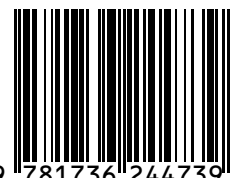
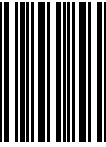


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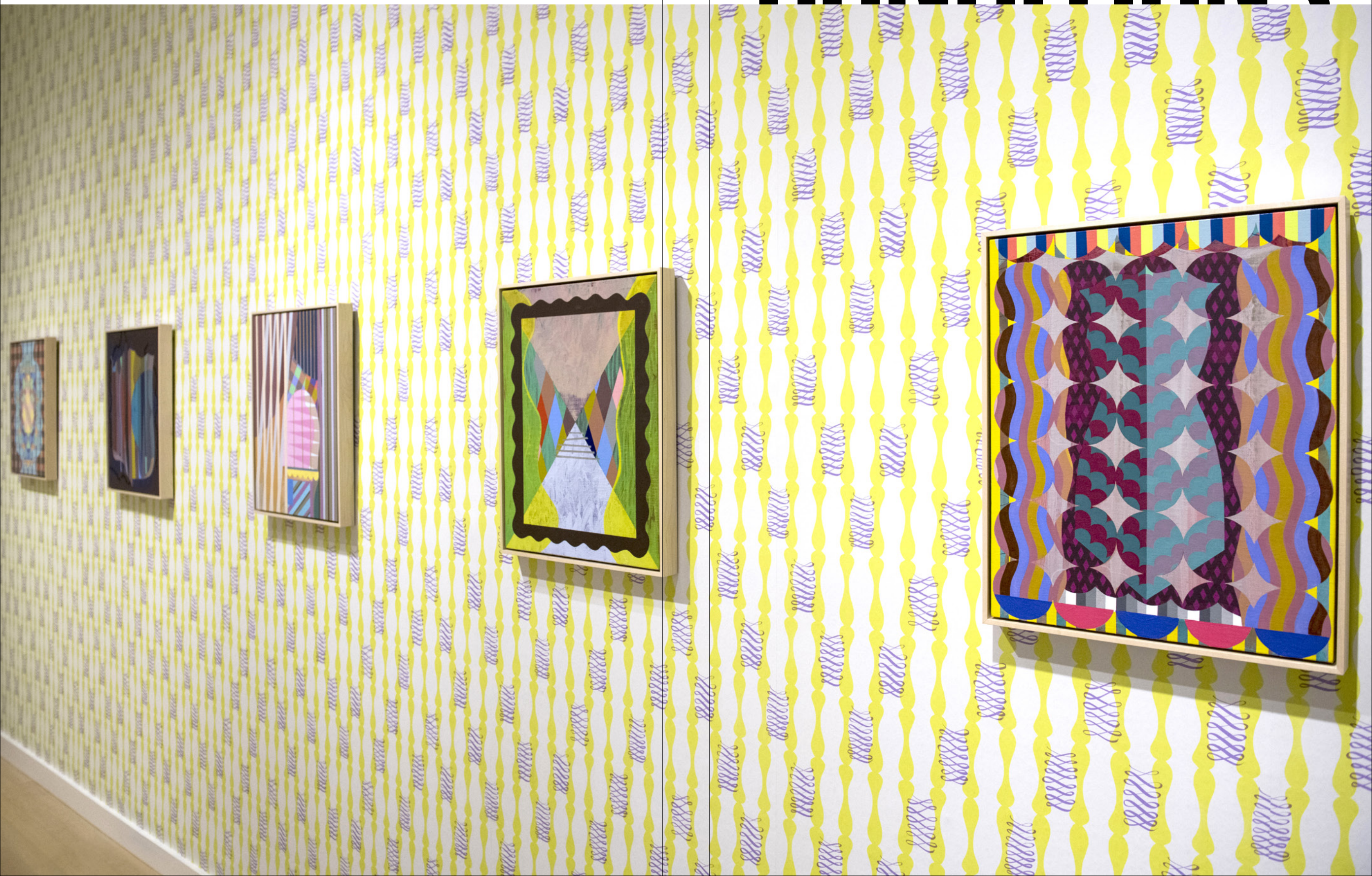
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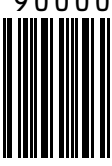
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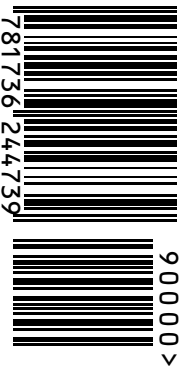
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The Ford Family Foundation, University of Oregon Center for Art Research, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College, and the Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University are located on the traditional homelands of Indigenous people. Since the arrival of European explorers, the Indigenous people of Oregon have repeatedly been dispossessed of their land by settler colonialism, including the United States government and their policies to forcibly remove the Indigenous populations to reservations in Oregon and around the country. Today, the descendants of Oregon's first people continue to make important contributions to communities, institutions, the state of Oregon, the United States, and to the world.

In acknowledging the original people of the land we occupy, we extend our respect to the Indigenous people of Oregon and all other displaced Indigenous people who call Oregon home. With this publication and our collective activity, Critical Conversations recognizes Oregon's first people as the past, present, and future stewards of this land, and we pledge our commitment to make ongoing efforts to center Indigenous existence and related knowledge, creativity, resilience, and resistance in the work we do.

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VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM



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The Ford Family Foundation's Visual Arts Program honors Mrs. Hallie Ford, the Foundation's late co-founder, whose lifelong interest in the arts inspired her to support Oregon's established visual artists to actively pursue their work. One element of the program is Critical Conversations, a collaboration between the Foundation and the University of Oregon, along with three academic partners—the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery; Reed College; the Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University; and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University.

Critical Conversations encourages exchange and inquiry. The partners above facilitate a year-round calendar of studio visits for Oregon artists by prominent visiting curators and arts writers who present public lectures and other forms of engagement in our community. Recognizing the nexus between artists and those who research, reflect upon, and present their work, Critical Conversations also sponsors a series of convenings that specifically engage Oregon's curators and arts writers with currents in the field.

The title and concept for *CONDITIONS* came into focus as the editorial team launched its first issue, *FIGURING*. Here, we shift from *FIGURING*'s multiple perspectives on the body and the psyche to examine the cultural and biological mysteries and actualities of life at this tenuous environmental and socio-political moment. As our need for breath and sustenance are foregrounded across an accounting of our shared lives, we hope that *CONDITIONS* offers a space to meditate on the ways in which works of art (including writing) support us in making meaning from our state of, and provisions for, being.

In an effort to awaken new insights from the visions, projects, and persons that make up the arts communities in this state, Critical

Conversations once again dispatched two commissioning editors to enlist authors to tune their curiosity antennae toward a subject. Returning to this role for a fourth year is Stephanie Snyder, the John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director of The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College, whose past editorial works, along with those of Sue Taylor, Professor Emerita of Art History at Portland State University, were published online by the Visual Arts Ecology Project in cooperation with the Oregon Arts Commission. This year Snyder was joined by a new commissioning editor, Mack McFarland, a cultural producer, educator, and Executive Director for Converge45.

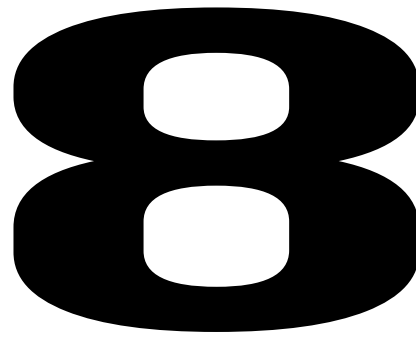
In addition to these new texts, the editorial board reviewed texts previously commissioned by the Foundation and by Oregon ArtsWatch. Fourteen works in total were gathered for *CONDITIONS*. Perhaps shy of full clarity, together they aid in sharpening the picture of our nesting in the same temporality; that is, within a shared resolution of time and being.

In an effort to find our footing in the river of the moment, we gathered words surrounding us, forming stepping stones, aiding our way toward publishing this volume and building our resolve for the next. We came to this list by passing words back and forth, absorbing the present, ruminating on the recent past, and hypothesizing what may come. While by no means a catalogue raisonné, the ensuing pages offer more of a functional précis.

Temper / Invisibility / Land / Encoded / Lack / Immemorial /
Suffering / Dissociated / Abundance / Alternative Facts / Access /
Migration / Reclamation / Valuation / Accelerated / Projection /
Fetish / Mutual-aid / Historicity / Revision / Post-Linearity /
Hesitancy / Disoriented / Volatile / Collapse

Critical Conversations Editorial Board

Meagan Atiyeh
Brian Gillis
Mack McFarland
Maryanna G. Ramirez
Stephanie Snyder



A bibliography is a list of sources referred to in a scholarly work, typically included at the end of a publication. A bibliography's content is foundational to the text it relates to as it informs research and writing processes and is referenced after it is published, essentially serving as the conditions from which the text emanates. To extend this publication's exploration of "conditions," we've positioned the bibliography in front of the text as a bridge between the Table of Contents and the content itself in order to offer access to some of the text's working conditions.

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Retelling Stories:
Sarah Farahat's *Palestine
Then and Now* and
Towards the Setting Sun

— Amelia Rina

14

“Do we have any better way to organize such wildly disparate experiences as a half-remembered crocodile, a dead great-aunt, the smell of coffee, a scream from Iran, a bumpy landing, and a hotel room in Cincinnati, than a narrative?—an immensely flexible technology, or life strategy, which if used with skill and resourcefulness presents each of us with the most fascinating of all serials, *The Story of My Life*.”
—Ursula K. Le Guin¹

In 1878, nine women stood in a river near Lawrence, Kansas. In 1961, Sarah Farahat's grandfather took photographs of life in Ramallah, Palestine. Nearly fifty years later, Farahat retraced her grandfather's steps and photographed the same locations. In November of this year, I visited Farahat's studio in Portland, OR, to hear her stories.

I've been thinking about storytelling a lot recently. Who gets to tell stories, who gets to hear the stories, which ones do we remember, who are the main characters, and why? Ursula K. Le Guin has been a sort of guiding light for me in this line of questioning—a journey to uncover narratives other than what she describes as “the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero.” Like Le Guin, I think we deserve something more nuanced, meandering, sticky, and true.² If yet another man—either underdog or demigod—goes on a journey, overcomes a challenge, conquers a foe, gets the girl, and enters the annals of heroic history, what can we learn? What's the difference between Theseus, Luke Skywalker, Indiana Jones, or Harry Potter? Not a lot. Instead of these neat and tidy stories (which, admittedly, can contain a lot of exciting events), I want to know about the peripheral characters, the ones mentioned in passing or not even mentioned at all.

Amelia Rina

In Sarah Farahat's two projects, *Palestine Then and Now* (2009) and *Towards the Setting Sun* (2016–ongoing), she gives us a view into four vastly different worlds. Her stories transport us through nearly 150 years, over 7,000 miles, and don't necessarily have protagonists. Instead, the stories tell us about the specifics of place and time, and how certain people moved through those worlds—some freely, others not.

Despite being made almost a decade apart, and without any intentional connections by Farahat, *Palestine Then and Now* and *Towards the Setting Sun* illustrate the artist's decades-long interest in place, identity, and the many political factors that complicate each person's life story. We'll start at the beginning. Farahat's grandparents moved to Ramallah in 1961, where her grandfather worked as a theologian and archeologist studying the recently-discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, and her grandmother worked as an English teacher. Farahat traveled to Palestine in 2009 and attempted to find the locations her grandfather photographed decades prior: Al-Manara Square, which is still a nexus in Ramallah; the exercise yard at the Friends Boys School; and the living room in her grandparent's old house, for example. During a second trip to Palestine, Farahat was abruptly and inexplicably deported by the Israeli Defense Forces, barring her from reentering the region and making it impossible to complete the project.

Palestine Then and Now consists of diptychs—Farahat's grandfather's and her own—that tell a story of presence and absence. Each of her grandfather's images are full of people, whether it's a crowded square, a grid of boys with arms outstretched on a blacktop, or smiling family in a holiday living room. In Farahat's images, these spaces are sparsely populated, if not totally deserted. The schoolyard and Al-Manara Square have a few people moving through them, but nothing compared to the photographs taken in 1961. Farahat's grandparents were living in a Palestine-controlled city, before the so-called Six-Day War in 1967, resulting in over 300,000 Palestinians fleeing or being expelled from their homes. 1967 marked a major expansion of Israel, occupying the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and most of the Syrian Golan Heights—tripling the territory under Israel's control. Today, with only fifteen³ percent of the country's original historic land controlled by Palestinians, the emptiness in the photographs reflects a region plagued by forced exile.⁴ When trying to document an absent person or thing, you have to treat it like gravity. We can't see gravity in the same way we see opaque objects that light bounces off of, but we can document its effects. Farahat's photographs document the gravitational pull of a decades-long, violent, and devastating occupation.

The multimedia installation *Towards the Setting Sun* employs a similar tactic of identifying absences and presence to tell the story of colonialist expansion and occupation, this time in the US. First presented as her MFA thesis at California College of the Arts, *Towards the Setting Sun* combines photography, collaborative sculpture, sound, and text. At the center, there are two photographs. One, taken in 1878, shows nine women shin-deep in slow-moving water, heavy skirts hiked up to keep them dry. Two of the women stand on the river's rocky edge, and one of them points a rifle out of the frame. The other image, taken in 2016, captures Farahat standing in the Yuba River in eastern Sacramento Valley, California, heavy skirt hiked up to keep it dry, eyes directed straight into the camera's lens.

Farahat told me that when she first came across the nineteenth-century photograph, she was immediately captivated by its strangeness. Who were these white women in some Kansas river, charged with agency



Sarah Farahat, *Self-Portrait, Yuba River, Yuba Goldfields, California, Nisenan Land*, 2015. Archival pigment print, 44×66 in. (Photo: Kristine Eudey)

and independence, during a time when women had far less than today? What is that one woman doing—the one walking across the frame, her face blurred by her movement, with a long, thin stick in her hand, prodding the water? That stick threw Farahat down a rabbit hole of water divination and other explanations for the woman’s actions, rendered inexplicable by their petrification. Speaking across more than a century, that woman asked Farahat: Where do we go now?

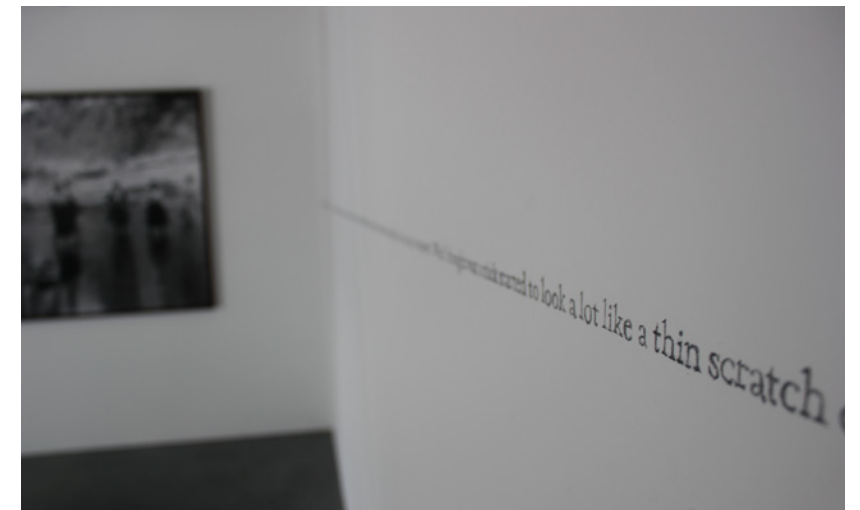
She answered with a short fantasy installed as a wall text in *Towards the Setting Sun*:

I followed her, wading carefully. The water was cold but not unpleasant. Her eyes were closed, as if in a trance. Holding a long willow stick, she swayed this way and that, pulled by a force that seemed not quite her own.

I wondered if she could do it, if she could find the way. It felt so hazy, as if what I knew to be true one day would almost surely be upset the next. I stumbled, jamming my toe on a rock. The water was deeper now and gravity seemed to loosen its grip.

As the water reached my belly, she became more transparent. What I thought was a stick started to look a lot like a thin scratch on a negative. Shivering, I reached out to her shoulder for support but found only filmy grasses that slipped gently out of my hand.

The story connects the nineteenth century photograph to its sister on the opposing wall: a black and white image of Farahat standing alone in the Yuba River.



James Boucher Shane, *Group of women in creek with woman pointing rifle*, approximately 1870–1923. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy Shane-Thompson Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas

Sarah Farahat, Installation view showing *Diviner*, 2016. Graphite on wall; and James Boucher Shane, *Group of women in creek with woman pointing rifle*, approximately 1870–1923. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy Shane-Thompson Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. Sarah Farahat use: *Kansas River, Lawrence, Kansas, Kansas Land*, 1878.



Sarah Farahat, *Al-Manara Square, Ramallah*, 2009.
Archival pigment print,
10½x7in.



Sarah Farahat, *Friends Boys School, Ramallah*, 2009.
Archival pigment print,
10½x7in.

Conditions

Amelia Rina



David Wieand, *Al-Manara Square, Ramallah*, 1962.
Archival pigment print,
10½x7in.



David Wieand, *Friends Boys School, Ramallah*, 1962.
Archival pigment print,
10½x7in.



Sarah Farahat, *Swift House, Ramallah*, 2009. Archival pigment print, 10½×7in.

Attuned to deeper narrative currents and broader sociocultural significance, Farahat navigated her photographic fascination toward an investigation of western colonial expansion. In

the 1800s, Kansas was a hub for settlers moving West. The .44 caliber rifle one of the women is holding had just been invented, along with barbed wire. By the end of the century, the Gold Rush had already hit California so hard that thousands of acres of land had been destroyed by mining operations. Farahat chose the location for her self-portrait because of its environmental significance; in 1893, the river had to be dredged to mitigate environmental disaster caused by overmining. Of course, the environment wasn't the only one to suffer from US colonialism. Farahat collaboratively expands *Towards the Setting Sun* by including contributions from Charlene Sul and Tomahawk GreyEyes as a way to challenge the siloed nature of solo exhibitions and the lack of collaboration in graduate programs.⁵ GreyEyes, an artist from the Navajo Nation, and Farahat were in the same cohort at CCA. Farahat included a Diné medicine wheel offering to the spring equinox made by GreyEyes as a gesture toward land sharing and inter-tribal solidarity. Charlene Eigen-Vasquez, a local Ohlone tribal elder, talks about the importance of place and healing in an excerpt from an interview conducted by the Earth Medicine Alliance in 2011. The two additions allowed the project to look beyond itself and consider both the broader and hyperlocal implications of the ideas addressed in *Towards the Setting Sun*.⁶

“Why is place so important?” asks Sul in the audio recording. “Place is so important because if you believe that everything is living, then



David Wieand, *Swift House, Ramallah*, 1961. Archival pigment print, 10½×7in.

you have respect for your surroundings just like you would any person.” You can't think of a place, a stream, a forest, or prairie as a being with the right to thrive, and then credulously destroy it. Just like you can't hurt your loved ones without at least a bit of internal turmoil. So why is it so easy to disregard (I don't want to use the word dehumanize here, because forests and rivers shouldn't need to be humanized to be respected) place? If Farahat's stories have a moral, it's that we should pay close attention to the places we're in, where we've been, and where we're going. We should pay attention to which characters—human and nonhuman animals as well as earthly entities—are missing or overstaying their welcome. Farahat describes *Towards the Setting Sun* as an ongoing project, but not in the sense that the original photographs and texts will be exhibited again. Instead, Farahat continues to pursue the project's themes and inquires through her activist and artistic work via organizations like the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative and her project Land Back Land Forward Partnership, a website working to connect landowners with Indigenous communities to facilitate land access or transferring of property rights.^{7,8} Through *Palestine Then and Now*, *Towards the Setting Sun*, and all her work, Farahat shows us how to build relationship with a place. In each action, she asks herself and others: where do we go from here? “Building a relationship is the foundation of understanding an area,” says Sul, “and the deeper the understanding of and the relationship with a particular area is, within a person, the easier it is to try to figure out what to do next.”



- 1 Ursula K. Le Guin, "Some Thoughts on Narrative," in *Dancing at the End of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989)
- 2 Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the End of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989)
- 3 "Israel's borders explained in maps," BBC, September 16, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54116567>
- 4 Mohammed Haddad, "Mapping Israeli Occupation," Al-Jazeera, May 18, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/mapping-israeli-occupation-gaza-palestine>
- 5 <https://www.tomahawkgreyeyes.com/>
- 6 Earth Medicine Alliance, "Importance of Place; Working with Spirits of Place; Advice for the Younger Generations," August 23, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9lreuQ1IVo>
- 7 <https://www.justseeds.org>
- 8 <https://www.landbacklandforward.com>

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Sarah Farahat, *Day of Rage*, 2020. Digital downloadable graphic, 8½×11 in., justseeds.org

Conditions

Amelia Rina



Sarah Farahat, *Land Day* 2021. Digital downloadable graphic, 16×16 in., <https://justseeds.org/>

Sarah Farahat, *Everybody's Got a Right to Live*, 2020. Screen print two colors on Speckleton White French paper unsigned open edition, 12½×18 in.

Hard to Describe: Alt Text and Artworks

Laura Hughes




Where it started: Sometime in 2018, about twenty minutes before teaching my Introduction to Drawing class, I found myself facing a page on the course website containing twenty images with little red dials in the bottom corners. The red dials indicated that the images were missing “alt text”—descriptions that replace images when a person is using a screen reader. These particular images exemplified qualities of line and composition; they included drawings by David Hockney, Toba Khedoori, as well as student work. As I began to add alt text to the images, I found that the field for entering the alt text limited me to 125 characters. (There are almost 200 characters in the first sentence of this paragraph!) Beyond the enforced brevity, I felt an immense responsibility to the reader, and to the artwork itself, to write effective descriptions. As someone educated to be suspicious of claims to objectivity, I spend a significant amount of time *not* telling students what to see in works of art so that they build trust in their own vision. So how could I justify describing anything in 125 characters? How could I begin to describe the particular kind of sensitivity, or energy, or ferocity observable in any one drawing (or line!) so to inspire a sense of possibility in someone else tasked with making a drawing?

How it’s going: To try and understand how to write effective image descriptions, I dug into any guidelines or writing I could find on the topic. Notably, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and New York’s Cooper Hewitt museum are leading the way with the most thorough guidelines for alt text readily available online.¹ I’ve also had conversations with numerous web accessibility experts from institutions across Oregon—conversations that led down rabbit holes with people who’ve had quite diverse experiences thinking about, and creating access, on the internet.

What is alt text? Alt text is a form of description for digital images embedded in websites, social media, and digital documents like eBooks, PDFs, and Google Docs. It is an alternative to the image itself and by necessity must be brief (like 125 characters brief). It is the text one sees when an image hasn’t loaded, or, when using a screen reader, the text that exists in place of the image. In most cases, however, alt text lives as an attribute within html and remains invisible. The existence and effectiveness of alt text can dramatically change the reading experience for a person with vision impairment. In the best case, a well-described image (i.e., an image with good alt text) can add an important layer of meaning to the artwork. In the worst case, it becomes a disruptive chunk of nonsense, a repeated caption, or a void.

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m?id=j0yMLEycjGwcDA== alt="" /></div>-->
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The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed into law in 1990, requires that “places of public accommodation” are accessible to all, regardless of disability status.² Later in 1999, after a number of lawsuits led the Department of Justice to clarify that the internet is indeed a “place of public accommodation,” the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) defined guidelines for accessibility.³ The very first guideline states that websites must “provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content,” e.g., alt text.⁴ And yet it wasn’t until 2018 or 2019 that I had ever heard of alt text. As a sighted person without a background in web design, and a tween when the W3C was formed, maybe this is not so unusual. Then again, as someone who maintains an image-heavy website, is a regular user of multiple social media platforms, a co-organizer of a non-profit exhibition space, and a person who has been teaching at public institutions for six years, it felt pretty shameful.

At about the same time that I received my first accessibility training for course materials as a college educator, I noticed image descriptions popping up in Instagram captions as well as little red dials situated next to images on my course websites. The little dial  is part of a web accessibility checker plug-in called Ally, and it stays red until alt text is added, after which it turns green (regardless of the effectiveness of the alt text’s content). Dionna Camp, Accessible Technology Specialist at Linn-Benton Community College, assures me that I am not imagining the sudden emphasis on alt text. Around 2018, the issue of course accessibility started to become widely discussed within the faculty at Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC). Around this time the accessibility tracker was added to the LBCC course platform. Camp is also quick to remind me that alt text is not the only measure needed for making text accessible for those using screen readers, but that reading order (the way a document is tagged using headings) is just as important.

Cody Hurst is a LBCC alumnus and an accessible technology specialist working with Portland Community College (PCC). Hurst uses a screen reader, and reassures me that the 125-character restriction is not a technical limit, but something akin to a strong suggestion. Sure, it’s good to be concise but it’s better just to communicate what needs to be said—standards and guidelines vary. MCA Chicago recommends as few as thirty words for alt text. Other art faculty I’ve spoken with around the state are equally mystified by the lack of conversation about alt text and visual art education. I’ve been asked by some college university accessibility departments whether blind or partially sighted students are interested in

taking visual art courses. I have not personally had a student with significant vision impairment in my classes. Still, I fear that their absence is a self-fulfilling prophecy, with advisors likely steering away visually impaired students who might otherwise be interested in studio art. If art classes are not designed with blind and partially sighted students in mind, why would they want to take them? This, in turn, generates a lack of perceived interest, and disincentivizes overextended instructors from making their courses accessible.

This brings up much larger questions. *Who do we assume art is for?* In *More Than Meets the Eye*, on the intersection of art and blindness, Professor Georgina Kleege hopes that “others can extrapolate from this example of blind people and visual art to examine other cases of cultural marginalization.”⁵ Kleege’s introduction compels us to address the responsibility we have as curators, educators, writers, and general content producers to ask who we expect our audience to be, who we are welcoming, and who is being marginalized. At the moment I write this, my Instagram account, personal website, and web presence of the exhibition space I am part of, do not contain comprehensive alt text—and yet the more I learn about access, the more evident it is to me that urgent changes must be made. Here we are at the meeting of the under-resourced cultural producers, adjunct faculty, community colleges, artist-run-spaces, etc. with their enormous backlog of undescribed images.

Even larger cultural institutions have a difficult time climbing this hill. Emma Ganger-Spivak, in her 2021 Reed College thesis: *A Poetics of Description: Alt text and The Museum*, is sharply critical of the (perhaps cynical) motives an institution may have for announcing their moves toward access. “The fact of its invisibility to most people means that past examples of image description programs have been largely forgotten, and along with them museums’ commitments to the practices themselves with little accountability. While you might expect that art museums would widely publicize such inclusion efforts, as they indeed publicize other access programs for blind visitors such as touch tours, alt text largely falls by the wayside.”⁶ Still, this is most certainly an issue of bandwidth and financial resources. Funders like to see money go toward a big new project, and rarely to operating costs and maintenance. In other words, how do you raise money for something that is invisible? While in Oregon there is some funding available for arts spaces to improve accessibility, it is usually project-based support.⁷

In a wide-reaching, big picture conversation I had with Megan McFarland from Portland State University’s Office of Academic Innovation, McFarland talked about the issue of “capacity building”—that an overhaul of a course or an organization’s website might not be in reach right now, but one accessible image is better than none. I’m encouraged by this, and continue to enter alt text for every new image I add to my courses, even though I know this is not nearly enough should a person with low vision enter one of my courses tomorrow. McFarland talked about how we, as educators, build in access to everything we share all the time, and that it’s just a matter of who we imagine our audience to be. McFarland used the example of twelve-point type. Educators use twelve-point type because they’re imagining a perceived “average” reader. They seem to know, intuitively, that twelve-point type is easy for most people to read and is generally larger than the type used in most printed books. McFarland believes that if we shift our idea of what “average” is, it becomes easier to shift our perceptions and our habits.

This relates to the idea within disability studies and activism that people with disabilities are to be “cared for” or are a certain special class of people. Instead, we might look at someone who is blind or partially sighted as *part* of an average—and that a sighted person may at any point experience temporary vision impairment due to eye strain, bright light, or injury. A rule of thumb I’ve encountered frequently in alt text guidelines, and a short answer to my 125-character problem is that, if there is that much to

A rule of thumb I’ve encountered frequently in alt text guidelines, and a short answer to my 125-character problem is that, if there is that much to say about an image, then it should not be said in the alt text.

say about an image, then it should not be said in the alt text. Perhaps that big idea about the beauty of a drawing, if it is important enough to express, should be stated on the slide, on the website, or in the essay. Georgina Kleege compares this framing to a wheelchair ramp that is “originally intended to provide access

to people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices can now be understood to serve anyone, disabled or not, who uses a conveyance on wheels such as a baby stroller, wheeled suitcase, or skateboard.”⁸

But there *are* precedents for major, all-at-once overhaul efforts. Kaela Parks, Director of Disability Services at Portland Community College, described a 2015 collaboration with PCC’s Art History faculty to make an entire course’s lectures accessible to students with low vision. She described a process that blew my mind. The college’s disability services department hired a student worker who was instructed by a faculty member to add alt text to their course’s images. The faculty member then edited the alt text, which was then evaluated by a variety of “end users.” There was also a tactile component: producing 3D prints and raised-line images of visual concepts. Like the wheelchair ramp, this was likely useful to all students. In the end, Parks told me that the group determined the time and energy needed for this kind of overhaul was just not practical, and that hiring a live describer to aid a student with low vision on a case-by-case basis would be more efficient and result in a higher quality outcome. The willingness to try, to put so much effort behind this kind of experiment, and to reevaluate alt text based on feedback from end users seemed so radical to me. Again, in part, it comes back to how well-resourced a department might be, though there are lessons that can be applied: there is no single fixed solution to any accessibility issue, and open communication is key.

As one of PCC’s contracted “end users,” Cody Hurst is part of a diverse group giving feedback on course materials, accessibility strategies, and new technologies. Hurst’s degree is in Network Systems, and while he was happy to answer my questions about alt text, he was far more excited to talk about some digital tools he’d reviewed recently. “I’m interested in finding these different, more obscure tools and methods of approaching something that isn’t traditionally accessible. I think that’s where we need to take this accessibility field because to a large degree, we’re still stuck in the 1990s.”⁹ Recently, Hurst had been looking at the open-source software Aria Tree Walker as a solution for adding alt text to vector graphics.¹⁰ As I understand it, the software gives vector images the ability to be interactive. A reader can access broad information about

the image in the alt text with the option to click around and explore the image in more detail. As someone who understands both back-end implementation as well as front-end functionality, Hurst grasps the potential of this open-source software. Perhaps not originally intended for complex images of artworks, and impractical in many situations, the possibilities of new technologies are exciting and have me feeling less beholden to, and restricted by, alt text's 125-character text field.

Lastly, I want to share the most useful tool I've found for writing alt text. Alt Text as Poetry is a project by disabled artists and activists Bojana Coklyat and Shannon Finnegan. It's a website, a workbook, and a series of workshops.¹¹ As the name suggests, the project encourages users to approach alt text as a creative form. "Instead of focusing on compliance and doing the minimum, what if we approach access creatively and generously, centering disability culture? How do we make spaces and experiences that people with disabilities not only *can* access but *want* to access?" Coklyat and Finnegan encourage looking toward poetry's careful attention to language, word economy, and experimentation, though never at the expense of web accessibility. They give examples of effective alt text that is personal, evocative, and funny—even promoting the use of different voices in different contexts (e.g., the alt text you write in an institutional context is not the same as the alt text you add to your social media feed). Alt Text as Poetry's website and workbook are dense with information, and include helpful tools and links to other disability advocates in the arts. Their writing is everything they encourage in their workshops; it is concise and approachable. I recommend that anyone reading this immediately visit their website: <https://www.alt-text-as-poetry.net/>.

There are inherent challenges that visual art comes up against in terms of access, but there are also unique opportunities. Art is social. While viewing/making/writing about art is typically a solitary activity, none of it happens in a vacuum, or without a community of others doing the same. I have heard of multiple exercises in which writing image descriptions becomes a generative activity in a classroom or museum programming. Georgina Kleege discusses a guided museum tour at MoMA in which she had been given access to handle a number of artworks. The docent was there to guide her through the galleries and provide visual description, while through her handling of the artworks Kleege was able to provide a tactile description to the docent who was not able to touch the work, and so the conversation became a reciprocal exchange rather than a one-sided handing-down of knowledge.¹² Art, in the best case, is also challenging. We are used to asking questions in order to stretch boundaries. There are many artists who center these questions of access and ability, such as Coklyat and Finnegan as well as Canadian artist Carmen Papalia. A wonderful list of other artists working at the intersection of disability, art, and

There are inherent challenges that visual art comes up against in terms of access, but there are also unique opportunities. Art is social. While viewing/making/writing about art is typically a solitary activity, none of it happens in a vacuum, or without a community of others doing the same.

communication can be found on Alt Text as Poetry and discussed in depth in the final chapter of *More than Meets the Eye*.¹³

What follows is my own exercise in writing alt text as a functional process as well as generative writing experiment. Some text was generously contributed by artist-friends beki basch and Brian Hagermann. In the spirit of Alt Text as Poetry, and following various guidelines I've come across, I've written alt text for five artworks from the collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art on the University of Oregon campus in Eugene. The artworks were chosen because in one way or another they are difficult to describe. Each artwork is preceded by lists of potential alt text descriptions. While there is only one alt text entry that is associated with any given image (in any particular situation), there is no definitive alt text for an artwork—alt text is always context dependent. My alt text descriptions were written over multiple weeks as I imagined different contexts and had informal conversations with the people around me.

- 1 "MCA Guidelines for Describing" (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago), accessed December 5, 2021, <https://live.coyote.pics/support>; "Cooper Hewitt Guidelines for Image Description" (Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum), accessed August 23, 2021, <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/cooper-hewitt-guidelines-for-image-description/>.
- 2 "An Overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA National Network), accessed 2017, <https://wwwadata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview>.
- 3 "Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities and Public Accommodations" (United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division), accessed December 12, 2012, https://www.ada.gov/anprm2010/web%20anprm_2010.htm.
- 4 Web content accessibility guidelines 1.0 (World Wide Web Consortium), accessed December 5, 2021, <https://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/#gl-provide-equivalents>.
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- 6 Ganger-Spivak, Emma. "A Poetics of Description: Alt Text and The Museum," 2021. 33
- 7 Access Reimbursement | Oregon Arts Commission (Oregon Arts Commission), accessed December 5, 2021, <https://www.oregonartscommission.org/grants/access-reimbursement>.
- 8 Kleege, 99
- 9 Hurst, Cody. Personal Conversation, November 11, 2021.
- 10 Krautsource, "Aria-Tree-Walker: A Lightweight Walker for Labeled Aria Trees," GitHub (krautsource), accessed December 17, 2021, <https://github.com/krautsource/aria-tree-walker>.
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- 12 Kleege, 60–66
- 13 Kleege 122–146
- 14 "Alternative Text," WebAIM (Institute for Disability Research, Policy, and Practice at Utah State University, 2021), <https://www.webaim.org/techniques/alttext/#context>.

Laura Butler Hughes is an artist living in Eugene, OR by way of Buffalo, NY and Baltimore, MD. Through diverse research and production methods [drawing, writing, bookmaking, garbage archiving, butter sculpting] she wonders what it means for all of us to live and die together, right now, in this present moment. Hughes has been an artist member at Ditch Projects artist-run gallery in Springfield, OR since 2016, curating a number of exhibitions there, including QUILT BLOC, a collaboration with the Springfield History Museum and artist Krista Raasch, exhibiting historical quilts alongside contemporary artists.

All images courtesy the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Special thanks to Danielle Knapp, McCosh Curator, and Jonathan Smith, Museum Photographer/Rights & Reproductions.



Rick Bartow (American, Mad River Wiyot, 1946–2016), *Untitled*, n.d. Graphite on paper, 8½×10½ in. Collection of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Gift of Rick Bartow and Froelick Gallery. Accession no: 2016:4.17

A line drawing of a scratched-out face.

A drawing of a bald person with a large, pointed nose, wide-set eyes, and red lips.

A sparse drawing of a clown.

A charcoal drawing of a face with quick red, blue, and yellow marks, centered on almost-square ivory paper.

An energetic drawing of a face made with scratchy black lines and smudges of red, blue, and yellow pastel.

A color and graphite drawing of a face overlaid by loosely rendered graphite [or pencil] lines.

A portrait, centered on white paper, with features blurred by quickly scratched and smeared charcoal and pastel. There is a ruffled collar and one line that suggests a shoulder.

A portrait of a person with no hair that looks as if they are being drawn while in motion.

A drawing of a distorted face with strange proportions made with scribbled charcoal lines and primary colors.

A drawing of a face with a sharp pointed nose, wide dark eyes, scarlet lips, rosy cheeks, and a bright blue mark above one eye. There is a suggestion of glasses and a flat-brimmed hat amidst quickly hatched lines.

On a field of white, a human face is expressively rendered in minimal strokes of graphite. Its exaggerated features are imprecisely distributed and covered in light scribbles of black, red, blue, and yellow.

A landscape-oriented drawing on cream colored paper. It is a simplistic line drawing of an abstract face with color smudges and swipes.



David McCosh (American, 1903–81), *Beach Things*, 1951. Acrylic on paper, 10¾×14 in. Collection of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Virginia Haseltine Collection of Pacific Northwest Art. Accession no: 1975:3.3

An abstract beach scene with birds, sand, and dried grass.

A tangle of swooping brushstrokes in a variety of yellows from pale to gold fill the center of the composition layered over washy pinks, tans, and grays. There are shapes suggestive of birds.

An abstract beach scene coming in and out of focus with expressive brush strokes. From afar it appears yellow and tan, punctuated with green and black. Upon closer inspection, it resembles a bird with orange wings, maybe sand dunes, maybe a dog or a fence.

An abstract landscape of swirling, interweaving yellow strokes run through abrupt marks and shapes of orange, green, white, and black on a rosy beige canvas.

A landscape-oriented abstract painting with experimental marks of wide-ranging variety. There is a central cluster of yellow and orange noodle shapes. Peach background. Light colors and black flecks.



Carl Morris (American, 1911–93), *Turning Light*, 1960. Gouache on paper, 21½×29½ in. Collection of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Gift of Mrs. Jacob Kainen. Accession no: 1969:24

A tilted soft grey rectangle with large visible brushstrokes streaked across the canvas. The rectangle appears transparent over a deep black background.

Blurred overlapping rectangles give the appearance of reflected light.

A painting of light reflected through a window filling a tall rectangular canvas.

Inside a framing band of black, a pair of gray, heavily textured, superimposed rectangles—one slightly askew of the other—is sparsely covered in superficial, sand-colored, dry brushstrokes.

Wispy-edged rectangular surface of rich black handmade paper with a stonelike rubbing or painting in its center. It is grayscale with highlights of very light pink and gold.



Hilda Morris (American, 1911–91), *Turning*, 1978. Bronze, 36¼×29 in. (approx.) Collection of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Gift of the Artist, Friends, and Family of Harry Alpert (1912–1977). Accession no: 1980:12.

An abstract black sculpture with a rough texture made of three conjoined organic forms.

Two large lung-like shapes joined to a small base.

Two sail-like black shapes are held off of the ground by a small stool of the same material. One sail has a small hole punched through. The sail shapes are joined toward the top creating a distinctive negative space between the two. The entire sculpture has an uneven jagged texture and a black patina.

An imposing black abstract sculpture, heavy at the top with small feet at the base.

A thick, flat, roughly bell-shaped slab of asymmetrical, abstract blackened bronze sits vertically atop a comparatively tiny, two-legged base. Its surface evokes a rough cliff face, with one large and one very small void at the center.

An abstract, rough-textured, hand built sculpture cast in bronze. It is dark in color and resembles human ribs or lungs.



Betty Feves (American, 1918–85), *Self-portrait*, 1964. Terra-cotta, 17×15 in. Collection of Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Gift of the Friends of the Museum/ Accession no: 1965:1.2

A face sculpted into a wide rectangle with soft edges sits atop a pedestal that tapers toward the top in a wobbly sort of way.

A flattened face with pinched edges rests on a platform as tall as the face is wide.

A judgmental face roughly modeled into clay.

A face formed from clay like a mud pie with eyes punched all the way through by a fingertip. One eye is perfectly round, and another is squashed in such a way that the eye seems set into its socket.

A face that has holes for eyes, a small, pinched nose, and a wide mouth that turns downward slightly in an uncertain expression.

A wide irregular shape with evidence of finger pinches at the edges sitting atop a column. A face is modeled into a wider shape with a drippy ring of silver encircling the face, other drop of silver just below the lip.

A wide rectangular face sits atop a tall, thin rectangle. The face has a wide mouth and round holes for eyes.

A sarcastic looking face formed from clay.

A flat, wide, earth-colored mask sits atop a tall, narrow plinth of the same material. Along with holes for eyes and a broad nose, a thin wide mouth in an almost-frown completes the face, which is ringed by a silver line.

A rough-textured tabletop sculpture of a crude, childlike mushroom shaped bust. It has asymmetrical eye holes, straight through a flattened head.

Nobody's Fool
at Carnation
Contemporary

Luiza Lukova

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Nobody's Fool, curated by art historian, cultural worker, and writer Ella Ray (she/they), opened at Carnation Contemporary on Saturday, October 23, 2021. The exhibition presents six contemporary artists whose work centers on each apex of the imagination of Black alternative realities. These realities depend on artists being afforded the opportunity to operate outside of racially charged and capitalistic systems. Weaving together a multitude of media, the pieces on view coalesce to map out a framework for working beyond their present conditions.

No other field than that of the (canonical) visual arts is more historically (and precariously) steeped in the trope of the white (male) artist. There exists an inherent tension in acknowledging that tearing down this model and building a new one might not be the domain of museums and galleries as we currently understand them. The art world cannot adequately function for artists of color when its very system is built off of an existing world of theft and anti-Blackness. To this effect, and what it means in terms of gaze and engagement, Ray tells me the execution of the show felt even more weighted. She notes, "While the portals, loopholes, maps, visions, and dreams created by these artists are technically on display for whomever is in the gallery, each work is speaking very specifically to Black participants. Knowing that the invitation to envision oneself in these futures and alternative realities is not extended to all audience members, space becomes less important."

What feels uncompromising about this group exhibition is the way in which the artists have attempted to move beyond the white-walled room and the socio/cultural/systemic parameters it imposes. Here the work shifts expectations and aims to construct a new narrative that seeks to become the norm. As the focal point in the curator's selection of artists

Luiza Lukova



and the resulting exhibition, Ray poses the question of "What would you amplify, glitch, flip, process, retract, or destroy to make it to the otherside?" The "otherside" here is malleable—at its crux it demonstrates a realm where these makers are addressing similar concepts and working toward different articulations of that dream space.

Entering the gallery, viewers first come across a GoldStar television placed on a short white pedestal, playing a video that seems to be aglow with bright neon colors and moving bodies. The only noise heard is the soundscape created by the echo of the work. The installation, *cavity*, by ariella tai (they/them), is a five-minute, looped film that tai has dubbed "a deadly siren song." Audiences may be lured with a sense of familiarity given the material: existing media of Black performances from film, video, and television. Closer inspection reveals that the material is queered and is meant to subvert and dissect the original cinematic intention. The scenes on the screen shift rapidly unlike a traditional film. At first the digital video is washed in deeply textured blue, lines running across the face on the screen, only to shift into a bright pixelated purple that, haltingly, fills only the bottom half of the screen. The images expand and retract, depicting at times multiple frames within the larger material one, and are consistently manipulated in some manner. Among others, we see the characters of Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington) in "Scandal" and the vampiress Queen Akasha (Aaliyah) in "Queen of the Damned." The characters act as heralds desirous of power, autonomy, frenzy, and answers. tai constructs an arena for their retribution, the possibility to exist beyond the limitations of their characters. *cavity* seems to imply a gap, a depression, a void to

Installation view. *Nobody's Fool*, Carnation Contemporary, 2021. (Photo: Luiza Lukova)



be filled only by re-conceptualizing an entire pantheon of Black characters.

Artists Mariah Green (they/them) and Nia Musiba (she/her) employ paint as their primary medium. In *We Are Not One Hundred Percent Ourselves*, Musiba uses vivid green and red colors to delineate the background from her figures, which are rendered in a smooth black and a textured off-white. The figures feature larger-than-life hands and bodies that contrast with small heads but are somehow humanizing nonetheless. Musiba presents bodies that could exist in surrogate spaces, free from homogeneity. There is levity in this type of play where bodies are fluid and averse to hyper-penetrative conventions.

In turn, Green eschews color, favoring solely black and white oils to depict their canvases as possible vehicles toward Blackness, expanding on the topics of Afrofuturism, transportation, and the “otherside.” *THE FOLD/THE ROOK* doubles as an image of a face and a wormhole. In the lower right hand corner, three wisping shapes appear almost as eyes with a pupil in the center, as if already possessing the ability to see the nearing of a tangible future. As an interpretative solution to the reality of space and time, viewers can speculate transcending this plane and accelerating forward to new horizons. Viewing these works becomes the first step in the process of moving past.

Carrie Mae Weems said: “Art is the one place we all turn to for solace.” For multidisciplinary artist Azha Ayanna Luckman (she/her), solace is found in the deeply intimate and candid moments she captures with her camera. *Black Cherry Reprise* and *I am called back into myself* are large-scale prints of medium-format self-portraits shot by the artist in 2021 and 2020, respectively. In the image on the left, Luckman gazes directly into the camera, a towel wrapped around her freshly-dyed, cherry red hair. In the image on the right, she looks away and into the light, giving us a view of her left profile with a shaved head. The ritual of changing one’s appearance is akin to shape-shifting, becoming grounded in a moment of transformation. With these two self-portraits, Luckman allows herself to be observed in two moments of revolution. While the body fluctuates and adapts, that which the lens captures remains and solidifies the becoming.

On either side of the parallel walls of the gallery are linocut and intaglio prints by artist, writer, and educator Melanie Stevens (she/her). Emphasizing storytelling at the core, these smaller framed pieces offer concentrated windows into this practice. Pushing against false narratives which supposedly center the African diaspora, Stevens sheds light on their harmful nature by juxtaposing and empowering her own reinterpretation of history. *The Fire Inside* mirrors tai’s *cavity* in its intensity and rage. The figure in the right foreground holds a lit torch while a fire in the background blazes through a large, plantation-style home. Through Stevens’s meticulous linework, we can almost see the flames flickering intensely. Speculative fiction can serve to sublimate the rest of our understanding of the setting. We are confronted with the image of how literal the fire inside this character has manifested itself; here it liberates and storms freely.

The violent chaos of white colonizer history has consumed and directed patterns of contemporary history making since the beginning of recordkeeping. Those who are not subsumed in these violent acts or prejudiced against them as a result are left to wonder how to effectively deal

Mariah Green, *THE FOLD/THE ROOK* (2021) and *X.1* (2021), Oil on canvas, 30×30in. and 30×30in. (Photo: Luiza Lukova)

Azha Ayanna Luckman, *Black Cherry Reprise* (2021) and *I am called back into myself* (2020), 120mm, 30×40in. and 16×20in. (Photo: Luiza Lukova)



Installation View. *Nobody's Fool*, Carnation Contemporary, 2021. (Photo: Luiza Lukova)

with this knowledge. Through serigraphy, artist and educator Kendyl Boyd (she/her) presents images interlaced with

text that prompt audiences to engage with themselves and their lived experiences. Her two pieces are shown in tandem and offer love, community, and understanding as reparative discourse. The text printed on both canvases is open, an interrogative: "What does love look like?" Its repetition conveys an urgency to engage, printed twice, once in red and once in blue and etched in the lower right hand corner of each work. In turn, one iteration of the same image is presented on each canvas, again in red and blue and diagonal from the question. The image in turn appears closed, enduring. From the artist statement we gather it is a photograph of the artist's parents taken in the early days of their relationship. The in-between expanse from photo to present, and all that that time encompasses, is what visitors are meant to face. The simple phrase holds the weight of a universal relationship far heavier than that of just Boyd's parents. As Ray tells me, "The works feel like a mirror—I see my kin, my family, my lovers, myself."

Nobody's Fool was born of the curator's interest "in understanding the markings and language of these feelings/actions/callings/pursuits [of fantasy/pleasure/vengeance], finding overlap and divergence across artists, and seriously and thoughtfully engaging with dream-space." *Nobody's Fool* affords the imagination to build an ecosystem wherein there are no restrictions on creative output. The works exhibited could be seen as arbiters, halfway points between this world and another; an ecosystem whose framework is innately more kind and truthful for Black people, and presents the opportunity to see compositions of this nature all of the time.

Luiza Lukova is a visual arts writer, poet, and curator. She is an art historian with an academic background in Postmodern Art History and Literature. She is the co-founder of homebase, a non-traditional backyard gallery space in Southeast Portland. Her other critical writing can be found at *Art Practical*, *Art & About PDX*, *60 Inch Center*, and other journals. Born in Bulgaria, she is currently living and working in Portland, Oregon.

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Kendyl Boyd, *What does love look like? (Blue)* (2020) and *What does love look like? (Red)* (2021). Serigraph on canvas, 30x35in. each. (Photo: Luiza Lukova)

Editor Stephanie Snyder invited Portland Art Museum Curator Sara Krajewski to interview artist Malia Jensen about her major work, *Nearer Nature*.

SARA KRAJEWSKI: The title of the project, *Nearer Nature*, has me thinking about the relational and about proximity. Who is nearer to nature or needs to be? How do we move toward nature and what is that relationship like?

MALIA JENSEN: In part the title describes my own literal action of getting out of the studio but I also enjoy how the slurry alliteration of *Nearer Nature* feels awkward to say. Just saying it requires an effort that feels foreign but implies genuine longing. Getting closer to nature could mean ten-mile hikes or simply being attentive to what you eat. How much energy and cosmic technology did it take to produce that fish? Or that rhubarb? How did humans (and animals) figure out what was edible and what was harmful? I'd like to think that we can still cultivate that level of instinctual knowledge and connection if we pay close attention. It's not meant to be prescriptive, but if you spend enough time

with the six-hour video (*Worth Your Salt*), it's my hope that you end up discovering someplace new.

SK: There are so many ways to dive into this conversation. For me, nature acts like a foil in the work. It can mean following the wildlife into an as-yet-unknown destination or, in the literary sense, acting as a character whose qualities contrast or challenge aspects of another, in this case, us humans.

MJ: That's a good way to express it. I'm interested in our persistent tendency to place ourselves outside of nature. The video can act as a stage, or space, for contemplation. I'm definitely trying to set up a situation in which the viewer might follow an unanticipated idea and gain insight simply by watching. So much can come from just letting your mind wander, and we don't do it anymore because we reach for our phones. Nature has always been a protagonist for me, going back to my childhood spending countless hours in the woods "thinking," which meant poking around in the forest floor or sitting in a tree for hours. It wasn't about making up specific stories but I remember being very conscious of trying to foment relationships with my fellow occupants of that world, imaginary or real. I'd like to support the dying art of daydreaming.



Malia Jensen, *Worth Your Salt*, 2021. Video still, Tualatin Mountains camera location



Malia Jensen, *Nearer Nature*, 2019. Installation map and project information card

SK: One of your first actions in *Nearer Nature* was to carve six salt sculptures, depicting a head, breast, two hands, a foot, and a suggestion of a stomach (via a dozen donuts) before placing them in six locations across Oregon to draw in wildlife.

MJ: Ha! That was my best trick. The animals are already there, and the sculptures are actually meant to engage a human audience. The placement of the pieces loosely implies an image of a reclining woman across the state, alluding to the interconnected system we are a part of, and placing the human body at the mercy of the animals.

SK: Why salt?

MJ: I've always been drawn to elemental materials, and salt is as complex metaphorically as it is essential to the function of human and animal bodies. I started working with livestock salt-licks when I was living in Brooklyn, New York, in a huge, rustic studio. It had massive iron-framed arched windows and sixteen-foot ceilings, and was such a picture-perfect crumbling beauty that a good part of my income came from renting it as a location for fashion shoots. I often had to protect my work from becoming background props, and making artwork there sometimes felt like a performance of being a sculptor, like I was a character in a set. Carving the salt blocks was the equivalent of leaning into a cliché music cranked up, zipped into my coveralls with chisels and hammers and salt flying everywhere, laboring over a series of gorgeous breasts. In 2010, I took several of the breasts to a friend's cattle ranch in New Mexico and made a video called *Salty*. Both *Worth Your Salt* (2020) and *Salty* are essentially Westerns, aspiring

to describe big, important relationships with spare gestures and an excess of time. I also enjoyed the grandiose humor embedded in lavishing all this work on something then giving it over to animals. There's a proxy sacrifice happening that I think of as an acquiescence to nature.

SK: That's interesting that you frame it that way. After the animal interactions with the carved salt sculptures you cast them in glass, capturing the beautiful decay and surrender to the elements. The sculptures are so central to the project overall, but they aren't the primary focus of the video. Why is that?

MJ: As much as I loved carving them and as crucial as they are, they're not really the subject of the project. I didn't want people to walk away once they "got" the setup. My hope was that the viewer would be drawn in by the beauty of the natural world, and a view into the private lives of animals. The cast glass sculptures weren't planned but at a certain point when I was checking the cameras in Nehalem, I was taken aback by how beautiful the hand offering the plum had become as it eroded. Glass has the perfect metaphorical associations of fragility, allowing me the chance to commemorate the "used" artifacts as odes to human vulnerability.

SK: Salt is ever present, even when it's invisible. It's the physical element found in all of the elements here: humans, the wildlife protagonists, and the landscape we all inhabit. Can we get really granular (ha!) about this choice of material? I'm curious about the "minimalism" of these utilitarian white blocks being transformed into beautiful, curvaceous forms that invite interaction. Placing these body parts in the untamed environment,

and subjecting them to the sensuality of licking, touching, and consumption by wild animals suggests a feminist subversion of an art historical landscape tradition that's been white-male dominated. Do you think of this piece as a feminist work?

MJ: Get granular! Perhaps it's an inherently feminist action, wielding heavy hammers and chisels, carving sensual female body parts out of solid white blocks and giving them over to "innocent" wild animals. I wasn't consciously setting out to produce a feminist work but my intention of elevating corporeal knowledge and restoring authority to the power of intuition fits solidly within that framework. Humor also has its own subversiveness and you could say there's an Arte Povera aspect to the feed store materials as well as an element of slapstick at play. Employing salt as a self-deprecating comic device (deer licks breast, elk tickles foot, bear bites hand, etc.) and using trail cameras also undermines some art world elitism, and expands the conversations I get to have around the project. I loved being asked by hunters and fisherman what kind of cams I was using, or being politely informed that they really liked the video but were just using it as a scouting tool. Obviously I did not reveal my camera locations!

SK: **Let's talk more about the video editing and pacing that is really central to *Worth Your Salt*. It appears spontaneous, as if it's live surveillance footage, but you've made a technically complex piece composed from many thousands of short clips captured by motion-activated cameras. Can you share the process of constructing it and what formal and aesthetic decisions you were making?**

MJ: The first and most important decision I made was to build the video into a grid. Setting the footage into quadrants invokes the ubiquity of surveillance but also keeps the piece moving. Your eyes flicker over it, finding small actions and subtle connections, making even the slow parts compelling.

Regarding the construction of it, there was a basic math problem of braiding together footage from two or three cameras at all six locations, eighteen cameras total with very different amounts of footage. The first group of cameras, set on the Brancusi-esque head location, was only twenty minutes outside of Portland and began recording early in 2019. Some of the other cameras, the Ashland and Joseph cameras for example, were installed later in the summer and subsequently captured less footage. Combining all of it required a system that was somewhat mechanical, enabling us to build the sequences without actually watching all the clips. The passage of time was the organizing principle, keeping everything sequential and allowing the changing seasons and shifting light over a full year to become a felt experience for the viewer. Dividing the screen into four sequences also created the opportunity to show four times as much footage at once; thus the six-hour video is actually twenty-four hours of footage. The frames change at slightly staggered intervals, allowing the clips to play out consecutively, overlapping like a round, a structure that I think supports the mesmerizing and consoling effect of the work by removing the element of suspense.

SK: **Who did you work with to sort, edit, and assist with the project?**

MJ: Having financial support that enabled me to hire people was absolutely crucial, and enabled me to get behind my conviction that art



Malia Jensen in her Brooklyn, New York studio, 2010. (Photo: John Muggenborg)



Malia Jensen in her Brooklyn, New York studio, 2010. (Photo: John Muggenborg)



Malia Jensen, *Nearer Nature*, 2019. Carved salt sculpture, Donuts, installation view, Sisters, Oregon

is part of an economic engine. Tiff Harker came on as project manager and we assembled a small crew of assistant editors, but I worked most closely with editor Ben Mercer. A few key friends helped me check the cameras in the further-flung locations, but most of the time it was a solo adventure, collecting the (SD) memory cards, lapping the state periodically and using the time to scout locations and businesses that might be willing to show the rough cut. There is a social dimension built into the project that echoed the overall vision of *Nearer Nature* as a reconstruction of an earthbound, tactile network.

SK: Animals have long been a subject of your work but your approach you've had to this piece feels different to me because the animals have a unique agency within it. They aren't being transformed or translated into sculpture; they're caught in the act of just being. Can you talk more about the simple but powerful act of observation that this piece fosters and how you arrived at this central pillar of the work?

MJ: When I started writing the proposal for this project in late 2018, it was compelled by a desperate drive to slip something broadly loving through a door that was closing. One comment I often heard from young people was that their favorite parts were when a variety of animals occupied the screen at the same time. I liked those moments too, and I think it's because we've become so accustomed to discord that seeing a squirrel and a deer on the same patch of ground feels wondrous. Slowing down enough to tease out the nuances and find connections requires an incredible effort. Different interests are not mutually exclusive, and there are so many things that should and can bring us together.

SK: Absolutely! When we created the online exhibition on the Portland Art Museum's website, you had hoped to make the video a balm to soothe our anxieties about so many things: the pandemic, politics, mass protests. Could you elaborate on what it meant for you to make the work accessible on the very same digital platforms that can be so distracting and alienating?

MJ: When we first began talking about sharing the video, the focus was on the mounting anxiety and dread around COVID-19. Ironically, the whole *Nearer Nature* project began as a drawn-out metaphor for inescapable interconnectedness, and then suddenly everything was upon us. There was just no place to turn that wasn't an emotional hazard. People were shut indoors with their families, or alone, facing fears and massive uncertainties, and although this project might have been a drop in the bucket, it felt like something I could contribute.

SK: Nature and art can be powerful tools for healing in both big and small ways. Do you see *Nearer Nature* working in this way for viewers?

MJ: I certainly hope it does. We're so used to the constant anxiety of thinking "What awful thing is about to happen next?" There's a fine line between shutting down and taking a break, and I think it's important to find ways to sustain ourselves without turning away from what's difficult.

SK: While we're talking about animals and humans, another relationship considered in *Nearer Nature* is our connection to the land, both literally and symbolically. Am I right to think this is about a physical as well as spiritual, even political, relationship to the facets of this specific place—that is to say, Oregon?

MJ: One of my favorite camera traps was installed on the Nehalem River Estuary, a site at the water's edge of a salt marsh. The camera was strapped to the upturned root-slab of a fallen tree, facing west. In the foreground you see a beautifully gnarled and faded piece of driftwood — salal and cedar saplings growing on top — and beyond it the shifting tidal landscape. At one point in late summer, a flock of band-tailed pigeons arrived, making an annual visit to a mineral deposit in the soil exposed by low tide. Another camera nearby recorded an elk calving just out of frame, a May event apparently predictable nearly to the day. The animals that are here now are directly related to the animals that inhabited this same place hundreds, maybe thousands, of years ago. We're inextricably bound to these life cycles and patterns.

SK: A big part of this project for you — that isn't easily seen in the final video — is the connections you made with people in the locations where you produced the work. I know it has been important to you to create bridges between different backgrounds and ways of thinking — because issues of land use and environmentalism are important to people on “both sides.” Often, the way these concerns are framed exacerbates the divide between urban and rural. You've called this piece a “Trojan horse,” a contemplative artwork that unpacks so much more as it opens up. When you were out in the field, how did you go about sparking these conversations?

MJ: Early in the project I had so much car trouble that I decided it was part of my practice. I had a 100-mile conversation with a tow truck driver and learned about his badass grandmother who started the tow company in the

1960s. I had a flat tire on an isolated road in Wasco County, and a man and his grandchild eventually stopped (as I was tightening the lug nuts!) and we talked about his family's tradition of camping every fall to watch the wild turkeys in the Tygh Valley. The requirements of the project also created more straightforward ways to engage: May I install this saltlick breast and camera on your land? Would you be willing to host this video in your store, bar, school, restaurant, mental health clinic, chocolate shop, etc.?

SK: Over the course of the project, you brought the video into the communities near where you had placed the cameras. Tell me about some of these locations and how these screenings (twelve in total!) and the people you met shaped the whole project.

MJ: This was the beating heart of the whole project. One location resulted from a chance encounter in Tygh Valley where I met a group of Oregon Health Science University (OHSU) scientists on a fly fishing retreat. I was installing the breast sculpture along the White River and we struck up a conversation. Amused to find a stray artist in the woods, they invited me to join them for dinner and stay at the cabin they were renting. We had a spirited conversation about the intersection of art and science, among other things. OHSU later agreed to host the video on a screen normally used for infographics, letting the sound of elk calls and coyotes echo through the corridors of the Department of Molecular & Medical Genetics.

The video was also installed at the 100 year old Tygh Valley General Store, and in Maupin at the Riverside Restaurant where, at one point, I met a couple who planned their lunch visits (arriving early or late) so they could get the table right in front of the screen. Everyone was incredibly



Malia Jensen, *Nearer Nature*, 2019. Video Installations: (*clockwise*) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Portland, Oregon. Courtesy KSMoCA; The Riverside, Maupin, Oregon (Photo: Eric Edwards); Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon; Southern Oregon University, Ashland, Oregon (Photo: Heather Watkins)





Malia Jensen, *Worth Your Salt*, 2021. Video still, Nehalem Estuary camera location

generous with their time and willingness to take a chance on this unanticipated art project.

SK: You were awarded an Oregon Community Foundation Creative Heights Initiative grant to produce *Nearer Nature*. This program was created to support risk and encourage innovation in artistic practices. How has executing the *Nearer Nature* project challenged you and pushed you in new directions?

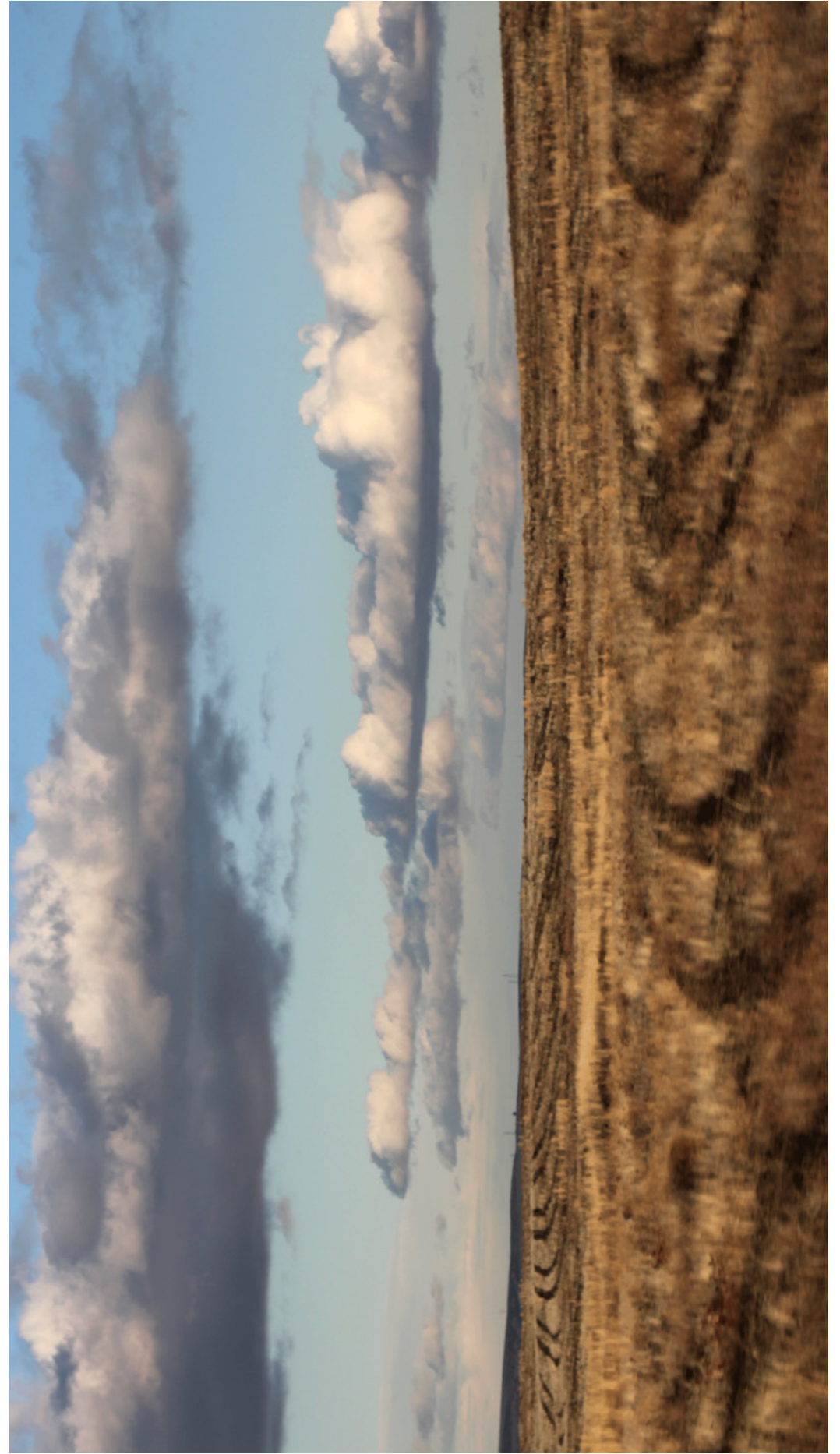
MJ: Working outside the comforts of my studio, testing my own vulnerabilities, and making space to say “I don’t know” felt important. I challenged myself to go beyond using a familiar visual language to describe situations, or posing unanswerable questions toward inhabiting metaphor. I wanted to re-complicate my own way of seeing things, and move beyond examining the mechanics toward affecting the machinery. Just because we connect to the natural world (and each other) differently does not mean we are not connected. To try to describe the uncountable ways we are part of—and reliant on—the natural world is impossible. It’s everything. Helium is mined! How often do we think of that when we buy someone a balloon? Being able to explore and share some of this fragile world has been an honor. The project would not have been possible without the support of the Oregon Community Foundation, and to say I’m incredibly grateful barely touches the surface. Producing *Nearer Nature* has had an enormous effect on my work, and it continues to change my life. I’m also deeply thankful to everyone who got involved in many and different ways. Thank you for the opportunity to have this conversation.

Malia Jensen (b. 1966, Honolulu, HI) is a Portland-based multidisciplinary artist recognized primarily for her work in sculpture and video. Jensen’s materially-varied studio practice marries the tactile authority of the handmade with underlying psychological narratives and a genuine quest for harmony and understanding. Her work is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. Jensen’s *Nearer Nature* project received support from the Oregon Community Foundation’s Creative Heights Initiative.

Sara Krajewski is the The Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Portland Art Museum. Her recent exhibition projects include: *Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...*; *We,Construct. Marvels.Between.Monuments*; *Josh Kline: Freedom*; and *Placing the Golden Spike: Landscapes of the Anthropocene*.



Malia Jensen, *Foot (detail)*, 2020. Kiln-cast glass, etching ink, white oak and fir base, 8 x 13.5 x 11.5 in. (Photo: Lauren Shime)



Malia Jensen, *Wasco County*, 2019.

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In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City, during which my ability to understand what art institutions should be doing alternated rapidly between frantic optimism and deep apathy, I read “Smells Like Burning” by Isabel Parkes in *Flash Art*, which cannily comments on the growing embrace of the concept of ecosystems within art institutions. Parkes used two primary examples in her article. First, the Serpentine Gallery in London, which distinguished itself as the only arts institution to have a curator, Luisa Pietroiusti, devoted to ecology, and had recently proclaimed a new mission which centers ecological responsibility. This would be a challenge for any institution showing temporary exhibitions of international artists, but perhaps particularly for one whose artistic director, Hans Ulrich Obrist, set the precedent for the curator-as-ambassador for globalization, never staying in one place long enough for the jet lag to settle in. The second example was that of Performance Space New York, whose Executive Artistic Director Jenny Schlenzka announced that, during 2020, a group of artists would have complete control over the programming and budget for the institution, with choreographer Sarah Michelson—who has had a long and involved history of performance there—taking on the role of ecologist, rather than as director or leader of the group of primarily younger artists. These two institutions are using “ecology” in different ways to distinguish themselves from the historically extractive relationships between artists and institutions; Michelson is not meant to reduce the carbon footprint of Performance Space New York (PSNY), but divert dominant ways of working. In the many metaphors between natural ecological systems and those in the art world, one line by Parkes continues to stir some conflicting feelings within me almost two years later:

“Reintroducing Performance Space New York or the Serpentine Gallery as ecosystems in which the most fundamental *and endangered organism is the artist* has allowed Obrist, Pietroiusti, and Schlenzka to differentiate their institutions to board members, artists, and audiences alike in a crowded cultural landscape.” [Emphasis my own]¹

Undoubtedly, at the time of publication this article couldn’t have fully predicted the severe and long-lasting impacts of the pandemic on the arts, particularly performing artists relying on live audiences and touring gigs. And artists working in all disciplines felt the burden of having their shows canceled by the same institutions who were now asking them to share some videos online, make a lockdown playlist, or do an online studio visit for invisible audiences for free or meager honorariums. (As an institutional curator, I am guilty of these requests as well.) But now that we are years and multiple variants into the pandemic, and as we’ve delved into reopenings with unpredictable caveats requiring constant improvisation, I’m sitting with the word “endangered” in this moment of extended uncertainty. We (and now I use “we” as the people embedded in institutions, or those who are tasked with presenting works to a public) still depend on artists for everything—to give us content, to make us relevant, to animate us, to make connections between ideas we can’t fully present as our own because we are afraid of potential repercussions from donors or online critics—as we’ve shown time and time again that we can’t effectively deal with even the vaguest threat of conflict. Parkes recognizes this as well, writing “The risks of using ecology as a metaphor include that it perpetuates these institutions’ ability to profit from more free or freelance creative labor, burdening artists with the task of not only making art, but producing and packaging it to the highest ethical standard.”² There is a thin line between empowering artists within the institution and exploiting them when we ask them to act as curators, administrators, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access consultants, or healers, without taking on institutional accountability within ourselves or resolving basic questions such as putting artists on payroll and giving them health insurance. As Pietroiusti says in an *Artnet* interview about her role, “Unfortunately, a tree is never going to be a curator, and so we need to address the ‘ecological’ somewhere else in the infrastructure, in terms of, say, greening institutions themselves.”³

Art institutions
aren’t natural.

All of this has shown that artists are fundamental, absolutely. But artists are only endangered in relation to the institution. And institutions are only one part of the ecosystem. Art institutions aren’t natural. They take a tremendous amount of resources to sustain, they can die off without the proper support, and they’re resistant to change. 2020 is a year that sounds like the future, but it was one where we all got stuck in the present, unable to move at our prior speed or to respond to calls to truly “slow down.” The ecological system was no longer a metaphor as vital participants vanished overnight, and the mechanics of the cultural landscape went quiet. Only the political climate seemed to move swiftly past us all, goading us to keep up. Some of us made valiant efforts to make changes for the future, while others kept their heads down and hoped the moment would pass. Around me, there were calls to break down the barriers between administrators, directors, funders, collectors, artists, and the environment itself. Over time, I’ve seen multiple projects that engaged soil and dirt continue to spring up, hoping to find ways to create

unpredictable growth and mess within typically sterile galleries. Let's compost it all.⁴ What are the models that allow us to breathe better, to regenerate, and to nourish each other? When I think of the most endangered artists, I think first of the artists who garner the most mainstream press, who are on the rosters of blue chip galleries, or artists who have dozens of studio assistants as the most protected by the market. These artists are consistently presented as consolidating power in the art world, yet in that ecosystem, predatory collectors are able to swallow artist's careers whole, controlling them at auction without the artists themselves participating in the profit. In another ecosystem, one that's more symbiotic, perhaps the artists who can create their own conditions for showing, and who understand the power and potency of remaining outside of the center will never make it on the endangered list.

Years into the pandemic, I'm attempting to learn about Oregon through a screen, inserting myself virtually into the living rooms and studios of artists instead of seeing and touching things, understanding scale, and missing the intimacies of local hospitality. Despite the hours that we've all spent doing this since March 2020, no one has become accustomed to the limita-

tions of this format. Yet, as difficult as it is to see outside the frame of Zoom boxes, I'm aware that studios, galleries, and theaters are also restrictive frames that prove difficult to see beyond. When artists say

Perhaps this is why "ecosystem" is now preferred over "community," which needs to define itself through commonality and thus exclusion.

they are in the woods, moved to the woods, rooted in the water and terrain of Oregon for generations, I can't imagine what that smells or feels like. Despite how much I can read about the severe heatwaves of last summer, or see images depicting devastating wildfires, they remain outside of my sensorial library from my roots in the East Coast and particularly my home in New York City. Ecology is not a term that has to be superimposed on these studio visits; it is ever present even if not named. When one artist speaks of secret locations in their local landscapes, ones which are referenced in their work but not revealed, I think of how artists are asked to expose everything about themselves and their practices, while curators are generally asked to share absolutely nothing about their identities in relationship to their work. Which parts of the ecosystem do we keep for ourselves for protection, sustainability, survival? And what are the economies that can support this? What I can see within this artistic ecology is a mode of generative negotiation—one that often follows refusal—within a structure that wants to be flexible. I can see how the spaces and institutions that the artists are choosing to engage with are consistently being challenged to keep up with practices that are not up for compromise. I can see this reflected in the intention of the Oregon Visual Arts Ecology Project, and the lack of desire to define or silo the presentation of information. Like the myth of individual responsibilities toward climate change, our individual responsibilities in the art world can only go so far without each other. Collaboration and mutual opportunities for learning were at the core of these visits, but never couched within the easy narrative that this shift was caused by isolationist demands of the pandemic. These modes of collectivity came out of a greater desire for the ecosystem to develop together, without predictable outcomes but an acceptance

of risk or opacity. Perhaps this is why "ecosystem" is now preferred over "community," which needs to define itself through commonality and thus exclusion.

The must-read status in the art world (at least from my perspective) achieved by anthropologist Anna L. Tsing's 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, which looks at the economies of the matsutake mushroom—including the foraging culture by Southeast Asian immigrants in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon—demonstrates our desire for other systems to take root (or perhaps take over completely). In a recent interview in *Art Review*, Tsing proposes another form of relation:

"It is so important to work across different forms of knowledge-formation and allow them to interact without trying to create what [sociologist] John Law calls a 'one-world world', a homogeneous space in which everything fits perfectly together.... I like the term 'assemblage' as it's used in ecology. In that context it describes all the plants, soils, and other things that just happen to be in a particular place. It doesn't assume in advance to know the relationships between them, and so it forces you to figure them out rather than simply apply a predetermined logic. Are these two plants in some form of mutualist relationship, or is one a parasite on the other? We don't know, and we shouldn't presume to know what the effects of their rubbing up against each other might be."⁵

There is no intimate knowledge when a curator drops into a city far from their own and does a series of studio visits with artists they meet for the first time. I am fortunate to have done this in cities all over the world, and am grateful for every moment that marks difference, unknowing, and the impossibility of understanding. Studio visits are transactional by design, and perhaps curators who drop in are really just parasites on artists. (I think we've all felt that at least once.) But what cannot be shared or said during these interactions, what can only be revealed in other modalities of communication and open-ended timelines is invaluable. In this embrace, the line between the ecosystem, which allows us to live and breathe, can be fully integrated into the one which fuels our making; one which doesn't differentiate our institutions but demonstrates their potential for meaningful adaptation.

1 Parkes, Isabel. "Smells Like Burning" *Flash Art*, April 22, 2020. <https://www.flash-art.com/2020/04/smells-like-burning/>

2 *ibid*

3 Brown, Kate. "'We Have More Agency Than We Realize': Serpentine Curator Lucia Pietroiusti on How the Art World Can Tackle Climate Change" *Artnet.com*, July 16, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/lucia-pietroiusti-serpentine-climate-change-1593163>

4 I owe this love of compost to performance artist Alex Tatarsky, who was in residency at The Kitchen in November 2021.

5 Eastham, Ben. "Anna L. Tsing on Creating 'Wonder in the Midst of Dread'" *ArtReview.com*, November 29, 2021. <https://www.artreview.com/anna-l-ting-on-creating-wonder-in-the-midst-of-dread/>

Lumi Tan is Senior Curator at The Kitchen in New York, where she has organized exhibitions and produced performances with artists across disciplines and generations since 2010. Most recently, Tan has worked with Kevin Beasley, Baseera Khan, Autumn Knight, and Kenneth Tam. Tan's writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *Mousse*, *Cura*, and numerous exhibition catalogues. She was the recipient of the 2020 VIA Art Fund Curatorial Fellowship.

Greg Archuleta and
Lifeways: Cultivating resilience
through education

— *Steph Littlebird*

58



Conditions

Steph Littlebird

Tucked away just south of the Ross Island Bridge in a nondescript building off Barbur Boulevard is the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) satellite office, which serves Portland-area members. The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community includes over 30 Tribes and bands from western Oregon, northern California, and southwest Washington. Some of these tribes include the Kalapuya, Molalla, Chasta, Umpqua, Rogue River, Chinook, and Tillamook. It's here where contemporary artist and CTGR member Greg Archuleta works, where everything he does is centered on protecting and restoring the history of Western Oregon's Indigenous people.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde were formed when the United States government forced the aforementioned Tribes to surrender their lands and move to a remote Reservation in Oregon's coastal range. In February of 1857, Federal troops marched Indigenous people on a 260-plus mile trek from Table Rock, near present-day Medford, to the new Grand Ronde Reservation.

The original Grand Ronde Reservation was formally established by treaty and Executive Order in the Summer of 1857. Over the course of the next one hundred years, the Grand Ronde Reservation would be reduced from 60,000 acres to less than ten. This massive land theft occurred through various means, including treaty violations and land-grabs disguised as legislation, such as the Dawes Act of 1887.

In 1954, the U.S. government decided to abdicate its former agreements with Oregon Tribes, and Congress passed the Western Oregon Indian Termination Act. This era in Native history is known simply as "termination" because it severed the relationship between Tribes and the federal government in a visceral way, while also delivering yet another blow to these fragile communities.

As Grand Ronde Tribal scholar and Oregon State University professor Dr. David G. Lewis elaborates in his essay on the Termination era:¹

During the post-termination period of western Oregon, native people appeared to cease to exist, and for twenty-nine years the Grand Ronde descendants suffered disenfranchisement, and a multitude of social problems. In this era, the loss of a tribal center caused a loss of tribal culture, languages, and caused fractures in the community fabric. Most tribal members lost their land and had to move to the cities to find work. Poverty and substance abuse was normal among the terminated natives, as they did not inherit land or resources sufficient to start over anew without federal support.

In the 1970s, many Tribal members became activists and began working to reverse termination. In late 1983, CTGR won federal recognition, and their rights as a sovereign nation were restored. In 1988, over 9,000 acres of the original reservation were reclaimed when the Grand Ronde Reservation Act became finalized. Following the reestablishment of the Reservation, CTGR focused on rebuilding its institutions and developing programs to meet the unique needs of their members.

What does it mean to reclaim traditions when traditional life was disrupted so violently by colonization? How does a community overcome intergenerational traumas while also restoring what was lost?

Greg Archuleta, the
Confederated Tribes of
Grand Ronde

It takes many hands, many generations, the resilience of elders and their descendants.

After the restoration of the tribes, many Native activists came to work for these restored Nations in the administration of education and governance programs. Many people were involved in the reestablishment of the Grand Ronde community specifically, including artist Archuleta, who contributed specifically to traditional education and the tribe's cultural reemergence.

Archuleta is a descendant of the Clackamas Chinook, Santiam Kalapuya, and Chasta people. He was born and raised in the Portland area, spending part of his youth in a section of East Portland that was not yet incorporated, when it was still rural land. He went on to attend the University of Oregon, where he earned bachelor degrees in Journalism and Political Science.

In 1987, Archuleta moved to the Grand Ronde Reservation to work for the Tribe as a newsletter writer and hunting and fishing coordinator. Later he became an administrative officer for the tribe and worked in policy and planning before relocating back to Portland twelve years later. When Archuleta returned to the city, he realized that there were not the same cultural resources available to Tribal members who lived off-Reservation. As he explained in a recent interview, "We didn't really have any programs, we had social service support and things like that, but we didn't have any cultural programs, so that's when I decided to create the Lifeways classes."



Greg Archuleta,
Chinookan Figural Box Rattle.
Yellow cedar

In 2005, the Lifeways classes were born. As an instructor, Archuleta wanted to “emphasize and focus on giving Tribal members the opportunity to learn more about the culture and way of life (of the Tribes of western Oregon) ...and to emphasize those areas because a lot of the existing cultural programs were more general.” The guiding purpose of a Lifeways class would be to share traditional knowledge about ancestral foods, the cultural arts, crafts, and ecology while fostering a sense of community for all who attended.

Archuleta envisioned Lifeways classes to be different: informal, or “experiential,” as he describes. His approach to teaching enables students to explore various forms of traditional knowledge without the pressure of deadlines or assigned homework. Lifeways is an opportunity for students to follow their interests without a rigid curriculum. Students are allowed to explore and choose their own adventure: they determine the structure of their experience and what subjects or disciplines they explore. Along with these classes, Archuleta has taken students into the field to gather materials for projects like basketry, showing them how to properly acquire, process, and store natural sources like cedar bark and spruce root.

Through Lifeways classes, Archuleta also sought to develop more awareness around the unique art style of the Columbia River Tribes: “There was little recognition of the art form of the Columbia River Region, which is unique from the Salish and Northwest Coast, which kind of overshadows our area ... that includes working with basketry, carving, art design, and integration of the Chinuk Wawa, our language.”

Members of many Indigenous communities must grapple with the inheritance of intergenerational trauma. Often we are tasked with navigating multiple generations of oppression, along with unraveling our own. One of the ways Native people find the path toward healing is through the reclamation of culture and tradition. The Lifeways framework that Archuleta created goes beyond the confine of a “class,” and creates a tangible and lasting impact in the lives of Oregon’s Indigenous people.



In progress cedar hat, an example of a project from a Lifeways class

Greg Archuleta, *Daughter of Sun Returns to the Sky World*. Red Cedar, abalone, and acrylic paint





Greg A. Robinson, *We Have Always Lived Here*, 2015. Basalt carving at the end of the Tilikum Crossing Bridge, Bridge of the People. Gift of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. TriMet Public Art Collection. (Photo courtesy TriMet)

Conditions

Steph Littlebird

Art and design is an important aspect of traditional knowledge that is shared in Lifeways classes. Early in the program’s infancy, Archuleta recruited his friend and fellow Chinookan carver, Greg A. Robinson. Robinson, a former Chinook Nation Tribal Council member, teaches the carving style of the Columbia River people. His masterful works are permanently on view at the Multnomah Falls National Scenic Park in Oregon and the Parkersville Historic Park in Camas, Washington. Visitors can also see Robinson’s 7,000-pound basalt statue, representing a Chinookan chief with his people, adorning each side of the Tilikum Crossing bridge that connects Southwest and Southeast Portland.

“The Gregs,” as the co-instructors are fondly referred to by their students, were friends first. They met while learning the Tribe’s language, Chinuk Wawa, together at the first CTGR Portland office. Together, these two men have fostered a real sense of community and belonging for many of Grand Ronde’s urban members. They’ve created a space for cultural learning and personal growth to occur simultaneously. The Lifeways class is also a place of connection for other people outside of the Grand Ronde community. Many artists from other Tribal nations and places like Hawaii have visited the class to share and learn over the last fifteen years of Lifeways’s legacy.

Archuleta is a humble man; his modesty is disarming. But he’s among the most respected and knowledgeable Indigenous artists of western Oregon. His work is featured in the Portland Art Museum’s Center for Contemporary Native Art. In 2019, Archuleta was selected as a contributing artist for the Exquisite Gorge Project, a massive 66-foot steamrolled relief print project orchestrated by the Maryhill Museum of Art in Washington state. Additionally, Archuleta is part of the Confluence Project, “a community-supported nonprofit that works through six art landscapes, educational programs, and public gatherings in collaboration with Northwest tribes, communities, and the celebrated artist Maya Lin.”

While contemporary Indigenous life has changed greatly since first contact, our culture continues to remain dynamic and resilient. The Grand Ronde Lifeways class moves beyond the constraints of Western formalities to give students a sense of belonging and purpose outside of a life prescribed by the dominant culture.

¹ Lewis, PhD, D., 2018. Lewis 2008, *Termination of The Grand Ronde Tribe*, Chapter 1. [online] QUARTUX. Available at: <<https://www.ndnhistoryresearch.com/2018/08/08/lewis-2008-termination-of-the-grand-ronde-tribe-chapter-1/>>

Steph Littlebird is a Kalapuyan visual artist, professional writer, and curator from Portland, Oregon. She is the 2020 AICAD-NOAA National Fellowship recipient, 2020 Caldera Artist in Residence, 2019 Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) project grant awardee, and a three-time SciArt Initiative recipient. Littlebird’s work revolves around her Indigenous heritage and contemporary Native issues. She has been featured by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Oregon Bee Project, and at World Environment Day.

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HONEY

— Ido Radon

66



Conditions

Ido Radon

Do you remember it? Blown on the winds, on current and tide, its gas-filled float like a silicone potsticker on the surface of the ocean. Iridescent bubble with a gradient to a deep blue. Below the waterline dragged bulbous tentacles, mucous-y midnight blue with venomous barbs coiled, trawling for passersby.

Many as one, this colony of function-specialized clones in their symbiotic interdependence, four types of physiologically integrated zooids in unseverable relation. Colloquially a man-o-war, it/they was/were in its/their exquisite mutuality and organization nonetheless operationally rudderless, adrift, opportunistic.

Do you remember when you and I and all of us joined those who access the world primarily through the window of the monitor, the seventy-one keys, and cursor/selection input device?

And how some people counted days and others didn't, and neither tactic (reframing or unframing) changed anything. And time that normally marched onward unstopably, and all of the other things that for better and also often worse one relies on happening regularly, didn't. Do you remember the feeling of moving through molasses or marshmallow cream or chest-high water?

Early on, in the time when the virus moved freely, when things were changing daily, he said, This time is different.

He had been at ground zero, had become ill, did the research before any of the rest of us. When he returned, he said, we would have to seal off our household of six. We have to think of it like this, he said:

We are all one organism.

That year the wasp children came, emerging from the ground as they did each year when the sun returned, leaving piles of chewed clay around their perfectly circular holes. I had struggled over the years about what, if anything, to do about the wasp children, worrying that in their enthusiasm they might hurt a passerby, and yet unable to do more than hang a single ineptly-loaded wasp trap in the camellia some years.

When the density of their flight paths became acute, I would do a little haphazard internet searching and finally conclude, given the wasp lifespan, that we only had to cede the tiny front yard to them for a month or so. And wasps are pollinators, aren't they? It seemed in that year important, more than ever, that things should be pollinated.

Let us LIVE, I remember saying. And I meant the wasp children and the finch family and the dog-walking people, even, and the crows, and Catherine my regal neighbor and former symphony violinist drinking Prosecco six feet away from a friend out front of her house, and the man in his robe putting out the trash.

I had made plans more than once to dig out the clay of this tiny plot in the winter and add so much mulch that it might make it less conducive to perfect-hole-making so that the children might elect to go somewhere else. But the truth is I might miss them.

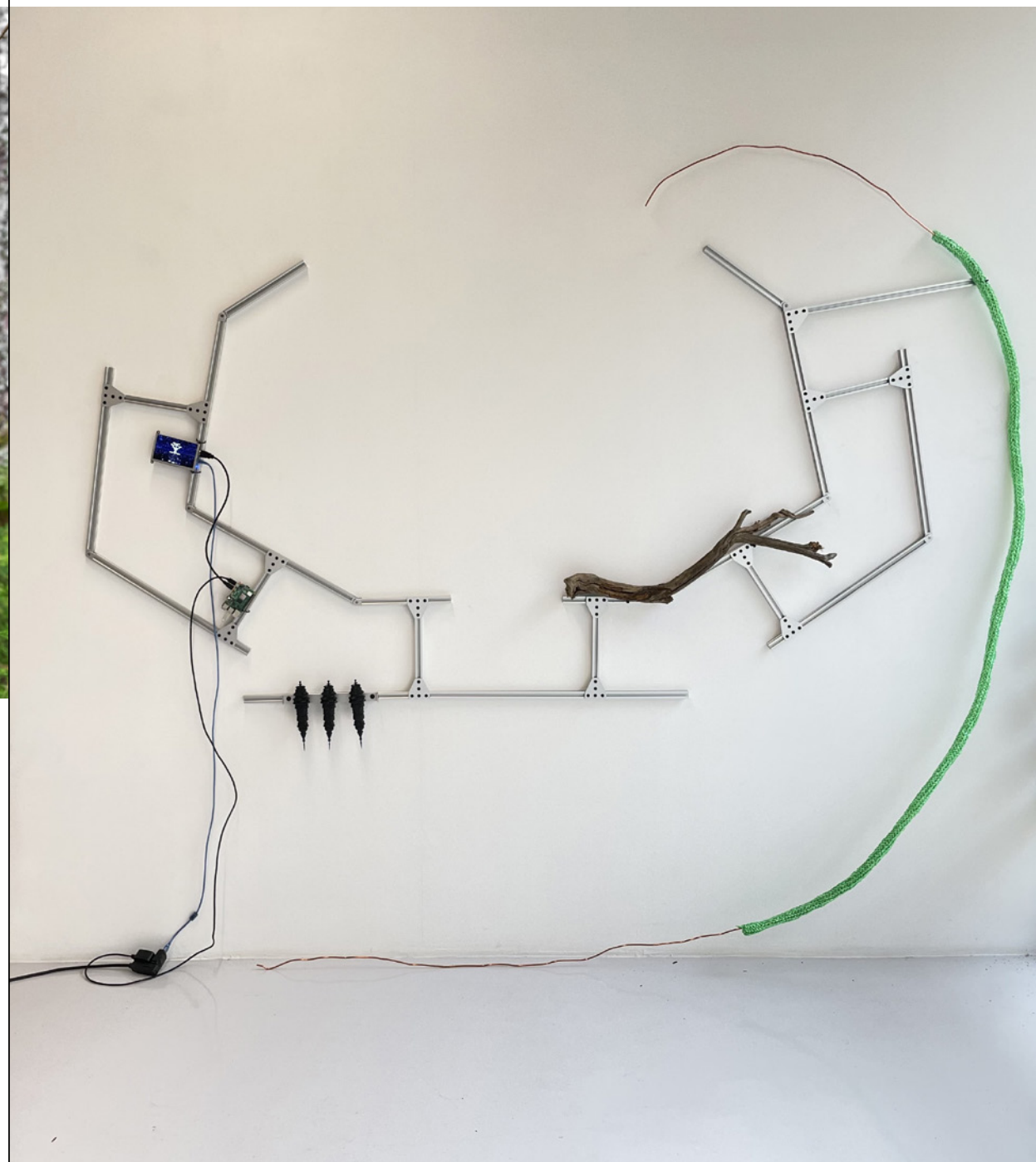
That was the year I learned that the wasp children were in fact ground bees. Remember the slow one with heavily-laden legs.

George Markov, *Fungal rhizomorphs on dead wood*
(Photo: Shutterstock)



Elenia Photo, *Honey mushrooms grow on a tree trunk. Edible mushrooms in the forest.* (Photo: Shutterstock)

Opposite:
Ido Radon, *Framework Zero (with Node Prototype 192.168.1.165)*, 2021. Aluminum profile, PLA 3-D prints, microcontroller, display, mp4, extension cord, rosemary, aluminum, copper, day nylon twine, hardware, (with Oskar Radon). Imagining a post internet method of serves and sharing data, this work hosts a local website on a microcontroller-based webservice that is only accessible via the gallery's wifi router. Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville (Photo: Marc Damage)





Ido Radon,
Friddceamework
 (192.168.1.100/), 2021.
 Aluminum, PLA 3-D prints,
 Apache webservice on
 meeeeeeeicrocontroller,
 display, power cords,
 tripod, selenite, sand,
 mahogany, latent electromag-
 net, bay leaves (with Molly
 Radon-Kimball), mp3
 (with Neville Kimball), mp4
 (with Oskar Radon).

Slatan, *Closeup of agaric honey
 mushrooms growing on tree
 stumps* (Photo: Shutterstock)



What I don't remember, because it was before my time, was this place being an incubator for anarchist thought. The *Firebrand*, later known as *Free Society*, an anarchist newspaper that was published in Portland, Oregon, in the late 1800s was apparently influential in disseminating and shaping anarchist conversation in the United States. Notably, it also addressed sexuality, women's rights, and free love.

I reread, among other things, Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*. He rejected, you'll recall, the notion of competition or survival of the fittest as the way of things in the natural world as well as human society. And I thought and still do about radical empathy and an ethics based on care.

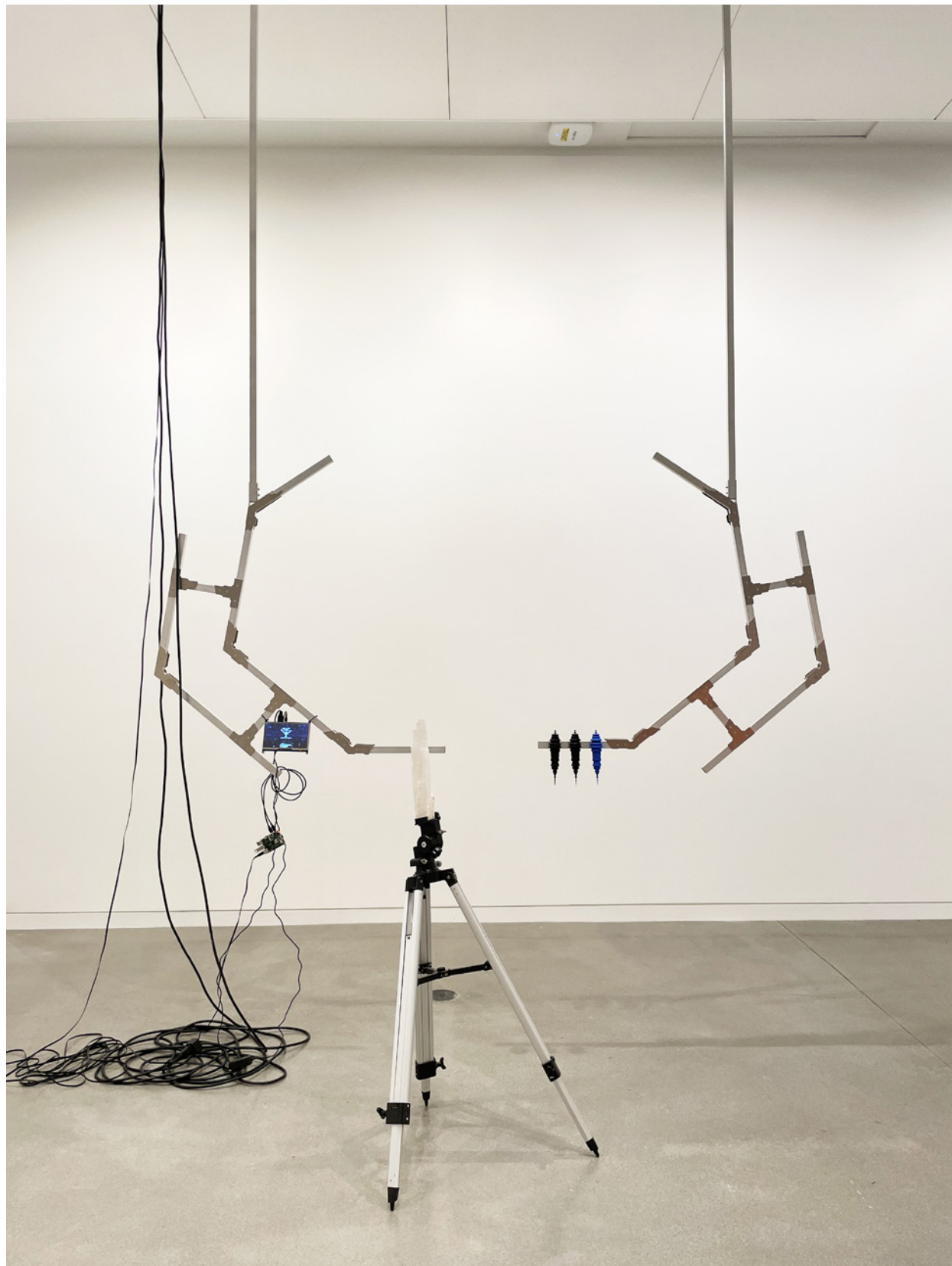
And I remembered how tides of awareness rise and fall and that histories are as tangled as fungus rhizomorphs and buried as deeply beneath straight lines and grids of capital-H history written by the victor.

The lyric mode exists without chronology or causation; its principle of connection is associative. (Of course, no piece of writing can exist purely in any one mode, but we can certainly talk of the predominance of one element, perhaps two.)...A writer who employs the lyric structure is setting various images, events, scenes, or memories to circling round an unspoken, invisible center. The invisible center is what the novel or poem is about; it is also unsayable in available dramatic or narrative terms. That is, there is no action possible to the central character and no series of events that will embody in clear, unequivocal, immediately graspable terms what the artist means. Or perhaps there is no action or series of events that will embody this "center" at all. —Joanna Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" (1971)

Somewhat earlier was the 2003 manifesto titled *The Wireless Commons*. Among its charter signatories were the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Cory Doctorow and Creative Commons' Lawrence Lessig. Framed as an open letter, it was drafted by Adam Shand who, in 2000, founded Personal Telco, a network of open, free wifi nodes throughout Portland, installed and maintained by a group of volunteer engineers and believers.

We have formed the Wireless Commons because a global wireless network is within our grasp.... We will break down commercial, technical, social and political barriers to the commons....

The Internet's value increases exponentially with the number of people who are able to participate. In today's world, communication can take place without the use of antiquated telecommunications networks. The organizations that control these networks are limping anachronisms that are constrained by the expense and physical necessity of using wires to build their networks. Because of this, they cannot serve the great mass of people who stand to benefit from a wireless commons. Their interests diverge from ours, and their control over the network strangles



our ability to communicate.... Most importantly, the network needs to be accessible to all and provisioned by everyone who can provide. By adding enough providers to the network, we can bridge the physical gaps imposed by the range of our equipment. The network is a finite resource which is owned and used by the public, and as such it needs to be nurtured by the public.

The anarchists made hand sanitizer. And then it was the case that we joined them in wearing masks. And once the immediate threat had passed, having regained a tiny sliver of unsurveilled privacy, why would we stop.

By 2004, Personal Telco had installed 114 wifi nodes in Portland and were working on installing more powerful WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access) boxes to increase coverage.

In December of 2006, the city of Portland launched its “Unwire Portland” citywide wifi network project that was meant to offer free wireless internet access

Denis Gavrilov, *Armillaria mellea* or honey fungus growing on a tree trunk in the forest among moss (Photo: Shutterstock)

Opposite: Ido Radon, *Two-Axis Crafting Table*, 2021. Aluminum profile, passionflower vine, 3M 2097 filters, PLA 3-D prints, display, video (“The Lighting,” with Molly Radon-Kimball), extension cord, solar panel, Voxeljet print, fulgurite (lightning glass), copper, ripstop nylon, aluminum, selenite, paracord, cat claw. The first of the frameworks. The PLA 3-D prints are the waveform of a crow’s call modeled around an axis. 2020 gave me a new appreciation for the black bloc of birds. Courtesy the artist and Melanie Flood Projects (Photo: Leif Anderson)

across ninety-five percent of the city. Rather than work with the team of Personal Telco, the city contracted with a company called MetroFi to build the network by installing access points on light poles.

Just two years later, in March of 2008, Unwire was over. MetroFi reported that it had not been able to generate enough revenue from ad sponsorships, and was pulling its access points from the city.

But Personal Telco persisted, with 100 nodes in its network providing free wifi at numerous sites throughout Portland.

It was still the case that the largest organism on earth lived in Oregon. For eight millennia, an interconnected colony of *Armillaria ostoyae* had thrived on 3.5 square miles in the Malheur National Forest in the Strawberry Mountains. It wound beneath the ground in tangled networks of brown-black rhizomorphs. It embraced the trunks of Douglas firs in thin sheets of pale mycelium beneath the bark. And at their bases it thrust forth clutches of charming golden mushrooms, glossy and sticky.

There had been a dispute about the scientific name, but in the vernacular, the mushroom was commonly called *honey*.

There in the Malheur, an infected tree would often grow a distress crop of cones.

So it was years earlier in my birthplace: the Monterey Pine out front succumbing, as so many did, but in a last great push expressing dozens and dozens of cones in clusters on her bare, grey limbs.

What you will remember is that redundancy mattered. In various and crucial ways, too many to enumerate here. That preservation, maintenance, distribution of deprecated vessels, knowledges, technologies, seeds, was perhaps even more vital than anyone could have known. That backup systems need backup systems. That everything depends on this.

But okay, now we can look back and see clearly the benefit of choosing correctly between a handful of cloud and a handful of sand.

It had been just before that time that I had studied to take the test to earn my amateur radio operator Technician license from the FCC permitting me certain privileges on the radio waves to which the United States government, within its borders, laid claim. And so I became aware of the repeaters. Maintained by volunteers, repeaters regenerate signals suffering from distortion. Repeaters empower the signal to cover greater distances, to move around and be received on the other side of an obstruction.

Flower to flower 60,000 strong she and her fellows foraged. On return to the hive, her honey crop or second stomach full of nectar, she would transfer some of her nectar to a receiving bee's mouth. There, an enzyme helped

Ido Radon

break down part of the sugar, removing some of its moisture content, and the bee passed the nectar on to another bee's mouth.

The nectar was passed repeatedly mouth-to-mouth, slowly thickening into a pre-honey. Finally, she, another, inserted the then-honey into a hexagonal waxen cell. Others fanned their wings above the open cells, removing more moisture before the cells were sealed with wax plugs.

Every one of the worker bees was female.

Postscript. This writing gathered to it thinking that fed my art practice but more importantly laid the groundwork for bodies of work exhibited in 2021 at Melanie Flood Projects, Air de Paris, and the AHVA Gallery at UBC. These works illustrate this essay. I continue to think about feminisms, technologies, persistence, and power.

END

Overlaying considerations of the digital network on the radically interconnected, interpenetrated nature of things and beings, Ido Radon prototypes technologies and protocols via temporal laminations of cypherfeminist speculation and deprecated tools and methods including applied material folk knowledges.

Ido Radon, *Redundancies (Touched)*, 2021. PC cases, custom aluminum brackets, passionflower vine, ripstop nylon, paracord, aluminum

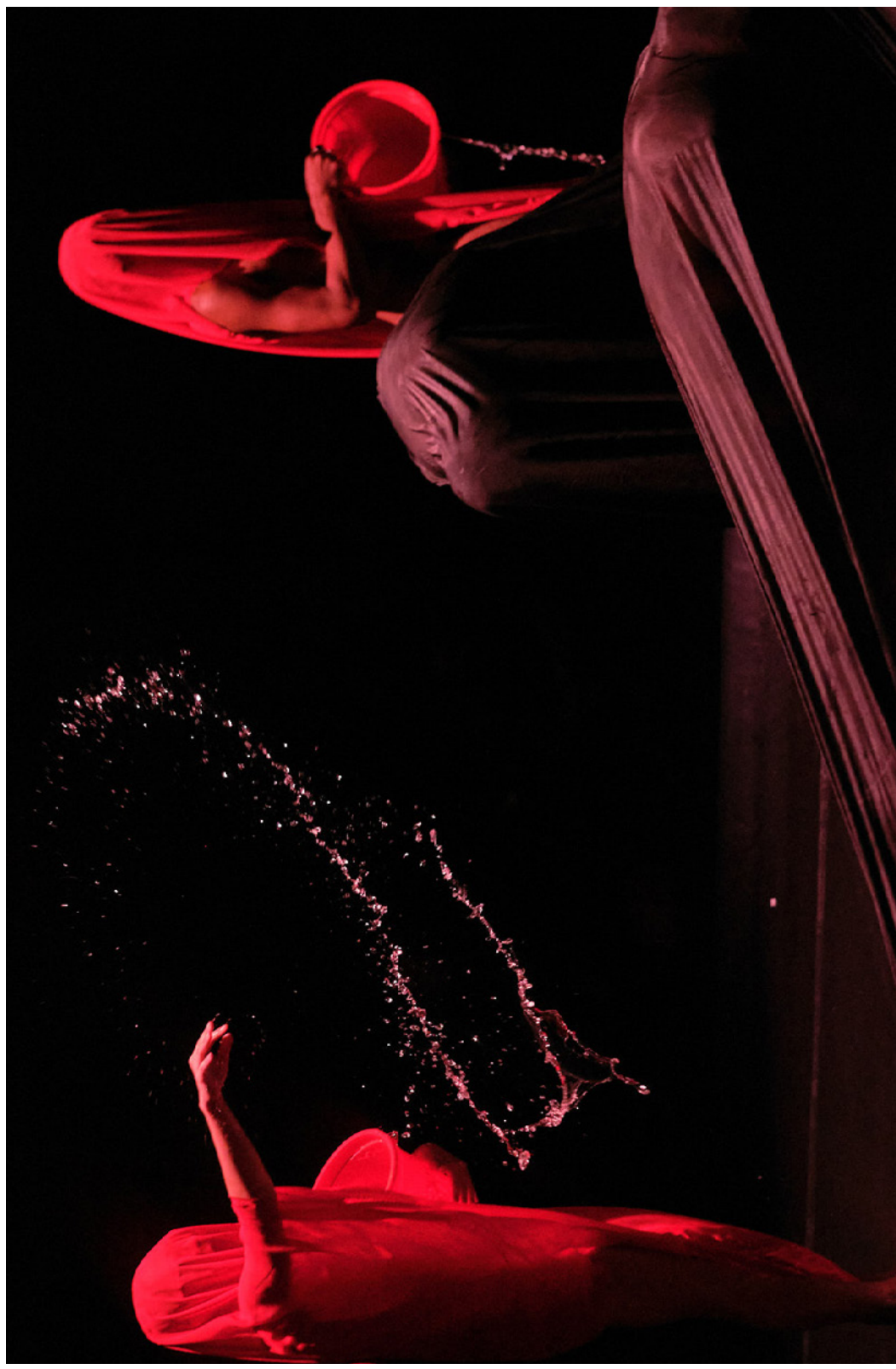


The works of rubén garcía marrufo are an audiovisual fabulation of the awe-inducing instant, gathering phantasmagorical narratives, silences, and rituals which expand the ways we embrace the concept of *border*, going beyond its social, historical, and political meaning, to manifest *border* as the site for a vital existence. With video, film, and sound experimentation as their principal mediums, they project their pieces onto public spaces or edit them into fragmented montages that alter our perception of the moving image in an exercise that fuses poetic fiction with documentary chronicles. garcía marrufo invites us to transcend the veil of lost moments that occur when we sense the pulse of our surroundings through sequences and scenarios that present human life as a fluid passage from one place to the next, a translation of languages and symbols, oral testimonies that tell stories of loss and communion. This work is a place where we launch into a sensorial adventure of discovery, that intimate encounter with the pondering image and its ability to connect with us, residual moments where we witness something both fulminating and captivating, summoning us to reunite with the primal wonder of being-in-the-world.

garcía marrufo is a restless creator, full of curiosity and critical insight regarding the effects that natural and urban surroundings have on

our senses, as well as the singularity of being human and the manner in which we make sense of what we see, hear, or touch, from near and from afar. At a very young age, they developed an omnivorous attitude toward all forms of artistic expression, engaging everything they found in their path without prejudice, driven by a permanent state of inquisitive imagination. Their early forays into the visual arts stemmed from exchanges with the art communities of Mexicali and Calexico, a multidisciplinary creative sector animated by a spirit of collaborative experimentation. This awareness of a perpetual game regarding art, its meanings and possibilities, led them to produce a series of documentary pieces, video collages, and sound designs, using different archival sources, rearticulating the sensory experience of the spectator before an audiovisual work. This attentive wandering forged a loving relationship with the moving image and with voices that flow like a whirlwind of memories stolen from reality.

A deep concern that garcía marrufo finds in the audiovisual medium is the ability to record a present that isn't there anymore, to see a fleeting moment that transcends its simplicity. We can see in their early pieces the configuration of a work guided by both documentation and by making the audiovisual experience a confrontation with the realm of the senses:



rise x fall
(rubén garcía marrufo,
maximiliano, Jaleesa
Johnston), *AT THE END
OF EMPIRE*, 2021.
Three channel video
installation, perfor-
mance. Courtesy
Portland Institute for
Contemporary
Art (Photo: Tojo
Andrianarivo)

dreamlike whispers that flow alongside noise and distortion, the earth's trembling mixed with the agitated voices that witness a mountain evaporating in midair, an experience not unlike discerning the sound of the wind caressing leaves, sunrises hiding behind the ruins of a wall while we listen to a man singing *nortañas*.

As their work evolves, garcía marrufo passes through a series of inter-sections between memory and presence, moving image and performance, allegorical installation and public space, which lead them to redefine the threshold between the audiovisual experience and its manner of operation where the Black Box migrates toward the White Cube and where the act of being in front of a projection will no longer be a still encounter with images on a wall, but rather an ecstatic experience, which lets the spectator meander through the surroundings of a given projection so to feel ourselves part of the ritual.

To live inside the works of garcía marrufo is to inhabit a place where playing children assault the camera with their screams and gestures while we listen to a tale of migration from the man that stops in his tracks to marvel at the “shiny constellations” when crossing a field bedeviled by coyotes (*El Cielo más Hermoso*), or to place us in between an opera singer and a captive audience on another screen (*Don Quixote a Dulcinea*), bodies covered in red cloaks that wander a city in ruins through the entrails of a crashed plane (*AT THE END OF EMPIRE*), bodies absent and oracular, a meditative dance of a silent nature. The camera lens approaches these sites, these voices, these pilgrimages in the middle of nowhere, to define a metaphysics of presence, the time and intimate tale of migration, placing us at the center of a state of transition, where subject and nature interweave

their poetic performance. In this manner, garcía marrufo articulates that sense of awe and epiphany behind those everyday discoveries that bring an all-too-human quality to existence, a voice of the subaltern that says, “I am Here. Always.”

Alejandro Espinoza Galindo is a writer, curator, and art historian. Professor of Art History and Theory at the School of Arts of the Autonomous University of Baja California, Mexico. This essay was originally commissioned by The Ford Family Foundation and included in an artist monograph, 2022.

rubén garcía
marrufo, *delineation
of breaths ii*, 2020.
Performative lecture,
Zoom play, 80 min.
Dimensions variable

Following sprout:
rubén garcía marrufo,
el cielo más hermoso,
2019. Documentary
video, installation,
single channel video,
22 min. Bench from
the former ICE facility
located at 511 NW
Broadway, Dimensions
Variable. Courtesy
Oregon Contemporary
(Photo: Mario Gallucci)





Figure 1. Name, Title, 202X. etc.,
123 x 123 in.

rise x fall
(rubén garcía marrufo,
maximiliano), *AT THE
END OF EMPIRE*, 2021.
Site specific perfor-
mance, digital video,
35 min.



rise x fall
(rubén garcía marrufo,
maximiliano), *AT THE
END OF EMPIRE*, 2021.
Site specific perfor-
mance, digital video,
35 min.

Shields, Open Wounds,
and New Landscapes: An Artist's
Account of Creation

Stephanie Gervais

84

Stephanie Gervais

I made *Shield* in 2014, while living between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil. My friend Yuri modeled *Shield* in front of an old, decomposing house in Rio. My intention was that he would lift up the beaded, lattice-like structure and wrap it around his body, like a shield. Yuri was seventeen at the time. Strong, but not a bodybuilder. I didn't anticipate the work's weight; it was an enormous effort to lift it. Even as Yuri gripped one beaded end and pulled it upward a large section lay stuck on the ground. Two lines of beads split open in the middle, the fishing line snapping from the weight.



Stephanie Gervais,
Shield, 2014. Plastic beads
and nylon thread.
52×100×0.5in. Archival
inkjet print, 19×19in.

Recently, I have been thinking about composing more shield-like sculptures. The idea started as an image of a body bag composed of small, white, round beads that migrate between shades of white and off-white. A large opening at the top is lined with a single strand of gold beads. This opening resembles a wound as well as a vagina. This is where my body enters. I have been impacted so many times by heartbreak that the body bag is a form of not wanting to participate in the world—to be invisible, or disappear.

Now I imagine this new shield as a singular sheet, but perforated with gold-lipped wounds of all sizes. There is something tactically and emotionally satisfying about stringing beads and forming seams. They are reparative acts. The new shield is supposed to look messy, in crisis, like an unresolved, fractured aggregate—like life. The original *Shield* was included in my recent one-person exhibition *Gulalhi*.¹ It provoked the most questions; it was potentially out of place. I couldn't always articulate its place in the exhibition, or the ideas behind it, especially in relationship to other works in the show that documented concrete events—including the destruction of refugee campsites, and the presence of people I was close to who lived in these border zones.

Once you've been broken so hard, I think, you stop breaking, but refract, dislocate—archipelagize.⁴

In Afghan performance artist Lida Abdul's film *In Transit* (2008), made outside of Kabul, a group of children play with a decomposing Russian plane abandoned during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The plane's metal façade is splattered with bullet holes—wounds—that the children fill with bunches of cotton. Watching the film, we know that the plane will never fly again, but we also think about the metal sheeting that once served as protection for whoever was inside.



Stephanie Gervais, *Aziz*, 2018. Archival inkjet print on Dibond. 26×20.5in.

In the Afghan army, Aziz learned how to detonate bombs. Sitting next to him on the couch, I am reminded once again of this closeness to death and destruction of eyelids, eyelashes, torso, voice being touched by seeing I am sitting with this closeness You use a thin piece of wire, bent over, your arms come close to the ground slowly lifting the dirt until you find the active wire It's easy, he says, his eyes skipping.

When you cross all borders, you forget everything, he tells me. You forget selling fabric, or shaved ice, from village to village You forget the ovular impact-marks splayed across your forearm You forget each of the five times I've seen you cry.

I told you that when something breaks, when a cut appears, we need to fix it I was talking about us but also about you When you refuse to talk about it, it will grow and afterwards we can't close it. After multiple bursts, the holes line up close to one another. It becomes a landscape or an archipelago, and the wounds are transformed into positive space.



Stephanie Gervais, *Gulahi* (installation view), 2018. Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College. Photo courtesy Nina Johnson

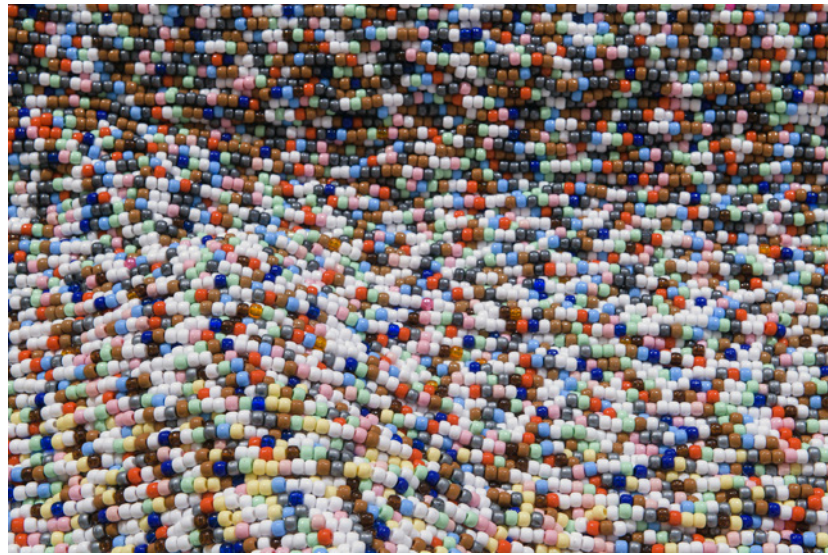
American theorist Judith Butler ties vulnerability to bodily exposure—both to other people, and to power.² She writes: “Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.”³ The bodies that I photographed and wrote about in these border zones were exposed, in particular, to power, or power-as-violence. These works testify to a violently disproportionate, politically-constructed vulnerability close to destruction and death. Yet, Butler also affirms that vulnerability and bodily exposure can constitute a resistance to subjugation and violence. A shield blocks the body, protects the body. What about a shield that is made of holes or wounds? It is terrible as a shield, but it claims its own structure, accepting brokenness. This shield, where its beaded slabs are secure, is woven carefully, expertly, but where it opens or branches, it gives the illusion of breaking, of “holding on by a thread”—of being made of holes.



Stephanie Gervais, *Wallet burnt by the police*, 2018. Archival inkjet print on Dibond, 22.5×28in.

Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe describes how colonial occupation rewrites spatial relations by “...seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area.”⁷ This leads to the creation of boundaries, fragmentation, segregation, and the dispersal of people and land. Under colonialism, and what, more generally, Mbembe calls “terror regimes,” people are hierarchized within social and spatial categories that are defined by varying degrees of violence, vulnerability, and disposability. Mbembe affirms that in precolonial Africa, it was human movement that determined and shifted space, not the other way around: “Space is a product of the way people move.” In precolonial Africa, borders were porous sites of open relation and exchange. In contrast, today’s border regimes—whether in Africa, Europe, or the Americas—structure and block movement.⁸

“All of Afghanistan is blood. Many people don’t have arms or legs.” We are constantly looking at images of blood, bodies wrapped in white cloth. How can we speak about trauma when your entire upbringing, history, the things you have done and the ways you have moved through space, are all inseparable from violence?⁹



Stephanie Gervais,
Shield (detail), 2014. Plastic
beads and nylon thread.
52 × 100 × .5 in. (Photo
courtesy Nina Johnson)

Judith Butler relates grief to dispossession, becoming undone, and being *beside oneself*.⁵ In the exhibition *Gulalhi*, *Shield* evoked a territory made up of shifting, elusive patterns, reflecting the photographic landscapes in the space and suggesting the wounding of people and land simultaneously.



Sophie Ristelhueber,
Fait #14,
(<http://www.sophie-ristelhueber.fr>)

The photographer Sophie Ristelhueber photographs places and landscapes touched by war. Her series *Fait* (Fact) depicts the Kuwaiti desert after the first Gulf War from an aerial perspective. The photographs trace the marks of war on the landscape—in the form of craters, incisions, holes, newly embossed lines, and pathways.⁶



Stephanie Gervais,
*Campsite burnt by the
police*, 2018. Archival
inkjet print on Dibond,
26 × 20.5 in.

What is an emergency?

“Are they trying to kill them?” my friend Ala asked, incredulous, when I told her stories of the homeless shelter of pod-like containers where my two friends were staying through the winter, after having crossed the border into the UK and been granted legal refugee status in the country. There were metal walls and a heater they could turn on for two hours a day. “This is about an emergency,” she said.

Everywhere we go in Calais smells like fire, my clothes smell for days afterwards. Every night when _____ goes to “try,”¹⁰ he dismantles the tent, stuffs all his blankets in a black garbage bag.

I follow him up the hill, he throws it in the middle of some trees, where no one will find it, then dusts off his hands.

I cried when he told me his friend in Afghanistan was killed. He had been telling him to leave the army, but he couldn't find another job.



Sophie Ristelhueber,
Old Jungle, 2018. Archival
inkjet print on Dibond,
20.5×26 in.

What is an emergency?

An emergency is when people are subject to dramatic, continuous violence: corralled, partitioned, or permitted from moving freely and being somewhere without putting their life at risk.¹¹ In *Borderlands La Frontera*, Gloria E. Anzaldúa writes: “The U.S. Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”¹² Border zones are open wounds; and border culture—a culture of survival and resistance—is an outgrowth of these wounds—landscapes of eruptions, secretions, splits, heartbreaks.

“Never worry, never sad, never scared,” he says. “When you cry, your heart can’t be big. You wanna make your heart so big—then you never cry.” His heart is big because he is neither scared nor greedy for experiences. What if you truly went all around the world with your heart that big, I thought. But also, when I cry it is another kind of strength.

I have the right to be made of wounds.

According to Judith Butler, the language of human rights, based on integrity and self-determination, while necessary, does not reflect our primordial woundability. She writes: “[Human rights discourse] does not do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own, irreversibly, if not fatally.”¹³

My new shields are punctured by holes that become positive space—topologies of experience that account for the negative and for breakdown. These openings are places where connection is lost, experience is suspended, diverted, uprooted, or untranslatable—places where we experience violence, grief, and undoing in gashes, gaps, bridges, and crevices.

- 1 The one-person exhibition *Gulalhi* was on view at the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College from November 15 to December 23, 2018. “Gulalhi” is a word in the Pashto language of Afghanistan, meaning “flowers.”
- 2 “How are vulnerability and bodily exposure related, especially when we think about the exposure of the body to power?” Judith Butler, *Vulnerability in Resistance*. (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 95.
- 3 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. (London: Verso, 2004), 20.
- 4 I am inspired by Édouard Glissant’s writings about creolization and archipelagic thinking: modes of thought and identity that are oriented around multiplicity and relation rather than boundedness or unity. The ocean around his native Caribbean archipelago is described as open and intersected; creating passageways that favor diversity, exchange, and implication—in contrast to the concentrated unity of the Mediterranean. The basis of creolization is the contact between cultures (which today defines the world) and this contact incorporates violence and loss as part of its history. Creolisation ingests and redirects violence. See: Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), 14–15.
- 5 Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics,” in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 21–24.
- 6 Gérard Kouchner, commenting on landscapes in which people are always absent, writes: “Objects outlive men but they preserve their trace.” Gérard Kouchner, “Objets inanimés, avez-vous une âme?” *Le quotidien du médecin*, 10 novembre 2016 p30, <http://www.sophie-ristelhueber.fr>
- 7 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics” in *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Duke University Press, 2003), 25.
- 8 Achille Mbembe, “The Idea of a World Without Borders” YouTube video, 55:00, posted by European Graduate School Video Lectures, February 10, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLRpH5RRwhQ>
- 9 “Our psyches resemble the bordertowns.” Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 109.
- 10 To cross the border by entering into UK-bound commercial trucks from parking lots at night.
- 11 What Mbembe calls the management of the multitudes are: “...brutal attempts to immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people or, paradoxically, to unleash them, to force them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of a territorial state.”
- 12 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 20.
- 13 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 25.

Stephanie Gervais is an artist whose work incorporates photography, sculpture, and language to focus on social crises, violence, migration, and spaces of cultural hybridity. She has shown her work in France, the UK, Brazil, and the US. She completed her MFA at Goldsmiths University, London, and her BA at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. Her work with specific groups of people has evolved over time and is an expression of her long-term personal relationships. Her recent one-person exhibition—entitled *Gulalhi*—was shown at Reed College’s academic museum, The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, in 2018. Her installation was a complex conceptual portrait focused on the daily life of refugee camps in France. She was a teaching artist-in-residence at the Oregon College of Art and Craft in Portland, Oregon in 2018.

www.stephaniegervais.com

Lynne Woods Turner
Process and Patience

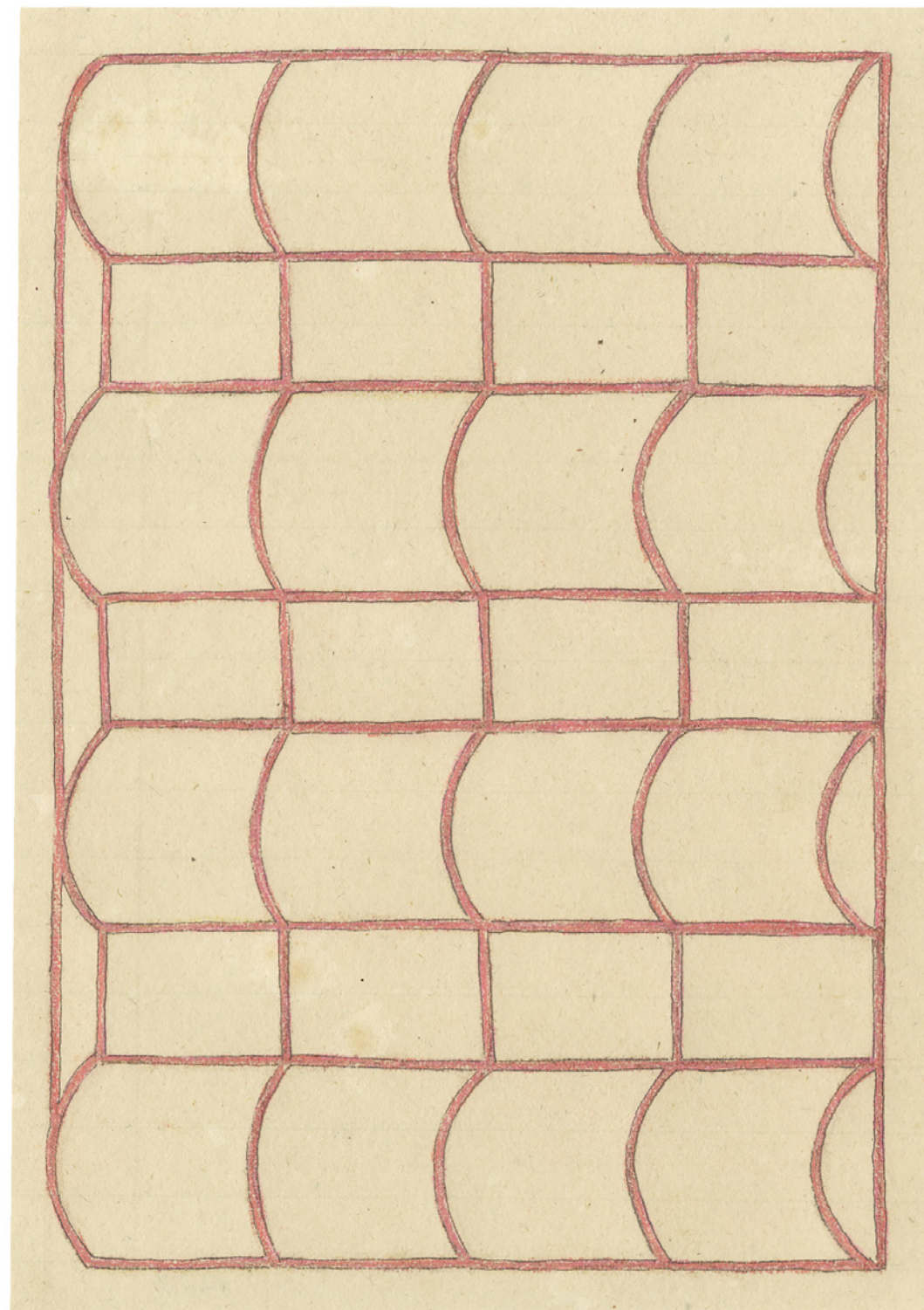
— Stephanie Snyder

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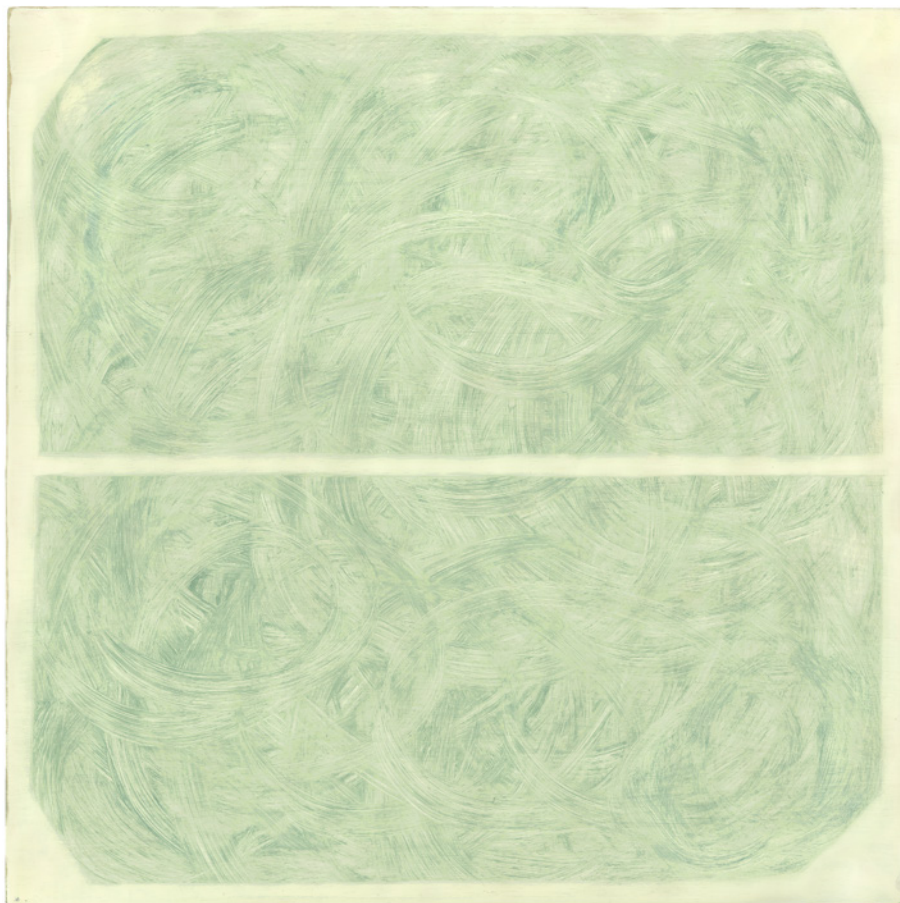
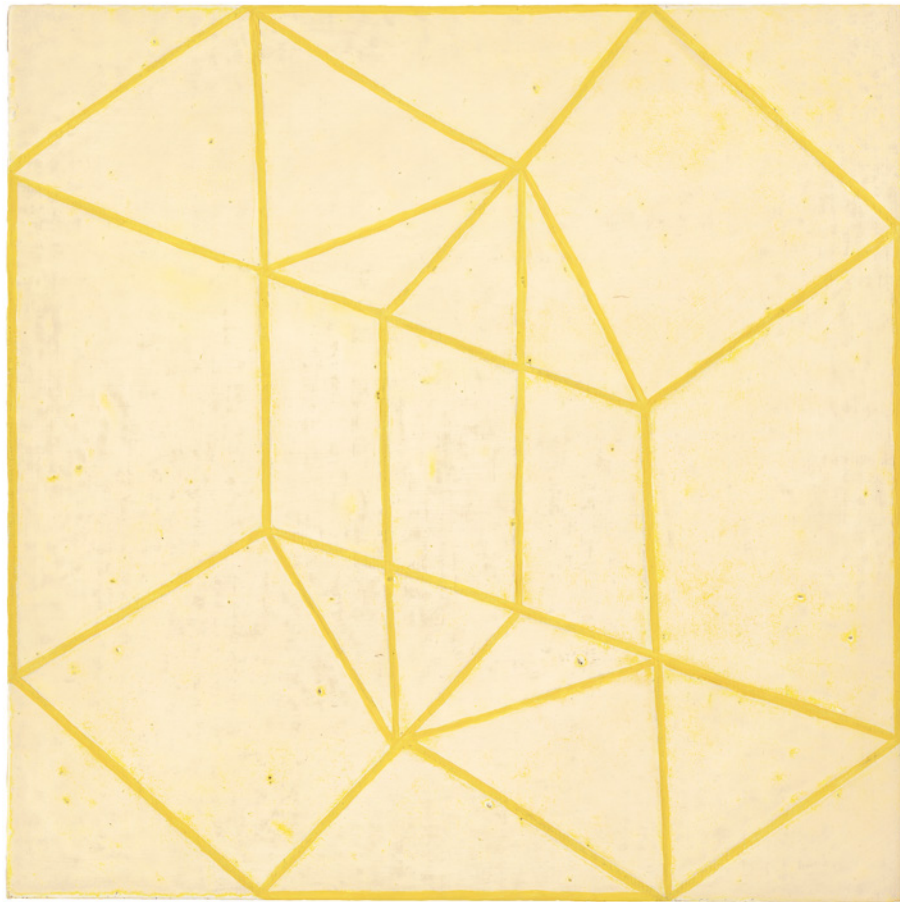
Lynne Woods Turner's works on paper and canvas do not ferry images in any traditional sense; rather, they reveal the odyssey of forms engaged in their own *détournement*, like life companions—the best kind. The kind you walk the world with, intimately, often silently, sharing the textures and colors of time as they slip into memory and psychogeography. Importantly, Turner's spatial journeys are a collection of turns, folds, and undulations that awaken the shapes within and around them. These gently rendered yet precise divisions are recognizable to us as patterns that unite meaning and time, as in poems, Renaissance gardens, or baseball diamonds: spaces where the mind lingers in harmony with geometry. Within such intentional delineations, the energy of *the arranged* ignites sensual, idiosyncratic desires. Contraction, expansion, and renewal—these rhythms are as true of the elements as they are of human behavior. As Turner says, "I am far more interested in synthesis than thesis."¹ We witness synthesis taking place in Turner's work as a coming-together of interdisciplinary tonalities, as opposed to an artistic or intellectual theory. Breath has no theory; and we feel, somehow, the earth speeding us around the sun.

The medial, embraceable scale of Turner's work inflects the context around it; we watch the forms of her drawings shift scale with equal measure whether we're up close or across the room. Moving around the work is met with a sense of dreamy animation. This experience resonates with the geometries of living things such as women's bodies, or the blossoms of flowers—peonies come to mind in particular—whose spatial magnanimity persists whether in Turner's garden or her studio. Like artists before her, Turner's accomplished garden is a constant source of inspiration. In her words, "...my interest in scientific and botanical drawing predates my earliest attempts to actually garden. Both have made me

Stephanie Snyder



Lynne Woods Turner, #1225,
2016. Pencil and colored pencil
on paper, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ ×4 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.



more aware of visual subtleties and information, and I find that drawing, like gardening, requires attentiveness, patience, and humility.”² Organic life cycles are geometric events; much of their geometry is latent and still, awaiting eruption, and reproduction.

While never created to fool the eye, neither are Turner’s forms designed in relation to any notion of ideal symmetry. In drawing #1225 (*Untitled*)³, for instance, sustained looking reveals distinctions between the curved edges on each lateral side of the drawing. Along the right, small vertical arcs appear like hidden portals; but on the left, the same barreled edges abut a vertical span of Turner’s ubiquitous, carmine ichor. This difference is the truth of Turner’s experience. In another instance, painting #9299 (*Untitled*)⁴, appears to contain two crystalline forms that tangle in the middle of the canvas. But the spatial anchors of this mating hover above and below, in the horizontal bands of interlocking form at the top and bottom of the painting. It takes time to arrive at these margins. These works are just two examples of the brilliant, quiet force with which Turner’s forms arrest seeing from the instrumental, to the observational and aesthetic.

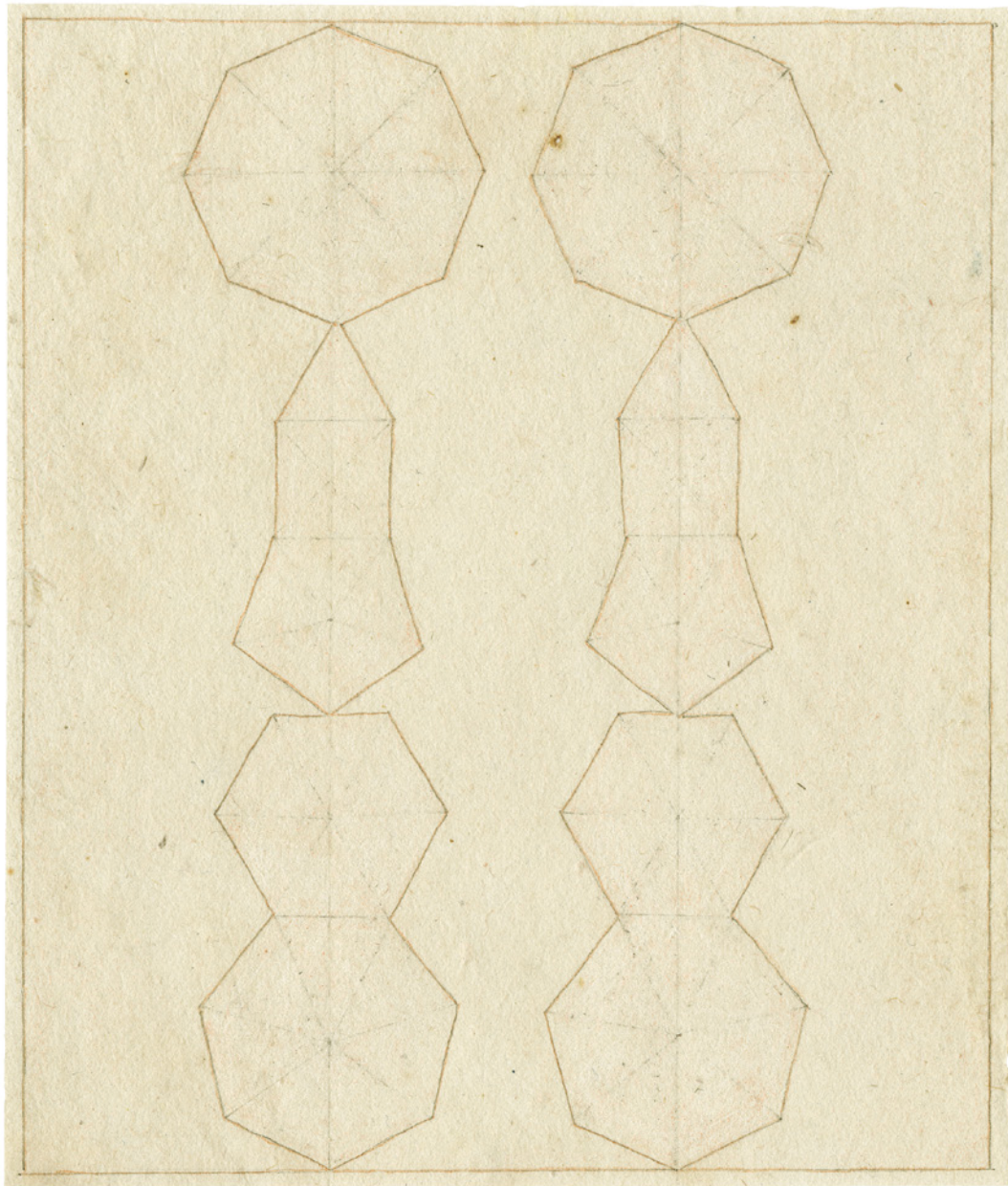
Lines upon lines become something else entirely, something shaped that is palpable to the body. In the artist’s words, “The shape is not exactly a figure, though a torso is suggested; not a landscape, though suggestions of diagrams, maps, and architecture are in play.”⁵ Turner leaves the traces of her process undisturbed within the work. As subtle as eyelashes, or stitches, these ticks and impressions might be considered the work’s subtext, except that it is a mistake to separate Turner’s forms into conceptual layers. We wouldn’t consider the constellations of the artist’s freckles as separate from the organ of her skin, would we?⁶

The same may be said of Turner’s drawing materials. There is a small group of American artists who work to source historical paper; and they collaborate and share their finds with other artists. I’ve heard Turner recount how small caches of paper have been found in a French eighteenth-century chest of drawers or an old Mumbai warehouse. Often, bundles of historical paper are what remain in the cupboards of a home as unwritten correspondence, or the corners of an old print shop as unpublished pages or prints. Some of the papers Turner has used are soft and thick, and some are impressed with the lines of wooden and wire deckles. Some are slightly toned with warm or cool hues. These small artifacts are humble and preindustrial; at the time they were made they were precious, hand-made goods. To develop her drawings in dialogue with these storied objects is a communion of past and present—from the now anonymous papermaker’s hands to Turner’s. This energy, this vibration of life past, is felt throughout Turner’s work as a palimpsest.

In researching and “placing” Turner’s work, one naturally turns to the great geometric artists of our era: Sol LeWitt, Ellsworth Kelly, Bruce Connor, Agnes Martin, and, perhaps surprisingly, Louise Bourgeois. In many of Bourgeois’ drawing series created on small, like pieces of paper, the artist, like Turner, evolved simple forms—such as the arcing legs of her maternal spiders—into exploratory, shifting patterns. These drawings by Bourgeois resonate with the emotional richness and feminist physiology in Turner’s work. In contrast, Sol LeWitt drew a fairly hard distinction between “conceptual” art and expressivity. In his 1967 “Paragraphs on

Lynne Woods Turner, #9299,
2016. Oil on linen over panel,
12×12in.

Lynne Woods Turner, #9285,
2017. Oil on carved wood on
paper, 12×12in.



Lynne Woods Turner, #1058,
2013. Pencil and colored pencil
on paper, 4×3¼in.

Conditions

Conceptual Art,” LeWitt wrote, “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”⁷ Nothing could be further from Turner’s process, though it’s satisfying to discern meaningful associations between LeWitt’s instruction-based wall drawings and Turner’s evolving interiority. In fact, Turner was part of a team that executed a LeWitt wall drawing at the lumber room in Portland in 2015.⁸ Fortunately, LeWitt couldn’t control the sensitivity and skill of those enacting his plans. Though Turner studies her papers and canvases with something LeWitt may have acknowledged as planning; for Turner, planning is never a goal or mental compass. For Turner, planning and execution are subsumed by experience, and this brings us closer to the work of Agnes Martin, who experienced the drawn line as a form of spiritual practice. In Martin’s words, “An artwork is a representation of our devotion to life.”⁹ Where Turner’s work extends from Martin’s vibrating fields is in its development of slow, shifting geometries that unite, turn, part, and fold into dimensions that elicit the oblique of emotions and intellectual reveries. Certainly, this is also a form of devotion.

1 Artist statement, August, 2020.

2 Ibid.

3 Lynne Woods Turner, #1225 (*Untitled*), 2016, Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 6.625×4.625in.

4 Lynne Woods Turner, #9299 (*Untitled*), 2018, Oil on linen over panel, 12×12in.

5 Artist statement, August, 2020.

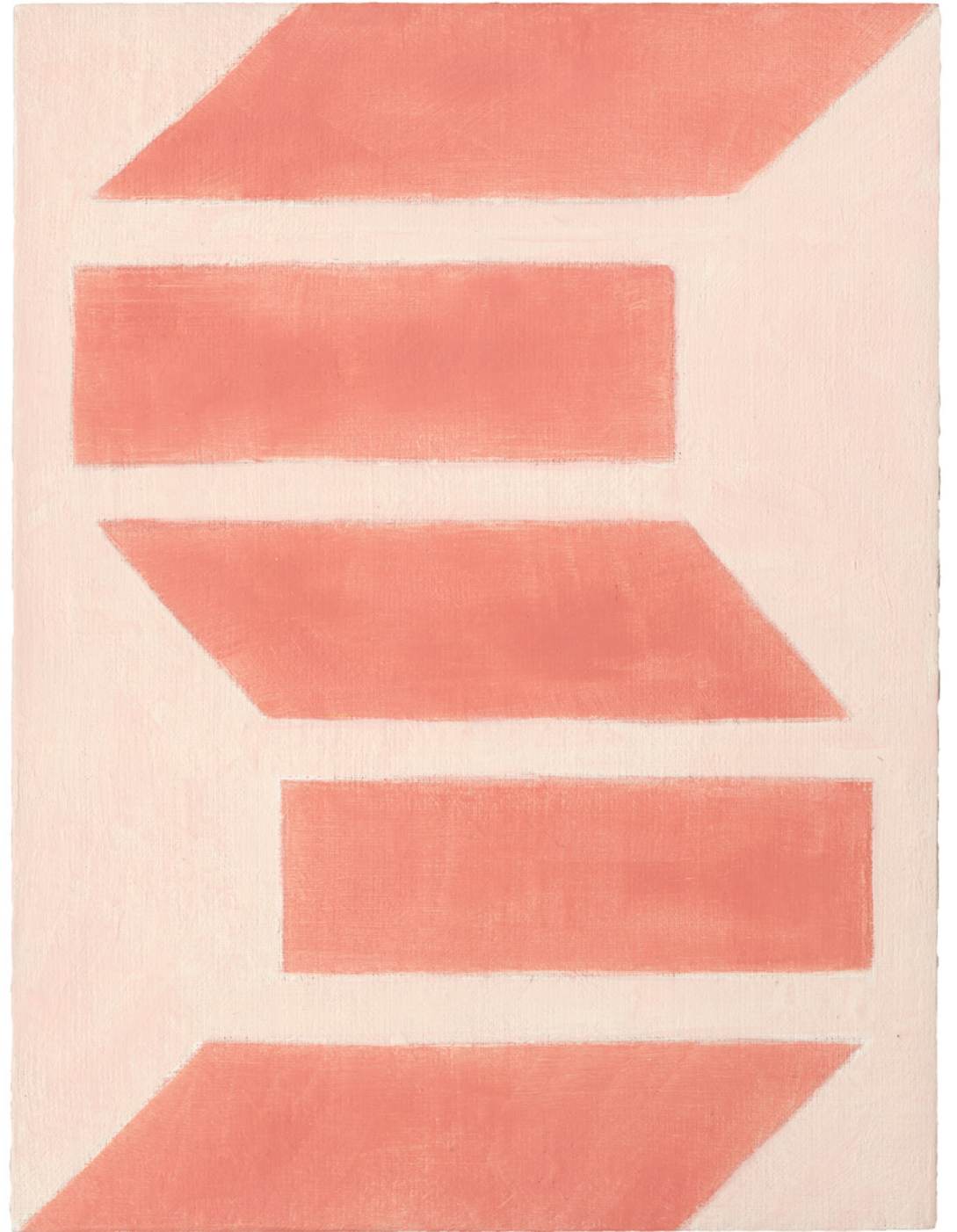
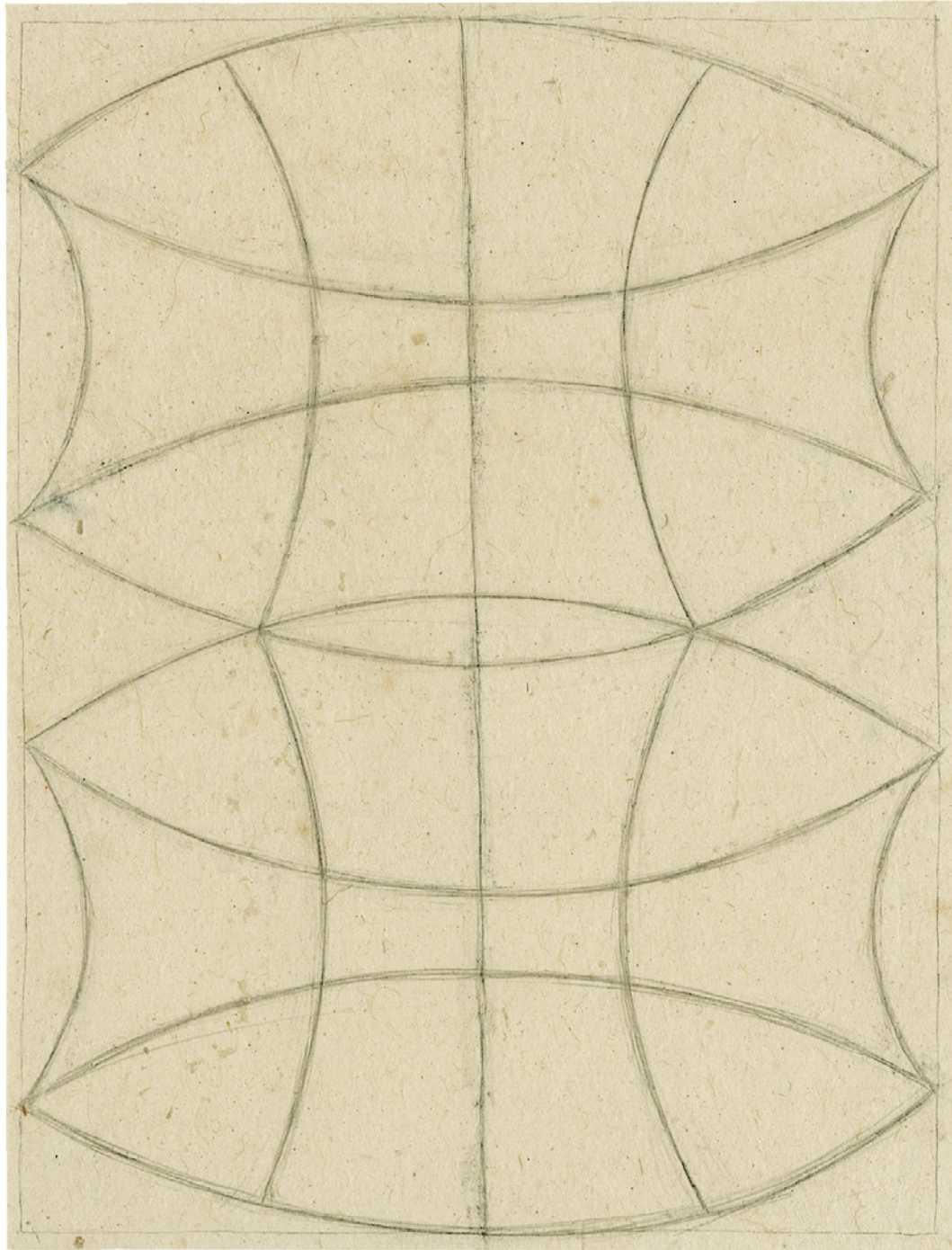
6 These distinctions speak to the pattern-language of textiles, and the relationship between patterned forms and the body. Turner learned to sew well as a child, and traveled through Asia with her parents. In an August 2020 statement, the artist writes: “My travels as a child sparked an interest in non-Western art. I have found sources such as Indian miniatures, Japanese woodblock prints, and Chinese ink painting particularly relevant to my work for their intimacy and attention to detail. For similar personal reasons I am also interested in textiles. As a child I learned to cut patterns, embroider, piece, quilt, knit, and crochet at the same time I was teaching myself to draw.”

7 Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum*, 1967. Interestingly, LeWitt published the text before he constructed his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1968, in the exhibition “The Xerox Book,” organized by Seth Siegelau.

8 Turner was part of a small group of artists invited by lumber room founder Sarah Miller Meigs to execute Sol LeWitt’s *Wall Drawing #109* in the spring of 2015. The LeWitt was part of the exhibition *With a Clear Mind you can move with the truth*, on view at the lumber room from March 13 to May 2, 2015. The exhibition also included a series of twenty-one untitled drawings by Turner created in 2013, now part of the lumber room’s permanent collection. The exhibition was organized by lumber room founder Sarah Miller Meigs. <http://www.lumberroom.com>

9 Agnes Martin, from a 1976 interview with John Gruen, <https://www.artnews.org>

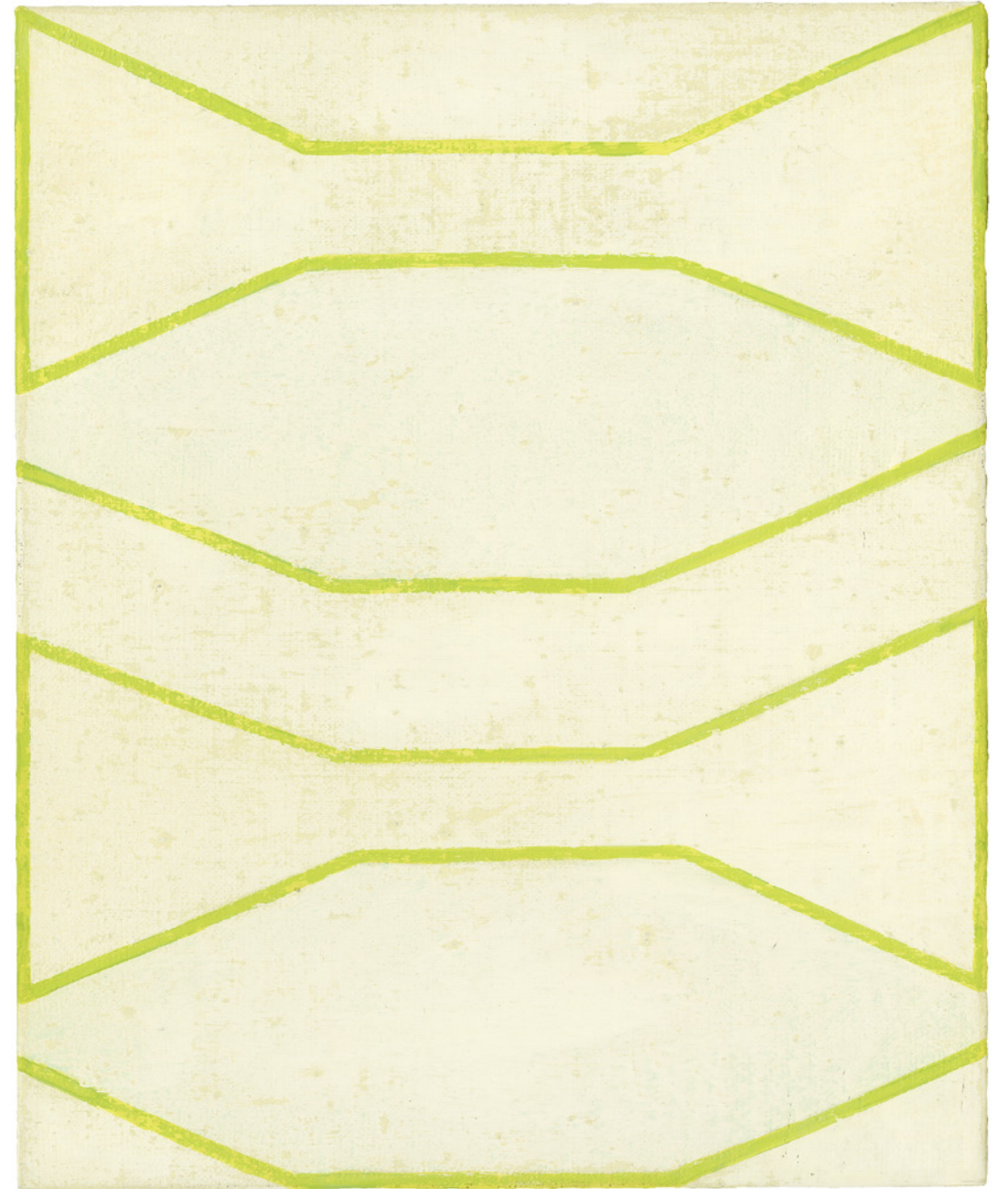
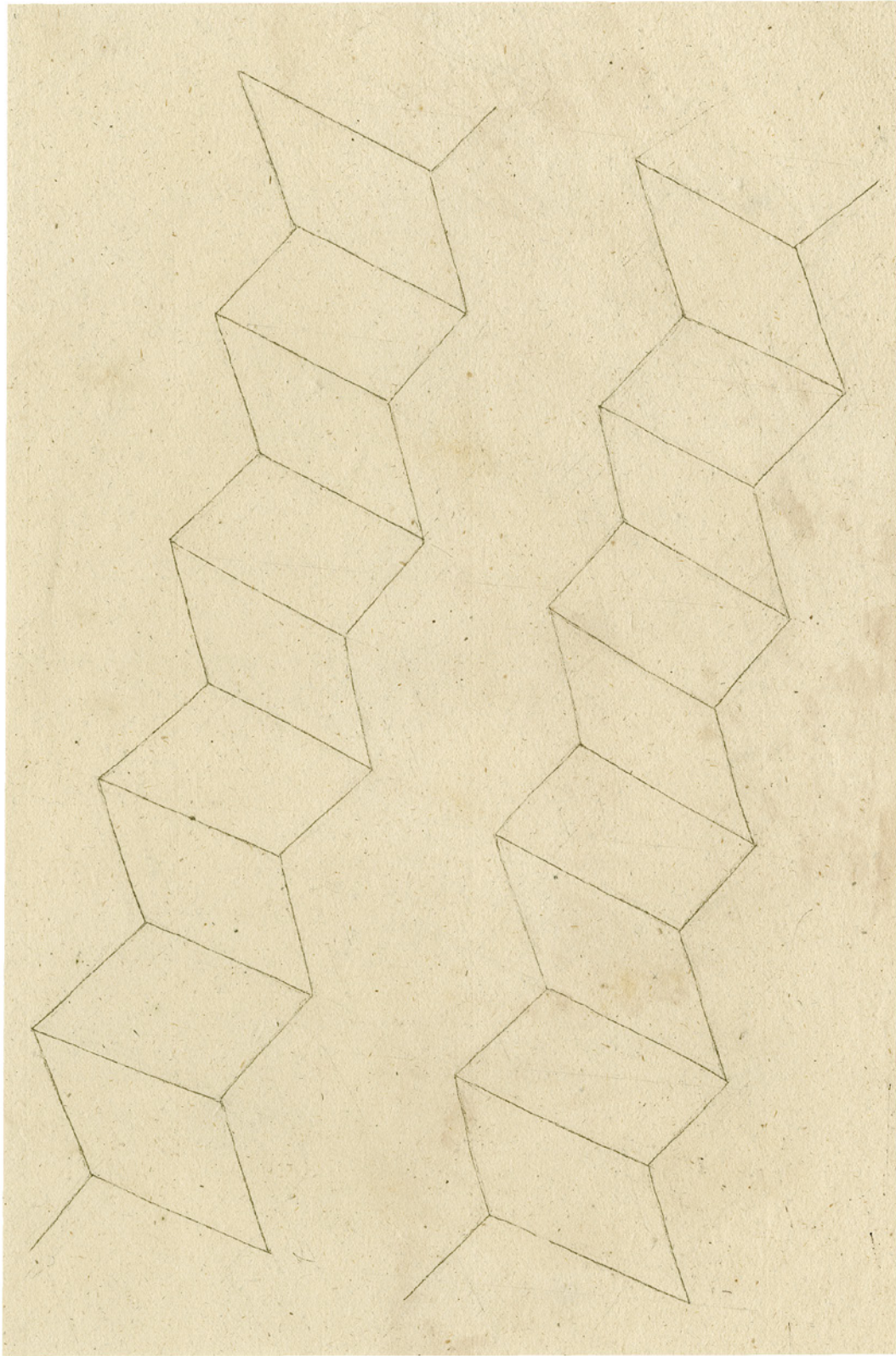
Stephanie Snyder is the Anne and John Hauberg Director and Curator of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, a position she has held since 2003. Snyder is the curator of over seventy-five Cooley exhibitions including: *Gregg Bordowitz, I Wanna Be Well*, which traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago (2019) and MoMA PS1 (2021); and *No Face, No Case, Portraiture’s Breaking* (2021–22), a collaborative research project around gifts from the Peter Norton Family Collection. Alongside curating, Snyder is an author, poet, and contributor to *Artforum* among other publications.



Lynne Woods Turner,
#1122, 2014. Pencil on paper,
5¼×4in.

Conditions

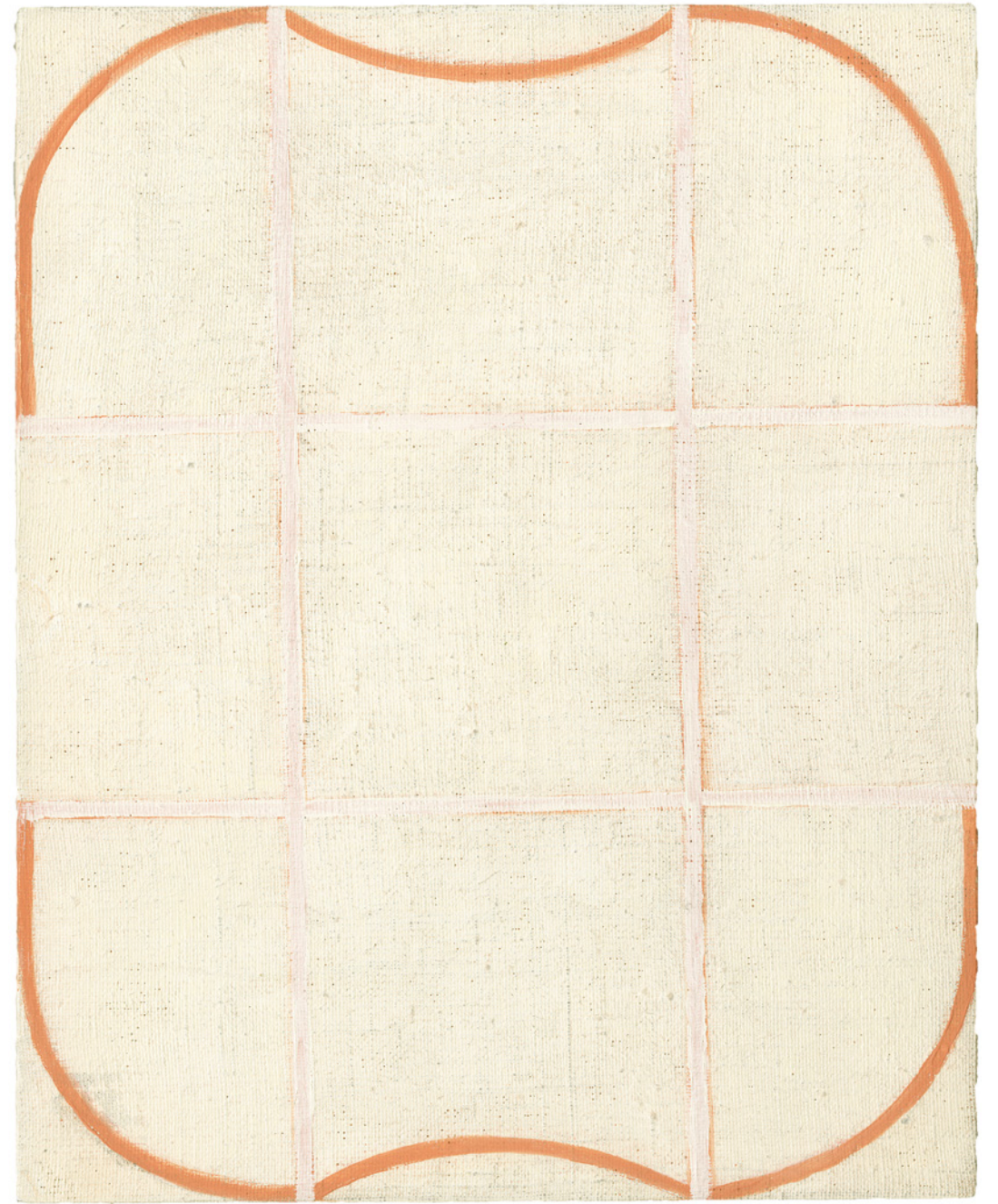
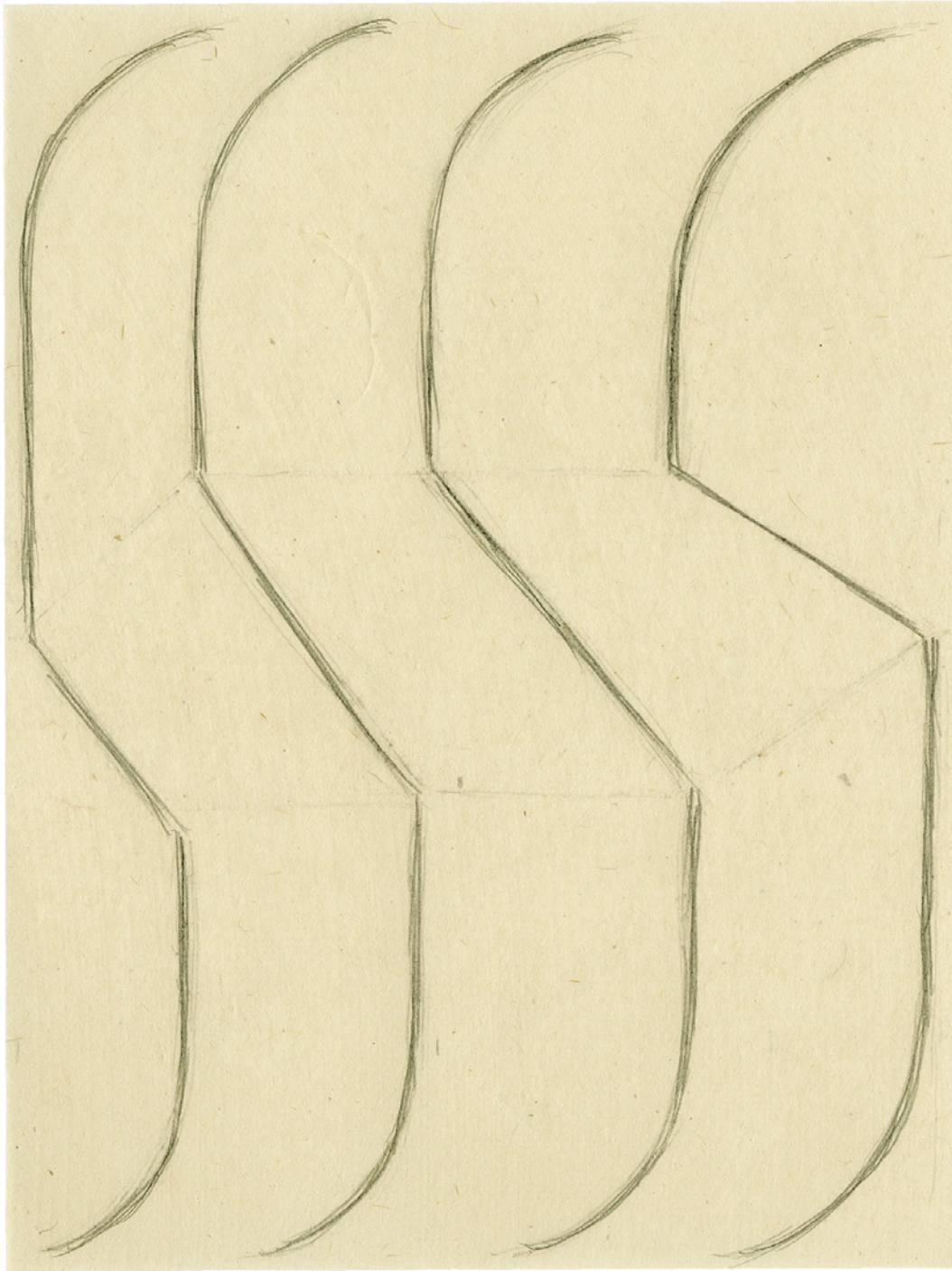
Lynne Woods Turner, #9148,
2015. Oil and pencil on linen
over panel, 12×9in.



Lynne Woods Turner,
#1149, 2014. Pencil on paper,
9½×6¼in.

Conditions

Lynne Woods Turner, #9142,
2014. Oil on linen over panel,
11×9in.



Lynne Woods Turner,
#1131, 2014. Pencil on paper,
6x4½in.

Conditions

Lynne Woods Turner, #9215,
2016. Oil on linen over panel,
10x8in.

If you're like me, and it's a safe bet you are, you're fed up with spam calls and texts. Recent surveys show that nearly half of the 97 percent of Americans who own smartphones receive robocalls or junk text messages every single day, and by the time this article sees print, that number will probably be far higher. Scam phishing operations and the like are a highly lucrative industry with very low operating costs, and they show no sign of going away any time soon. Ironically, one of the keys to their success has been their ability to mimic SMS protocols that were created to protect consumers: many of the texts, for example, identify themselves as coming from legitimate companies such as AT&T or Wells Fargo. Anyone foolish enough to click on the URLs in the bodies of the text is guided through a series of verifications that ask for personal information like Social Security numbers and bank account numbers. The rest of us just ignore the messages, but the nuisance persists.

"I liked my phone more in 2013," says Ariana Jacob. I am talking with her and her collaborators over Zoom about the Spreading Rumours collective, which she initiated nearly a decade ago with Garrick Imatani, Anna Gray, and Ryan Wilson Paulsen, and which created a range of public interventions with the involvement of around twenty other Portland artists and activists. Back then, she continues:

Scam phishing operations and the like are a highly lucrative industry with very low operating costs, and they show no sign of going away any time soon.

I almost only used my cell phone for direct contact with people I knew and cared about, so my phone felt more like an intimate object. I experienced it as a site of relationship, and I felt more affectionate towards it because it was basically a portal for nourishing human connection. That association made it easier to imagine cell phone communication as a space for possible, tender curiosity. At that time I didn't use my phone for doomscrolling news or zoning out on the disassociated relationality of social media, so I hadn't begun to build up a sense of addiction combined with disgust that I now feel towards it.

She explains to me how one part of the project came about: thousands of random people were selected to receive a barrage of short, anonymous poems in the form of text messages like the following:

(POEM) marconi tesla
edison jobs one old secret:
send messages to loved
ones regularly informing
them of intention to love
always, txt to learn more

(POEM)state of emergency
or sister city work makes
us giggle or they can't meet
our eyes light displaced by
design or nothing in this
catalog will ever be yours

(POEM) replace all human
FBI personnel with therapy
dogs and then let them
untrain one another as
they wish <http://url2txt.com/1z09Ntj>

The language of these cryptic pieces (composed by Sam Lohman, Morgan Ritter, Brian Mumford, and Adam Rothstein) ranges in its apparent subject matter, but all of it exhibits a similar tone, borrowed from electronic and commercial discourse—i.e., spam. Phrases like "one old secret" and "txt to learn more" are immediately recognizable from the milieu of digital advertising, as is the blue font of the embedded URL. Whether the texts are immediately recognizable as poetry depends on the reader's familiarity with contemporary experimental literature. This may be why they all begin with the orienting word *poem* in all caps, enclosed in parentheses, although it is more likely that the labeling serves as a sort of disclaimer: no coded terrorist threats here, just art.

Around 3,500 texts were sent. Most of the 127 responses were in the form of terse questions: "who sent this?" Two people composed answer poems, Jacob tells me. But most of the messages disappeared into the void. A handful are now suspended in a static cloud-afterlife on the Spreading Rumours website.¹

The text-poems were one of three phases for the project. In another, wads of confetti containing revolutionary calls to action (e.g., "NO FUTURE • UTOPIA NOW") were shot from Portland rooftops. In the other, placards positioned in the form of "tents" to invoke makeshift homeless shelters were placed on vacant corner lots and front lawns of houses in neighborhoods zoned for upscale development. These signs critiqued the outrageous rise of housing prices and the resultant diaspora of lower-income longtime residents, many of whom were minorities. Predictably, in the few years since the signs went up, most of these sites have been completely transformed. One also assumes that all the confetti has been swept up.

In her artist's statement, Jacob talks about her desire for art to play "a fundamental role in society beyond the professional confines of the discipline." She aims accordingly "to make work that can be discussed and circulated outside of the art world's paths of distribution and dialogue, yet remain articulate and relevant within art discourse."

A driving question in this context for the Spreading Rumours project was the relation of art to activism. In particular, Jacob and her collaborators grappled with the problem of the art world's complicity in gentrification: one of the contributing factors to the rampant upscaling of old neighborhoods has been their rebranding as "creative" zones populated by privileged bohemians and their patrons. Was it even possible for artistic activism to have radical potential, or were such interventions always already defused by their containment within establishment parameters of acceptable aesthetic expression? Put another way, if an artistic gesture makes enough of an impact to show the potential for restructuring or dismantling dominant configurations of power (and exclusion from power), this visible subversive potential can be countered in at least two ways, sometimes both at once: it can be framed as a dangerous but marginal anomaly, or it can be rewarded with institutional

recognition and thus made safely assimilable—and, of course, utterly hamstrung as an instrument of genuine social change. Finding a way to proceed in the face of this double bind was a major goal for Jacob and her collaborators.

The Spreading Rumours collective don't pretend to have solved the problem. They have managed, however, to open up some useful avenues of investigation. Three takeaways (as they say on the internet) from the Spreading Rumours experiment:

Put another way, if an artistic gesture makes enough of an impact to show the potential for restructuring or dismantling dominant configurations of power (and exclusion from power), this visible subversive potential can be countered in at least two ways, sometimes both at once: it can be framed as a dangerous but marginal anomaly, or it can be rewarded with institutional recognition and thus made safely assimilable—and, of course, utterly hamstrung as an instrument of genuine social change.

1 The connection of the project to Portland houseless rights organizations like Right 2 Survive/Right To Dream Too² highlights the way in which institutionally sponsored art activism both benefits from and is limited by familiar social models of protest and resistance. One of the barriers political art faces is a still-prevalent conception of DIY activism as a fringe activity, one that suffers from its inability to compete with corporate propaganda at the level of production and representational gloss. In a vexing double bind, the same elements that give many grassroots anti-capitalist movements an air of authenticity and integrity (e.g. low-tech mechanical reproduction, 1960s-style iconology, etc.) can threaten to make it appear quaintly ineffectual. On the other side of the equation, the code-switching involved in attempts to update visual symbology and rhetorical tone by borrowing from corporate strategies (or contemporary avant-garde practice, which often overlaps with the former) presents its own problems.

2 Poetry is especially tricky as an element of any activist strategy, since no one can agree on its political efficacy, or even what it is, really. As I write this, the editor of a small press poetry publication is trending on Twitter for having been forced into resigning after posting a tweet in which she ventured the incendiary opinion that poetry is irrelevant to the masses. The small stakes to big noise dynamic of stories like these is all too familiar to anyone who has spent any time in the poetic community. Still, articles with some variation on the title "Is Poetry Dead?" continue to get published, and people keep responding as though there is something important involved. This must mean that at some level, poetry pushes buttons for people. The question is what these buttons actually connect to, and what they do.

3 The SMS poems appear to spring from two (possibly conflicting) theoretical platforms. The first, going back to Jacob's comments about her relationship with her own phone at the time the project started, is founded on a notion of "nourishing human connection"; the texts were meant, it seems, to be received as earnest communications from human beings to other human beings. Their inscrutability served mainly as a gentle attention-getting device. The second is almost the opposite: by borrowing much of their form from the degraded context of e-commerce and e-fraud, the poems challenge traditional notions of value, beauty, meaning, and even what constitutes an act of true communication. They depend in part on being perceived as spam, and therefore as functionally inhuman.

I can't help but wonder how the project might differ if tackled today. Now that unsolicited texts have ballooned into a global blight, the playing field is transformed. Any notion that the messages might trigger

Poetry is especially tricky as an element of any activist strategy, since no one can agree on its political efficacy, or even what it is, really. As I write this, the editor of a small press poetry publication is trending on Twitter for having been forced into resigning after posting a tweet in which she ventured the incendiary opinion that poetry is irrelevant to the masses.

a measurable current of productive dialogue, person-to-person connection, etc. must seem naïve.

It may be useful to look at some of the operating principles behind actual spam: a recent *Business Insider* article by Walt Hickey addresses the question many recipients of junk calls and texts ask: how does anyone make any money from it when it is so obviously a scam?

The economics of phone spam are incredibly favorable. For perspective, 125,000 min-

utes of robocalls from Message Communications, Inc—which sustained a \$25,000 penalty in 2015 for what the FTC described as "willful, repeated" violations—has sold for a mere \$875. Assuming a consumer listens to the call for an average of three seconds, that \$875 would translate into

2.5 million calls, with one cent getting a buyer twenty-eight spam calls. Even if just one out of every 10,000 calls turns into a qualified lead, at a going rate of \$7 per lead, an hour of robocalls will pull in \$1,750 in revenue, neatly doubling their investment. It's an engine that turns phone calls into money with a byproduct of distributed annoyance.³

The strategy is effective because, instead of predicating itself on values such as clarity, sincerity, transparency, trust, etc., it starts from the assumption that if you throw enough rocks in all directions, you will eventually hit something.

The question for anyone wanting to translate this into a model for activist art is: what is it one hopes to hit? In the case of real spam, the answer is obviously money. For artists, it generally isn't, at least not via such a direct arc. But what if it were? Spam operations, as the article I've quoted makes clear, are cheap and easy to launch. They make back their investments quickly and expand them into huge profits. If it's so easy to get people to part with their money, why haven't we looked into it more? I'm not recommending defrauding people into surrendering their Social Security numbers, but (legitimate and legal) embedded calls for donation might be one tactic. I'm also interested in that "byproduct of distributed annoyance," which is immaterial to the fraudsters, but might be quite productive from an aesthetic standpoint.

The poems by Lohman, Ritter, Mumford, and Rothstein that were circulated in the Portland area are enigmatic, engaging, socially charged—but they are also very amiable. Each one announces itself as what it is ("POEM") before making its polite if nonlinear overture, and the language is often suffused with a warm ethos of fellow feeling ("intention to love always," "work makes us giggle"). They are easy to like and easy to ignore, like neighbors' children. They are most provocative when they threaten to evoke crisis or acts of political disruption ("state of emergency," "replace all human FBI personnel"), or when they open up the possibility of luring the reader into an unidentified commitment ("txt to learn more"). Perhaps most confrontational is that little taunt, "nothing in this catalog will ever be yours." This is the opposite of a sales pitch, and there is a faint sting to it. Consumers generally don't like to be informed that there is a commodity they can't attain.

Imagine this irritation factor magnified and concentrated. Imagine the power poetry could wield when converted into an instrument of mass annoyance, shrill and unapologetic. Instagram poets like

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Rupi Kaur⁴ have demonstrated in the past few years that poetry can reach a mass audience and reap substantial financial rewards by taking advantage of the distributive clout of social media. In Kaur's case, the hook is accessible emotional directness (while her detractors might say simplistic triteness and sentimentality). Projects like those undertaken by Ariana Jacob, Garrick Imatani, Anna Gray, and Ryan Wilson Paulsen point the way to an alternative hook: the gloves-off sucker punch of scattershot guerilla marketing. Maybe the activist poetry of the future will learn to be as exploitative and cutthroat as the cynical power structures it aims to challenge.

1 <https://rumourcontent.tumblr.com>

2 <https://www.rightsurvive.org/projects>; <https://right2dreamtoo.blogspot.com/>

3 <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-so-many-spam-robocalls-how-to-stop-them-2021-3>

4 <https://www.rupikaur.com/>; https://www.instagram.com/rupikaur_/?hl=en

K. Silem Mohammad is the author of several books of poetry, including *Deer Head Nation*, *Breathalyzer*, and *The Front*. His work appears in numerous magazines and anthologies, including *Poetry*, *The Nation*, and *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. He is a professor at Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

Patterns of Protest: Pat Boas and the Making of *Sentinels*

— Prudence Roberts

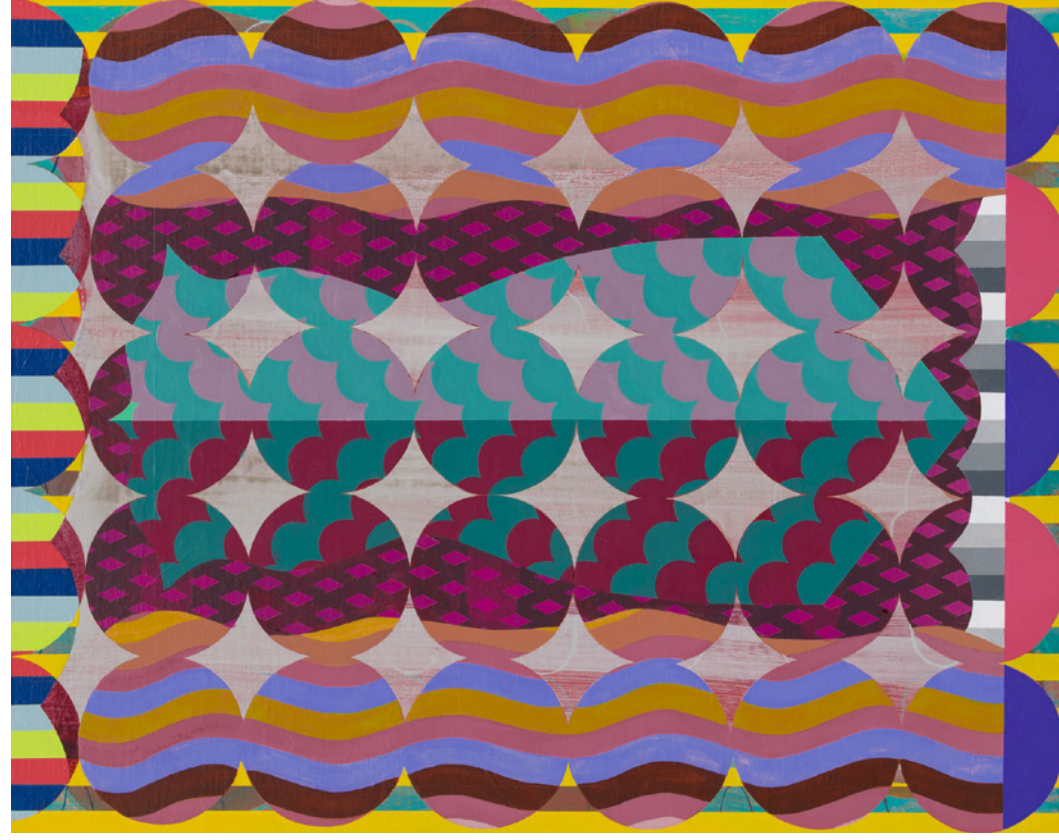
The five paintings in Pat Boas's recent installation at the Sun Valley Museum of Art are testament to her brilliance as an artist. Dazzling in their sheer abundance of color, pattern, and rhythm, generous in their beauty and rewarding in their complexity, they were further enriched on the occasion by being installed against a wallpaper Boas designed. Together, wall-paper and paintings, along with quotations from a speech given by Oregon suffragist Abigail Scott Duniway (more on that later), form a body of work that is unique in Boas's oeuvre: the equivalent of an abstract history painting, as it were.

Collectively titled *Sentinels*, the installation was part of *Deeds Not Words: Women Working for Change*, organized by Sun Valley's curator, Courtney Gilbert. The exhibition, which ran from January 8 through April 16, 2021, included works by Boas contemporaries Angela Ellsworth, Elena del Rivero, and Lava Thomas, as well as drawings by early twentieth-century architect Alice Constance Austin that had been photographed by Kim Stringfellow. Gilbert conceived the project as a way to commemorate the centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment, which in 1920 gave U.S. women the right to vote, and to celebrate women's ongoing activism across a broad spectrum of social issues, from racial equity to dress reform.

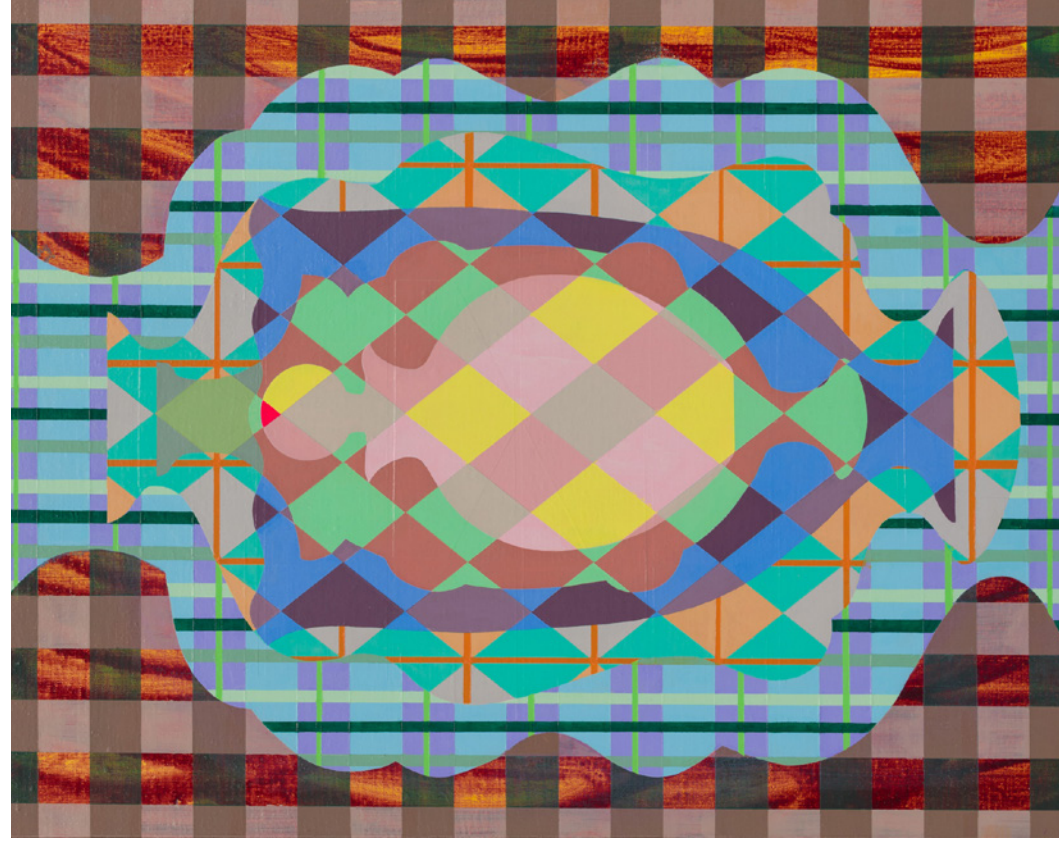
In 2019, Gilbert invited Boas to Idaho to research the state's own history of women's suffrage and to develop a body of work that in some way responded to that history. While Boas had in her visual art frequently made use of texts, including newspapers and magazines, she had never made work based on historical research nor on a theme that she did not herself generate. The challenge intrigued her, and she initially envisioned that she would uncover and commemorate the stories of individual women warriors of Idaho suffrage.¹ During her residency, Boas visited state archives, historical societies, and local libraries. She found much that was interesting, but her research bore out her suspicion that the suffrage movement, and the women whose names are recorded in its history, had been overwhelmingly white. (As she has noted, that picture is beginning to change as historians recover the names of forgotten or overlooked figures.) She did learn the names of some women of color but did not feel qualified to interpret or represent their stories.

While in Idaho, Boas stayed at the Ezra Pound House in Hailey, the birthplace of the poet. The property was acquired by the Sun Valley Museum of Art some years ago and restored to its late-nineteenth-century roots, with facsimiles of period furnishings, fabrics, and wallcoverings,

Pat Boas, *Sentinel* (banner), 2020. Acrylic on linen over panel, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Pat Boas, *Sentinel* (vessef), 2020. Acrylic and flashe on linen over panel, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Prudence Roberts

and a library of books on Victorian and Arts and Crafts decorative arts. Boas's immersion into the material world of nineteenth-century domestic culture was to be as influential for her project as the documents she consulted in Idaho archives. With her love of colors and a long-held interest in the Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s, Boas relished both the nature-derived motifs and softer palettes of the furnishings that surrounded her, as well as the more garish, synthetic hues that were developed during the Industrial Revolution.

Her initial idea had been to honor Idaho suffragists by creating abstract “portrait” paintings based on the monogram, a motif of highly stylized interlaced letterforms. This seemed a logical extension of the work Boas had made over the last decade or so, including several paintings and prints in which deconstructed text and images, along with individual letters and numerals, were central to her visual and intellectual explorations of language and its underlying patterns. But she began to have doubts about the validity of her approach as she gave more thought to the monogram itself. It is typically a symbol of privilege, a way of marking one's linens or silver, for instance, and, as such, not relevant to most women. Further, the stylized initials do not always represent the identity of a woman so much as they do her dependence on male figures to define her—her surname is likely that of her husband or father. Boas was also finding it problematic to single out individual suffragists for honor when the movement had relied on the participation of so many whose identities will never be known.

As she pondered her path forward, the world began to change around her. The opening of *Deeds Not Words*, originally slated for September 2020, was twice pushed back by the pandemic. During months of delay and

lockdown, Boas read, distilled her research, started painting (in her garage, when she could not get to her studio), and considered and reconsidered her initial ideas. She was also finding parallels between early suffragist demonstrations and the passionate Black Lives Matter marches that filled the streets of Portland and other cities in the summer and fall of 2020. In particular, she was drawn to the stories of the historic Silent Sentinels, members of the National Women's Party. From January 1917 until the final ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in August 1920, the Silent Sentinels, as they came to be called, stood without speaking in front of the White House for hours each day, six days a week, in an effort to persuade President Woodrow Wilson and Congress to pass legislation guaranteeing women's right to vote. When one of the demonstrators left or was removed—many were jailed and some were tortured and force fed—another would take her place. Like the protestors in the streets in 2020, the women (more than 2,000 of them over the months) were, for the most part, anonymous. Their mute vigil was an embodiment of their collective voice, and their impact came as much from their unyielding and constant presence as from the words on the banners and placards they held.

In abandoning the monograms—and with them, the idea of paintings focusing on individuals—Boas searched for a way to represent the collective passion and power of the Silent Sentinels and, by extension, the greater suffrage movement. Bracketing the words of their slogans and the names of individual leaders, she kept returning to the patterns, colors, and costumes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gradually incorporating their aesthetic into the paintings that would become her *Sentinels* series: *banner*, *shield*, *frame*, *vessel*, and *window*. The single-word subtitles came as

Pat Boas, installation view of *Sentinels* on artist-designed wallpaper. Courtesy Sun Valley Museum of Art (Photo: Dev Khalsa)



she worked on the paintings and allude, albeit obliquely, to the silhouetted forms within her compositions. These ground rather than define the paintings and speak to the contradictions between the public and private lives of the suffragists.

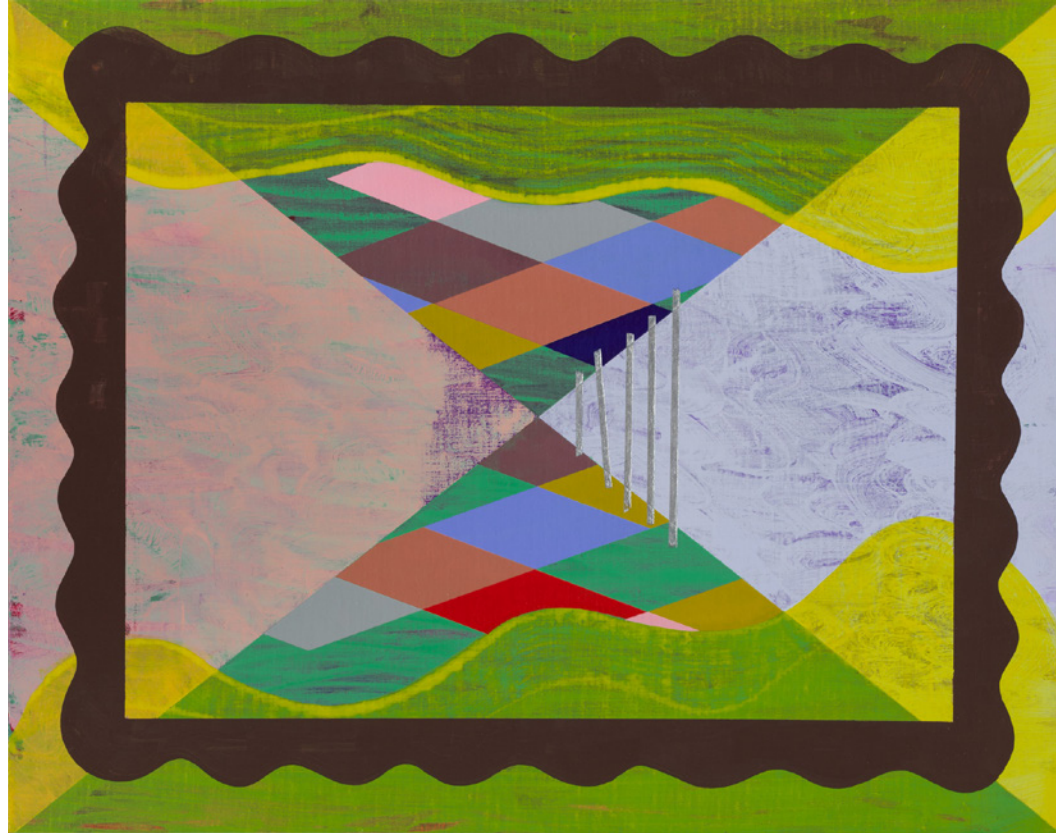
The *Sentinel's* paintings, like Boas's other compositions, reward close and leisurely study. At first glance, one is drawn to their surfaces, where layer upon layer of pattern and color jostle with each other. Scallops, zigzags, stripes, plaids, circles: a heady abundance. Each painting plays with positive and negative shapes, so that the form in the center dances in and out of dominance, suggesting an interplay between open and closed spaces and between silence and utterance. The symmetry of the regular lines and the patterns' repeated shapes impose order. But look more closely, and looser, more gestural underlayers emerge. The women to whom these paintings pay homage were radical and they were courageous. But, they reasoned, to better advance their cause, they needed to be seen as upstanding citizens and competent wives and mothers worthy of the responsibility of voting. The patterns within *Sentinel's*, like the conservative clothing the suffragists wore, thus act as a cloak of respectability, suppressing the simmering turbulence glimpsed underneath. Look, for instance, at *Sentinel's (vessel)* with its bright layers of windowpane plaids and checks that both define and surround the central motif of nested vessels, the smallest of which is a stoppered perfume bottle, perfectly centered. Behind the vases, urns, and bottles lies a gingham pattern, and beneath that the viewer glimpses a loosely painted, flame-colored ground — passionate, yet suppressed and held in check.

The scalloped window frame in *Sentinel's (window)* establishes a sense of interior and exterior space. Four large triangles meet at a point

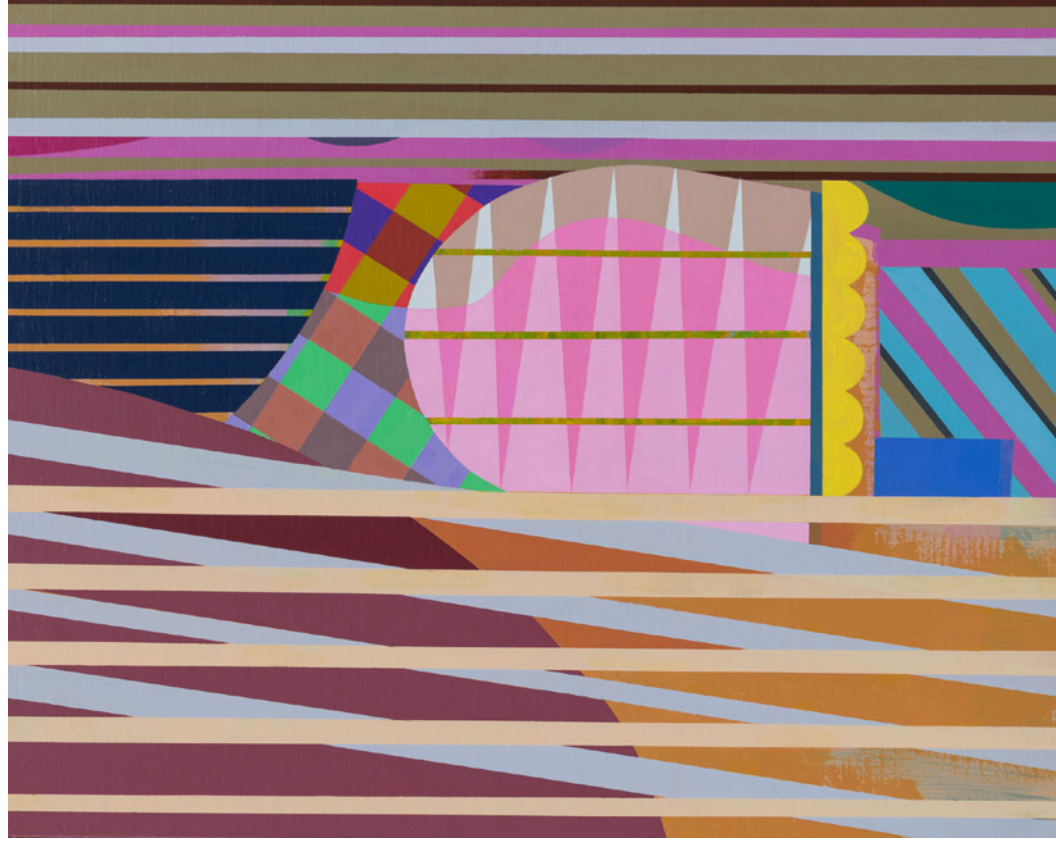
in the absolute center of the composition. Our eyes, trained to perceive illusionistic, perspectival space, interpret this as a vanishing point on a horizon. Alternatively, that point might be the core of a woman's body, her form suggested by undulating yellow lines enclosing wonderfully contradictory passages of scumbled paint and precise harlequin checks. We might be inside, looking out at a stormy vista, or outside, looking through a window at a female figure. The abstracted motif that anchors *Sentinel's (frame)* resembles a bell jar, or cloche, with a jaunty row of yellow scallops at the bottom. Inside, rendered in shades of pink, is a silhouette of a woman's buttocks, seen from the side, its irregular curves breaking the geometries and more somber colors seen elsewhere. Boas derived the shape of the enclosing cloche from illustrations of Victorian hoop skirts. These metal cages, strapped to a woman's waist, acted as a framework for the weighty and voluminous upholstery of clothing they supported: skirts and underskirts that suffocated the wearer's sexuality.

Boas's wallpaper suggests, but does not replicate, the elaborate papers of the Victorian era. She worked on this piece of her project with her daughter-in-law, Kris Blackmore, a graphic designer. They fabricated a paper with yellow and white vertical stripes that allude to the turned balusters of a railing, and, at regular intervals, purple calligraphic motifs. The paper is, in a sense, an homage to the Ezra Pound House and to the sorts of interiors that were part of the suffragists' lives. One also cannot help but think of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's haunting novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, whose protagonist, confined to her yellow-walled room because of "female hysteria," gradually loses her mind. Sequestered by her controlling, over-protective, paternalistic husband,

Pat Boas, *Sentinel (window)*, 2020. Acrylic and flashe on linen over panel, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Pat Boas, *Sentinel (frame)*, 2020. Acrylic and flashe on linen over panel, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



she represents the very kind of female disempowerment against which suffragists struggled.

One suffragist who emerged for Boas in her early research, when she was still looking for individuals to honor, was the above-mentioned Abigail Scott Duniway (1834–1915). This extraordinary woman, whose family trekked to the Pacific Northwest from Illinois, lived for most of her life in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, but also spent time at a family ranch in Idaho. Duniway wrote, lectured, and campaigned tirelessly for the cause of equal rights. At the Sun Valley Museum, Boas used excerpts from Duniway’s 1889 address to the Idaho Constitutional Convention in a takeaway broadside whose borders and design recall early voters’ ballots. Quotes from this speech also appeared on a wall in the installation, printed on vinyl and configured as five floral shapes invoking the syringa, Idaho’s state flower. Duniway’s words, like Boas’s paintings, couch passion and anger behind a scrim of polite eloquence: “What the great majority of the women of the Pacific Northwest are asking,” she explained to the gentlemen of the Convention, “is that you will engraft into the fundamental law of this commonwealth a clause in your chapter on suffrages and elections providing that, other things being equal, except the right to bear arms, which custom accords to men, and the far more perilous right to bear soldiers as armor-bearers (which nature imposes upon women), there shall be no restrictions placed upon the right of suffrage on account of the incident of sex.”²

Despite the social and political changes wrought over the last 132 years, many of Duniway’s battles are still being waged, including universal access to the ballot, and who controls a woman’s body. In creating the works that

comprise *Sentinals*, Boas has constructed an aesthetic document that brilliantly exposes these battles, celebrates feminist activism, and also exists as testament to her own formidable gifts as an artist.

- 1 My account of Boas’s conception and development of the *Sentinals* project is based on conversations with the artist via Zoom and in her studio in Portland, Oregon on August 21, September 10 and November 20, 2020¹, and on March 23, 2021, respectively.
- 2 Abigail Scott Duniway, “Equal Rights for All” address to the Idaho Constitutional Convention, Boise City, Idaho, July 17, 1889 in *She Flies with Her Own Wings: The Collected Speeches of Abigail Scott Duniway (1934–1915)*, <http://www.asduniway.org/home>.

In June 2018, Prudence Roberts retired from her position as a Professor of Art History and the Director of the Helzer Art Gallery at Portland Community College’s Rock Creek campus. Roberts was the Curator of American Art at the Portland Art Museum from 1987–2000, where she focused on the museum’s regional collections and also specialized in early American museology. She is co-chair of Portland Community College’s Women in Art Lecture series, which has brought such notable artists as Carolee Schneemann and Jaume Plensa to See Smith to Portland audiences.

Pat Boas, takeaway broadside (detail) for *Sentinals*, courtesy Sun Valley Museum of Art (Photo: Dev Khalsa)



Pat Boas, vinyl text for *Sentinals*, courtesy Sun Valley Museum of Art (Photo: Dev Khalsa)

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FAMILY." I KNOW HOW PERSISTENTLY MANY WIVES — CUNNING DIPLOMATS —
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THEM TO WATCH THE WOMEN. WE KNOW EVERY ONE OF OUR OPPONENTS' THREADBARE ARGUMENTS AGAINST
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Y^{ES} SAY, "BAD WOMEN WILL VOTE." WHEN YOU WELL KNOW THAT BAD MEN VOTE. AND CLAIM THE
BALLOT FOR THEIR PROTECTION. WHY DENY PROTECTION TO ONE CLASS OF HUMAN SINNERS AND ACCORD IT
TO ANOTHER? YOU SAY WE "MUST NOT SIT ON JURIES." THOUGH EVER AND ANON A WOMAN IS TO BE TRIED BY A
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No/And: Contemporary Conversations About Queer and Trans Art

— Sara Jaffe

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Ten or so years ago, I was feeling depressed about the word “queer.” It was everywhere, which was maybe the problem; it had become a catch-all way to communicate “not straight” instead of the barbed claim to an anti-(hetero and homo)normative politics that had so defined my own understanding of my own sexuality. But in the last few years I’ve sensed a resurgence of that old school potency—maybe it has something to do with 90s nostalgia, or younger people’s investment in radical activism, or essential conversations happening around historic discrimination against queers of color and trans people in LGBTQ+ movements and spaces. All of which is to say, I think that this is a particularly exciting and generative moment to engage in conversation with several of the queer curators in Portland about the state of queer art in our city and beyond.

It should, I hope, go without saying that when I ask the question *What is queer art?*, the last thing I’m looking for is a definitive answer. As Roya Amirsoleymani states below: “Queer art is a kind of No.” It has both multiplicity and refusal baked into it. And this refusal—of conventional forms, ideas, institutions, roles—can also be an act of creation. It can be a *not that, but this, instead*. And refusal itself is always contextual. As manuel arturo abreu points out, practices that may be construed as a “no” in relation to the white-dominated art world may be an established “yes” within the marginalized communities from which they emanate.

Though the curators I spoke with represent a range of curatorial practices and positions—M Prull and manuel arturo abreu are independent curator-artists; Amirsoleymani is artistic director & curator of public engagement at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), a performance-oriented arts nonprofit; and Molly Alloy is co-director of Five Oaks Museum, an institution dedicated to the history and culture

Sara Jaffe

of Washington County, as well as a working artist themselves—they each in some way participate in acts of selection. Selecting, grouping, and organizing implies a critical awareness of, if not adherence to, the power of categorization. Each curator gave voice to the ways their queer/trans curation practice works to defy or deconstruct this inevitably norming practice. Their thoughtful and subversive responses silenced the cringily basic question lurking in the back of my mind, which I would have been too embarrassed to ask outright: *How do you decide what goes in and what stays out?* Nobody talked about what stays out.

When these curators do describe their process of grouping and selection, it is always as a dynamic act, a deliberate intention to make space for more than one story. Prull describes the process of curating *Partial Permutation*, an exhibition of work by trans artists presented via Upfor Gallery (rest in peace) in February through April, 2021. The title of the exhibition itself speaks to the desire to simultaneously be intentional about presenting trans artists and also transparent about the futility—practically and politically—of making a definitive statement about who a trans artist is or what kind of work they make. According to Prull, a partial permutation in mathematics is “a set, but not the only possible set.”

For queer art workers employed in a more institutional setting, that sense of possibility may deflect how their very positions are structured. Alloy became co-director of Five Oaks Museum two years ago as part of a radical reenvisioning of the institution. Originally founded by what Alloy describes as “literal sons and daughters of Oregon pioneer settlers,” the museum had, for decades, existed primarily to archive and display artifacts of settler culture. In an effort to create a museum that better reflected the diversity and rich history of Washington County, Alloy and their co-director Nathanael Andreini became the museum’s co-directors and shifted curatorial responsibilities to guest curators chosen by a panel of community members. Decentralization, radical reimagining—more queer practices of possibility.

I began each interview (conducted over both email and Zoom) with the question “What is queer art?” and from there we mapped a sprawling and inspiring terrain. What follows is by no means a scene report or a state-of-queer-art-round-up, but an exciting cross section of how queer and trans people practicing curation are offering a transformative way of approaching art.

Finally, I want to be forthcoming about the fact that while I’ve asked these questions in part for the sake of you, readers, they also come from a place of utter self investment. I want to understand what the “queer” in queer art is now because I want to understand myself in relation to culture, both as a consumer and creator of art (I write fiction and creative nonfiction that centers queer identity and experience). Lately I’m old (44), but it’s not just about that. For all the ways that theory is lived and useful, when I say “What is queer art?” I’m also saying *Is this story too queer? Not queer enough? Will I see you at the opening? Am I supposed to like this? Is this piece saying what I think it’s saying—please let it be saying that*. In this approach I’m indebted to Ariel Goldberg’s 2016 book *The Estrangement Principle*, in which asking “What is queer art?” is a way to understand one’s own queer self as well as the communities and histories that comprise us.

Below are excerpts from my conversations with M Prull (multimedia artist and curator), Molly Alloy (artist and co-director of Five Oaks Museum), Roya Amirsoleymani (artistic director & curator of public engagement, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art), and manuel arturo abreu (non-disciplinary artist and cofounder, home school).¹

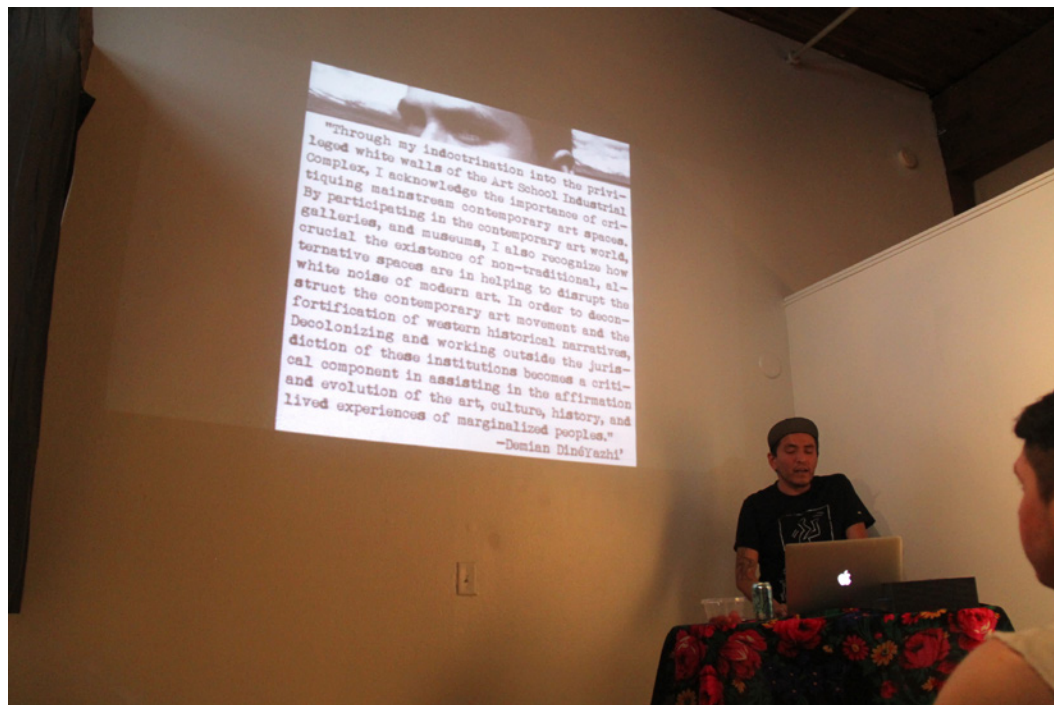
What is queer art? Is “queer art” a useful category?

abreu: Queer art is art made by people who identify or are identified as queer, gender-variant, and/or sexually-deviant. “Art” is a western category of activity which is a vestige of theological endeavors such as monk scribal work, fresco painting, etc. Because of this fraught framework, I’m not sure the concept “queer art” is useful. Perhaps it serves the market as a genre for consumers and investors to quickly categorize work, and perhaps “queer art” can also act as a shorthand for queer makers and thinkers to find each other, but the problems I mentioned remain. The concept of art as functionless, autotelic (autonomous from the social) activity drawn from the western modernist origin myth flies directly in the face of ancestral functional aesthetics which are socially and spiritually-embedded (non-autonomous).

AMIRSOLEYMANI: Queer art is a kind of *no*. And no, “queer art” is no longer a useful category. To state this with conviction feels like a betrayal, a rejection of a culture, community, and identity so critical to shaping my curatorial purview, and my sense of self. But perhaps such a sentiment signals an expansion. An explosion, even. Or something softer. A maturation or complication. If we no longer need to assert, exploit, or instrumentalize our own queerness (the queer-in-us) just to be granted agency over our images and existences, then we are at some liberty to seek or stumble upon or self-determine the queer in something (and in ourselves) rather than be shown or told about it.

I can afford to respond to this question experimentally, and yet elsewhere, and for other people, queer can have different realities, and very real consequences. Disownment. Deportation. Depression. Death. When we can point to ourselves, and our own image, and celebrate it, locate joy in it, in the face of danger and despair, then yes, we must still point to the thing, assertively, elatedly, collectively.

Demian DinéYazhi’
delivering home school talk at
Compliance Division, Portland,
2016. Courtesy the artist and
home school (Photo: Victoria
Anne Reis)



Conditions

Slipperiness, Range, Networks

AMIRSOLEYMANI: Queer has always embraced its own mutability, fluidity, uncapturability. But I find it also takes pride in an unwillingness, an unruliness, a constant state of (un)becoming. For me, the spectrum spans from passivity to fury, and I find myself drawn to its poles. I like a queer art in which the queer quietly slips in (or even slips through, ungraspable). And yet, the sonic vibration and sheer glow of queer rage is electric. Especially when certain retrospectives or documentaries or archival exhibitions or historical group shows get it right, so right that you can feel the pulse of the paper just from gazing through the glass.

manuel arturo abreu, *Arepas*,
2021. Banana leaves soaked
in vegetable glycerin and
stretched over canvas or insu-
lation foam. Installation view,
rot semantics, May–June 2021,
haul gallery, Brooklyn. Courtesy
the artist and haul gallery



Being While Making

ALLOY: During the exact same six months that we were able to move into our new way of working at Five Oaks Museum, I went from an embedded, unknown truth to a fully realized, publicly shared truth of being non-binary and coming into a trans identity. So it was as if the fact of discovering a truer way of being myself required that I not then go to work and participate in things that were false.

AMIRSOLEYMANI: I can say “I am queer,” but more so I feel like I am cut from its cloth. Queer is a “stuff” I am “of.” Lineages. Languages. Lost translations. Stardust.

PRULL: Being trans often comes with a reinvention that I think shortens our timelines, for art history as well as selfhood.

RaiNE Brebender,
Ham and a Half, 2020. Digital
photograph, 8x10 in.
Courtesy Five Oaks Museum



Conditions

Sara Jaffe

Explosion, Permutation, Attention

ALLOY: It's sort of like we burrowed into the middle of the title “curator” and exploded it out, so that it could just include everyone, which is totally how I think of queer community—taking something restricted and trying to build the whole universe inside it.

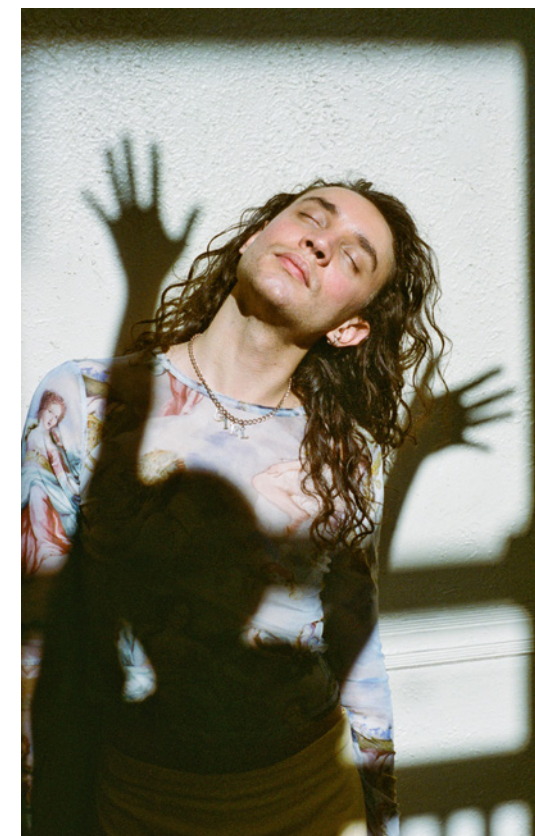
PRULL: The idea behind Partial Permutation was to provide a lot of different entry points to think about queer and trans art in different modes. It would do a disservice to the concept of queerness to narrow it down to “This is queer art, and this isn't” because there's so much space to be filled with queerness, both in and out of the art world. I don't see how we could possibly think of queer or trans art without allowing for things that we don't understand or agree with.

Abreu: According to current trends in queer theory, any deviation from the norm can be characterized as queer, and any norm can be claimed to have queer undercurrents trembling within it. The implicit problem here is one of legibility in a white context: what the settler calls “queer” or deviant may in fact be an ancestral gender category which, from within its cultural context, is not deviant at all. Attention to this problem can help us understand why “norm” and “deviation” are not the best way to process queerness. And consider that there may very well be cultures that view the settler hetero norm as a destructive deviation from their norm.

AMIRSOLEYMANI: I think about the tension between queer's soft and hard edges. I find “tension” to be a useful curatorial strategy, not manipulatively, but in aiming for a tension that builds and hovers above you, or right beside the work, or just (long) enough to force a closer listen or second look. A slight discomfort or questioning that permeates.

ALLOY: I have this opportunity, through the museum, to take on the role that I think is important for someone situated within whiteness: to be a disruptor.

Ursa Nuffer-Rodriguez,
Sun and Shadow, 2019. 35mm
film scan. Courtesy Five
Oaks Museum



Queer Qualities

AMIRSOLEYMANI: Queer feels more like an ethereal spirit than a tangible presence. It is felt in the otherness of an uncertain object. It is noticeable in the nuances of narrative-shifts. It appears in the impossible images and in-between spaces. It is heard in the misinterpretations and missed understandings. Queer does not just *have* shape and form. It can *be* the shape and the form (and color, and line, and texture...)

PRULL: I started out doing self-portraits, and then I was like, what if we did the self-portrait but thought about it through the lens of the body as a medium, and what if we abstract it? And now I'm very much like, what if we really abstract it and just think of it as a medium to reach another thought. For me, that reflects growing up in a way, growing into myself and my community, and what I want to think about.

ALLOY: The newly stated values of Five Oaks Museum are: Body, Land, Truth, Justice, and Community. And *Body* being the first, is a queer act.

Molly Alloy, *Taut*,
2018. Driftwood, leather,
and artificial sinew
(Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Conditions

Sara Jaffe

Building

ALLOY: We've situated ourselves to be a receptive entity. We want to use what we are and what we have as an institution to address what is needed from the community—a total queer tactic, right? I'm looking to the Queer Resource Center from Portland State University, queer group housing, mutual aid. Those of us that are now within this institution are essentially drawing on tactics that marginalized communities of all kinds have always had to use. And we're just implementing them within the context of the institution. We're not inventing new ways of being, but they're often new to the museum world.

AMIRSOLEYMANI: I think about mutual respect across generations, but also about unequal wealth and power, and how queer artists and curators—especially White ones—could be taking more personal responsibility and risk when it comes to the redistribution of resources.

Maya Vivas, */härt/*, 2017. Black
stoneware, 10×14×4.50 in.



PRULL: Part of the reason I thought to do this show in the first place, part of the reason I wanted to start a gallery full of all trans artists is because I literally went through and looked at all of the Portland Art Dealers Association galleries, and I looked through every person that was represented by them, and there was not one trans person represented in those established commercial galleries. Portland bills itself as the most queer-friendly city in America, and in a lot of ways that's true, but when it comes right down to it, I don't think there's a commercial space in America where queer and trans people are treated professionally on an equal level with straight people. When you Google trans artists it's the same 5–10 people that show up on every list, like they're the only 5–10 trans people with gallery representation in all of America.

abreu: In a time of gutted social services, absurd rent prices, and decreased funding for art in the Pacific Northwest and the US, it's obviously not fair that artists should be burdened with patching things up. And it's also obvious that we are being trained to treat art as a way to generate value (i.e. value as beauty). Social practice as the mainstream practice of our moment makes this clear: Claire Bishop points out that in the European context, the rhetoric of "social practice" actually dovetails quite nicely with an overtly neoliberal

agenda of replacing government-run social services with well-meaning volunteers offering creative entrepreneurial solutions.

Tabitha Nikolai, *Dissensus*, 2021. Narrative video game made using the Bitsy game engine. A collaboration with Myra Lilith Day, deSolid State, and anonymous, with audio by Vangelis. Playable online: <https://tabithanikolai.itch.io/dissensus>



Conditions

Let's quickly outline some strategies in town. One is the recuperative mode: unearthing of legacies of innovation and resilience in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. Intisar Abioto, for example, ran a project called *The Black Portlanders* (2013–18, documenting Black people in the Portland Community). The online archive centers the enduring Black presence in Portland, and allowed Abioto to use the conceit of street photography to deepen her own connection to her adopted community (she moved to Oregon from Memphis, Tennessee), notably concluding with an online post centering Indigenous folks. Building on this work, Abioto's recent project, *Black Mark, Black Legend* focuses specifically on unearthing and canonizing Black Oregon artists such as Bobby Foucher and Thelma Johnson Streat.

In another vein of recuperation and imaging community, Demian DinéYazhi's *Survivance* zine series, with four issues released to date, archives the work of Indigenous writers and artists in an effort to build intertribal solidarity, bridging the Oregon Indigenous conversation with broader issues related to the First Nations of North America. Many artists in Portland use publication as a means to provide evidence of their presence in a time where space is at a premium and most institutions don't care to curate anything but tokenized trauma.

Artist Sharita Towne has for years explored what it means to spatialize reparations in Oregon. She describes herself as "from I-5," having grown up in a number of towns dotting the highway. Local Black artists know her as someone who cares deeply for her community, and who's blessed with skills for resource redistribution. Her most recent project, *A Black Art Ecology of Portland*, works to build a coalition of community arts and equity organizations driven to address the lack of resources for Black art and youth in Portland. The project centers those Black Portlanders who have faced or risk displacement at the hands of "development" and "urban blight." Suffused with aesthetics of public engagement and skeptic historiography, with much of its most important work going undocumented, Towne's practice speaks to the expansive imagination necessary to start undoing the anti-Black, anti-Indigenous violence which frames Portland's groundwork.

Refusal remains an option. Opting out can pressure institutions to make change. Some months ago, two Native artists refused to show their work in the Oregon State Capitol building in Salem for the Art in the Governor's Office program. Both Ka'ila Farrell-Smith (Klamath) and Brenda Mallory (Cherokee) cited the Governor's silence on the Jordan Cove natural gas pipeline, which threatened the lands and clean water of the Klamath, Siletz, Coos, and Coquille people. The Governor's office cannot ethically show Native art while also refusing to oppose a project which would have been the largest source of pollution in Oregon by 2020. Black and Native artists must reject becoming window dressing for the settler project. It would be interesting if all future regional artists tapped for the program refused, in solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty and health. The Governor's office, as a result, would remain empty, a gesture of the empty promises white settlers continue to make for their ongoing occupation.

Making space is another critical component of the artist's toolkit in Portland. The City's independent curatorial and publication endeavor the Nat Turner Project, for example, only curates emerging local artists of color, and tasks them to imagine what aesthetic freedom might look and feel like. Melanie Stevens and maximiliano martinez started it in

a bathroom at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2017, redolent of other bootstraps projects in the region due to lack of arts funding and institutional shuttering. This visionary project continues to curate and publish amazing things. As well, Ori Gallery, a Black-run art space on historically Black Mississippi Avenue, only exhibits queer and trans artists of color. However, many examples of the bootstraps approach in Portland don't go on to tackle any critical or political content, instead choosing to make a whimsical spectacle of their marginal aesthetics in hopes that institutions will take notice. To each their own, I suppose.

In Seattle, the Wa Na Wari project has converted a rental home—Black-owned since 1951, but until now rented out near market rate and thus participating in gentrification—into a Black creative space that archives oral history; hosts exhibitions, artist talks, performances, workshops, and parties; and maps out possibilities for keeping the home in the family in perpetuity. This is a promising tactic. Many people who own their own homes may realize that they can add value to their life and contribute to community by opening their homes to people who need space to live, work, and pursue their projects. Marginal spaces, like garages, basements, and backyards, serve these purposes well. I know this from experience, as I lived in a garage and called it an artist residency from 2013 until earlier this year. This was only possible because someone opened their home up to me.

ALLOY: We constantly feel this really important prioritization of remembering the locality of the museum in Washington County and considering what it means to different people here.

Largely because of economic factors, it doesn't work like it may have used to where there's this neighborhood where all the queer people are and the gallery in that neighborhood is the queer art space. Now it's more about online presence and other modes of connection. How can we deploy these multiple tactics—which, again, I think of as so queer—how can we go from *There's real life and there's the Internet* to some kind of a beautiful universe that holds those two and isn't limited to a polarity or one thin line between them?

Pace Taylor, *Here, for Now*,
2021. Soft pastel and graphite
on paper, 22x30 in.

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Exhibitions/Practices

AMIRSOLEYMANI: While it was not difficult for the majority of the work in PICA's exhibition *No Human Involved: The 5th Annual Sex Workers' Art Show*, which I co-curated with Kat Salas and Matilda Bickers of Stroll PDX in 2019, to be understood "as queer," what became interesting was the audience's desire for art "by sex workers" to meet their expectations for confessional, vulnerable, or salacious content that would validate a worker's labor or trade as a "lifestyle." Where was the "sex"? The "hooker" narrative? The "about"? The show resisted the audience's impulse to predict or control a conventional plotline, both in content and experience. For me, the artists queered public consumption by generating tension between expectation and outcome, and by denying resolution. They queered the space, and an already queer show, beyond the politics of identities and images.

Ebenezer Galluzzo, *Wear Bravery*, n.d. Color photograph.



Sara Jaffe

ALLOY: We had a panel choosing from proposals for exhibitions, and they awarded *Gender Euphoria* to a non-binary curator, to create an exhibition all of trans and non-binary artists from the region. It allowed me to see that my work was institution-shaping. It felt like this wonderful magic trick that happened when I did some letting go that I felt was appropriate to my position as co-director.

I find the work of Ursa Nuffer-Rodriguez, one of the artists in the exhibition, to capture moments that feel intimate, invoking the kind of embodied joy that often can only happen in the safety of being close with someone who fully sees and accepts you. That type of moment has sometimes been elusive for me due to dysphoria, so I love how Nuffer-Rodriguez's images can bring me into it. And RaiNE Brebender's work hits a deep chord for me; I think it helps interrupt my learned inclination toward assimilation (into binary gender, privileged status, etc.). The images they create show me modes of self-love and empowerment that are gentle and quiet in a sturdy way; I learn a lot from them.

PRULL: For *Partial Permutation*, Maya Vivas did these ceramic pieces that are like interpretations of body parts: stomach, gall bladder, bladder, heart, intestines. They're ceramic pieces about how they have a very complicated relationship to their body—not just on a visual level, but on an internal level. For them, gender identity intersects with their Black identity and is a very personal, intimate experience, it's very physically rooted. Ebenezer Galluzzo did this series *As I Am*. He likes to do visual puns—taking imagery that has a particular gendered connotation and turning it on its head. I thought that was a really cool take on the trans self-portrait. I also really liked that he goes in and puts in these gold leaf elements, to get back to religious imagery and celebrate the body and celebrate himself in a spiritual way. And then we did Pace Taylor, who is now represented by Nationale. He does these soft pastel and graphite images, which sold out on the first day. His work was especially pertinent right in that moment in the summer of 2020, because a lot of his portraits are concerned with intimacy and connection, which was really on the forefront of everybody's mind right then. The last person in the exhibition is Tabitha Nikolai, who does a lot of new media, video game-based art. She created this video game, *Chronophasia*, about childhood and finding oneself and creating spaces through the internet, which is really interesting to look at when you talk about trans/queer art and gender because a lot of queer people find themselves through the internet. *Chronophasia* is kind of a game and kind of a piece of interactive poetry. And it's free and on the internet.

Urgency

ALLOY: I'm thinking about how urgent the need is not just for queer artists to be in the studio making our queer experiences visible or enacted in whatever ways we can, but for those folks who are interested in curation, whatever that holds, to put their energy toward making spaces that show amplified presence of queer and trans experiences through art. That act is also so urgently needed, and I've learned there's more of a dearth of it than I would have thought.

AMIRSOLEYMANI: An uncomplicated upholding of queer art can be dangerous, because for queers with racial, gender, able-bodied, and economic privilege in established positions, their queerness can be currency in an already relatively protected sphere. Meanwhile, queer and trans artists and arts workers of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Disabled folks, are largely unsafe and insecure within current systems and structures, struggling still within the art world's oppressive architectures and toxic social hierarchies.

ALLOY: When I was in First Brick,² it was like: this is such a beautiful project, such an urgent need, and four white people just can't meet the need. It was right idea, right time, right place, and all great people that I love doing curatorial work with, and we were able to uplift some diversity of voices, but I just felt like, when I really started looking through a lens of *What does the community need, What does the arts ecology need*, and not the lens of *What can I do, What can I have, Who am I* that I'd grown up with, it was clear that I wasn't the individual who was most urgently needed in that work.

abreu: Trans is trending, which may or may not help, but most likely hurts, actually-existing trans people. A concrete institutional definition of trans is still "under construction," itself having undergone various "queerings." But both above and under the carnival of signifiers and the circulation of theoretical concepts, trans people, especially of color, still inordinately suffer and die. Our voices are still unheard and ignored, even as aspects of the condition become generalized and hyper-visible. The world cheers on as we agonize. (from *transtrender*)

Emi Koyama, *SESTA=Death*, 2019. Installation view, *No Human Involved: the 5th Annual Sex Workers' Art Show*, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, OR (Photo: Mario Gallucci)



Conditions

Sara Jaffe

Queer Time

AMIRSOLEYMANI: As a curator of contemporary art who works with living artists, I tend to think about the present more than the past or future, this moment in time as the crux of the inquiry. How are we examining and expressing the now? Yet lately, I find myself asking how a particular piece or performance or project serves as an intervention or interruption in the trajectory of things to come. How does a thing, a person, or an institution do differently? How does it disrupt? Can a rupture of the present fissure the future that would have been, had we not acted, not risked? What is our responsibility to that which is possible but not yet arrived?

PRULL: Most of our queer ancestors are lost to time. A lot of the time there's no record, or if there is, it's incomplete, at best. Yes there's a line to be drawn from the past to what's happening now, but it's a very complicated one.

Queerness today is not going to look the same way it will in fifty years because it's a product of the moment.

abreu: Queer makers and thinkers are attuned to cyclical time in a way that brings us closer to how I think time actually works. In a sense the linearity of hetero time works to strangle us and cast our nonlinear work as spirals and sickness. But I personally am, ahem, down with the sickness.

1 Some of abreu's text is also taken from their writings *transtrender* (Quimerica Books, 2016) and "real fake artistry," commissioned by Roz Crews and Ralph Puggy for the Schemers, Scammers, and Subverters Symposium, 2019.

2 First Brick is a queer curatorial collaboration that Molly Alloy was involved with from 2017–2019.

Sara Jaffe is a writer, educator, and musician living in Portland, Oregon. She's the author of *Dryland*, a novel, and her essays, short fiction, and criticism have appeared or are forthcoming in publications including *Catapult*, *Fence*, *BOMB*, *NOON*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*.



Acknowledgments

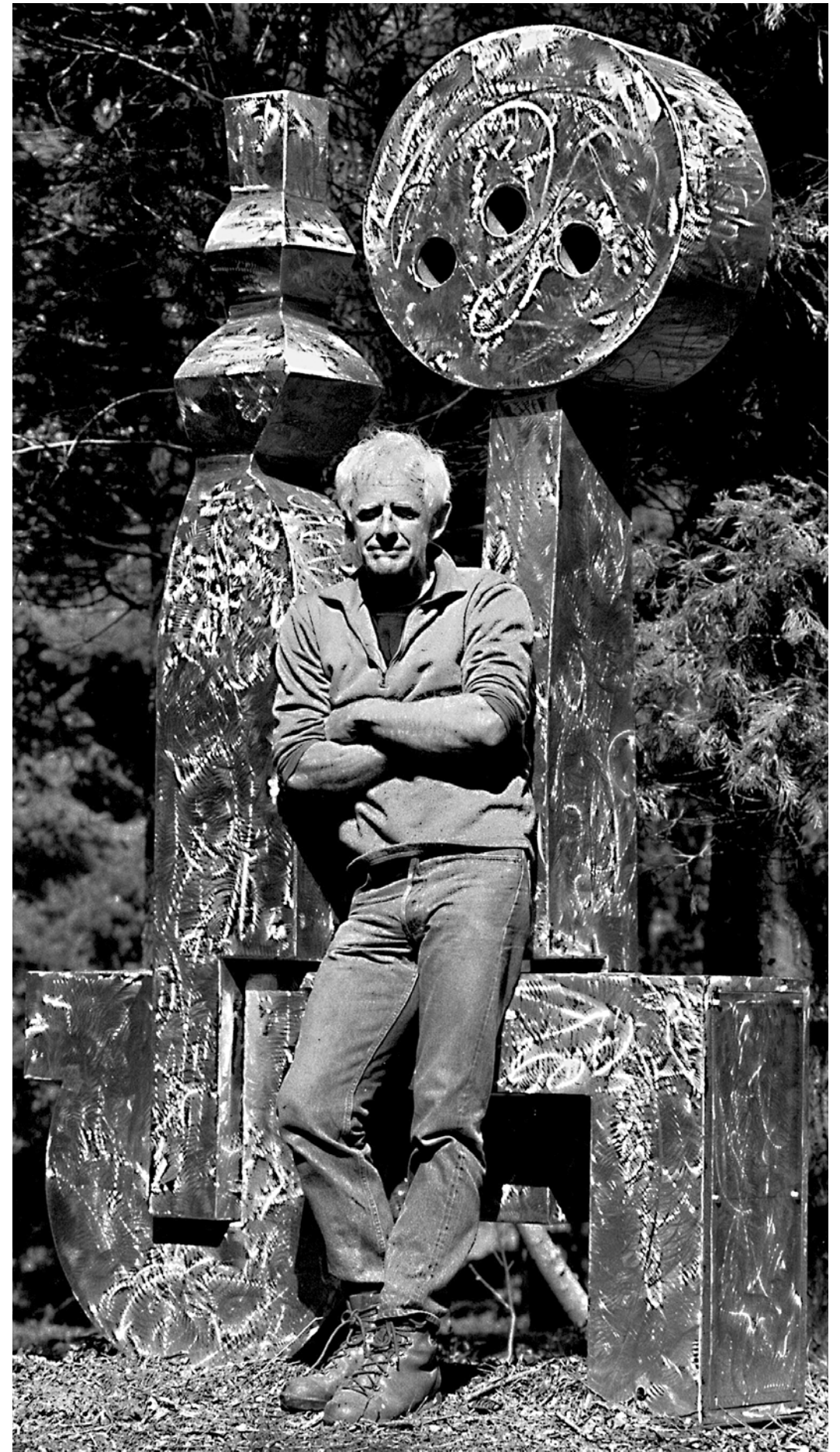
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Lee Kelly
(1932–2022)

Lee Kelly exemplified creative passion, clarity of vision, and dedication to process and practice. He was an extraordinary thinker, artist, poet, and adventurous spirit who enjoyed gathering with others at his home, studio, and sculpture garden. Lee had an abiding love of poetry and kept notebooks full of sketches and poems that he would read aloud at special moments.

His brilliance, generosity, humor, and artwork will long be treasured.

—Elizabeth Leach



Covers:
Pat Boas, installation
view of *Sentinels* on artist-
designed wallpaper,
courtesy Sun Valley
Museum of Art (Photo:
Dev Khalsa)



Sarah Farahat,
Self-Portrait, Yuba River,
Yuba Goldfields, California,
Nisenan Land, 2015.
Archival pigment print,
44×66 in. (Photo:
Kristine Eudey)



rise x fall (rubén garcía
marrufo, maximiliano,
Jaleesa Johnston), *AT*
THE END OF EMPIRE, 2021.
Three channel video
installation, performance.
Courtesy Portland Institute
for Contemporary Art
(Photo: Tojo Andrianarivo)



In 1957, Kenneth Ford and Hallie Ford established a then-modest foundation to give back to the timber communities of southwest Oregon. It grew in size, scope, and geography to become The Ford Family Foundation in 1996. With its headquarters office in Roseburg, Oregon, and its scholarship office in Eugene, Oregon, The Ford Family Foundation now manages large, internal initiatives and makes grants to public charities predominantly benefiting communities in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, Calif.

The Visual Arts Program honors Hallie Ford's lifelong interest in the arts by helping Oregon's most promising, established visual artists actively pursue their work. It also seeks to enrich Oregon's visual arts ecology by growing centers of excellence. The program, at times in collaboration with state and national partners, supports creative-work time and space, provides resources to artists at crossroads in their practice, engages arts writers and curators in critical conversations, and makes investments in Oregon visual arts institutions.

Critical Conversations is a collaborative program developed by the University of Oregon and The Ford Family Foundation, with partners Pacific Northwest College of Art at Willamette University, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at Portland State University and The Cooley Gallery, Reed College. These partners create a year-round calendar of visiting critics and curators for studio visits, public lectures and other forms of engagement, as well as overseeing commissioned arts writing for this publication and the Oregon Visual Arts Ecology project, an online partnership with the Oregon Arts Commission.