn't all about my individual vision of what a good show would look like. It was really a series of overlapping groups that, in some cases, you were already part of.

I think an exhibition can really benefit from putting people together, who don't know each other. But I do think with a project like this, there was a sense that we wanted to bring people together to actually have conversations and to really work together (though they didn't need to literally make their artworks together). To do that required something more than simply imagining their works together in a gallery space. It was really about trying to imagine us together working on a project, working on something that we all have agreed is worth doing. That was part of what I didn't even realize was going on when all of this was starting to bubble.

The thing that we were talking about earlier, before we started recording, was what this is leading to: I liked what you said about when people ask you what you are hoping for in terms of a response to the project.

Jeff

I had been thinking about this in terms of our conversation. Like, “What’s the final observation of a project like this?” I use the metaphor of white corn because it was historically and prehistorically so important to the wellbeing of Indigenous people. I had wondered, how did we survive the European invasion of Turtle Island? Corn is one example; it supplied a steady food source and in turn supported new ideas and societal growth. In using corn for *GardenShip* came the metaphor of planting new ideas, relationships and associations. An example was working on my first installation for *GardenShip* and working with Ron Benner. Ron’s garden was just outside the window for my installation. I borrowed trellis fencing Ron uses for his garden projects and I printed images of my hand holding corn from Ron’s garden. As co-curator I wanted to make an indoor link to the outside garden, and the metaphor also included the traditional planting technique used by Haudenosaunee people, the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash—and how they intertwine with each other and support each other during the growing season. This was realized with the curators, artists, and writers. I was amazed to think about how everything we were doing was based on some sort of aspect of traditional knowledge, and ultimately, this is the outcome and final product I came away with.

Patrick

The thing that this makes me think of is how much of the project was really

involved with planting, nurturance, and land. I think this comes up in some of the conversations in the publication. We were fortunate to have this generous grant, and so people were able to make a lot of new work, which was wonderful to see and be able to present. But then, in so many cases, they’ve moved on with that work to do other things with it. It’s been taken up by other exhibitions, moved into collections, and that sort of thing. So there is a sense that what you’re talking about, in terms of history and the metaphor of corn and planting, was a foundational way of thinking about what’s going on here. There’s also the actual artistic experience that all of these artists, hopefully, had and some of the ways that they were able to move forward with their ideas. I think we all feel really good about it, insofar as it means it’s not just about making a show, but it’s really about moving forward with our creative work. Fundamentally, that’s something that I do think is hopeful and aspirational. Certainly, the backdrop included COVID and so many other challenges. Some of them were important for us to acknowledge and work with: the confirmation of the graves of children in Kamloops at the former residential school, during the second summer of our project; I think that was both difficult and something that had to be worked with by all of the people in the project in one way or another.

So many other things have been like that. But at the same time, there has been this great generativity and sense

of purpose that I think really feels like it's substantial, and it continues insofar as we're now doing some community projects.

Jeff

I'll just make one more point, and that's about the role of the writers in the project. It's probably, for me, one of the most satisfying outcomes of the project in terms of having groups come together and sharing information. We didn't want to leave the writers to percolate and wait for their time to write their essays, why not make them part of the process from the beginning. And as you mentioned, there were COVID issues, and I wanted to have an opening giveaway of corn seeds. We weren't able to do that—not just COVID, but also protocols for the Museum. But the idea was taken up by the writers who formed the Cross-Pollinators, and in the end, they produced a booklet with a package of corn seeds inside of it. And as you mentioned, it extended to the London Public Library as well, which was an important aspect of the exhibition: the extension of the exhibition to other public spaces, and showing that the public outreach was considered. It's not just for the artists, the Museum and the curators. It's for the public. In the end, all of these things came together and made this project work in ways that, I think, we knew it would. But, you know, it's a dream and in the end, it came true. For me, there's no looking back and thinking, "I wish we had done this or done that." I wish there wasn't COVID. But in the end, I think that exceeded my expectations.

Patrick

Yeah, me too. When you say the public was considered, I would even go so far as to say that they were wanted. I know art students who are afraid to go into galleries: they feel like, "Maybe I'm not wanted." I think more than anything, if people felt included and wanted, people working on the project, people coming into the gallery, and people doing some of the community things, then I do think that's a big success. I think we both recognize that it was.

Jeff

Virtual handshake.



A Garden Ship

Andrew Kear



¹Eleanor Rosamund (host), Hans Ulrich Obrist, Lucy Neal, Wayne Binittie, Dr. Jenna C. Ashton, “Green Thinking: Can artists help save the planet?” BBC Radio 3: Arts and Ideas (podcast), June 3, 2021.

When you imagine a garden ship, what comes to mind? For me, a plot of green life clings precariously to a vessel swirling in some grey, engulfing sea. Of course, whatever we picture is only in our heads, a fictional object without a referent. Nonetheless, as Hans Ulrich Obrist has recently pointed out, if images impact dreams, which in turn impact actions, the garden ship of our minds can be a motivational emblem, inspiring meaningful action to address the climate crisis.¹ But, the mental image of a garden ship can also be unresolvedly ambivalent and confuse our dreams. For instance, when you see a garden ship in your mind’s eye, do you see it as an ark or as an accident waiting to happen? Is your garden ship a symbol of life, a celebration of hope, grit, and collaborative agency? Or is it a harbinger of immanent catastrophe, something lost, the stranded outcome of our dumb collective inaction? When you see a garden ship, do you hope or do you despair?



Paul Chartrand, *Desiccated Root Text*

This is an open question running through the exhibition *GardenShip and State*. The project, which brings together works by twenty artists and collaborators, doesn’t offer a verdict one way or the other. This is for the best; art falters when it *merely* tries to win arguments, surrenders complexity for didacticism, or aims for concise, assured, conclusions. Instead, the exhibition sits with its audience in straining (but not muted), suspended (but not inconsequential) tension: between hope and despair. The artists champion collaboration between people and the world at large, interrogate historical legacies complicit in ecological destruction, and expose cultural practices that make us rethink our relationships to each other, and to our earthly garden ship. More specifically, I think we can see the artists and collaborators participating in five overlapping activities that, while broad in scope, shape the exhibition: interconnecting, witnessing, remapping, signalling, and storytelling.

Interconnecting: Paul Chartrand, Tom Cull, Ashley Snook, and Andrés Villar



Ashley Snook, *the honey is sweet*

The works of Paul Chartrand, Tom Cull, Ashley Snook, and Andrés Villar pinpoint interconnection—the relentless pursuit of preservation, control, and replication among earthly phenomena and systems—as constitutive of the world itself. Chartrand constructs cybernetic life-support mechanisms or hydroponic sculptures. These assemblages embody microcosms of interdependence. As he notes:

Individually, plants, inanimate objects, or human actions may appear mundane, but when framed in the context of thriving and interconnected webs of being, they become members of a community.²

Language is also a recurring element in his work. In *Desiccated Root Text* the aphoristic phrase from the Book of Isaiah, “All Flesh is Grass”—itself written with grass—reminds us of the fragility and vulnerability of all systems, natural and technological.

Poet and writer Tom Cull is a well-known community activist based in London, Ontario. In 2012 he and Miriam Love co-founded Antler River Rally, a grassroots environmental group which works to protect and restore the region’s Deshkan Ziiibiing (Thames River). Cull’s video poem *UpStream/DownStream* documents several volunteer river clean-up initiatives in two communities connected by the river: the city of London and the Indigenous community of Oneida Nation of the Thames. Working in collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan, Cull highlights the historical inequities of colonialism that frames the politics of clean drinking water and healthy river ecology. While London and Oneida are only 30 kilometers apart, the latter has been under a boil-water advisory since September 2019, due in part to the pollution that flows from London and other upstream communities.

Ashley Snook explores ways humans, nonhuman animals, and vegetal life exist in complex interconnection. Her multimedia installation *the honey is sweet*, traces her journey through an overgrown Ontario wetland with a group of scientists and volunteers who make up the Invasive Phragmites Control Centre. Snook explores growth patterns of one of the foremost invasive plant species in Canada: *Phragmites australis*. For the artist, the presence of invasive phragmites is not simply a biological issue, but points to “the history of colonial expansion and industrial processes on southwestern Ontario.”³ One of the installation’s elements, a video taken from a Truxor—a phragmites-control vehicle that cuts and removes biomass—prompts uneasy questions about human management of natural systems in the face of climate change. Snook’s work also prompted unexpected challenges for our Museum: nature is, by definition, “invasive” in an institution that houses materials susceptible to spores, mould, and insects, and so the artist’s use of phragmites material had to be managed accordingly.

Andrés Villar’s sound-based installation *Birdsong* consists of an inverted, wall-mounted wooden chair, with bird calls percolating from a small speaker. The work highlights the indexicality of natural sounds as signs of a vibrant and living ecosystem. But Villar’s pre-recorded birdsongs are merely the artificial traces of natural sounds. His installation speculates on the human desire to control, preserve, and replicate natural phenomena through ersatz means, at the expense of living in balance with the natural world. “The horror vacui of contemporary life might stimulate the production of simulacra for the senses, but,” Villar asks, “is a garden filled with simulacra still a garden?”⁴

²Exhibition label for *Desiccated Root Text (and other works)* by Paul Chartrand. In the exhibition, *GardenShip and State*, co-curated by Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas, Museum London, London, ON, October 2021 – January 2022.



Andrés Villar, *Birdsong*

³Exhibition label for *the honey is sweet* by Ashley Snook, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

⁴Exhibition label for *Birdsong*, by Andrés Villar in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Amelia sharing the HBC Collection during a virtual behind-the-scenes tour. Image courtesy of Amelia Fay.

Witnessing: Amelia Fay, Mark Kasumovic, and Jeff Thomas

Artists also approach and address the climate crisis forensically, archivally—creating works that critically address the fraught distinction between truths and values, facts and opinions, representations and interpretations. Art can bear witness to the different and sometimes competing ends to which documentation and evidence have been made to serve. For Amelia Fay, Mark Kasumovic, and Jeff Thomas, the human relationship to the environment is conditioned, in large part, by how historical truths about land and the environment have been understood through various evidentiary media (artefacts, photography, writing) and the curation of that media.

Amelia Fay is an anthropological archaeologist and a curator whose work explores the historical relationships between the English Hudson’s Bay Company and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis fur traders. For *GardenShip and State*, Fay created *Curating Colonialism*, consisting of three hoops embroidered with questions drawn from her essay in this publication, alongside a pair of moccasins on loan from Manitoba Museum’s Hudson’s Bay Company Museum Collection. Her installation is a response to the fact that the moccasins are catalogued at the Museum under the name of a white male collector, rather than the identity of the Cree woman who crafted them. That the woman’s name is unknown speaks to the inherent acts of erasure that colonial institutions, like Museums, have historically enacted. In Fay’s words, the project reflects, “the struggle I feel as I grapple with the role of museums [and] collections” about “how to best serve the objects under my care.”⁵

⁵Exhibition label for *Curating Colonialism* by Amelia Fay, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

Based in the United Kingdom, Mark Kasumovic is concerned with the truth-value and documentary function of photography and video. His photographic series, which includes the compelling *Bird Watching Hut* and the video *Rottnest*, investigates the relationships between technology and knowledge production within the context of scientific research. Kasumovic’s focus is a conservation area in the UK, surrounded by heavy refining industries. The near post-apocalyptic skyline contrasts with the wind-blasted and foreboding natural surround, registering “the often subtle and quiet ambience of climate change.”⁶ Kasumovic extends his exploration of the documentary form in an essay in this collection.

⁶Exhibition label for *Bird Watching Hut* by Mark Kasumovic, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Mark Kasumovic, *Erosion (Skipsea) #1*

Jeff Thomas, the Iroquois artist and co-curator of *GardenShip and State*, is deeply attentive to the historical interpretation of treaties among European settlers and the Indigenous populations of Turtle Island (North America). *Broken Treaties*, for example, reflects on the principle of peaceful co-existence set forth in the 1613 Two Row Wampum Treaty between the Dutch and Thomas’s Haudenosaunee ancestors. The idea of co-existence also, of course, embodies an ethics that positions human life as something taken up within the world, not outside it or in competition with it. *Corn = Life* conveys a related idea and ethics: food is that which completes and continually reconnects birth to death, within the cycle of life.

**Remapping: Ron Benner, Sharmistha Kar, Michael Farnan,
and Michelle Wilson**

While some artists interrogate the use of evidentiary media in history's construction, others focus on how we constitute our understanding of the land. For Ron Benner, Sharmistha Kar, Michael Farnan, and Michelle Wilson, the complexities of climate change can only be understood through the geo-politics of movement and migration. These artists reorient understandings of geography and space, inveighing against the self-interest of state and industry in a world of policed resources and prescribed borders (that often serve to compound ecological disaster).

Ron Benner's practice investigates the history and political economy of food cultures. While training in agricultural engineering in the late 1960s, he became deeply critical of industrial agriculture and bioengineering. Benner creates mixed media installations that often incorporate photography and gardens. *As The Crow Flies* follows meridians of longitude south from Toronto and London, Ontario. The work brings together the natural objects of these longitudes—seeds, stones, waterways—with the cultural objects—newspapers, buildings, events. In the artist's words, the installation provides “an alternative vision of what lies due south of London and Toronto, Ontario.”⁷

Artist Sharmistha Kar explores themes of mapping, migration, and identity through traditional and contemporary embroidery practices. The thrift-store fabric she uses for her embroidered works embodies the idea that people, while always appearing in one place at a given time, can also be thought about as the embodied traces of unobservable stories of relocation. Individual migration stories link directly to the climate emergency. This also reflects Kar's own shifting connections to local people and places in both India and Canada. Audience interaction is also a crucial element in much of Kar's work. *In Soft Shelter – Walking Together*, visitors pulled strands of embroidered fabric from a back-lit tarpaulin over the course of the exhibition, enacting ideas of extraction, change, disappearance, and resettlement.

Working at the nexus of painting and drawing, sculpture, video, and performance, Michael Farnan addresses colonial representations of wilderness, nature, and nationhood. *A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land... A Work in Progress*, wrestles with the role settler histories play in the artist's interpolation of meaning onto the Great Lakes region of Southern Ontario, where he lives and works. Farnan represents colonial settlement as a cluttered, layered map of the region. His largescale painting highlights a frenetic legacy of parsing and reparsing—including the historical displacements of Indigenous people, as well as birds, fish, and mammals, in the service of settler interests. In the work's video element, the artist provides, “a moment of reflection” that links East Kootenay in Southern British Columbia with tree planting (an inherent aspect of the forestry industry). Farnan has been a tree-planter in the region for twenty-five years.⁸



Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (detail view)

⁷Exhibition label for *As the Crow Flies* by Ron Benner, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Michael Farnan, *A Map Depicting the Settlement History...*

⁸Exhibition label for *A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People, and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress* by Michael Farnan, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

⁹Exhibition label for *Forced Migration* by Michelle Wilson, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Michelle Wilson, *Forced Migration* (with *Outlaw #5*, Manitoba Museum Collection)

Forced Migration, by Michelle Wilson, is an interactive textile map comprising organic materials and electronics stitched into a cybernetic system. Touching the map elicits different audio narrations, story fragments that offer, in Wilson’s words, “a glimpse at the places, beings (human and non-human) and tales that have shaped our current relationships with bison.”⁹ The work memorializes the lives of specific bison killed, captured, or bred in North America to save the species from extinction. *Forced Migration* was installed beside *Outlaw #5*, the taxidermied head of one of the actual bison addressed in Wilson’s work. Supine in the gallery, the violent trophy—loaned from the Manitoba Museum—becomes a confluence of honour and mourning.

Signaling: Sean Caulfield, Patrick Mahon, Quinn Smallboy



Sean Caulfield, *Powerlines* (detail view)

As the inexorability of climate change sinks deeper into our cultural understanding, the objects, narratives, and symbols we’ve been living with take on new significance. The valences of familiar things can suddenly shift, and with them, our familiar understanding of the world in which we live. In their works, Sean Caulfield, Patrick Mahon, and Quinn Smallboy recalibrate ideas and objects to which they have familiar and personal connection, casting new and strange shadows. *Powerlines*, by Sean Caulfield, consists of a series of sculptural toys. Some represent the sort of infrastructure used by the fossil fuel industry, including an oil tanker and oil derrick. Other toys are less recognizable, and exhibit amorphic, bodily qualities. The Alberta-based artist, whose work is often rooted in printmaking, creates unsettling associations. The assemblage of works reminds us of the formative cultural role toys play in forging a child’s sense of identity, childhood values, and beliefs. Caulfield’s intent is simultaneously whimsical, absurd, and dark, with an ominous foreshadowing of the “consequences we all face if we do not build more sustainable and equal communities.”¹⁰

¹⁰Exhibition label for *Powerlines* by Sean Caulfield, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site*

Patrick Mahon’s three incised watercolour drawings depict three apparently disconnected subjects: a photograph by Jeff Thomas of a 2005-2006 First Nations protest encampment at Caledonia, Ontario, the grounds in front of the University of Winnipeg’s Wesley Hall, and the flag of the Hudson’s Bay Company flown from a replica of the merchant ship, *The Nonsuch* (on permanent display at the Manitoba Museum). Addressing real and resonant sites of the agon of colonial history—of institutional and cultural authority, trade, settlement, as well as political resistance—Mahon’s images are nonetheless obscured, represented “as if in a state of transition.” For Mahon, the drawings intentionally oscillate between focus and diffuseness, pointing symbolically toward “important present-day challenges regarding the environment and colonization.”¹¹

¹¹Exhibition label for *Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site – from Photograph* by Jeff Thomas by Patrick Mahon, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

Quinn Smallboy’s artistic practice investigates what it means to be a contemporary Indigenous artist. Hailing from Moose Cree First Nation, on the west side of James Bay, Smallboy works to reshape, or “flip,” what he refers to as “customary symbols

and icons of Indigenous culture” into the customary objects of art galleries and museums: “painting, sculpture, and installation.”¹² *Colors – Small Drum Ring* and *Lines – Large Drum Ring* adapt the shape of a traditional Cree hand drum, while also referencing minimalist sculpture through their monumental scale and the use of industrial material. Traditionally a vehicle for storytelling, Smallboy’s drums expand expectations about the kinds of stories they tell.

¹²Exhibition label for *Colours – Small Drum Ring* and *Lines – Large Drum Ring* by Quinn Smallboy, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

Storytelling: Lori Blondeau, Jamelie Hassan, Jessica Karuhanga, Mary Mattingly, Adrian Stimson

Despite being human-caused, climate change often feels like a situation that is out of our control, an unresolvable macro-event that is simply happening to us. Art has the capacity to render the crisis in granular, human scale, returning a sense of agency to the project of countering its causes. The works of Lori Blondeau, Jamelie Hassan, Jessica Karuhanga, Mary Mattingly, and Adrian Stimson accomplish this by attending to the particulars of individual people and places, and by evoking narrative and storytelling.



Quinn Smallboy, *Colours – Small Drum Ring*

According to the Plains Cree/Saulteaux/Métis artist Lori Blondeau, “storytelling has influenced every aspect of my practice, and makes up a lot of what I produce visually.”¹³ Working at the intersection of performance and photography, Blondeau draws together the historical and the personal, the global and the local, the particular and the universal. Her two photo-banners *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* presents the artist assuming a persona of Iskwew—Cree for “woman.” The work signals the dignity and strength of matriarchal power in her family and culture. Blondeau evokes the sensibility of a particular place—here, Manitoba—articulating the land’s intrinsic and timeless value through the archetypal figure of Iskwew standing on the frozen shores of Lake Winnipeg. At Museum London, the banners were installed within an atrium, adjacent a massive window overlooking the forks of the Deshkan Ziibi.

¹³Exhibition label for *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* by Lori Blondeau, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg*

Jamelie Hassan’s mosaics are likewise rooted in quotidian storytelling. *Gizzard Shad*, for instance, began in 2021 with the artist walking to Deshkan Ziibi to experience the once-in-a-decade swarming of the gizzard shad fish at a confluence of warm storm waters and chillier river water. Working from a photograph taken by her partner, the artist Ron Benner, Hassan responded to the organic swirling forms of the shimmering fish. Her loose, intuitive process for creating this piece has resulted in a work that references a shifting, abstracted memory of a moment with nature. These moments “have been an immense presence and comfort during these months of the COVID-19 pandemic.”¹⁴



Jamelie Hassan, *Gizzard Shad*

¹⁴Exhibition label for *Gizzard Shad* by Jamelie Hassan, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.

Jessica Karuhanga is an Afro-Canadian artist who works through writing, video, drawing and performance. As part of *GardenShip and State*, Karuhanga’s video *Blue as the insides* comprises a multitude of single shots. In the video, a lone

figure dances and gestures, reaching in solitude. The tightly shot scenes provide viewers with an intimate meditation on ideas of loneliness, grief, and loss Produced during the pandemic, the video speaks to the climate crisis in a way that is indirect but profound. Karuhanga asks, “What is the efficacy of art in a period riddled with unending uncertainty?”¹⁵

¹⁵Exhibition label for *Blue as the insides* by Jessica Karuhanga, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides* (video still)

American artist Mary Mattingly evoked the idea of a literal garden ship in her 2016 work *Swale*, in which she led a free, floating food forest on a barge in the public waters of Brooklyn, New York to circumvent public land laws. In *GardenShip and State*, Mattingly’s installation *Ecotopian Library* comprises stories, objects, digital files, experiences, and books, amassed as a toolkit to help expand imaginations through storytelling. As in *Swale*, here Mattingly’s goal is envisioning and supporting community flourishing within the context of a changing climate. Mattingly’s *Ecotopian Library* also had a presence at the main branch of London, Ontario’s Public Library, and incorporated the work of other artists and craftspeople, as well as insect and bird specimens borrowed from the Zoological Collections in the Department of Biology at Western University.

Adrian Stimson’s contribution to *GardenShip and State* includes the monumental multimedia installation *Naamo Ooko’o’wa Omahkokata A’paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking*, the elaborate textile piece *Naamoi’stotoohsin - Bumble Bee Regalia*, and the video installation *Ina’kitapii Sais’skiimoko ooko’o’wa - Little Peoples Green House*. A member of the Siksika Nation, the artist draws together Blackfoot culture with the experience of living within the Anthropocene and responding to “the real effects of the [COVID-19 global] pandemic.”¹⁶ It is, however, Stimson’s triptych *Awwasukapi -- Many things happening, some good, some bad (1, 2 & 3)* that most succinctly expresses the focused tension that permeates *GardenShip and State*, as a whole. He writes,

¹⁶Exhibition label for *Naamo Ooko’o’wa Omahkokata A’paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking* (and other works) by Adrian Stimson, in the exhibition *GardenShip and State*.



Adrian Stimson, *Naamo Ooko’o’wa Omahkokata A’paissapii - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking*

I have used the Blackfoot term ‘Awwasukapi,’ meaning: many things happening, some good, some bad. It is often used to describe something bad, yet it can be subjective, meaning that good things can come of the bad.

In this, Stimson expresses the ambivalence of a garden ship, as a symbol of hope and despair.

Conclusions: Hope and Despair

According to the literary and political theorist Eva Horn, the idea of ecological crisis operates somewhat contradictorily as a “catastrophe without event.” Even while knowing the devastation humanity bears witness to is in some fundamental way (albeit disproportionately) self-caused, its unfolding reads as an “imperceptible shifting of states, with multiple, contradictory, and unpredictable consequences,” without an “identifiable source” but rather “a multitude of sources and agents.”¹⁸ This slow, centreless, manifesting of disaster intensifies the feeling of ambivalence that lies at the heart of the garden ship image. It’s not simply that we must choose between hope and despair, but rather that we must sit with both, endure the charged repulsion between them, without being able to finally alight on one or the other.

¹⁸Eva Horn, *The Future as Catastrophe: Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age* (New York: Columbia University, 2018), 55-56.

While cognitively exhausting, the enduring tension we feel between hope and despair in the face of ecological devastation is a potent precondition for meaningful action. Practically and ethically, this is a good thing—or, thinking of Stimson’s triptych, if it’s also bad, it will at least keep us honest. After all, the solutions to the climate crises will themselves be messy, nuanced, protracted, at times uncertain, necessarily forged under an ethos of patience, compromise, and collaboration. Far from irrelevant, art’s role in this context of global ecological crisis is to be present and responsive, highlighting and offering correctives to facile, bad, and unjust ways of thinking—what philosopher Vid Simoniti drawing from Adrian Piper calls “the spectres of pseudo-rationality”—by which we have steered ourselves into the climate crisis in the first place.¹⁹ Good or bad, the garden ship remains at sea.

¹⁹Vid Simoniti, “Art as Political Discourse,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 61, 4 (October, 2021), 567-70.



Adrian Stimson, *Awwasukapi - Many things happening, some good, some bad* (1,2 & 3)

BE PREPARED: Witnessing the destruction of our mother

Adrian Stimson



In 2019 I was invited to exhibit in NIRIN 2020, an Indigenous-led biennale in Sydney, Australia. I had travelled to Australia several times over the past few years, a combination of exhibitions, residencies and visiting my mates. This year, however, was a little different given the recent wildfires and the quickly evolving pandemic. Plans were in the making yet tempered and tenuous. We asked ourselves several times, why are we going? Given the destruction of the fires over the past months, will we be of help or a burden? Given the trauma everyone was experiencing, what would the mood be like? The early virus developments in Hunan and Italy were making us feel even more hesitant. In our decision to go, we talked about being witnesses to the aftermath of the fires, and to offer our support to dear friends. After consulting with friends at home and abroad, we booked before any travel warnings were issued and arrived just before the virus exploded.

My husband and I arrived a couple weeks early to spend some time down the New South Wales coast. Over the years we had developed a love for Hyams Beach in Jervis Bay, one of the loveliest and talked about tourist destinations in Australia. It is an incredibly beautiful place with silica white sands that squeak beneath your feet, bush full of round-leaved tea trees, Eucalyptus, and waratah. The waters, crystal clear, support dolphins, seals, fairy penguins and migrating whales. There are sharks: hammerheads, whitetip and blacktip reef sharks, and whale sharks elicit caution and demand respect. I personally find Hyams Beach a place that soothes my soul and connects me to the wonders of nature and my place in it.

Upon arriving at our Airbnb, we immediately noticed the changes to the beach because of the wild-fires. Ash had covered the sand making it a grey with black specs, not the pristine white of the past. The water was also grey, ash covering the coral and the various blue green tones. All our immediate reactions were of alarm and despair. The once pristine environment was now showing the real consequences of climate change.

Our collective thoughts began to wonder about the impact on the aquatic life and flora and fauna of the bay. We had already seen how close the fires came—the burned-out bush outside the towns spoke to the emergency experienced. Visiting Callala Bay for some tucker, we came across some heart-breaking drawings of children: koalas crying in burning trees, firefighters fighting, and all the animals in peril brought home the trauma of the fires. The collective grief was evident everywhere, and you could feel the despair in the air. So many businesses had been affected, leaving many on the verge of bankruptcy and wondering, what is next? A once chipper and vibrant place was downtrodden and troubled.

Our friend Tess had made lunch arrangements with artist Amanda in the village of Milton, Shoalhaven. Amanda's home and 85 percent of Conjola were hit by the firestorm, and several residents died. Our intent was to visit Amanda to ensure she was ok and hear of her experience. We also had a monetary donation to give on behalf of the Siksika Nation.

Driving to the town of Milton to meet Amanda, you could already see kilometers of burnt forests on both sides of the highway. The random destruction that wildfires caused was evident in the homes that survived and the ones that didn't. Listening to Amanda describe the chaos of the fires was surreal yet real. Fire evokes terror yet demands respect. The resilience that Amanda showed was inspiring, yet the tragic impact was felt deep within.

At the conclusion of our lunch, a very special moment occurred. Amanda gifted us the burnt wood and seed pod of one of their sacred trees; a representation of the fire, an offering to the future and seeding possibilities between our Nations. Her generosity in the face of adversity was a gift to life, despite all that happened. Her resolve to move forward, rebuild her community and make art was heart felt.

After having lunch with Amanda, we decided to go further south to Mogo. It was a sobering drive: you could feel the trauma settling in, and the randomness of the fire was astounding. The experience of witnessing the burnt landscape, the silence of the forest and getting first-hand accounts from Amanda was emotional. Tears flowed, and our collective breaths revealed our grief. This set the tone for our trip and then compounded the reality that COVID-19 was about to disrupt all that we take for granted.

Our pre-biennale holiday at Jervis Bay was unsettling. Unlike previous visits we were consumed by the news: constantly checking the status and advancement of the new virus; cruise ships becoming petri-dishes for the virus to spread; countries declaring its presence; our discussions focusing on what would come next and how we would respond. The invisible enemy was upon us.

Upon returning to Sydney, things still felt "normal" albeit anxious. News messaging was already indicating the importance of cleanliness, masking up and not gathering—a recipe that put the many openings and events scheduled for the biennale in jeopardy. You could already hear the debate about the severity of the virus.

“All our immediate reactions were of alarm and despair. The once pristine environment was now showing the real consequences of climate change.”

Most people went straight to denial or cognitive dissonance, and the “it’s only the flu!” declared by so many echoed the ignorance being spouted by the so-called leaders of many countries. It was disconcerting and angering. Where was the critical thinking? Where was the listening to the advice of medical science? Where was the caution and care associated by being responsible members of community, the social contract that binds us all?

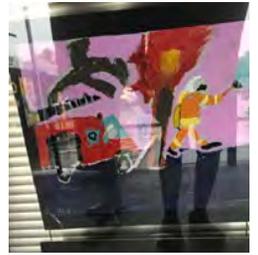
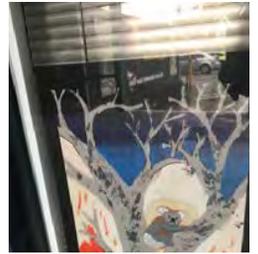
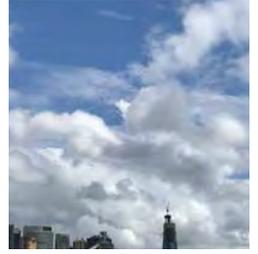
It was the beginning of the divide that has become a real problem in our civil societies. The fear was building and becoming too much to process; understandably this put stress on the biennale organizers. Events began, openings occurred, yet attending these events was stressful. I recall being at the opening at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which is situated at the Circular Quay where all the cruise ships moor. There were 1500 in attendance and all I could do was look back and forth between the ships and the gallery thinking: this is a recipe for disaster.

Perhaps I was being too dramatic, yet my military training and having recently been in the theater of war in Afghanistan prepared me to be overtly aware and cautious. The quote “carry on” seemed to be the thinking of the day. Openings continued and I began to prepare for my performance, I had invited elders and youth alike to take part and was amassing props, engaging technicians for the spectacle as the alarms became louder. I think of the Australian saying, “loving themselves sick.” Like Nero, we all “fiddled while Rome burned”.

When the Canadian government announced that citizens needed to return, I cancelled my performance and booked tickets straight home. Like many, my concern was not only for myself but the communities I was in. First and foremost in my mind were the people who I recruited for the performance. The dread of thinking that they could be infected weighed heavy in my mind, as did the idea that we could bring this virus back to my home community of Siksika; elders and indigenous people have been cited as more vulnerable to the virus. Knowing that elders, my mother, family, and Nation were threatened caused us to be decisive in our decision to cancel the performance and flee Sydney.

I like to think of myself as a critical thinker and I am a skeptic of the spiritual dimension, yet I have had many events occur in my life that assure me that there are many things in the Great Mystery still to understand. The night before the Canadian government announced for citizens to return home, I had a dream (or maybe a vision). My late father Adrian Sr. came to me. This was the second time since his death where I could feel his presence, the first being at my great uncle’s place in the UK shortly after his death: while I was dreaming of him, he came to me and held my hand. I physically felt his grip. I knew he was there, and I began to sob uncontrollably yet felt better for it. This time, again in the dream world, the dream was a bit weird as it centered around an alien invasion. Armadas of spaceships were ominously entering the atmosphere. I was home at Siksika watching the ships arrive, filled with dread and panic. Suddenly, my father was there, sitting on the deck. He looked at me and said, very clearly, “Be Prepared.”

Opposite Page:
Adrian Stimson, *Ina'kitapii*
Sais'skiimoko ooko'o'wa -
Little Peoples Green
House (video stills)



What this means I am not exactly sure, yet at that moment it was a signal to act, to get the hell out of dodge, get home and be prepared for anything that comes our way.

Thinking back to Jervis Bay, my mates Tess, Ruben, Happy and I all predicted that this would not be over until 2024. Today we are at the beginning of 2022. What the year holds is still unknown, yet the endemic seems in sight. Everything has changed and with it the real danger of conflict brought about by opposing ideologies. Sadly, millions are dead as the result of the pandemic: one element that heightens our understanding of climate change, the social contract, and the fragile nature of being human.

The *GardenShip* project was going on simultaneous to my trip to Australia—it too being affected by the events yet an opportunity to delve deeper into the reality of climate change and our human experience of it. During one of our meetings, one quote stood out: “We must prepare for the worst and adapt,” by Mark Maslin, a quote that echoes my father’s words from beyond.

Throughout my life, I have been very interested in and supportive of movements for and discussions of food security. Given climate change and the realities of disrupted food supply chains caused by the pandemic, food security has never been a more important topic.

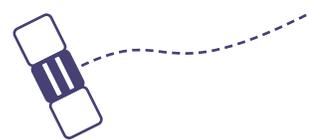
In the 90’s I created a project called the Siksika Nation Youth Entrepreneurship Development Society. Its purpose was primarily to introduce Nations’ youth to entrepreneurs and notions of business development. After a couple of years, it was decided by the youth to further investigate the idea of a market garden. As a group, we fundraised and managed to make a trip to California to visit various farms that employed organic and community garden practices. We visited Fairview Gardens, a Community Supported Agriculture project in Goleta Valley, University of California Santa Cruz Centre for Agro-ecology and sustainable food systems, and the Esalen Institute gardens. This research led to the creation of “First Light Gardens,” which operated for several years before closing at the end of 2002. I have always felt that food security is one of the biggest issues that we will face in our times. For many in the world, that reality is already here and further exasperated by the pandemic. Shelves are empty.

Happy and I moved back to Siksika in 2016 to take care of my mother and move into the family home. Our home is in the Bow Valley, the Nation community of North Camp where most of my family settled and continue to live. The site is the former Old Sun Residential Schools garden. In the 40’s, Poplar, Manitoba maples and Caragana were planted, and a water canal created. My father remembered planting potatoes on this site and when we moved back to the Nation in 1975, he checked to see if anyone else had claimed and built there. Lucky for us, no one had, and we built our home. It is a unique site: the trees have become a sanctuary for wildlife, the trees are home to many local and migrating birds, we are surrounded by coyotes, badgers, weasels, and gophers. More recently, bush hares

have moved in, creating an environment full of animal interactions and wonder. We have introduced honeybees and chickens to this mix. I truly believe that this is a unique micro-environment and sanctuary to many animals, and I feel strongly that we are stewards of this site and the land. I have decided to work toward mapping, protecting, and enhancing it. My artwork in the *GardenShip of State* exhibition reflect this love of the land I live on and the care we all must give in the stewardship of the earth.

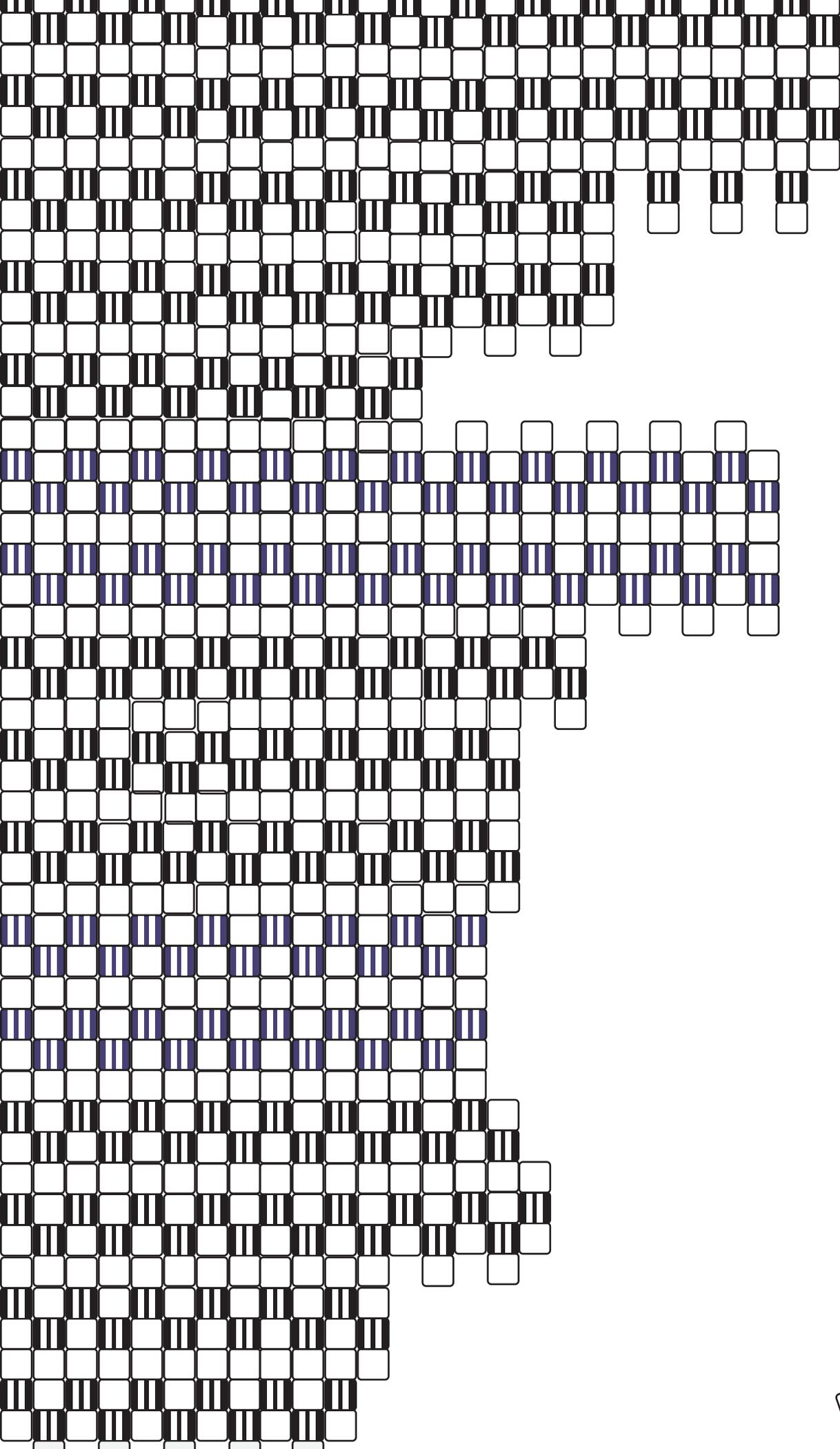
I see our garden as a microcosm of our larger world and the issues of climate change. I'm a disciple of the "Think globally, act locally" movement, as well as the many movements that focus on community development and distribution of food. Historically the Blackfoot people were known as fantastic farmers, and many of my own family were farmers. We transitioned well into agriculture yet were sabotaged by Indian Agents at the behest of local non-indigenous farmers, simply because we were better farmers than them. Today there are only a handful of farmers, mostly ranchers. Many agricultural venues have come and gone, often succumbing to capitalist, colonial pressures and racist ideologies. Gardens were plentiful on the Nation, and I remember garden contests in the 70's and 80's. There was pride in garden ship. Today, only a few home gardens exist yet there is a growing movement to change this, and with recent food shortages due to the pandemic, more people are digging up their back yards.

Having had the experience in Australia and now three years and into the fifth wave of the pandemic, many lessons have been learned yet ideologies seem to be dividing us beyond repair. To make another military analogy, it felt like many of our commanders failed—further, many of the troops went AWOL or mutinied. Perhaps like the climate, storms are happening in all sectors and continue to brew. We are not so unlike the environment that surrounds us. While despair can take hold, I remember the words of my father: "Be Prepared." Ominous at first, yet comforting in context with these past few years, being prepared is about caring for the sanctity of all life. We all need to be prepared to change our ways to save our lives and the incredible beauty of our garden that is mother earth.



February 2022





Time of the mayfly
 Time of the glacier
 Time of the star
 Time of the page
 Time of plastic
 Time of day
 Time of the virus
 Time of the footprint
 Time of death
 Time of the mountain
 Time of the river
 Time in the sky is worth two in the bush
 Time of light
 Time of the cosmos
 Time of the minnow
 Time of the sentence
 Time of the Bristlecone Pine
 Time of a limping bird
 Time to skip rope
 Time of the song
 Time BUZZZZ!
 Time after time (I'll be waiting)

after time

after time

after time

after time

time

time

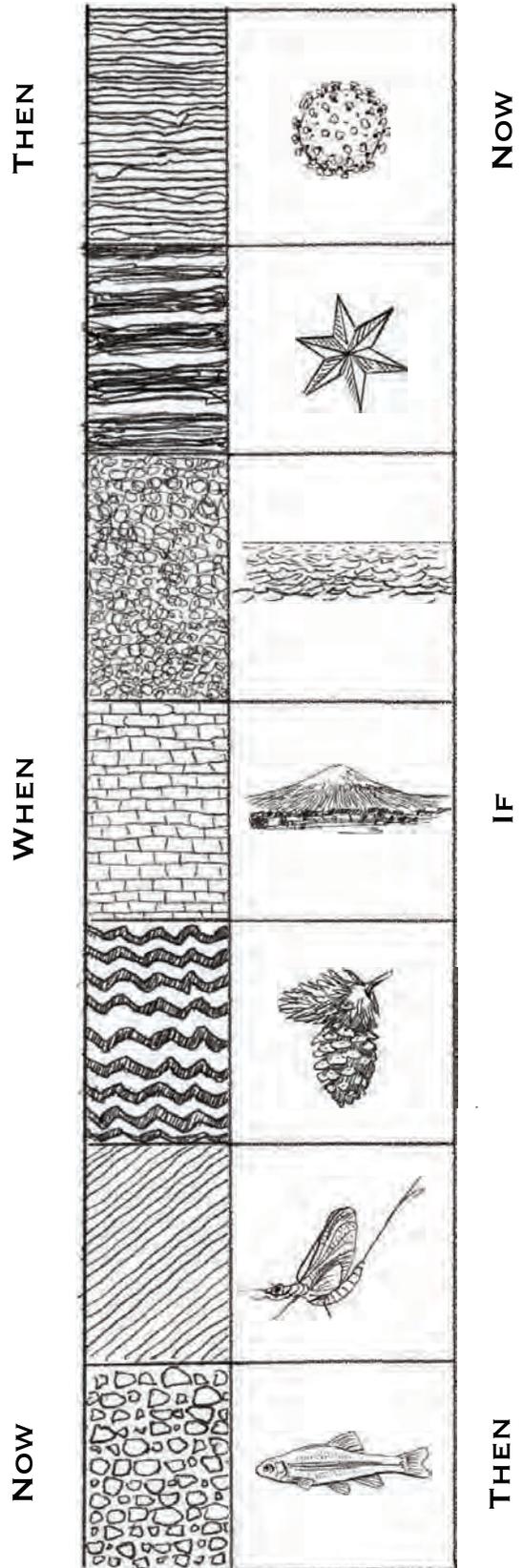
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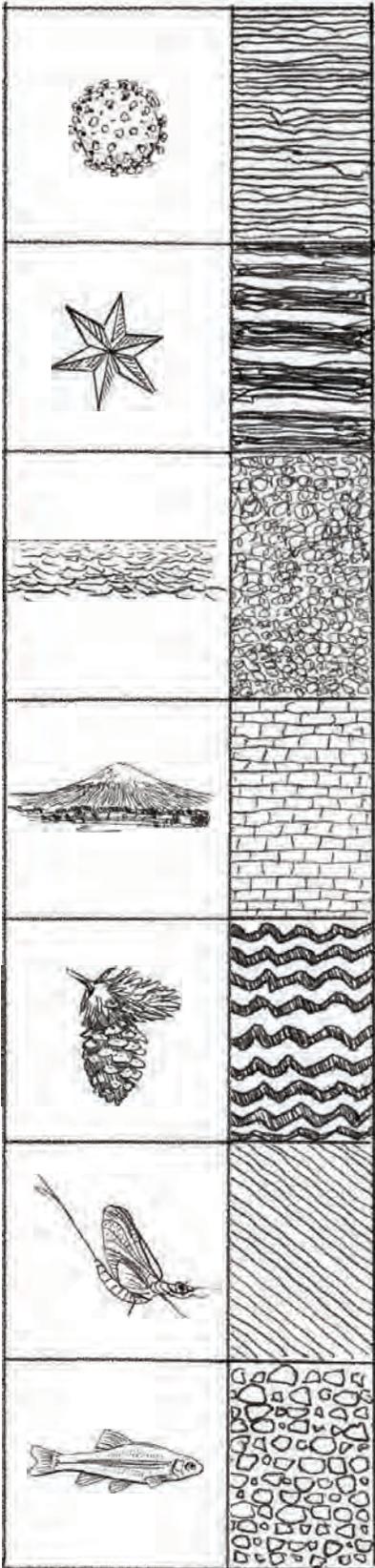


STRATA



STARTS

NOW



IF

THEN

THEN

THEN

NOW

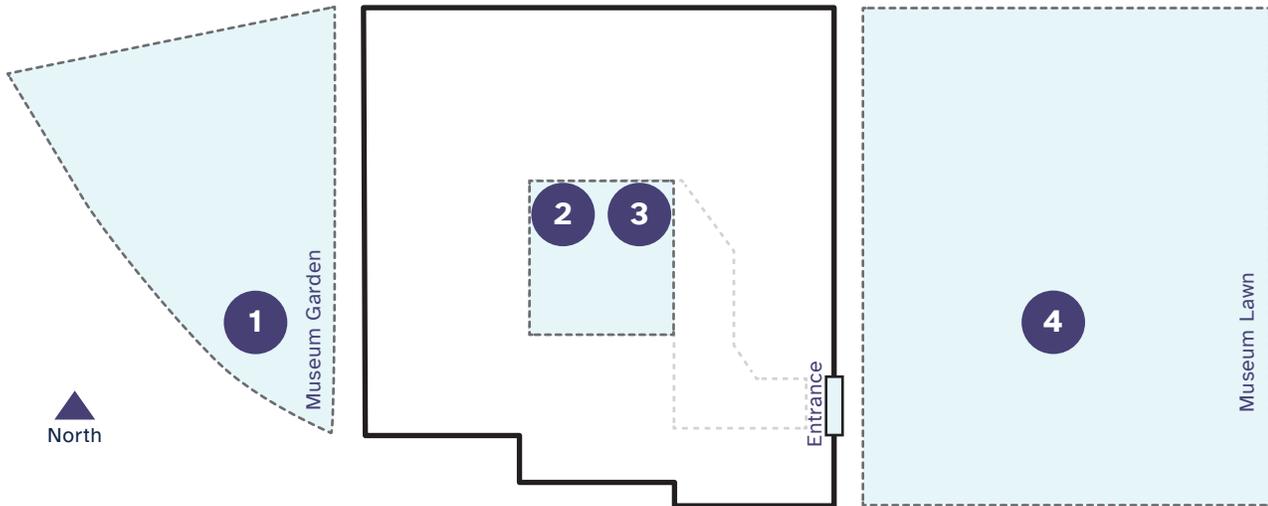
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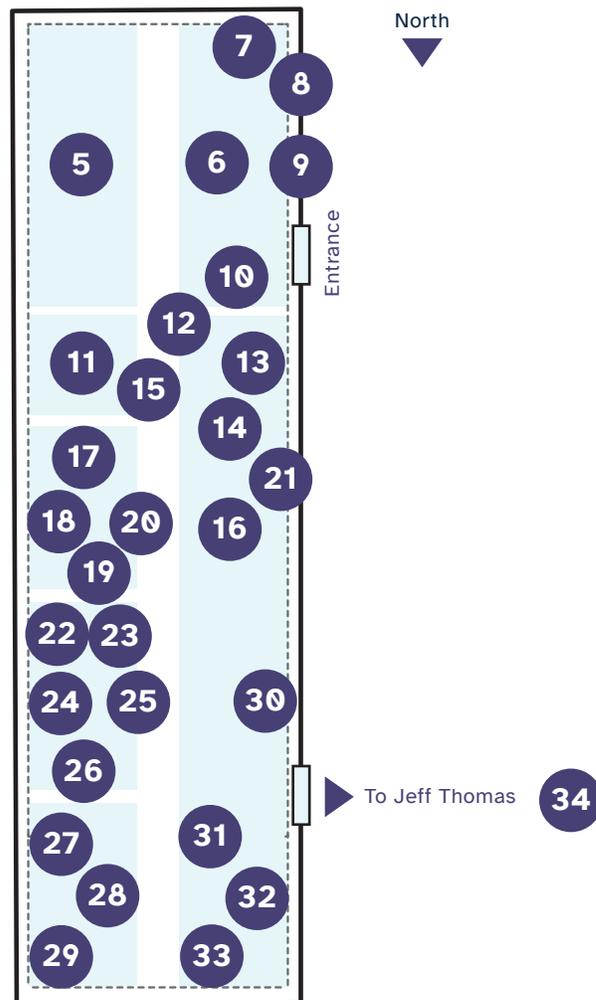


The Exhibition

Main Floor & Grounds



Second Floor Ivey Galleries



Exhibition Legend

1. Ron Benner
2. Lori Blondeau
3. Tom Cull
4. Jamelie Hassan
5. Ron Benner
6. Michelle Wilson
7. Jeff Thomas
8. Jeff Thomas
9. Tom Cull
10. Amelia Fay
11. Jessica Karuhanga
12. Sharmistha Kar
13. Sharmistha Kar
14. Sharmistha Kar
15. Jamelie Hassan
16. Jamelie Hassan
17. Mark Kasumovic
18. Mark Kasumovic
19. Mary Mattingly
20. Andrés Villar
21. Patrick Mahon
22. Sean Caulfield
23. Lori Blondeau
24. Michael Farnan
25. Michael Farnan
26. Lori Blondeau
27. Adrian Stimson
28. Adrian Stimson
29. Adrian Stimson
30. Ashley Snook
31. Paul Chartrand
32. Quinn Smallboy
33. Quinn Smallboy
34. Jeff Thomas





GardenShip AND State

Through a multi-sensory, multi-media, multi-disciplinary approach, GardenShip AND State explores the complex relationship between the natural and the built environment. Through a multi-sensory, multi-media, multi-disciplinary approach, GardenShip AND State explores the complex relationship between the natural and the built environment. Through a multi-sensory, multi-media, multi-disciplinary approach, GardenShip AND State explores the complex relationship between the natural and the built environment.

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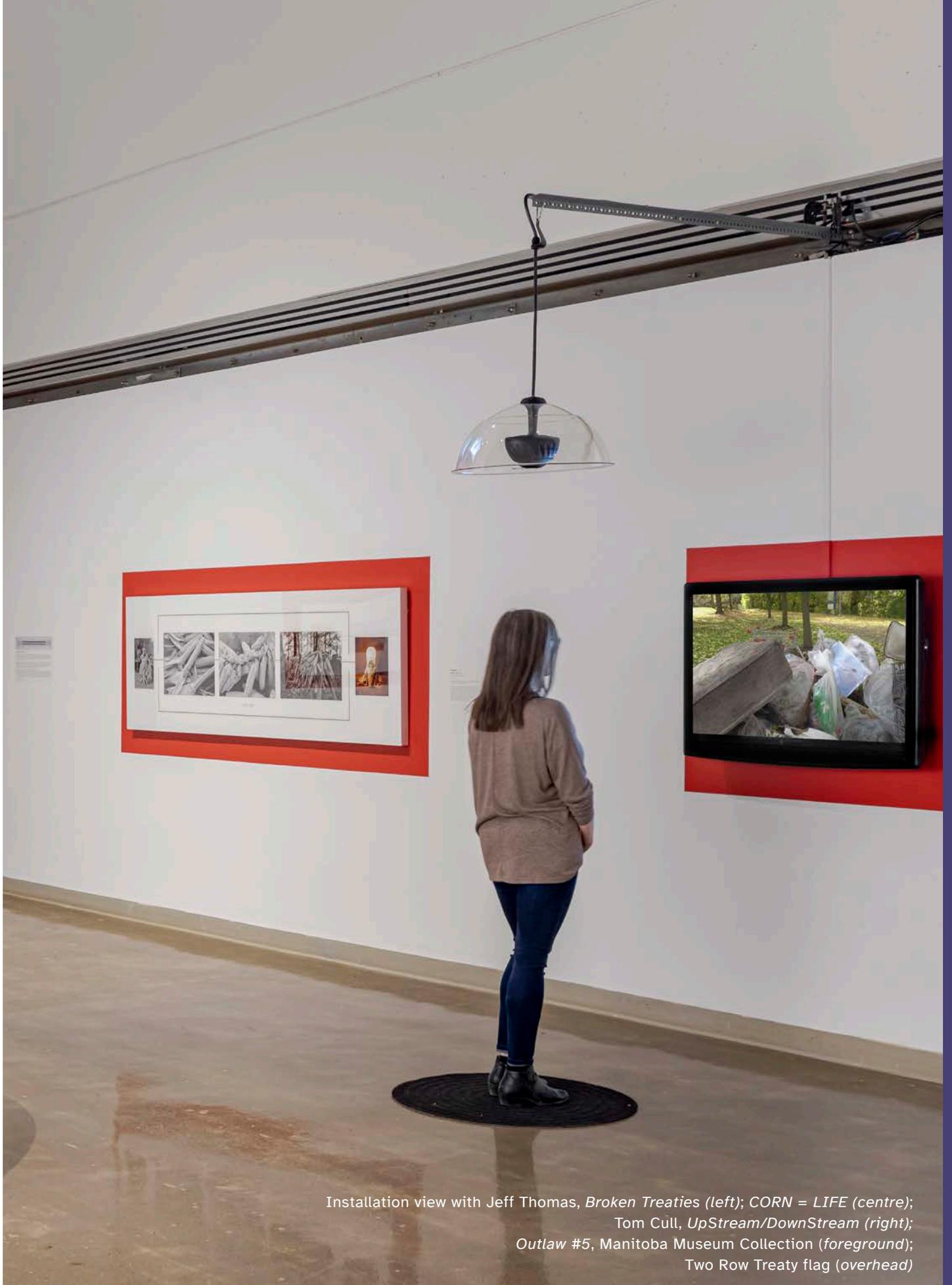
Installation view with Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* (left); Tom Cull, *UpStream/DownStream* (right)





Installation view with Michelle Wilson, *Forced Migration*, with *Outlaw #5*, Manitoba Museum Collection





Installation view with Jeff Thomas, *Broken Treaties* (left); *CORN = LIFE* (centre);
Tom Cull, *UpStream/DownStream* (right);
Outlaw #5, Manitoba Museum Collection (foreground);
Two Row Treaty flag (overhead)



LLAMA HIBISCUS TALARA NEGRITOS GULF OF MONTIJO BALBOA ISLA LEONES SIBONEY BANAMA PLAZA GIRON

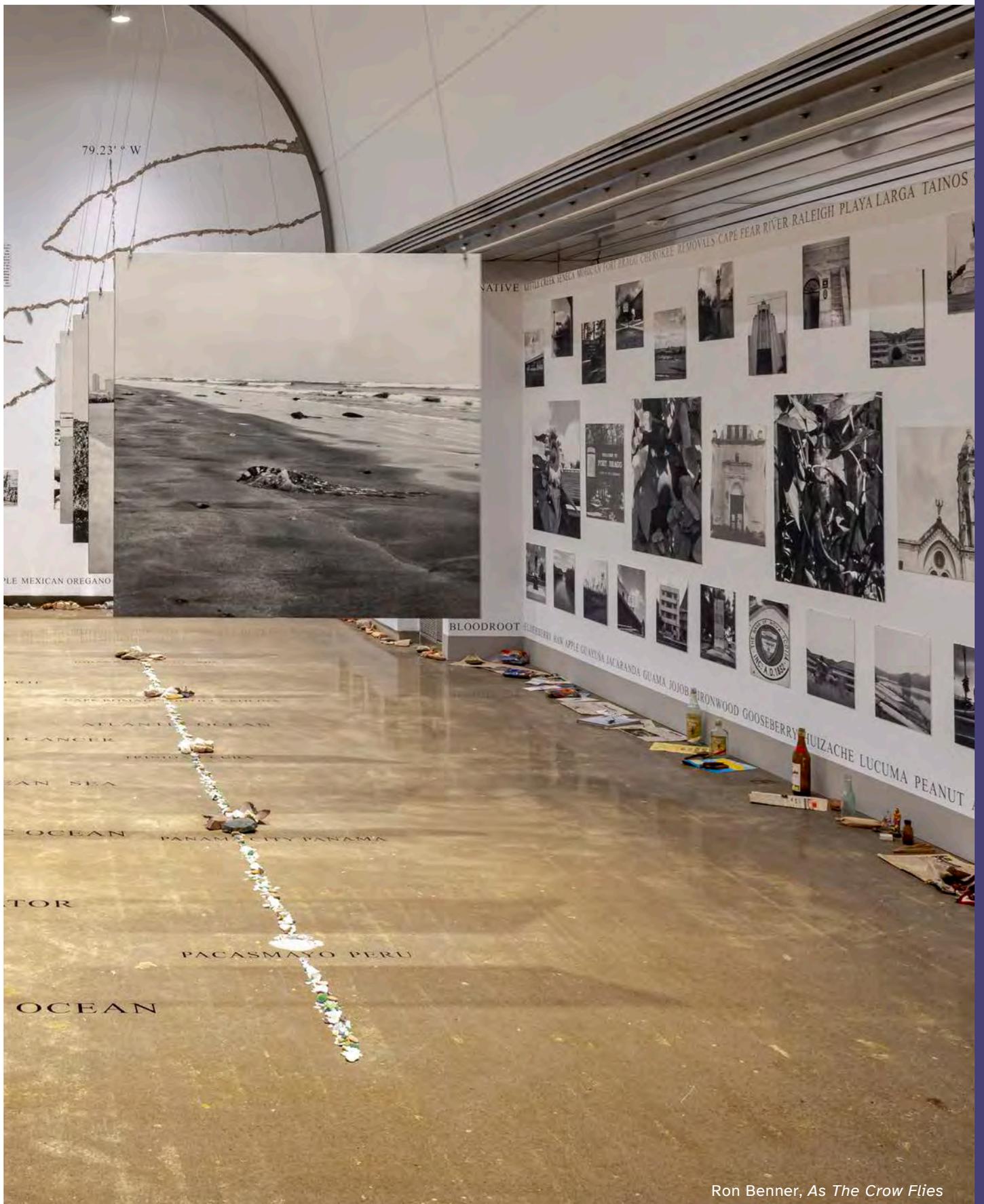
81.14° W

ROYAL PALM WILD GINGER WATER HYACINTH ROSMOS JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE TOBACCO LIMA BEAN CAYAMA PLUM WATERBURY TOMATO

STRAWBERRY PINEAPPLE

PUNTA PARINAS PERU

PACIFIC



79.23° W

PLE MEXICAN OREGANO

BLOODROOT

NATIVE KITTILIA CALIF. HANDELIA MICHIGAN FORT BRAGG CHEROKEE REMOVALS CAPE FEAR RIVER RALEIGH PLAYA LARGA TAINOS

IRONWOOD GOOSEBERRY HUIZACHE LUCUMA PEANUT

PACASMAYO PERU

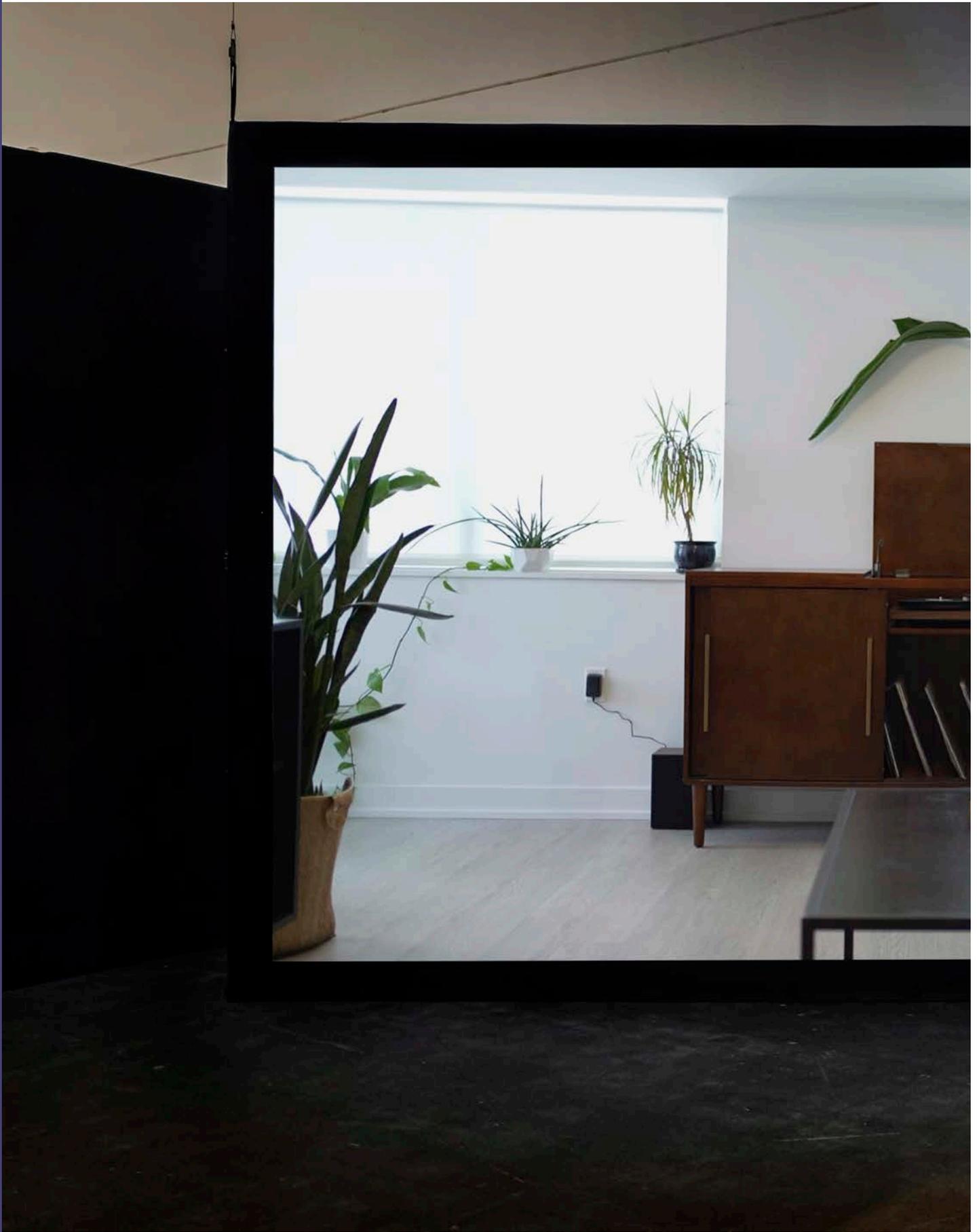
OCEAN

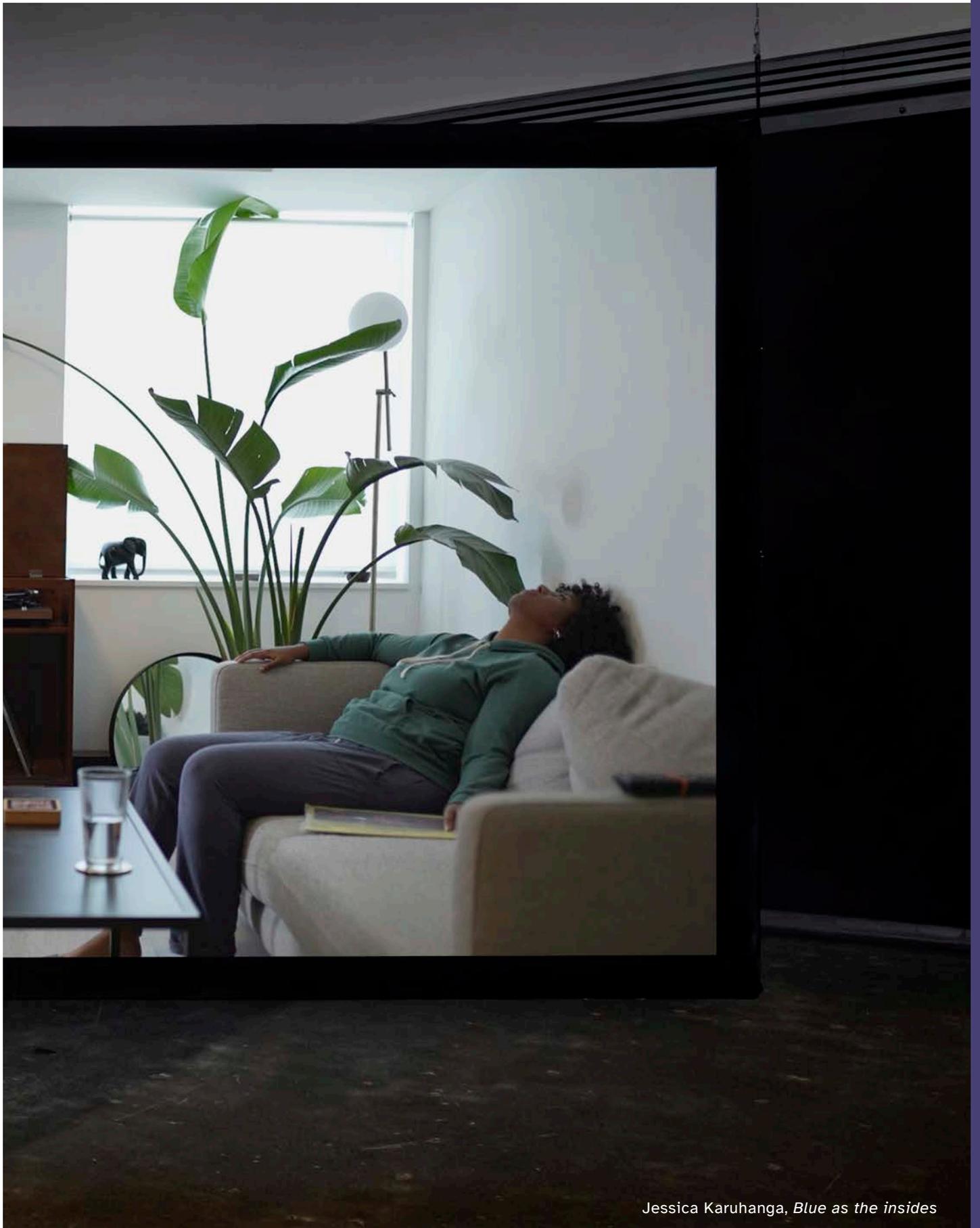
Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies*





Ashley Snook, *the honey is sweet*





Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides*





Installation view with Amelia Fay, *Curating Colonialism* (left); Sharmistha Kar; Quinn Smallboy; Sean Caulfied (right)



انترنت
INTERNET
→

SKOLSTREJK
FÖR
KLIMATET

Earth

- Love -
- Yubav -

Home

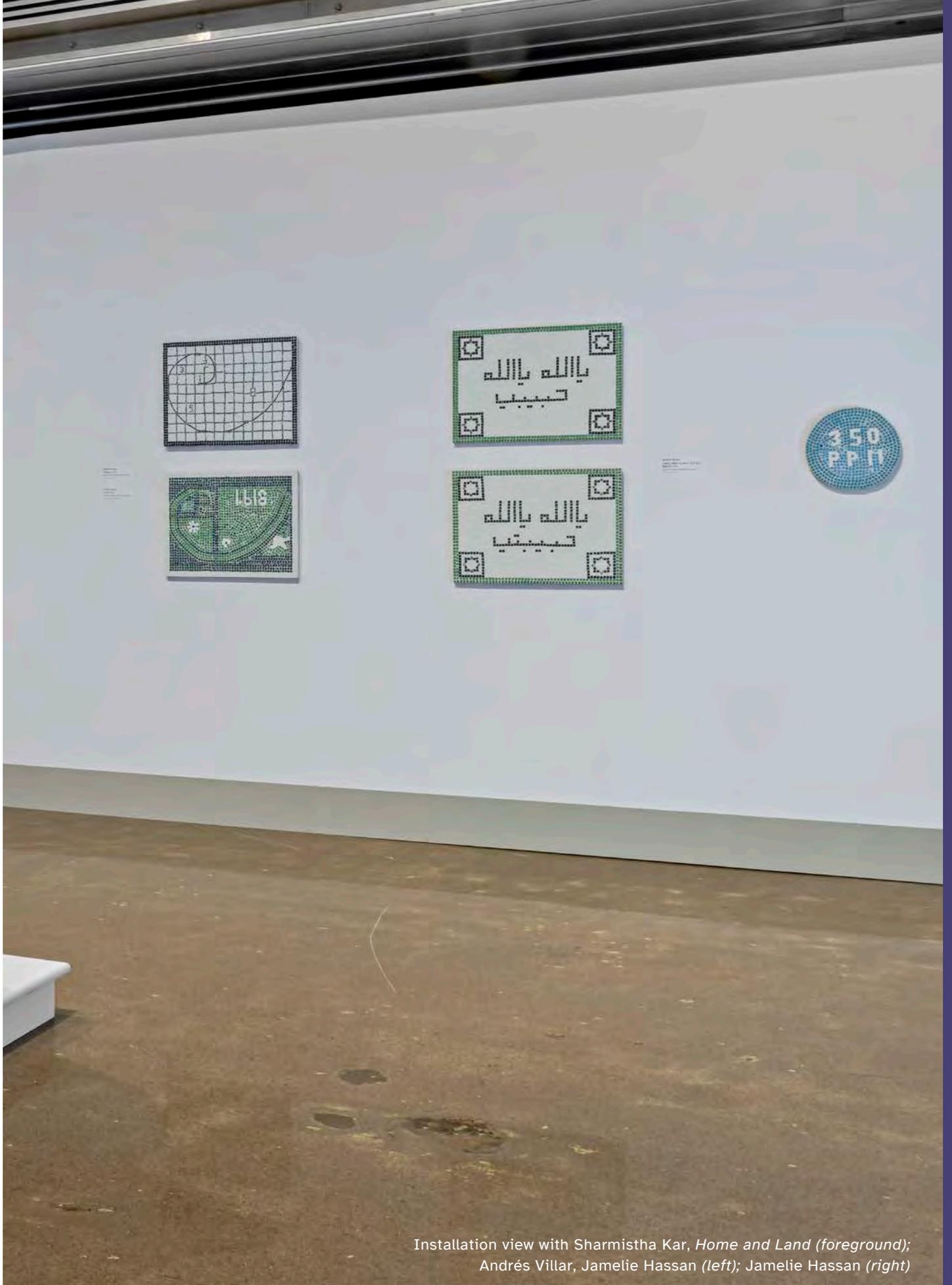
Land

Me gente
My people

Meis antepastor
My ancestors

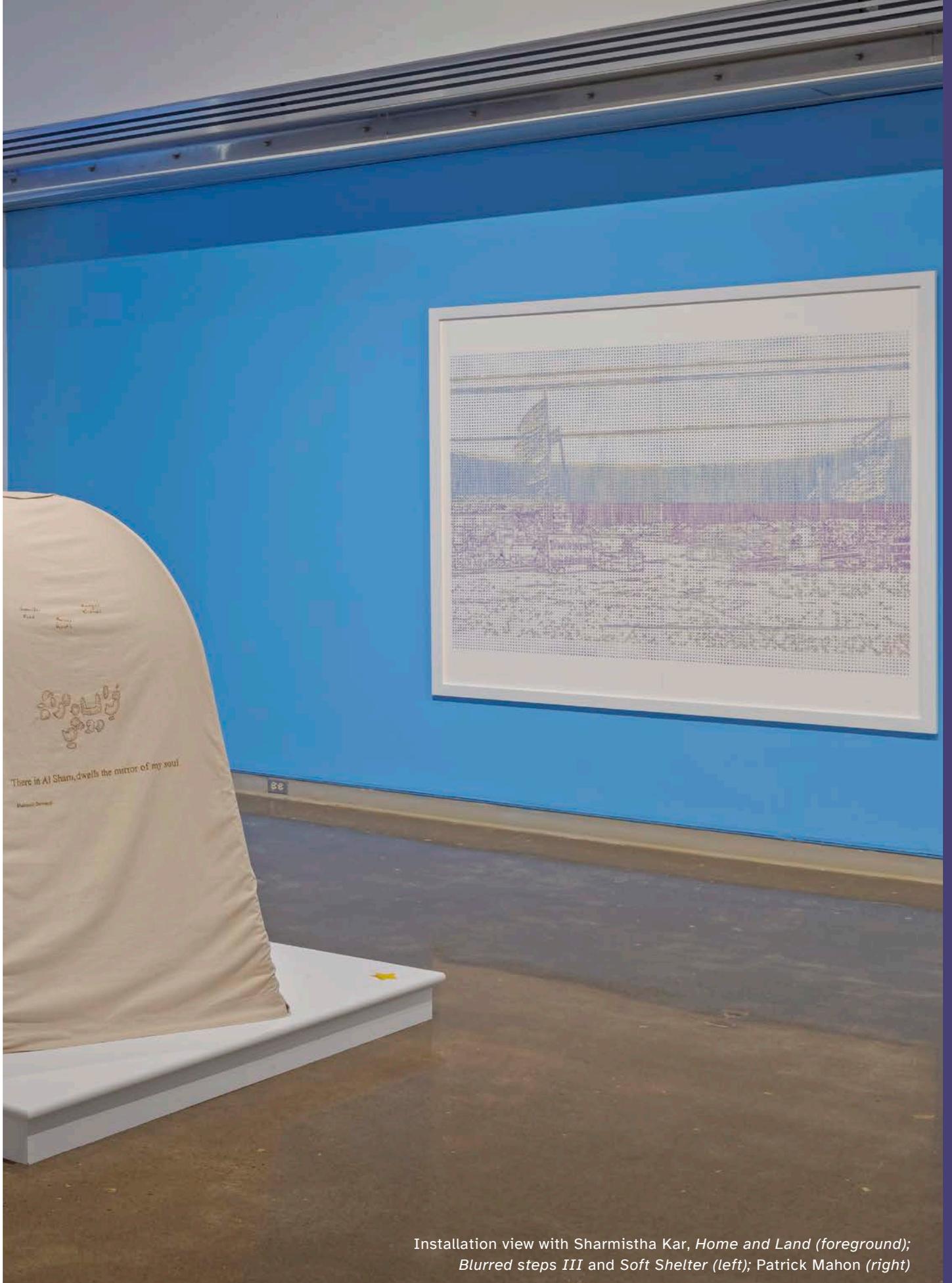
Amor de mãe - Father's love
Algo que sinto e - Long and high
saudades
Coração e - Bones and
memórias good memories
Made with - My life
made history my history
our culture my past
and traditions and made my future
& long memories

Home → Family (Bingirina)
Land → Kijana (Agostina)

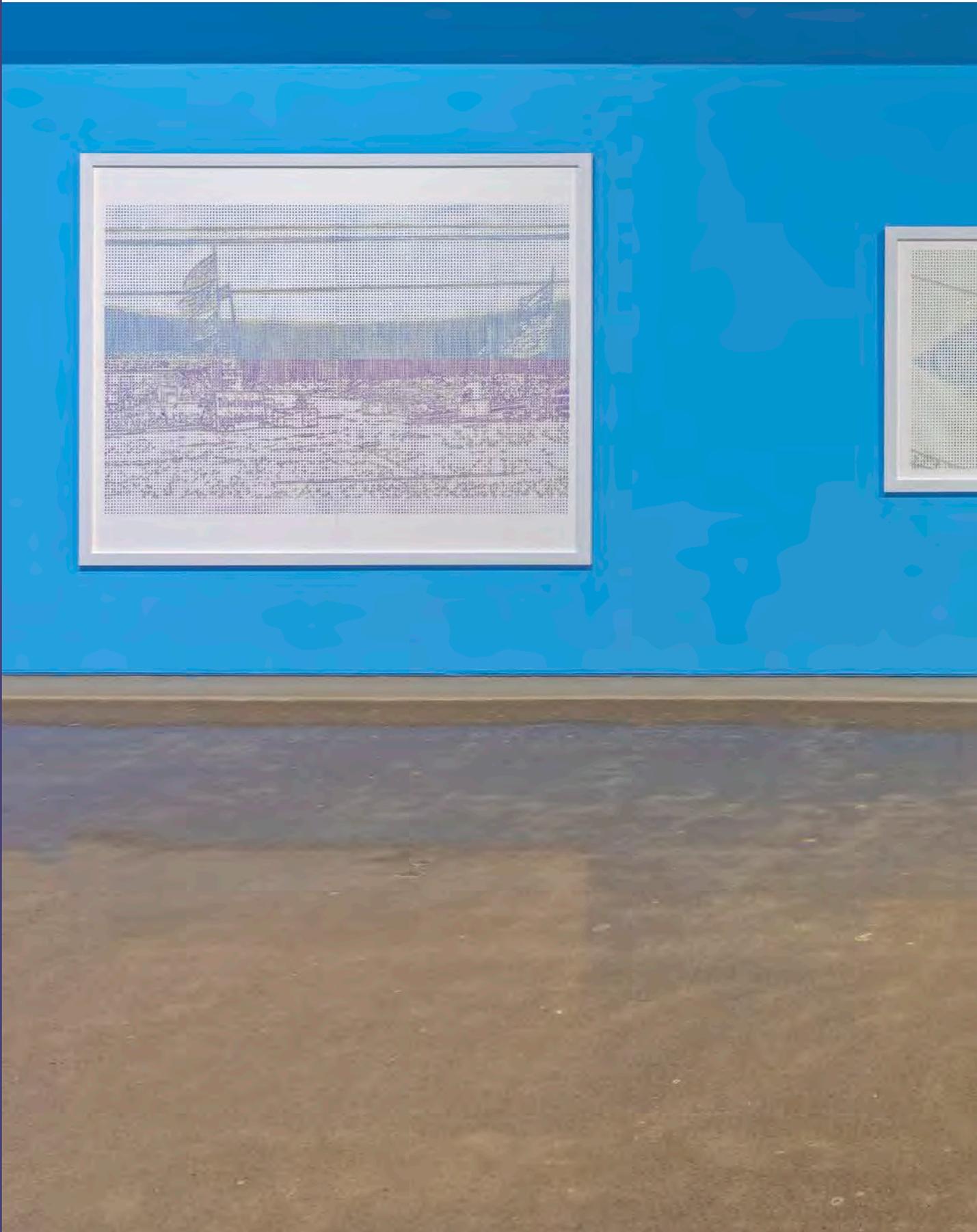


Installation view with Sharmistha Kar, *Home and Land* (foreground);
Andrés Villar, Jamelie Hassan (left); Jamelie Hassan (right)





Installation view with Sharmistha Kar, *Home and Land* (foreground); *Blurred steps III* and *Soft Shelter* (left); Patrick Mahon (right)





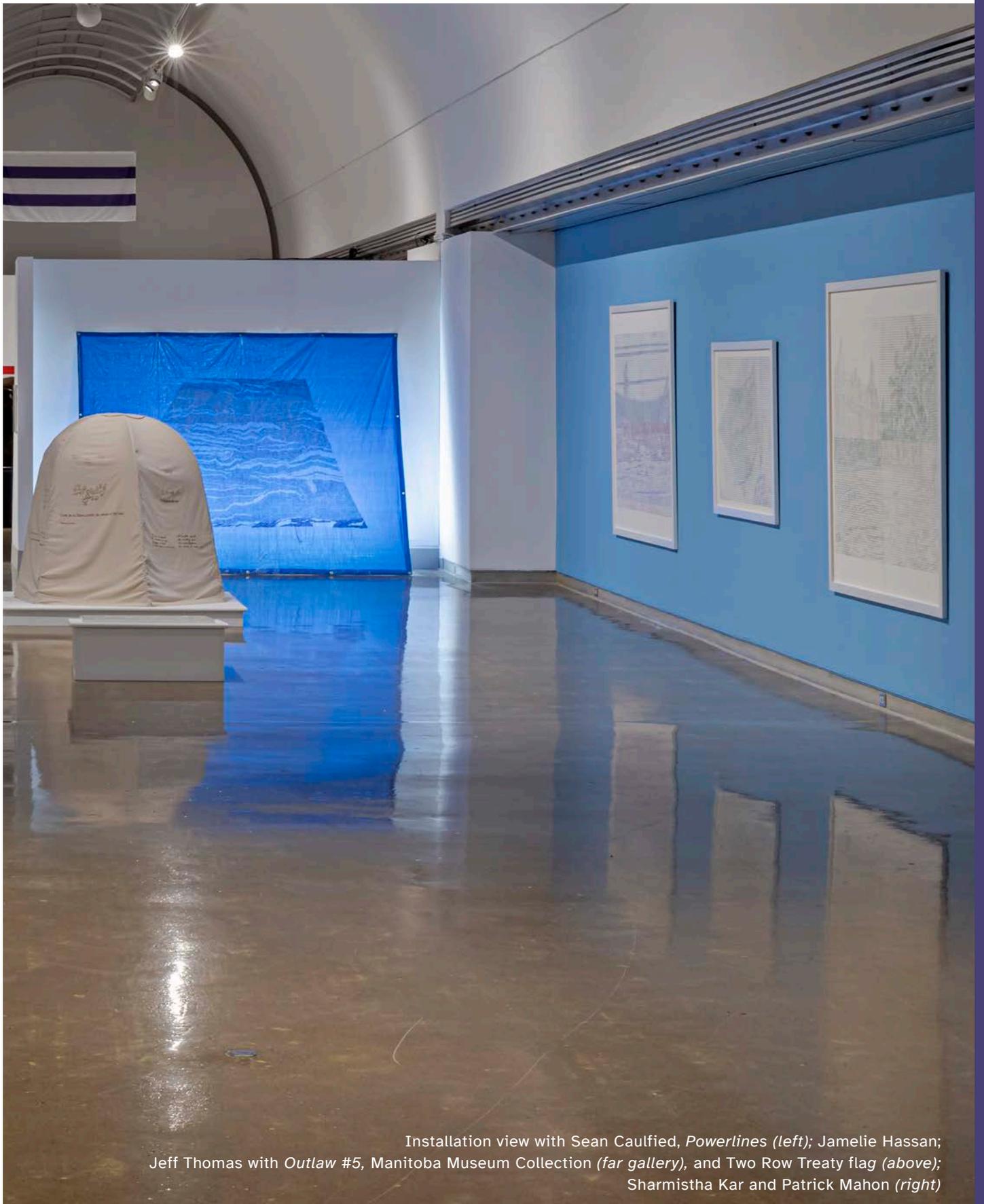
Installation view with Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags Series* (wall); Jamelie Hassan, *Gizzard Shad* (foreground)





Installation view with Jamelie Hassan, *Gizzard Shad* (foreground, left);
Andrés Villar (*alcove left*); Jamelie Hassan (*cap wall*);
Mary Mattingly; Mark Kasumovic (*inset, centre*); Jamelie Hassan (*right*)





Installation view with Sean Caulfied, *Powerlines* (left); Jamelie Hassan; Jeff Thomas with *Outlaw #5*, Manitoba Museum Collection (far gallery), and Two Row Treaty flag (above); Sharmistha Kar and Patrick Mahon (right)



Installation view with Sean Caulfied, *Powerlines* (right);
Michael Farnan, *A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People,
and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress* (left)







Installation view with Quinn Smallboy, *Colours – Small Drum Ring* (left); *Lines – Large Drum Ring* (centre); Paul Chartrand, *Desiccated Root Text*, *Memorial Scroll in Chlorophyll*, and *Hydroponic Harvest Table* (right)

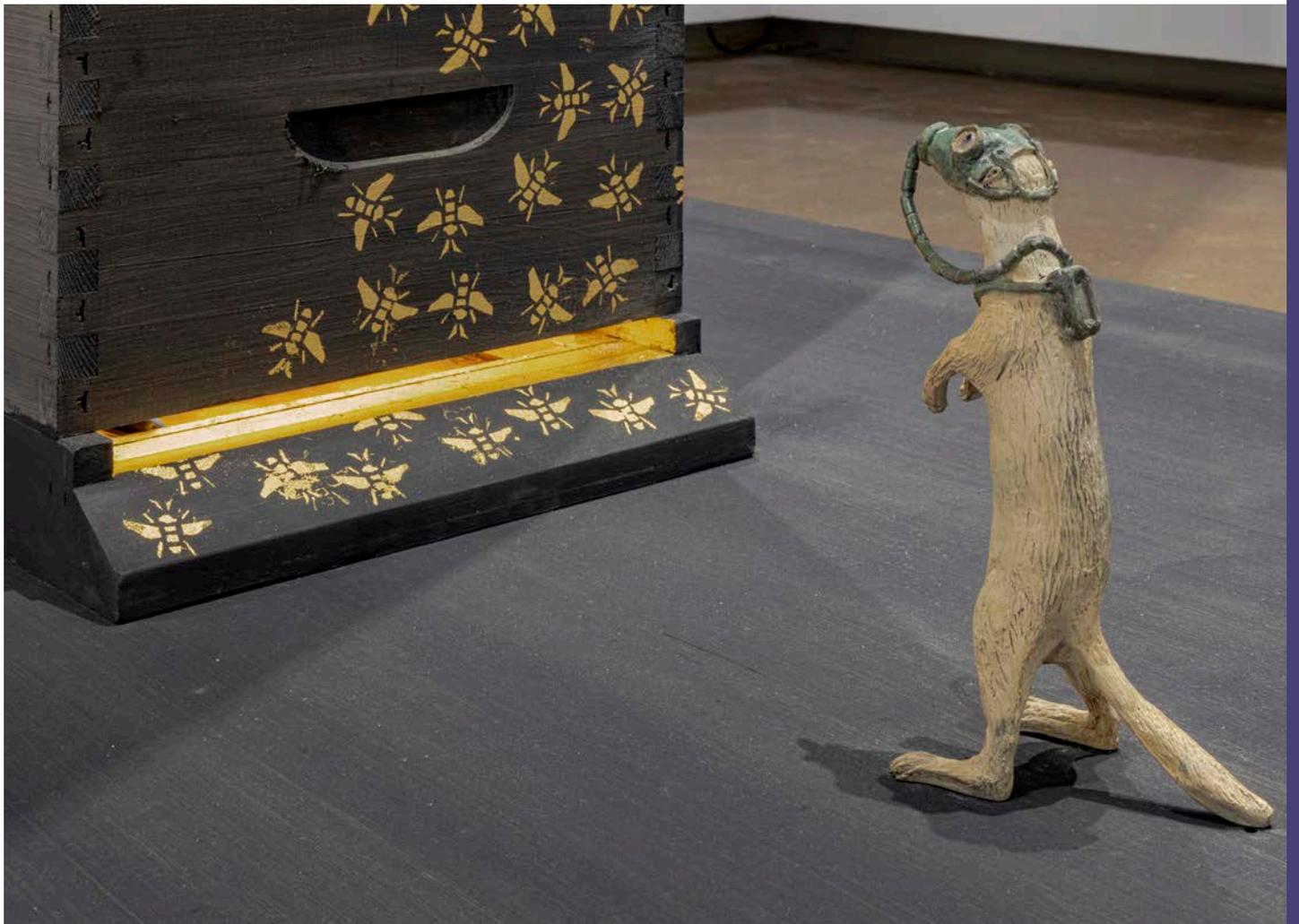




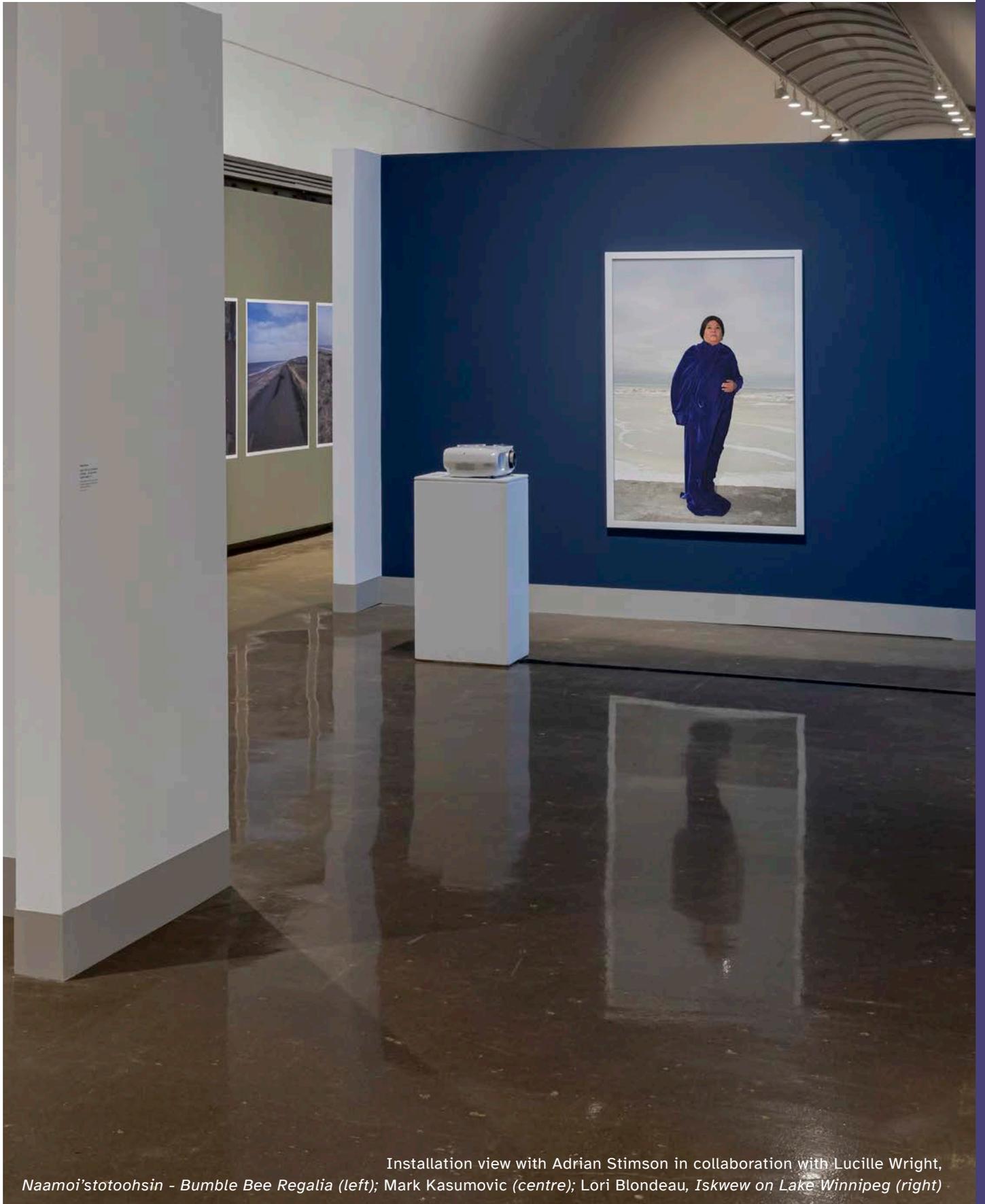
Installation view with Paul Chartrand, *Desiccated Root Text* (left);
Memorial Scroll in Chlorophyll (wall);
Hydroponic Harvest Table, (right)



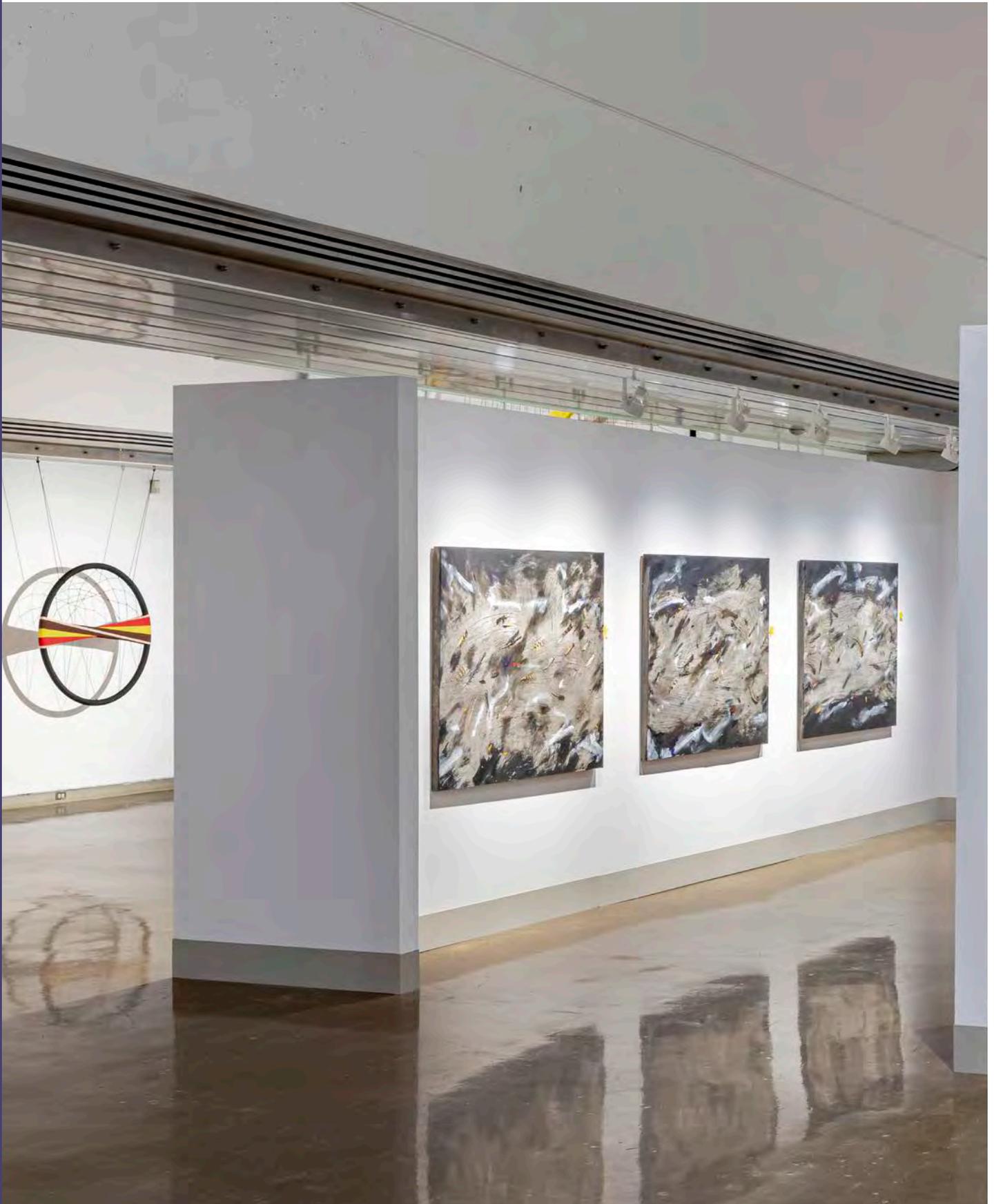
Installation view with Adrian Stimson, *Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking* (opposite page, detail view)







Installation view with Adrian Stimson in collaboration with Lucille Wright, *Naamoi'stotoohsin - Bumble Bee Regalia* (left); Mark Kasumovic (centre); Lori Blondeau, *Iskewew on Lake Winnipeg* (right)





Installation view with Quinn Smallboy, *Colours – Small Drum Ring* (left);
Adrian Stimson, *Awwasukapi – Many things happening, some good, some bad* (1,2 & 3);
Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* (right)

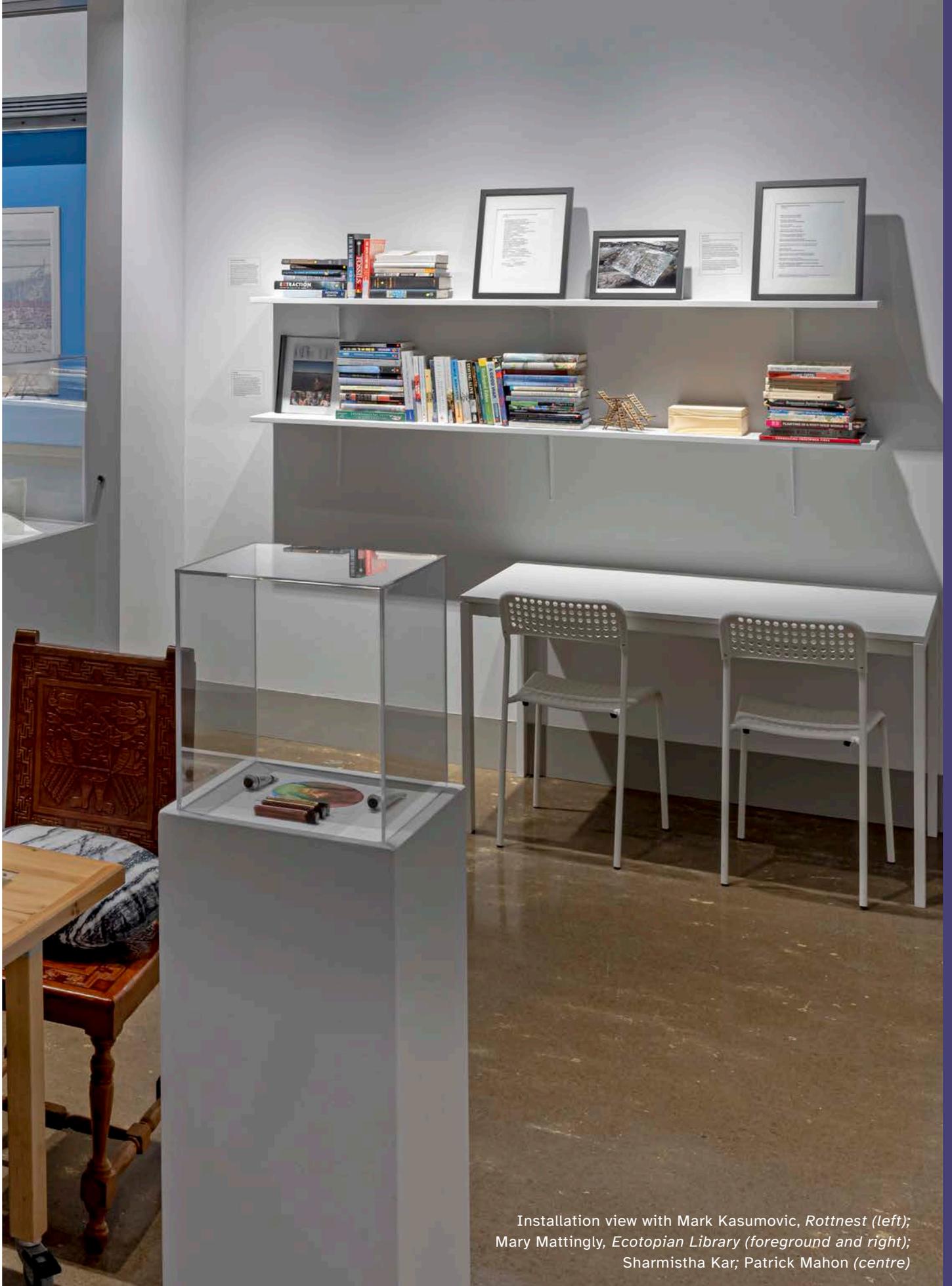


Installation view with Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* (left);
Michael Farnan, *A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People, and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress* (right)



A Map Depicting
the Settlement History
of the Land, Plants, Animals,
People and Water
Between
Here and There.
Here being where I am and
There being where you are.
A work in Progress





Installation view with Mark Kasumovic, *Rottnest* (left);
Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library* (foreground and right);
Sharmistha Kar; Patrick Mahon (centre)

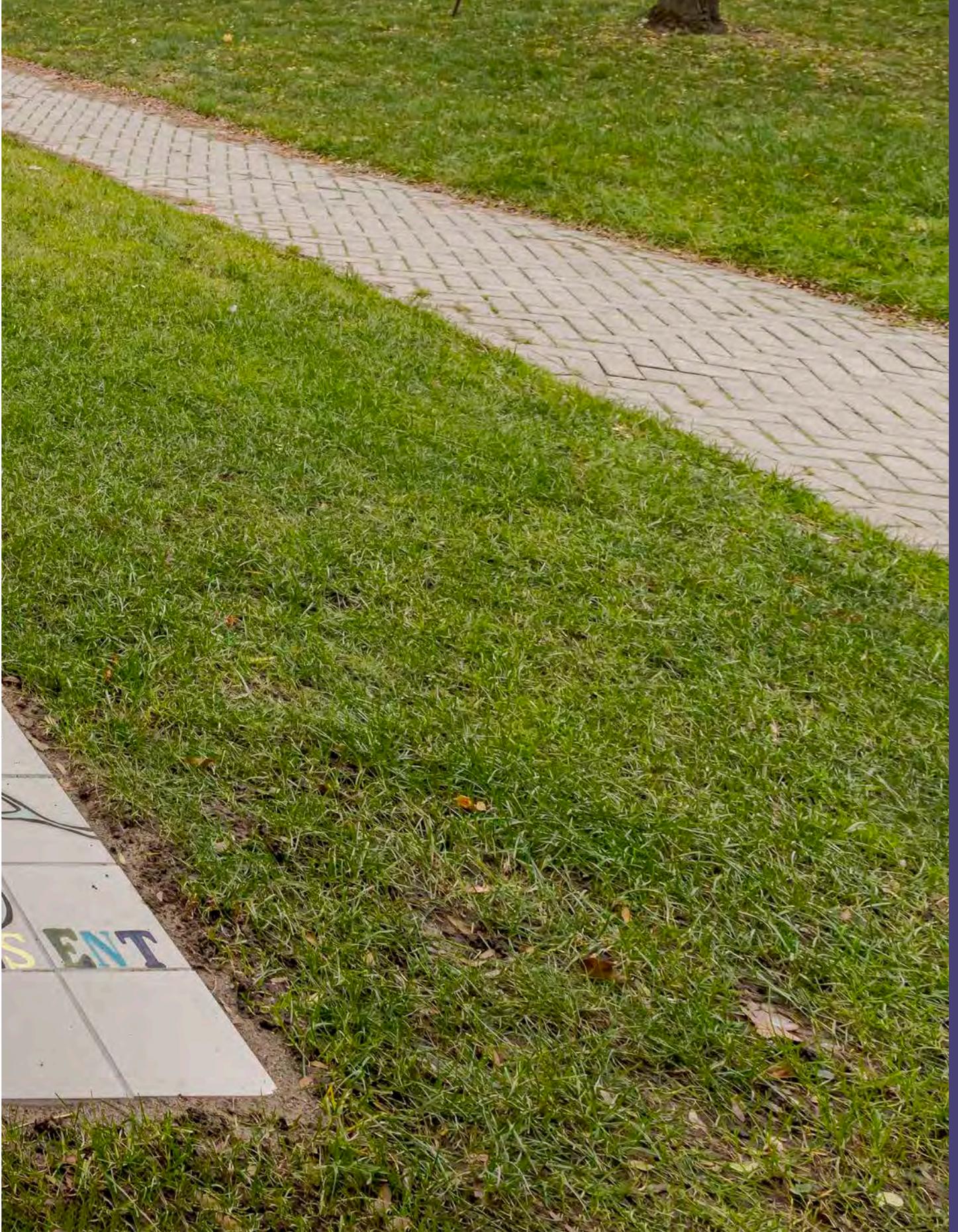


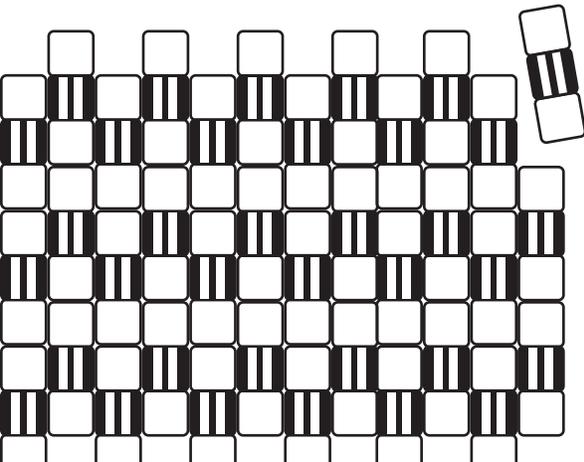
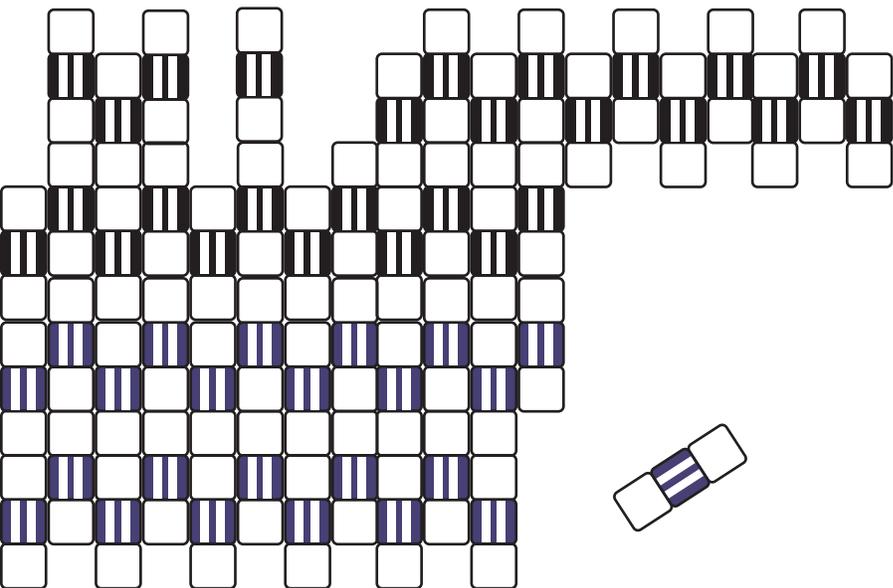
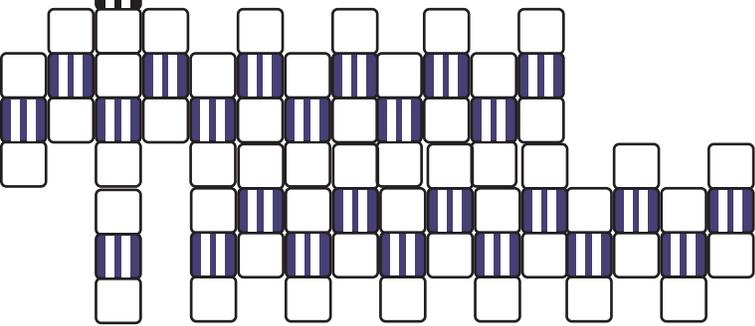
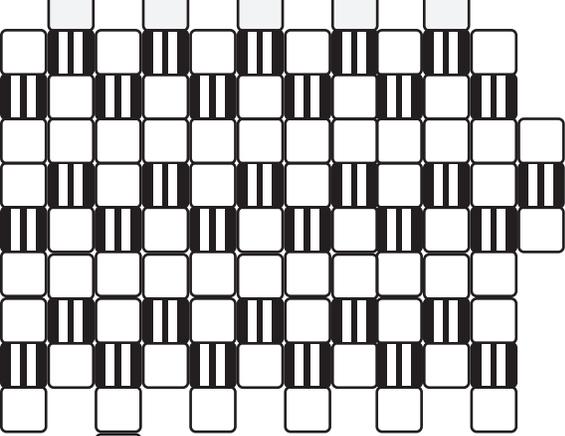


Installation view with Jeff Thomas, *Waiting for the Delegates to Arrive: From the Garden of Ron Benner*; Chair, Collection of Museum London



Installation View with Jamelie Hassan, *Map of Deshkan Ziibi* (Museum London's entrance and grounds)





we are all born
multispecies
newcomers to Earth
brimminghummingbuzzing
with life
with history

what entanglements
hospitable connections
survive

we are all born
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Texts

Curating Colonialism

Amelia Fay



As curator for the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) Museum Collection, I am responsible for over 27,000 artefacts (and growing) connected to the Company’s history. It’s a bit of a unique and challenging collection to curate. It contains artefacts¹ from across what we now call Canada, and even beyond, which has required me to expand my expertise beyond a particular geographic or cultural region. And the HBC Museum Collection is an additional challenge because of the very nature of it, and what it represents. While almost all museums are colonial institutions, a museum collection celebrating the company responsible for initiating the colonial process in many parts of the country has an added layer of colonial cringe.

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¹You’ll see that I use the term ‘artefact’ here, but later shift more towards ‘object’ or ‘item.’ This reflects my grappling with museum terminology and practices—specifically, that something automatically becomes an artefact once it enters a museum collection, but prior to that is categorized as something else entirely. ‘Artefact’ becomes a very loaded word.

The collection was first established in the 1920s as part of the Company’s 250th anniversary celebrations. The anniversary planning committee contracted a former district manager, F.D. Wilson, to collect “historical relics, lore, and souvenirs of the early history of the company” for a museum.² Collecting was already a well-established practice within the HBC at this time, as many HBC employees had amassed their own private collections and the head office in London, England was exhibiting artefacts. In 1922, the Company displayed Wilson’s amassed collection at their Winnipeg store on Main Street (the Museum moved when the department store at Portage and Memorial was built in 1926). This exhibit was one of the first public museums in Western Canada. A call went out to friends within and outside the Company to fill in gaps in the collection. Artefacts were donated, purchased, and even traded, for the collection. It is unclear from the records whether the money from the purchased items went to the artists/creators or to the collectors. The Company collection expanded with the transfer of artifacts from its Vancouver location in 1935, and from its Beaver House Headquarters in London in 1972. In 1994, the majority of the HBC collection was officially gifted to the Manitoba Museum. The Company retained the original Royal Charter from 1670 as well as a large corporate art collection, and their Heritage division manages these resources as well as other retail-era items.

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²F.D. Wilson’s contract lists this as his directive for the project. Wilson was the former District Manager for James Bay and had considerable contacts within the communities.

.....
³While a full discussion on decolonization is not really the intent of this reflexive essay, I would be remiss not to point out the abundance of scholarly work on this topic by Indigenous, Black, oppressed, and marginalized writers. Tuck and Yang (2012) is always a great starting place, but depending on your discipline or area of interest there are most certainly scholars whose work you need to be reading, citing, and engaging with. For museum-related works that have inspired me I would suggest the following: Das & Lowe (2018); Gilchrist & Skerritt (2016); Isaac (2016); Nixon (2020); Odumosu (2020); and Zawadski (2016).

Decolonization³ is quite the buzzword right now, but as many have pointed out, **how do you decolonize the colonial?** Roughly two-thirds of the artefacts in the HBC Collection were made by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Very rarely is the individual who made or used the item noted in the record.

Instead these objects are linked to the collectors: predominantly white, Euro-Canadian men. While the Company exhibited these objects in their head office, and later museum, with an air of exoticism, I am not entirely sure that was the motivation behind many of the HBC employees' personal collections. Employees "on the ground" worked closely with Indigenous peoples, at times forming deep and meaningful relationships. The birth of the Métis as a distinct cultural group that emerged during the fur trade is a prime example of this. Racial and status superiority overtones were certainly upheld by some employees, but it is clear that others were in strong disagreement with these values.⁴ Many of the incredible beaded, quillworked, and embroidered items from personal collections were purchased or traded for because of the skill and beauty they conveyed, and these employees likely wanted to share such skill with family members back home. "Home" for early fur traders was often Scotland and England, and later, a newly formed Canada.

.....
 "There are a number of references to HBC employees who really embraced the local communities and cultures of the Indigenous peoples they lived and worked with, some relatively "famous" (i.e. cartographer David Thompson; Arctic explorer John Rae) and others who flew more under the radar. More recently, I have been working with the descendants of fur traders who worked for the Company in the 1930s and '40s, and learning about the struggles that many of these employees faced as they tried to strike balance between their employer's wishes and the needs of their friends and community members.



Amelia sharing the HBC Collection during a virtual behind-the-scenes tour. Image courtesy of Amelia Fay.



Amelia uses natural light from the kitchen window to trace the template on to the fabric. Image courtesy of Amelia Fay.

Most recent donations to the collection come from the descendants of employees who recognize that these objects not only represent great skill, but carry meaning and deserve to be 'home.' Although Winnipeg is the geographic centre of Canada, it certainly is far removed from the source communities for the majority of the artifacts in the Collection. Is being stored and/or exhibited in a museum really 'home'? Further, while Museums give special care to objects deemed sacred or ceremonial in nature, what about everyday objects? **Do everyday objects miss their home communities too?**

I think a lot about the objects under my care, but not in the purely academic way that I suppose some assume a curator would. I like to think about their life histories, how they were made and who they were intended for. I think about what each maker might have thought about their item spending its days in a museum.

I talk to the objects if they go on display or when I pull them out from their drawers for a visit with a researcher or community member, and then again when I tuck them back into storage. I'm never fully sure if this is normal curatorial behaviour or just part of the strange relationship I've developed as custodian for this diverse collection.

I also spend time thinking about the inextricable link between colonialism and the environment, and how our current environmental crisis is the outcome of centuries of extraction and exploitation. When I first started thinking about the themes of the *GardenShip and State* project, I considered the immense resource extraction that took place under the Hudson's Bay Company, and the boundaries that they imposed. The Royal Charter of 1670—where King Charles II granted the entire Hudson Bay watershed and all of the resources within to the newly formed HBC—initiated the colonial legacy of Canada. The HBC called their newly acquired territory Rupert's Land (after their first governor, and financial investor, Prince Rupert), and justified their action of claiming land based on two principles presented by Pope Alexander VI in 1493: the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius—the belief that lands inhabited by non-Christians were 'vacant' or 'unoccupied' and free to be 'discovered' and claimed. For the next two hundred years the Company extracted furs and other resources, while exploiting Indigenous knowledge and labour to achieve their profits. Selling Rupert's Land to a newly forming Canada in 1869, without any Indigenous consultation, further solidified the Company's place in Canada's colonial history.



⁵I selected a pair of late 19th century moccasins from Saskatchewan, by an unknown Cree artist. There are 145 pairs in the HBC Collection so I'm not sure why I chose these ones, but there was something about the embroidery that I really loved. They were collected by a physician who worked in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. He amassed a large collection of Indigenous objects between 1897 and 1901 from across what we now call Canada. He sold his entire collection, 449 items, to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1921 for their newly developing museum. There is no information on how he acquired such a broad and diverse collection, and the source community for this pair of moccasins is listed only as Cumberland House.

So where do we go from here? **How do we reconcile the irreconcilable?**

When I was asked to contribute something to the exhibition at Museum London, I immediately thought about including a pair of moccasins. I love moccasins because they represent a beautiful mix of technology and design. Functional yet fashionable. An everyday object, but one of great importance, as we all know how awful it is to be wearing improper footwear. Moccasins were one of the first articles of clothing that European fur traders adopted. Many of the moccasins in the HBC Collection were never worn, but I love the ones where you can see the shape of a foot inside and some wear and tear on the sole.

As I examined the embroidery on the vamp of the pair I included in the exhibition, the perfect tiny stitches, I thought about the unnamed woman who made them.⁵ I was encouraged to find a way to include my own work into the exhibition too, and although I hadn't embroidered anything in years I decided to try my hand at it again. I couldn't replicate her stitches. I decided to take inspiration from her design for my work, alongside words from this essay. I used the stitches that I knew how to do to make the florals, so my embroidery looks similar but not at all the same, and not nearly as skilled as her work. I asked my mother to provide

her perfect teacher's handwriting so I could embroider over it. Yet once I started stitching the letters looked lopsided and clunky—not at all a good representation of the handwritten templates my mother provided. I started to feel discouraged, and wondered if any of the artists whose work I curate had similar thoughts as they worked away on their creations. The physical act of embroidering gave me a much better understanding of the incredible items that I care for, and I wondered why I hadn't come back to embroidery earlier. Each pricked finger, every stitch pulled out and redone, made me feel some kind of connection to embroidery artists, both past and present. As I looked at my finished product, unhappy with the lettering, I remembered what a wonderful Métis artist and knowledge keeper had shared with me: only the Creator is perfect. And so, I accepted that my imperfect embroidery would be situated next to these perfect moccasins, in a gallery full of works by exceptional artists.

My journey with the *GardenShip and State* project has allowed me to really think about my role and responsibility as a curator: about the role of museums and reconciliation, and about my practice going forward. The conversations that I've been able to have with this incredible group have helped push me to confront things that have been bothering me for awhile, but that I could not quite articulate. I'm not certain I've fully articulated them here, but I'm still on this journey and I don't think I need to have all of the answers just yet. I know that museums are not perfect, that my role as a curator is not perfect. But I see lots of possibilities and ways that we can make small improvements and changes.

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Radical Documentary & the *GardenShip* Project

Mark Kasumovic



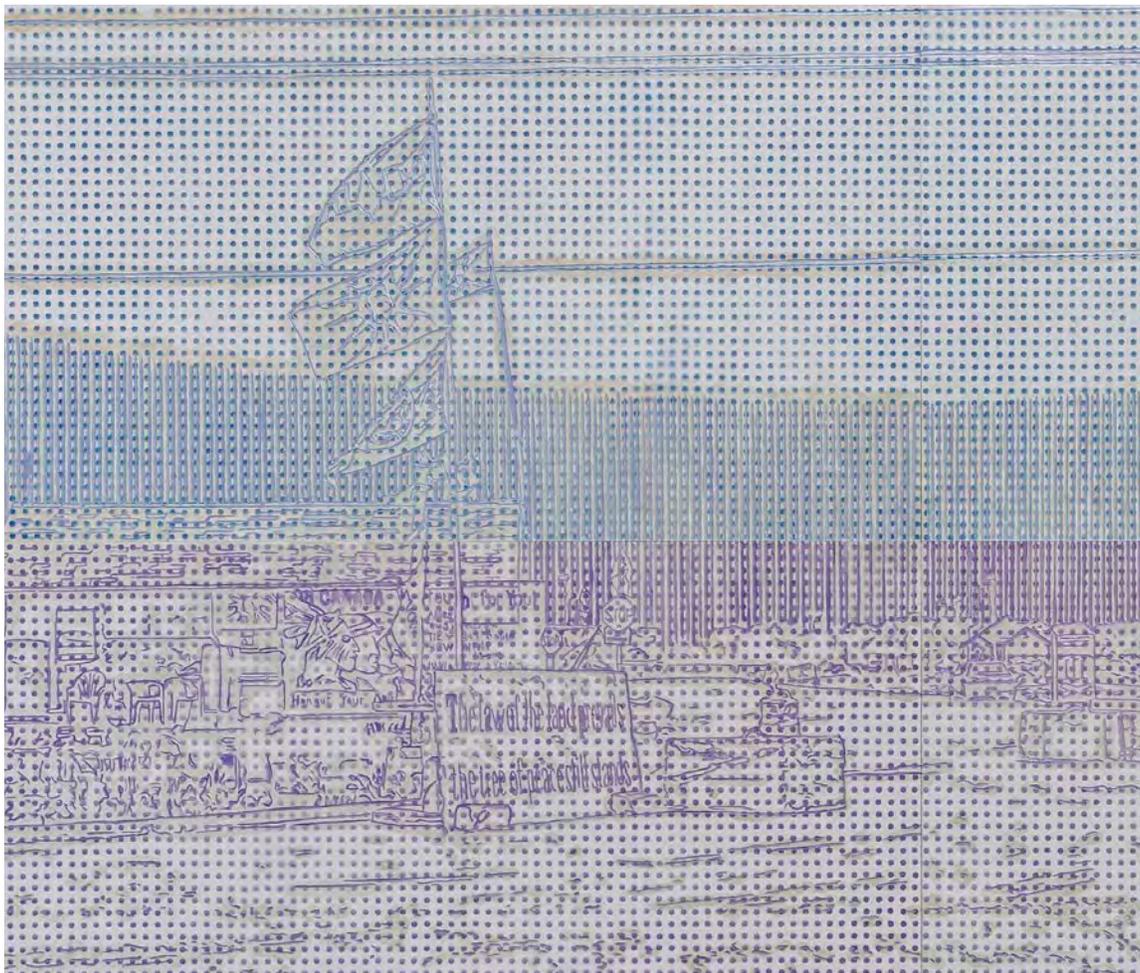
GardenShip and State embraces a form of radical curating that seeks to address issues which, due to their scale and complexity, are inherently difficult to represent. In his essay, “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?” Jacques Rancière scrutinizes the challenges inherent within representation. He locates these challenges in the aesthetic and political limitations embedded within the contemporary image. The pursuit of depicting and questioning problems that are as intermingled and multifaceted as global warming and colonization must address these limitations head-on. This opens up an important conversation whereby issues of representation within contemporary culture must be considered alongside notions of documentary, critical curating and new ways of displaying images together.

All images must confront a universal challenge: their capacity for adequately and accurately representing their subjects. The history of images and the practice of image making reveal many complications regarding the tenuous relationship between images and what they represent. Roland Barthes famously withheld a photograph of his mother in his written observations about photography in *Camera Lucida*, explaining that the image would be meaningless to his readers. For Barthes, it was his personal relationship to the photographed subject that made the photograph meaningful. Countless other thinkers have raised concerns over how images represent others, how meaning is culturally and personally ascribed, and how images manipulate the truth in various and subtle ways. It is now difficult to imagine how images might solve some of the problems—of (mis)representation, of manipulation, of distrust—that they have, at least in part, created. This representational challenge amplifies when an image’s subject is itself difficult to define.

Patrick Mahon’s *Threshold Flags* (2021) introduces an apt metaphor for the challenge of representation within contemporary culture. In his contribution

to the project, Mahon is “concerned with places where flags appear at a threshold site of social or historical engagement,”¹ and shrewdly uses halftone printing techniques to confuse the legibility of the images being presented. The flags are therefore depicted within his images as stuck within a permanent world of transition: emerging and receding simultaneously and forever, they persist in the particular agony of an unresolved image. Squint as we might, the picture does not become clearer. Instead, Mahon’s work raises peculiar questions about the state of images today. We are forever learning that images rarely speak with any authority to their subject and can only ever show some sides of a many-sided problem. They are increasingly touted as endlessly interpretable, shifting in meaning, and never fixed (as they once were perceived to be).

Exhibition label for *Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site* – from Photograph by Jeff Thomas (2008), by Patrick Mahon. In the exhibition, *GardenShip and State*, co-curated by Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas, Museum London, London, ON, October 2021 – January 2022.



Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site* – from Photograph by Jeff Thomas (detail view)

Unfixed and interpretable images create many challenges for artists who wish to represent some form of facticity—or even truth—within the world. This challenges the concept of documentary as we have come to understand it. As the *Threshold Flags* series suggests, difficulty in representation is amplified when the subject matter is globalized, sprawling and abstracted. So, do Mahon’s images symbolize the futility of trying to represent sweeping, global issues as an individual artist and citizen? Or do they point towards the possibility that we must strive to create new

ways to describe such problems? As an artist participating in the *GardenShip and State* project, I find the most exciting part has always been to see how individual voices can merge and create a new visual language.

It is worthwhile to briefly reflect upon how ideas around representation are shifting within contemporary culture. When considering intertwined and complicated issues such as global warming, the lasting ramifications of colonialism, and the evolving effects of technological progress on the planet, it is reasonable to deem that some things are genuinely becoming “unrepresentable” by nature of their scale and complexity. Climate change science, as an example, requires the collaborative effort of thousands of scientists and countless experiments to describe how human activity alters the natural systems of our planet. Inevitably, perspectives and standpoints will be excluded or ignored—whether by the necessity of scale or for political purposes. While scientific language is precise, such exclusions inevitably lead to distrust, distortion, and manipulation. And while scientists play a crucial role in understanding and disseminating climate change, its representation must involve many other actors. Artists have a stake in expressing the climate change problem, and they play a vital role in representing climate change in comprehensible and engaging ways. Artists are challenged with creating images (amongst other expressions) that, in some way, might come to communicate the complexities of this issue. Representation in contemporary culture is at a critical juncture, with many finding it hard to know what and who to believe. How might we use collective action to aid, rather than hinder, our collective understanding? In his essay, “Are Some Things Unrepresentable?” Jacques Rancière scrutinizes the challenges inherent within representation. He locates these challenges in the aesthetic and political limitations embedded within the contemporary image, and within language at large. What is interesting to consider in Rancière’s argument is how it relies on the presumption of a shared vocabulary of images that are not exclusive to its subject.² This implies that there is no specific kind of photograph that is understood as, for example, an “environmentally concerned” photograph; instead, this kind of photograph must borrow elements from a long history of representation. While interpretability is a valuable feature of certain images, Rancière perceives interpretation as a significant limitation as well. When we think of particular images specifically, such as images of ecological disaster, they can (and often do) mimic the same biases and aesthetic traditions found in art historical periods, such as Romanticism. Further, the same image presented in different contexts is understood in drastically different ways—for example, an image presented in an art gallery as opposed to a news spread. This malleability is a valuable quality for the poetic image, but presents a problem for Rancière when an “appropriate” and specific language of description is required.³ But what exactly is the appropriate language of images representing crises, both within art and otherwise? Are these images always biased, and if so, does that make them fallible? Should images remain neutral? Is that even possible?



² As an example, Rancière compares the writing of Robert Antelme’s *The Human Race*, which describes the horror of concentration camps, to that of the American behaviourist novel or of Flaubertian writing styles (of small perceptions placed side by side) that address much less distressing topics. This shows that a particular style of writing might well be suited towards certain subjects, but is not exclusive to the subject, and is often appropriated and re-contextualised. See Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 123–125.

³ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 126.

Alexander Galloway considers the influence of interface and context within images. He responds to Rancière’s question of representability by categorizing the types of images typically in circulation into four groups. He does this to understand how images communicate differently, depending on how they uphold and contest certain conventions.⁴ One of his categories is labelled “truth”, and while the title is problematic in this context, he suggests that only those images that have no aesthetic or political coherence have an opportunity to reflect the world in a “truthful” way—implying that all others images are somehow partial, biased and ultimately subjective. There is a problem here, because an image that avoids being coherent (aesthetically and/or politically) is difficult to understand and runs counter to our general expectation for how images work.⁵ However, within the framework of a curatorial project, images have the opportunity to introduce new ways of seeing old (and new) problems through how they are framed and interconnected—or as Galloway might say, by the interface through which we interact with them. But what are the new image languages, and the contextualizing interfaces, currently addressing globalization, colonization, the ramification of technologies on the planet, climate change and other sprawling issues? In our new image ecology, curatorial projects must confront and embrace the challenges of addressing the “unrepresentable,” despite its overwhelming challenge. From the inception of the *GardenShip and State* project, co-curators Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas created an “artist-led” and workshop-based approach to this collective, which offered the freedom for participating artists and researchers to unreservedly debate and propose the work that would eventually comprise the final exhibition. The early proposal circulated by Mahon outlined the impulses of the project. Thomas introduced the spirit of the Two Row Wampum Treaty.⁶ Combined, these elements provoked our collective impulses for experimentation and investigation, without a particular motivation other than curiosity and mutual exploration. To cite the Two Row Treaty, each participating artist was on a “separate-but-equal” journey, and this framework aptly set the tone of a collective voice composed of individuals with varying backgrounds and perspectives. This curatorial approach removed much of the expectation to align with a particular curatorial thematic (i.e., ensuring that a specific politic or aesthetic is adhered to when artists are creating their works). While the *GardenShip* project entailed a vision of sorts—an idea towards addressing a series of problems—the problems were open-ended, questioning and never assumed. This is visible in the breadth and scope of works produced for *GardenShip*, which offers responses to its themes in as many ways as there are contributors to the project itself.

GardenShip and State lent itself to the production of works that straddle a radical documentary line, one that raises questions regarding the appropriate language for describing a particular subject. While there are roots to the term ‘radical documentary,’ I propose that this approach is becoming more valuable in contemporary culture, and should not necessarily exist as a historical term.

⁴ See Alexander Galloway, “Regimes of Signification” in *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 51.

⁵ Considering Rancière’s idea, this type of image might lack the “shared vocabulary” that renders images intelligible to viewers.

⁶ The Two Row Belt, as it is commonly known, depicts the Kaswentha relationship in visual form: a long, beaded belt of white wampum with two parallel lines of purple wampum along its length. The lines symbolize a separate-but-equal relationship between two entities based on mutual benefit and mutual respect for each party’s inherent freedom of movement: neither side may attempt to “steer” the vessel of the other as it travels along its own, self-determined path. Jon Parmenter, “The Meaning of Kaswentha and the Two Row Wampum Belt in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) History: Can Indigenous Oral Tradition be Reconciled with the Documentary Record?” *Journal of Early American History*, 3 (2013), 83–84.

An excellent example of this new form is Mary Mattingly's *Ecotopian Library*, which is framed as a public toolkit combining objects and information from varying disciplines not often residing in the same physical space (forestry, geology, literature, botany, poetry, philosophy and the social sciences). Mattingly's unique conglomeration of objects and experiences can exist in few places other than a museum setting, and her rethinking of documentary begins to (re)construct image/object relationships entirely outside of everyday experience. This interconnected and interdisciplinary approach towards documentary produces an experience for participants beyond traditional narratives (and the associated problems when we approach documentary-as-truth). This encourages viewers to piece together understanding from various sources. Mattingly's proposition resembles our contemporary experience: as sifters of information trying to make sense of conflicting viewpoints. Most importantly, it also leaves the door open for viewers to have their discovery within the work.



Ron Benner, *As the Crow Flies*



Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library*

Ron Benner somewhat differently constructs an interconnected arrangement of organic and inorganic matter in his address and imaging of built and natural landscapes. In his multimedia installation, *As The Crow Flies*, the viewer is also invited to develop and imagine their own understanding and narrative of this abstract journey due south from Toronto and London, Ontario. Benner's politic and aesthetic are quite different than Mattingly's, yet somehow the installations fit seamlessly within the same exhibition. The expanded value of the *GardenShip* project is how these works can then be linked to, and infiltrate, other ideas within the exhibition, furthering the potential language being formed by this strange network of images. For example, Adrian Stimson's video work, included amongst *Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking*, mashes images of varying qualities, subjects and scales. From cell phones and flying drones, and oversaturated sunsets to scenes of quarantine: how do these scenes relate to one another? Is this constant stream of images representative of how we typically engage with each other and the world? And if so, does this reflect

on how we come to understand our own place in it? These relationships stimulate more questions than answers. Yet questions are, in all likelihood, more helpful in addressing the problems of our present.



Adrian Stimson, *Ina'kitapii Sais'skiimoko ooko'o'wa - Little Peoples Green House* (video stills)

Speaking of questions, I personally find that *GardenShip* feels more like an experiment than a theme, rooted in questions rather than statements. Questions themselves are not particularly rare within curatorial frameworks. It is less common for a collective of artists and researchers to be encouraged to discuss and workshop their ideas throughout the entirety of a curatorial project—up to and including the exhibition and the production of this catalogue—but also in the foreseeable future as a collective of artists drawn by the gravity of *GardenShip's* themes. We are beginning to see more projects like this, necessarily so, as they offer frameworks for dynamic, responsive and experimental works. And successful experiments require this ongoing incubation period.

The proposition of this curatorial project as an experiment is validated when considering the roots of genuine discovery, or a new way of understanding a problem. The notion of discovery is questioned by Paul Feyerabend—a philosopher of science on the radical edges of his craft—and he might say that it is only the unexpected, random and pluralist meeting of ideas that stand a chance of creating something new and different. It is this relationship between what informs a radical document with notions of radical curating that is interesting to me as a practitioner. When producing work that tries to speak to some truth about our current condition, it seems necessary to find unlikely connections and to at least attempt to create a fitting vocabulary for what is being represented. This is what hopefully makes each artwork unique in its time and place, but ultimately what could also work towards creating a collective voice that is loud and worth listening to. Considering the many crises we face, both perceived and actual, it does feel like more radical curatorial forms are necessary in order to envision meaningful change towards a more sustainable future. *GardenShip* demonstrates that there is a case to be made for projects that similarly embrace the unexpected and relish in the spirit of genuine experimentation, collaborative learning, and discovery.

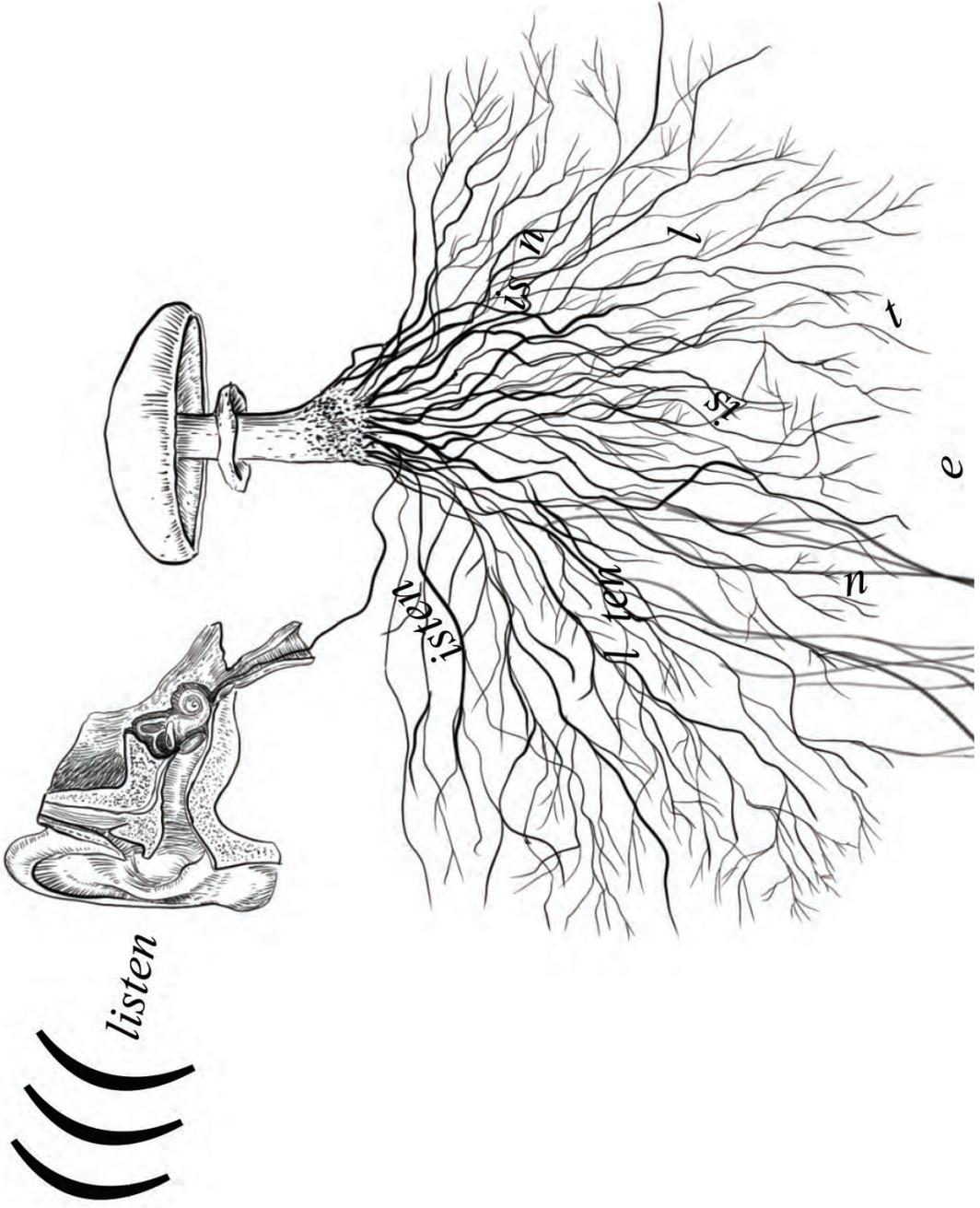


“When producing work that tries to speak to some truth about our current condition, it seems necessary to find unlikely connections and to at least attempt to create a fitting vocabulary for what is being represented.”



mycelial listening (mī- 'sē-lē-əl 'li-s'n-in) *n.* SPECULATIVE BOTANY (2021 Joan Greer epiphany)

1. The act of listening to the vegetative part of a fungus, consisting of a network of fine white filaments (hyphae) carrying nutrients and information through the soil. **2.** An ear to the ground.
3. Listening without hearing. **4.** Recording the nothing. **5.** Planting your cochlea in the soil.
6. Enoki implants.





On Gardens, Ships, and GardenShips

On Gardens, Ships, & GardenShips

Andrés Villar



Illustration courtesy of Andrés Villar

Gardens and ships are container-things found all over the globe. *GardenShip* began life as a metaphor, although *GardenShips* as container-things do exist. Containers and their metaphors are defined by boundaries, by what they encompass as well as by what they keep at bay. The relation between matter and metaphor is, as always, one of meaning-making. Material containers can be as solid as a prison or as ephemeral as a tent. Our cells, which are containers with porous boundaries, permit us, who are containers filled mostly with water, to exist and thrive. As metaphors, containers are analytically useful, but they are abstractions with a tendency to materialize in our mind's eye. When they do so, these and other metaphors can become the solace of a tradition or the hindrance to desperately needed change.

The metaphors embedded in “*GardenShip* and *State*” draw attention to “*Nature*” as an ill-defined container metaphor that holds sway over many contemporary ecological problems and the issues of governance they raise. In a material sense, the Earth is the ultimate container that sustains life as we know it: *GardenShip* Earth.



The Earth's boundary is porous, like those of our own cells and bodies, offering strong protection for the multitudes that live on or close to its surface. Those multitudes in turn carry multitudes themselves. Indeed, a human being is a poriferous home to a wide range of life forms, a wondrous multi-species ecosystem intimately connected to the mediums that engulf us, wherever we find ourselves. We share this circumstance with life forms at every scale, each a variable

universe unto itself, interacting with or against other life forms and objects in a continual process of attraction, rejection, and consumption. The connections that ensue, from the subatomic to the galactic level, entangle the many in webs of complex objects whose boundaries are in constant flux. These widely dispersed assemblages, which we see darkly through our analytical glasses, challenge the idea that the universe is already divided, like a pie, for the benefit of our own understanding.

The labels given our planet (for example, Mother Earth or Gaia) endow the solid substrate of our existence with meaning and value beyond the merely economic. Our finite globe might have once seemed large beyond anyone's capacity to picture or exploit, but today we face the limits of a container in which anthropogenic effects are evident even in environments far removed from persistent human presence.



A garden is a garden is a garden.

Gardens exist everywhere. Gardens are cross-cultural. Gardens can be enclosures, containers, or zones of distinction by virtue of what is contained in a particular plot of land. Gardening is the archetype of agriculture, which emerged thousands of years ago and has led to the industrial production that dominates today's food supply chains. In art and science, gardens appear as a frontier between the human "World" and "Nature" and as the exemplification of human action in "Nature."¹ Gardens are a boundary, a threshold or liminal domain that differentiates them, at least conceptually, from agriculture, which stresses the work of cultivating the land, of bringing it to heel.² Industrial agriculture takes this to extremes by disciplining fields into the sublime regime of contemporary monoculture.

Gardens can be contained and given the order of geometry or left barely tended. These differences are both transcultural and intercultural, and they tell us much about how particular humans engage with their environments. But gardens are not just for humans. Gardens depend on the myriad things and creatures that are essential to what a garden is all about: bees, wasps, and birds; ants, centipedes, and worms; and all the mycelia and microscopic life that makes soil spring to life.



Ships have become so naturalized that we do not see them as the revolutionary technology that they are. So revolutionary, in fact, that they continue to be a critical part of the human "World." From the crudest raft to the most sophisticated cargo ship, watercraft transformed water from barrier to medium. Airplanes, and later spaceships, extended the shiplly reach of containers into the skies and beyond. The large ships that ply the oceans today have configured the globe in the image



² Gardening and agriculture are of course not totally distinct. Both are arrayed along a continuum of humanplant relations that ranges from highly formalized to mostly hands-off.

of a capitalist matrix of production and consumption. Container ships, cruise ships, battleships, and oil tankers delineate the contours of a dynamic series of interconnected networks with land-sea nodes in far-flung ports. Like many of the critical elements of the contemporary techno-digital infrastructure, this network remains mostly hidden until something fails. At that point, the failed object makes itself stubbornly present. Such moments, which infringe on established norms of efficiency and complacency, provide opportunities, rarely grasped, to revise fundamental assumptions of value.

Ships have carried soldiers, settlers, and slaves. Ships have carried influenza, smallpox, and the Black Death. Ships carry weapons, medical supplies, refugees, tourists, bananas, rats, computers, cattle, cars, new plastic, old plastic, books, cobalt, coronaviruses, coffee, soybeans, furniture, electronics, toys, wheelchairs, cars, shoes, spoons, clothes, dried food, satellites, and the \sum commodity. The seabed is littered with things that never arrived.



We live in the Anthropocene, the age of human-induced global warming and large-scale ecological transformation. Climate scientists have been warning us for a long time about global warming in the Anthropocene, but it is only recently that the dangers of a rapidly changing climate have become embedded in public discourse. New and more intense weather emergencies around the globe are now an unavoidable reality. There is a strong temptation to frame global warming and other ecological impasses as merely technical issues that need technological solutions, but it is just as important to think in terms of socio-ecological systems. A truly ecological approach encompasses everything and everyone: a multiplicity of humans, of non-humans, and of things. Thinking in terms of socio-ecological systems is the antithesis of thinking about “Nature” as something out there, somewhere.

It goes without saying that “human” and “humanity” are convenient abstractions that encompass a plurality of individuals and communities across the globe. If, as some say, humans have become a geological force—with all the attendant responsibilities of such a capacity—this force is asymmetrically distributed. We are living at a time of reckoning with the effects of the colonialism that ushered the first era of globalization in the sixteenth century. With few exceptions, colonialism and modernity have slowly determined the conditions whereby “Nature” is understood as a resource to be exploited. The structures of coloniality are difficult to erase, but global warming has made it clear that the categories we project onto reality and the stories we tell limit how we understand what surrounds us and, by extension, how we act.



If the questions that confront us are so difficult and the prospects so bleak, as events around the globe seem to suggest, what can be done to fight despair? How can we speak to each other across stark ideological differences so that the human-geological-potential can be wielded for the good of the many?

GardenShip as metaphor raises questions about the future conditions of life on Earth. The mechanization of life and digitization of reality present real challenges that will not be overcome by seeking shelter in convenience and complacency, or constructing relations in terms of efficiency, or thinking more of the same and seeking refuge in the “normal.” The *GardenShip and State* project was established to demonstrate that artists can create imaginative scenarios and suggest different ways of thinking about and confronting the challenges of living in the Anthropocene.

An excellent example of an artwork that creates opportunities for thinking differently about where and how we inhabit the Earth is Mary Mattingly’s *Swale*, which is a community garden on a barge, a “floating food forest.”³ *Swale* is a creative solution to the question of how to make more food-producing spaces in a city. Community gardens are one such solution that has gained traction in the past several decades. In cities such as Havana, Cuba, urban gardens are a necessity supported by the state, but the ecological changes brought about by global warming will also make food security an issue in many parts of the globe. In New York City, bylaws against foraging made the state an obstacle in the creation of food forests. Mattingly and her collaborators’ solution was to use maritime common law to circumvent such restrictions by repurposing a barge to contain the food forest, which was designed to be open to anyone wanting to forage in it. A notable consequence of *Swale* is that it has spurred change in the city bylaws and established conditions and alliances that will expand on dry land what the project achieved on a barge.

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³ You can find out more about *Swale* and Mary Mattingly’s art practice at <https://www.swalenyc.org/> and <https://marymattingly.com>.

Many things account for *Swale*’s success: a creative idea, collaboration, an engaged public, and a forest-garden a stone’s throw away from the city, to name some of the most important. *Swale* is an initiative that shows how art can become a powerful catalyst for local, collaborative projects informed by an ethos of collective responsibility and ecological awareness. It is one of many *GardenShips* that, by making a leap from metaphor to practice, can help us chart a course from our challenging present towards a hopeful future.



Conversation: Archives, Artefacts & Art

Sean Caulfield, Amelia Faye, Mary Mattingly, Quinn Smallboy, and Andrés Villar



This discussion focuses on the exhibition's investment in traditional, alternative, and non-Western relationships amongst peoples, cultures, cultural objects, narratives, and information. The conversation's emphasis on art and the environment, and art and cultural reconciliation, links with the respective works of the speakers, which were featured in the exhibition. Sean Caulfield's Powerlines employs toy-like models related to extraction and consumption of oil to draw attention to the inculcation of cultural habits and attitudes regarding energy. Amelia Fay's Curating Colonialism installation presents a pair of hand-made moccasins by an unidentified Indigenous producer alongside Fay's embroideries, invoking questions of the culpability of

collectors, museums, and curators as evidenced through historical and contemporary museum practices. Mary Mattingly's immersive Ecotopian Library is a participatory site that repositions information, knowledge and art in the interest of envisioning a more sustainable present and future. Quinn Smallboy's spectacular hoop-based structures, entitled Colours and Lines, are artworks that speak about traditional Indigenous cultural objects while simultaneously offering newly imagined forms relating to contemporary power and energy. Andrés Villar's installation, Birdsong, links the 'natural music' of birds with human-made, technological sounds to propose a reconsideration of narratives of environmental catastrophe.

Mary

The *Ecotopian Library* functions best as a public library and a space that simulates a land-based commons¹. It houses transitional objects, and less represented works (books, art, natural objects, and tools). One thing that has been really important for me to try to include in this library is considering deeper-time through fossil collections. Paleontologists and biologists can trace timescales from the historic to the future: look at epochs like the Eocene 55 million years ago, how hot it was then, and then look at models 100 years from now to see that if humanity keeps increasing carbon dioxide at the current rate, the Earth could reach those temperatures again. I think of the plants that were existing then as being plants of survival. That's one specific example of an archival take on the *Ecotopian Library*.

I think it functions best when it can work around some of the rules and regulations of a colonial museum space. How I see that, in a very rote way, is more like a public library.

Andrés

This raises interesting points. One is the idea of an intellectual commons or knowledge commons. What does that imply? Who participates and what effect is that going to have? I think the *Ecotopian Library* deals with these issues in quite interesting ways, Mary.

You also brought up the issue of temporality. I was looking at your *Limnal Lacrimosa*² installation, which I think foregrounds this very well. Our default framework is human

temporality, but there are multiple temporalities operating all the time and we need to be more conscious or aware of this in order to be more expansive in how we deal with our lives, with the environment, and so forth.

I also see in this particular work an allusion to the agency of objects. Your work suggests play among objects. There's also a kind of musicality, a tempo—or various overlapping tempos—that the objects themselves orchestrate or establish. It seems to me that as artists we're working with that quite a bit: setting the stage for the artworks to speak.

Mary

I think that's an important way of imagining collective futures: more inclusive, collective, and more than human. One interesting thing about that space is how inventive movements, like the Rights to Nature, work within these frameworks to make space within dominant legal frameworks. It's incredibly tricky that through this kind of absurd situation, rights to nature have to be enacted in the legal space. The Library shows some of those examples, as a space between.

Sean

I began my work by first thinking about children's toys to reflect on how and what we teach children about their relationship to the world and to nature. I tried to create objects that on the one hand felt whimsical, but on the other hand, had a threatening, uncomfortable quality which conveyed potentially problematic viewpoints and ideologies that we pass on to younger generations.

¹"The Tragedy of the Commons" is a theoretical position which states that, since individuals with access to public resources (a common) will act in their own best interests, state or private interests are better positioned to manage resources in order to avoid exploitation and depletion. The political economist Elinor Ostrom defies this consensus as a given in her landmark work, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990). In a series of case studies, Ostrom demonstrates communities that effectively and collectively self-organize and self-govern resources at the local level, without centralized state or private leadership.

²A public artwork in Glacier National Park, *Limnal Lacrimosa* was a water clock keeping time of glacial melt. See more at <https://www.limnal-lacrimosa.com/>

Considering archives in relation to toys, I thought a lot about how, at certain stages in my daughter's development, she would organize objects in her world as a form of play. In a way, it was a kind of a little archive, right? It was a game in which order was placed on the world and particulars were categorized into universals. It seems to me that this is a paradox, because we need to organize and understand the world in this way and this can produce great good. But this process of 'archiving' the world can also be very problematic. It's complex, and I don't pretend to want to answer it with my work. But I hope this series might generate discussions around these questions.

Amelia

I'm drawing on what all of you are saying so far in relation to these objects' lives and the way objects can speak and tell things. I often think some of the natural historians that I work with at the Museum and a lot of the collections are kind of kept back of house to the Museum. Not a lot of people have access to it; you can request access but it's through that very Western colonial, "you must ask permission to come to the Museum." So one thing that I found appealing, Mary, about your *Library*, is that you're bringing that out and making it public commons for people to access. Often the natural historians I work with describe the value of their collections as being the archives of the Earth—not written archives, but collected specimens stored in museums as archives of the Earth.



Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library*

I'm thinking of what Sean just said about his daughter compartmentalizing, and thinking more broadly about how we organize things and how museums organize things. How do we break out of these singular frameworks? When we talk about decolonizing these Western institutions, it sounds like really lofty goals because I'm not quite sure how you can decolonize a very colonial framework within a colonial structure.

I find this all interesting to try to work out together. That's what's really great about this project: we're all working things out together. Maybe finding some answers, but not lots.

Andrés

It seems to me that using artworks to elicit questions is one way of working against the grain of established structures. Something that I think about is the tension between the complexity and chaos that's around us and the structures or frameworks we create to keep disorder at bay. We are thrown into a world that is already established in particular ways and that is difficult to change.

But I think that art opens up possibilities for working against the grain that constrains us or lulls us into complacency. *The Ecotopian Library*, for example, asks: What is knowledge? Who is in control of knowledge? How is it going to be accessed? How can one participate to actually effect change? And Sean's toys certainly make me think: What are we teaching our kids? What kind of play do we foster or hinder?

Sean

I made all the toy sculptures out of wood because when I first became a parent I said to myself: “I’m only going to buy wooden toys, because plastic is so evil,” right? And that lasted about a month. It is very hard to change. We are intertwined with the forces that are contributing to environmental change in so many complex ways.

Quinn

It’s interesting hearing different views on archives and artefacts. I find this a tough question and a tough way to look at in terms of: how do I vision my work? Who’s going to see it, and how are they going to take it in?

The one thing I always come back to in my drum frames is that it’s not a dreamcatcher. I’ve always been tangling with that idea: because it’s a circle, it’s made out of a frame, it’s made out of wood, and then I have string inside of it. I’ve been grappling with that. I’m not trying to get away from it, but trying not to make it so representational of a dreamcatcher. But it’s hard to do when you have all the correct material there to make it look like a dreamcatcher.

I’m trying to process all these questions and ideas. Where does this work, or my work, belong? It’s the feedback that I think I’m looking for from people. Because the big question from Jeff, he says, “If you were to install your work on a Native reserve, how would that look? Or what would that look like?” That just blew my mind. I never really thought of that.

Mary

I am thinking about that, and what Andrés was saying about artists having some sort of freedoms, or having the ability to navigate through different worlds and spaces, given that sometimes people might not take us seriously. I don’t know if that’s necessarily true. But I’d love to think about that a little bit more: the role of the artist is very mutable, and maybe that’s something that can be deployed or used to the advantage of the artist. Quinn, the way you’re saying, “Well, I don’t want it to be seen as a dreamcatcher.” I wonder, would you just say that?

Quinn

Well, I think that’s how people link to my culture. Because yes, it’s a dreamcatcher, I’ll say. And then I’ll come back and say, “No, it’s not.” Because, in that sense, I don’t want to display dreamcatchers. Because that’s not what it’s meant for. I think I’m in a great spot right now with this type of work. I always say that I’m walking that fine line of having meaning, and then having this other meaning. I think I know what I’m doing at this time. I like where I am: with my head around this idea of creating these works that look like a dreamcatcher, but still seeing the Indigenous aspect to it, the Indigenous connection to my culture.

Sean

Quinn, when I interact with your work I make associations to contemporary art traditions that speak to the history of minimalist and abstract sculpture. On the other hand, I also feel the work speaks to more traditional

“Well, I don’t want it to be seen as a dreamcatcher.” I wonder, would you just say that?



'craft' objects that sit outside art historical traditions. In this way, your work suspends me between various associations. And I think that's wonderful because it makes me question the kind of assumptions I have about a whole lot of things.

One of the powerful aspects about these museums and galleries is they do allow a shift in context. So, you can experience objects differently, which can be very useful and important for helping us to understand the world. At the same time, problems of power and control come up. I wrestle with that: how do you spark that shift in context, but not bring with it these other oppressive elements? Maybe it's a paradox that can't be solved.

Mary

Another thing that brings up for me is the notion of abstraction. And maybe that has to do with going into the museum space. It does abstract an artwork because it takes it out of context and the context that it was made in, and maybe that's also part of the violence that has to do with archiving. Or maybe abstraction in general is a violence, and that's because there's so much that's lost in that translation.

Sean

But aren't there things that are gained, too?

Mary

Through abstraction? I think ways of seeing philosophies, ways of pondering. Yeah, I think there are.

Amelia

Somehow, even though museums can be rigid and problematic in a lot of ways, in other ways it does give a venue where these things can happen, where these dialogues can take place. Conversations between the installations can take place in a space like that. That wouldn't necessarily happen, say, if you're each exhibiting your own works in your own smaller spaces, in isolation. And those works might be viewed completely differently. So, someone might approach Quinn's work in *GardenShip* and have a completely different revelation than they would if they saw Quinn's work individually and in its own separate space.

There's interesting interplay in a museum or an art gallery, but there's also the problem of red tape. I know there were a lot of things that we dreamed of for *GardenShip* that couldn't happen because of policies and procedures. That would be the same in any museum or gallery.

Sean

I think sometimes these projects function best in terms of their connections to the immediate community. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have dialogues with project participants, as well as with the community in London. Even just walking around the Museum and seeing the river and being present there helped me to grow as an artist and understand the project.

All of this was also coloured by COVID—not to make everything about COVID—but I think it tempered some of the way I thought about the project

because I worked in a more isolated way than I anticipated when the project started.

Amelia

I agree. From that initial kickoff meeting, there was so much promise and excitement about being together and collaborating. I think for the circumstances, we actually did a pretty remarkable job with the collaborations through Zoom. But it is always nice to do a bit of the “what ifs”: what if, and how different would things have unfolded, had we had the opportunities to do more of those in-person collaborations and connections and meetings?

Mary

While I was there installing, there was a ceremony of thanks for the bison that was in the exhibition, and bison in general. I think that was really groundbreaking in terms of what I’ve seen happen in museums. I do wish that there could be more workshops in the space and more people could be invited from the communities that live nearby in different ways. But it was tight with how many people could be in the space at once.

I think those boundaries are going to be really difficult to overcome: touching things in museums doesn’t have to do with COVID, it has to do with a lot of other issues of liability. And also bringing things into a museum that might be living, like seeds, is really tricky.

Andrés

Yes, those constraints were there from the beginning. But I don’t think that

GardenShip was handicapped by that because we knew from the beginning that defining *GardenShip* would be an ongoing process, and that the exhibition would be a joint effort with Museum London, which has its own set of directives and constraints.

Sean

I thought it was interesting, Mary, to walk through and around your work and feel uncertain what I could touch or not touch. That sparked ideas for me.

Mary

I hadn’t thought about it that way. Besides feeling somewhat absurd, it sparks the emotion of pain more than anything. But I like thinking about it as a comment on a space as well, and what can and can’t happen currently in spaces like museums.

Andrés

GardenShip became overall quite immersive. It extended the *Ecotopian Library* into the space because there was sound, and people really enjoyed that. A lot of people went in there because the space itself became alive.

Sean

How about the chair on the wall?

Andrés

The chair came from thinking about Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*. We are now very aware of the human impact on the environment, but when the book was published in 1962 it was an eye-opener for many. *Silent Spring* addresses the deleterious effects of chemicals and was an important contribution to the banning of DDT.³



Andrés Villar, *Birdsong*
(detail view)

³ Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) is an insecticide used in agriculture. Carson’s *Silent Spring* has been widely credited with raising public awareness and outcry about DDT’s harmful effects on humans and wildlife. This led to the banning of DDT in agricultural use in the United States in 1972. Its agricultural use in Canada was suspended in 1985. A worldwide ban on the use of DDT in agriculture was established in 2004.

The title of the book comes from the first chapter in which she imagines a spring without birds—hence a silent spring—were they to disappear because of the use of pesticides and other chemicals.

Many people have great confidence that technology will help solve many of our problems—eventually. Or that, if there is loss, technology will compensate for that loss or provide a substitute or simulacrum of something “solid” or “real” (think here of the metaverse that is slowly being foisted upon us).

The chair is a sound sculpture. There is an audio component that consists of bird sounds that are progressively “erased” and supplanted by digital instruments. The software instruments play sounds that resemble those of the birds and that are produced by an algorithm that samples audio signals.

So, ideas about what is “natural,” what is disappearing; about loss and how we commemorate; about how sometimes we are aware of things only when they’re broken or missing; about how things such as a chair become garbage or debris, but also how some of these things can be repurposed for something else. The chair on the wall is no longer functional as a chair but becomes a perch for the virtual birds. A human ruin becomes something else—the product of unintended consequences.

Sean

In a funny way, I saw the work as quite sombre. At the same time, there’s a hopefulness to it as well as it is an object that is repurposed. I like that tension.

Andrés

I like the fact that it was right there by your toys. I think your work highlighted a whimsical or playful aspect of the chair and stressed that tension that you speak about.

Amelia

Working on this project, did it maybe change, for some of you, the way you approach your works? Was there something about being part of this kind of project that might have sparked something in each of you? For me, this project has really helped formulate things that were always bugging me about museums and about my work as a curator in a museum. I’ve had many great conversations that helped me formulate little angry bits in my brain that were rattling around.

Sean

That first workshop was a wonderful experience. I picked up on several artists using humour in very powerful ways, and that led me to want to make sculptural objects that are, on some levels, humorous. That was something that stuck with me—the use of humour as a way into these really difficult topics.

Quinn

The biggest thing for me in creating these works was that they were my first full use of colour. There’s so much colour in them. I didn’t know what to think, or how to use these colours. That’s why I had this idea of wrapping. I don’t know if you guys remember how the works were: where the string was wrapped around a section of the rings. It was this idea of being incomplete, meaning I’m going to come back to it and finish the work. But that’s what I

wanted because that's how I see these rings being presented. Growing up as a child I remember my mom making these dreamcatchers. And that there were so many of them sometimes lying around or incomplete because they're all wrapped up.

For me, the use of colour—especially using red—is pretty big. In all my works there's always just black string. Using colour this first time was actually quite revealing, like: Oh, that's what colour looks like.

Another form that I try, another collection of colours, are the colours of the medicine wheel. I don't think any of the works have all the colours of the medicine wheel; Lines has red, black and yellow, but there's also a hint in there that's burgundy. I'm not using those representational colours because, like I said before, the shape itself is there so people could recognize it. Going off what Amelia was saying about doing something new: going back to colour is new to me.

Mary

For me, it was a conversation with Jeff Thomas. A lot of the books in this collection have come out of me asking people to imagine collective futures and what book responds to them in terms of that prompt. And Jeff said, "Well, I'd love to contribute a photograph to it." And it's called, "My father was a maintenance painter." It's looking at this book by this photographic colonizer of his nation, and then his response to that. I think, in the way books are an archive, it was really key to have that work in there in order to contextualize books and knowledge.

Andrés

This project has made me think more about the possibilities of collaboration. The journal we created for the exhibition was an interesting, joyful experiment in collaboration.

Sean

It's interesting when there is tension between art and research. Art is framed increasingly as research. I think about this a lot, working in a university. There's the positive side that this is encouraging more interdisciplinarity and open-mindedness to what art practice can mean. At the same time, I do have a concern about framing art solely as 'research.' Does this foster a kind of instrumentalization of creative practice that paradoxically counters some of the thematic goals of the project?

Andrés

I would suggest it's both. I don't think you can avoid that tension.

As an archaeologist, Amelia, what did you think about working with all these artists?

Amelia

I love it. This was actually the big joy for me during this crazy pandemic time. I'd just come back off of maternity leave, which was also a really crazy time. Then I got to meet this fabulous group of incredible artists. And I thought, "I can't believe Patrick thought I could be part of this really cool group of people." Yet everybody was so welcoming and kind and embraced the fact that I was a bit of an outsider in the art world. I learned that art isn't so scary.



Quinn Smallboy, *Colours - Small Drum Ring* (detail view)

I know we talked about this in one of our Cross Pollinator meetings, about how some people view art as intimidating sometimes, or, you feel like you don't 'get it.' But then I realized that you don't necessarily always have to get it. And everybody's 'get' is different.

I think it's made me a much better curator, and made me still really question what is being a curator of a museum and of a really colonial collection. I'm still in my own tension of grappling with the turmoils of curating the Hudson's Bay Company collection.

"Reparations" is a big word in museums right now. And it's something that's super complicated. On one hand, I would be happy to spend the rest of my career repatriating everything in the collection. And on the other hand, it's a challenging process to do because the records are so terrible. A lot of these objects were collected and you don't even know what community they're from. So how do you repatriate something when you don't know where it's supposed to go?

Much of the work I grapple with at the Museum right now is trying to strengthen the community threads back to these objects so that we can figure out where they could go, and if communities want them back. It's complicated and it's tricky. Going to a museum and viewing these objects, they're often presented in problematic ways: as a snapshot of a particular cultural group or moment in time. There is sometimes value, though, in learning through objects. But are there better ways we could do it? And are there better places where this could happen?

Mary

I've been following repatriation through land trusts. That's one of those examples that I was trying to get to, in the beginning of this conversation, about utilizing the same tools that have been used by a dominant culture in order to make big changes. I find a tension between that: between those tools that are effective right now, as being really necessary in this time that's in between something that I could imagine as a more collective future. That idea is one of many, and it's working, and it's a way to repatriate, to *rematriate*, land.

Sean

I have appreciated the conversations I've been able to have with my daughter and friends and family in a museum that I don't know would have happened quite the same in another environment. So again, it's a tension. And I think, Amelia, you were talking to that. It provides some positive opportunities, too.

Andrés

Reparations can mean many things: First Nations reparations, reparations because of slavery. In a broader sense, I think of "repair." For example, environmental reparations as environmental repair. And repair as a global issue that requires a multiplicity of voices, which I think *GardenShip* was able to convey. I think the *Ecotopian Library* does an excellent job of drawing attention to this.

With that we go back to the notion of commons, of what can or should be considered a commons.

Elinor Ostrom's work shows that commons can be managed—that they are managed, at different scales, in different parts of the world.

Mary

That's a great word for all the artwork in the exhibition. It's all in some way about repair. I love thinking about that on a scale that could change big issues that we're facing, like environmental issues. I think about it in terms of maintenance, too. Maybe this has to do with my own work and how sometimes it's really exciting to move to the next project instead of thinking about maintaining something for a long time. That's something that I've learned recently with *Ecotopian Library* and *Swale*: that the longer a project can be maintained, the more effective it can be, and hopefully be one of those nodes on that progression of social change.

Sean

This conversation brings up something that keeps me up at night, and that is this word “expert.” We need many voices and perspectives to deal with the complex questions we are facing today. However, we need expert voices to clarify complex scientific and social questions. A strong example of this is the problem that emerged around COVID and misinformation. Environmental change has related issues around misinformation as well. So how do you have the many voices and the expert? I see this wonderful tension: we need many voices and we need to open up the way we think about the world. But we also have people that just make up stuff on the internet. There's a dynamic where multiple ways of knowing need to be filtered, which ultimately results in power. So, we return to a hierarchy.

It's a paradox. Elinor Ostrom's work on the commons is a great example of ways that environmental, social and political issues can be resolved. But if you think about any of the ways she thought about the commons, they bring up power structures. How do we share? What do we share? Who watches who? Who gets punished? For what? How do we punish people? What I really loved about the exhibition is that it points to the power of art/creative practice to foster nuanced and complex thinking.

Andrés

I think of the art produced for *GardenShip* as transcending the notion of nuanced thinking by extending its reach to realms of nuanced feeling or experiencing. I think that's what art as art can do. And in its own way, it can suggest possibilities for change. Or make us think against the grain. Art has that potential.

Quinn

I have thought about the space that we're in at Museum London. How would this look if the show was in a different space? Not in a museum? This collection of artists—Indigenous artists, non-Indigenous artists—I think it's a good thing having us communicate like this.

I find myself learning a lot; coming to the show, and listening to these conversations. My view, when I want to view art, and with all the Zoom meetings—sometimes it doesn't work for me. I have to be in front of the person, in front of the work. I think I get a clearer understanding of what and how the person is talking to me. The pandemic changed that, obviously.

We just have to work around this in the near future.

Andrés

You say that there's a cultural trajectory that informs your work. You want to acknowledge it and respect it, but you don't want to be limited or totally determined by it. I've heard you refer to "flipping" as a strategy to do that.

Quinn

Yeah, flipping or reshaping. The other word I just thought of is keeping it traditional. Like, a traditional hand drum, a traditional dreamcatcher. It can't be in the sense where it's having a traditional hand drum in as an art piece—which is totally wrong, in my sense, because those are sacred objects. Those have a ceremonial purpose. The very first drum I made, at the time I was taking an Indigenous class and we got on a topic of masks in Indigenous culture. Especially out west where some masks are very sacred and hold a spiritual power. I was making a drum ring, and then just looping the strings over, just draping them down. I looked at it every way and I saw what I did. It looked like a mask. I stopped immediately and was like, okay, that's how far this drum ring is going because I don't want to make it more representational of a mask. But that's what I called it, I called it a mask. It's those little things for me I find challenging to make and to understand.

Andrés

I think that creates an interesting opening for dialogue: flipping a tradition acknowledges it but suggests it's not fixed. It creates an opportunity to think about things differently without necessarily letting go of what has gone on before.

Amelia

One question that I think about a lot with my work is the separation of art and artefact, too. I put those moccasins in the show, which to me are a work of art. And yet, we're going back to these structures: they're compartmentalized as they are as an artefact. Do you guys see more fluidity, I suppose, between museum collections' artefacts, and how they exist, coexist, in the realm of art? For me, it's so blurred, because so many of the objects in the collection I curate are fantastic works of art.

Sean

I sometimes imagined that maybe these toys I'm making are actually from the local Leduc oil festival, and they just happen to be found in someone's garage. I'm teasing, partly, but I totally understand what you're saying. Thinking through the relationship between art, and a spiritual object, or a utilitarian object, and where are those lines? Why do those lines exist? It's super generative and important to think through.

Quinn

I just want to comment about artefacts where you are Amelia. Because this came up in my schooling when I did my First Nations minor. At the time, the question was brought to us: should all these artefacts be returned back to their rightful owners? I think the biggest one was a totem pole. The rightful owners kept saying, "We want this back," because it was very sacred to them. At the time, I thought, "Yes, return everything!" But now I'm thinking these places are safe, more or less, because they're well kept. They're in a controlled environment. Yes,



Sean Caulfield, *Powerlines*
(detail view)

acknowledging of where, and of who owns these objects and these artefacts. I know back home in Moose Factory, we don't even have such a storage place.

Amelia

It's good you bring that up. Some of the communities that I am working with, they feel the same way. For a lot of the objects, they're safe where they are right now. They say, "We don't have a facility in our community, so where could we house them?" This raises more questions about access. Are there ways that we can provide access? Because for some of the communities, they're quite far removed from where the Museum is here in Winnipeg. Thinking, too, about maybe not necessarily always repatriating the physical object, but finding ways to repatriate through digital or other means to provide access to these collections that are housed here. It's not just black and white, or "give it back" or "keep it." There's a lot of gray there. In particular for me are the sacred and ceremonial objects. Those are the ones that often there weren't

detailed records for, so those are what I'd like to look into. They never should have been collected in the first place. And yet, here we are.

Mary

I think it also, obviously, connects to cultural power. A lot of things that are considered artefacts are coming from places where it's not acknowledged that people from those cultures might still be practicing. I think that the simple distinction I've always tried to make is to acknowledge the intentionality of the maker. And if you don't know who the makers are, for one reason or another, then it's harder to say whether it's considered an artwork or an artefact. I'd love to say everything is an artwork. But maybe it has to do with understanding the intentionality of the maker, if you can. And if you can't, then maybe: what's the history of the object?



Mary Mattingly, *Swale* at Brooklyn Bridge Park in the heat, 2016. Photo courtesy of Mary Mattingly.

Conversation: Art, Libraries, Museums & Activism

Joanna Kerr, Mary Mattingly, and Nina Zitani



This conversation draws upon the expertise of Dr. Nina Zitani, Curator of Zoological Collections and Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at Western University, and Joanna Kerr, Public Services Librarian at the London Public Library, to engage in interpreting the complexities of Mary Mattingly's Ecotopian Library which was presented in GardenShip and State. Mary Mattingly intends that Ecotopian Library will "build a toolkit that can help expand imaginations to co-build more regenerative futures within climate change."

The conversation highlights the very important interweaving of the work of artists, scientists and librarians in collaboratively addressing the climate crisis in ways that propose sustainable futures.

Mary

The way that I work is more of an artist-as-a-generalist. It's really a privilege to be able to work with people who are specialists. Nina is an artist and a specialist in the world of biodiverse ecosystems, specifically insects. Nina has discovered and named about thirteen new insects (and people have named maybe eight other insects after Nina). So, Nina, you have this history of being able to not only do the deep science work, but also to teach it. I think that that's what really drives me with *Ecotopian Library*: to be able to share resources and share tools for interconnectedness. That's also what Joanna is doing at London Public Library, with library sciences and with sharing tools for knowledge, illustrating and living the commons of the library. Maybe I could start with just asking Nina a little bit more about your work, how you share your interests with people and how you engage them.

Nina

Well, I think that's the key word, "share." I love to share my knowledge, but especially my passion. I'm extremely passionate about biodiversity and the conservation of biodiversity. That's everything that I do, whether it's art, or science, or outreach: everything—even in most of my spare time—is devoted to the conservation of biodiversity.

I've always loved teaching, and I've always been a natural teacher and a collaborator. I love to collaborate, and the passion and the sharing part is the fun part. I naturally gravitate towards that.

We are living in a time of environmental crisis, and it is multi-faceted: there's a biodiversity crisis going on, and there's a climate crisis going on. The two are interrelated. A lot of people see them as separate, I think, which is unfortunate, but they're not—they're interrelated, totally interwoven.

I personally can't imagine what else I would do, if it wasn't working on helping to solve these dual crises. Education is key, and so I work in both the scientific and the artistic community because you have to reach out to all.

In my opinion (and in the opinion of many other conservationists and people in the field), we have to share our knowledge, we have to work together, and we have to collaborate in order to solve the environmental crisis (I call it the environmental crisis as an easy way to lump the two issues together).

Mary

I'm also thinking about what you were saying about students and scientists, and how you bridge those worlds and how you're able to be what I like to call "a bridge person," where you're fluent in talking with people with either more or less expertise. People are getting inspired by you in this time where a lot of people feel hopeless. I think that's key to what you are doing right now in your role.

Nina

Thanks, I appreciate that. As you know, I've always been an artist and biologist. I've never really practiced professionally as an artist, but I've been an artist my whole life. I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from my undergrad. That's just who I am: having that love for trying to reach people. And my favorite group of people to talk to, really, are people who think bugs are disgusting. I love talking to people like that because it's a challenge. I mean, I'm happy to talk to anybody, but it's the people who are perceived as hard to reach that I thrive on. I like to help people overcome their fears and their misconceptions about nature and biodiversity. There are a lot of misconceptions out there, as you probably know. A big part of the education component is all the misconceptions about insects and arachnids and how gross they are. People think they're disgusting things and that they have no role in the environment. They actually have a major role in ecosystem functioning: they're essential for ecosystem function. We literally can't live without them. So that's a challenge that I find very, very rewarding.

Mary

Thanks, Nina. Joanna, I would love to talk with you about what we did at the Library and how the *Ecotopian Library* worked at the London Public Library—what people’s responses were or what your feelings were about it.

Joanna

I was reflecting on some of our first meetings about this: we were focusing on the process of it, like: how do we do this? And how do we merge this vision and these ideas for what this could be outside of a museum space? I was really excited about that. I really liked, in your initial proposal Mary, this idea of connection and social change through viewing the natural world and the intersection of different disciplines. When we first met, what came up for me were the ideas of a former chief librarian of London Public Library, Richard Crouch. In the 1940s, our library participated in the first art lending library in the country. Your project with the *Ecotopian Library* reminded me of this: you brought part of Museum London’s exhibit into the public library to connect people to the exhibit and encourage them to visit and to immerse themselves in more aspects of it. This project caused me to reflect on the history of this library and the philosophy behind the Canadian Art Lending Library 80 years later. I emailed you quotes from Richard Crouch’s biography because I saw that connection so strongly—his openness to ideas that hadn’t been connected to public libraries before. It was the idea that library material can be so many different things. For fifty cents, someone could borrow an original Group of Seven painting to take home.

Richard Crouch felt that it didn’t matter what causes curiosity, it doesn’t matter where knowledge leads you.

I felt a connection between that and this collaboration, not only in relation to art but to the kind of material that you were bringing. I was so pleased to look through your book list to see how many books we had in our collection and could display with your materials. We had images from the exhibit at the Museum on our walls on the third floor of the Central Library while also working with you to populate the glass cases with items that would hopefully draw people in and encourage interaction. And we also had Tom Cull’s video playing, so people could come to the exhibit in different ways. Patrick Mahon came and brought a few more items, like the wasps’ nests and bird’s nest. And surprisingly, a wasp was born out of one of those nests. (We brought her outside to set her free).

To me, it was so symbolic that we had life born out of this very (sometimes unfortunately) static glass case of items. I thought that was quite something: that there is life in this. Later when we added the corn seeds for people to take home and plant, the conversations that came out of that were such that there was this connection to planting: to what to do with the corn. I included a sign about the uses for the corn. I felt that this was a terrific way to do something different for the library, even though—looking at the history of this library—I realized it wasn’t that different.



Mary Mattingly, Installation view of *Ecotopian Library*, London Public Library.

Mary

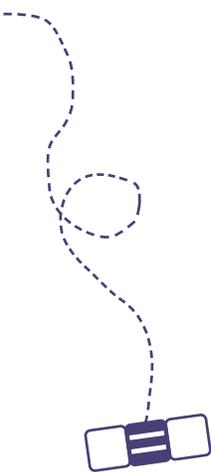
What we were able to do in the beginning, then, was the seed for what happened with you in the space, and the conversations that happened: the way that it expanded, that you and Patrick were able to take it on and give it a different life. That makes me think, Nina, of the specimens that we had in Museum London, and thinking about them as still, in some ways, alive. We talked about how people feel about seeing animals preserved in cases and what a valuable teaching tool they are. People both pull away and they push towards it at the same time. I'm curious to know how you think about them. Are they alive to you? Or do you think about them as generating life through conversation?

Nina

That's a good question. Museum specimens of biodiversity are invaluable for many reasons. Scientifically, they are voucher specimens in the sense that they have collection data associated with them, like the specific place of collection. For example, the specimens that we put in your *Ecotopian Library* were all collected in Ontario, and mostly in London. So, they have that data associated with them. But where in London? London is actually a big place. That's the first piece of information that a specimen needs to have in order to be scientifically useful – locality of collection. The second one is the date of collection: the day, the month, and the year. The third piece of information is the collector, the collector's name provides the authenticity that the collection, that the data associated with it, the locality and the date

are authentic. Then, that specimen becomes a representative of the species in place and time, for example, in London, Ontario—specifically (hopefully) at least in one of the four quadrants. Today, of course, we have GPS that gives us exact pinpoint localities on Earth, but these specimens in the collection in our Department of Biology are mostly historical and quite old. In the past, they had to just record the locality by hand.

So, specimens with collection data are invaluable for documenting biodiversity in space and time. This is how we know species occurrences, where they occurred and when: through museum specimens. They can also be used for all kinds of research, and museum specimens around the world are used for all sorts of current research projects. Then there's the educational value. The educational value, I think in many ways, surpasses the research value in that specimens can be used to educate not only students of science, but any students and any person who's interested and curious about nature and about biodiversity. Even those people that have a little bit of a "disgust" impulse, maybe at first, usually learn something by looking at specimens. The education value cannot be overstated at a time when we are living in a sixth mass extinction: when biodiversity is in decline due to human activities, due to things that we are doing. We humans are the cause of it. Many people don't realize the extent of biodiversity, even in their own backyard—for example, how many different kinds of plants and animals and fungi are native to their backyard or their region. By looking at specimens, they can learn a tremendous amount about biodiversity.



“...the museum itself is struggling with being a part of a system of exploitation. I’m sure libraries are struggling with it in many ways, too.”

Mary

That’s bringing up a series of questions in terms of colonial influence on cultures: how this influence has oppressed peoples throughout the history of colonization and oppresses people today. That made me think about the notion of terra nullius, meaning “the land that belongs to no one,” and how that continues to influence societies in terms of extraction. If there are these larger metanarratives that many people live inside, then this contributes to the need for the work that both of you are doing with highlighting diverse knowledge sets and biodiversity.

Nina

Can I just address the collecting and colonialism a little bit? At Western University, we’re not actively collecting right now, except in rare circumstances when I find an insect species in my backyard that we don’t already have in the collection. Anytime I have collected specimens, it was always legally collected under permit. It’s very important today that anyone who is collecting, is collecting under official permit, given by whomever owns the land. We don’t engage in illegal collecting. It goes without saying, but it does need to be said, you can’t just go out and collect a specimen anywhere. That’s illegal. You have to collect under permit. But anyway, we’re doing very little collecting. Mostly, we’re just preserving a historical collection. That’s not necessarily the case, of course, around the world. There are people who are still illegally collecting today, that have done it in the past and are still doing it. That’s unfortunate. It is essential that we respect the land

of where we are collecting and get permission by the owners of the land to collect. It’s an important topic and we could spend a lot of time on it, these issues of museum collections and colonialism.

Mary

I think it has to do with each of our practices in different ways. I think about it in terms of what materials I’m using, for example: where they come from and how they’re part of an extractive process. Then I try to make an assessment as to whether I think it’s worth using. I’m always assessing and struggling to figure out what the benefit is to being able to share this tool or artwork, versus not having it and not using it. I think that has to do with this messy space in between: we’re not in an ideal society, we are coming out of a place that was even less so, and we’re in this messy struggle where people are sorting things out in different ways, and trying to learn different sets of ethics. It is really key to what the exhibition is pointing towards and what everybody in the exhibition is, in one way or another, struggling with. And also institutions, like you said: the museum itself is struggling with being a part of a system of exploitation. I’m sure libraries are struggling with it in many ways, too. Maybe in terms of what is in the library and what’s not in the library, in some cases limiting access to certain materials while always working to create more access for more people.

Joanna

It’s certainly a focus. That’s one of two primary values in our new strategic plan: looking at anti-racism, anti-oppression and examining it in all

aspects of what we do—from the collections to our policies, our spaces, the programs we offer, our training, our hiring, our board members. It is throughout what we are examining as a public institution and certainly, as you mentioned, as a space. Are we welcoming and inclusive to those who will access our spaces? It really is looking at that, in addition to the spaces and the collections that we buy, because of course that is a decision when we buy materials and when we offer programming. What’s that decision-making based on? It really is about having that lens for everything we do in relation to anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Mary

Wow. The library is so much further along than I’m sure the museum is able to be.

Joanna

I don’t know about that. But I wanted to pick up on something you had mentioned earlier that I realized I hadn’t addressed, when you were asking about how people were interacting with the exhibit and with the material there. Not to be intrusive, but I certainly did hang out there and notice how people were interacting with the material. It was nice that we could have, in a small way, something for people to interact with and engage with. That was part of your invitation, I guess I could call it (and you can correct me with that wording), in the *Ofrendas for a Dying Planet*.¹ So first of all, it was a beautiful invitation in that you had this lovely coloured paper with these prompts. I would collect these, and I took pictures of many of

them (and I shared some with you). It was an interesting reflection not only on people’s connection to the natural world, but also to this time of pandemic. Of some of the messages that I saw, “I miss being happy” was one of them. You wonder where that is coming from and what sentiment is really being expressed. Another one was: “I remember more snow in winter.” These are really reflective of this invitation. But it’s also really reflective of an opportunity to just sit in one of our comfortable chairs around this display and to pick up a pencil or pen and write about this. I really appreciated that this was part of what you provided for this exhibit. I think it was a nice way for people to feel like they could share something when we couldn’t have as much interaction as we’d wanted.

Mary

I think that’s one of my favorite things in the library. Artist Sophy Tuttle devised those prompts, and it’s always so powerful to read them. But it does offer people a chance to shift perspectives and sit for a while in order to think through these relatively simple questions. I think about perspective shifts in artwork a lot. What I want to try to do is to ask people to step outside of our day to day and to see things in a slightly different way. On *Swale*², for instance, I see it happen in terms of people coming onto this platform: they get on and it’s moving, and then they’re onboard for a while and they stop noticing that it moves. People tell me that it looks like the skyline is moving. Then after that, they start to question everything about the barge, “Well, where’s the soil

¹ Mary Mattingly’s *Ofrendas for a Dying Planet* borrows its name from an installation by artist Sophy Tuttle. The word ofrenda means “offering” in Spanish, and an ofrenda is placed on a home altar during the annual Día de Muertos, or Day of the Dead, celebrations.

² *Swale* is a large-scale, ongoing public artwork and floating edible landscape on a reclaimed barge that Mattingly launched in 2016. You can find out more about *Swale* at <https://www.swalenyc.org/> and <https://marymattingly.com>

from? Or where's the water actually from? Are you getting it from the river because I'm not going to eat this." And then people start to dig deeper into questions about food. We talk about it and they may say, "I guess I don't ask the grocery store. I guess I could eat this. What's the difference?" What I tried to think through is, how can a prompt lead towards a perspective shift? I think Sophy's project in the *Ecotopian Library* is able to do that, with young people especially. I get chills when I read some of the answers.

"Almost everybody has an idea or knowledge set they might relate to a species—knowing about it, or assuming that it's already gone."



Nina

You just touched on something I often experience with the Zoological Collections. I think that's their value in your *Ecotopian Library* and their contribution. Again, and I made this comment already: not realizing what's in your backyard in terms of biodiversity. But another issue, which is where the museum specimens come in, is that people don't realize how much more biodiversity would have been in their backyard—that same piece of land, exactly where it is—one hundred years ago. Even fifty years ago, even twenty-five. Fifty, one hundred, three hundred, five hundred years ago: there would have been so much more biodiversity in their backyard. That's what the specimens show when they have that date on them: "This species collected in London, Ontario in 1964," or in 1972, or even just 10 years ago. There's been so much defaunation: which is a term in science now which is kind of analogous to deforestation, but with animals. There's been this incredible loss, not necessarily of extinction; in defaunation, they're not extinct. It's the concept that their

populations are just so low. They're still extant, the species is still present, but their populations are in severe decline.

It's what you were talking about, that perspective shift: when you look at a specimen of a bird or an insect that used to occur in London, we know that because we have this specimen with the data on it. That's the proof, that's the evidence. It's indisputable, and that's the value of that specimen. Then you can ask the question, "Is this species still here today?" This is one of my side projects that I'm working on now. Whether it's just a publication or it's an exhibition, I want to use the collections more to talk specifically about defaunation in London. Being involved in your project was the start of that. It was a little tiny glimpse into it. I hope to be able to expand on it. It's that perspective shift that you talked about, when people look at things that they don't normally look at, or they see information, or they're given facts that they don't know about that helps them to realize that maybe there's a different reality out there. This is essential because there's misinformation about the environmental crisis, even within people who are in the know, potentially, but more so of course among people who aren't aware.

Mary

When we were installing the Library and the specimens were on the table, people were coming by during the installation. They were looking at them and debating whether they were still extant. Almost everybody has an idea or knowledge set they might relate to a species—knowing about it, or assuming that it's already gone. That seemed kind of common. I was sad, listening to people.

Nina

The biodiversity crisis is sad. One hundred percent. There's nothing not sad about it! It's my whole life, and it can be really hard, but yet I've learned, for my sanity, that when I do engage in any sort of project (whether science or art), it's a teaching opportunity. That's the key: to be doing something positive. That's what keeps me going. And the students especially -- working with students is just the best, and it totally keeps me going and staying positive.

It's controversial, to me, the activism issue. Personally, I don't like the word activism because I think that some people immediately put up a wall and they don't want to listen. To me, it's education. That's why I use the word "education," because activists are educators. That's what they should be. That's ultimately what they're doing: trying to educate people about the issues and trying to make and cause change—perhaps rapidly. Maybe that's one way of defining an activist versus an educator. But in my case, I'm absolutely trying to educate people, trying to cause change, and trying to do it immediately and as quickly as I can. So, I think I am an activist, but I don't use that word. It's not a criticism of activism or "activist," it's just my own personal experience in how I want to approach things. I'm constantly evaluating whether my actions are effective, and then I modify my actions to get the best results. In my case, this means getting people to understand what biodiversity is and that there is a biodiversity crisis, and the components of that complex topic.

I've learned a lot in the many, many years that I've been teaching about the biodiversity crisis. I started teaching at the university level in 1995, so it's been 27 years that I've been teaching university students, the public, doing all kinds of outreach about the biodiversity crisis. Over that time, I've learned the need to be compassionate and respecting of other people's opinions. If you want to try to change someone's viewpoint, you can't attack them. You have to work with them, you have to have compassion that they maybe don't have the knowledge or experience that you have. I feel very privileged, actually, to be in the position and the role that I'm in where I can use all the experience that I have to engage people in my teaching role.

Mary

Joanna, did you want to respond to that? I'd be so interested to hear from your perspective.

Joanna

Libraries have been referred to as neutral spaces. But as I mentioned earlier, there are choices in the materials that we have available for people to borrow. And obviously, there are choices that are made for people who never see the items that we made the decision not to purchase. The idea of access in public libraries means that this is a space where people can come to learn and to connect, and to be with others, and that this space is open. I think there is something around the choices that we do make in terms of who we bring into this space and the kind of programming that we offer.

We recently wrapped up our Environmentalist in Residence program with Jennifer Chesnut. Our last event with Jennifer was called Eco Activism. I think I noticed in myself, too, reflections on that word and what it means. I liked the way Jennifer described it in that, specifically, it was an event for youth. The idea was that youth could see their connection to something bigger, and see that there was adult support for the ideas and the work that they wanted to take on. We had other organizations at the library to connect with them as well, but I really liked that focus on activism: to say that there are people doing this work that you can learn from, connect to, and work with. Jennifer did a great job providing a bridge in these ways, because we were working throughout the month with groups like the Council of Canadians. There came to be, perhaps, more of an open discussion about what activism can look like. The library and our partners, the City of London, were very happy to be collaborators in that process and to talk about that focus around activism and around the ways in which we talk about and situate these issues—what we’re calling for and how we are inviting people to engage with it. I think that’s what I liked about it. It was this offering to say, “Here’s someone that’s very passionate about this. How do you connect with it? Where do you want to join in here, if at all?” I think Jennifer did a good job in inviting people to that. The phrase “social change” stuck out to me when I went back and looked at the original *GardenShip* exhibition proposal. I think that’s an important role for libraries: to sometimes provide that access in a way that allows people to engage with it without necessarily any other narrative.

Mary

This is making me think about the United States and book banning and the rigour of this movement right now, and how, in a way, there’s an opportunity for so many more activists—and there are different types of activists, of course, and many reactionary activists right now. It makes me feel like there needs to be more room for nuance. When I was in residency in Montana, many people wanted more nuance in a conversation around the climate crisis. They did not just want a two-word description for something that is much bigger: that they may agree with in part, but they might see other parts as an oversimplification. Overall, I saw this as a sensitivity that I don’t always find in conversations about the climate crisis in New York, where I live, it’s easy to say “climate change” and have everybody get it. It influences people in a very specific, direct way: sea level rise, the atmosphere, the air quality. There is a list you can check off. Whereas if you’re in these open spaces, it’s just a whole other set of contingencies. But that’s made me think about the role of an artist right now. Besides asking people to question, the role of an artist is fluid. Activism can mean something different one day than it does the next. I think one thing that artists can do is call ourselves artists in some cases, activists in other cases, and ecologists when the time is right. It’s a way to move between conversations and also continue to be sort of a generalist, and maybe a bridge person. But I think that titles are important, and being able to be malleable with a title is a privilege artists can utilize. Most artists I know

want to question a status quo, and that's not quite the role of an activist. But art can aid in activism in multiple ways. I think that might be how I respond to that topic today, but it would probably be a different answer tomorrow.

Nina

I think there's a lot of chaos and misinformation in regards to the environmental crisis that we're in, and it's a real problem. I don't know how to solve it. But the first step is recognizing the problem. It is important to do that, to go through the process. Earlier, when you said the word "wild," that's what came to mind for me: chaos. When I go out, and when I leave my little realm, my cozy little "me world" where I just teach about the biodiversity crisis, and when I go out into the world, I see a lot of chaos because of this misinformation. And when you said reactionary activism, I think there's a lot of that going on, as well. I don't know what the solution is, but I sure know that art has a big role because art reaches people in a way that the science doesn't and science journalism doesn't. So many other forms of communication don't reach people the way art does. I see that art has a critical role in educating people about the environmental crisis. We have to keep going. We can't stop, we've got to keep working. We started out this whole conversation collaborating and sharing and working together. In terms of the environmental crisis, the Public Library having an Ecologist in Residence is a fantastic action. We have to all keep working together. That's the key: sharing our knowledge and working in collaboration.

This goes for everybody, I'm not just saying it to the three of us. We're not going to solve the environmental crisis by forming factions and fighting against each other. We need to work together. We need to get the facts straight and we need to be all inclusive of everybody and working together to solve it.

Mary

That is a really good note to end on. I think that should be our conclusion. It makes me think about the Art Lending Library Joanna mentioned coming back and playing a role. And Nina's current projects she's planning on biodiversity loss. I am hopeful that there will be more collaborations from this group in the future.



Mary Mattingly, Installation View of *Ecotopian Library* (detail view, Museum London)

Conversation: Gardens, Plants & Practice

Ron Benner, Paul Chartrand, and Ashley Snook



This conversation brings together three of the artists from the exhibition regarding the interrelated ways their works focus on historical and contemporary ideas and engagements with gardening, plants, and artistic practice. Ron Benner's immersive As the Crow Flies is a deep and comprehensive installation of photography, texts, and artefacts. It links botanical and agricultural practices and histories of the north and south, referencing names of native American plants, place names and Indigenous nations. Ashley Snook's the honey is sweet focuses on a specific invasive species of plant, Phragmites australis (now found throughout Turtle Island), contextualizing its spread within histories of colonization and sustainability efforts. And Paul Chartrand's multi-part project, including the growing text piece All Flesh is Grass, highlights relationships between sustainable horticulture and embodied ways of engaging with the shifting challenges of the environmental crisis.

Ashley

My current work examines interconnectivity between human and non-human species and vegetal and botanical life. Within my PhD right now, my research and studio work investigate fundamental linkages between species in the hopes of fusing conceptual separations. I take an intersectional approach, so decolonization is definitely important to that concept. For *GardenShip and State*, I was really interested in looking at the concept of invasive species and how colonialism is a central point in their history.

Paul

Since I completed the MFA program at Western, I've been primarily focused on making assemblages that are crafted from human and non-human elements in differing ratios. So usually, there's three components: there's a human made object of some kind that's being repurposed as a home for the second element, which is either plants or insects or some sort of non-human element (or combination of non-human elements). Then the third element is my involvement as a gardener-artist hybrid. I'm looking at these assemblages, and

considering them as combinations of agency, I guess, and trying to work through some of the ideas that I have about non-human agency. I tend to be most focused on plants. In *GardenShip*, it took a more pared down approach—partly because of logistics, but also in attempting some material explorations to see where things could lead with these living texts that I’ve been working on. I’m also trying to see where these concepts of text and art and plants and agency can go. That’s what I was focusing on with *Desiccated Root Text* and the other works: these living texts and plant agency, but also associated environmental issues.

Ron

The reason I wanted to have the *As the Crow Flies* installation included in *GardenShip and State* is because of my garden project behind Museum London, of the same title. The garden behind the Museum came out of an indoor installation that I did between 1984 and 1991. I showed it at Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal in 1991, and then the work went into storage. I hadn’t seen the installation in 30 years, and there were a lot of things I had forgotten about. When I set up one of these comprehensive installations, every space has its own dynamic and therefore I adapt them to the specific site. In the case of Museum London, I had to work with the arched ceiling and things got crunched a bit, but that was alright.

Even though the installation was compressed a bit, I was fine with that. I wanted that piece to be shown because it is a work about relationships, and also about similarities between peoples

and differences between peoples. Although the work is about colonization and decolonization, it’s really more about how people are—and not just people, but people’s relationships to other life forms are sometimes similar or greatly different, philosophically. One of the things I’ve learned over the years in my travels, going back to 1973 south of the US-Mexican border, is that there are major philosophical differences between the original inhabitants of the Americas and Europeans, philosophical differences that you can’t get around. The Europeans can have all these different philosophers, and most European philosophies are human-centered. When you come right down to it, the closest relationship between First Nations’ philosophies about the Earth, about life in general, is not European at all. It’s closer to Buddhism perhaps, or forms of African animism, because it’s not human-centric.

Ashley

Human centrism sparks something for me. For my project, *the honey is sweet*, I followed a group of scientists and other volunteers who are part of the “Invasive Phragmites Control Centre.” Essentially, they go around the GTA, and also heavily in London, to remove Phragmites, which is listed as an invasive species. There is a native version that isn’t as detrimental to wetlands, especially. But the Control Centre focuses a lot on the damage that the particular species that I was looking at causes. There are a lot of resources to educate people on the destructive nature of Phragmites, but there’s little to no detail on how it came to North America in the first place. I see this as contributing to human



Ashley Snook, *the honey is sweet* (detail of video still)

centrism because it seems there's no accountability for the reasoning of the species travel. The focus is just about the importance of the removal. The reason why Phragmites are here is because of us and commercial transportation of goods.

Paul

Well typically, the processes that lead to those unintentional transplants of non-humans is because of these superpowers of economies and capitalist colonization around the world, right? I know, Ron, you talk about this a lot in your work: the level of accountability in terms of collateral damage, with things that are taken for granted in a shipping industry or an airspace industry.

For example: if we need to manage the ballast in a boat, we'll just pump a bunch of water in, and we're just thinking about it as a material that's non biotic. But every tablespoon of seawater (or any water, for that matter) has hundreds of thousands of microorganisms that, in some cases, are very hyper specific to a location. If you're taking hundreds of thousands of gallons of water into a vessel and then sailing it halfway across the world, and then pumping that water out into a completely different body of water—even saltwater into freshwater, into the completely wrong kind of body of water—you're definitely going to have things like the Zebra Mussel problem or the Asian Carp problem. And it's funny how we consider it: we named the problem after the organism, but the organisms are just taking advantage of an ecological niche. It's all a human problem. It's not the Zebra Mussels' fault.

Ashley

They exist and they have a place somewhere. We deem them invasive because of what they cause to the environment they've been situated in, but we don't take accountability for our contributing actions.

Ron

We oftentimes blame, as Paul said, the plant. We don't want to take responsibility for our own idiocy.

Paul

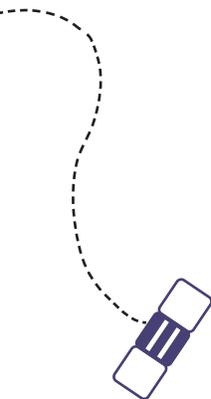
I find it interesting that the most frustrated people get is when these sorts of migrations cause damage to the industries that are causing those migrations. Especially in agricultural settings, like if you look at Australia with the cane toads and mice, cats, rabbits, pigs—any number of species.

Ron

And cacti. There were no cacti in Australia prior to the arrival of Europeans.

Paul

Yeah. It's an irony, right? Once the capitalist practices that caused the problem are affected negatively by the problem that they created, something gets done about it because it's affecting people directly. It's not often that we see, for example, something being done about fixing the cave ecosystem that is collapsing because some caver's foot introduced mud from two kilometers away. That cave is not really a problem for most people because you don't see the problem and your livelihood isn't affected.



“We deem them invasive because of what they cause to the environment they’ve been situated in, but we don’t take accountability for our contributing actions.”

Ashley

I should say, too, that with my experience of the Phragmites, the discussions around the invasiveness of the species comes from very westernized modes of thought. This includes removal processes and educational resources that are readily available to the general public.

It seems as though it is a slow process to acknowledge that there are other ways of learning and actually implementing those ways into practice. There is now acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge around the topic of invasive species, but of course, there could be more.

Paul

Has there been much success with combating—I mean, there I go with the terminology—but, dealing with the Phragmites from a more Indigenous background? Maybe introducing other species that are able to defend against how invasive the Phragmites are?

Ashley

I can only speak on my recent experience of actually being in the field with the group of volunteers. The machinery is almost comical because it's highly customized and some look like tanks. It's like a war on Phragmites. They pollinate very easily and aggressively so I suppose the methods have to be similar in nature. So, I would say that it's addressed in writing but I didn't see it in action, just from my experience.

Ron

Within *As the Crow Flies*, there are names along the top of the wall, circling the piece: place names, names of people, descriptives and nouns. Along the lower part of the wall is a compendium of plants native to the Americas. Some of the descriptives that I used were words like “invasive” or “exotic.” When the Europeans accidentally bumped into the Americas, Columbus, for instance, immediately brought maize back to Spain, but the maize seeds that he brought back were a tropical variety so they didn't grow very well in Spain. Within eight years, a Portuguese businessman and explorer, Pedro Álvares Cabral, bumped into Brazil. He was on his way to India, via the Horn of Africa. In Brazil, he loads up with freshwater and maize and papayas and probably guavas. Off he went over to Africa, and then around the Horn, and he landed in Cochin, India in 1500. Cabral brought maize into India in 1500. And the corn that he brought was tropical, so it grew and it was accepted by the people of India. There's different forms of movement and relationships that happen. The relationship between the Portuguese and the people of India was awful. However, when the Portuguese showed up with maize, papayas, guavas and cashews, the food crops from the Americas were accepted immediately, and they moved: within one generation maize was growing in Yunnan China, near Kunming. And again, the Chinese accepted maize, and they accepted all these plants that came from the Americas via the Portuguese. They had conflict with the Portuguese, but they loved these plants that the First Nations of the Americas had developed over thousands of years.

These crops were being brought to the rest of the world, but the peoples of the Americas weren't acknowledged. No one understood what the Americas was. Cabral had it figured out that the Americas was not India because he landed in India. He thought maybe it might be in the outer reaches of China. But at that moment in time, in 1500, neither Cabral nor Columbus, or any of the other ones around at that time, understood what the Americas was: two massive continents with civilizations, philosophies, farming far more sophisticated than most other parts of the world and architecture that rivaled Rome or any city in China or India.



Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (detail view)

There's this thing about acknowledgement that always gets lost in the equation of trying to understand colonization. If an Indian or a Chinese person living in those countries cannot acknowledge the fact that they had a massive population increase after 1500 because of the food crops that came from the Americas, then we're lost. Gradually, most of the farmers in China, India and Myanmar understood that maize is native to the Americas. However, if you talk to an urbanite in Beijing or in Mumbai, most have no idea that maize originated in the Americas, or papayas for that matter, or pineapples, avocados.... There's no acknowledgement. This is what I began to understand when I first did *As the Crow Flies*. I learned that all of these food crops existed way before the Europeans' or the Chinese', or the Africans.' And I felt really stupid that I didn't learn this as a child.

Paul

Part of the thing that strikes me about your work, Ron, is the volume of the different species. It's almost like looking at the credits on a Marvel movie, with just endless streams of identities of these different plants and animals that you've accredited. We're looking at these huge lists of plants that come from the Americas. I'm just thinking about the hundreds of generations, and how each generation contributed to the evolution of that plant.

Ron

We share it. So look at this, this is bizarre. [Ron takes out an herbal book] This is an illustrated herbal. The first herbal book was actually by a Greek, Dioscorides. This particular herbal was done by a guy named Garner around 1590. Do you see what it says about corn? It says "Red Turkey Wheat." Another one is "Blue Turkey Wheat." And here's "Gold Turkey Wheat." Most people will say, "why are they calling it 'Turkey Wheat'?" Well, if you look at the French, their word for maize is blé d'Inde, "wheat from India." Or if you look at the Italian, the word for maize is gran turco, "grain from the Turks." Most people don't know why. When I was working in the late 70s and 80s, I knew why. After doing *As the Crow Flies*, I knew exactly why that happened.

Maize went to India and was accepted by those people. The ruling people of India at that time were the Mughals, an Islamic and Islamic Hindu state. Mughal emperor Akbar had direct relationships with the Ottoman Empire, the Turks, and he even liked Christians.

Within one generation, maize moved from India up to Afghanistan, up into Persia, and over into Turkey. Then the Turks gave it to the Italians. So even in 1595, the English thought that maize was from the Turks. It's bizarre. It wasn't until Carl Linnaeus (you know, Linné) figured out that these early herbalists were wrong: he realized there was no corn there, originally. There was no maize. He wrote scathing articles about the writers of herbal books, how all their information was erroneous. Even though Linné was a total bigot and problematic, at least he knew where maize came from.

Ashley

This might be a good point to talk about working with plants, as an artist, and some of the challenges of working with plants in museum spaces. There was quite a struggle for my project to include organic material. Especially, you know, this deadly weapon of the Phragmites. I took it as an opportunity to add a bit of humor within my work. After speaking to curators in Botany departments and conservators, the Museum asked me to freeze and coat the plants in wax. It really was a lengthy process with a lot of back-and-forth discussions. At some point, and to save any potential issues in the future, I just decided to coat the phragmites in about 3 inches of wax so they're absolutely contained and almost unrecognizable as a plant. It was a challenge to physically include the main focus of my project. I find it interesting that concepts of nature are major topics in this collective project, but it was so difficult to actually include nature in the show.

Paul

I think it partly speaks to how threatening the agency of nonhumans is to these institutions: they can threaten an entire collection by the fact of their existing and having agency. Thinking about the different food crops, Ron, that have made their way across the world: you can look at that not only as us taking the plants and putting them all over the place, but also the power of those plants over us—their agency and their qualities of being. Look at grass: we're hypnotized into keeping it a perfect two inches long on hundreds of thousands of acres in North America, on land that could otherwise be used to produce food. Michael Pollan talks about this. It's interesting to me how many different plants have become so massively present in our discourse. It's interesting, too, that different cultures have different plants that are more dominant than others.

Ashley

It's the aesthetics, right? With the grass and keeping it short and un-useful for many reasons. It's mind-boggling what we do with our status as humans. For years and years (yet unknown for many), Phragmites have been one of the largest contributors as an invasive species. But they're still readily available at garden centers for home decor. I don't believe those garden center plants are treated in any way, so their seeds spread with any form of movement.

Paul

I think it's partly about fear. I worked a county office for a little bit: it's amazing the amount of calls we got from people angry with their neighbours because their grass was too long and the seeds from weeds were ruining their immaculate monoculture of Kentucky Blue lawn or Blue Rhye lawn.

Ashley

I think it's oddly about control, too. In the position of the human, there's fear of nature and therefore the need to dominate and conquer.

Ron

Right next to a garden that I did recently in Guelph is the Turfgrass Institute. This reminds me of work by Edward Poitras from 1987-88. Ed and I showed around the same time at the Mendel Art Gallery, and Ed did this great piece where he cut out a section of grass from his First Nations territory and he brought it to the Mendel Art Gallery. Then he cut out the same shape on the lawn of the Mendel and he put in his grass. He took the Mendel Art Gallery's grass back to his territory, put it in the ground, and he documented what happened. The grass that he brought to the Mendel thrived. But the grass that he took from the Mendel to his territory was dead in a season. It was gone.

Paul

That's part of it, too. The more we deliberately breed and crossbreed and tamper with the evolution of the crops that we grow, the more they tend to become hyper dependent on specific pesticides and forms of control, and vulnerable to biodiverse pests.

Ron

I was at Woodland Cultural Centre yesterday. I took some of our contributing editors from the Embassy Cultural House to Woodland. Patricia Deadman gave us a tour. I've been there many times in the historical part, and there was a display of the different kinds of wood that the Haudenosaunee used for different things, like the making of their long houses. The bark that they used was from the Elm tree. There are very few Elms left now because of a disease. They had a big piece of Black Ash, which they make their baskets from. All the ashes are now being attacked by beetles. Something has to happen. But whenever I see a single Elm tree growing all by itself, I say, "Wow, there's one." It's like a friend. And I'm not First Nations. But I say, "there's a friend."

This gets into the issue of the purpose of genetically modified organisms. For the most part, it's all about being able to, for example, patent the plants that are genetically resistant to glyphosate. The whole point isn't to produce more food, but for Monsanto and a few other companies to be able to market glyphosate. It is all about chemicals, and that's where the profit is. The companies control the genetically modified seeds, but the real profit is in the glyphosate.

What we're getting into is, broadly speaking, the whole word "garden," "gardening." In the popular mind, especially around the environment, gardening is a good thing. But obviously, it's not without its problems.

Ashley

In a more theoretical way, I like the idea of a garden as a system in which rhizomatic thinking occurs. The roots provide different channels but they collectively work together. Using gardening as a concept allows for opportunities to consider different modes of thinking, specifically how things connect and work together.

Paul

Gardening is a hard term because it implies the presence of a person in it. I mean, I think it implies the presence of a person because it's a rationalized encouragement of plant growth, in one way or another. Either you're growing them for purely aesthetic reasons, or for food or medicine, or to repair damage that you've done to a landscape. There are not very often cases where people are gardening, or encouraging plants to grow, simply for the growth of the plant or the enhancement of the environment. Or, if it's to enhance the environment, it's to repair damage that we've done. It's interesting to take plants from all over the place and grow them for your own needs, and to think about that as an inherent good. Because in some cases, you're doing damage.

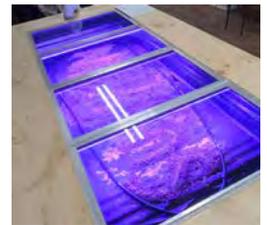
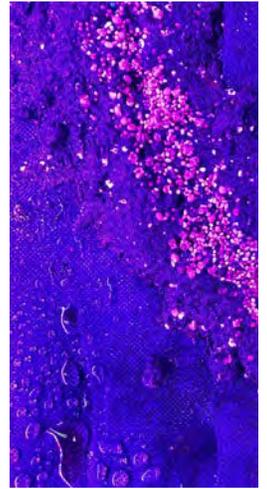
I always think that it's powerful and amazing to grow plants and have that relationship with something non-human. It's kind of like living with a pet: they give you that joy, and that joy can translate into a wider spanning stewardship. It doesn't have to stop with the garden or with watering or walking your dog or being tolerated by your cat. I do think that gardening is good, but it can quickly devolve into

more dangerous, careless activities. That's something that you have to work really hard to prevent yourself from inadvertently getting into. It's something that I'm always struggling with in my projects: working with living plants as part of an artwork. What is the actual art object? What is just considered a material? I try not to consider the plants as just a material; they're something that I'm working with, and trying to enhance the life of, rather than just using for an aesthetic reason or a goal.

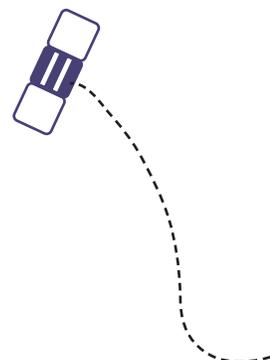
Ron

I've done so many garden installations. The first one I ever did, *American Cloisonné*, was in a plant conservatory next door to the Mendel Art Gallery. That was the series of exhibitions that I was involved in with Ed Poitras. The first outdoor garden I did was in Windsor. It was a billboard with a garden in front of it of Native American plant species: everything from maize to tobacco to sunflowers, potatoes and chili peppers. The billboard itself read along the top, "Native to the Americas," and there was an alphabetical list of economic plants of the Americas. Superimposed on top of an image of a shopping cart was the term "First Nations."

A neat thing happened. Paul, one time you were talking about how you were going to use First Nations' names for plants, and you asked me if I had ever come across problems with that. Well, here's an example. The Director of the Windsor Art Gallery at the time was Alf Bogusky. I set up the billboard and I planted the garden. About a month later, a group of First Nations people



Paul Chartrand, *Hydroponic Harvest Table* (stills from livestream feed)



(I think they were from Walpole), looked at my garden piece and they came to the front door. They wanted to talk to the Director. They wanted to know if there was any more First Nations art in the art gallery. Alf said, “Ron, they think you’re First Nations.” And I said, “That’s all right!” I said, “You know, knowledge is knowledge. And I think that the more people know, the better.” At least they know where maize came from. To be honest, some First Nations people don’t know where maize came from. It’s hard to believe. But if they’re urbanites, and they’ve never talked to their elders or gone back to their land, then they don’t know. And that’s the real tragedy. It’s not ironical. It’s a tragedy for the world, for First Nations and for everyone else, that we don’t know all the contributions that came from the farmers of the Americas. Because they’re astounding. They’re still astounding. I learn from them all the time.

Paul

The idea of where things are from is temporarily defined, right? I mean, we talk about where people are from and what their origins are, but we’re all from basically the same region in Africa. All the continents were one continent. As people who live a finite span of between 30 and 100 years, we have a pretty limited scope in terms of where something would be from because we only have these generational snapshots. Even if you think about the lifetime of a civilization, civilizations don’t really last that long.

Ron

300 years. The British control of India lasted 300 years, at the most. They don’t last long. The United States will be gone pretty soon. It’ll be gone in maybe 50 years. It’ll break up. Omar El Akkad’s novel, *American War*, has a map of what the United States is going to look like in forty years: when the level of water rises and the whole coastline changes, and then the United States politically changes, one whole section near the Carolinas becomes a giant penal colony.

Paul

Something that became a really significant part of my projects for *GardenShip* was working with the names and identities of Indigenous community members and environmental activists who have been killed for defending the land around the world. For me, it was trying to reconcile some of the part that I have to play in the deaths of these people as a Canadian, living in a country whose corporations—particularly mining corporations—have really terrible reputations, globally, for displacing communities, eradicating communities, polluting them. There’s a long way to go, obviously, in my practice, but it was something that I wanted to try and get the ball rolling for myself in acknowledging the harmful aspects of colonization. Really trying to focus in on one thing, trying to acknowledge the environments and the people that have been harmed by just living in the countries that we live in.

Ashley

I'd like to piggyback on that, and to reiterate the need for other knowledges in mainstream management strategies, but also at a larger scale of understanding current ecological crises and injustices.

Ron

This is a re-installation of *As the Crow Flies*, thirty years after it was first installed and then went into the vault. In thirty years, we're still being confronted by the same lack of knowledge, the same bigotry, the same racism. Some of the newspaper articles that line the perimeter of the piece were chosen because of their ridiculousness as fake news, but others because of what was going on, their truthfulness. I didn't choose them for sensationalism, I chose them because that is exactly what was going on when I was doing the piece. There's an article on residential schools from 1989 from *The Globe and Mail*. There's another article, right before Dudley George was murdered,¹ on what was going on at Ipperwash at that time.

I had forgotten those newspaper articles were in the piece. And in fact, when I was pulling stuff out, I went, "Oh God, it's always the same shit. Thirty-two years later, we're still trying to get people educated." Because that's the problem: miseducation. Even this "Freedom Convoy," as they call it, in Ottawa: 5% of them were outright fascists, but the others were just people who had been inundated with all sorts of misinformation, and they were gullible because they're frightened. Those are the people you want to get through to, somehow.

Paul

I know a couple of people that went there from Dunnville.

Ron

You know, when you talk to them, you try to share some of the things that we have in common. For instance, I'm against capitalist globalization, and so are they. All these jobs have been lost because of corporate greed and Free Trade Agreements that are not free trade—they're just a corporate license to pillage. And they don't give a shit if a person in Ontario, Indiana or Ohio works or not. And yet, the unemployment rate has risen since the Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, Canada and the United States. So many people in the United States and Canada lost jobs. Go to downtown Brantford. You can see it: like the end of Massey-Ferguson and Massey Harris. There are no more tractors made in Canada. In London, Ontario, all we make now are stupid armored vehicles so that the Saudis can bomb the hell out of Yemen.

¹ Anthony "Dudley" George was an Indigenous land defender who was shot and killed by Ontario Provincial Police during the 1995 Ipperwash Crisis at the former Ipperwash Provincial Park.

Paul

Armored vehicles and frozen pizzas.



Gizzard Shad

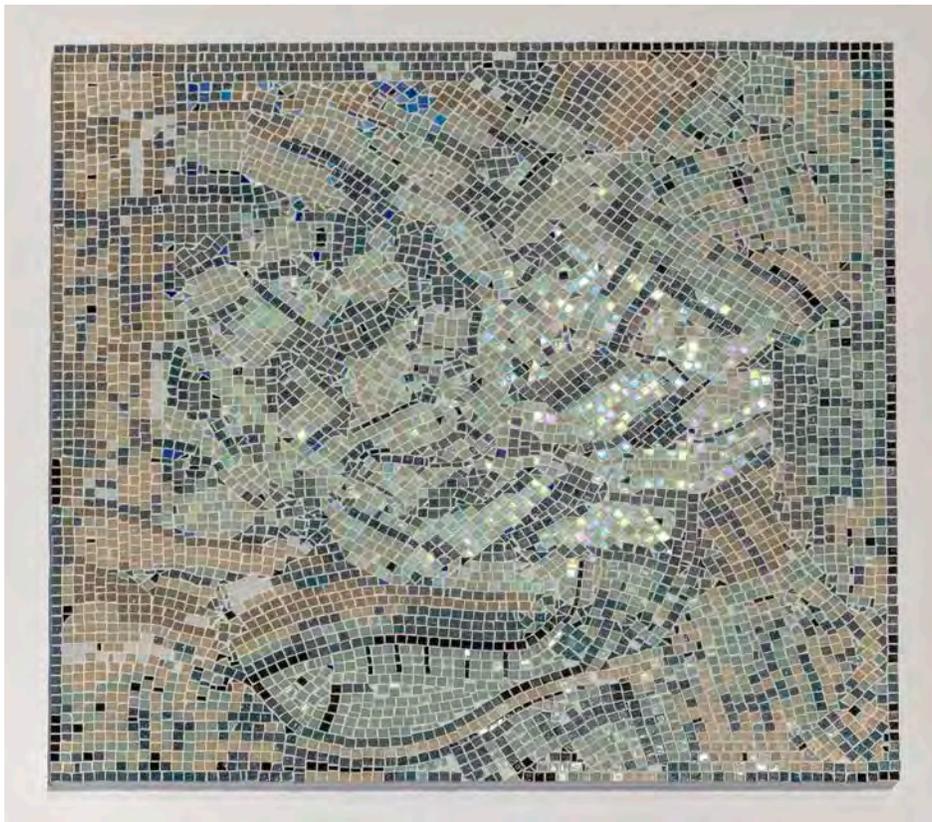
Tom Cull

Accompanied by Jamielie Hassan and Ron Benner



Our unruly rescue out-front
lunging at other dogs, pizza crusts,
following the river path to the estuary
where the fish have shoaled
in thousands, their slick coats
churning the water in patterned roil,
intermittent flashes of silver bellies
flipped sideways—one wide fishy eye
catches mine; tethers two worlds, above and below.
Three boys smash the water with sticks.
A parent in our party, braver than me,
says ‘don’t do that please; the fish do not like it’
Dead bodies stiff the banks;
our dog holds one in her mouth
sideways like a smile.

Shad gather where warm
water is flushed into the river—
sewage plants, storm water drains.
Why so many now? No one really knows.
We make jokes about sushi and signs
of the apocalypse, laugh loudly through
our masks; the crowd grows, more dogs, children—
our son holds a funeral for Carl the fish:
“Carl” he says, “you were a fish.”
I stand hypnotized by those bodies
swishing. Pop cans, trash on the creek bed,
something flashing red and blue through
the undulating screen of fish.



Jamelie Hassan, *Gizzard Shad* (above); Ron Benner, *Photograph of Gizzard Shad, Winter 2020* (below)

Waiting for the Delegates' Arrival

Jeff Thomas



This essay was originally contributed to the Embassy Cultural House's 2021 collaborative exhibition and publication, Pandemic Gardens: Resilience Through Nature. Pandemic Gardens was organized by Ron Benner and Rachel MacGillivray, with the assistance of Jamelie Hassan, Olivia Mossuto, and JoAnna Weil. For more information, visit embassyculturalhouse.ca/pandemic-gardens.html

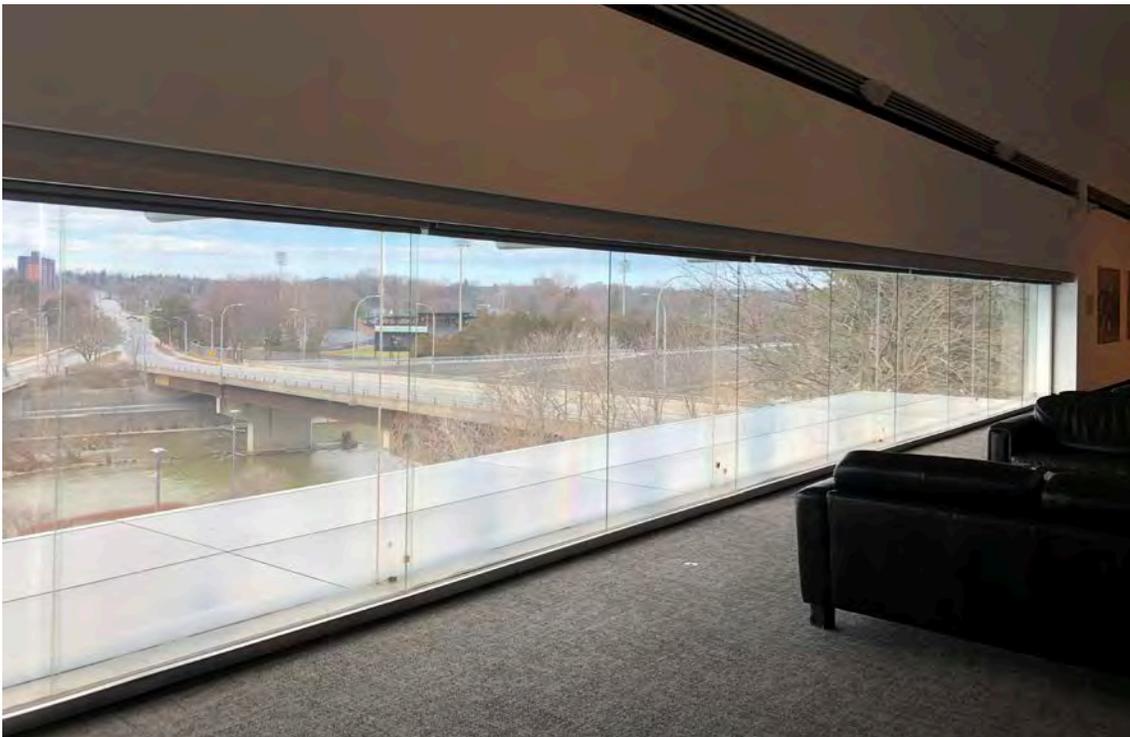
The first time I saw one of Ron Benner's garden projects was in 2007 at AXENÉO7 Gallery in Gatineau, Quebec. On the day we visited, Ron was overseeing his traditional corn roast event. I was impressed with the garden and the incorporation of images mounted on the trellis fencing. I remember thinking to myself that I would have loved to introduce Ron and Jamelie to my elders at the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve because I knew we would have a good conversation sitting around the kitchen table. My elders were my step-grandfather Bert General and his sister Emily General who were still running the family farm in the late 1960s, where Emily had a large garden by the chicken coop.



Jeff Thomas, *Ron Benner's Garden*, 2008

The opportunity to work with Ron came about in 2021 for the exhibition *GardenShip and State* at Museum London. Curator Patrick Mahon invited me to take part as a co-curator and artist. I finally had my opportunity to collaborate with Ron and was thrilled that he agreed to take part.

It wasn't long before our collaboration became a Covid-influenced project. The original plan was to have my new work *Corn = Life* connect with Ron's corn roast at the exhibition opening. But the opening was postponed due to pandemic restrictions and, now having more time, I began to consider a new work for the exhibition – an installation (my first) outside the main gallery. I was given window space in the Community Gallery room; from which I could see Deshkan Ziibi (Antler River) where it comes in from the east and branches off north and south. Below the panoramic window in the community space is where Ron's garden project is located.



Documentary photograph of window overlooking Ron Benner's Garden at the confluence of Deshkan Ziibi/Antler River (Museum London), 2023. Photograph by Patrick Mahon.

In a sense we were carrying on the tradition from ancient times when Indigenous people met and camped at the river confluence. *GardenShip and State* became a meeting ground for artists and writers.

My vision for the exhibition and its cross-cultural mix of artists and writers was to use the tenants of the Two Row Treaty of 1613 as a precept for our project. The treaty was made between my Haudenosaunee ancestors and the emerging colony of Dutch settlers around the Albany, New York area. In essence, the treaty was the recognition of each other's autonomy; to live side by side without interfering in each other's affairs. I felt that this project was itself a living document that could be an example of artists and writers living side by side and talking about our views on the political and environmental landscape.

Corn = Life reflects my thoughts on Ron's garden and the messages represented by the images mounted on the trellis fencing. The combination of living plants with images reminded me of my work juxtaposing historical images of Indigenous people with my contemporary photographs. The juxtaposition stimulates a renewal of the life blood of the historical images.

When considering images I could use for my installation, I asked Ron to send me some samples of the corn he had grown. I also asked if I could borrow the trellis fencing. Not only did Ron agree, but it was the same fencing he used in his 2007 project. I received a large box from Ron containing corn along with tobacco and other produce. I photographed the corn and tobacco in my studio by holding each piece in my hand. This was inspired by my step-grandfather Bert, who demonstrated the traditional way of braiding corn for drying. I had photographed Bert holding a cob of white corn in his hand as he pulled the corn silk off each cob.



Jeff Thomas, *Bert General*, 1990

This image became the central part of a new panel work entitled *From The Garden of Ron Benner*.



Detail View with Jeff Thomas, *Waiting for the Delegates to Arrive: From the Garden of Ron Benner*

The pandemic threw many challenges at Patrick Mahon and me, but, in the end, the project and my collaboration with Ron proved to be one of my pandemic highlights. I envision pursuing more work with Ron in the future. Just like the garden, new seeds have been planted.



Jeff Thomas, *Waiting for the Delegates to Arrive: From the Garden of Ron Benner*



As the Crow Flies 1984-1991: Ron Benner's Subversive Cartography

Richard Fung



It's -10°C and blue February light floats through my window as I peruse digital images from *GardenShip and State*. They have been electronically forwarded to me in Toronto as the global COVID-19 pandemic has forced Museum London to close to the public. As a result, I can't visit the exhibition in person. It's a situation that underscores the urgency of the show's focus on environmental critique and decolonial theory.

There is much to engage in the photographs: the curation is rigorous and the installation elegant. The exhibition breathes. I find it difficult, nevertheless, to overcome the distance and truly feel the artworks across the gap. But as I make my way through the images, words jump out suddenly and draw me into the computer screen: bougainvillea, kapok, guanábana, cassava, papaya. These conjure colours, textures, smells, flavours and mouthfeel familiar to me. They take me back to the tropics and the winter day is warming. My heart skips a beat when I glimpse the word "Trinidad," but then I see "Cuba" next to it. Not my Trinidad, this is a city at the other end of the archipelago. But it's in the region.

Ron Benner's installation *As the Crow Flies*, 1984-1991 follows longitudinal lines from London and Toronto, Ontario south to Peru. On the floor of the installation is a grid, which on traditional maps would orient the viewer to the cardinal directions. But here the nodes identify the points along the north-south vectors where a landmass encounters big water. From London these are Port Stanley, Ontario on Lake Erie; Cape Sable, Florida on the Gulf of Mexico; Bay of Pigs, Cuba on the Caribbean Sea; Puerto Mutis, Panama and Punta Pariñas, Peru on the Pacific Ocean. From Toronto they are Mohawk Point, Ontario on Lake Erie; Cape Romain, South Carolina on the Atlantic Ocean; Trinidad, Cuba on the Caribbean Sea; and Panama City, Panama and Pacasmayo, Peru on the Pacific Ocean.

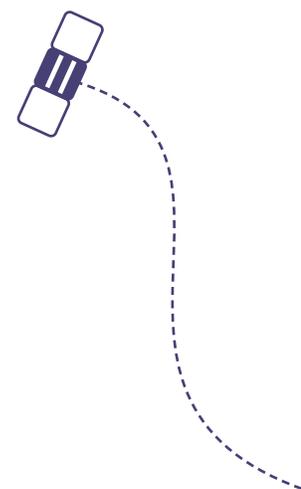
Hanging above the nodal points are panels with black and white photographs on both sides, showing northward and southward views of each location. Photographs also cover both long walls of the rectangular gallery and are scattered across a third. On the end wall above the two Canadian cities is an outline drawn in clay of the Great Lakes with Lake Erie at the centre. Opposite, above the Peruvian locations, words for plants, animals, peoples and places cluster around the text, "NATIVE TO THE AMERICAS." The floor is edged with a myriad of found objects. Among the pebbles, worn bricks, rusted metal, and shards of mirror, a globe, atlases, and map fragments nestle in one corner. A pile of crushed Coke cans with one Canada Dry can perched atop fills another corner. Dried kidney beans and cocoa beans are interspersed with bottles of Cuban rum and industrially packaged dried potatoes from Peru. A polished gourd and a mola textile from the Guna people off Panama are some of the scattered mementoes. Finally, newspapers from the period add a chronological dimension, anchoring this space-time capsule in events, issues, and personalities in their various localities. A clipping from the Fayetteville Observer-Times announces "The Security Council on Wednesday adopted a truce resolution that requires Iraq to abolish weapons of mass destruction, renounce terrorism and pay war repatriations." The London Free Press features a photograph of Oji-Cree politician Elijah Harper and headlines "The Struggle for Camp Ipperwash" and "A lesson in misery: Canadian Indians look back in anger at residential school days." Dried tobacco and flint corn lie beside in a gesture of respect.



Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (detail view)

Ron Benner has created a meta-map, a cartographic object incorporating scientific and social observations that is at once politically resonant and deeply personal. The collection of objects and images function as a material log of relationships to places and people from Benner's travels in the specified locations. Spatializing the journey as an installation allows the viewer the freedom to move randomly within the trajectory of these encounters, a non-authoritarian approach accentuated by the fragility of the map's construction: applied clay for Lake Erie; pebbles, coral and sand at the photographic nodes; and glass and ceramic sherds from the Lake Erie shoreline marking out the lines of longitude.

As the Crow Flies brings back my own 1981 backpacking journey from Nicaragua, recently liberated by the Sandinistas from the Somoza dictatorship, to the shores of Lake Titicaca where my southward trek was truncated by a coup in Bolivia. I too bought a mola, and Benner's pop cans remind me of drinking far too much sugary fizz to stave off dehydration while avoiding unpotable water.



The mountains of Venezuela are visible from Port of Spain, yet "the Main," as it was still sometimes referred to in my childhood, was a shadowy place. Other than Guyana, which has a similar history and demographics to Trinidad and was not really thought of as "South America," the continent was foreign and mysterious. My eight-month journey on the continent was therefore a revelation. Along with the new, I discovered shared flora and fauna, and familiar foodways owing to analogous encounters between Indigenous and Iberian cultures, and

African, Levantine and Asian diasporas, all shaped by the conditions of extractive colonialism. Agricultural labour, mining, railway and road construction all fostered a diet high in carbohydrates.

My great grandparents went from China to Trinidad as indentured workers in the scheme to replace formerly enslaved Africans on the sugar, cocoa and coffee plantations. By the mid-19th and early 20th century, India became the preferred labour source for British, Dutch and French Caribbean territories. In that same period, Chinese coolies worked the plantations of Cuba and built railroads in Panama. In Peru, they also worked the fields, built railways and mined guano. Korean workers went on contract to Mexico and Cuba, and Japanese ones to Cuba and Peru. By 1981, I'd met Asian Canadians and Americans, but I knew nothing of these southern communities parallel to my own. Yet, when I would enter an Asian business in Peru, I was addressed as "paisano" (countryman).

At high school I learned to name the Great Lakes and that gold and copper were mined in Timmins, Ontario, but we were taught almost nothing about the continent next door. The irony that I knew more about Canada than our closest neighbour, and that Latin America might have been equally unknown to me as for Benner, shows not only that the education system in the recently independent nation was yet to be decolonized. In selecting which regions to teach about and which to ignore, the curriculum also reveals the ideological production of British empire and its afterlife in the Commonwealth—Canada still dominates banking in the Anglophone Caribbean.¹

Trinidadian contemporary artist and critic Christopher Cozier notes that, contrary to the implication of "insular," on an island you're always looking out beyond the shore.² I started my university studies in geography, and not long ago I realized that my work as an artist is centred on movement across geopolitical space—people, plants, recipes, identities, politics, ideas. In this way, I share an affinity with a strand in Benner's practice that maps Indigenous horticultural contributions. Just consider the global economic and cultural importance of potatoes, corn, tomatoes, chiles, peanuts, marigolds and strawberries.

In his influential 1989 article, "Deconstructing the Map," J.B. Harley lists the rules of cartography:

The object of mapping is to produce a 'correct' relational model of the terrain. Its assumptions are that the objects in the world to be mapped are real and objective, and that they enjoy an existence independent of the cartographer; that their reality can be expressed in mathematical terms; that systematic observation and measurement offer the only route to cartographic truth; and that this truth can be independently verified.³



¹ Tamanisha Jennifer John, "Canada's Financial Dominance in the Former English Caribbean Colonies (FECC)," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, January 9, 2018, <https://www.coha.org/canadas-financial-dominance-in-the-former-english-caribbean-colonies-fecc/>.

² Richard Fung, *Uncomfortable: The Art of Christopher Cozier*, 2005, video, 47:38, distributor: www.vtape.org.

³ J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map." *Classics in Cartography: Reflections on Influential Articles from Cartographica*, Martin Dodge ed. (Oxford and New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 277.

Belying the supposed objectivity and scientific neutrality in cartography are the political stakes that impel and underwrite mapmaking. Working from a reading of Foucault, Harley observes that, “[e]specially where maps are ordered by government (or are derived from such maps), it can be seen how they extend and reinforce the legal statutes, territorial imperatives and values stemming from the exercise of political power.”⁴

⁴ Ibid, 286.

Yet even within standardized cartography there is room for subversion. Analyzing mapmaking in early Hispanic America, Cody Barteet describes how “cartographic objects” function as “apparatuses to govern and control.”⁵ Even so, Hispanic American *relaciones geográficas* (geographic accounts involving image and text) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, created for the Spanish king but rendered by Maya and other Indigenous artisans, reveal “complex multicultural negotiations.”⁶ In some maps this is visible as a tension between the Renaissance grid and circular forms of composition, the former associated with order, stability, and compartmentalization—including for racial categories—and the latter linked to Mesoamerican cosmological and calendrical systems.⁷

⁵ Cody Barteet, “Contested Ideologies of Space in Hispanic American Cartographic Practices: From the Abstract to the Real in Spanish and Indigenous Maps of Yucatán,” *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 38, no. 2 (2013), 22.

⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁷ Ibid, 28.

As *the Crow Flies* both foregrounds and undermines the spatial governmentality implicit in official mapmaking by inviting the viewer to consider the world from an avian rather than a human perspective. Birds fly distances in search of food and water and to reproduce, which impels seasonal migration. As they fly between south and north and back again, birds follow the earth’s magnetic field unimpeded by topography or national borders. What matters for migrating birds is where the forest ends at fresh water or the desert gives way to the ocean. And so their dependence on the natural environment makes birds subject to humans. Bird migration—and the survival of species that migrate—is threatened by habitat loss, human structures and the effects of climate change. These hazards are not limited to individual states.

Migrating birds make no distinction between island and continent, and the division into North, Central and South America have no meaning in avian navigation. For geographers, North America comprises the states of Mexico, the United States of America and Canada, and that forms the rationale for the North American Free Trade Agreement. Yet an equally forceful cultural and political construction is “the idea of Latin America,” to quote the title of decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo’s influential book. Mignolo describes the development of the racial discourse that subtends the division into two Americas, with a white USA and Canada to the north and a brown “Latin” America below. He charts the process by which, since the nineteenth century, the word “Latin” became delinked from its European association and indigenized as mestizo: “‘Latin America’ became darker and darker in relation to the increasing discourse of White Supremacy.”⁸ Within global capitalism, the consequence of homogenizing discourses applied to both Americas—French is a Latin language, after all—is the relegation of “Latin”

⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden M.A.: Blackwell, 2005), 90.

America (and the entire Caribbean) to sites of resource and labour extraction and, increasingly, holiday destinations that are accessible even to working class metropolitans. Tourism exacerbates ecological stress, creating garbage and diverting water to resort pools and golf courses. It also often displaces locals and cuts them off from beaches and other natural riches. This industry engenders a precarious economic dependency, as the COVID-19 shutdown exposed. The subordinate status of Latin America explains its absence from my high school curriculum; textbooks and graduating exams still came from Britain.

Despite the imperialistic relationship between white and brown Americas (and a discursively Black Caribbean), basic similarities exist across the hemisphere, starting with the traumatic reconfiguration of this vast area, running nearly pole to pole, into “America.” From the early sixteenth century, European cartographers applied this name to the lands of the Western Hemisphere in homage to Amerigo Vespucci, the Florentine explorer working for Spain and Portugal. The discursive act of erasure and appropriation discloses the genocidal foundations of this “New World,” a term coined by Vespucci. The places in Canada, the United States of America, Cuba, Panama and Peru cited by Benner share a formative history in colonial carnage and plunder, theft of land and sovereignty, slavery and indentured servitude. Indigenous people in Canada still struggle against conditions of coloniality. Migrant workers from the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia labour on Canadian farms, in businesses and private homes under coercive contracts with limited or no access to permanent residency. Considering the planet from an avian perspective emphasizes spatial continuity over geopolitical division. In its implicit critique of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, *As the Crow Flies* points us toward solutions that are wholistic and inclusive.





Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (detail view)

Conversation: Lands & Mapping

Ron Benner, Michael Farnan, Patrick Mahon,
Adrian Stimson, Jeff Thomas, and Michelle Wilson



This discussion addresses GardenShip and State's preoccupation with interrelationships between ideas regarding land, mapping as a representational practice, colonization, and decolonization. The terms of the conversation draw upon the works of each of the speakers to demonstrate intersecting concerns that bespeak the complexity of GardenShip's themes. Ron Benner's immersive As the Crow Flies links the botanical and agricultural practices and histories of the north and south within Turtle Island, by referencing names of native American plants, place names and Indigenous nations that are proximal to two lines of longitude extending from London, ON, and Toronto, ON. Michael Farnan's Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress involves a map whose imagery illustrates historical 'settlement' narratives (colonial invasion) of the Great Lakes region of Canada, as well as their intersections with (forced) Indigenous displacement and the non-human life of bird, fish, and mammal. Patrick Mahon's Threshold Flags series came about as he was thinking about land within histories of colonialism and about corresponding present-day

challenges regarding the environment that require deeper understanding (including how "land" is symbolized through emblems such as flags). Adrian Stimson's works, including Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking, draw upon the artist's research about the Anthropocene epoch (or humans' activities that have impacted the earth), imaginatively expanding upon histories and stories from his Siksika First Nation to enlarge our thinking about the effects of climate change on traditional lands and the environment as a whole. Corn = Life and the other works in the exhibition by Jeff Thomas are based on the principles set forth in the 1613 Two Row Treaty, and act as central reminders of the historical agreements fostered at an earlier stage of colonization that can be and must be upheld. Michelle Wilson's Forced Migration offers viewers an opportunity to engage with an embroidered map and therefore to inferentially 'touch' the places, beings (human and non-human) and tales which have shaped current relationships with bison, proposing that we consider larger questions related to being, land, and belonging.

Michelle

I have trouble navigating the world through maps. Before phones and GPS, I would get lost a lot. That kind of abstraction doesn't make sense to me—I have trouble translating it into the real world. It's interesting that making maps has become so much a part of my practice. The things that my maps are looking at are not static, fixed places but relationships. I'm interested in how textiles respond to the way that land has been divided up: how the grid is echoed in the warp and weft of most fabrics. I am working on maps that elide those boundaries, and I'm working with felt which doesn't depend on that weaving structure but is an enmeshed materiality. It suits the maps I've been creating to help us understand our relationship with bison.

Bison are numerically very strong as a species but a lot of biologists consider them ecologically extinct, because they exist only in these bounded relationships with their kin. The mapping that I'm doing imagines them back onto the land in a way that they existed before it was divided up for private property or private ownership. A lot of people are talking about restoring them to the commons, and I haven't really worked through exactly what that can mean (and the different ways that the commons can be interpreted).¹

Adrian

My trajectory to "Mapping" was really brought on by the *GardenShip* project. The Siksika nation has its own interior territories within the reserve boundaries. You have North camp, you have South camp, you have Little

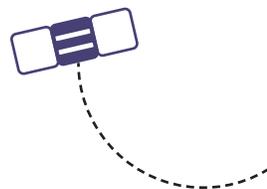
Washington, Little Chicago, all these interesting territories on the Nation, and the relationships and how they were formed (originally by clans). I belong to the Old Sun and Heavy Shield clans, and so I am situated in North camp, which is my familial territorial history. I think a lot about my ancestors in this particular area, and I know Old Sun is buried just over the hill. I used to make maps as a child of this particular area where I exist. I live in the former Old Sun Residential School garden surrounded by trees and such. But around us, of course, is the animal world—the badgers, the weasels, the gophers, the bird life, the hawks. As a kid, I would go out and map all these things: the animals' territory. I think that's really interesting in relationship to Michelle's work and the animals' territory, first and foremost.

With the *GardenShip* project, with the use of drones and re-figuring out that territory, I'm seeing how, through time, the various communities have started to encroach in and move. That relationship to the animal and territories is interesting, in the sense that suddenly a huge swath of land you had is now slowly diminishing. I was thinking of the bees, because they have a three-mile radius around where they are. I've been trying to map and think, "Okay, where do they get their food in this area?" There's a lot of relationships between human and animal, because food is obviously something that is so important to us.

Jeff

Adrian, I just want to ask you: how did you feel, using the drone, and how did it change the way that you saw the landscape, in terms of mapping?

¹ "The Tragedy of the Commons" is a theoretical position which states that, since individuals with access to public resources (a common) will act in their own best interests, state or private interests are better positioned to manage resources in order to avoid exploitation and depletion. The political economist Elinor Ostrom defies this consensus as a given in her landmark work, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990). In a series of case studies, Ostrom demonstrates communities that effectively and collectively self-organize and self-govern resources at the local level, without centralized state or private leadership. For a related discussion of the commons, see "Conversation: Archives, Artefacts, and Art" with Sean Caulfield, Amelia Faye, Mary Mattingly, Quinn Smallboy and Andrés Villar, in this publication.



Adrian

I love and hate the drone, because I've used the drone in previous instances of mapping massacre sites. There's that tenuous and weird feeling in having that bird's eye view. But that view is also that sense of being the hawk, being the owl: looking over the territory and getting a whole new perspective of that territory. It has created within me more of a love, an appreciation for the nuances and little things I hadn't seen before. It's opened up a new world of seeing. The history and the bad use of drones in warfare and everything else (which I'm familiar with) is something that I struggle with. At the same time, the nature of the drone is becoming less intrusive, in a sense.

Michael

I feel like I constantly lose my way as an artist. I feel like I make choices that go against some of the things I believe in. I turn back to maps all the time just to find my way into some level of understanding. In my practice, and in my own life, I use maps to understand settlement history, to understand my place on the land, and to see how these things are constructed. In particular, I think of the human and non-human. Like Adrian describes, I've lived and worked in places where interaction with animals can be just as important to understanding your place in the land as understanding colonial histories of industry and settlement. I have spent a lot of time living and working in remote locations. In those situations, we have to be aware of the bears, wolves, cougars, coyotes, migration patterns and seasons—not only for animal behaviour but also for hunting and

the dangers that presents. We have to know where the animals are, and where we are safe, while at the same time behaving to keep the animals safe and mitigate negative interactions. For me, there has always been this connection between the human and non-human.

I have also been thinking about my relationships within institutional frameworks. The longer I remain on the peripheries of mainstream academies of arts and culture, the more I seem to be moving away, ideologically, from institutional and academic conventions. I say that, with full awareness that I constantly shoulder up to them: using these institutions for support, opportunities and connections. I wonder if there is another path. In this way, I've been thinking about land acknowledgments—how colonial institutions use them, and how settler communities use them, to understand histories of place and space. It's a remapping of ownership, right? It's an understanding of a history of settlement and land use that remaps ownership to absolve the current beneficiaries. It's about settlers trying to figure out how the land has been stolen and redistributed, and it seems like that understanding is framed as a solution. In a way that I wasn't initially conscious of, my map in *GardenShip and State* was a way to figure that out: trying to understand all the treaties of the areas that we live in, where things like residential schools were located, and how people were shipped around. I'm also trying to figure out invasive and non-invasive species in the Great Lakes. When I think about all that and my aspirations as an artist, it brings up the ideas of reconciliation and

decolonization and how these forces are put into service.

One of the initial questions posed to the group was: what does decolonization mean in relation to *GardenShip*? I would answer that with more questions. What is decolonization at this point? How are institutions responding to these initiatives? How are regular people able to take that on? I know one of the ways that, institutionally, we try to decolonize is through land acknowledgments, which could be seen as a way of breaking down barriers and attempting to redistribute power. But I see this as a remapping of power, without breaking things down. One of the big things I keep returning to is the idea of Crown Land. There isn't a single piece of land in this country that's not owned. How can we acknowledge and change that? Adrian, you're sitting on reserve land and traditional land, but it's owned land. And even within the reserve, there's problems with individual ownership versus band ownership, versus government ownership. How do we acknowledge that?

Adrian

Perhaps I'm an example of that weird sort of disconnection with land—being born off reserve, and then spending my life on reserves but in residential schools, and then coming back home to the Nation. My parents were the first family to go into the CMHC program² and had a mortgage on reserve, which under the Indian Act entitles us to a quarter section of land around the nation. That totally negates the fact that this particular area is used by

many Nation members for their cattle, horses and such. For us to claim it, and say this is ours, would be like a political suicide for my family in many ways. But that is not the case for many First Nations. If I just go south to the other Blackfoot Nation on Kainai, there are many families who own their land. That has caused a lot of issues within the Nation, because there's a great many people on that Nation who don't own their land. Here on Siksika, even though under the Indian Act we're entitled, Chief and Council made a decision to take that away. But that decision has no legal basis. At the same time, we're always encouraged: go off reserve and buy land, because we have no capital by being on reserve. I went off reserve and purchased land to gain that capital. Then, all of a sudden (and this could be decolonization in a sense), I gave all that up and came back to the reserve to take over my family home. I have no capital now. It's this weird disjuncture that exists for me as an individual, but my intent is to be on reserve and contribute like everyone else, and know that I'm a steward of the land. I think it also leads into Land Back, in a sense: the most magic notion that we get all the land back. The fact is, we know we're not going to get the land back because of the many issues that exist in ownership today.

On top of that, we just settled a major land claim here on our Nation, the 1910 land surrender. So we're getting compensation, and part of that is that we can buy land anywhere in Alberta and turn it into reserve land. It becomes this weird sense of, "Okay, where do we get the land?" I also think



Michelle Wilson, *Forced Migration* (detail view)

² The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is Canada's national housing agency and state-owned mortgage insurer.

about our Dakota cousins, the Morely Tribes, who have actually been buying land all over southern Alberta. That hasn't turned into reserve land yet, but it's within Blackfoot territory. What does that mean? It creates these crazy conundrums and interesting plays of land stuff.

Ron

Well, the Pope is being asked to refute the Right of Discovery, or to be more blunt, the right of conquest. For me, that's a very important aspect of the First Nations' meeting with the Pope. It's not just the apology for the residential schools. It's rescinding the Right of Discovery: this stupid idea of "discovering" the Americas. The mirror image of that is the Delaware going over to England and "discovering" England and saying, "Oh, this is ours. And you have to accept that." And that goes with land acknowledgements: if you rescind the Right of Discovery or the right of conquest, as a human right, then the land acknowledgement becomes very important. Because then we're acknowledging that as European Canadians, we're just guests. You have to start there. The images coming out of Rome are amazing. They're medieval, with the Pope on one side and the First Nations and the Metis and the Inuit on the other. There are just fantastic images coming out. It's bizarre, but very important.

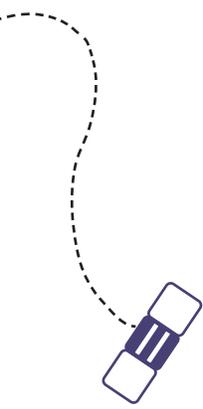
Patrick

With my project, the idea of the flag as symbolic regarding land was really central. I think a lot about borders and boundaries, but also perceived borders and boundaries. Ron, when

you're talking about the media images of Rome, and the perception of who's speaking and who's listening, that seems to be really part of what all of that is about. My thinking about this project came out of having worked on the Nonsuch when I was sixteen; they had just brought the replica ship into the Manitoba Museum. At the time, it was for a "celebration" of the Hudson's Bay Company's 300th anniversary.

Gradually, my whole understanding of the narrative of that ship shifted dramatically. The Hudson's Bay Company had come with its flag – and the very symbolism of putting your flag in the ground as a way of claiming territory – was something that became increasingly clear and significant to me. By extension, I came to see the many ways that we're continuously dealing with ideas of state, or ideas of territory, and of specific boundaries. And, as we know, when we produce maps, a boundary can represent, in some cases, a very wide swath of land that becomes potentially contested.

When I saw Jeff's photographs of the protest site at Caledonia, they struck me very powerfully: the flags ultimately have a disruptive means of claiming territory, and point to the problem of claiming territory through these very mechanisms. That, to me, became an important metaphor for our project's preoccupations with land and questions of colonization and decolonization. Michael, what you're talking about around land acknowledgments is absolutely germane to the way I'm thinking about this.



“...the flags ultimately have a disruptive means of claiming territory, and point to the problem of claiming territory through these very mechanisms.”

When I titled my project *Threshold*, I was thinking about borders and boundaries as permeable and subject to contestation in myriad ways, and for myriad reasons. One of my works is subtitled, “University Building with Tree and Rock.” It refers to an image my nephew photographed for me of the original buildings at the University of Winnipeg – it was called United College when it was founded – where flags are quite a minimal presence, and a large tree and an impressive boulder take up about half of the picture. I was interested in the ‘negotiation’ between the presence of a colonial building and emblems of nature, within that setting where teaching and learning are at stake. It might be somewhat of an indirect narrative, but I still hope that viewers will pick up on the tension between the architecture and the so-called natural world where flags are a subtle presence, too: it’s shown in a way that’s meant to create an elusive visual experience.

Jeff

I’ve been thinking about how long maps have been a part of my life: looking through my grandmother’s encyclopedia, and the kind of overlays that they had in there. It was fantastic to look at it. But when you look at it, being a First Nations person, it represents how the face of Turtle Island has been changed. That came to mind for me in 1992, during the Christopher Columbus 500 Anniversary celebrations. I decided to make a road trip: initially, it was to go to South Dakota, but I ended up traveling right across the United States and back through Canada. The idea was to

understand the act of commemoration, and also to experience absence in terms of, “Well, what does this contemporary landscape mean to me?” I had a Canada Council grant, and I ended up returning home with hardly any photographs made, because I didn’t know what to photograph in the larger world. That became a challenge and something I had to figure out. From that period on, I thought, “Well, what does a map need?” Having used maps to lay out where I wanted to go and what I wanted to see, it became about absence as well—and about the static nature of how Indians are shown on a map of the reservations. I wasn’t born on a reserve, I was born in a city, and there is no sense of movement within this document.

I began looking at inverting the idea of the logic that Europeans used when they invaded Turtle Island. How do you go back, and how do you use that kind of motivation to say, “I refuse to be rendered invisible”? For me, photography became a way of documenting the trips that I made, and looking at the map as an archive. It not only lays out a framework for my work to understand, but also in terms of leaving an archive for future generations. How do you want that to look? How do you decolonize a map? I think you can use the format, it’s just the same if we use painting or sculpture or photography or whatever—it’s a colonial thing. But how do we indigenize it? How do we make it speak for ourselves? In essence, I looked at it as taking the tools from the dominant society and turning it on them. So that’s been my role.



Patrick Mahon, *Threshold*
Flags: University Building with
Tree & Rock (detail view)

The Two Row treaty is also geographic, demarcating territory along the Hudson River. What does that mean in terms of mapping? With *GardenShip and State*, this was really the first time that it all began to come together, curating with the Two Row. How do you incorporate those elements of history into a current conversation? That's how it emerged with Patrick and I putting the exhibition together: having a format that is a living document. I see the map as a living document as well. I continue to populate it with the places that I photograph, along with information. It's a challenge, when we think about hope and those recent meetings, and about people announcing reconciliation from the government: you know that not a damn thing is ever going to change. The Pope is paying lip service. Indigenous people are there, doing it all over again, thinking, "Well, what's the value of hearing an apology from him?" For me, it just points out the fact that nothing will ever change. It just manifests itself in different ways.

This is what I thought with *GardenShip and State*. That if we come together, the most powerful thing, I feel, is becoming allies. Going back in time, I asked myself, "How did Indigenous people survive?" When I was growing up, it seemed like it was almost impossible to have survived colonization and subjugation. How do we begin to embrace those historical concepts and work as allies, as opposed to working in your own cultural area? We have to begin looking at how we make new connections. The Two Row became the foundation for the way that I looked at the exhibition.

Surprisingly, everybody embraced it in one way or another. It just goes to say that this is what I love about the work and this project. It's an opportunity to build allies rather than continuing along those endless roads of empty promises and nothing being done.

Patrick

Jeff, that makes me think of some of the ways that, in the university, we are trying to change. One of the things that gets asked is, "How are we doing land-based education?" I'm not even necessarily sure how to begin to think about the question. But when I consider this exhibition, I actually think it was and is a land-based project. By that I mean that we're not trying to come at history as a set of abstract narratives. And it seems like with so much of the work here— and as you're saying vis-à-vis the Two Row Treaty— there's a way in which the artists began with the question of what land means for them. I could look at everybody here and argue that that's the question that their work is asking. And then it becomes a question being asked of the audience: what does land mean for us?

A few years ago, Museum London hosted a gathering over several days, focused on the river. At that point, the organizers began using the Anishinaabe name for the river, Deshkan Ziiibi. At the time, Tom Cull, who was one of the organizers, said he thought it would be a while before the name would catch on. But in fact, that usage has become quite common. I can't speak for the citizenry of London at large, but it seems to me that this in itself is emblematic of the fact



Installation view with Two Row Treaty flag (Museum London)

that while land acknowledgments are abstractions in so many ways, actually naming seems to be really concrete and significant.

Ron

Jeff, you mentioned allies. My ally (or friend, or teacher) was Tom Hill, in the 70s. Jamelie and I would go to the Woodland Cultural Center, and Tom was the Director at that time. It was through Tom that we learned so much. I keep thinking of his 1982 catalogue, *Beyond History*. The history that Tom's talking about is a European construct. That was an amazing book that I used to distribute everywhere.

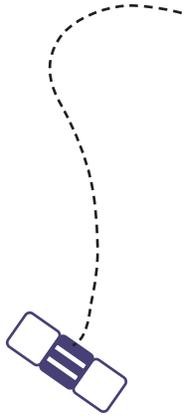
Jeff

That's what I was thinking too: about the map as an archive. The first time that I met Ron and Jamelie was in North Bay. As I was driving north from Ottawa, I was around Arnprior—which is about a third of the way—and I looked and there on a rock cut was the Hiawatha Wampum Belt reproduced in paint. That's the national flag now for Haudenosaunee people: using the Hiawatha Wampum Belt, which essentially shows the five original Nations that accepted the Peacemaker's plan for peace among the five tribal groups. The trip became even more important when I met Ron and Jamelie. Then, I made photographs in North Bay of historic trains that were on display. It's interesting to think about these connections (Ron used to work for the railroad and I was starting a new series on the railroad), and using the river as a metaphor for how things flow together—and how we remember, think, and talk about our own history in terms of those kinds of relationships. It

was a very important trip for me. I was born in Buffalo. Buffalo, prior to being settled, was known as the Buffalo Creek Reservation. It became a waypoint for Iroquois people who lost their land in eastern and central New York State during the Revolutionary War. I could say I was born at the Buffalo Creek Reservation. But what was hard was finding a map that detailed the former reservation. I wanted to know exactly where it was. Here I was driving down streets and photographing sites that had been the Buffalo Creek Reservation. How do you manifest that in a way that people will understand? I thought the Buffalo Creek Treaty had signed away all of the land, but there was one acre left in downtown Buffalo that's now called the Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino. It's the only Indigenous land in the city of Buffalo that's still recognized as Indigenous, and now it's a casino. It's absolutely fascinating and scary, the way that the land changes. What is our role in that? How do we contribute something important to that as well?

Ron

My first use of maps had to do with traveling down to Mexico in 1971. I didn't have proper maps, so I was going into places not even knowing what the city would look like. In 1973, I traveled down into Mexico again. I would pick up maps from little tourist places (if they existed). But in 1974 I took another trip and I ended up traveling through Central America. I looked over at this young woman, and she was El Salvadorian. She had this book: *The South American Handbook 1974*.



“...using the river as a metaphor for how things flow together—and how we remember, think, and talk about our own history”

When I got into Panama City, I went to a bookstore and I bought one, the same edition. What I've done over the years is analyze the whole methodology of how one travels. Even though there's racist bullshit in these books, by 1970 they're also saying that the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, Guatemala, of the Americas, of Peru, Bolivia, etc., are demanding recognition and their rights.

This work drawing from 1978/1982, from an installation called *¿Como se Llama...?* was my awakening to this massive confrontation that happened, philosophically as well as physically: a philosophical confrontation between Europeans and the peoples of the Americas. The work includes a drawing of an old map. At this time, I'm going to places like Palos De La Frontera in Spain. That's where Columbus first left from in 1492.

For *¿Como se Llama...?*, I went to where Europeans left from, and then I went to where they arrived in the Americas, and most of these were Indigenous ports. New York City was an Indigenous port. So was Pachacamac and Chimbote in Peru, and Tulum in Quintana Roo, Mexico. I took a set of llama hooves with me that I had acquired in January of '79 in Huancayo, and then I had the Museum of History in Lima preserve them for me. I took that set of four hooves on a journey. The title of the piece translates to, "How are you called?" And the word llama or llamar is a really strange word because it's both the noun llama for the animal, but it's also (when it's a verb), "how do you call yourself," *llamarse*. Or if you get rid of the transitive, it becomes "to burn," "to torch something."

Adrian

Mapping has now become a part of my process. I did the Calgary Stampede alternative map. When they asked me, they requested it in the traditional map style. But I kept hitting the colonial wall, and going, "No, I don't want to do that!" I proposed to do it on a bison robe, which is our traditional way of mapping, in relationship to winter counts and warrior robes. I developed that map as an alternative Calgary Stampede story. The stories the stampede doesn't really like to promote are now forever memorialized on a Blackfoot story robe, which I love.

That led me to a project with the Red Crow College on Kainai nation. I've been given the huge entrance wall. They want me to create a traditional Blackfoot map of the traditional Blackfoot territory in pictographic form. I'm going to be meeting with the elders and looking at the historical pictographs that depict mountains, foothills, rivers, and then create a story room with all that: our sacred sites, the Blackfoot people, where we roamed all the way down to the Yellowstone toward Prince Albert, toward Regina and the mountains. I have to map all the sacred sites as well. Meeting with them is going to be very interesting—I'll be able to bring that historical way of mapping onto a traditional story robe. Then I'm going to photograph that robe and blow it up twenty times its size for the wall. When you come into the Red Crow College, you'll be met with the traditional territory of the Blackfoot in Blackfoot pictographic language. The actual story robe will be on a mannequin in front of it. In the old days we would wear these within

the camp; they were our encyclopedias, our maps, our stories. It's become a process of enlivening maps. I've been studying the pictographic warrior robes and winter counts—getting a whole new understanding of mapping and also getting away from mapping, because the elders didn't want a colonial map.

Michelle

I was thinking about what Adrian was saying about the wearing of the robe and keeping that pictographic mapping close to the body, and that the person was the encyclopedia or the housing of those stories. The map becomes this kind of mnemonic site to recall. The stories and the histories that are cited in the land are also cited in the body, and the map is to facilitate the recall—so that they are living things. And what Michael was saying about mapping being a kind of wayfinding through your own relationships and ethics and how to be in the world. It's very active in that way. I've become more aware of my own non-neurotypical ways, so mapping has been a way to work through these complex concepts and entangled things.

Patrick

I was thinking about your map in the exhibition, Michelle. What you just said helps me a lot, because it's a map that, when you think about conventional maps, is quite difficult to think about. For one thing, it's got so many layers as to how it actually works. But when you're describing a kind of embodied map, or mapping as more of an activity as opposed to a surface, it makes more sense why your work actually has those levels of complexity—in order to be what it is. It's great.

Michael

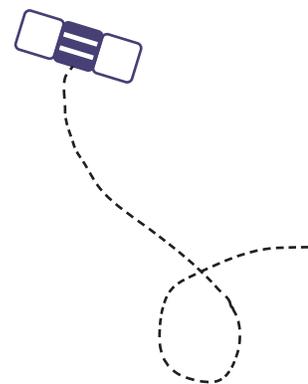
Jeff, you did a fantastic job synthesizing a few ideas discussed here that really ground the work I'm doing, and maybe some of you will feel the same. Jeff asked, "How has the face of Turtle Island been changed?" I think that's a fundamental grounding of all the work we do in *GardenShip* and how we use mapping. Followed by, how do you decolonize a map? This is a huge question. I think we're all doing that in certain ways, bringing in the histories of mapping, tradition, archiving and intervention. The big questions for me that follow are, how has the map changed? How do our understandings of the map change? How has our use of the map changed?

We use maps to create allies and connections. I think one of the big questions that a map can ask is, who do we give power to? The structure of a map, the style of a map, who we share the maps with. Going back to ideas of power, I agree with Jeff's observations on church and state around issues of reconciliation. I recognize that there is so much emotion wrapped up in this violent history, and that any acknowledgement or apology is in turn wrapped up in how we organize that power, how we understand and move it—navigate through it. For that reason you can't take the authority away from the station of the Pope, for example, for all the things that he'll say that will acknowledge issues that are important to large groups of people. I believe that by continuing to give power to the Pope's voice, we continue the legacies of colonial violence and dominant power structures his position upholds. We always have to be cognizant of that.



Michael Farnan, *A Map Depicting the Settlement History...* (detail view)

“...how do you decolonize a map?”



Jeff's question about the changing face of Turtle Island also brings about questions around language. You've talked about this Patrick, how language is adopted by settler people. I know I've sometimes struggled through the language of decolonization and critical settler methodologies and institutions attempting to indigenize. I often feel these words are not mine to use. Turtle Island is probably one of those. I don't describe the land that way because I've never been taught to understand it that way. For me, describing the land that we live on as Turtle Island is wrapped up in a history of teachings and understandings of being that I don't necessarily share. I aspire and find allegiance and understanding in it.

Ron

For the Quechua and the Aymara of South America, the map was more in the shape of a puma, not a turtle. Turtle Island doesn't really include South America. The puma goes all the way from Argentina up to Canada. It's an amazing animal. And the word "Erie" refers to the eastern Puma in the Huron-Wendat-Attawandaron languages.

Speaking of power, I grew up with liberation theology in the 70s. The present Pope is Argentinian. He knows about the atrocities committed by the military in Latin America, by the United States and other fascist countries. But this Pope is different. I think that this Pope is actually moving toward all sorts of changes in the Catholic Church. I'm a socialist, I don't give a shit about churches. However, the Vatican is a multinational transnational corporation

with millions of followers. He has a lot of power. He could influence his followers to acknowledge that there's no Right of Discovery and no Right of Conquest.

Michelle

Part of the rationale that the Doctrine of Discovery was based on was that Europeans did not recognize the way that Indigenous peoples managed the natural world around them. Because they had not dominated nature in a way that was recognizable to Europeans, they therefore didn't have claim to the land. Controlling nature, exporting species, cultivating the land in a way that Europeans recognize, was absolutely part of their project of taking ownership of that land. It has been justified through biblical scripture, in Genesis: in the very beginning, God gives domination to humans to subjugate the land and bring it into service to humanity.

In the past 20 years, the United Church wrote this whole document about how that interpretation was wrong. But what power does a document have when our entire society is structured around resource extraction and treating every other being—and other people, even—as resources for us to instrumentalize and to use? The power of that whole framework, that mindset, is so embedded into colonial society. How you decolonize that understanding of your relations is foundational.

Patrick

When I think about the question as to whether change is possible, it strikes me that this is where artists can really

do some work. There is research which shows that one of the problems with so-called positive thinking is that your brain can perceive that you have actually had a particular experience, even though you didn't really have it. So, I don't believe that we can just imagine a better world, and it's going to happen. But I do think we need to have images that actually represent what we believe is possible. And we should be able to critique them. We should be able to actually say whether they could be(come) real. I don't like to think that this project is overly optimistic, but I would like to think that it's productive insofar as it's using the imagination, and it's using what artists do to ask questions about the possible rather than to say: change is impossible, therefore nothing is possible.

Michelle

We can't expect change to come from a centralized power, or an authority. But we are enacting it in our own small ways. Like you're saying, Patrick: envisioning a different way and materializing it in our own lives.

Adrian

As human beings, we have a very difficult time changing. Some of us do try to attempt it. But the fact is, the real change, and the one who's going to dictate change, is Mother Earth. Climate change is going to cause us to redraw the maps around the world. As we've seen through the pandemic, a virus can cause massive change—not necessarily good, but it also shows us our faults in being unable to change. It's going to be the earth and the animals who show us how to change.

That's one of the things that I feel very confident in and take solace in, even though it's really difficult (in the sense that we'll probably all perish because of it, that the earth will get rid of us).

Jeff

Something that Michael had said earlier about understanding the concept of using Turtle Island as a description of North America, I was thinking about back to 1613 and wondering what it was like for these two groups of people—essentially the Mohawk and the Dutch—that were having these gatherings. I imagined what the opening speeches would be like, and what the Dutch might say in terms of how they see exploration and colonization, if they were being honest (the Doctrine of Discovery). Then I think about the Mohawk leaders that would be there, and how they would go through an opening address and prayer that could last for days. I used to think, why is there something so moving and emotional about hearing one of our speakers speak in our own language? It brings you into this state of tranquility, for lack of a better word. What is it that's so beautiful about that? I didn't really understand it. But now I see how they were talking about the reverence that they (Indigenous people) have for the natural landscape. How do you describe it? How do you embrace the concept that we're only part of it and that we don't dominate it? And how much intelligence does it take to avoid those pitfalls, and adhere to an Indigenous way of looking and relating to the world?

I think that's probably one of the more interesting conversations that's taking place now with *GardenShip and State*: we go back to the beginning and think about how our leaders talked about what they brought to negotiations, and how it moved people. We should be speaking in a different way about our relationships to the world around us and to each other, as a diverse group of human beings that now live side by side on Turtle Island. This is what I meant with these examples like the Pope, or Stephen Harper giving an apology. In the end, what do their words change? Not much. But the idea is: well, what are we waiting for? We're waiting for ourselves to do it. Because that's the only way it's going to have any kind of impact.

Michael

I think people can be fundamentally moved to change on issues such as climate change. But then our institutions constantly remind us, as Michelle said, how impossible that change actually is. Russia invading Ukraine, is an example of that for me. People are genuinely shocked that there are still leaders in our society who would go back to old ways of conquest and colonization. But I don't expect change from my governments because our systems are so tied into resources and colonization. My whole life is wrapped up in resource extraction. I could frame it as a positive thing, as many do. I'm going tree planting in twelve days, and I could describe this work as giving back and replenishment. But really, it's tied into resource extraction, renovations, toilet paper and the building of societies.

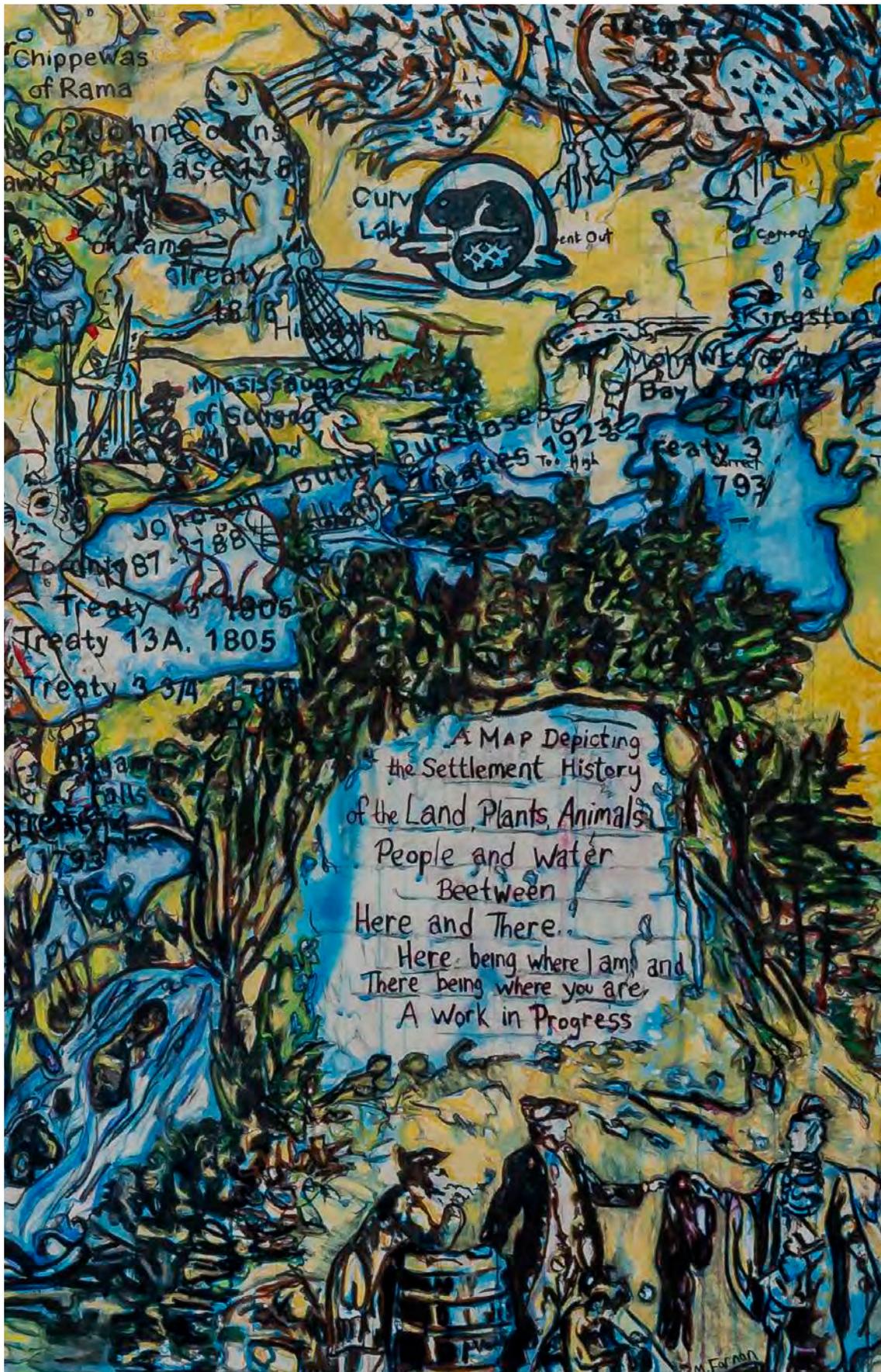
That's why we're really planting the forests: for today, not the future. I don't really see that changing.

Until that power is somehow destabilized, we won't change. All governments, all communities right across our country would flourish if we developed localized economies. But multinational corporations, with investors and profit margins, make the decisions. I suppose that's why I don't trust universities, either. Because my experience with them is that they are also corporations and run like businesses making decisions around profit margins and performance metrics. When ideas like land acknowledgement run through these filters, I see it as another capitalist venture. When our Liberal government makes overtures to reconciliation, I see it as an effort to stay in power. Maybe maps are subversive, maybe they're not. But they are one way for us to understand the histories of place and space that we are part of.

Ron

There's nothing wrong with collective action. Even on a small scale. But if you want to really have change in these nation states, you have to have a collective action that's a bit bigger than a neighbourhood.





Michael Farnan, A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People, and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress (detail view)

Conversation: Gardens, GardenShip, Women & Decolonization

Nandi Bhatia with Jamelie Hassan, Sharmistha Kar, Katie Wilhelm, and Jessica Karuhanga



Introduction by Nandi Bhatia:
This roundtable conversation took place following Patrick Mahon and Jeff Thomas' co-curated exhibition, GardenShip and State. One of the key messages that emerged from the exhibition was the articulation of multiple responses to colonialism and decolonization, specifically in relation to themes of home, separation, partitions, displacement, treaties, solidarities, and reconciliation. The conversation that follows was conducted in the spirit of understanding and expanding the dialogue on how Jamelie, Sharmistha, Katie, and Jessica relate to the above-mentioned themes in their art.

My own entry point in this conversation began through colonial and postcolonial literature, where gardens, parks, farmsteads, and land have been assigned various symbolic meanings and connotations. They appear as spaces of labor economies that worked in the interest of the empire; spaces that generated

environmental and human damage as in plantation economies and imperial spaces in colonial homes. Paradoxically, they are represented as spaces that enable solidarity, camaraderie, friendships, community building, and environmental and economic self-empowerment. A couple of examples of novels that deal with moments of decolonization and of life under colonial economies stand out. The first is Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India, which is a story about the traumatic effects of the 1947 partition on families, individuals, and communities with the splitting of the subcontinent into two nations—India and Pakistan —when India attains independence from centuries of British colonial rule. Set in Lahore and told from the perspective of an 8-year-old girl named Lenny, a large part of the action takes place in Queen's Park, where Lenny and her caretaker, Ayah, spend a lot of the time with Ayah's friends and admirers from different religious groups. With the cataclysmic

shifts caused by Partition, Lenny registers the changing landscape of Queen's Park as desolate when she witnesses invisible walls that divide communities who begin to stick to their own. Soon, Queen Victoria's statue also disappears, evoking the symbolic disappearance of the Raj that held its authority over the subcontinent for several centuries. Thus, Queen's Park becomes a dynamic space that records the debilitating consequences of forced migration, and its attendant loss of people, villages, and property.

*My second example is Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions*, in which Tambudzai, a young girl growing up in 1960s colonial Rhodesia, has a tremendous desire to attend school. When her brother is sent to school because there's not enough money in the family to send both children, Tambu decides to raise money for her school fees by growing maize or "mealies" on a plot of land that she cultivates based on knowledge inherited from her grandmother with whom she had worked in her garden. With the aid of Mr. Matimba, the Sunday schoolteacher, Tambu sells her mealies to a white woman and raises enough money to pay for her school fees. While this story tells the reader about Tambu's spirited initiative, through which she secures educational self-empowerment and sustenance by drawing on lessons learned in her grandmother's garden, it is simultaneously a story about the power of gardens and how they come to be entangled with the politics of race, class, and gender in the colonial economy of Africa.*

Nandi

In literary texts and critical analyses, there's a lot of work on gardens. They've been seen and represented as colonial spaces that worked in the interest of the empire; as spaces that generated environmental and human damage as in plantation economies, and as spaces that affected local knowledge through renaming of living plants. Simultaneously, what I've come across is this paradox that gardens are enriching, dynamic, therapeutic spaces of sustenance. I'm thinking of a particular story, Tambu's story in colonial Rhodesia in author Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions*, who grows corn in her mother's garden plot to raise money for her school fees. Tambu turns the garden into a space of educational self-empowerment as she draws on the lessons she learned when she had lent a hand in her grandmother's garden.

Given the articulation of such issues in literature, perhaps we could open the conversation from each of your perspectives as artists. How does your work envision and respond to the theme of women and decolonization?

Jamelie

I was just thinking how appropriate it was that the beginning of your context for us is storytelling. Jeff Thomas refers to himself as a storyteller and I think many of us relate to this approach. This really made me think about how sometimes it's difficult to respond to questions—my ideas are actually grounded in the reference or history of my experiences, or a story that someone in my family has told me.

“It is simultaneously a story about the power of gardens and how they come to be entangled with the politics of race, class, and gender in the colonial economy of Africa.”



Jamelie Hassan, 1.618
(detail view)

These intergenerational relationships are so important. Intergenerational narratives tend to, in my own practice, be a point of reference or a way of expanding an idea. It may not be so obvious to someone looking at my work. They may not see the story, it may not be told in a familiar language, but the story may be buried within the piece.

Also, my relationship to text and language is central to the work that's in the *GardenShip and State* exhibition. I returned to what is more or less considered an archaic medium, something not related to technology: working with glass tile mosaics. The shift here is in terms of media. For myself, this reflects how we are living in a historic time. I remember my son saying to my grandson: "It's a pandemic, it's a historic time." We were in Rome on the eve of the pandemic being declared. To say that to a fourteen-year-old is to say something that felt absolutely incomprehensible to me.

How do we create and present our works in this historic time? It's just so resonant with emotion, that sometimes I found I wasn't really capable of maintaining my composure—the art practice I was involved in was helping me to maintain that composure, or having that focused, deep relationship to working.

Sharmistha

Thank you, Nandi, for putting the first question in terms of the garden. I respect Jamelie's perspective of nurturing, and how we all play a part in it some way, passively or actively.

GardenShip and State was a big learning process for me, and helped me to think more in terms of how I thought of two different sectors, which were inspiring me. The first was my personal experience of living in various regions. The second was colonial history. I chose the section of the project related to critical decolonization, but I felt colonial history is definitely underneath.

I did hand embroidery work. And hand embroidery has its own history of travel through colonial history and the trades, which we know. Embroidery I felt also as a kind of vessel: it holds a lot of information, cultivates ideas, and creates the atmosphere to communicate, to interact, to converse. And then history of embroidering large scale Kantha as a group where women meet in the afternoon. I see it as a zone where they share what happened or what might happen. It's a time where they share apart from their domestic activities, and they can create, they can reflect. And it's a time that they exchange as well. So embroidery history and its communication interaction were the areas that I tried to explore in this project. Definitely embroidery is one of my key tools. I'm constantly trying to make it more than a skill, which can convey a concept. It has its repetitive aspects to it where we see that it creates, it progresses, it captures the process—the way maybe a garden brings a human being to the act of nurturing and seeing the growth or the process.



Sharmistha Kar, *Blurred steps III*
(detail view)

Nandi

I'm thinking about what Jamelie said, starting with the importance of storytelling and how that is central to what you as artists do. And so, Sharmistha, you said you worked on the Kantha work—which I understand, is itself a form of storytelling—and many of the elaborate Kantha pieces have stories embedded in them?

Sharmistha

When I visited the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, I saw some of their collections. A lot of documentation even shows incidents of colonial India, like the Sepoy in British India. Those women definitely lived in domestic life, but they passively documented those facts—what was happening around them—in that process of embroidery. So for me it's an archive and the documentation of history. These women probably weren't that active in terms of political commentary. They might not have even discussed it with other family members, but they had experiences and they depicted them. And they're definitely not educated institutionally. It's all their own skill. I just felt there are a lot of other modes of art from just the one or two we know, like Kalighat (a 19th century Indian school of painting).

Jyotindra Jain's book, *Kalighat Painting, Images From A Changing World*¹, refers to those Kanthas that are taught to us by women who migrated from different parts of Bengal to Calcutta to grab more clients. That was easier for them: to go to a temple and sell their artwork. The King's patronage system had ended and markets around popular temples became the place to

sell the painting. These paintings were sold to mass visitors of the temple as souvenirs. The subject of Kalighat painting varies from social life to the religious aspect. And then, some of the colonial images that I refer to were also there.

So it was to bring those facts, and show them in this particular way that I show them: verso, the back. And to address some of the unknown facts, or what might have happened in terms of the artisans who created those artworks, or who had produced them.

Nandi

Katie, would you like to add some of your views about storytelling?

Katie

I had an interesting part in the exhibition in that I got to create the *GardenShip Journal*, which was a non-critical response meant to engage the viewer. In the development of the catalogue, we were talking a lot about breaking the fourth wall, and posed the questions "What is the life of the exhibition?" "What comes next?" "How does this live for seven generations?"

My installation at the Grand Theatre called *Mush Whole*, for example, is rooted in the Land Back messaging, and aims to connect this abstract idea of Land Back with tangible actions. The artwork itself has a space and then "Back" (____ Back) which encourages people to think about, "What am I actually going to give back?" And this reminds me of gardens. You know, as Indigenous people, we always want to make sure that we're leaving enough



Katie Wilhelm, *Mush Whole* (Installation at the Grand Theatre, London). Image courtesy of Katie Wilhelm.

¹See Jyotindra Jain, *Kalighat Painting: Images From a Changing World* (Chidambaram: Mapin Publishing; Middletown, NJ: Grantha Corporation; 1999).

behind so that the garden is able to flourish behind us. As we need to flourish outside of colonialism, what are we going to leave behind to allow this garden to flourish? Settler people and Indigenous people need to think about what they're going to give up. That's the message of the _____ Back artwork. I've been calling this artwork collection "visual land acknowledgement." I've created a few different pieces that are visual land acknowledgement, and they strive to do the same thing: to inspire people to leave something behind. This relates to the theme of colonization rooted in power, control, and greed.

Design and art, to me, is what communication looks like. And in this exhibition, we have such a juxtaposition of some kinds of gentle messaging and then some very stark brutalism. I'm not sure that we have one common thread, but lots of ideas are in response. My artwork is a response to trauma. The discovery of my own voice and the discovery of my history, and what happened to my people, what happened to my grandma and her grandma. Through that, to rediscovering relationship with land and plants.

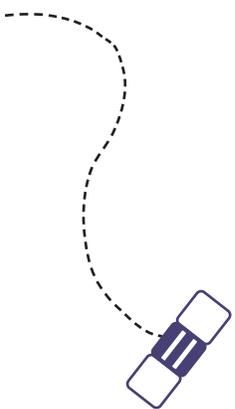
Also, the discovery of land, water as sentient beings, and starting to promote it to today's society. In a lot of ways, I think that this is a missing key. If we were all able to truly understand and form a relationship with plants and land as sentient beings, we would be able to better understand this idea of seven generations and leaving something behind, leaving your power behind and the want for greed behind in the sentiment of the garden. I'll

leave it with this metaphor of the Three Sisters Gardening: with the corn and the beans and the squash, and how each are meant to benefit each other. And the fact that they are looked at as sisters, as women: plants as women. And Sky Woman created them.

Jessica

There are a lot of beautiful points that were said by everyone that are really resonating with me. But to begin, I'm going to riff off of what Katie was just saying about what we leave behind. I think the opposite was going on for me to what Jamelie articulated: about how art was this necessity to survive and thrive during the pandemic. I went through a huge period where that was an impossibility. There was this kind of bleakness, or this hole, that just opened up. A lot of us had to reconcile or face ourselves honestly. For many people, that affected their relationships and their mental health. Maybe these were things that were latent and they came to the surface: grief that was unhealed, all sorts of emotions.

Most of my work, if not all of it, is deeply personal. When it comes to the performance work that I do, I don't really think of it as a performance where I'm playing a character and putting on a show. I always think of them as enactments. So, if the theme is grief, that is my grief that I'm sharing. There are points where it becomes hard or difficult to share certain projects or to re-perform and re-enact them. I think that's why I find myself slowly making a return back to image making, storytelling through film, through video, and also through inviting other



“Design and art, to me, is what communication looks like.”

people into a performance space and mentoring other people through that.

My project in *GardenShip* is called *Blue as the insides*. Definitely the key themes in there are separation, isolation, and a word that came up—I think from you, Nandi—was this theme of partition. Figuratively and also in the physicality of the installation, that phenomenological experience, a frame or screen or surface was constructed to look like a window or a wall floating through space, with a film that you could see on both sides and that you could walk around. There’s something sculptural there, because normally I feel like when we think of projections it’s typically a screen on a wall—you aren’t thinking of the underside or the backside. But I’m always trying to think of materiality as something that can be displaced. Nothing is really fixed. Maybe I’m borrowing that from a diasporic experience. But the project ultimately is about this Black woman in isolation and her descent, or ascent, into a world of her own making.

I think storytelling is very key for me. With that piece, the title is a line from a Yusef Komunyakaa poem called “Blue.” I really love this line that kept playing in my head: “blue as the insides.” I really felt eviscerated for all the things that are going on in my life, and how this shifted our sociality. There are key directions in the video and everything’s deliberate or intentional, but I also left a lot of room for Ahlam Hassan, who is the subject in the film, to initiate her own movement. There is a lot of intentionality in her gaze, which is often averted. Seldom, maybe once, she

looks at the camera but never directly into the center of the lens. It’s a series of these long single frame shots of improvised movements. How do you move through your solitude and the impossibility of touch?

Even the books she’s reading are very intentional: they’re books by poets like Okot p’Bitek, who is a very important postcolonial poet—I use that word gently because I don’t know what the “post-” is—who is very important to the continent of Africa, but more specifically East Africa, Uganda. His daughter, Juliane Okot Bitek, is also a very well respected Ugandan Canadian poet. All those things were very deliberate and intentional, these references to poetry. Films really influenced me as well. I was thinking of a film that subconsciously influenced me by Julie Dash called “Diary of an African Nun.” I was re-watching it and I realized, “Oh, there’s parallels or connections here.” It’s based off of a short novella, short story, by Alice Walker. It’s about a Ugandan nun, interestingly enough, who’s left Uganda and is in America, I believe. It’s about what that isolation and separation from place, or trying to find place again, is doing to her spirit. There’s hardly any dialogue. It’s all very musical and it builds and builds and builds and builds. So that was an interesting connection that I made after the fact. That’s how those tropes or themes come up for me.

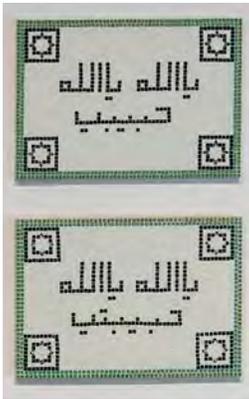
Nandi

Jamelie, you started with the idea of storytelling, intergenerational memory, the tropes of separation and isolation,



Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides*, (video stills)

and relationships to language and texts that are central in your work. I'm wondering if you can speak to how, specifically, these aspects are embedded in your art, especially because, as you said, people may or may not be able to read all the meanings in an artwork. Is there a tension in your work about silence and erasure, when you talk about something being embedded, and at the same time, an attempt to articulate the language through which you are emphasizing your theme?



Jamelie Hassan, *yallah, yallah, my love* – (f) & (m)

Jamelie

Thank you, Nandi, for that question because I think, sometimes, holding back is really a part of the process. Certain aspects of a work set an obvious parameter, but in other projects, there's flexibility. I take that liberty. I take that space and freedom to think about the piece in a different way: in terms of audience, in terms of not just how it's working for me, but how it communicates. So definitely, there's a tension. I think that's an important word for us.

I'm the grandmother in this round table conversation. This role really means a lot to me. I remember Roberta Jamieson being interviewed and saying: "Of all the different roles that I've had, the most important and most critical role that I have is being a grandmother." I think about that because I also feel the honour of being a grandmother, and what I learned from my grandchildren: the reciprocity of our relationship and working together. I like to think of our relationships as circles. We have a very beautiful expression

in Arabic my father used to say to us: *Dara, dara hub ayn dara* (circle, circling love the circle). I grew up in a household that spoke Arabic. This ties into this relationship to language because when I went to school, I didn't really know that I wasn't speaking the language that everybody else was speaking.

Nandi

If I remember correctly, you have a mosaic with the letter alef on it, right? I could see that that is your connection: to include the Arabic language in kufic script. That stood out for me as an audience member.

Jamelie

I talked to Jeff and Patrick about including that diptych in Arabic because of its masculine and feminine forms. Appropriate for our conversation about the climate crisis, one was "yallah, yallah, ya habibi," (m) and "yallah, yallah ya habibiti" (f). The Arabic phrase is common and could be read as, "Come on, let's go, let's get going." There's tension or frustration in the yallah but also affection, because the "habibi" or "habibiti" is "my love." - "Let's get going - Let's keep this happening, whatever we need to do - move it." The design motifs reference Islamic mosaics designs.

My desire to do mosaic works came from my own research looking at mosaics in different sites in the Mediterranean. I have wanted to create mosaics for decades. I learned how to do mosaics from a workshop with Brenda Collins, an Indigenous woman, who has been doing Four Directions/

Medicine Wheel mosaics in the region. I invited Brenda to come and do her mosaic workshop with my family, and we all worked on the medicine wheel mosaic together. Brenda also brought her collection of replica treaty belts and talked with our family members about their significance during the workshop.

Sharmistha

I helped Brenda in one of her projects, actually, for a few days and I learned mosaic. She mentioned how her family members also help in her projects. That was a great experience for me, and I was thinking constantly about embroidery. It also follows certain patterns, but embroidery could be more free form. I also compare it to painting: how it expresses the feeling, or how the process also gives a controlled or measured experience. It has its own language.

Jamelie

Brenda Collins has created over one hundred of those Four Directions/ Medicine Wheel mosaics with students in schools, and recently for the Tourism London building. Katie, you probably know Brenda.

Katie

I was a part of curating that Indigenous artwork. She's a popular gal.

Jamelie

Brenda is really a great person and workshop leader. There's a skill in being able to encourage people to feel the confidence to participate, or not be intimidated by the skills of others. Brenda's desire to engage with community, with youth and others,

is really admirable. She learned how to create mosaics when she went to a glass mosaic workshop in Toronto, which was owned by an Egyptian-Canadian artist couple who are also our sources for mosaic materials. So there was a beautiful circle happening in relation to learning the early technique of mosaic making.

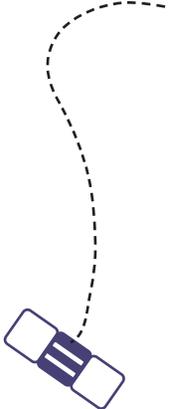
Nandi

I think this may be a good point to talk about the question of audience. I've been very curious to know how you, as artists, envision your audience? Do you have an audience in mind when you're making your art?

Jessica

I think for me, there are intentions sometimes. I'm thinking about someone out there who could have a similar subjectivity to me, or there might be points of connection that we all have. I'm searching for relationships with other human beings, subjects that remind you of home and vice versa. The more I grow farther from my origins, the more I want to connect with those origins. I think a lot of people connect to that. Anyone that can draw analogies from their unique mélange of life experiences, I think, can be someone that draws themselves into the work.

I also make work understanding that once it leaves my body, my spirit, and once I eject it into the world and it's installed, to a certain extent it's mine, it belongs to me and it's my baby; but it also doesn't. I love what Jamelie said about her grandson, and the people such as Sharmistha who helped to bring the tile pieces of mosaics



“The more I grow farther from my origins, the more I want to connect with those origins. I think a lot of people connect to that.”

into life: how those people can see themselves in those works. I think I'm striving, ultimately, for that. With that understanding or acknowledgement, and honoring that the works are not mine, that they live on in spaces and sites that I haven't even visited.

I think of all the works we see and how artists become almost mythologized. I am inspired by artists that contemplated their own mortality, in a way, to have stipulations or thoughts in place for how they could live on. I think of someone like Felix Gonzalez Torres: some of his works and the systems in place that acknowledge different iterations or ways of existing. The audience is also always changing. It doesn't have to be a terrifying space, this space of letting things go.

You know, maybe that is one of the ways of thinking about things you leave behind: whether it's language that lives on in the bodies of other people that you touch and how they touch you. It has to do with memory, it brings it back to memory, storytelling, and those themes. I touch on a lot of things, such as Black subjectivity and the things that might affect that subjectivity. But that also doesn't exist as an island or monolith, right? I think we're all finding points of connection. I think that's what really resonates in this exhibition.

Katie

For me, the target audience is both the settler public and Indigenous peoples: I am trying to connect the community through the artwork and inspire other Indigenous people to use their voices, stand up, and start their healing journeys.

In relation to language, I wanted to touch on silence. For me, silence is a space and represents listening. I think that that's really powerful, and something that's used against women often: for example, in silencing our voices with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous women. Silence is self-reflecting and leaves physical space to grow, and to help others grow as well. It's interesting that silence is used as a weapon, when I see it as one of my greatest strengths.

This comes through my work with the visual land acknowledgement collection, which works to create space that is not meant to be occupied.

The silence creates space.

Sharmistha

Yes, I like Katie's interpretation. In terms of the audience, I definitely think of a general audience and their own perspective. I am the first person to see or converse or interact with my work, and there is a different way that I see the work in my studio.

Embroidery is my primary medium, and there are already a lot of preconceived notions about the medium. I think of my concept or thematic, my pursuit, and what I am trying to portray through this known medium to a common viewership. Keeping those thoughts in my mind, I'm bringing an interactive aspect to my work with the audience now. I am focusing on a few areas and developing my interests: like fragility and relationships with each other, a human being with another human being, or nature and a human being.

Nandi

Just to follow up, Sharmistha: I remember from the exhibition, and correct me if I'm wrong, I think you emphasize the other side of the embroidery, which intrigued me. I was wondering, when you're thinking about silence, about marginality, about fragility, is that in some way connecting to this idea of showing the other side of the embroidery which tends to be hidden? You know, we want to show the nice side of embroidery and then forget the knots and the threads and whatever's hanging on the other side.

Sharmistha

You are right, and that was my first key point to emphasize. When you said silence and agency, I connected very immediately. I'm not a very vocal person. I ask questions, but I'm not very vocal to ask things publicly. I am trained as a painter, my undergrad, my first master's was painting. But I thought, "How can I express what I don't know, what I don't understand through painting?" I feel all of those things, or my experiences, are going underneath a painting and I am not able to show them. The back of embroidery, I felt, shows the process: the experience that I was in.

I did the tent work where I tried to talk about the fragility of our relationships. This particular process of embroidery is a Japanese embroidery technique called Bunka. In India, in the streets, you can see how to do a very beautiful flower image with this handmade tool. It's a repetitive process and it captures the whole path of where it is going. Then the other side looks like sprouts.

That's how the interactive parts with the audience and my work slowly developed. In *Home and Land*, a work I did for *GardenShip and State*, it was an undoing process of what I go through to create the work: by interacting with the same technique and by unwinding the process, which leaves a mark on it of the process. So, the audience is important, always. But now the audience is becoming an interactive aspect of my work.

Nandi

The whole question, the overarching question of decolonization, underpins the *GardenShip* project and this roundtable.

Jamelie

I think this might be a really good place for us to raise this relationship to the term "settler" and the relationship to people who are non-Indigenous. There is a book that I've been looking at called *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*². It's by Ugandan Asian author, Mahmood Mamdani. I've had conversations with Jeff and with Patrick: how do we relate ourselves in terms of Indigenous sovereignty issues and rights, as our families are not European settlers? We have a relationship to other places, other traditional knowledges.

Nandi

Jamelie brought up the issue of settler colonialism, which is very much what is on our minds now, within academic and popular discussions. It would be nice to hear from each of you, as artists, with your own unique perspectives and styles, what decolonization means in relation to settler colonialism in your work.

²Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020).

“I studied in a school which was one of the first schools in colonial India [...] to give education for women. People didn’t think it was a good idea for women. There was a belief that it would bring bad fortune to the family.”

Katie

What does decolonization mean in relationship to *GardenShip*, the state and the environment, for women? That is such a loaded question. I’m a granddaughter of a residential school survivor. Going back to some of those ideas about where colonization is rooted, in power and control, and how I think our patriarchal systems in Indigenous nations were about nurturing and inspiring and thinking about the future generations. Today, often us women are trying to fill these roles of power and greed, and we end up putting our others down instead of lifting others up. So for me, maybe two steps for decolonization would be to first lift each other up actively in all spaces. Through my artwork, I hope to inspire and leave space, to help to raise all of our voices up together. The other piece of decolonization is seeing our land as a sentient being, as a woman, and to help to lift up her voice while we network together: as trees, as roots, rooted in the mother, the earth.

Sharmistha

This question definitely makes me think a lot. What I mentioned in the beginning, colonization is underneath decolonization. I felt it needs process, it needs experience. It goes through the physical and psychological. It’s not something that we can portray very easily. The whole *GardenShip* project talks about exchange, talks about sharing, interaction, and conversation. I thought of my own education as a woman. I grew up in Calcutta, which was the capital of colonial British India. Calcutta has a lot of signs of that: my school has those different

buildings, and a lot of architectural evidence and statues. I kind of grew up passively in all these signs and histories. I studied in a school which was one of the first schools in colonial India (it was independent at that time) to give education for women. People didn’t think that it was a good idea for women. There was a belief that it would bring bad fortune to the family. I felt embroidery—which is predominantly connected with women—it has relationships with colonization, travel, history. The work is talking to the facts of what has happened. Decolonization is definitely a key point for my work, and I try to reflect on that.

Jessica

I love the lyrical nature of the titling of the *GardenShip* exhibition, the project that brought us all together. I feel like decolonization relates to the exhibition and to our work in the realm of aesthetics. But also, they’re embodiments. Even though I joined that conversation a bit later than most of the people here, something beautiful was initiated. We were asking ourselves very serious questions, one of those being, “What is art’s efficacy in this moment?” And then when I think of decolonization in relationship to the state, I think the state is a violent construct that is in opposition to that. In relationship to the environment, I think the environment, the earth: it knows, it’s the wisest, it’s older than any of us here. It was there before humans came into being, and it will be there long after we go. At some point, maybe our solar system will be sucked into a black hole. I don’t know what is correct, what is real. But I do think

that the environment, on a molecular and on a spiritual level, is knowing. It knows. I think it's us as humans, as corporeal beings, that are dealing with that question. I even think some other animals know a lot better than us too.

As for women, I am a first gen, biracial, Black African person. Whenever I go home to Uganda, my connection to the land there is very powerful and beautiful. It's something that I could only intellectualize before I arrived there. But then I realized, "Oh, this is where my ancestors are from." That's a very powerful thing, and it definitely changed the way that I look and move through the world. My only hope is that we're all taking a practice of mindfulness—which I struggle with immensely, but I think it also helps my mental health on the individual level. But I think: if culturally, if society, if the world at large could practice something like that more: so every footstep was done with intention, and every word with intention (words are very powerful, they're almost like magic spells). That's what my hope would be.

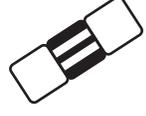
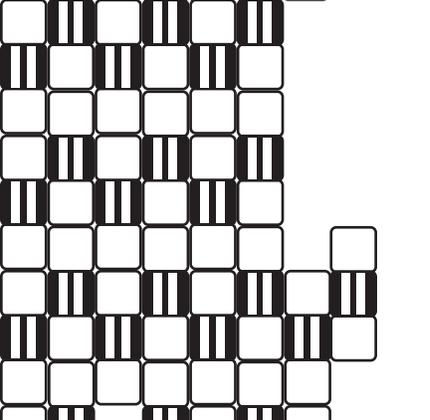
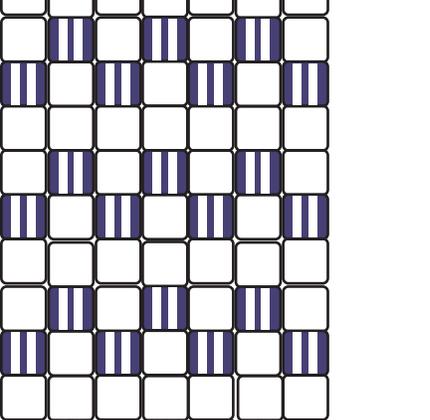
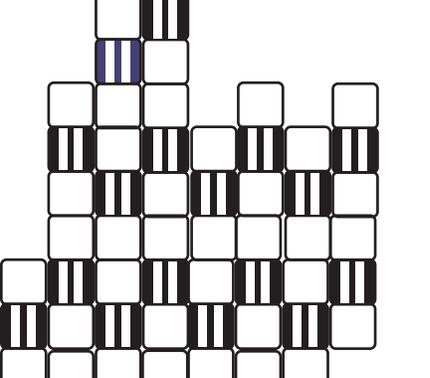
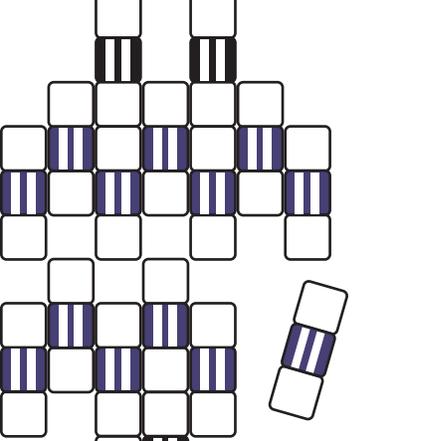
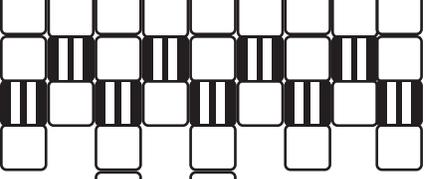
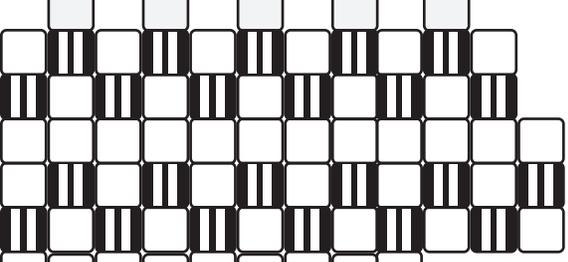
Gendered violence is very real. What patriarchal systems look like in different geographic places is also very real. All the wisdom and knowledge I have, on both sides of the family, whether it's my Roma history, my Ankole history in Uganda, this is passed down through the woman, through the femmes that I descend from. I think that deserves all the acknowledgement and honoring and praise. That's how I consider decolonization in relation to all of these sites or locations.

Jamelie

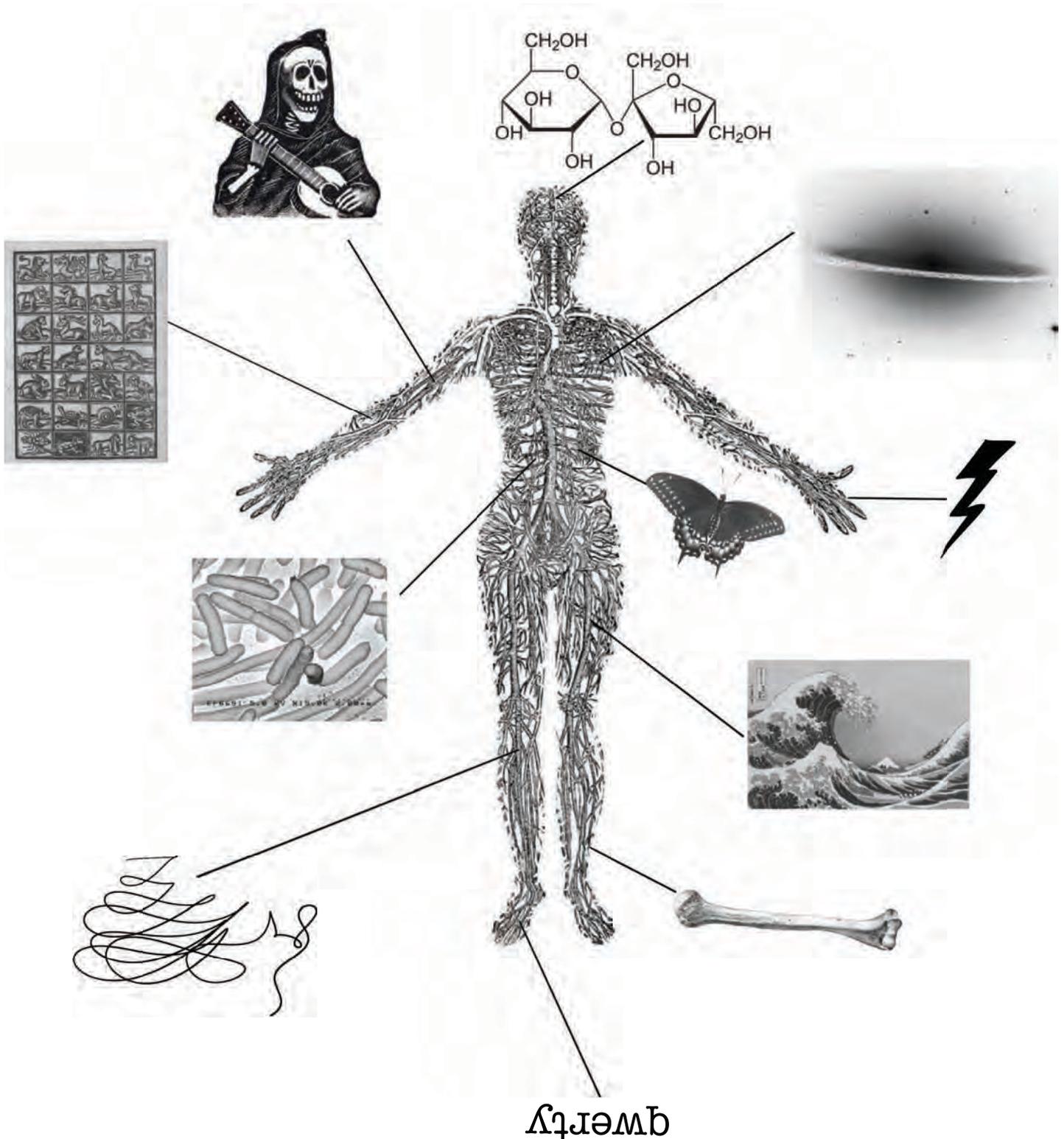
I'm in that spirit of cooperation and listening, and what we've talked about throughout the morning: the way that this project has brought us together in different capacities and ways of expressing our desire to see a more just world, a more equitable world. And responding in relation to the natural world, and the respect that we feel towards the natural world and each other, is really at the basis of the way that this has been organized with care and sensitivity by the curators. When we remember the word "curator," "to curate" comes from the relationship to care, to show compassion.

Within all of that, creativity continues and goes forward. I'm sure we've all had periods of the black hole of depression that Jessica talked about. I truly respect your ability to express that, and also the relationship that you have talked about in terms of origins in places, other locations, and sites of knowledge. At the same time we respect and desire that knowledge sharing from our communities around us here, the communities that I believe this exhibition was very much about addressing, and Indigenous communities within Greater London. When we think about London, its colonial reference has been so inscribed within our lives, because we're here in this place, this city that's called London. We're on the shores of Deshkan Ziibi ("Antler River"). So, I like to say I'm on Turtle Island. I appreciate it. I love it, actually.

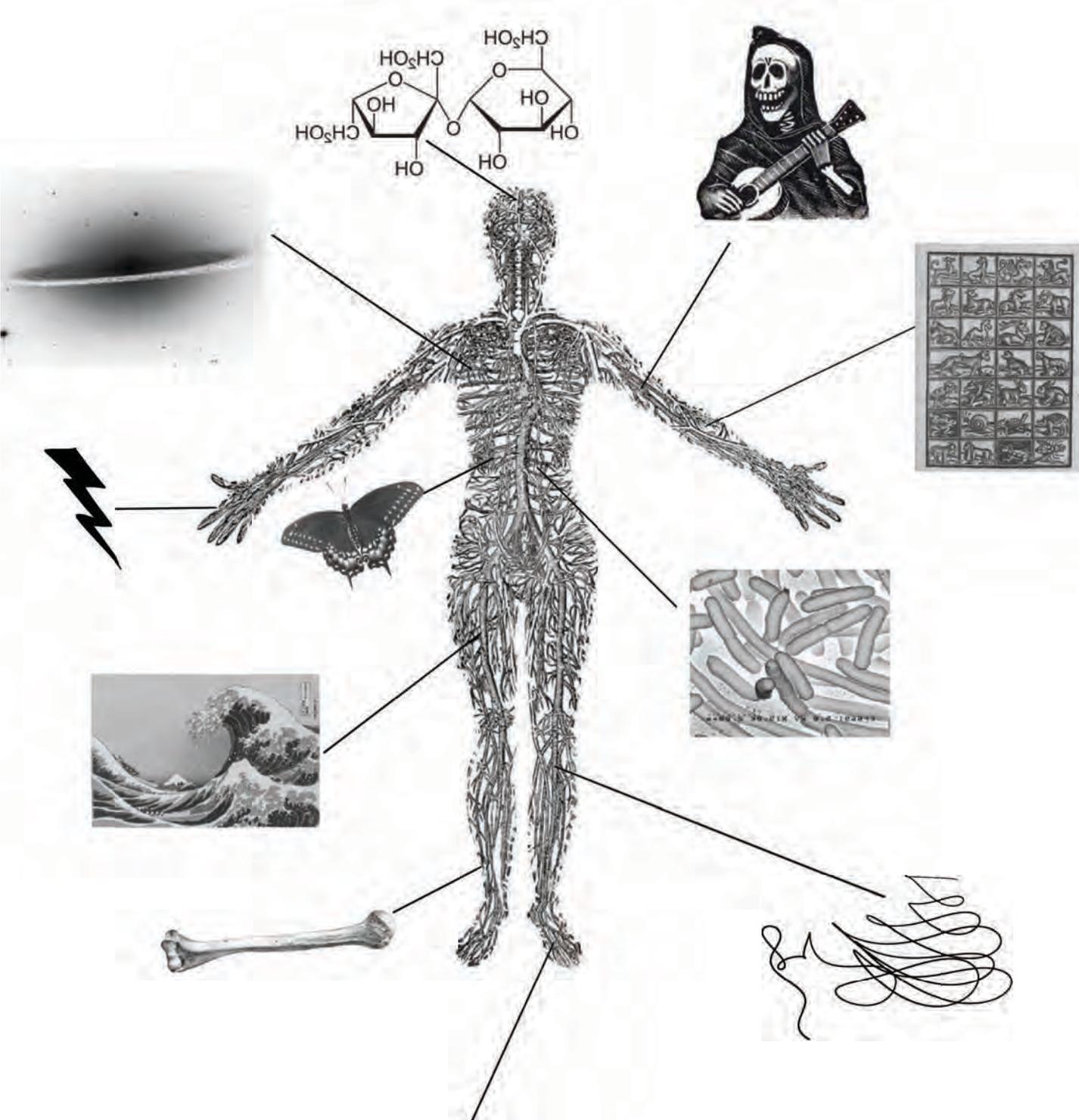




“What’s inside me?” Madelaine, age 3½



“What’s inside me?” Madeline, age 3½



υελερδ

Exhibition Works

Adrian Stimson

Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking, 2021

Bronze gopher, wood base, wood tower, 24k gold leaf, copper, lights, audio player and hive audio file USB

Awwasukapi - Many things happening, some good, some bad (1,2 & 3), 2021

Acrylic, oil, wood ash, found feathers, 24k gold leaf on birch wood canvas

Naamoi'stotoohsin - Bumble Bee Regalia, 2021

Collaboration with Lucille Wright

Mannequin with brass eyes

Outfit: XXL white bee suit, 300 beaded bees (Lucy), wooden wings gold leafed, feather antenna, beaded gloves (Lucy), beaded moccasins (Lucy)

Bumble bee shield: bison rawhide, owl feathers, beads, 24 k gold leaf, acrylic paint

Bumble bee dancing stick: wood, eagle talon, ermine, beads, metal cone, shells, horsehair, cloth

Ina'kitapii Sais'skiimoko ooko'o'wa - Little Peoples Green House, 2021

Wood base and frame, visual/audio monitor, video data file USB,

Collection of the artist

Adrian Stimson's installation is a response to the research and work undertaken through the *GardenShip and State* project, seeing, and experiencing the rapid changes in our environments because of climate change. Stimson writes: "I have used the Anthropocene epoch or humans' activities that have impacted the earth as a guiding principle, as well as the real effects of the pandemic that impacted this project at the beginning. I have used the Blackfoot term 'Awwasukapi' meaning; many things happening, some good, some bad. It is often used to describe something bad, yet it can be subjective, meaning that good things can come of the bad."

Opposite page: Adrian Stimson, *Ina'kitapii Sais'skiimoko ooko'o'wa - Little Peoples Green House (left); Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii... - Bee Tower and Gopher Looking (right)*







Opposite page: Adrian Stimson,
Awwasukapi - Many things happening, some good, some bad (1,2 & 3)

Above: Adrian Stimson in collaboration with Lucille Wright,
Naamoi'stotoohsin - Bumble Bee Regalia

Right column, upper three images: Adrian Stimson in collaboration with Lucille Wright,
Naamoi'stotoohsin - Bumble Bee Regalia (detail views)

Right column, bottom image: Adrian Stimson,
Ina'kitapii Sais'skiimoko ooko'o'wa - Little Peoples Green House



Amelia Fay

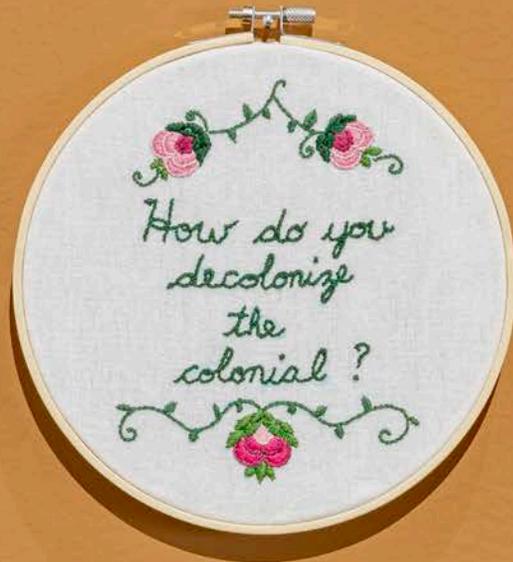
Curating Colonialism, 2021

Embroidery floss on fabric; late 19th century moccasins by unknown Cree artist [on loan from the Manitoba Museum (HBC 475)]

Writes Amelia Fay, “My role as Curator of the Hudson’s Bay Company Museum Collection is a challenging one. The collection, established in the 1920s to celebrate the Company’s history, reflects some startling truths about a history deeply rooted in colonialism and environmental extraction.” While roughly two-thirds of the artefacts in the collection were made by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, the presence of these items reflects the problematic nature of how some of them were acquired. These moccasins provide an example of the everyday objects that make up the majority of the collection, showcasing the beautiful artistry by the maker yet imbued with this complicated history: they are catalogued under the name of the collector (a white man) rather than the Cree woman who crafted them. A name that was never recorded and is now lost. Fay’s embroidery, inspired by these moccasins, reflects the struggle she feels as she grapples with the role of museums, collections, and thinks about how to best serve the objects under her care. As she acknowledges, “These questions aren’t new, unique to me, or this collection, but rather reflect some of the wider challenges museums face today.”



Amelia Fay, *Curating Colonialism*





Above and opposite page: Amelia Fay, *Curating Colonialism* (detail views)

Andrés Villar

Birdsong, 2021

Wooden chair, audio equipment.

Can there be such a thing as a silent garden that lacks complex, intermingling voices vibrating in the air here and there? Animals speak but are only superficially understood by humans, many of whom do not even listen to members of their own species. In her book *Silent Spring* (1962) Rachel Carson conjured the arresting image of a springtime devoid of birdsong to draw attention to landscapes made toxic by humans and their chemicals. If birdsong disappears, what will take its place? What will replace forms of life that are extinguished? The *horror vacui* of contemporary life might stimulate the production of simulacra for the senses, but is a garden filled with simulacra still a garden?

This artwork's soundtrack consists of discrete bird sounds that are slowly replaced by imitations created with digital software. The bird sounds in the first half of the soundtrack were transformed into MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) files, which were then played on virtual musical instruments to create the substitutions that appear in the second half of the recording. These substitutions reproduce the general pitch relations and rhythms of the original sounds, creating a poignant echo of birdsong.

In its altered function the upturned chair has become an empty perch. It is a residue of human intentionality and the unintended consequences of creating human worlds on planet Earth.



Andrés Villar, *Birdsong*





Above and opposite page: Andrés Villar, *Birdsong*

Ashley Snook

the honey is sweet, 2020-2021

Bronze, acrylic, wax, wood, urethane resin, spray paint, *Phragmites australis*, video, and sound

the honey is sweet is a video installation that reflects my exploration of the colonial history and growth patterns of one of the foremost invasive plant species in Canada: *Phragmites australis*. The presence of invasive phragmites in Canada reflects the pervasive impact of colonial expansion and industrial processes on southwestern Ontario's native vegetation, endangered species, and the ongoing threat it poses to biodiversity in Canada. This video installation traces my journey through overgrown Ontario wetlands on the Truxor machine – a phragmites control vehicle that cuts and removes biomass. In tracing the colonial history of *P. australis* arrival in Canada and investigating current treatment methods, *the honey is sweet* invites the questioning of environmental decision-making, in favour of more inclusive and informative strategies for controlling invasive species.



Ashley Snook, *the honey is sweet*



Above: *the honey is sweet* (detail view)

Opposite page: *the honey is sweet* (video stills)



Jamelie Hassan

Gizzard Shad, 2021

Glass mosaic tiles mounted on wood

This tile mosaic began with a walk to Deshkan Ziibi to experience the once-in-a-decade swarming of the Gizzard Shad fish at a confluence of warm storm waters and chillier river water. Then, working from a photograph snapped by her partner Ron Benner, Jamelie Hassan responded to the organic swirling forms of the shimmering fish. Her loose, intuitive process for creating this piece has resulted in a work that references a shifting, abstracted memory of a moment with nature. These moments, in Hassan's words, "have been an immense presence and comfort during these months of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Map of Deshkan Ziibi, 2021

24 porcelain tiles mounted onto plywood panel

yallah, yallah, my love - (f) & (m) diptych, 2018

Glass tile mosaic mounted on plywood

Skolstrejk för Klimatet, 2019

Glass tile mosaic mounted on plywood

Internet, 2020

Glass tile mosaic mounted on plywood

Fibonacci, 2019

Glass tile mosaic mounted on plywood

1.618, 2020

Glass tile mosaic mounted on plywood

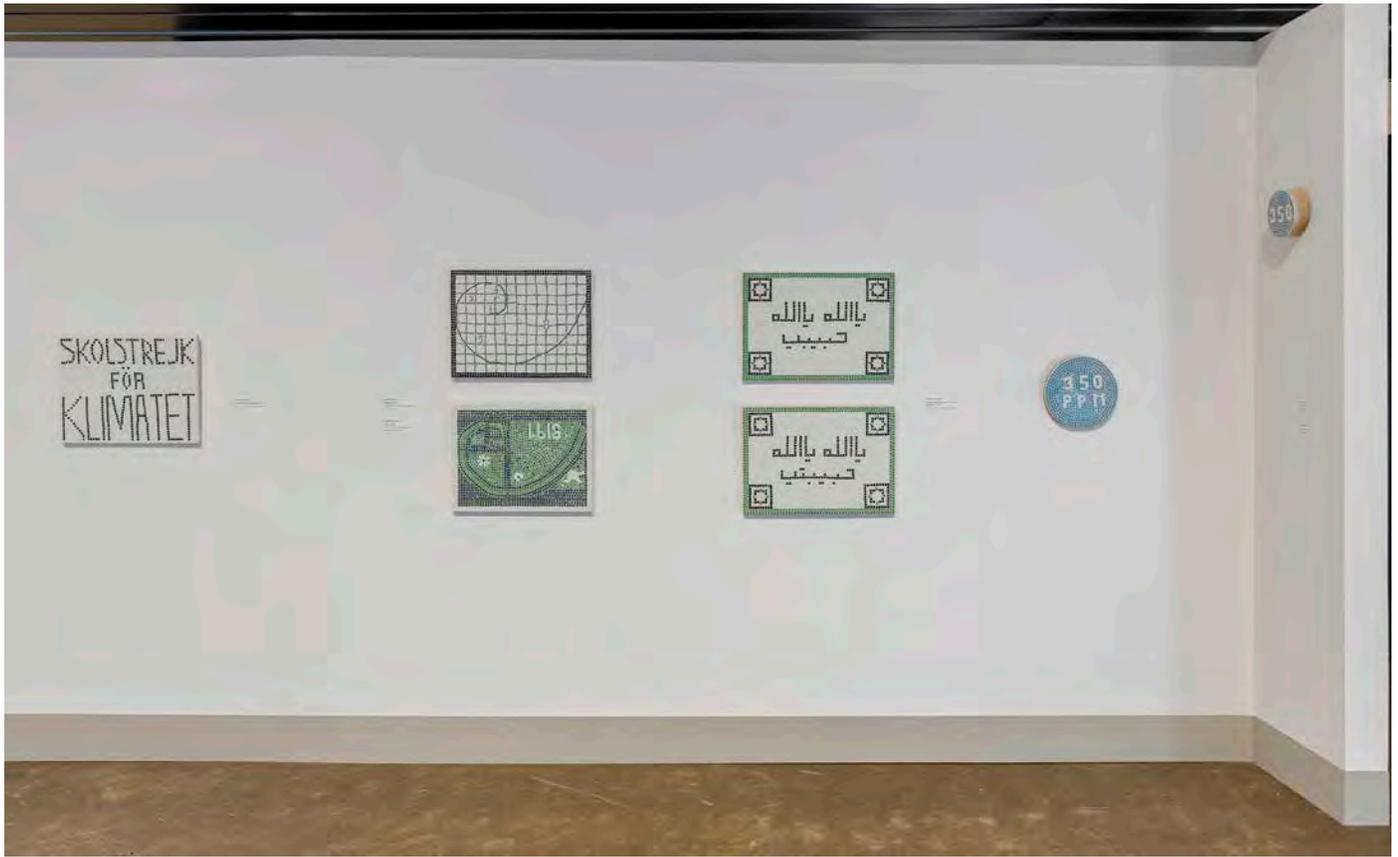
Collection of Morgan Malone

350 PPM, 2021

Glass tile mosaic mounted onto recycled wood

350, 2021

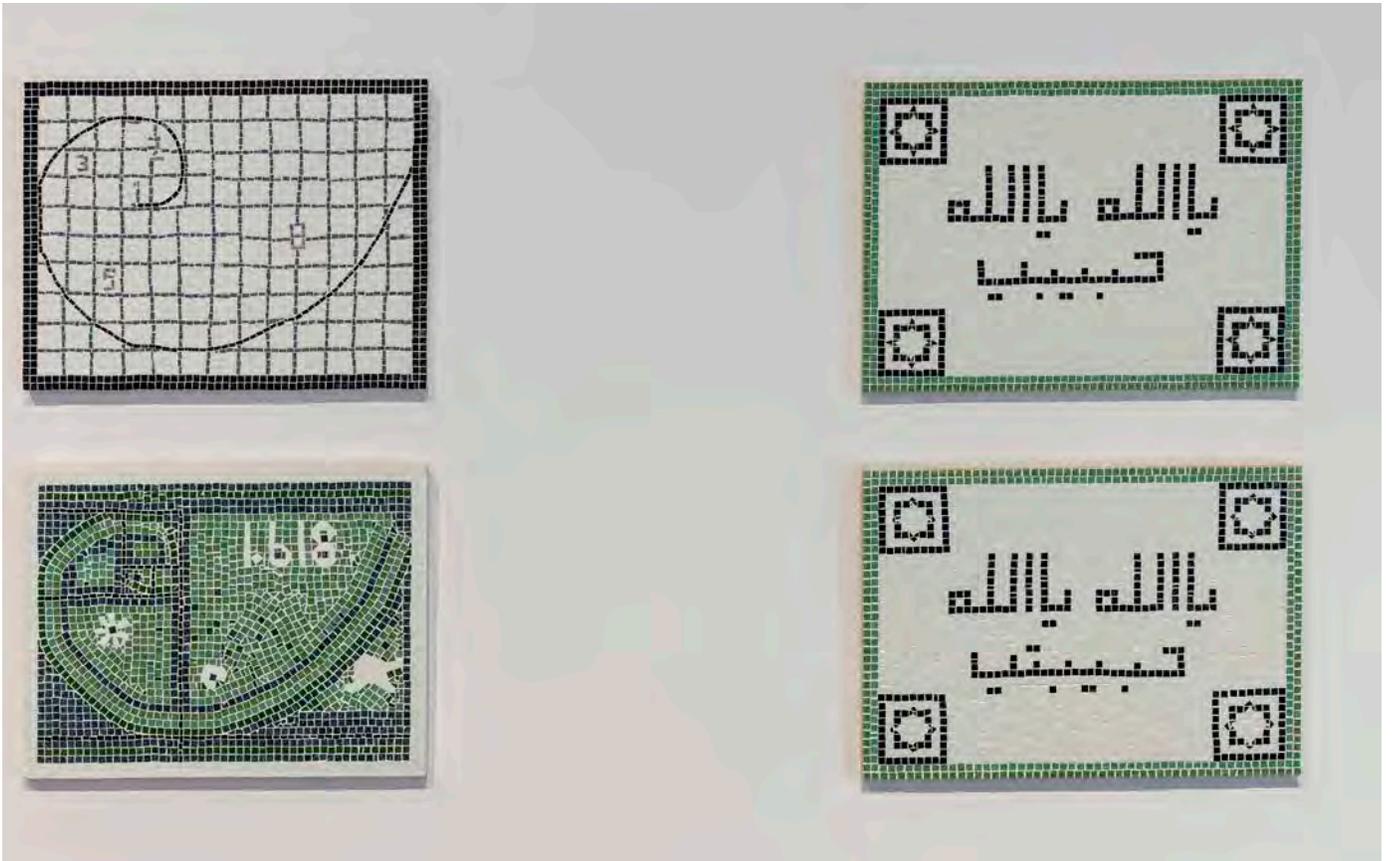
Glass tile mosaic mounted onto recycled wood



Jamelie Hassan, Tile Mosaics (installation view, above); Map of Deshkan Ziibi (installation view, below)



Jamelie Hassan, 350 PPM (above left); 350 (above right); Gizzard Shad (below)



Jamelie Hassan, *Internet* (above left); *Skolstrejk för Klimatet* (above right)

Lower panel, clockwise from upper left: Jamelie Hassan, *Fibonacci*; *yallah, yallah, my love - (f) & (m)*; 1.618

Jeff Thomas

CORN = LIFE, 2021

Pigment print on archival paper

Broken Treaties, 2021

Pigment print on archival paper

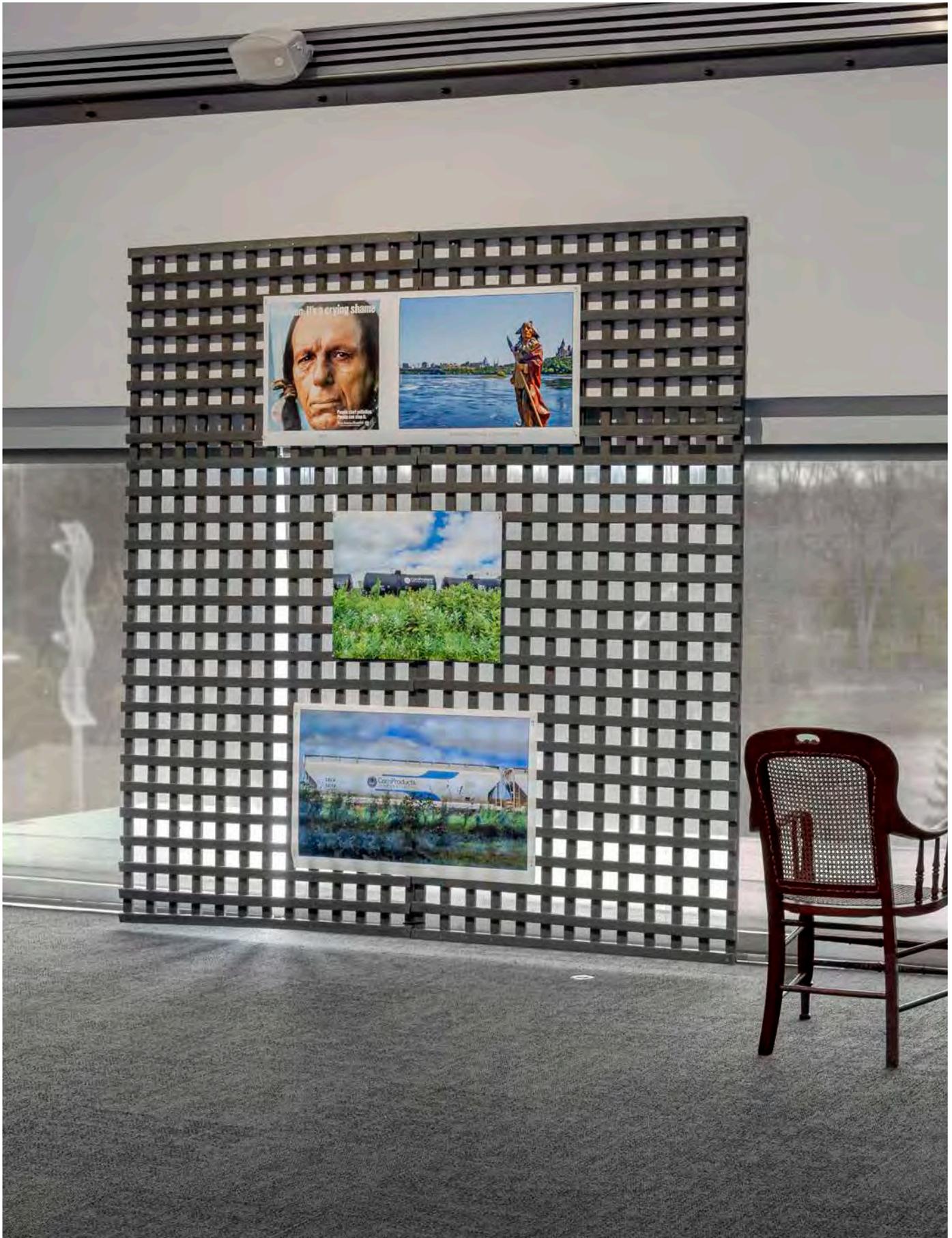
Waiting for the Delegates to Arrive: From the Garden of Ron Benner, 2021

Collection of the artist

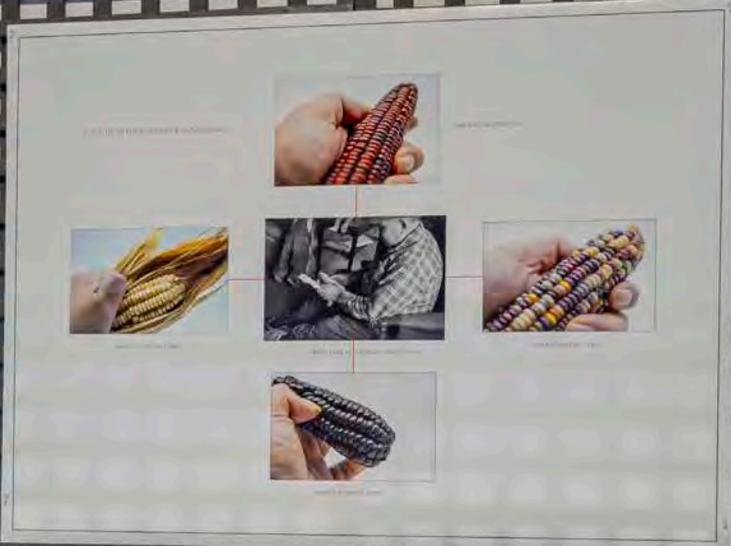
These works by Jeff Thomas are based on the principles set forth in the 1613 Two Row Treaty. The treaty was a document agreed to between the quickly emerging Dutch colony and Thomas' Haudenosaunee ancestors. Writes Thomas, "The principal of peaceful co-existence was not carried forward by European settlers, yet, the Haudenosaunee still hold the treaty as a living document and in this light, my hope is that we can find new pathways as allies, as all people face the ramifications of an environment in peril. My rendition of a now infamous poster represents my dual approach to *GardenShip and State*, the stereotype, treaty, and the land."



Jeff Thomas, *CORN = LIFE* (above); *Broken Treaties* (below)



Jeff Thomas, *Waiting for the Delegates to Arrive: From the Garden of Ron Benner*



Jessica Karuhanga

Blue as the insides, 2021

Single-channel video

Shifting between disconnected spaces and moments, *Blue as the insides* is comprised of innumerable single-frame shots. The video depicts a figure dancing, gesturing and reaching in moments of solitude. The tightly shot images allow the viewer an intimate glimpse of a performance conveying the most personal themes; loneliness, grief, and loss. The lone dancing figure is an affective meditation on solitude in this moment of isolation. In this work, Jessica Karuhanga asks, “What is the efficacy of art in a period riddled with unending uncertainty?”

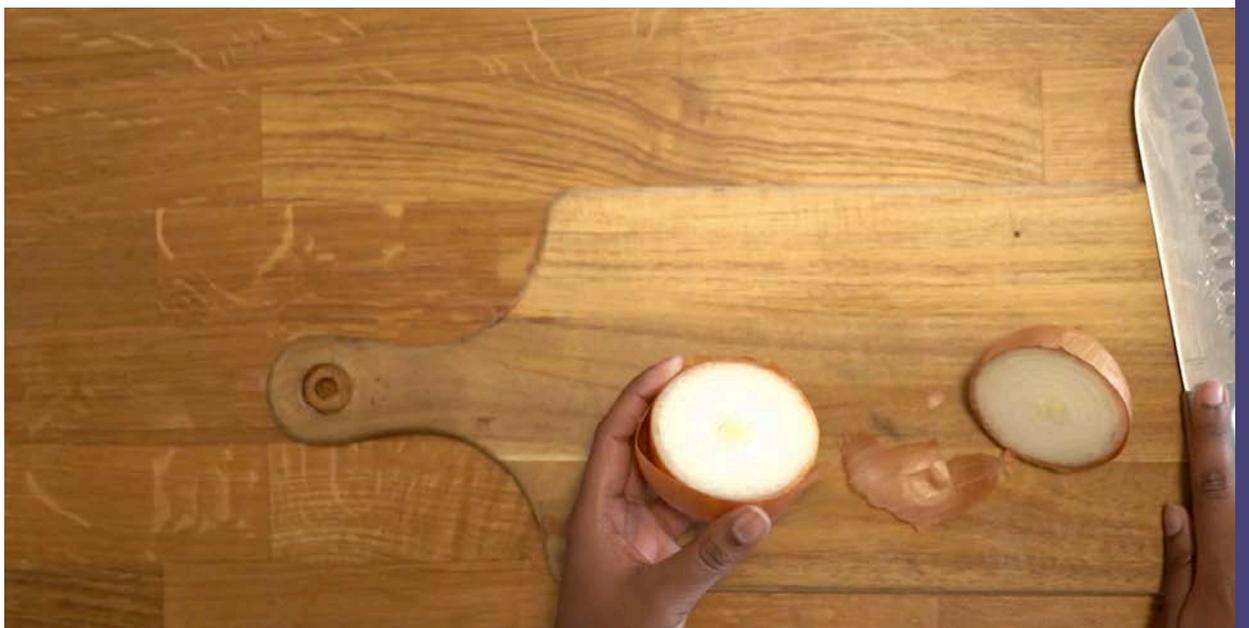


Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides* (video stills)



Above: Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides* (installation view);

Opposite page: *Blue as the insides* (video stills)



Lori Blondeau

Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg, 2018

Photo banners on poly silk

Collection of the artist

Writes Lori Blondeau, “Storytelling has influenced every aspect of my practice, and makes up a lot of what I produce visually. I take the stories, whether they are old stories or contemporary ones, and make them into visual culture. I see what I do with my art practice as high-tech storytelling in a contemporary time. As an artist who is an Indigenous woman, I cannot help but be influenced by the stories of the day and how they impact my worldview. This work, titled *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg*, was influenced by my move and family history in Manitoba. The photography and performance personas I create refer to the damage of colonialism and to the ironic pleasures of displacement and resistance.”



GardenShip

Iskwew (The woman) from the Inuit legend of the same name is a woman who lives in the Arctic and is said to have been the first woman to plant a garden in the Arctic. Through her actions, she is said to have brought the sun back to the Arctic and to have taught the Inuit how to plant and grow. The artwork is a tribute to her and to the resilience of the Inuit people.

© Lori Blondeau 2018. All rights reserved.

Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* (installation view)



Above and opposite page: Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg* (installation views)



Mark Kasumovic

Spill (North Gare), 2021

Colour UV photograph

Erosion (Skipsea) #1, 2021

Colour UV photograph

Erosion (Skipsea) #2, 2021

Colour UV photograph

Beach (North Gare), 2021

Colour UV photograph

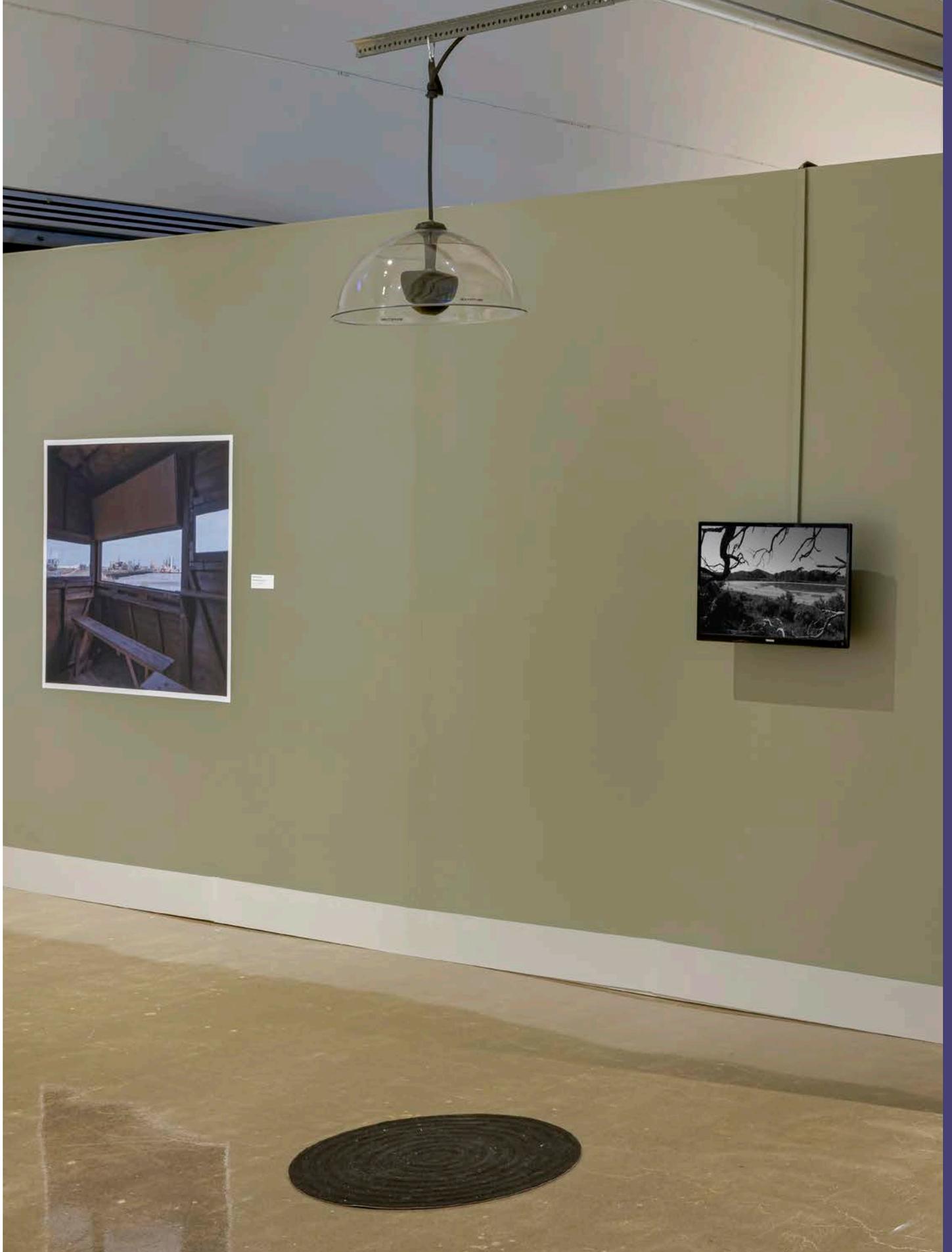
Bird Watching Hut, 2021

Colour UV photograph

Rottnest, 2021

Video

Mark Kasumovic's work revolves around the inherent truth-value of the photograph and the many limitations within the medium. His most recent projects have investigated the relationship between technology and knowledge production within the context of scientific research. His work within the *GardenShip and State* project focuses on a conservation area in the North of England surrounded by heavy refining industries in a lens-based suite of works. Photographs within the series explore the often subtle and quiet ambience of climate change. This searching is underscored in the video *Rottnest* which, with cinematic flair, follows the quiet work of a team of scientists observing subtle and quiet changes within the landscape.



Mark Kasumovic, *Bird Watching Hut* (left); *Rottnest* (right)



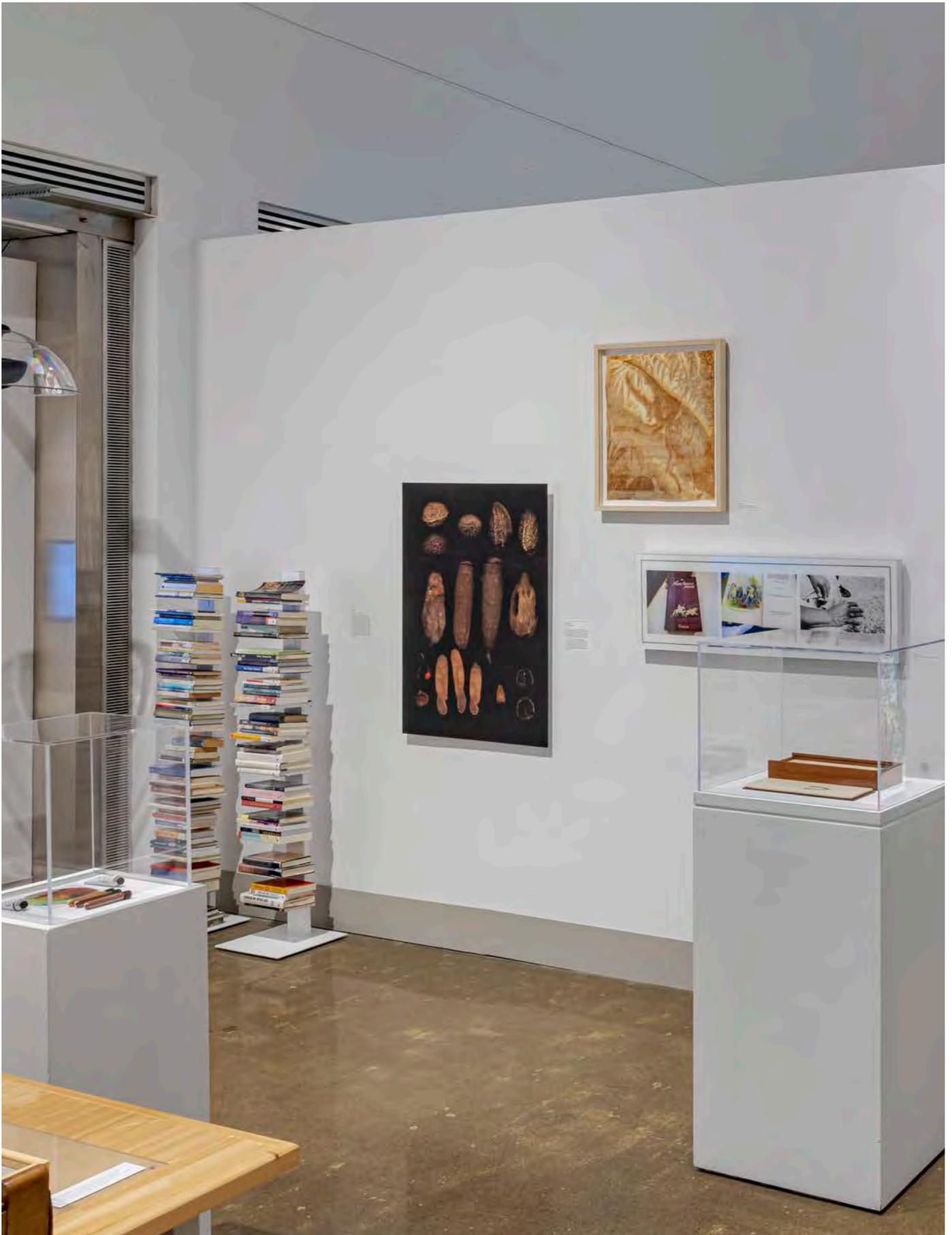
Above: Mark Kasumovic, *Spill (North Gare)*; *Erosion (Skipsea) #1*; Opposite: Mark Kasumovic, *Erosion (Skipsea) #2*; *Beach (North Gare)*



Mary Mattingly

Ecotopian Library, 2020

The Ecotopian Library is a reading room that is a cross between a contemplative exhibition and a tool library, where visitors can browse and borrow books, engage with objects on display, and consider how art and ecotopian thought can aid in cultivating systemic social change. The library's tools range from books, games, and media to art and natural objects. Books range from literature to poetry, from earth sciences, forestry, and geology to Traditional Ecological Knowledge and ecological philosophies. This project stems from the belief that transdisciplinary work is the key to the future regeneration of our shared place, in which we must peacefully coexist with humans, non-humans, and the complex ecosystems that sustain us.



Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library* (detail view, Museum London)



Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library*



Michael Farnan

A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People, and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress, 2021

Ink, chalk, charcoal on paper

Meditations on a Repetitive Stress Injury, 2021

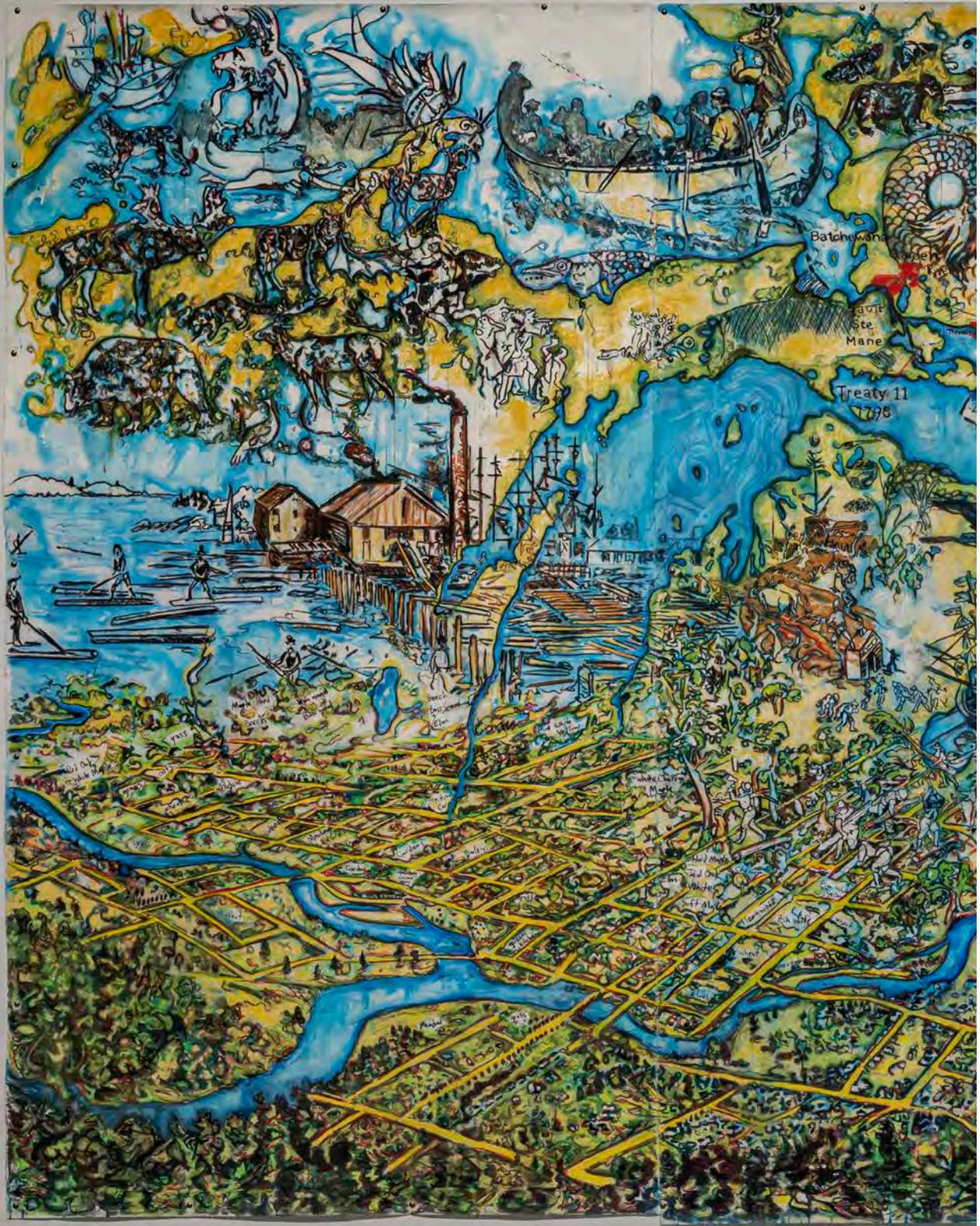
Video

Collection of the artist

These works represent a visual mapping and meditation on the politics of making place and meaning, as a settler, on the land and waters in which Michael Farnan lives, works, and travels. The map imagery illustrates historical “settlement” narratives (colonial invasion) of the Great Lakes region of Canada, as well as their intersections with (forced) Indigenous displacement (Reservations and Treaties) and the non-human life of bird, fish, and mammal. The video shown represents a moment of reflection on one of the other places Farnan thought of as home, living and working in the East Kootenay’s, planting trees for the past 25 years. Writes Farnan, “For me, this research is ongoing, vital, and remains a work in progress.”



Michael Farnan, *Meditations on a Repetitive Stress Injury* (video)



Michael Farnan, A Map Depicting the Settlement History of the Land, Plants, Animals, People, and Water Between Here and There. Here being where I am, and There being where you are. A Work in Progress.



A MAP Depicting
 the Settlement History
 of the Land, Plants, Animals,
 People and Water
 Between
 Here and There.
 Here being where I am, and
 There being where you are.
 A Work in Progress

Michelle Wilson

Forced Migration, 2020-2021

Wool (felted and roving), embroidery thread, conductive thread, glass beads, copper tape, wood, imitation sinew, microprocessor, speakers, wire cable, rocks

In this interactive textile map, Michelle Wilson stitches together organic and technological material to memorialize specific bison killed, captured, or bred in an effort to save the species from extinction. *Forced Migration* is a bridge between the past, present, and future with bison. Visually, *Forced Migration* represents the movement of five bison calves taken into captivity in the 1870s and then the transfer of their descendants and kin from owner to owner over the following century. However, it is also a repository for audio stories that play when viewers touch the map. These stories take as their focal point the men who tried to control the bison and establish themselves as ‘saviours,’ the bison who lived in reciprocity with one another and the Land, and the colonial system of conservation itself. As the narrator, Wilson periodically employs quotes from the archive to situate these stories in the past. In other parts, she shares her own embodied subjective experience. These audio essays reveal how ideologies around capitalism, human exceptionalism, and white supremacy have influenced settler relations to the more-than-human world. In creating these affective, sound designed audio works, Wilson has intentionally extracted archival-research based narratives from a white supremacist, patriarchal written tradition for critical purposes.

Outlaw # 5, 2021

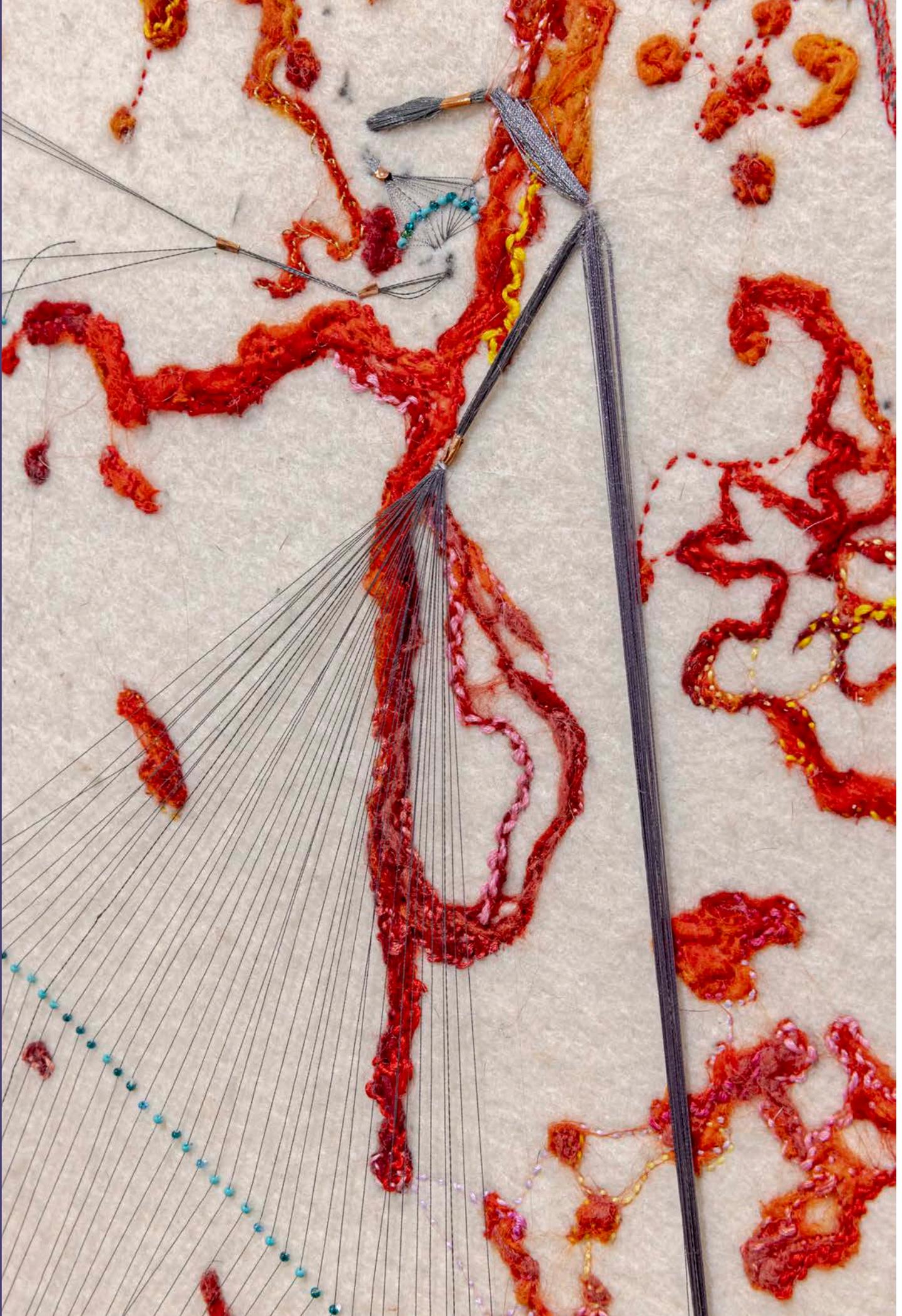
Taxidermy bison shoulder mount, wooden platform, audio recording

Collection of the Manitoba Museum

On loan from the Manitoba Museum, this taxidermy mount is all that remains of one of the bison whose life and death Wilson records in thread in *Forced Migration*. Reoriented on his back, this installation of *Outlaw # 5* subverts the traditional reading of a taxidermic specimen. In addition, Wilson has produced an audio history of this singular bison, recontextualizing him within history, connecting him to his kin, and bringing the past directly into a shared present.



Michelle Wilson, *Forced Migration*





Above: Michelle Wilson,
Forced Migration (with
touch sound activation)

Below: *Outlaw #5*, 2021,
Manitoba Museum
Collection

Opposite page: Michelle
Wilson, *Forced Migration*
(detail view)



Patrick Mahon

Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site – from Photograph by Jeff Thomas (2008), 2021

Incised drawing on mat board with pearlescent watercolour and engraved frame

Threshold Flags: University Building with Tree & Rock – from Photograph by Andrew Mahon (2020), 2021

Incised drawing on mat board with pearlescent watercolour and engraved frame

Threshold Flags: HBC Flag on Nonsuch, MB Museum – with “Desire to Communicate” Nautical Flag Overlay, 2021

Incised drawing on mat board with pearlescent watercolour and engraved frame

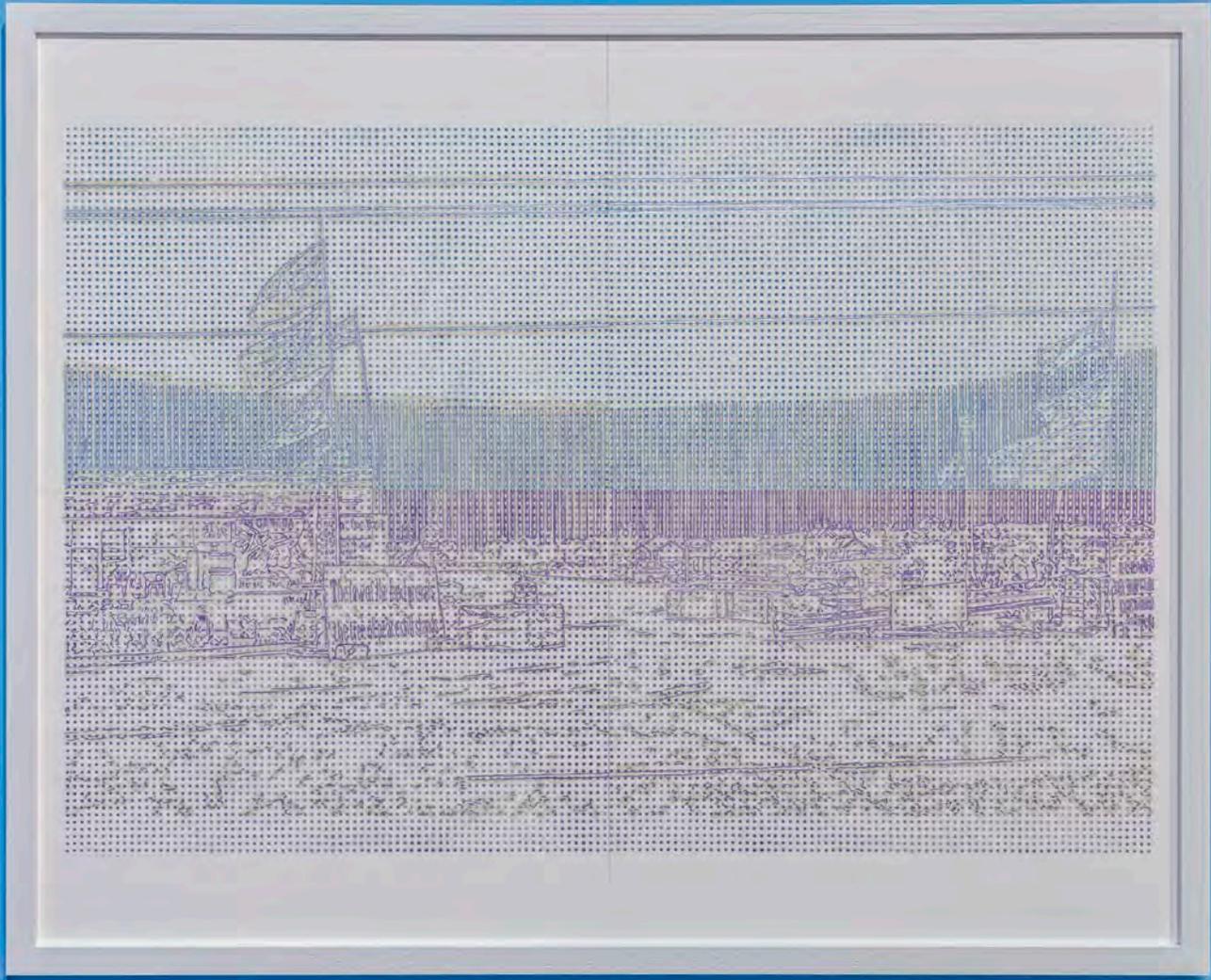
Patrick Mahon is interested in signs, emblems, and markers of place, as well as the use of flags for ceremonial and ritual purposes. These works are based on photographic images involving flags. They came about as Patrick was thinking about land, and histories of colonialism, and about important present-day challenges regarding the environment and colonization that require work and understanding—including through our use of symbols.

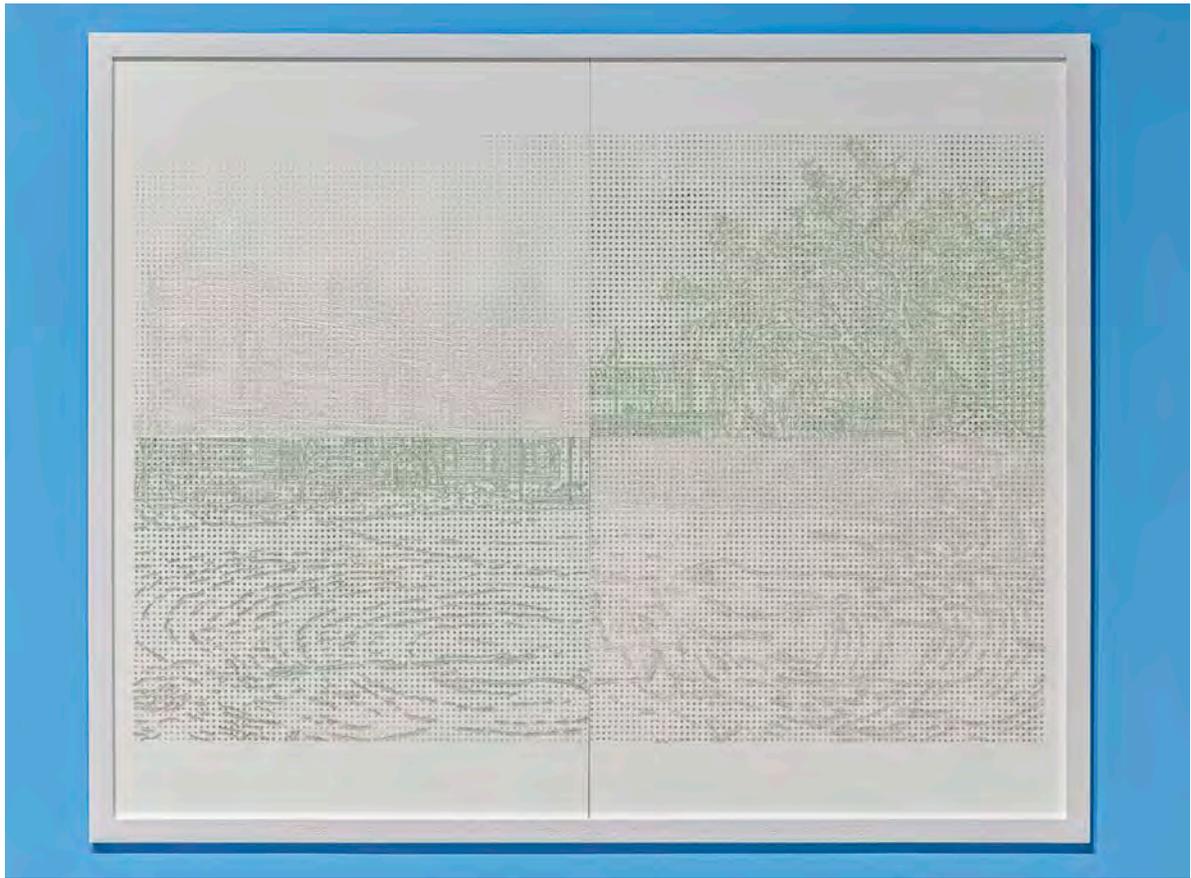
Mahon notes, “Each of the works depicts a context where flags appear at a threshold site of social or political engagement. I made the pieces by carving the image into mat board, line by line, and then filling the incised lines with reflective watercolour. This method is meant to fix the image physically, while presenting it in an implied state of transition. I’m asking the viewer to decide if the pictures are coming into focus, or becoming more diffuse, and what that can tell us about the time of transition, transformation and passage we are in.”

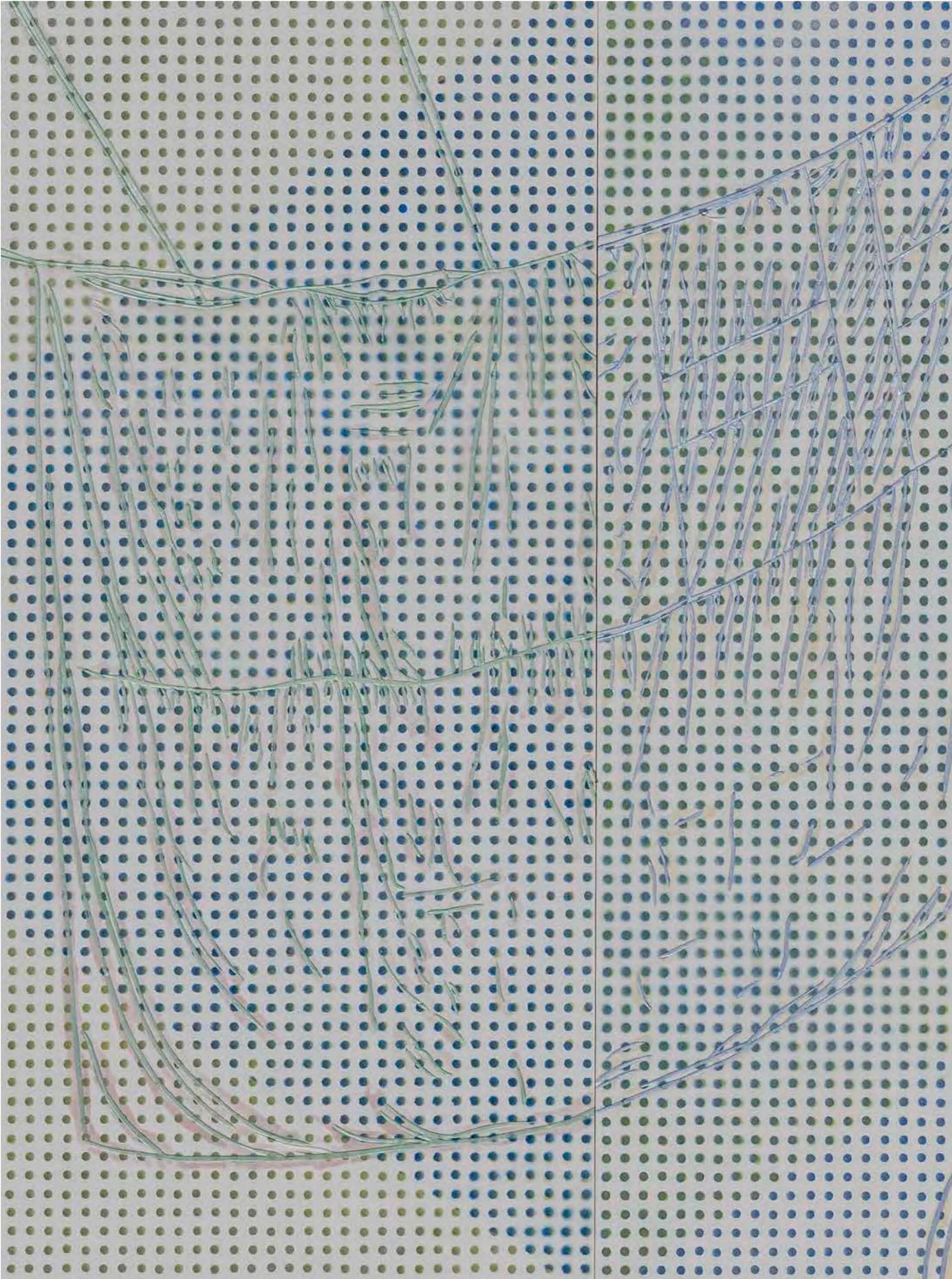
Opposite page: Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags: Caledonia Occupation Site – from Photograph by Jeff Thomas (2008)*

Following page spread, left page: Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags: University Building with Tree & Rock – from Photograph by Andrew Mahon (above); Threshold Flags: HBC Flag on Nonsuch, MB Museum – with “Desire to Communicate” Nautical Flag Overlay (below)*

Following page spread, right page: Patrick Mahon, *Threshold Flags: HBC Flag on Nonsuch, MB Museum – with “Desire to Communicate” Nautical Flag Overlay (detail view)*







Paul Chartrand

Hydroponic Harvest Table, 2021

Varied edible sprouting plants, hydroponic system, repurposed windows, wood, metal, plastic

Memorial Scroll in Chlorophyll, 2021

Chlorophyll ink, receipt paper

Desiccated Root Text, 2021

Mixed grass seed, hydroponic grow medium, vapour barrier, wood, open-cell foam, polycarbonate

Collection of the artist

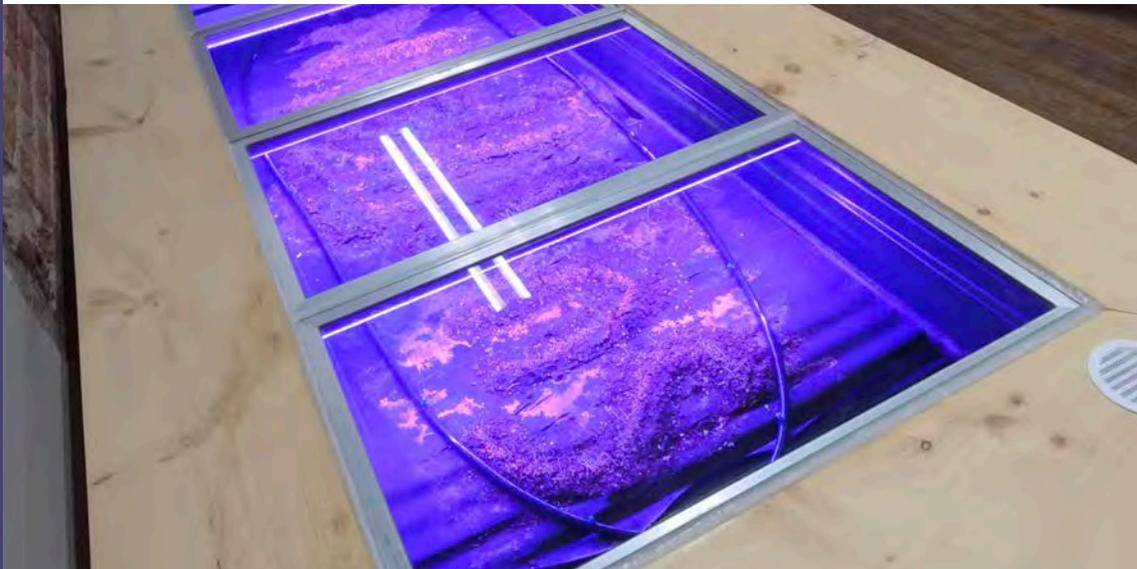
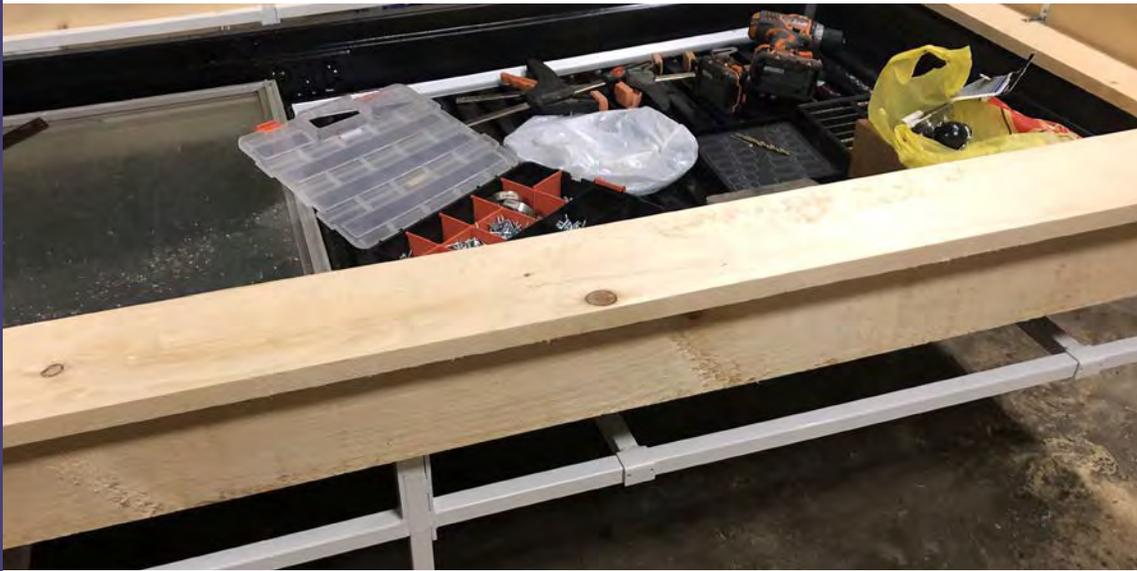
Paul Chartrand engages with environmental and cultural issues through the construction of sculptural assemblages built from carefully chosen and assembled objects, which he then populates with *living* plants. States Chartrand, “I consider the meaningful roles of discrete parts in functioning, living entities. Individually, plants, inanimate objects, or human actions may appear mundane, but when framed in the context of thriving and interconnected webs of being, they become members of a *community*. For the *Gardenship and State* project, I wanted to emphasize community in these assemblages as well. How can an artwork act as a focal point and catalyst for social organization and activism? Or act as an ever-changing memorial? Or as a tangible reminder of the ephemeral nature of life, the written word and art itself?”

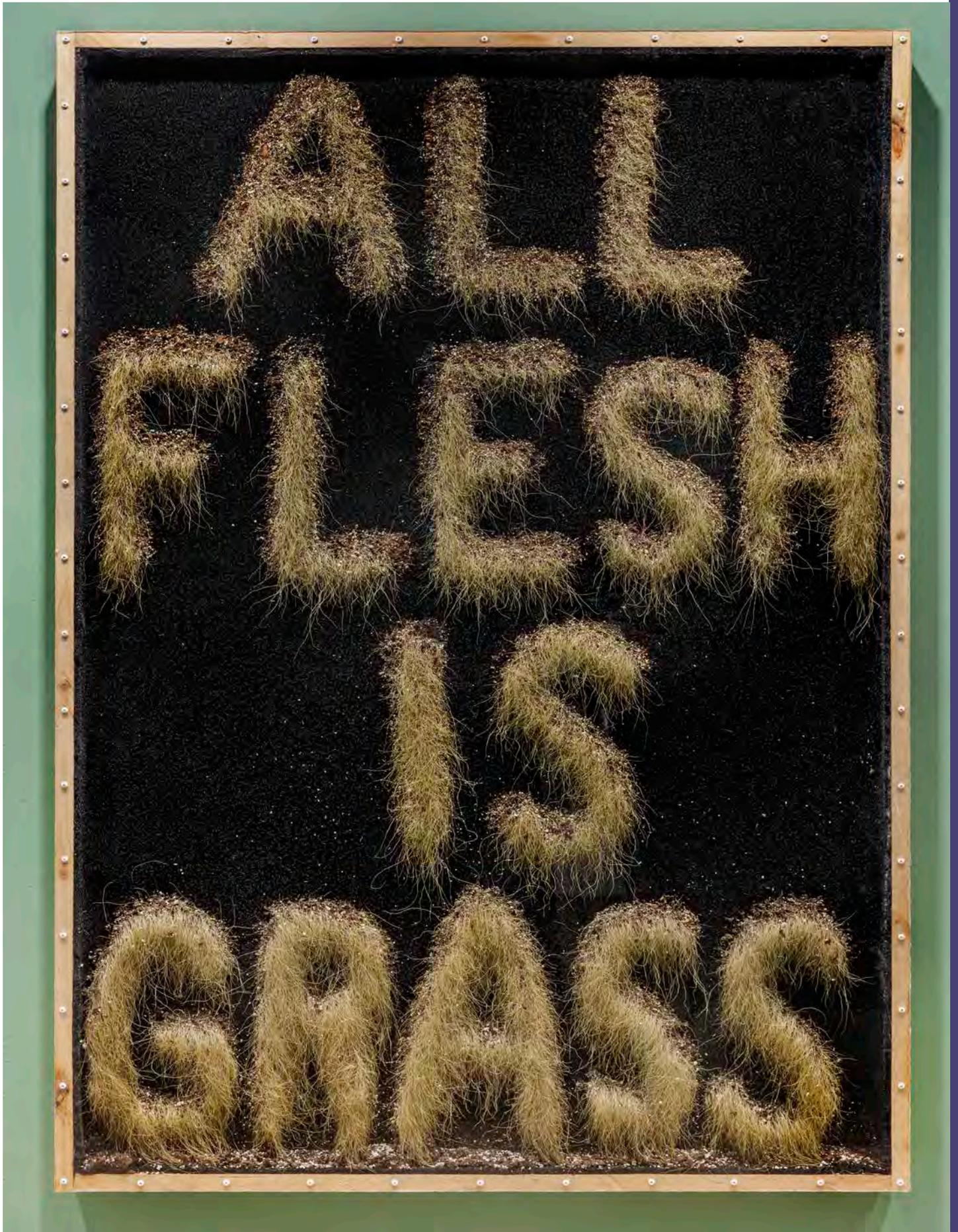
Opposite page: Paul Chartrand, installation view with *Desiccated Root Text* (left); *Memorial Scroll in Chlorophyll* (wall); *Hydroponic Harvest Table*, (right)

Following page spread, left page: Paul Chartrand, *Hydroponic Harvest Table* (stills from livestream feed)

Following page spread, right page: Paul Chartrand, *Desiccated Root Text*







Quinn Smallboy

Colours – Small Drum Ring, 2021

Steel, rope

Lines – Large Drum Ring, 2021

Steel, rope

Currently, Quinn Smallboy’s artistic practice investigates what it means to be a “contemporary Indigenous artist.” Specifically, he questions how customary symbols and icons of Indigenous culture translate into painting, sculpture, and installation. These works, entitled *Colours – Small Drum Ring* and *Lines – Large Drum Ring*, are a flip on a familiar shape within Indigenous culture. For Smallboy, this idea of flipping or reshaping familiar objects provides a new look at Indigenous storytelling.

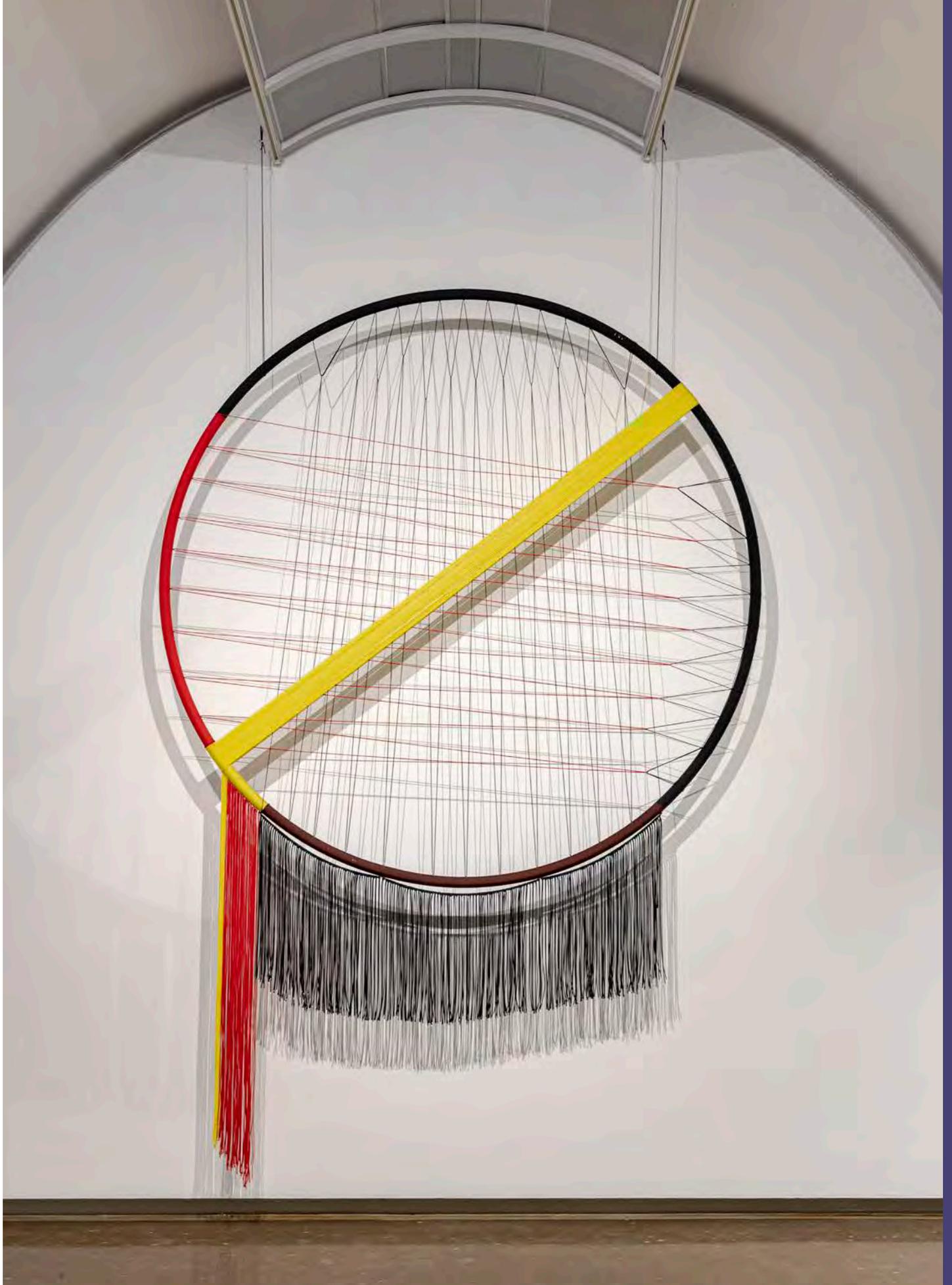
Opposite page: Quinn Smallboy, *Colours – Small Drum Ring* (left); *Lines – Large Drum Ring* (right)

Following page spread: Quinn Smallboy, *Colours – Small Drum Ring* (left page)

Following page spread: Quinn Smallboy, *Lines – Large Drum Ring* (right page)







Ron Benner

As The Crow Flies, 1984-1991

Mixed media photographic installation

Collection of the McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London, Ontario

Ron Benner's multi-media installation *As The Crow Flies* follows meridians of longitude south from London, Ontario and Toronto, Ontario. The work provides glimpses of the interconnected organic and inorganic matter that forms these sites. Writes Ron, "The names of native American plants, place names and Indigenous nations found along the two longitudes border the perimeter of the space top and bottom. This work offers an alternative vision of what lies due south of London and Toronto, Ontario."

Opposite page: Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (installation view, above; detail view, below)

Following page spread: Ron Benner, *As The Crow Flies* (various detail views)





Sean Caulfield

Powerlines, 2021

Wood, silkscreen, paint

In *Powerlines*, Sean Caulfield considers how we imagine a more just future for and with our children. This series of sculptural ‘toys’ references the infrastructure of the fossil fuel industry, including an oil tanker, oil derrick and military vessel. Alongside these vessels’ recognizable contours are several smaller amorphous bodily ‘toys.’ The work is simultaneously whimsical, absurd, and dark, an ominous feeling of “consequences we all face if we do not build more sustainable and equal communities.”

Opposite page: Sean Caulfield, *Powerlines* (installation views)

Following page spread: Sean Caulfield, *Powerlines* (detail views)







Sharmistha Kar

Home and Land, 2021

Hand embroidery on fabric, wooded tent structure, wooden platform

Soft Shelter - Walking together, 2021

Bunka on tarp

Blurred steps III, 2021

Three hand embroidery works on fabric

These works emerge from Sharmistha Kar's shifting connections to place as she has moved around India and Canada. Addressing themes of migration and resettlement in the wake of colonialism, Kar recognizes this shared history in both of the nations she now calls home. She uses meticulous embroidery and shows the verso (or reverse) of works to record and make strange the traces colonialism has left on land, culture, and her own lived experience.

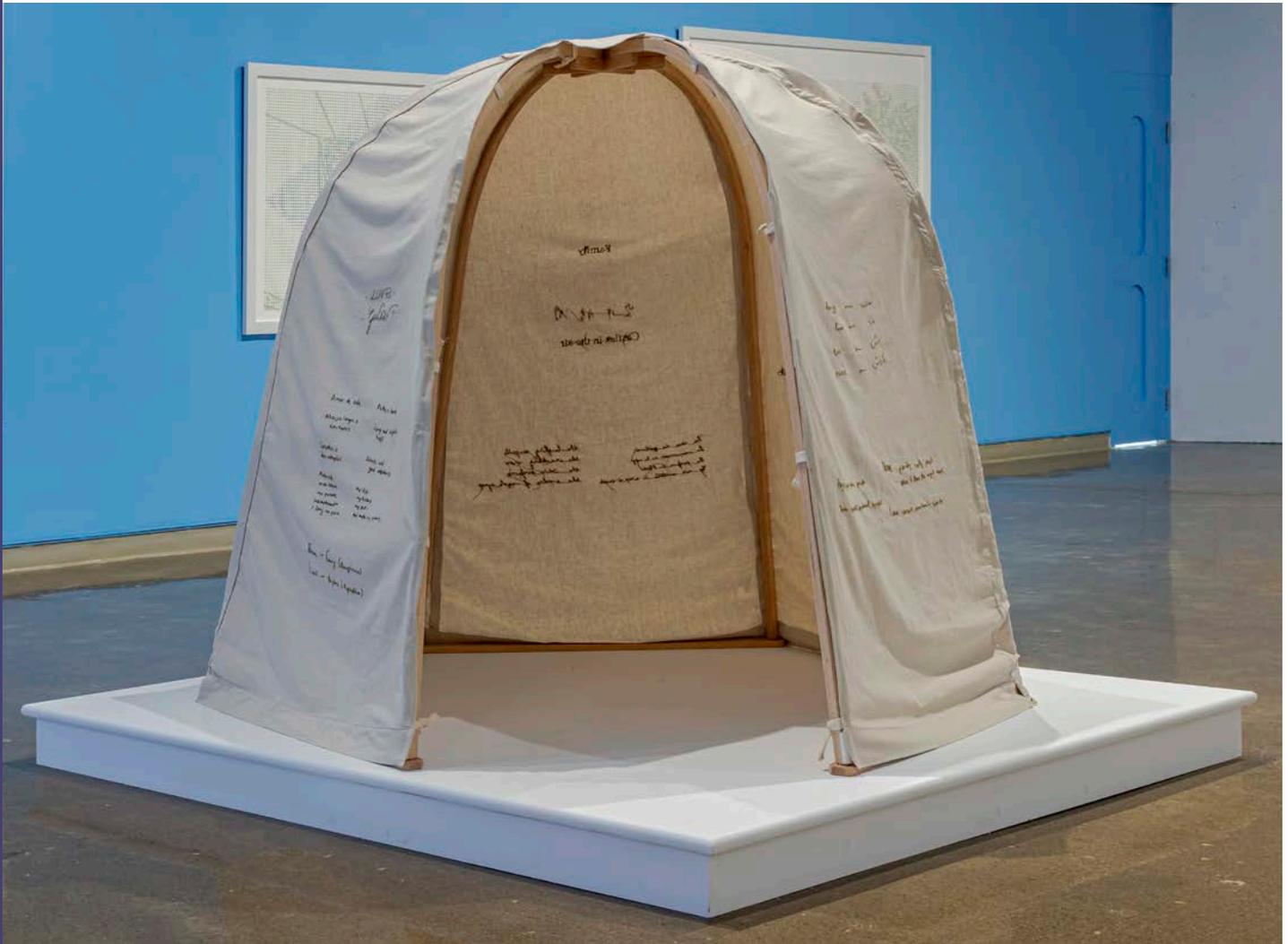
Kar developed *Home and Land* in response to Arjun Appadurai's text "Aspiration and Memory Gap" (2003). The split between the individual's personal archive and larger social archives is a key concept behind this project. States Kar, "Wanting to see the immediate response when one hears the words 'Home' and 'Land,' I reached out to friends who had moved to Canada as refugees and immigrants. The texts on the fabric are their written responses in their mother tongues and in English. Those texts were hand-embroidered on a shelter-shaped structure, evoking ideas of the place home is situated within memory."

In producing *Soft Shelter - Walking together*, Kar used the Bunka embroidery technique to express the fragile, delicate, yet desired relationship between humans and the surrounding world. Her installation emphasizes becoming and transformation as visitors interact with the work: the action of pulling threads produces a subtly visible map of puncture marks, and visitors are invited to keep the threads.

In her *Blurred Steps III* series, Kar "attempts to see those artistic traces of 19th-century Kalighat painting in the 21st century," presenting these traces as a means of archiving history.

Opposite page: Sharmistha Kar, *Blurred steps III*





Sharmistha Kar, *Home and Land*



Sharmistha Kar, *Soft Shelter - Walking together*

Tom Cull

In collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan

UpStream/DownStream, 2020-2021

Video

UpStream/DownStream is a project that brings together art and activism to focus on the interrelated issues of colonialism, environmental racism, clean drinking water, and river ecology. The work comprises two video ‘poems’ that were composed from footage taken at several river cleanups held in London, Ontario, and at Oneida Nation of the Thames—two communities that are connected by one river: Deshkan Ziibi/Thames River. Oneida First Nation is currently on a boil-water advisory due, in part, to the ways that the city of London and other upstream communities pollute the river. States Cull, “We invited volunteers to participate in the cleanups and reflect on what water means to them and how water might offer ways to reimagine community and ecological justice.” The cleanups were organized by Antler River Rally (ARR), a grassroots volunteer group co-founded by Tom Cull and his partner Miriam Love. Started in 2012, ARR holds monthly cleanups of Deshkan Ziibi, and works across the watershed to advocate for healthy river ecology.

Opposite page: Tom Cull in collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan,
UpStream/DownStream (installation view)

Following page spread, left page: Tom Cull in collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan,
UpStream/DownStream (video stills)

Following page spread, right page: Tom Cull in collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan,
UpStream/DownStream (installation view)





GardenShip AND State

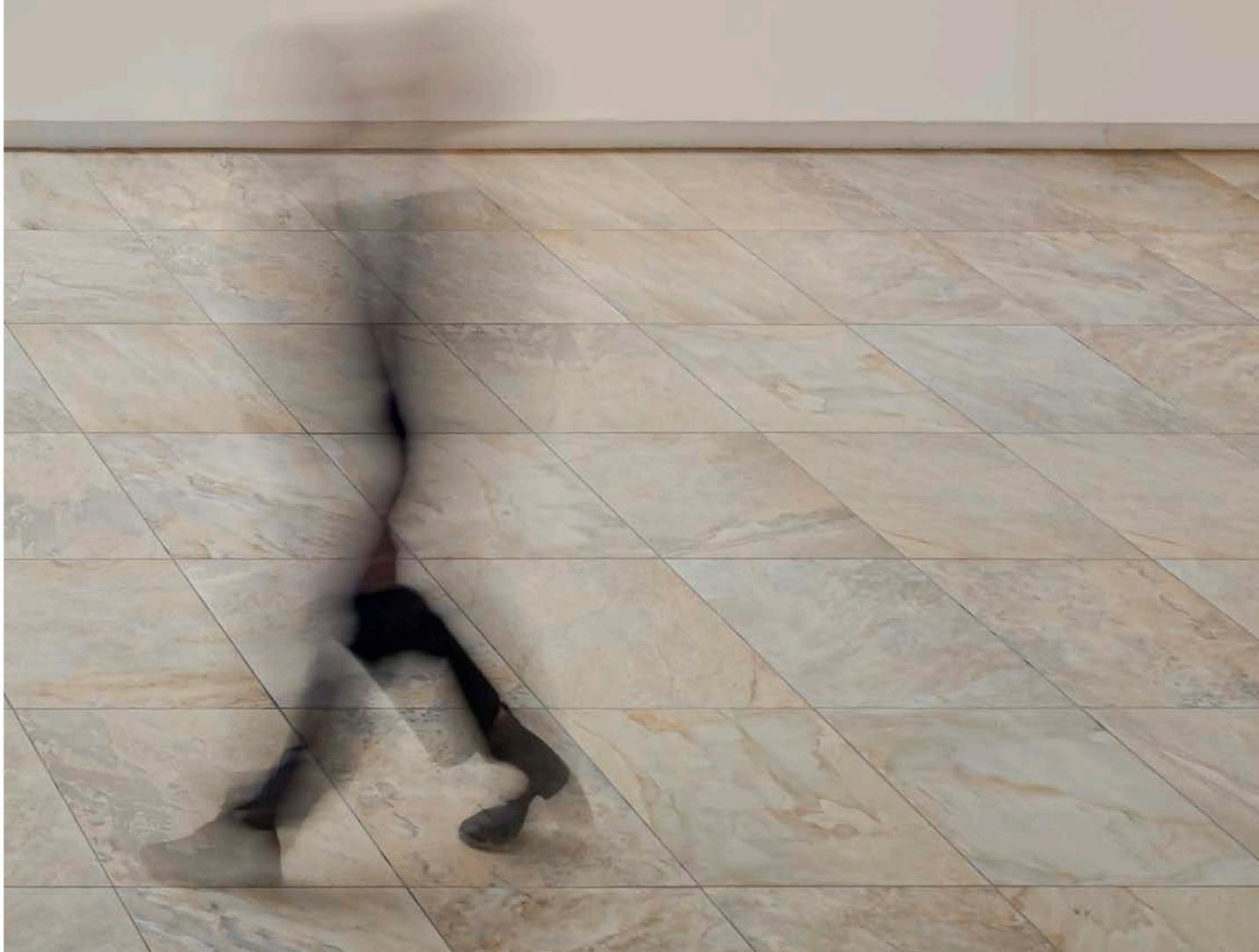
GardenShip and State began as an artistic research project involving a diverse group of 20 artists and writers from across Turtle Island, from areas within Canada and the United States. Through work comprising textiles, photography, sculpture, video, gardening, and installation, the artists in this exhibition engaged issues of decolonial critique, environmental activism, as well as government and industry complicity in the ongoing climate crisis.

Through a wide array of innovative artistic projects, the exhibition asks: How can we work together and create together as a global community to restore the planet, while respecting differences and seeking to repair divisions and address injustices brought about by colonialism?

The exhibition inhabits Museum London's second-floor Iney Calienes, a site within the second-floor Community Gallery, as well locations on the Museum's front lawn and here, the first-floor atrium.

Left: Thomas and Patrick Mahon, Co-Curators

Artists in the exhibition: Ann Brown, Len Boudreau, Jane Caughfield, Ross Chapman, Sam Cull, Anita Lee, Michael Forman, Jason Goss, Sarah Hagan, Shonnette Kay, Jessica Kurland, Mark Kuznetsov, Patrick Mahon, Alan Munnigh, Chris Orloff, Audrey Quinn, Nadia Simons, Jeff Thomas, Amber Viki, Michelle Wilson.



Programming

Patrick Mahon

GardenShip and State was a multi-year collaborative project with art at its core. Some of the artists worked in groups from the very beginning and, as a consequence of the project's larger objectives, other kinds of collaborative work between artists and scholars, and amongst artists, writers and community members, stimulated an ongoing exchange of ideas and creative production. Group discussions (the majority via Zoom owing to the challenges of the pandemic) functioned as the primary procedure for formulating and assessing the ideas and artworks that came to fruition. As the project progressed, the artworks provided audiences with imaginative, experiential means with which to explore the socio-cultural and environmental issues highlighted by the project's work.

With all of this determining its overarching character, *GardenShip and State* had a four-year timeline. Its phases were aptly titled: Seeding, Nurturing, Reaping, Harvesting, and Transplanting; an unfolding process likened to gardening and planting-related practices. Organizing the project in that way enabled a rich engagement with artistic research, as well as a grounded means of considering and accommodating some important cultural and creative engagement.

Community-building within and beyond the *GardenShip* team, the sharing of resources, and embracing the tenets of the Two Row Treaty regarding peaceful co-existence as a pillar of our ongoing engagement, manifested in a variety of ways throughout the project. In the following pages, images and captions that highlight a range of activities and sometimes 'smaller gestures' that extended the life and reach of *GardenShip* — as well as fostering friendships and collaborations within and beyond the group — are presented. Further evidence of the extended life of the work is also to be found in the *GardenShip* Almanac, a smaller publication than this one, that highlights four community-based projects that were intentional ways of "harvesting and transplanting" the ethos as well as the practical aspirations of *GardenShip and State*.



"Lands & Mapping" with (clockwise from top left) Michelle Wilson, Patrick Mahon, Ron Benner, Michael Farnan, Jeff Thomas, and Adrian Stimson



Embassy Cultural House, *Stop Extinction! Restore the Earth* virtual exhibition launch on May 2, 2021



GardenShip and State – A Public Workshop

Saturday, November 30, 2019 at 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Museum London - Centre at The Forks
Everyone Welcome - A Free Event

It is now generally acknowledged that human activity is instigating dramatic environmental changes at an unprecedented scale. The growing awareness of global warming and other widespread effects of human activity have given rise to the notion that we currently live in a period which should be known as "The Anthropocene." Yet what are the implications of adopting such a label, and what does living in the Anthropocene entail? *GardenShip and State* is an ongoing interdisciplinary project with art at its core that seeks to explore, and imagine responses to, the complex and uncertain challenges facing humans and other life forms on a rapidly changing planet Earth.

The public is invited to an inaugural workshop in which the Canadian and international artists and scholars comprising *GardenShip and State* will present their work, their ideas, and their aspirations for the project, which will generate an ambitious exhibition at Museum London in 2021. This workshop is conceived as a creative contribution to *GardenShip and State*, and will emphasize the importance of thinking, imagining, and producing collaboratively.

Artists: Ron Benner, Lori Blondeau, Sean Caulfield, Paul Chartrand, Michael Farnan, Jamelie Hassan, Sharmista Kar, Mark Kasumovic, Patrick Mahon, Mary Mattingly, Quinn Smallboy, Ashley Snook, Adrian Stimson, Jeff Thomas, Michelle Wilson

Scholars: Amelia Fay, Joan Greer, Andrés Villar

A Co-production between Museum London and SASA/Arts & Humanities, Western



Image Credit: (L to R)
Mary Mattingly, Seattle, 2015.
Sharmista Kar, We are together in these ways, 2015.
Lori Blondeau, Michael Farnan, Adrian Stimson, *Pages of the Will*, 2016

Opposite page: *GardenShip* Launch Workshop, Nov. 2019 - (top) Public Presentation, Museum London; (middle) Group interaction with (l-r) Western University students, Jamelie Hassan, Adrian Stimson, Lori Blondeau, Quinn Smallboy, Sean Caulfield; (bottom) Public presentation with Amelia Fay and Jeff Thomas, online

Above: Poster for Launch Workshop Public Gathering, Nov. 2019 (Ashley Snook)

Right image columns: Response tags from public participants, Launch Workshop

How can art (more effectively) reach people who may not have 'no interest' in art...? Specifically: people who not typically visit galleries & museums (especially orphans & caregivers/art...)

The State always serves selective interests, is always founded on a series of material, inequality, yet we must contend with it...

Care Knowledge mindful
Empathy Share
Trust Compost
Reciprocate Names
Ethical agency
Action interconnectedly
Informed Kniship
WORDS FOR HOPE

How as citizens can we "involve" evolve

"OBJECT: SENSE OF SELF" TRACES



re: sensitive practice ~ of embodied anatomy & politico creative process
interest in working w/ interesting & movement artist into this project?

unpredictable & uncomfortable process of recognizing sloughing layers of unconscious entitlement w/in my european psyche

hope / despair
despair / hope

Jamelle ...
be these tree pieces with Arabesque calligraphy NOW - in Guildwood Park
from Glade Palme

State of Fluidity!

Anthropo-who?





Opposite page:
 Mary Mattingly, *Ecotopian Library*, installation of interactive library project with artifacts, artworks and take-away seed packets, London Public Library, Central Branch, London, ON

Above left:
 A Tour of the Exhibition
 Left to right: Ron Benner; Laurel Thomson and Gloria Thomson, ECH Advisory Circle collaborators, Mary Lou Smoke and Dan Smoke

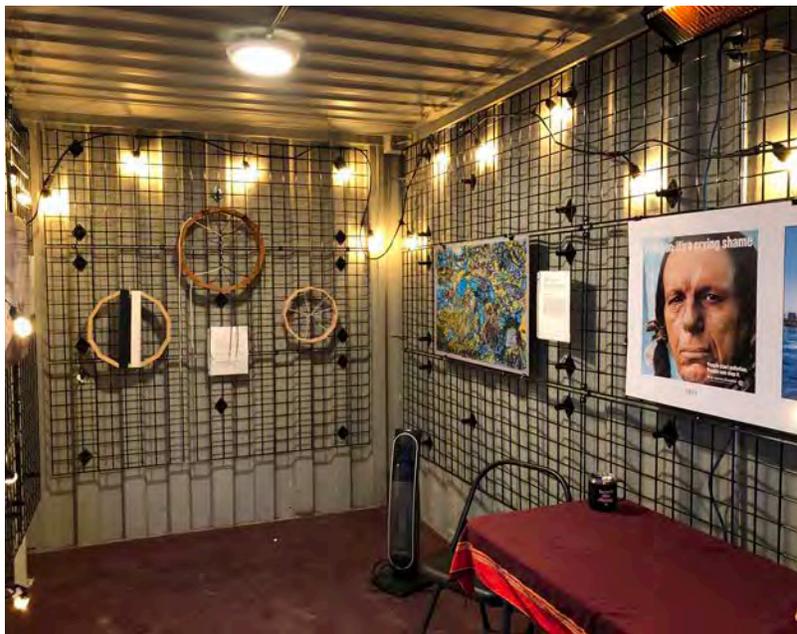
Below left:
 GardenShip group gathering (Oct. 2021) at Ska-Nah-Doht Village and Museum. Located in Longwoods Road Conservation Area, it is focused on the Haudenosaunee People of the Longhouse. (l-r) Quinn Smallboy, Patrick Mahon, Andrés Villar, Sharmistha Kar



Opposite page: The ongoing project, *Sowing Clay*, brings together communities to create a memorial to land and water defenders killed protecting the more-than-human. Paul Chartrand and Michelle Wilson lead this collaborative project, which calls on participants across Turtle Island to create a monumental installation. When completed, this memorial will comprise a chain of over 700 open links formed from unfired, locally gathered clay. Each link in the chain will carry one etched name and native seeds mixed into the clay body. When joined, the links will resemble intertwined arms, harkening to non-violent resistance movements and protests.

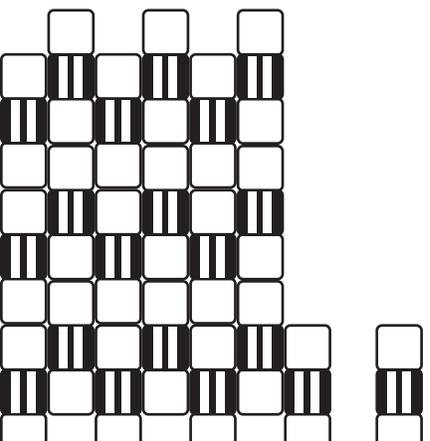
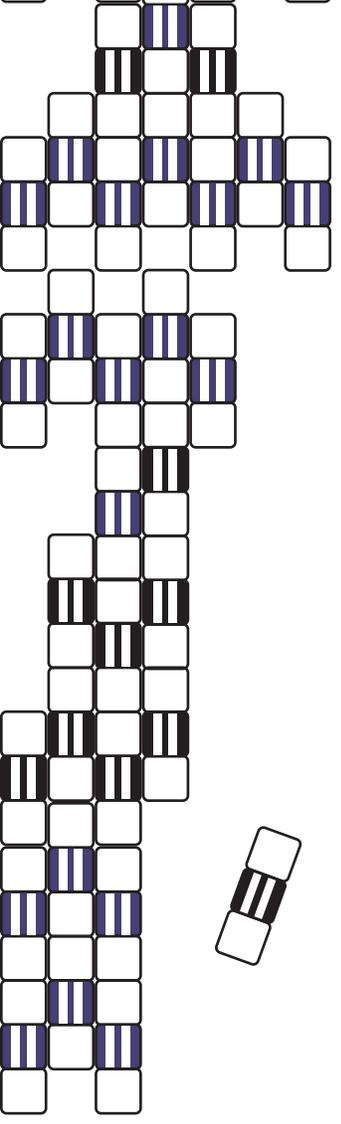
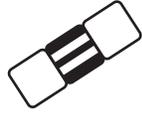
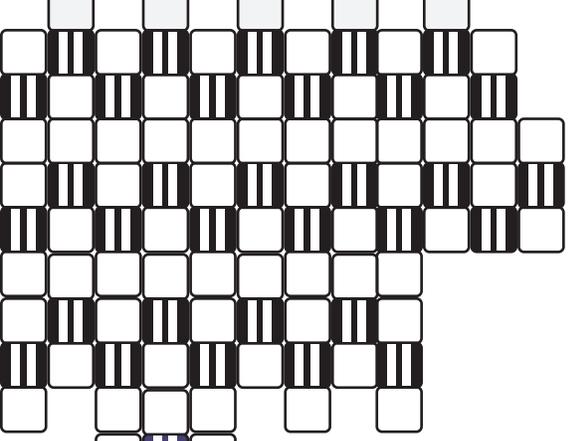
In the fall of 2021, Paul and Michelle produced the initial round of links through a series of workshops at Support Gallery and a park near Deshkan Ziibi (Antler River). Inviting activists to speak at these gatherings allowed the workshops to facilitate conversations around activism and decolonization. Invited speakers included Tom Cull, Brandon Doxtator, Jenna Rose Sands, Skylar Franke, and Melanie Schambach. These initial workshops helped Paul and Michelle develop a prototype for similar events, which partnering artists will conduct in multiple locations. The varied clay of these regions will draw attention to the numerous and specific localities on which battles against climate change, wanton resource extraction, and habitat destruction are being fought. Paul and Michelle hope that one day they will disseminate the seeded, unfired clay links to return them to the earth—the emerging plant life a reminder of the responsibility inherent in our connections.

These workshops were made possible through a partnership with the Embassy Cultural House and the *GardenShip and State* exhibition at Museum London.



This page (left and below): IndigenArt Market presentation, December 2021. Curated by Katie Wilhelm, this street-level showcase and sale was an opportunity to promote the *GardenShip and State* exhibition at Museum London, and to integrate with local Indigenous-led organizations, businesses, and non-profits

This page, left: *GardenShip and State* was promoted in London, ON, via bus-shelter posters and numerous other mechanisms. During the exhibition's run, Museum hours were more limited than normal due to Covid restrictions, but audience attendance was substantial thanks to formal, informal, and online messaging



We, the Cross-Pollinators, are a shocked contingent of the GardenShip project. We aim to uncover the multi-disciplinary and multi-species complexity lurking around every corner of uncertainty that our institutionalized world attempts to paper over. We believe that concepts and ideas should cross-pollinate, transgress boundaries, and extend like mycelial tendrils (hyphae). Our primary model is the pollinator give-and-take that sustains so much life. But watch out! Pollinators can also sting.

The Cross-Pollinators are Joan Greer, Amelia Fay, Tom Cull, and Andrés Villar



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Conclusion

The *GardenShip* Journal

Introduced and annotated by Joan Greer



These texts were crafted and delivered by Joan Greer for the GardenShip and State exhibition opening to describes the developments and operations of the GardenShip Journal. Her words have been transcribed here as repurposed annotations, and they overlay facsimile pages from the Journal to both continue its life cycle and gesture toward the productive outcomes (and formations) of accrual, absorption, and compression.

In introducing the *GardenShip Journal*, I'd like to first acknowledge my fellow collaborators – *my fellow cross-pollinators*: Tom Cull, Andrés Villar, and Amelia Fay. I am speaking on behalf of all of us when I gratefully acknowledge our designer, Katie Wilhelm. It has been a wonderful experience for us to work with Katie and you only have to look at the journal to see just what incredible work she has done.

I also want to say how very grateful we are for the rich insights and ongoing support given to us by Jeff Thomas and Patrick Mahon. *The form and level of generative and generous spirited insights and creative leeway they have provided to us at every turn has modelled a collaborative and generative kind of leadership – that has been truly amazing; a leadership allowing for and enhancing creative, conceptual cross pollination.*

We would also like to acknowledge the other members of the *GardenShip* project, and we would like to thank the staff and volunteers of Museum London, with special thanks to Anita Bidinosti whose work has been insightful, supportive and steadfast; and of the London Public Library (with special thanks to Joanna Kerr).





my gardenship journal



My GardenShip Journal: What is it?

An interventionist activation piece.

It is provocational.

It is a welcoming Gift: to all who visit the exhibition. Modelling a gift economy as an alternative to the market driven one. You have a copy of it in your hands; there will also be a digital iteration.

It is a personal “journal” of sorts – one to make your own; to take on one’s own journey through the exhibition; as a companion as you move through the exhibition; as a means of activation. A call for reflection. A call to action.

Related to this: it is an invitation: to engage with all the works in the exhibition; to begin a conversation with them; individually; and considering how they speak to each other. And, to actively engage with these works by producing creative responses to generative prompts; responses that can be sent as text or image to a website where they, in turn, can contribute to the exhibition.



Michelle Wilson, *Forced Migration*, 2020-21, (detail)

Home

GardenShip and State finds its heart on the banks of Deshkan Ziibi, where the antlers branch. These are the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. Others related to this project find their homes elsewhere. *What are your stories of home?*



Home is a space filled with stories, memories, dreams, impressions Share one here.

The *GardenShip Journal* contains multispecies and pluriversal reminders of our relationships to others; and to the lands we occupy.

As you will read, we say to the visitor to the exhibition, to the person who picks up this small “parcel of pages” – beginning to make it their own:

This booklet is your journal. It is meant to give you the opportunity to participate in the *GardenShip* project. ...

[with the richness of pollination in mind, we say]
Be inspired!

[We continue saying:] We invite you to engage with the artworks and themes of this exhibition, but don't feel limited by our prompts! Reflect, doodle, sketch, vent.

[These responses are yours to keep or share more broadly through the *GardenShip* social media channels and website]

Your Journey Begins Here

So what will be clear already is that we are concerned with creative collaborations. And I will emphasize that relational process and deliberative and generous collaborative exchange is at the heart of our methods.

We have taken as our starting point overarching themes inherent in the *GardenShip and State* project which are present in the journal visually as well as conceptually.

The First: Pollination and especially Cross Pollination: indicating a collaborative, multispecies approach to living in this world. It privileges convivial conversation and non-extractive, relational ways of knowing and experiencing. Do Note: in relation to the pollination theme Katie Wilhelm's playful bee, its flight paths punctuating the pages.

Two Row Wampum Belt: the two row wampum – and particularly understandings of this as embodying the possibility to embrace principles of enduring friendship and peace conveyed to us in word and image by Jeff Thomas. Find it referenced visually both on the back and front covers (along with Michael Farnon's beautiful image) as well as within the pages of the Journal.

And of these themes, I will finally just mention Corn: corn runs through the exhibition and the Journal as a recurring motif. Rich in its references to sustenance; to life.

Shared Space
Add your own words...

Friendship

Quinn Smallboy,
Lines – Large Drum Ring, 2021
(detail)

Go to (<https://native-land.ca/>) to learn about the traditional territories on which you have lived and the treaties that cover those lands.



Paul Chartrand, *Dessicated Root Jesu*, 2020-21, (detail)

Envisioning Futures: Caring for the Garden

Gardens produce and nurture many complex and rich relationships. Gardens can be big or small. The Earth itself is the ultimate garden, rotating in space around the sun that fuels all its life.



Plot out (draw) your own ideal garden-- is it orderly, wild, both?

All gardens require effort and care. With care, gardens give much; without it, they wither away. Watch Tom Cull's *UpStream/Downstream* (made in collaboration with Danielle Butters and Sruthi Ramanarayanan), Ashley Snook's *the honey is sweet*, and Jessica Karuhanga's *Blue as the Insides*, to see how we inhabit the world and live in it both with and without care. Or venture into the speculative world of Sean Caulfield's uncanny yet whimsically envisioned *Powerlines*.



Use your phone or take a photo to record what a damaged garden or world looks and sounds like. What does a healing garden or world look and sound like? Share your recordings with #GardenShipAndState.



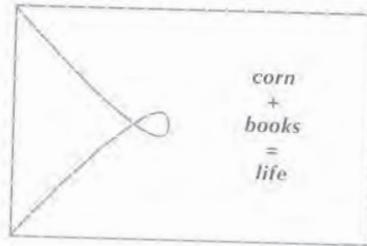
Jeff Thomas, *CORN + LIFE*, 2021, (detail)

A Gift of Seeds: Bringing it All Home

Once outside the Museum you will see Ron Benner's garden installation, *As the Crow Flies*, and be able to spend time with the tile work *Map of Deshkan Zibi* by Jamelie Hassan. Head about four blocks east to the central branch of the London Public Library (251 Dundas Street); go to the third floor and visit Mary Mattingly's *Ecotopian Library*. Keep your eyes open for the GardenShip seed packets there.



Slip one of the seed packets into your GardenShip Journal to keep it safely, together with your thoughts and memories of the exhibition. In it you will find your gift of corn to take home and plant.



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Ron Benner, *As the Crow Flies*, 1984-93, (detail)

River of Words

Water is a giver of life. It runs through our bodies and the land, connecting us to one another and to the plants and animals that, like us, depend on water for existence. Jeff Thomas's *It's Still A Crying Shame* and Ron Benner's *As the Crow Flies* look out over Deshkan Ziibi.



What are the waterways that are important to you? Use this space to jot down words, memories, prayers, poems, doodles, greetings that you wish to send downstream.



Sean Caulfield, *Powetimes*, 2021, (detail)

Who Pollinates Your Garden?

Bees, butterflies, beetles, hummingbirds and other birds, bats and other small mammals are pollinators crucial to the wellbeing of our planet's ecosystems. Consider how they enliven and cross-pollinate the spaces they inhabit. Find them in works such as Adrian Stimson's *Naamo Ooko'o'wa Omahkokata A'paissapii ...* (Bee Tower and Gopher Looking) and Andrés Villar's *Birdsong*, as well as when outside, exploring the grounds of Museum London.



Where do you find them in this exhibition? In your own garden? Build an acrostic poem below that celebrates POLLINATORS.

Ex: *Bumble*
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There are three main Components:

1. The Journal itself (it comes with a little pencil, to encourage and assist with your personal activation of the work).
2. The *GardenShip* Cross-Pollination Map created by Andrés Villar. As we say within the journal pages, we invite everyone to "... discover its layers. [To] Enter into this "blueprint" for creatively navigating the *GardenShip* and *State* works. In addition to the titles of the *GardenShip* artworks, and names of contributors to the exhibition, you will find themes in red scrawled over Deshkan Ziibi.
3. A Seed Packet: A small package with corn kernels to be taken home and planted; available at the Public Library, close to Mary Mattingly's work there. You will see a reference to this seed packet of corn and a place holder for it in the Journal itself.



In closing for now, I would just like to say that we invite you all to begin - or perhaps better said, to continue - this journey of cross-pollination as you activate the journal in your own personal way.

Designing *GardenShip*

Katie Wilhelm



This publication's design creates activism through art and community. The publication itself is an immersive and creative tool to share the knowledge gathered in the *GardenShip and State* exhibition in an accessible - and visually pleasing - way.

Each step of the design process was cared for, with every design detail having a unique and intentional impact. The subject matter of the publication also deserved time: the time to sit with the content and give space to respect those spirits whose stories we are sharing.

Through consulting and collaborating with *GardenShip* contributors and collaborators, this publication project was carried out with inspiration from the Two Row Treaty, the Be(e)d symbol, accessible text, and an ethos of regenerative design. The design process entailed knowledge sharing: listening to the participants, talking with the community, and consulting with the *GardenShip* teams. The most influential discussions were with the Cross Pollinators, with whom I worked closely on the *GardenShip Journal*.

The *GardenShip Journal*

This all started with the *Journal*... and we can't start a conversation about the catalogue design without discussing the *GardenShip and State* exhibition *Journal*. The *GardenShip Journal* was created with project collaborators and Cross-Pollinators Tom Cull, Amelia Fay, Joan Greer, and Andrés Villar as a personal guidebook and space for visitors to reflect upon and engage with the works and themes of the exhibition. I worked that same relational familiarity into the *GardenShip and State* website (gardenship.ca). Select pages from the *Journal* appear in this publication with accompanying thoughts and reflections from Joan Greer on the *Journal's* function as "an interventionist action piece."

The *GardenShip Journal* was a collaboration between myself as the designer and the Cross-Pollinators group as provocateurs. The spirit of the *Journal* was one of fostering creative responses and conversations. As a designer, my complete immersion into the Cross-Pollinator's conversations and themes allowed me to become intimately familiar with both the contributors and their approaches, and I enfolded this familiarity with how we collectively designed the *Journal's* content.

The process of creating the *Journal* inspired the process of creating this publication's design, as did conversations with the broader *GardenShip* community. Through these conversations, I decided to incorporate the likeness of the Two-Row Wampum wherever possible.

The Two Row Wampum

A central theme of the project, the Two Row, is an important symbol that appears throughout the publication.

This book is divided into five sections - the same number of rows in the Two Row Wampum. Though not immediately as visible, the layouts of text-based pages are designed in five rows as well.

The purple-blue colour used throughout the publication is sampled from a quahog shell. This type of shell was used in the creation of the beads in the Two Row Wampum belts. There is deep symbolism behind this colour.

The fore edge of the book (the edges of the book pages) is also designed to create a Two Row Wampum: the image pages are organized into two sections with the images setting to the edge of the page. This imprint of colour creates two subtle lines on the fore edge.

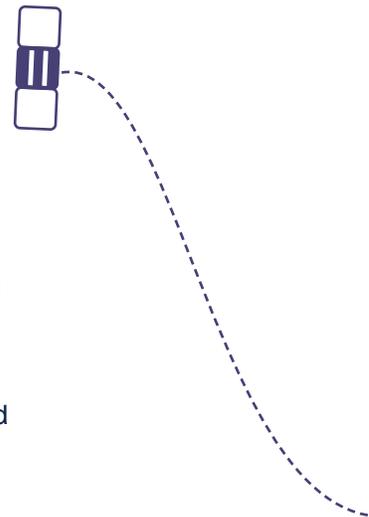
The likeness of the Two Row Wampum also appears in the design of the Be(e)d symbol that appears throughout the *GardenShip Journal* and this publication.

The Be(e)d Symbol

The spirit of collaboration resulted in the Be(e)d symbol. With many bee themes throughout the exhibition and conversations about the beaded wampum belts, I had the idea of a Bee Bead design during an early discussion with the Cross-Pollinators: this design was three beads arranged to resemble a bee - a bee bead - a Be(e)d.

This design unifies the key themes behind the Cross Pollinator's provocations and the ethos of the *GardenShip* project in one minimalistic symbol. The Be(e)d was also created to emulate the beaded Two Row agreement.

The Cross Pollinators are named for the important distributing activity of bee culture, with the vital role of bees in the environment mimicking the role of the Pollinators in developing and designing this project.



The Be(e)d has become an interventionist element throughout this book, signifying the interventionist actions that need to be taken. Be(e)ds appear and disappear across the margins as symbols of this activity - prompting the viewer towards a particular idea, a potential action, a possible mindset - or state (of mind). As a functional device, Be(e)ds under each text contribution denote the number of authors or conversation participants.

Accessible Text

The typeface used throughout this publication is Atkinson Hyperlegible and was developed by the Braille Institute and Applied Design Works (Elliott Scott, Megan Eiswerth, Linus Boman, and Theodore Petrosky). It differs from traditional typography design because it focuses on letterform distinction to increase character recognition, ultimately improving readability.

The text hierarchy and design of this publication also emphasizes accessibility. Paragraphs feature expanded spacing between text and lines for increased legibility. An early reader with dyslexia commented that the paragraph design makes reading the texts a comfortable experience.

The footnote design was also designed with accessibility and readability in mind: footnotes align with the referenced placement in the text and, where applicable, include image references.



Regenerative Design

A goal of every project in my design practice is to consider sustainability, and I always aim to create regenerative design.

Created to be a living document, sections of this publication can be partitioned for separate uses. Some early discussions of this function included easy circulation of shorter reference materials to schools and community organizations, and distributing booklets for libraries. The *GardenShip and State* website is another interface where the book's content can be sustained in interactive online spaces.

This book is also materially regenerative: the team worked with a local printing firm, Accell Graphics, to source eco-friendly paper and printing options.

Though this book partially functions as an archival element of the *GardenShip and State* exhibition, it brings new voices and ideas to the project. Through its design, my hope is that the publication can, in the spirit of *GardenShip and State*, have a sustained and regenerative life.





Installation view with Jeff Thomas, *Broken Treaties*;
Outlaw #5, Manitoba Museum Collection (foreground); Two Row Treaty flag (overhead).

Conversation: Jeff Thomas, Lori Blondeau & Patrick Mahon



At the entrance to GardenShip and State at Museum London, audiences encountered two large-scale vertical photo-murals by Lori Blondeau. The images are of Blondeau herself, garbed in blue velvet and set against a frozen lake, making reference to Shawnadithit, the last Beothuk woman. In the following conversation, co-curator Jeff Thomas, introduces a sculpture that was presented at the entrance to the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, entitled Destiny of the Red Man, as a counterpoint to Blondeau's images of a powerful Indigenous woman who appears to look beyond our gaze as we enter

the museum. In the discussion, Jeff Thomas and fellow co-curator Patrick Mahon engage with Lori Blondeau about some of the ways that representations and 'voices' are foregrounded throughout the exhibition. In that regard, Thomas speaks about his strategies as a photographer; one who sometimes asks his subjects, "How do you want the public to see you?" Ultimately, this conversation highlights the exhibition's role in challenging historical structures and assumptions around cultural representations, asking us to consider them in light of our current moment on planet Earth.

Jeff

I was going through the Library of Congress website over the weekend. I was interested in the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. During that period of time, there was a lot of activity with sculptors making works: not just for fairs, but for a lot of the vanishing this and that, and the dying warrior on horseback and everything. I was looking because there were a lot of prominent monuments during that period of time, like Adolph Weinman's *Destiny of the Red Man*. I had never seen anything like that. I think what I'm looking at in the image I have of it is a maquette that was photographed. There is also a stereograph that shows the actual monument outside. You would never get the same detail from the stereograph, so it was really something to find that photographed maquette. There were two photographs, one that showed the front and then the back. And in the back photograph, what you see above is a man with a blanket over his head, looking out. I think that is supposed to be Death because there's a vulture right behind them. You can't see this from the front view but you can see it from the side.

I was wondering how sympathetic this person was. I hadn't heard of this sculptor before, but I know that a lot of sculptors used live models for their work, and these people look pretty spot on. But it reminded me a bit of the Aboriginal War Memorial here in Ottawa. This figure at the top, he has his hand outstretched and he's pulling back his cloak. I was wondering if it was reminiscent of the Trail of Tears. Maybe there was some influence on that. The way that I always look at

historical images is to look at parallel contemporary things that you can compare to it to carry out that narrative and update it, in a way. And that's why I was thinking about your work, Lori, in regards to this photograph. For me, it would be fascinating to see and to talk about how they would look side by side, as a diptych.



Destiny of the Red Man, 1903 (exhibited in 1904). Image courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society

So I was thinking about the prominence of how these monuments were used at the World's Fair. They were outside all the major buildings. I was thinking about how Patrick wanted to put your photographs out in the lobby, as well, in that extended format. What did people think about when they were coming into the Museum and seeing an Indigenous woman—very proud, very strong, in control of the medium, and making a photograph like this? That's essentially what I was thinking about, and thinking about how your images played such a prominent role in introducing *GardenShip and State* to the community, and what that meant.

“I believe we had little control over how we were imagined in the colonizers’ eyes.”

I was curious about your thoughts around that. As Patrick has said, making photographs carries a lot of weight in terms of how you decide to do things. For example, I was thinking of the background as kind of a negative space: in a way, it’s open for conversation, for discussion, to ask you questions about your work. I thought that it was perfect. I couldn’t think of any other images that actually would work in the lobby for the exhibition, except for yours. So you played quite a prominent role in the presentation of our work to the public.

Lori

When I’m going to make a photograph, I approach it very much like I would a performance piece: how do I present myself within a landscape, or what am I trying to say? And how am I going to say that? I look at some of these old images, and obviously I’ve been influenced by this, even as a child: the Indian Princess, or the “dying race.” We were always presented—in some ways, today, we’re still presented—by non-Indigenous people in that same format. I was just reading something about how, as Indigenous people of North America, we’ve been portrayed to the world: how we’ve lost all this culture, how we’ve lost this way of life. This article was talking about how we were presented to the world from that colonial lens, and how we were always presented in this fashion (like in this photograph) because of the way colonization works. It’s about erasure. If non-Indigenous people can’t see us without thinking of this kind of image, then we don’t exist. And what better way to colonize the land than erasing us, or keeping us held static in history.

I believe we had little control over how we were imagined in the colonizers’ eyes. But we also did have control. I learned so much from you, Jeff, and your work around Edward Curtis and his photographs: how some of the Indigenous people would stick in objects (but then they would have to get erased), or just mess with Edward Curtis and his photographs. I think that was our way of having some kind of control, back in the day. Being a contemporary Indigenous woman who is an artist and works with photography and performance, I can only work from where I’m positioned, which is now. And like I said, I am influenced by the past, of course, because I’m very proud of our people. I’m proud of my people.

A lot goes into thinking about how I’m going to present to the public, and how they’re going to perceive it. With *Asiniy Iskwew*, where I’m on the rocks, it’s about Mistaseni.¹ I knew right away, as soon as I chose to use red velvet, that people are going to think, “Oh, Murdered and Missing Women.” I don’t know if I want to call it a stereotype, but this has become an identifier for how we see missing and murdered Indigenous women, and not looking at the history of Indigenous women artists who have used red in their work. Rebecca Belmore’s used red before this whole inquiry, or before Jamie Black did The REDress Project. I’ve used red. I think, in a way, there are symbols that still get put on us. Those are big banners when you walk into the gallery. When you guys wanted to put them there, I thought, “Wow. That’s a great space because it’s huge!” I think they needed a really big space.

¹ Mistaseni, a Cree word meaning “big rock,” was the name given to a 400-tonne rock that resembled a resting buffalo and was a sacred gathering place for the Cree and Assiniboine peoples of the plains. In 1966, in advance of flooding the area to create what is now Lake Diefenbaker, the rock was dynamited as part of the South Saskatchewan River Project. Lake Diefenbaker is now the largest body of water in southern Saskatchewan, formed by the Qu’Appelle River Dam and the Gardiner Dam.

I really appreciate what you said, Jeff, that I'm in this stance of being proud, of being strong. I wanted that look, but it was also with this very stark backdrop of the frozen lake. It was cold. When I was doing the shoot, there was a moment where it was so cold tears were running down my cheeks. I said to the person who was photographing it, "I don't want to look like I'm crying, but I can't stop my tears from coming down!" Because I didn't want to be that Crying Indian. I'm glad that you saw in that light, of it being strong and being a strong image.

Jeff

Now that you mentioned that, I think with photography we generally see images that are done in fair weather. Based on what you just said, you were making a sacrifice to make that image. That is also an important consideration about how we talk about these photographs. It's not a random thing now because everybody has a phone with a camera on it. It's so ubiquitous. But here, I think that there's something really important that can carry on. I remember when I first saw the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and it had Theodore Roosevelt on horseback and you had a Black man on one side and an Indian Chief on the other side. It's almost hard to describe, sometimes, what those images mean, so you work it out through your practice.

Patrick

Thank you very much for getting us going, both of you. And thanks, Jeff, for bringing this photograph to the conversation, because I think it's very astute in relation to something about

what Lori's works at the entrance to the exhibition are doing and not doing. I gave a lot of tours of the show to people. In most cases groups were quite mixed, and I didn't necessarily know all of their backgrounds and identities, including whether anyone was Indigenous and might therefore have picked up on some of what you're both raising, from that standpoint.

One of the things that was a strong experience when you walked into the space was that Lori's works are so large. And even though the space is vast, there's a sense of them having a real presence that truly inhabits the space. That's partly about your gaze, Lori. And, it's made more intense because the two images are looking in different directions.

The thing that for me became really interesting was when people would walk up to the pieces. The bottom of them is about shoulder height for most people. So there was a need for visitors to look up. And there was a sense of the question that you're bringing to it, Jeff... of what Lori's works claimed in the case of our exhibition, or (hopefully by contrast) what those works outside of the World's Fair in 1904 were claiming about Indigenous people and culture at the time. Obviously, it seems like very different kinds of things were being asserted, but I don't think we can assume the same reading for all of the viewers that came into our show. Certainly, they all could see a strong Indigenous woman. And at the same time, there is that cold background, of the frozen lake. They are complicated images.

“How are we going to be looked at in a hundred years compared to how we were looked at a hundred years ago? The signifiers are changing.”

That complexity wasn't lost on me; I tried to remind people that much of your work, Lori, is as a performance artist. So, in a sense, these photographs are performed. Regarding the *Asiniy Iskwew* figure, I was able to say something about who was being referred to: the last Beothuk woman. Maybe you could say a little bit more about that.

At the same time, there was a sense of a real, living, strong presence; someone who is not meeting your gaze. I had a lot of questions from visitors, and I could tell people were both moved and challenged by the photographs, your image: by this presence at the entrance to the exhibition.

Some people commented, “I understand something about the *GardenShip* part, regarding the environment and all that, but this question of *State...*” I think there is a way in which those figures, those women at the entrance to the exhibition, are claiming space and—I would argue—claiming land in a particular way. I don't think I completely saw that relationship to the question of “state” until I had the experience of bringing people into the show.

Lori

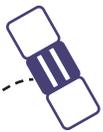
That's interesting talking about the gaze, because with the *Asiniy Iskwew* images about Mistaseni, I didn't want to look at the camera. I was very intentional. Same with the works that were in *GardenShip*. I didn't want to look at the camera because of how the gaze has affected us, obviously, as Indigenous people. We're always being

gazed at. I wanted to be monumental because of what I was representing: whether it was to talk about the history of Mistaseni and the stone being blown up and what it meant to my people, or Shawnadithit and her being the last Beothuk woman. She was a strong woman. I think, throughout history, of how she had been played or described by her captors (if you want to call them that). It wasn't like she was a strong woman: “Oh, she was the last, she died because of disease.” But she was actually, I think, really resilient, because she survived.

I was part of the creative team of *Shanawdithit*, the Indigenous opera. I was the only Plains Indian in that opera who was doing set design. The other three artists were Mi'kmaq. I had to have a real conversation with them about me feeling a little uncomfortable because of being from the Plains. Of course, I knew the history, I knew the story. But was it okay for me as a Plains, Cree, Saulteaux and Metis woman to actually contribute to the set? And they all just said, “Yes, we want you to do this.” I felt I needed permission, because I don't claim to represent every Indigenous woman from this land when I make my work. Yes, my work probably confronts some of the stereotypes that I think all Indigenous women in North America have faced. But to make work that was representing this last woman of her nation was a huge thing for me. And not returning the gaze was very, very important to me.

Jeff

That's really interesting, Lori, because I was thinking about when I did my



Powwow work in the 1980s. I had all of the answers. I said, “How do you want to be looked at?” “How do you want to be seen?” “What do you want the person looking at you to think?” For me at that time, the answer was to make direct eye contact from the photograph to establish their own power. And so I wanted to open it up to them. But hearing you talk about the gaze now, I realize that you can also be just as powerful by not engaging with the public. It’s all about body language.

I think too about how, as artists, our Indigenous background continues to influence what we do, but we have to be able to articulate it as well. It’s a very interesting process to think about all of these things. I remember that in the early 1980s there was this march going across to Washington from Rosebud. A Lakota guy came through Buffalo, and my first wife (who had been involved in Wounded Knee²) and I decided to go. As we got closer to Washington, the Lakota guy had to leave and go home. He wanted me to carry his bundle for the rest of the way until he came back. I gladly did that. It was when my hair was braided and I had all these things on (you know how we were in the 80s, wanting our identity worn right out there). I couldn’t believe the number of photographers that were around me. They wouldn’t have been there if I didn’t have all these other things going on as well.

Lori

I’m glad you brought that up, Jeff, because yeah, there are signifiers. What signifies the past. I remember, I would have to say it was the 70s and maybe I was ten or twelve years old.

My mother (I don’t know why she did this) dressed me and my sisters up, and she had these beaded headbands—you know, the ones that are done on the loom. She made us put them on, sitting on this chair, looking up (maybe that’s why I don’t like the gaze), and she took photographs of me and my two sisters. We all had long hair, so of course our hair was braided. I think about that a lot. Because in the 70s, too, I think as Indigenous people, we were getting back our pride. Wounded Knee had happened, there was tons of activism going on, and my parents were activists. My mother made us feel proud. But as I got older, I started thinking that those signifiers, like the Indian Princess, affected her too. I think about signifiers a lot, because I think they’re changing. And they’re changing really fast with contemporary art. Even thinking of the Toronto Indigenous Fashion Week that just took place, and looking at some of those images of young Indigenous models modeling contemporary Indigenous clothing. How is that going to be looked at in a hundred years? How are we going to be looked at in a hundred years compared to how we were looked at a hundred years ago? The signifiers are changing.

Jeff

Sometime in the late 80s, Ruth Phillips had invited me to go down to an American Indian art history conference. They were concerned at that time, because there were very few Indigenous artists that were coming to it. I went to this one talk, and it was an anthropologist who was talking about his work among the Lakota: he had been adopted, and had learn to speak Lakota.

²The Wounded Knee Occupation, also known as the Second Battle of Wounded Knee, began in February 1973. 200 Oglala Lakota (Sioux) activists and followers of the American Indian Movement seized and occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Reserve. The 71-day occupation arose following the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization’s failed attempt to impeach tribal president Richard Wilson for corruption. The occupation attracted widespread media coverage and contributed to public awareness of longstanding injustices against Indigenous peoples. Supporters traveled to Wounded Knee to join the occupation, which demanded an immediate renewal of treaty talks with the U.S. government.

He went on to criticize contemporary dancers who used manmade objects in their dance outfits, and how terrible that was. William K. Powers. I think he was at Princeton or Harvard, or something like that. But it was scary, in a way. He said, “I have the support of Lakota chiefs, so that’s why I’m talking about this.” When you look at the Powwow now and see the dancers and what they wear, it’s quite a bit different from the grass dance.

Lori

But it’s nice that at some Powwows, you’ll see the old style grass dance outfits, which I really love. That means that some of our people are holding on to those older outfits and keeping up those older dances that have drastically changed over the years. Even our songs and our drummers, they’re going to the Junos and to the American Music Awards. But it’s scary when you have non-Indigenous people, especially anthropologists, being the authority on us. I think that’s something that has drastically changed. But I know that there’s still non-Indigenous anthropologists out there, who are our “experts.” That is scary. Also, we have pretend Indians that are becoming the authority, and then they get caught. How much influence do they have on the people they’re teaching? You know, you can go to an academic conference and be the only Indigenous person there still, today. That’s the reality. That’s where I think these people come along and can just say this stuff, because there’s no Indigenous people in the room to challenge them. I’ve been to a conference like that, in Australia in 2014.

Jeff

I went to a Powwow conference in England, at the British Museum, and there were a lot of Powwow dancers there. It was really nice. There were also hobbyists there. There were two groups, and they ended up getting in a fight in the audience. And I thought, can anything be more absurd than what’s going on right now? They were really going at each other, you know. It was pretty weird.

Patrick

One thing I was thinking about—and this goes to what you’re both talking about, perhaps indirectly. Lori, when you’re talking about the gaze and who’s looking, and the choices that you made as the artist... I’m reminded of the ways that representations are changing. The gaze, and who’s looking, and who’s looking at who: your work reminds us that all of that is shifting a great deal, as indeed, it needs to. In our show, there were three other works from that same series upstairs... Originally, they were all going to be on one wall. But in the end, that wasn’t going to work. So, instead, we installed two on one wall and then one diagonally across from them. You had a triangulation happening for the viewer. And there was that sense that, on the one hand, your image, as the subject, wasn’t meeting the gaze of the viewer, and the viewer was implicated in the midst of those looking figures.

Then I was thinking about your works, Jeff, not just in our exhibition, but other works, too. One of the subjects you use that implicates us—as non-Indigenous viewers—at times, are particular toys.

You can look at those toys as historically really problematic, but you use them is another way, including to shift our assumptions around questions of so-called “authenticity.”

I think both of you do that work, by being contemporary artists, and also by giving us the sense that the work is coming out of lived experience. It’s not theoretical, and it’s not about a claim that, “this is what Indigenous people think today.” I see it as being about presenting expressions by living human beings who are Indigenous, who are doing their work. And so the work is complicated.

That was one of the things that I really value in our exhibition. There is a lot of complexity, and probably contradictions, too. And that’s where I think this conversation we’re having—and the publication—is going to be helpful, because the kinds of stories that we’re telling each other are a big part of what the project was meant to be about.

Lori

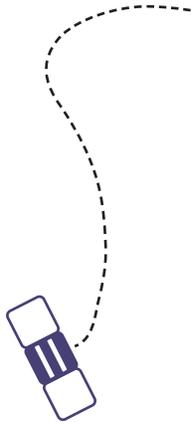
It is theoretical, though. It is. There’s so much theory wrapped in it. It’s being written from an Indigenous point of view a lot more, now, but there is that theory there. And we’re creating theory, also, because we’re unpacking all of this crap that has been put on us—and still today is being put on us because you can still buy those toys, you can still get the plastic Indians from the dollar store. It’s a continuous job. But at the same time, it’s like erasure.

Patrick

I appreciate that interjection, Lori, that corrective, because you’re absolutely right. I think when I said “theory,” I was being a bit disparaging. But the point is, the work you’re doing is theorizing and talking about the idea of what it means to be Indigenous in the world in which we’re living, as well as about the narratives that go along with that, and that often need to be corrected. So yes, it’s a way of doing theory that actually matters, and is unavoidable to the viewer. As viewers, we’re implicated in looking at these images and in trying to understand what they’re asking of us.

Lori

I think Indigenous contemporary artists do that with their audiences because now we have the space to do it. We’re putting the questions out there, and now you’re faced with them. If you’re in the gallery, and you come up against any of the images that are Indigenous within the *GardenShip* show, you’re confronted with a living Indigenous person’s work. You can choose to ignore it, which I imagine some people do, or you can learn how to engage with it, or engage with us. I think that’s where the art world is really shifting. You could see it shifting in the last thirty years in Canada, and even the United States. The amount of emerging artists we have just blows my mind. It makes me so excited. All the Indigenous arts groups that are popping up, collectives, and how much work people are producing. It’s just not something you would even see twenty-five years ago. I remember being an emerging artist and thinking, “Oh my God, where are my fellow emerging artists?” There wasn’t a lot, and it was



getting scary at some points. Then it just exploded with this younger generation. It's a very exciting time for me as an art maker, as an educator, as a curator, and as a programmer, working in the arts for as long as I have.

Jeff

It's a movement for sure. And I think it's part of a movement that's been going on since before Europeans arrived. That's one of the areas that I'm pursuing right now: with what was going on before Europeans arrived and how this continued to influence us throughout the generations. In fact, we're still part of that process today.

With your imagery in the beginning of the show, I was also thinking about how women are looked at in the Indigenous world. My elder was an activist throughout her whole life. I just found out that she had rescued a boy from residential school and raised him. She was a teacher, but not in the residential school. There was this history within her, and I see now how that influenced how I looked at the work I did on residential schools. Also, she was always in her garden, and that's something that's a part of our culture. I think that for most Indigenous areas, the women were in charge of the maintenance of the garden, and were protectors of our future in that sense. The imagery in the Museum atrium for the *GardenShip* exhibition was quite loaded in that. When I was originally looking at the exhibition, I saw you as the introduction, and then I was the end note with the work that I did collaborating with Ron Benner on the garden—*Waiting for the Delegates to*

Arrive—working within the parameters of the Two Row in how we can get along with one another. The work was based on the garden as well. There was a very interesting coming-into thing, and having all this work in that one space, then going out the back and coming to the end. It all worked very effectively in that way.

Lori

I like that. I like being a bookend, or the quotation marks. Thinking of gardens too, Jeff, you bring up residential school. The gardens were a huge part of every residential school, right? All of our past relatives and ancestors worked in those gardens. Even though on the Plains we were more gatherers, gathering is still like gardening. I think that probably for a lot of those children back then, and throughout the history of residential school, the garden was a savior: getting them out of those really constrictive, horribly designed buildings that were stifling, like prisons, and being outside was probably what saved a lot of them.

Patrick

Thanks, Lori. That's very astute and moving. I was thinking about the way in which, as you say, so many Indigenous artists have come forward and are doing amazing things and taking up space. I was thinking about how, Jeff, when you and I first talked about this project, I was so happy that you were willing to be involved. Ultimately (and I don't want to lay this on you too heavily), it seems like your work on this project was a powerful form of leadership: leadership through storytelling, through challenging certain assumptions—even with some of our

“It's a movement for sure. And I think it's part of a movement that's been going on since before Europeans arrived.”



group who were perhaps a bit fearful to enter into the Two Row Treaty, as if they might be unwelcome, or stumble and make a mistake.

I was actually thinking of the notion of leading from behind, which is about making sure nobody has been left out or lost along the way. I don't know if the word "leader" is the best word in this case, but there is a kind of leadership that I think your work, Lori, showed within the exhibition, too. I think that was by intention, that it would be seen as taking a space and making an important claim.

In light of that, for myself as an artist, while I'm definitely interested in having something to say, I'm also learning. I feel like I've learned a lot through this process. I actually think that the project has been about learning for all of us, maybe for some of us more than others. For that to happen, it requires teaching and it requires leadership. That was truly my experience.

Jeff

Well, I just turned sixty-six, so it's now or never.



Lori Blondeau, *Iskwew on Lake Winnipeg*

Afterwords

Patrick Mahon



1. Quiet and Unquiet Work

¹Gal Beckerman, *The Quiet Before: On the Unexpected Origins of Radical Ideas* (New York: Crown, 2022), 271.

“Radical change. . . doesn’t start with yelling. It starts with deliberation, a tempo that increases, a volume set first at a whisper. How else can you begin to picture what doesn’t yet exist?” – Gal Beckerman, *The Quiet Before*¹

In various settings, and earlier in this book, Jeff Thomas and I have discussed our ways of meeting and working toward a common purpose. Such an approach not only requires shared conversation, but also necessitates the efforts and commitments of many others². I cannot imagine a more grounded and rewarding way to proceed as an artist and a curator. Certainly, the rich and complex opportunities to engage with artists, writers, and community leaders involved in the *GardenShip* exhibition, as well as others who responded to the exhibition for this book, have been singular. And recently, it has been extremely heartening to be able to observe and support the *GardenShip* community projects that have been developing over a period of many months following the show.

²In this regard, Jeff Thomas introduced the Two Row Treaty into the *GardenShip and State* project early in our process. The following is an excerpt from a text Jeff wrote for the exhibition: “The 1613 Two Row Treaty was made between my Haudenosaunee ancestors and the Dutch as a template for a peaceful and respectful co-existence. The treaty is a living document and it is one of the pillars in *GardenShip and State*, bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists together. The idea of peaceful co-existence began as a conversation between myself and co-curator, Patrick Mahon, the artists, and writers. Our hope is that visitors will also come away with the same feeling of community, unity, and urgency to protect the world as the creator has given to all human beings.” Wall text for the exhibition, *GardenShip and State*, Museum London, London, ON, October 2021 – January 2022.

It’s helpful here, I think, to acknowledge that the metaphor of gardening was intended to be close to the heart of our work from the outset. At the grant writing stage, we envisaged an unfolding project encouraging initial activities of nurturance, periods of reaping and then harvesting, followed by transplanting. So, our early means of preparing the soil for our work was with an introductory Launch Workshop involving almost all of the project participants in a three-day gathering in London, Ontario in November 2019. It culminated with a public engagement afternoon at Museum London in order to share the project plan, and its future ambitions, and to receive feedback from the community. After that, the artists returned to their respective communities and began to think about their work: both their individual preoccupations and how their work might function in the context of our nascent creative community setting. Exchanges via email and (with the ‘dawn’ of the pandemic) on Zoom enabled the work to be seeded, and allowed for a sense of vitality. Those interactions helped foster a rich context into which Jeff’s introduction of the Two Row treaty as a tool for connecting and creating became possible.

The various workshops, virtual conversations, and periods of intensive art production amongst the twenty of us—and the work of turning it all into an

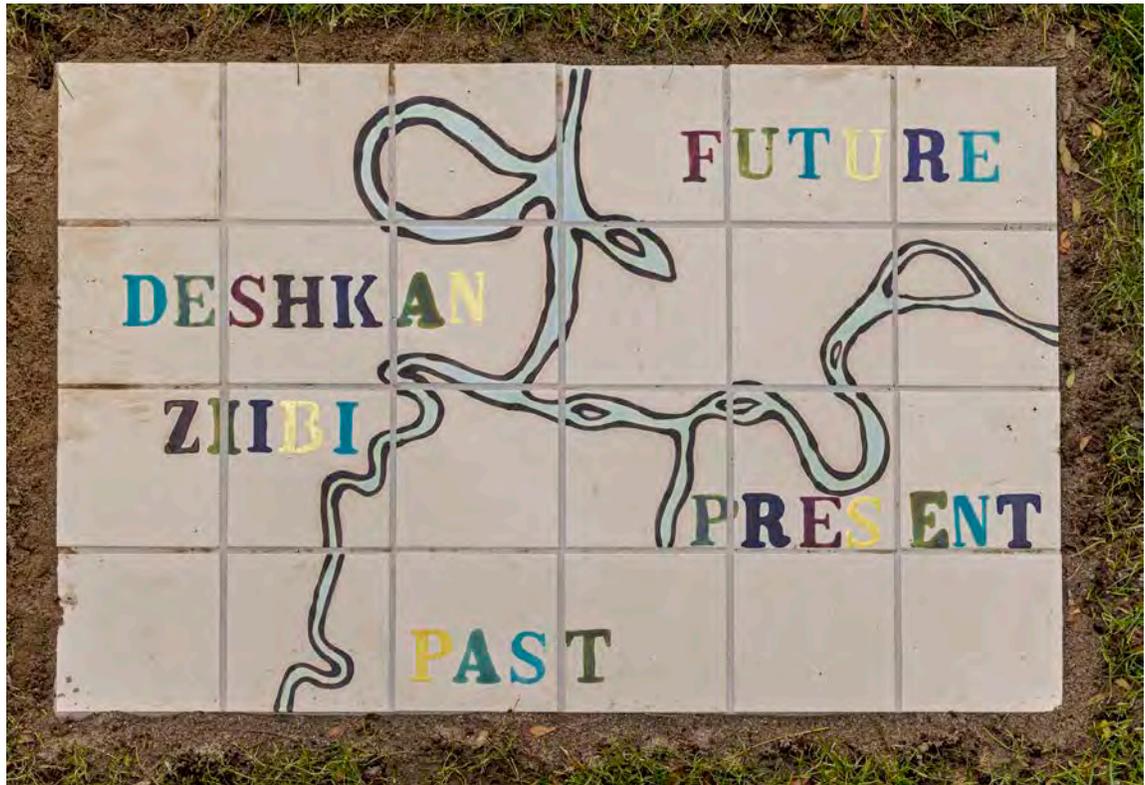
exhibition (and later toward a set of community projects)—was demanding, creatively rewarding, and all-consuming. Yet alongside those frameworks dedicated to productive outcomes, the ‘real’ activities of our lives, of our individual lives, proceeded. From the standpoint of a temporal experience, the unfolding of the *GardenShip and State* exhibition spanned three years. Over that period, with the involvement of upwards of twenty humans and their wider circles, life events in all their myriad wonders and attendant struggles were unavoidably present to us.

Even as pandemic occurrences inflected our work and our exhibition planning, the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 deeply impacted our conversations and our thinking regarding the powerful, shifting ground of activist social and political engagement. And on a level both sweeping and also intimate and personal for so many in our project, the confirmation of the burial sites of children at former residential schools in Canada, which began in May 2021 with announcement of the graves of 215 children at Kamloops, B.C., troubled and moved all of us in significant and profound ways. It continues to do so. Prior to that moment, our project had already been developing a public face. Jeff and I co-curated the online exhibition *Stop Extinction! Restore the Earth* with the Embassy Cultural House team for Earth Day 2021. Embassy Cultural House’s online incarnation was launched by Tariq Hassan Gordon, and by Jamelie Hassan and Ron Benner, who are central to *GardenShip*. Their valuable platform for online expression enabled our group to participate in important and timely discussions.

Just several weeks after those confirmations occurred, the murder of five members of the Afzaal family from London’s Muslim community also shocked and saddened our community. Again, ECH offered a respectful community platform for acknowledging our shared grief and solidarity, including with statements from *GardenShip* members³. And, of course, the war in Ukraine began in Winter 2022, and it continues to deeply trouble and confound us even as I write this. While none of the foregoing struggles and attendant recognitions of the necessity for change could have been part of the ‘brief’ for *GardenShip and State* at its outset, what had been part of our anticipated work was the need to address the realities of our historical and environmental moment. Therefore, the occurrences I’ve just recounted were unavoidably woven within the fabric of our project.

.....
³See the Afzaal Family Tribute hosted by the Embassy Cultural House, <https://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca/afzaal-family-tribute.html>

Close to the ground, our *GardenShip* group experienced both the ordinariness of the everyday, as well as more profound personal realities: together we sometimes mourned, and also celebrated our life experiences, and occasionally just paused to breathe with one another. As artists, writers and thinkers, we each continued to try to make sense of our times. This deeply influenced our project and shed new light on the aspirations, and perhaps even the hubris, of its initial intent in seeking to understand the connections between the environmental crisis and colonization. As such, we sometimes paused to reflect on our motivations—to shine a light on what seems inherently dark, and to imagine possibilities where none might have at first appeared to exist.



Jamelie Hassan, *Map of Deshkan Ziibi*

2. Guiding the Way: Jamelie Hassan's Map of Deshkan Ziibi, and Other Signs

During the period when *GardenShip and State* was presented at Museum London, in Fall and early Winter of 2021, a handmade porcelain tile 'floor' of moderate size was embedded in the lawn directly in front of the Museum entrance. With its bold tracery outline of Deshkan Ziibi (which in English translates into Antler River and is known as the Thames River), and delicately coloured and playfully arranged words, PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE, it acted as a 'grounded' sign to help us locate ourselves, and also as a reminder that real waters flow behind the Museum, not within it⁴. In essence, Jamelie Hassan's *Map of Deshkan Ziibi* is an artwork as index, which is meant to remind us that while art can be a wondrous vehicle, it can rarely capture the real depths and significance of life itself – inasmuch as it ought to beautifully point towards it.

⁴Interestingly, when the building was first built and opened in 1980, it did contain an interior 'pool' amidst the exhibition spaces on the lower level (where Hassan herself exhibited works). Eventually it was filled in owing to the difficulty of having 'open water' within an art gallery, particularly in proximity to art storage vaults.

Within *GardenShip and State* as presented in the Museum, a series of visually arresting tile mosaics by Jamelie Hassan presented viewers with a range of sign-like images meant to orient them culturally, historically and spatially. In contrast, her *Gizzard Shad* (2021) elegantly responded to a photograph of a school of fish that suddenly appeared in Deshkan Ziibi in January 2021—a strange albeit welcome appearance in a world where environmental catastrophe often brings disappearances. Hassan's sparkling image, combining surprising illusionistic veracity with compelling abstraction, is treated in a project featured in this book, which also draws together artist Ron Benner (who captured the photograph on which Hassan's work is partially based) and poet Tom Cull. So, let us turn back to

Jamelie Hassan’s sign-like mosaics, which do such lively work within the exhibition. As I consider those works and their character as guiding markers and signposts, I am reminded that they are metonyms of Jamelie’s capacity for care and guidance to others in her role as a senior artist and activist.

Among the most stirring of Hassan’s tile signs, *SKOLSTREJK FÖR KLIMATET* (2019), *350ppm* (2021), and *350* (2021) stand out with regard to their direct address to the climate crisis. The now internationally familiar Swedish-language cardboard placard made by activist Greta Thunberg, calling for a “school strike for climate,” is here ‘replicated’ in mosaic tiles, taking on a character of gentle permanence that causes it to resonate with increased gravitas. Similarly, the delicate, turquoise circular forms embedded with *350* and *350ppm*⁵ are reminders of the powerful necessity of reaching targets for the well-being of the planet; their physicality and weight argues for the incontrovertibility of their messages.

⁵The mosaics refer to the global movement whose name, *350.org*, is based on the safe level of carbon dioxide, 350 parts per million.

Jamelie’s interest in language, and cultural complexity are represented variously in the exhibition, including through the elegant diptych, entitled *yallah, yallah, my love - (f)&(m)* (2018), which draws on a common Arabic expression of endearment – a way of saying “move it,” or “let’s get going, my love”. In a related vein, *Fibonacci* (2019) and *1.618* (2020) invoke mathematics, specifically the manner in which it ‘travelled’ and was translated across cultures and periods—oftentimes as part of a history of colonization. But perhaps the most charming of Hassan’s mosaic contributions is the Arabic and English plaque, *Internet* (2020), that records a sign the artist observed in Morocco. In the exhibition it ‘points’ in direct fashion toward Mary Mattingly’s *Ecotopian Library* installation-and-reading-room, in essence doing some of the necessary work of guiding us in the world that Hassan’s practice as an artist and activist upholds so beautifully.

3. On Living the Questions

“I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves.... Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”

– Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters To A Young Poet*⁶

⁶Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters To A Young Poet*, translated by M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962; 1954; 1934), 34-35.

These *Afterwords* begin with a brief excerpt from author Gal Beckerman that suggests that true change sometimes arises slowly and quietly. And here is a passage from Rilke’s famous volume where the author insists that the young soldier and poet to whom he writes should pause, and ‘live’ the questions. Both epigraphs seem particularly apt as I reflect on our project and on the making of this book. Indeed, the conversations captured in this volume—the searching with

words and images regarding apparently vast problematics—remind us of the deep necessity to embrace uncertainty as fertile material, and to have great respect for the sometimes amazing wisdom that others can offer us. This was the spirit that the Two Row Treaty lent us as a tool for our work, our talk, and our actions throughout the *GardenShip* project.

I had the privilege to read each of the pieces that our managing editor, Ruth Skinner, and designer, Katie Wilhelm, so carefully attended to as this publication took shape. In many cases, I then wrote short letters to the writers as a form of response and affirmation. The following message sent to Andrew Kear, Museum London’s Senior Curator and Head of Collections, Exhibitions, and Programs, seems worth sharing. His generous and searching text points to the capacity of art to do its work in an *interrogative* fashion. Nonetheless, Andrew’s efforts reminded me of the necessity that we avail ourselves of all sorts of guides and accompanists on the journeys that art inevitably insists on our lives.

July 19, 2022

Dear Andrew,

I’ve been thinking about the work that your writing does in relation to the ‘question’ that is *GardenShip and State*.

As I consider the many other writing contributions to the book that I’ve read to date, I recognize that many run with question—and rightly so, I suppose. For, the large majority of our contributors were invited into the exhibition project at its outset, and therefore, as collaborators, they recognize that their work as artists is not about answering the question, it’s about ruminating on it, struggling with it, and/or discovering that it’s a shared problem and/or opportunity.

In the end, though, I think that someone/something (the museum?) needs to support our struggles with the question(s), so that art is not allowed to merely trouble us, or mystify us, but so that it can enable us by doing its work. (Here I’ll add that I think Jeff’s role in the project, among many, became about helping us with the question, too; and he absolutely did... thanks again and again, Jeff).

Perhaps museums often help us by acknowledging art’s (the question’s) beauty, or newness or gentle familiarity—or maybe with naming the trouble we’re in. Perhaps with greater sensitivity than we often experience in life.

Andrew, I think that, through that act of naming—which your text helps us to do—art helps us to see the problems/the questions as human ones. By this I don’t mean to privilege the human, but to suggest that the questions are within us. Admittedly, that’s very difficult to think about when the problem is the climate crisis. But you’ve done a tremendous job of showing us that while the ‘vehicle’ here is a gardenship, (with the lack of a capital you favour in your text), the real question, or proposal, is: do we hope or despair, or both? Each of us has our own answer within us, or needs to have, as you eloquently point out.

With thanks,

Patrick

Opposite page: Jessica Karuhanga, *Blue as the insides* (detail of video still)





Contributor Biographies

Adrian Stimson

Adrian Stimson is a member of the Siksika Nation and resides in Blackfoot Treaty 7 Territory, Southern Alberta; his work includes paintings, installations, sculpture and performance. Adrian is known for his performance personas, Buffalo Boy and Shaman Exterminator. He exhibits nationally, internationally and was awarded the Blackfoot Visual Arts Award, Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal and the Alberta Centennial Medal, and the Governor General's Award for Visual Arts. Stimson's work is in the collections of the British Museum, Canada Council Art Bank and the McKenzie Art Gallery.

Amelia Fay

Amelia Fay resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Treaty 1 Territory. She is an anthropological archaeologist specializing in the contact-period between Indigenous communities and various European newcomers in what is now Canada from a long-term, historical perspective. Fay received a BA in Anthropology from the University of Manitoba (2004), and an MA (2008) and Doctorate (2016) in archaeology from Memorial University of Newfoundland. She joined the Manitoba Museum in 2013 as Curator of the Hudson's Bay Company Museum Collection and is actively building the collection to broaden the story of the HBC by exploring the relationships between European employees and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis fur traders as they negotiated space, material culture, and their daily activities.

Andrés Villar

Andrés Villar resides in St. Thomas, Ontario, situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. He is an artist, musician, and writer. He is co-editor of *Afro-Latinx Digital Connections* (University of Florida Press, 2021) and co-author of a book about digital activism in Brazil (Vanderbilt University Press, forthcoming).

Andrew Kear

Andrew Kear resides in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. He is Senior Curator and Head of Collections, Exhibitions, and Programs at Museum London, which is located at the forks of Deshkan Ziibi (Antler River), or Thames River. He was formerly Chief Curator and Curator of Canadian Art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Kear has written and curated exhibitions on a wide range of contemporary and historical Canadian artists.

Ashley Snook

Ashley Snook is a settler interdisciplinary artist and researcher, born in North Bay, Ontario on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg peoples and within the lands protected by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850. Snook currently resides in Tkaronto (Toronto). In her practice, Snook examines interconnectivity between human and nonhuman animals, and vegetal/botanical life. Currently, her research and studio work investigate notions of animality. More specifically, her research takes on a historically-informed perspective regarding animality to problematize a spectrum of human-centric, socio-cultural and scientific frameworks. Such frameworks are shown as the hegemonic forces that enabled rampant environmental degradation, racial injustices, and destructive human-animal relationships. The trajectory of her research aims to reconnect a raw sense of intimacy between the human and animal and the surrounding biosphere through drawing, sculpture, and installation. Snook has shown her work nationally, including in exhibitions such as *NODES: Animality and Kinship* at the McIntosh Gallery in 2022 as well as the recent exhibition *GardenShip and State* at Museum London. She has received various awards during her academic studies including, most recently, a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). She has also received the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC) during her MFA at OCAD University in 2015 and 2016. Snook is currently a PhD candidate in the Art and Visual Culture program at Western University and recently exhibited her show *NODES* at the McIntosh Gallery, which represents her culminating work within the program as her graduate thesis exhibition.

Jamelie Hassan

Jamelie Hassan resides in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Attawandaron and Huron-Wendat peoples, and is a visual artist who is also a social justice activist and independent curator. She has organized both national and international programs including *Orientalism and Ephemera*, a national touring exhibition originally presented at Art Metropole in Toronto, and most recently *Dar'a/Full Circle* for Artcite Inc. Windsor, ON. Her work is represented in numerous public collections in Canada and internationally, including Museum London, Western University, the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC; the New Museum, New York City, NY. and the Library of Alexandria, in Alexandria, Egypt. Other recent projects and group exhibitions where her works have been featured include, *Here: Contemporary Canadian Art*, curated by Swapnaa Tamhane, Aga Khan Museum (2017); *Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989*, curated by Wanda Nanibush, Art Gallery of Ontario (2016 – 2017); *In Order to Join: the Political in a Historical Moment*, organized by Museum Abteiberg in Monchengladbach, Germany (2013-14) and Mumbai, India (2015). Recipient of numerous awards, Hassan received the Governor General's Award in Visual Arts in 2001 and an honorary doctorate from OCAD University, Toronto in 2018. With Ron Benner, she is the cofounder and curatorial advisor of the Embassy Cultural House, a community-based, cultural collective and not for profit in London.

Jeff Thomas

Jeff Thomas is an urban-based Iroquois, self-taught photo-based story teller, writer, public speaker, and curator, living in Ottawa, Ontario, and has works in major collections in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Jeff's most recent solo shows were *Birdman Rising*, University of Southern Illinois, *A Necessary Fiction: My Conversation with Edward S. Curtis & George Hunter*, Art Gallery of Mississauga, *The Dancing Grounds*, Wanuskewin Heritage Park (Saskatoon), and *Resistance Is NOT Futile*, Stephen Bulger Gallery (Toronto). Thomas has also been in many group shows, including *The Family Camera*, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; *Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989*, Art Gallery of Ontario; *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*, Markham, Ontario; *SAKAHÂN*, National Gallery of Canada; *UNMASKING: Arthur Renwick, Adrian Stimson, Jeff Thomas*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France.

In 1998, he was awarded the Canada Council's Duke and Duchess of York Award in Photography, Royal Canadian Academy of Art (2008), The Karsh Award in photography (2008), the REVAL Indigenous Art Award (2017), and the Canada Council Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts (2019).

Jessica Karuhanga

Jessica Karuhanga is an African-Canadian artist who works through writing, video, drawing and performance. She was born in Ottawa, located on unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin Territory. She currently resides in London, Ontario, where she is Assistant Professor in Studio Arts at Western University. Karuhanga has presented her work at The Bentway, Toronto (2019), Nuit Blanche, Toronto (2018), Onsite Gallery at OCAD, Toronto (2018), Museum London, London (2018), Goldsmiths, London, UK (2017) and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016). Her writing has been published by *C Magazine*, Susan Hobbs Gallery and Fonderie Darling. She has been featured in *i-D*, *DAZED*, *Visual Aids*, *Border Crossings*, *Toronto Star*, CBC Arts, *filthy dreams*, *Globe and Mail* and *Canadian Art*. She earned her BFA from Western University and her MFA from University of Victoria.

Joan Greer

Joan Greer resides in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta), in Treaty 6 territory. Her PhD is from Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam; she is a Professor at the University of Alberta, where she teaches the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture. Her research engages with issues of artistic identity, landscape art, the history of environmentalism, and theories of nature and ecological envisioning, both historically (most particularly in the long nineteenth century) and in contemporary art and design, with a special interest in The Netherlands and Belgium. Her ongoing major research project is entitled "Visualizations of Nature in Nineteenth-Century Dutch Print Culture: Religion, Science, Art". Greer is a member of three national and international collaborative research-creation projects; a founding member of the University of Alberta Faculty of Arts/ALES Environmental Studies (ES) Programme; an ongoing member of the U of A Science and Technology in Society (STS), and Religious Studies (RS) interdisciplinary programmes; and a member of the leadership team in the U of A Faculty of Arts Mediating Science and Technology Signature Area.

Joanna Kerr

Joanna Kerr is a librarian with the London Public Library. She was born in Tkaronto (Toronto) but grew up in Ottawa, located on unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin Territory. Kerr moved to London, Ontario in 2010 to attend Western University for her Master of Library and Information Science degree. She's been in London ever since.

Katie Wilhelm

Katie Wilhelm resides in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. She is an award-winning designer and marketing consultant. She utilizes art and design to connect the community, revitalize spaces, and create knowledge-sharing opportunities. Wilhelm is a proud member of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation at Neyaashiinigmiing with Canadian settler heritage. A champion for all Indigenous Peoples, Wilhelm continuously looks to inspire others to create a colourful future for Turtle Island.

Lori Blondeau

Lori Blondeau is Cree/Saulteaux/Metis working as an interdisciplinary artist in performance/ photography/installation. Her late mother Leona Blondeau was raised on the George Gordon First Nation and late father Maurice Blondeau was raised in Lebret, SK, both located in Treaty 4 territory. Blondeau is an Assistant Professor at the University of Manitoba in the School of Art. She holds an MFA from the University of Saskatchewan, winning the Humanities & Fine Arts Thesis Award. In addition to her extensive exhibition history, Blondeau has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally including the Banff Centre; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; Open Space, Victoria; FOFA, Montreal. In 2007, Blondeau was part of the Requickening project with artist Shelly Niro at the Venice Biennale. In 2021, Blondeau was the recipient of the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

Mark Kasumovic

Mark Kasumovic is a Canadian artist and researcher, born in Hamilton, Ontario, situated on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. He currently lives and works in the UK. His work revolves around the inherent truth value of the photograph and the many limitations within the medium. His most recent projects have investigated the relationship between technology and knowledge production within the context of scientific research.

Kasumovic has received grants and honours from the Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, Culture Nova Scotia, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. He has exhibited his work internationally at venues such as the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Halifax), Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires), Museum London, Bad Spirits Gallery (Newcastle) and the Harbourfront Centre (Toronto).

Mary Mattingly

Mary Mattingly is an interdisciplinary artist living in Brooklyn, New York, which occupies the unceded homeland of the Lenape people. Mattingly co-creates sculptural ecosystems that address forms of public food and commons. She launched *Swale*, a free public food forest on a barge in New York City. In 2020 she organized *Public Water* with +More Art, a project that comprised a history of New York's Drinking Watershed. In 2021, Mattingly built an experiential water clock called *Limnal Lacrimosa* in a former factory in Montana.

Mattingly's artwork has also been exhibited at the Istanbul Biennale, the Havana Biennial, Storm King, the International Center of Photography, the Seoul Art Center, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Public Library, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, the Palais de Tokyo, and the Parrish Museum as part of Radical Seafaring curated by Andrea Grover. With the U.S. Department of State and Bronx Museum of the Arts she participated in the smARTpower project, traveling to Manila. Mattingly has been awarded grants and fellowships from the James L. Knight Foundation, Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology, Yale University School of Art, the Harpo Foundation, NYFA, the Jerome Foundation, and the Art Matters Foundation.

Michael Farnan

Michael Farnan is a multidisciplinary artist and educator, living and working in Victoria Harbour, ON. Victoria Harbour is located on Georgian Bay, traditional and Treaty territory of the Anishinaabeg, now known as the Chippewa Tri-Council comprised of Beausoleil First Nation, Rama First Nation, and the Georgina Island First Nation. This region of Georgian Bay was also the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and is the homeland of the historic Georgian Bay Métis community, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Farnan's work addresses settler-based decolonizing strategies centred on disrupting and unsettling Canada's history of colonialism and dominant Eurocentric ideologies of place and space.

Farnan's exhibitions, videos, and performances have been shown throughout Canada, with presentations at PAVED Arts, Saskatoon; Doris McCarthy Gallery, Scarborough; and Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon. Recent exhibitions include his participation in the group show *Gardenship and State* at Museum London, and solo exhibition *Canoe Fight: From Reverence to Redress*, at the MacLaren Art Centre. His work has been supported by the Canada Council of the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Farnan holds a Studio-based Ph.D. in Art and Visual Culture from Western University.

Michelle Wilson

Michelle Wilson is an artist and mother currently residing as an uninvited guest on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations in London, Ontario. She was born in Calgary, Alberta, or Wīchīspa Oyade, the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyāxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3). In the Euro-American archive, the bodies of other animals are used to convey colonial knowledge systems. Their stories of survival are used to perpetuate myths of "settler saviours." As a feminist of settler descent working in colonial institutions, this is the legacy that Wilson has inherited and is confronting. She successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation, *Remnants, Outlaws, and Wallows: Practices for Understanding Bison* in May 2022 at the University of Western Ontario. She is currently a postdoctoral scholar with the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership at the University of Guelph.

Nandi Bhatia

Nandi Bhatia is a Professor in the Department of English and Writing Studies at the University of Western Ontario (UWO), in London, Canada, and on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. Dr. Bhatia is currently the Associate Dean of Research in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Her research interests include colonial and postcolonial literature and theory, British India, the 1947 Partition of India, diasporic literatures, and theatre. She is the author of *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theater and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (University of Michigan Press and OUP, 2004), and *Performing Women/Performing Womanhood: Theatre, Politics and Dissent in North India* (OUP, 2010).

She has co-edited 2 volumes of essays (with Anjali Gera-Roy) titled *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement* (Pearson-Longman, 2008) and *Regional Perspectives on India's Partition: Shifting the Vantage Points*. (Routledge, forthcoming, 2022) and has a forthcoming monograph on women's stories about India's Partition, to be published by Routledge. For her research, she was awarded the John Charles Polanyi Prize for Literature and was named UWO Faculty Scholar. Dr. Bhatia was born in Bareilly, India and currently resides in London.

Nina Zitani

Dr. Nina Zitani resides in London, Ontario, Canada (on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations). She teaches at Western University and is curator of the Zoological Collections in the Department of Biology. Nina is an accomplished field research biologist with a passion for teaching people of all ages and backgrounds about the wonders of the living parts of the natural world. Her published research includes discovering and naming 15 new insect species of Costa Rica; scientists have named nine new insect species in her honor. Recent research has focused on the ecology of the Onychophora (velvet worms) of the cloud forests of Ecuador. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, she uses her extraordinary creativity and photography to enrich her lectures on evolutionary biology, biodiversity and conservation science. For nearly 30 years she has been a science educator in the classroom and in the field. Her engaging natural history lessons on topics ranging from pollination to the ecology of native plants and food webs, to the evolution of birds, insects and arachnids incorporate stories and imagery from her many field experiences in Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica, North America, and her travels around the world.

Patrick Mahon

Patrick Mahon was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Treaty 1 Territory). He is an artist, a writer/curator, and a Professor of Visual Arts at Western University (UWO) in London, Canada, situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. He is a Distinguished University Professor at Western, and a member of the Royal Society of Canada. Mahon's artwork has been exhibited widely in Canada and internationally.

Recent solo and group exhibitions include: *Patrick Mahon: Messengers' Forum*, Thames Art Gallery Chatham, ON (2020-21); *Written on the Earth*, curated by Helen Gregory, McIntosh Gallery, London, ON, (group exhibition, 2021). The SSHRC-funded project, *Art and Cold Cash*, which involved Mahon and artists from southern Canada and Baker Lake, Nunavut, was produced and exhibited between 2004 and 2010 (MOCCA, Toronto; McLaren Arts Centre, Barrie; Platform, Winnipeg; Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina), and a book was published by YYZ in 2010. A collaborative SSHRC-funded initiative led by Mahon, *Immersion Emergencies and Possible Worlds*, resulted in a ten-artist group exhibition, *The Source: Rethinking Water through Contemporary Art*, presented at Rodman Hall, Brock University, Canada, in 2014, with a second iteration, *The Living River Project*, at the Art Gallery of Windsor in 2019. Among Mahon's curatorial projects are the exhibitions Gu Xiong and Xu Bing: *Here is what I mean*, (2004, Museum London and Doris McCarthy Gallery, Toronto); *Hinterlands: Fastwurms, Glabush, Thornycroft, Urban*, (2008-09, McIntosh Gallery, Western, and Harbourfront Centre, Toronto); and *Barroco Nova*, with Susan Edelstein (2012, Museum London, McIntosh Gallery, and ArtLab at UWO). Mahon's work is held in numerous private, corporate, and museum collections.

Paul Chartrand

Paul Chartrand was born in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. He currently resides in Dunnville, Ontario, which is situated within Haldimand Treaty territories. Chartrand engages with environmental issues through the construction of sculptural life support apparatuses populated with *living* plants. He repurposes objects and cultural signifiers like language to act as habitats and conceptual support systems. Doing this subverts and re-contextualizes them as players in functioning ecosystems. Currently he is focused on living text installations, hydroponic assemblages and interdisciplinary drawing practices. The plants and other natural elements that Chartrand involves all have agency of their own—manifested through their power to change the appearance and effect of the work. Often the projects are dispersed through viewer participation that includes planting, conserving, reading and physical consumption. By working with plants, it is Chartrand's intention to meaningfully engage with their agency as well as their relationships with humans' past, present and future.

Quinn Smallboy

Quinn Smallboy completed his MFA at Western University and in 2004 received a diploma in multimedia and production design from Fanshawe College. Currently his artistic practice investigates what it means to be a "contemporary Indigenous artist" – specifically, he questions how customary symbols and icons of Indigenous culture translate into painting, sculpture, and installation. His work resides in several public and private art collections, and his exhibition experience includes public and private art galleries, and museums including McIntosh Gallery, Woodland Cultural Centre, and DNA Art Gallery. Smallboy was born in Moose Factory, Ontario and is a member of the Moose Cree First Nation. He currently resides in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations.

Richard Fung

Richard Fung was born in Trinidad and lives in Tkaronoto (Toronto). His award-winning videos have been widely exhibited and collected in Canada and internationally. His essays have been published in numerous journals and anthologies, and he is the co-author with Monika Kin Gagnon of *13: Conversations on Art and Cultural Race Politics*. He is Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Art at OCAD University.

Ron Benner

Ron Benner is an internationally recognized, German-Canadian artist whose longstanding practice investigates the history and political economy of food cultures. Benner originally studied agriculture engineering at the University of Guelph 1969/70. Finding himself ethically opposed to industrial agriculture and bioengineering, he began to travel and research the politics of food. Benner's mixed media installation works, including commissions of photographic-garden installations, have been shown in solo and group exhibitions at Museum London, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University, and many other galleries, museums and cultural institutions in Canada and internationally. His work is included in numerous public collections both in Canada and internationally, including the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario. He has recently been appointed artist in residence in the Department of Environmental Science at the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, 2020-2021. Benner resides in London, Ontario, on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations.

Sean Caulfield

Sean Caulfield was named a Canada Research Chair in Fine Arts (Tier 2) from 2001 – 2011, Centennial Professor from 2011 – 2021, and is currently a Professor in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta, living and working in Treaty 6 territory, amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta), Canada. He has exhibited his prints, drawings, installations and artist's books extensively throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, and Japan. Recent exhibitions include: *Found Anatomies*, Peter Robertson Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (2022); *The Flood*, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (2016); *The Body in Question(s)*, UQAM Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (2012); *Perceptions of Promise*, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, USA/Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta (2011).

Caulfield has received numerous grants and awards for his work including: The Special Award of the Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Krakow Triennial, 2015; SSHRC Dissemination Grant; Canadian Stem Cell Network Impact Grant; SSHRC Fine Arts Creation Grant; Canada Council Travel Grant; and a Visual Arts Fellowship, Illinois Arts Council, Illinois, USA. Caulfield's work is in various public and private collections including: Houghton Library, Harvard University, USA; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England; Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, USA. In 2017 Caulfield was elected to the Arts Division of the Academy of the Arts and Humanities of the Royal Society of Canada.

Sharmistha Kar

Sharmistha Kar is an artist from Kolkata, West Bengal, India and currently resides in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal). She is pursuing her MA in Art Education at Concordia University. She did her MFA from Western University, focusing on hand embroidery. Kar's early education began in West Bengal and higher education in Fine arts at the University of Hyderabad. She was at Space studio, returning to Hyderabad in 2012 to join IIIT as a lecturer. She was awarded with the Charles Wallace India Trust Award (2013), Dean's and Chair's Entrance Scholarships at Western University (2016), and the Graduate Thesis Research Award at Western University (2018). She has exhibited in India, UK, the USA, Finland, and in Canada.

The exquisitely complex work of Kar employs traditional and contemporary adaptations of embroidery to explore mapping, migration and identity. Using fabric from thrift stores, she addresses her interest in including the touch of local people within her projects. A sense of temporary presence became an important thought for her due to personal travel experiences, and the *tent* therefore became a key image for her, as well as an architectural form. Employing the geometric form of a parallelogram to represent the roof of the tent was vital for Kar, in different compositions on paper and on tarpaulins. She is interested in exploring how the anthropology of individual embroidery styles can be utilized as ethnographic research. She likes to explore how embroidery can play a vital role in the creative process of further reflecting on the concept of cultural translation.

Tom Cull

Tom Cull was born and raised in Huron County, Ontario in Treaty 29 territory. He currently resides in London, Ontario, on the banks of Deshkan Ziiibi, which flows through the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Attawandaron and Huron-Wendat peoples. He works at the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, teaches creative writing at Western University, and was the Poet Laureate for the City of London from 2016-2018. Cull is the author of two poetry collections: *Bad Animals*, (Insomnia Press, 2018) and *Kill Your Starlings* (Gaspereau Press, 2023). He is also the author of two chapbooks: *What the Badger Said* (Baseline Press) and *Keep Your Distance*, which he co-wrote with his dear friend, Kerry Manders (Collusion Books). His work has appeared in several journals and anthologies, including *This Magazine*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *The Rusty Toque*, *Long Con Magazine*, *The Windsor Review*, *The New Quarterly*, and *Undocumented: Great Lakes Poet Laureates on Social Justice* (Michigan State UP). Cull is the director of Antler River Rally (ARR), a grass roots environmental group he co-founded in 2012 with his partner Miriam Love. ARR works to protect and restore Deshkan Ziiibi (Antler River). Cull is also an editor for *Watch Your Head*, an anthology of creative works devoted to climate justice.

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