

**EX
PLOR
ING**

SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS THE ARTS

EMERGING PERSPECTIVES

FOFA Gallery

We acknowledge that the FOFA Gallery is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montréal community.

The FOFA Gallery is anti-racist and aims to be a 2SLGBTQIAP+ positive space. We strive towards being barrier-free and eradicating institutional biases and systemic discrimination in our programs and in our work together.

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FOREWORD by Jasmine Sihra

At the end of a successful year of sustainability work at the FOFA Gallery, I am extremely pleased to write this foreword for the gallery's publication highlighting a few emerging perspectives on sustainability across the arts.

I thought of creating this publication because I believe in the profound importance of involving emerging professionals and artists in sustainability work, particularly in the arts. Now, at the end of this project, I can confidently demonstrate how emerging artists, students, and professionals are integral to sustainability work. After reading this publication, you might notice how those at the beginning of their careers immerse themselves deeply into process and materials. Providing us with a kind of closeness and intimacy, these practitioners interrogate, affirm, reflect on, and explore sustainability in a refreshing way. Pierina Corzo-Valero writes a thought-provoking, creative piece on the FOFA Gallery's sustainability and no-vinyl PVC lettering initiative. Armando Rivas' essay explores the relationships between sustainability, class, and accessibility, opening up a conversation about how the need to be financially conscious as artists drives reliance on salvaging and repurposing as much as, or perhaps more than, the effort to to work sustainably. Emem Etti offers beautiful photographs capturing the designs she created during her residency at Concordia's Centre for Creative Reuse (CUCCR), melding zero-waste and reuse with Afrofuturism and fashion. In Caro Defrias's text, they reflect on the gallery's Panel on Creative Reuse, thinking through the politics of garbage and lessons from creative practitioners Suzanne Carte, Merlin Heintzman-Hope, and Arrien Weeks. Last, but certainly not least, Amanda White's comic strip describes how the Centre for Sustainable Curating at Western University, one of our partners on this publication, was developed from an appreciation for the lands, waters, and airs where it resides—all from the perspective of a rock. As you read through this publication, consider how the writers explore connections to materials and objects that might seem mundane but become special and precious through their writing.

Often, when I tell people about my sustainability work in the arts, they usually ask me, “What does sustainability have to do with art?” As someone who researches sustainability and artistic and curatorial practice, I think the short answer to that question is that sustainability has everything to do with art. Put simply, museums and galleries produce large amounts of waste, consume resources, and arguably have a responsibility, like every industry, to think critically about the role the arts plays in the climate crisis. Of course, the long answer is more complicated than that. I was extremely lucky to have been exposed to the possible relationship between the Arts and Sciences when I was an undergraduate student in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University, where I was mentored by Dr. Kirsty Robertson in the museum studies program. Through her courses, Dr. Robertson taught her students about sustainable curating, and it inspired me to seek out projects and research that allowed me to continue this line of inquiry and consider how the arts could respond meaningfully to climate change with creative, community-oriented solutions. It was Dr. Robertson’s creation of the Centre for Sustainable Curating and suggestion of no-vinyl PVC lettering in arts and cultural institutions that inspired Nicole Burisch, FOFA Gallery’s Director, to develop a project around sustainable signage. I do not think I truly understood the impact of responses to climate change in the arts until I started my position as Curator of Sustainability and Engagement at the gallery, while working on exhibition signage. Ultimately, what I have learnt from this is: artists can make complicated issues like climate change more tangible and legible for a broader audience; and curators can facilitate spaces for artists and other practitioners to work closely on an issue and come up with creative solutions. In the process of both, I realize that when we foreground community-building and relationship-making, we can leverage these to involve different stakeholders in the generation of new ideas, strategies, and solutions. We can ensure that workers are treated with kindness, respect, and care, that they are compensated fairly, and that there are skill development opportunities for new and emerging professionals. I believe that the work of artists presents a strong opportunity to prove that, when you work to sustain

community, you can do work in more sustainable ways. Though sustainability is a loaded buzzword, and may feel like a lofty goal, if we think about it as a way of taking care of people and the environment, then it can feel more attainable and tangible.

Of course, what made this publication possible is the community of arts practitioners and curators that I was lucky enough to be surrounded by at the FOFA Gallery during this project. Nicole Burisch was the best mentor and support, and her incredible grant-writing skills are quite literally the reason this project came to fruition, and truly made my dreams come true. Geneviève Wallen always offered an attentive ear when I needed advice, and never failed to give me space to be myself. Joé Côté-Rancourt was an extremely patient technician and embraced my ideas while also reaffirming my own value for community-building work. María A. Escalona's honesty allowed me to reflect on myself and better understand my own role as a curator. I could always rely on Pierina Corzo-Valero because of her eagerness to work on signage projects at the gallery, and she became a true confidante in the process. Laurence Poirier captured the best photos of the gallery's sustainability work, many of which can be seen in the toolkit and this publication. Our two newest team members, Joni Man-Yi Cheung (Snack Witch) and Josh Jensen, proofread and reviewed this publication and toolkit, and their enthusiasm and advice about our sustainability initiative reminds me that there are indeed a growing number of people concerned about climate change and the arts.

There are several other individuals who deserve recognition for their help throughout this project, too. First, I am grateful to the gallery's exhibiting artists who welcomed the sustainability initiative and were patient with me as I transitioned into my role and learnt more about exhibition installation. Dr. Kirsty Robertston made this publication possible from afar, and always offered suggestions and advice on how to move forward. Concordia University's Centre for Creative Reuse (CUCCR) is extremely lucky to have Arrien Weeks as their Sustainability Technician, and I am so honoured to have worked

with, learnt and sought advice from him throughout this project. My PhD supervisor Dr. Heather Igloliorte is a curatorial role model to me, and her generous support of my position made this project possible. Jules Beauchamp Desbiens, the coordinator of Concordia's Digital Fabrication Shop, gave the gallery space to work on salvaged and repurposed materials for our signage projects. Virgine Fillion-Fecteau, one of the gallery's former exhibiting artists, introduced us to the world of nori paste and was regularly available to help or give advice about our signage projects. Philip Kitt, the gallery's technician, pushed the team to repurpose materials, find simpler solutions to install work, and train our new technicians. Our former technicians, Etta Sandry and Nick Everett, helped with sustainable signage and workshops early on in this project. Juan Pablo Hernández Gutiérrez and Paras Vijan stepped in to offer technical support with different initiatives and projects at the end of the year. Joséphine Rivard did a fantastic job proofreading the French version of this publication. And, lastly, I am so appreciative of my older sister, Aneeka Sihra, for proofreading this foreword and making me sound decent.

I am so excited and proud of this publication. I hope that this, along with our *Exploring Sustainability Across the Arts Sustainable Signage Toolkit*, inspires you to think about the importance of artists, curators, and creative practitioners' voices in and work on the climate crisis and sustainability work in the arts.

Jasmine Sihra
Curator of Sustainability and Engagement
FOFA Gallery

**INITIATIVE - VINYL & ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AT
CULTURAL VENUES** by Joé Côté-Rancourt

Foreword

It is important to remember that sustainable development is a scheme born of a capitalist economy seeking to prolong its reign by applying greenwashing strategies to its insatiable production needs.

Thus, the aim of environmental efforts is to initiate a process of degrowth to reduce the needs, standards and impacts of that production. These efforts also seek to offer alternatives and, ideally, to find retroactive measures to reverse the consequences of the human footprint on the environment.

True environmentalism cannot operate in coexistence with capitalism, which must be dismantled.¹

Mandate

As part of its sustainability efforts, the FOFA Gallery aimed to discontinue the use of vinyl in its exhibition signage in order to explore options with a lesser environmental impact. The reason for this initiative is that vinyl is a single-use material composed of non-recyclable plastic and chemical derivatives.

I will first present some conclusions and avenues for reflection drawn from this mandate for environmentally responsible exhibition signage. I will then open a discussion on the potential implementation of an environmentally responsible exhibition space.

Low-impact signage

Several options explored during the experimentation process involved modifying different printmaking techniques for use with wall text. Similar to silk-screen printing, for example, the technique most often used for wall signage involves producing stencils or cut-out text, often using automated machines (such as laser cutting and CNC cutting for vinyl).

Stencilling is the closest technique to using vinyl: if the stencil is level, the result will be as well. We obtained very “professional” results with a close resemblance to the aesthetic of vinyl when using paint or more creative materials like nori paste and

crushed rock powder. This is our preferred technique for cases when artists are hesitant to replace vinyl with an alternative.

Adhering text directly to the wall is more complex than using a stencil, mostly due to variations in spacing between letters and words. However, using a cursive font (with joined characters) can resolve this issue.

Using an underlined font facilitated the installation of wall text for the *A.llegades* exhibition, in which still-moist plantain leaves were cut using CNC laser cutting technology to produce a text frieze around the entire perimeter of the exhibition.

Laser cutting with the machine normally used for cutting vinyl is an effective method for reducing production time for signage tools. With the facilities at Concordia University and their connection to the fine arts department, I was able to use the machines myself and experiment for several hours with producing different materials to cut and use for signage.

Working with stamps was also raised as an idea. However, the FOFA Gallery chooses a new font for each exhibition, and producing a new set of letters for each exhibition does not seem like a better option than using vinyl.

Projection and hand-tracing of text were also tested as production techniques for exhibition signage. However, tracing takes a significant amount of time and requires an additional repainting step after the event, since the pencil or ink used for tracing cannot be removed without leaving a mark. Graphite pencils are an attractive option for their ease of use, but they leave marks even after being erased.

The FOFA Gallery exhibition space took a major step forward by including an on-site technician who was familiar with multiple techniques and had access to a number of production workshops to assist with devising and employing different strategies for this mandate. This required a good deal of knowledge, including graphic design and layout, printing techniques, 2- and 3-axis CNC cutting, assembly of wood and other materials (gluing, casting), wall repair, indoor painting, flyposting, and certain concepts from ceramics.

Takedown-related challenges and eco-friendly optimizations

Much effort was devoted to the different options for producing and installing text for exhibitions. However, a large portion of the ecological impact of these methods occurs at takedown. Solutions are therefore needed for non-polluting cleaning methods (without chemical cleaning products) that do not damage gallery surfaces. For example, some materials may leave stains on the walls from the moisture in the paste when used for several consecutive weeks.

Additionally, the glass surfaces of FOFA's exhibition spaces have specific requirements, as the gallery's display windows and cases are fitted with UV protection coating. Any lettering applied to these surfaces risks damaging the coating when scraped off. The option of installing signage on the UV-free (exterior) side of the glass surfaces was ruled out due to the risk of damage from natural elements or passersby.

In continuing our efforts to find environmentally responsible signage alternatives, it may be worth considering installing pre-prepared spaces that can accommodate signage at any time, and creating a single style of text (font and format) that can be used for all temporary exhibitions. Projecting the text for the duration of the exhibition could also eliminate any risks of damage during takedown, while also allowing for more information on a smaller surface with moving text.

We also considered producing signage specific to each exhibiting artist, which could be made in a reusable format. For example, the artist could have their own labels to use alongside their work in future exhibitions or once acquired by individuals. The signage materials could also be recycled by the artists.

Using digital (online) strategies was also considered as an approach for limiting the production of physical signage. Downloadable exhibition pamphlets and augmented reality are two examples of resources that can help reduce the use of the single-use materials typically used for exhibitions.

If the FOFA Gallery wishes to continue its efforts to limit the use of environmentally harmful materials, it could adopt the objective of discontinuing the use of paint and

chemical products. These products, which create invisible impacts and waste, are rarely taken into account by such measures despite the real harm they cause to the environment in their production and their interactions with the environment.

These systematic changes would create a major shift in how certain works and signage are installed in the gallery space.

Green self - re - definition (revolution)

Cultural venues could have a lower environmental impact if they allowed themselves to break away from standard signage models.

The norms of the contemporary art world are oriented toward a relationship of consumption, addressing a bourgeois and proletarian clientèle as the consumer. As such, the culture comes from the class defector, and in part, from their great respect for the idea of the “white cube:” clean, intact, immaculate, pristine, etc. In this case, the arts community can be seen as moving away from artisanal approaches toward more industrial ones.

It is therefore important to reconsider the white cube aesthetic, the ways in which exhibitions are promoted and archived, and the cult of novelty and material “creation” in exhibition contexts.

The lighting grids installed on theatre ceilings and in some exhibition spaces are examples of an alternative aesthetic response to the white cube: conveniently modular, neutral, and accommodating, lighting grids offer a variety of placement options, with each piece being removable as needed. This type of installation could define the walls of the gallery space, subtracting the need to paint and patch walls often. An example of this kind of space would be La Caserne Dalhousie in Québec city when it was the project incubator for *Ex Machina* (1997-2019).

In material terms, cultural venues’ activities include installing, uninstalling and packing artwork, and resetting and maintaining the space. How can these steps, which require the production of materials, be modified to reduce their environmental impact?

A large part of the answer will surely involve pooling the tools and materials needed to carry out these different tasks.

Each venue must therefore build relationships with organizations that share its vision for reintegrating “waste” in order to discuss the ways in which that “waste” can be reintegrated into installation work, as well as the packing of artwork and maintenance of the space. The venue can thus become more aware of the “waste” it produces in order to share it with nearby organizations to use for their own processes and procedures. By regularly collaborating with individuals, organizations, and artists, cultural spaces would benefit from developing these relationships by having members being part of two or more of those organisations to create a circular economy for the residual materials created in the course of its on-site activities.

The longer I navigate the art world, the more I feel that the liberation of the arts will depend on a departure from the class defector phenomenon, which creates a divide with the general public as well as between members of the arts community.

Conclusion

As the FOFA Gallery is a university institution and technically a non-profit, it receives funding without the requirement to pursue a commercial mission. However, it is limited by the functions of Concordia University, which offers education as a consumer good. These gears turn in the pursuit of profit. The appropriation of a vocabulary connoting social justice and the common good therefore serves only to reinforce its agenda to maintain the established system in which the institution profits from its investments.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that our efforts must not stem from a simple greenwashing of our exhibition activities. The university as a whole must develop long-term consciousness to avoid being part of a fleeting wave of neo-capitalism subject to the values of social whitewashing.

ENDNOTES

1. *Anarcho-syndicalism as a foundation for revolutionary environmentalism*, Un CéNéTista, Spain, 2022.

ON FASHIONING SUSTAINABILITY by Pierina Corzo-Valero

-Oh what does my tattoo mean? It's "reduce, reuse, recycle" in Russian. Vegan ink by the way. Yours?

-Yeah, I recently started buying my groceries at this cute biodegradable-fair-trade-locally-sourced zero-waste-cruelty-and-hormone-free post-consumerist farmer's market. It's on the Plateau yeah.

-My eco-therapist was telling me how most of my exes were probably toxic because they had microplastics inside them. He reads a lot of non-fiction.

-Yeah bro I'm doing my next podcast episode on my 100-mile drug diet. It's all about buying local you know. If I source my carrots nearby, why not my ketamine.

-Everyone should knit their own clothes. It's just about finding the time to watch YouTube tutorials. I can lend you my USB key where my cyborg grandmother lives. She's the one who taught me to spin my own yarns from plastic bags I thrift at Renaissance. Yeah, I do this after my 9 to 5, you can too.

-Gosh, my new curated moss shoes are so comfortable. It feels so good to wear an outfit that is entirely composed of non-shame recycled fibers. I'm serving queer ecologies at the rave tonight.

Ah, it's happened.

The climate crisis has permeated our social sphere. Don't we look hot when we wear the concepts of ecology and sustainability like blush on our cheeks. It's *sooo* attractive to care about the planet. Don't confuse my harsh tone for a diss towards care; it is crucial to support the eco-cause, yet culture can't help but aestheticize convictions. It quickly becomes a set of automations of tote bags, mason jars, buying *green* and using the term sustainable for branding our social status. How can our intentions align with the meaning of becoming sustainable?

Maybe the sustainable turn should move beyond guilt-tripping one another to do our part: a collective attitude of uplifting and comforting ourselves. Because it's not a competition, nor is it *cool* to be sustainable. It's a multi-generational burden that has accumulated into something that can't be ignored.

Being sustainable is responding to the heavy weight we feel in our chests when we smell the smoke of record-breaking wildfires or when we see cities flooding on the news. Being sustainable means standing up against the dread, untangling our behaviours, consciously choosing the materials we use and dreaming a collective vision we want to move towards. It means sitting down, observing and starting to build with what's already around us.

It means to constantly ask ourselves *why* we are fighting for sustainability.

Is it to cleanse our internalized shame?

Is it to dream of a world outside of capitalist dynamics?

Is it to cultivate hope?

Is it to find another way of occupying space on this planet; inhabiting our bodies and environments differently?

What does it *mean* to practice sustainably in our personal context?

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When I joined the FOFA Gallery team over a year ago, I was unaware of the amount of waste galleries produce every time a new show opens, with new wall text and signage every 2 months or so, repainting walls, packaging materials for the artworks, lighting and display devices, and the list goes on. You realize that the white walls effectively conceal the amount of labour and materials that are necessary to produce the polished finish of an exhibition.

It turns out the gallery-standard minimalist aesthetic was never sustainable to begin with. Can we envision a new aesthetic norm that transparently reflects the multiple steps of exhibition-making instead of hiding behind a façade? If art wants to value sustainability, there needs to be an alignment between the discourse and the material process.

What would it look like if artwork was not isolated from processes of creation and installation by framing it in a neutral labour-less backdrop? If artmaking is always a choice, shouldn't materials and methods be out in the open, questioned, and part of the dialogue. Transparency rhymes with accountability, especially in a culture of appearances.

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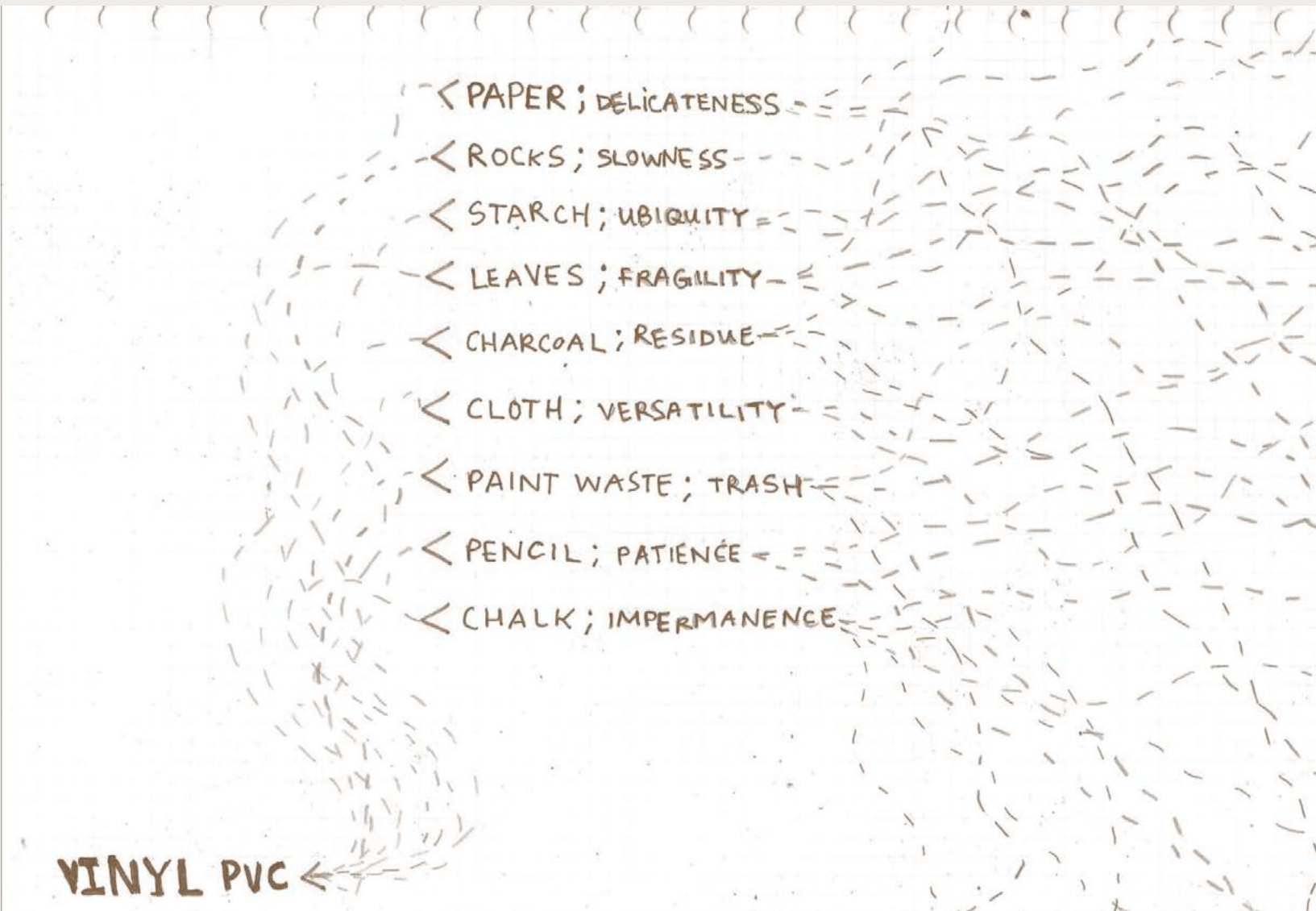
It also feels privileged to be thinking about sustainability in the arts. Sometimes, I think about how my impact on the world could be different if I were in another field. I often need

to remind myself that one person can't carry the weight of the human condition on their back. We only have our current position to work from, whether you're an artist, a social worker, a traveler, a cook, a teacher, or ∞ . We are creating, producing and expressing humanness through materials and gestures. It's how we do it that matters.

I don't want to adopt a manifesto tone, it's utopian and nostalgic of a past modernity, to say the least. But also, why are we making art if not to move somewhere, inspire a direction through a sensation. Yes, art is anything someone wants it to be. But we need a flash of a shared vision as a community. Because if we all make for our own selves, our own success as an individual, aren't we reiterating the neo-liberal vision that's led us to the failure of the current human project?

The FOFA Gallery's sustainability initiative to move away from the use of PVC vinyl seemed small to me at first, mainly because signage wasn't something I paid careful attention to before working in a gallery. I've grown to appreciate the care devoted to labels and exhibition texts. They're ultimately the framing devices for the artworks, and when done right, they can really move an audience and elevate the exhibition narrative. The materiality of these texts, whether we read the words through vinyl or paper or cast shadows does matter. It contributes to the affect of written language.

From there, the restriction presented by moving away from vinyl generated a multiplicity, allowing us to rethink gallery text: its texture, colour, and smell. From a small resolution, a multitude of expansive directions, all led by the material.



Pierina Corzo-Valero, *Moving towards other material values* (informal graphic), 2023. Drawing with words. Photo courtesy of Pierina Corzo-Valero.

Materiality matters more than we give it credit for. Each material has its own body and personality. It teaches you through interaction. Each of the signage materials we tried brought different reflections on creating sustainably.

When María Andreína Escalona De Abreu, the curator of *A.llegades*, chose plantain leaves to craft the signage of the exhibition, a dialogue about the memory and culture carried by material emerged. Using the leftover leaves from shared meals between the artists and the curators was a way to include these moments of the exhibition-making process in a poetic way, not by stating these moments explicitly but by infusing them into the materiality of the exhibition.



Documentation of plantain leaves during experimentation session for *A.llegades* (2023) exhibition signage. Photo credit: Pierina Corzo-Valero

As a second-generation Venezuelan who uses plantain leaves in my traditional holiday dishes, the presence of the leaves made the curatorial text feel intimate. I had never interacted with the plantain leaves other than for making *hallacas*, so I knew about their tendency to tear into vertical strips. Still, it felt quite intentional to include this memory-bearing leaf for wall texts that otherwise felt impersonal through the vinyl art-industrial standard. Perhaps the finished aesthetic was not as polished as vinyl, but it was anchored in a mutual correspondence with the material and with our own experience, not a means to an end that will eventually end up in the trash.

**A REFLECTION ON MY ARTISTIC PRACTICE
FROM 2021-2023** by Emem Etti



Emem Etti, documentation of CUCCR Residency, (2021-2023). Photos: Emem Etti.



Emem Etti, *If the Shoe Fits*, (2021-2023). Photos: Olivia Bizimungu

A reflection on my artistic practice from 2021-2023

The past few semesters, I have been thinking critically about my relationship to my ancestors. Due to violent and totalitarian Western imperialism, my parents denounced their Nigerian traditions, and with that, left me far removed from the rich histories that exist. Moving to Montréal and attaining more autonomy over my beliefs led me to explore my Nigerian heritage and ancestral forms of creation. I began to read up on masquerade costumes which are worn exclusively by men during ceremonies to invoke spirits. During my artist residency at Concordia University's Centre for Creative Reuse (CUCCR), I created my very own costume using recycled materials. My costume became not only an exploration of ancestral traditions and methodologies, but a powerful defiance of gender-norms. My work consistently tries to oscillate between the ancestral and the contemporary, offering a post-colonial femme perspective on issues as they relate to the personal, the spiritual, and the collective.

**DEVELOPING THE RIGHT MINDSET: PHILOSOPHIC DANGERS
IN USING RECYCLED MATERIAL** by Armando Rivas

I wish it were as simple as gathering a couple scraps, using the same tired water bottle day in and day out, or zipping around with my bike like a maniac in the dead of winter – but developing a sustainable practice is much more than this. In fact, my obtuse fixation with cutting costs and the overproduced rustic aesthetic of repurposed materials are perfect examples of a kind of “shallow environmentalism.”¹ I have sadly come to conclude that my art practice isn’t as sustainable as I once hoped it was, and that I am co-opting a false aesthetic of ecologism without even realizing. The main problem is one of attitude, values, and true commitment.² This is something especially present with sustainable development as a practice. Since its coining and mass application, sustainable development’s ambiguous goals allowed prevailing corporate and political agendas to overemphasize economic concerns over the pillars of social and ecological preservation.³ However, for an individual that breathes within these ever-present institutions, the reproduction of capitalist values becomes an operating system. As an immigrant who has personally faced difficult work conditions, it is hard to see beyond economic survival at the cost of my social wellbeing and health, especially when I embody some sort of personal ecological crusade that reinforces and justifies my own auto-exploitation.

To any artist, especially a visual artist, money is crucial — it's how you get material, it's how you transform that material, it's how you get it around. For me, recycling material has been a means to an end, one purely of saving money. In *Green Political Thought* (1995) Andrew Dobson suggests that recycling is a preferred strategy for maintaining the status quo in that it is an economic and industrialized solution instead of a direct challenge to industry.⁴ Following this, recycling has been a way for me to take advantage of all the waste generated by industry by incorporating it into my art production process. In this way, my answer to the ecological crisis ultimately depends on industry and maybe even excuses the complex. In response to this, I often ask myself; how can I truly challenge these harmful systems if my actions don't radically stray from the strategies of industry itself?

As an international student in Montréal in a studio art program, I paid elevated tuition rates, and I had no choice but to creatively source materials to bypass “mandatory” class supply lists. My first and ongoing experiences with recycled materials didn't arise from ideological goals, but out of pure necessity. Logically speaking, one will take the path of least resistance in any form of venture— sound advice I got from one of my design professors in my undergraduate degree. As part of an exercise, our professor asked us to visit factories and use their offcut waste material to create a project. And so, a mania around recycling and repurposing was born. It has been a means to reduce production and design time and reusing materials has become second nature. Why would anyone decide to base their art practice around materials that are difficult to source, or prohibitively expensive? I used to love oil painting until conditions forced me to re-evaluate what was accessible to me. But it was also my change in lifestyle, when I became a construction worker, began sourcing construction materials for my work. These construction materials tend to be large and heavy, making them difficult to carry. Transport and storage have since become a major preoccupation in terms of access, considering the increasingly unorthodox ways I've had to source and store material, as well as negotiate with different individuals and organizations to access tools and spaces. Among the first and most illustrative of my material expeditions was sourcing discarded sections of subfloor structure for an artwork. This form of scavenging became the norm for me during the pandemic years when I was working full time in demolition. It set the arduous precedent for carrying heavy awkward wood scraps over long distances on public transport. We were doing a subfloor reconstruction in Montréal's Little Italy neighborhood, a manageable 20-minute bus ride away from where I lived in Outremont. I found that plywood offered a nice, flat surface to paint on. I could cut it into any shape, making it ideal for all forms of 2D work. Because I was working in demolition it was also readily available, much more than pre-stretched cloth canvases that cost between \$20-30 each. One of my first artworks made of plywood was *The Entire City*. It is a large piece—

about 7 feet in length, 4 feet wide, and something like this needs to be propped on one's shoulder, making it a feat to carry over distances, leaving me with a sore back. The jagged nature of the plywood sheet is what made it particularly uncomfortable to carry. All the pieces I took from the job site were scrap, too, being either too small or too awkward to serve any purpose in the rest of the project. It made for slightly nervous moments as I dug through piles of debris that were full of nails, all done at night out of fear that my employers would think I was either stealing from them (which I sort of was because of the high price of plywood at the time) or mocking me for holding onto what they saw as garbage. My employers often made fun of me for being an artist, they didn't quite understand what I did, so I didn't bother explaining what I wanted to do with the scraps I coveted so much. We would argue over the course of the workday, because they wanted me to toss everything into the large 4 tonne garbage containers that we put next to job sites. The scraps that I stowed away in the corner of rooms took up space and putting them aside also meant that I wasn't focused on my other work tasks. Everything in construction needs to be done fast and without much questioning. The competitive and hyper-masculine construction world doesn't offer much space for sustainability, so my stubbornness in the face of their priorities stirred up a lot of conflict. They were running a business at the end of the day, and I was an obstacle to this. Because of the price of the materials that I took, sustainability became a contentious topic; I was afraid that I would be charged for the waste even though they had no interest in using it. Nighttime



Armando Rivas, *The Entire City*. 2022. Paint on plywood. Photo courtesy of the artist. Work description: A sprawling megacity skyscraper that uncontrollably grows in all directions.

dumpster diving became the best way for me to get the wood I was using for projects. On the one hand, I was developing a way to make art at a low cost, and I always found a way to get the wood home, nevertheless I felt that it generated stress and strain on my body, too.

I hoped that my latest work, *Dentro del Almacen*, would be my greatest feat yet in wood repurposing and logistics, but it ended up being a nightmare for multiple reasons. At first, I was excited because I was working at a woodshop, so scraps were always available and the owners were absent enough that they didn't care about me using the little pieces, meaning no more night raids. Because the tools were there, I didn't have to transport the material anywhere else for further processing, and I could do everything on the spot. The stars seemed to align for a straightforward production, but alas, there were obstacles. The first big problem was the number of nails in the repurposed wood, mostly from the pallets that I broke down. Because of the rough manufacturing process for pallets, there was a lot of nail debris in the wood that made processing extremely difficult. I had to transform the wood boards into a slab, but the boards had to be the same width, so I passed the boards through a jointer and planar.



Armando Rivas, *Dentro del Almacen*, 2023. Carved wood panel. Description: A mock illumination of a workplace accident inside. Photo courtesy of the artist.

I had an accident with one of these tools before, precisely because I was using repurposed wood. The planar is a tool that has a cylindrical tube with multiple knives alongside the length of the cylinder. The cylinder rotates, and when a piece of wood is passed through the rotating knives, these scrape off, level, and plane material at a predetermined size. It's a very strong tool, but its knives are only designed to handle



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

Armando Rivas, *Dentro del Almacén*, 2022. Documentation of production process for the central panel of *Dentro del Almacén*. Image 1: Dismantling of the pallets that were scavenged for the piece. Image 2: Processing of the wood boards, resizing to the correct dimension and removing sections with metal debris. Image 3: Clean boards before panel formation. This panel was not used for the final piece as it was deemed too dangerous to carve into by the technicians. Photos courtesy of the artist.

wood, so when they encounter metal, their edges chip. This ultimately ruins the finishing on the wood and requires longer sanding times. Overall, using recycled wood can damage the tool, and there are few, better alternatives for the operations I wanted to perform, unless I wanted to exponentially increase my workload. In this case, using recycled materials actually became unsustainable because in damaging the tool I produce a larger carbon footprint by having to replace the damaged blades or damaged engine. In the end, the technician for the machine did not allow me to use the planar. Instead, we purchased a new wood plank from RONA, much to my distaste. This took twice as long because I started from scratch, and it had already taken a lot of time to clean the pallet wood and cut them to desired length because they were oddly configured.

My practice has become a labyrinth of personal challenges. I work using heavy materials that I clandestinely source from remote work sites scattered around the city. At first, I thought that doing things in a cheap a way and at great personal cost in energy and time meant that I was on the right ecological path. Instead, because of circumstances somewhat out of my control, I have cornered myself into thinking that doing things the hard way was the best and only way to accomplish these vague aesthetic check boxes that give my work a sustainability status. It has become a vicious cycle in that because my process is low cost, I have come to believe that it is good (for my wallet), but always at the detriment to something else. I haven't wanted to think outside of this framework until writing this article. I know I will have to continue renegotiating my process to one day truly be sustainable. Indeed, there is a demand that cultural workers halt, observe, and question their surroundings. Recognizing these flaws is part of working against inaction and individualism that has contributed to our current climate crisis and the need to think through sustainable practice.

ENDNOTES

1. Kate Rigby, "Deep Sustainability: Eco-poetics, Enjoyment and Ecstatic Hospitality," in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, eds. Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire, (Manchester University Press, 2017), 53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1wn0s7q.16>.
Kate Rigby discusses Val Plumwood's idea of deep and shallow sustainability. Plumwood's definition of shallow sustainability is one mostly concerned with "privileging exclusive human interests."
2. Mandy Bloomfield, "Unsettling Sustainability: The Poetics of Discomfort," *Green Letters* 19, no. 1 (2014): 6.
3. Adeline Johns-Putra, "The Unsustainable Aesthetics of Sustainability: The Sense of an Ending in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*," in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, eds. Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire, (Manchester University Press, 2017), 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1wn0s7q.16>.
4. Andrew Dobson, "Introduction," in *Green Political Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.

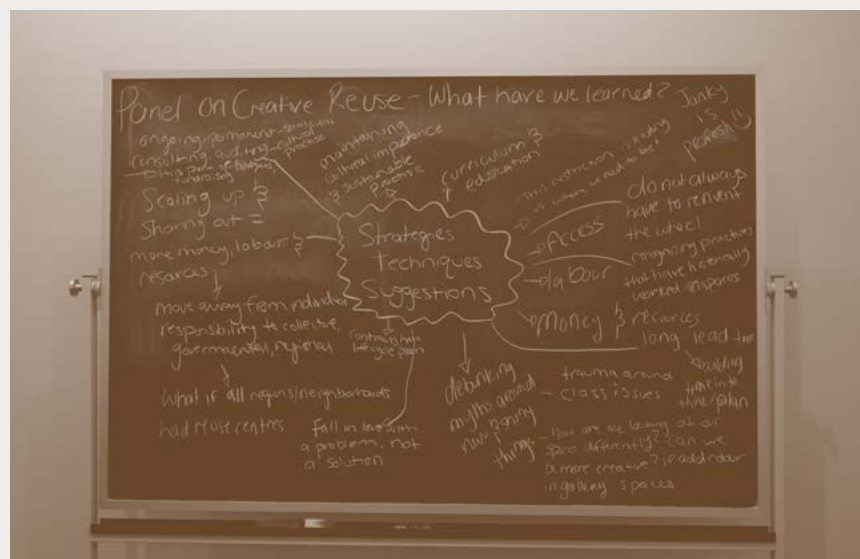
**THE POLITICS OF GARBAGE: REFLECTIONS ON FOFA'S PANEL
ON CREATIVE REUSE** by Caro (Caroline DeFrias)

On the morning of September 29th, 2023, under the care, hospitality, and guidance of Jasmine Sihra, the Curator of Sustainability at Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA) Gallery, we took a deep breath—a breath that expanded into the depths of our chests, holding the air we shared for a moment. We exhaled with gentle force and contracted inwards as we gave back that same air. We repeated this somatic exercise to (re)position ourselves critically in time, in community, in place, and with one another for FOFA's Panel on Creative Reuse. Here, creative practitioners Suzanne Carte, Merlin Heintzman Hope, and Arrien Weeks gathered to share their respective practices of sustainability within the arts to foster a dialogue on the urgency of repurposing, salvaging, and reusing existing materials within creative practices. Each speaker shared their unique experiences of sustainable practices in the artworld, as well as issues they identify and challenge in their work. Importantly, the panelists neither set out to define a definitive artistic programme of sustainability. Rather, their conversation encouraged resistance to the resignation and inertia that is pervasive within ecological systems by reconditioning our relationship to objects, materials, and each other, and by sharing stories of partial successes. In the discussions which arose throughout the panel, recycling emerged not simply as a static practice of waste reduction, but as an embodied politic. Indeed, what are lungs if not the meeting place of body and land, of self and others? What is the breath if not a moment of reuse by the body, a moment of locating life from the discard of nature?

Yet, this essential principle of life—reuse and relation—is something the panelists highlighted as often forgotten within many artistic spaces. Suzanne Carte, award-winning curator and cultural producer, explained that the origin of her project the Artist Material Fund (AMF) stemmed from a particular disembedded culture within artistic spaces that forget the ecological impacts of their exhibitions. Here, disembeddedness speaks to this unique relationship of the aesthetics and ideas of an exhibition and their environmental impacts; namely, that the design of exhibitions and artworks frequently operate independently of environmental concerns. As an example, Carte recalled an

exhibition on deforestation and humanity's relationship with trees and tree worlds that, when taken down, left behind tremendous amounts of waste not accounted for in the exhibition's design. Somewhat paradoxically, an exhibition meant to respect trees threw many of them into a landfill. Fortunately, Carte ran into a colleague named Tom who said he could use the leftover wood to build a shed. Unable to give the wood to him outright, Carte promised to leave the materials on the side of the dumpster where they were legally out of her hands, and she was happy to discover the wood gone the next morning. And happier still weeks later when she received a picture from Tom of his new shed. From here, Carte founded AMF in 2014 as a way to distribute and find new homes for the so-called garbage left over from cultural institutions across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. What we can learn from Carte is not simply a new way to think about "garbage," but a way to connect with one another through the mutual aid that results from the reuse of material.

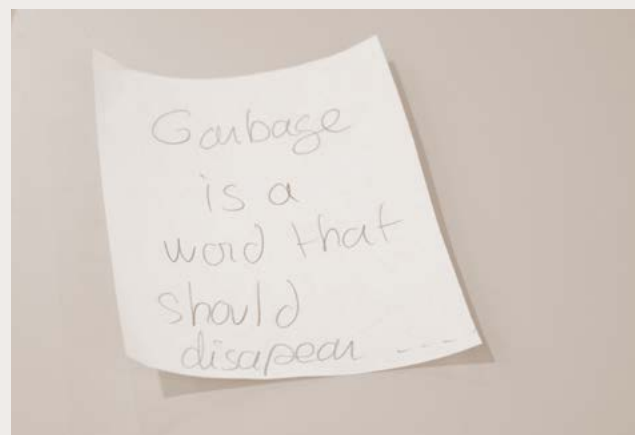
However, as Arrien Weeks, Concordia University's Centre for Creative Reuse's (CUCCR) Sustainability Technician also discussed in his presentation, professional arts spaces and institutions in North America frequently locate themselves as separate from the ecological sphere—thinking first and often only of the aesthetic of the exhibition and pieces, and not the materials and waste generated in the wake of the show. Similar to AMF, CUCCR, cofounded by Weeks in 2017, operates to minimize waste and consumption through the free redistribution of discarded materials and the creation of a space where people can learn to care for and create objects.



Documentation of brainstorming session during FOFA Gallery's Panel on Creative Reuse. September 29, 2023. Photo credit: Pablo Pérez Díaz.

At CUCCR, the ethic of “don’t buy that” does not limit artistic and creative work, but instead expands its possibilities through creative imagination, asking us to think again about items we might otherwise overlook. This is an essential politic which challenges the disembodied relationship artists have with their materials as objects outside of the narrative and aesthetic of their practice, and recentres the body and environment in essential and critical relationship with art.

We can unpack this disembodiedness with reference to Isabel Stengers and Philippe Pignarre’s *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*. Their text posits that the capitalist system paralyzes individuals with an apathetic passivity born of “realist” logic from having to choose between a lesser of two unlivable evils. Stengers and Pignarre write, “capitalism works continuously to reduce the intelligence of its agents, to replace it by automatic behavior that can in turn become the matter of infernal alternatives.”¹ The individual is left feeling helpless and alone in their soul-killing everyday actions. Think here of the defensively numb experience of grocery shopping: many rely on big chain stores and factory farming for their essentials, while simultaneously possessing the knowledge that the individuals and environments involved in the production of their essential items were likely abused by the market economy. Think of the impact of an apple: the ecological crisis coming from contemporary agriculture practices that prioritize efficiency over sustainability, which grew the apple; the mistreatment and illegal, dangerous working conditions of the migrant workers who picked the apple; and the grocery clerks, who



TOP: Documentation of panelists Arrien Weeks, Merlin Heintzman-Hope, and Suzanne Carte (from left to right) during FOFA Gallery’s Panel on Creative Reuse. September 29, 2023. Photo credit: Pablo Pérez Díaz.

BOTTOM: Documentation of participant’s notes during FOFA Gallery’s Panel on Creative Reuse. September 29, 2023. Photo credit: Pablo Pérez Díaz.

sold that apple to you, who do not make a living wage. But we have to eat, and so are ostensibly presented with that famous capitalist freedom of starvation or buying into the system, placating these injustices so we might sustain ourselves.

This mentality exists in the art world too, as many artists and gallerists operate with low budgets and a cultural rhetoric that tells them it is largely their responsibility to solve the climate crisis; and in this fatigued binary of creating art with affordable materials and contributing to the climate crisis or ceasing their practice until they have enough wealth and the right materials. This dichotomy is unhelpful, as it draws us into an imaginary where the climate crisis and its responsibilities are levied equally among individuals regardless of their positionality. To state it plainly, the climate crisis became framed as an individual rather than a collective responsibility. The resulting fears of this framing operate as a kind of politics which kill politics, a fear which isolates us from each other, from better practices we are made to feel are outside of our reach.

But how do we foster a politics that is generative of politics? A way to think about and fight the climate crisis that moves us towards hope and one another? Perhaps the first and most important question we must ask ourselves within practices of sustainability is who we are. Certainly, this is how neurodivergent Chinese Canadian multidisciplinary artist Merlin Heintzman Hope approaches his creative reuse practice. In his presentation, Heintzman Hope discusses his positionality and the pathway he



Documentation of participants and panelists during FOFA Gallery's Panel on Creative Reuse. September 29, 2023. Photo credit: Pablo Pérez Díaz.

took to arrive at his sustainable practice, highlighting and celebrating the creativity and possibilities of reuse on a personal, localized, community scale. He noted that many students and young artists, such as himself, have sustainable practices by virtue of being in a lower-income bracket and working with whatever materials they have access to. Working from this reality, Heintzman Hope created Club Répare, a free-use community workshop based in Centre-Sud, Montréal, that became a critical site of care, curiosity, connection, and community. Club Répare hosts regular workshops on how to care for material objects, with a focus on repair and creative reuse to make sustainability accessible for all.

The Panel on Creative Reuse argued for the importance of community, of hope and of creativity. These discussions were not ominous warnings of a future of destruction but a promise of ways of attempting to be better, surrounding the present in an embrace of community and environment. Garbage does not need to be a bad word. Rather, it can be a new politic where we come together to reduce our impact through reusing our materials and resisting rhetorics which paralyze us in fear. Indeed, garbage is not a static, discharged, or worthless object. Rather, garbage is an opportunity to rethink our materials and relationships.

ENDNOTES

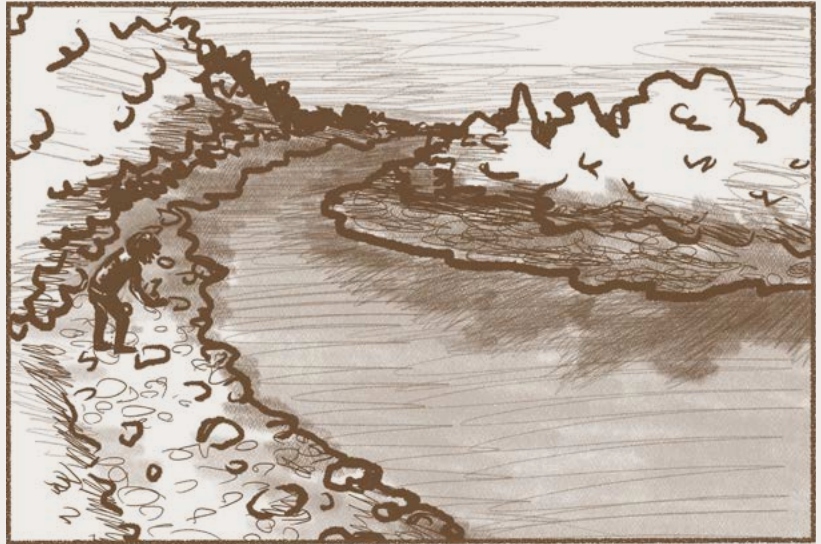
1. Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, ed. Andrew Goffey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 21.

CREATING THE CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE CURATING
by Amanda White

The Center for Sustainable Curating is located in the Department of Visual Arts at Western University. The Visual Arts Building sits on the banks of the Deshkan Zibi (Antler River), and in many ways, being in relation to the river has shaped the vision of our work, guiding what we do. Considering questions like, how can we imagine and act through responsibility, and accountability to the communities we are a part of and the communities that are in relation to us? How can we foreground the lands, air, and water of the Great Lakes region in our work?
Is it possible to build an institution that is based in reciprocity?



Le Center for Sustainable Curating est situé dans le département des arts visuels de l'université Western, en Ontario. Le bâtiment dédié aux arts visuels se trouve sur les rives de la Deshkan Zibi (autrefois appelée la rivière Antler) et le fait d'être en relation avec ce cours d'eau a façonné notre vision du travail et orienté nos actions de plusieurs manières. Nous nous posons ainsi plusieurs questions : comment pouvons-nous imaginer et agir en faisant preuve de responsabilité envers les communautés dont nous faisons partie et envers celles avec lesquelles nous sommes en relation? Comment pouvons-nous mettre de l'avant les terres, l'air et l'eau de la région des Grands Lacs dans notre pratique? Est-il possible de structurer une institution en se basant sur le principe de réciprocité?



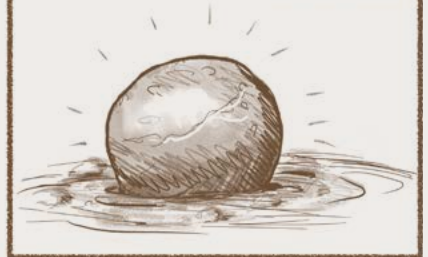
Hello, rock.
You look so interesting!
I wonder how old you are?

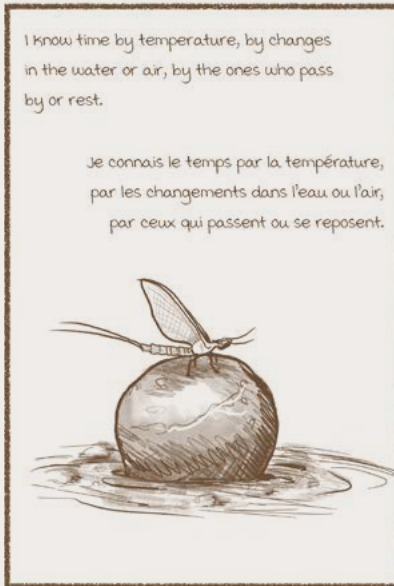
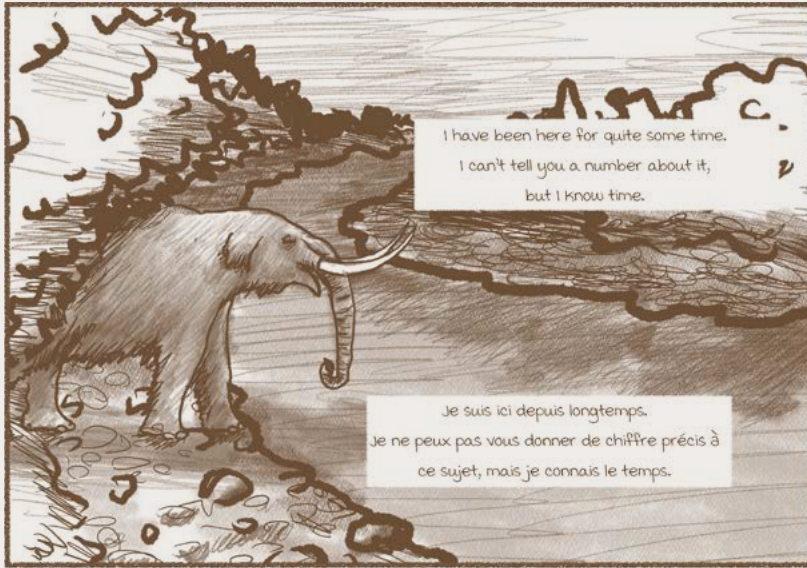
Bonjour, rocher.
Tu as l'air si intéressant!
Je me demande quel âge
tu as?

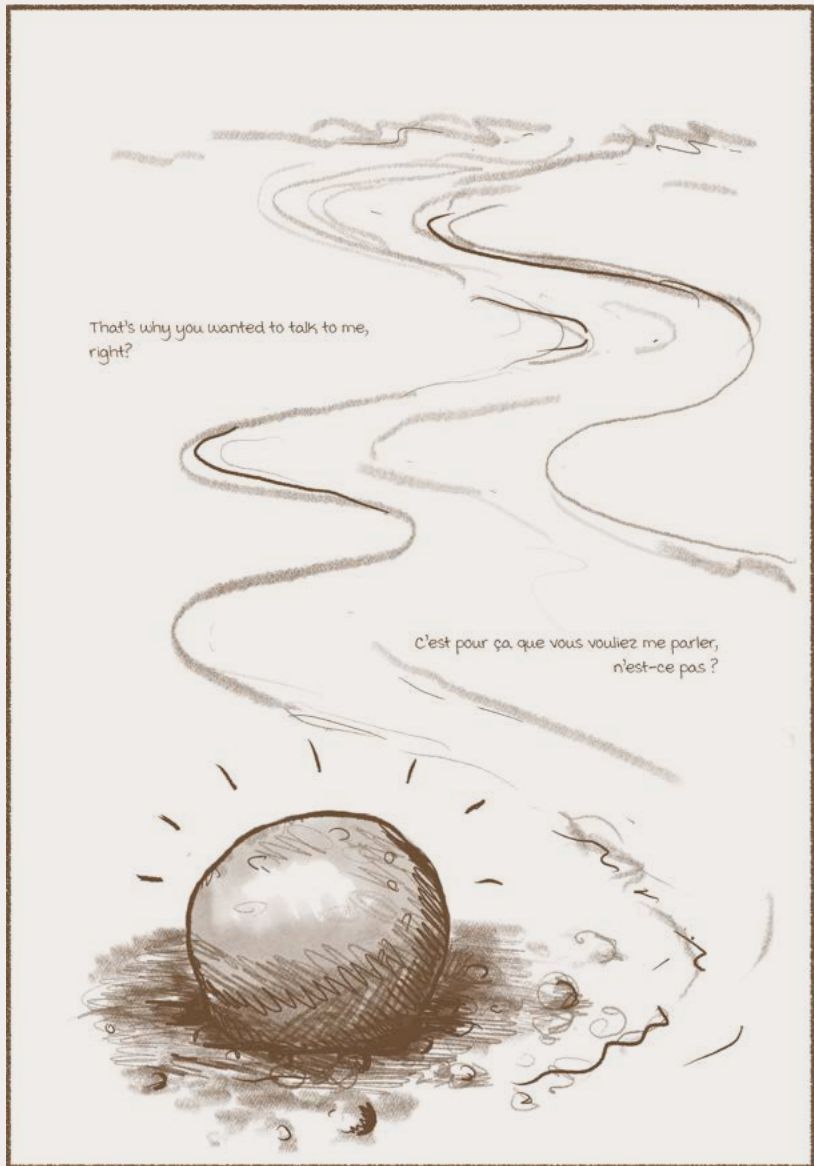
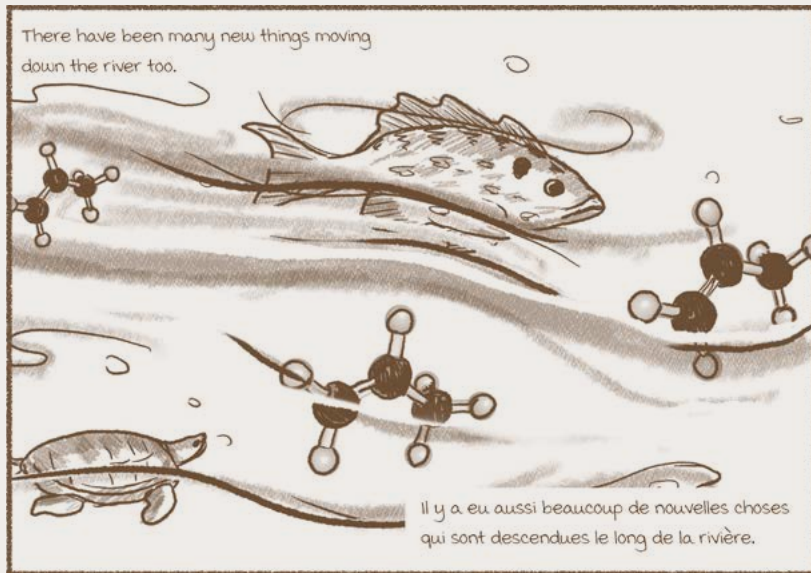


How old am I?
What do you mean?
Older than that flower, or
that tree over there, but
younger than the sky.

Quel est mon âge?
Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire par là?
Plus vieux que cette fleur ou cet
arbre là-bas, mais plus jeune
que le ciel, facilisis.







CONTRIBUTOR'S BIOS

[AMANDA WHITE](#) (she/her) is a white settler artist and scholar currently living and working in Tkaronto/Toronto. She is a postdoctoral Fellow at the [Centre for Sustainable Curating](#) in the Department of Visual Art at Western University and is also a Co-initiator of the [Creative Food Research Collaboratory](#). Amanda's work sits at the intersection of art, environmental and cultural studies with a focus on plants and food. Amanda holds a PhD from Queen's University, and a MFA (visual art) from the University of Windsor. Her ongoing works-in-progress include several collaborative and solo studio-based projects, a co-edited book (forthcoming from Wilfrid Laurier University press) and a graphic novel.

EMEM ETTI is a Nigerian-born, Vancouver-raised artist and community engagement worker currently finishing their BFA in Film Production at Concordia. Within their rug practice, Emem is interested in exploring fibres as a means of sensory grounding therapy; using various tufting methodologies to enhance and complicate our connection to rugs. Furthermore, within their film practice, Emem is interested in highlighting Black femme intimacy, representation, and collective identity through the lenses of expanded cinema, Afro-eroticism, and Afro-surrealism. Emem's passion for community engagement came about during their position at FASA as the elected Student Life Coordinator from 2021 to 2023. They were dedicated to creating a vibrant, engaging, and accessible community for all students at Concordia, with a strong focus on building more community for QTBIPOC students. Through events and workshops such as Black History Semester, monthly movie nights, and hair workshops, Emem sought to set a precedent for future Student Life Coordinators to look back to in hopes that these structures will create a lasting impact on student life at Concordia. Emem is currently continuing their passion at Eastern Bloc as the Technical Assistant & Special Projects Coordinator.

CARO DEFRIAS is an emerging academic, artist, and curator currently based in Tiohtià:ke (Montréal). They are currently pursuing a master's degree in art history from Concordia University. They hold a Combined Honours with Distinction from the University of King's College, Kjiptuk (Halifax) in the Historiography of Science and Technology and Social Anthropology, with a certificate in Art History and Visual Culture. Their work is interested in critically exploring queer processes of identification and aging; inheritance and identity in relation to immigration and (re)settlement; the construction of the gallery space, politics of display, and the encounter of the object; as well as the ethics and pathos of the archive.

ARMANDO RIVAS is a Venezuelan artist currently immigrating to Canada. He is a flunked architecture student turned renegade carpenter and community organizer. His current work focuses on the intersections and relationships formed between the economy of labour conditions and technological development, under the framework of architectural history.

PIERINA CORZO-VALERO is an artist, weaver and writer based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. They're pursuing a BFA in Fibres and Material Practices and have worked at the FOFA Gallery as a communications assistant since 2022. They're interested in processes of queering and dedicate a lot of attention to the role of materiality and landscape in our imagination. Usually, their works take the form of installations that echo her playful associative thinking by bringing together fibres, text, photography, video and found objects. Corzo-Valero wrote an article on Queer Phenomenology and Brazilian Art that was selected by CUJAH for publication in 2023. Their installation works have been featured in group exhibitions at the CTRL Lab, the VAV Gallery and Galerie Onze.

Born in Limoilou, JOÉ CÔTÉ-RANCOURT moved from the suburb of Atouta-régulé, Kebed (Quebec) to Hochelaga to pursue a BFA in sculpture at Concordia University. Joé's multimedia works witness human interactions with the environment, beings and materials. Thinking about the ways in which his work bears witness to those interactions, his works reveal interwoven actions and political directions. What emerges are questions about the way humans function, interact and communicate. Joé also works as Sustainability Technician for the FOFA Gallery, and technician at Digital Fabrication Shop in Concordia University's Core Technical Centre.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Olya Zarapina

Photographers:

Alexis Bellavance
Pablo Pérez Díaz

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS & EXHIBITIONS: 2023

Undergraduate Students' Exhibition: *An Anatomy of Apocalyptic Care / Une anatomie de la bienveillance apocalyptique*
Jess Slipp, *with & of (Becoming Rock)*
Worlding Public Cultures: re : imagining / créer/ building / faire / mapping / connaissance / ...*, curated by Manar Abo Touk, Varda Nisar, Lorraine Doucet Sisto with works by rudi aker, Pansee Atta, Amin Rehman, and Swapnaa Tamhane
Ryan Clayton and Emilie Morin, *The Spectre Animates our Bones / Le spectre anime nos os*
Kinga Michalska, *Diary*
Lan "Florence" Yee, *What Academia Has Done to Me / Ce que l'academie m'a fait*
Graduating Students' Exhibition / Exposition des finissant.e.s
James Gardner and David Lafrance, *Moving Pictures*
A.llegades, curated by María Andreína Escalona De Abreu with works by Armando Cuspina, Juan Pablo Hernández Gutiérrez, Marguerite Marion-Reyes, Emiliano Moreno Quesada, Denise A. Olivares, Armando Rivas, Sarabeth Triviño, and Elsy Zavarce
Mara Eagle, *Pretty Talk*
Kesso Saulnier, *Histoires Fil'tisses*

2022

Mylene Raiche, *318 jours*
Eugene Park, *Yellow Saga*
Frédérique Laliberté, *Un lieu vide où il ne se passe rien*
Jordan Loeppky-Kolesnik, *Against Enclosure / Contre les enclosures*
Graduating Students' Exhibition / Exposition des finissant.e.s
Caroline Gagnon, *Fetish Territories*
Madeleine Mayo, *Vex-Visceral*
Adam Gunn, *Régretté de tous*
Guylaine Chevarie-Lessard, *Euphoria*
Jannick Deslauriers, *Swirling into Ashes*
Allison Moore, *Mukojima Diorama*

PARTNERS & SPONSORS:

Canada Council for the Arts Strategic Innovation Fund: Seed Grants

Canadian Heritage: Young Canada Works program

Centre for Sustainable Curating (CSC), Western University

Concordia University's Centre for Creative Reuse (CUCCR)

Digital Fabrication Lab, Core Technical Centre,
Concordia University

Sustainability Action Fund, Concordia University

Special thanks to Dr. Kirsty Robertson, Dr. Heather Igloliorte, Arrien Weeks,
Dr. MJ Thompson, and Jules Beauchamps Desbiens and the team at the Digital
Fabrication Shop of Concordia University's Core Technical Centre.

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Exploring Sustainability Across the Arts: Emerging Perspectives
(*Explorer l'écoresponsabilité dans le domaine des arts: perspectives émergentes*)
ISBN 978-1-927629-37-6 (English)
ISBN 978-1-927629-39-0 (French)

Legal Deposit: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Library and Archives Canada, 2024.

Design by Sita Singh.

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