

FORECAST

An exhibition by Christina Battle

February 29 - April 12, 2024

Forecasting a different sense of crisis: the work of Christina Battle

Essay by Mariana Muñoz Gomez

Although the air quality in a distant place may seem unrelated to us here and now, we are all connected. The earth's wind systems connect environments, ecosystems, communities, and individuals globally. Incredibly, dust from the Sahara desert gets carried across the Atlantic Ocean, nourishing marine life there, and fertilizing the earth in the Amazon. Gritty volcanic ash from the Popocatepetl volcano is carried into neighbouring Mexican states, compelling residents to wear face masks and glasses to protect their lungs and eyesight. Last year was deemed to be Canada's worst wildfire season – throughout the country, wildfires caused multiple deaths and forced evacuations of hundreds of thousands of people.¹ Smoke from wildfires in the Northwest Territories and British Columbia made its way through Manitoba, impacting our own local air quality.²

I turn to Christina Battle's exhibition, *FORECAST*, where the artist explores how we sense and anticipate the climate crisis with artworks that combine research, speculation, and storytelling. When recalling one's life experiences or when sharing a story, affect colours the descriptions which we use to remember. A definition of affect can be difficult to pin down as the term is based in the experiential; one understanding is that affect is the energies and feelings transmitted within

1 Magan Carty, "World on Fire: 2023 is Canada's worst wildfire season on record — and it's not over yet," CBC News, last modified September 4, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/world-on-fire-canada-s-worst-wildfire-season-on-record-1.6946472>.

2 "Out-of-province wildfire smoke prompts special air quality advisory for most of Manitoba," CBC News, last modified September 5, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-special-air-quality-statement-wildfire-smoke-1.6956806>

bodies and that can get stuck to bodies. This includes nonhuman and inanimate bodies. For instance, affect may be in the emotional pulse one receives from a piece of art, and in the sense of wellbeing humans get from spending time in nature. Considering affect within the scope of *FORECAST*, questions arise of who feels environmental disaster, and how.

I think about affect theory, class politics, and about various contours we can give name through categories of identity politics – such as race, ability, gender. I wonder about how this all intertwines with environmental injustice. I recall José Esteban Muñoz’s conception that one’s positionality – that is, one’s position within various social, political, and economic spheres – informs how one senses the world.³

Climate change is increasing the likelihood of environmental disasters as time continues to pass. The concept of environmental racism links structural racism to disproportionate exposure to pollution (for instance, policies that lead to or amplify social or economic stratification). Battle’s video, *the air we breathe*, presents observations and facts about the air quality in the city where she makes her home: Edmonton. The information she presents is not restricted to local realities; articles commenting on air quality and environmental racism around the world flash on screen as Battle’s voiceover notes that “governments and corporations disproportionately locate polluting industries and hazardous sites in Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities.”⁴

Often, racialized communities are also under-resourced by governments. Locally, there is Shoal Lake 40 First Nation: put under Canada’s second-longest boil water advisory of twenty-four years, the community’s water treatment system was only recently updated in 2021. While this case is not an example of a polluting industry placed in an Indigenous community, other facets of environmental racism have been at play, such as extraction and neglect. The diversion of clean drinking water from Shoal Lake 40 for the purpose of directing it to metropolitan Winnipeg created a hazardous site, physically isolating the community for one hundred years.⁵ Residents faced dangerous conditions in order to reach the mainland and

3 José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). In *The Sense of Brown*, Muñoz works from a Latinx Studies lens and focuses on the affects and performativity of racialized and queer people as expressions of their sociopolitical realities and relationships.

4 Christina Battle, *the air we breathe*. See also Chris Rose, “Canada Urged to Prepare for ‘Climate Migrants’ in *Warming World: New Report*” and Raina Delisle, “‘I Can Feel Your Breath’: When Covid-19 and Environmental Racism Collide.”

5 “Our History,” Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://shoallake40.ca/our-history/#:~:text=In%201919%2C%20the%20aqueduct%20to,an%20old%20native%20burial%20ground.>

resources located there. In doing so, community members drowned and others fell through the ice surrounding the community. Chief Kevin Redsky names trauma brought unto Shoal Lake 40 due to the water diversion.⁶ Trauma is an affect of environmental racism and of the climate crisis that resounds in other places near and far.

In a study from Cornell University and the University of Michigan on the Flint water crisis, the impacts of the crisis are connected to trauma's physical, mental, and emotional manifestations. The crisis began in 2014 when Flint city officials switched the drinking water supply for a city with a majority-Black population, a 40% poverty rate, and a higher proportion of people with a disability compared to the state it resides in.⁷ The new supply turned out to contain lead and other toxins. Within one month of the switch, residents complained to the city about the smell and colour of the water. As time went on, officials denied that the water was unsafe to drink even as test results showed alarming amounts of toxins in the water and as people got sick.⁸ The study proposes that about one hundred deaths may have been linked to bacteria in the city's water.⁹ By the end of 2015, Flint's Mayor declared a state of emergency over the unsafe drinking water. Now in 2024, the United States Environmental Protection Agency advises: "Flint residents should continue to filter water while the City's 'Fast Start' program continues. [...] Residents with health conditions that limit their use of tap water should talk to their doctor."¹⁰

The authors of the study note the term toxicohistronics – essentially, an overreaction to perceived substances in one's environment¹¹ -- a seemingly fitting term for city and state officials' views of the realities experienced by Flint residents

6 Kathleen Martens, "Shoal Lake 40 Sues Canada, Winnipeg for Years without Drinking Water, Road Access," APTN News, July 30, 2023, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/shoal-lake-40-sues-canada-winnipeg-for-years-without-drinking-water-road-access/>.

7 Leonidas Murembya and Eric Guthrie, "Demographic and Labor Market Profile: City of Flint," (Lansing, Michigan: State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget, 2016), https://milmi.org/_docs/publications/Flint_City_Demographic_and_Labor_Mkt_Profile.pdf.

8 Merrit Kennedy, "Lead-Laced Water In Flint: A Step-By-Step Look At The Makings Of A Crisis." NPR, April 20, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/04/20/465545378/lead-laced-water-in-flint-a-step-by-step-look-at-the-makings-of-a-crisis>.

9 Jerrell M. Ezell and Elizabeth C. Chase, "Forming a Critical Race Theory of Environmental Disaster: Understanding Social Meanings and Health Threat Perception in the Flint Water Crisis," *Journal of Environmental Management* 320 (October 15, 2022): Article 115886, page 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.115886>.

10 "Flint Drinking Water Response," United States Environmental Protection Agency, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/flint>.

11 Ezell and Chase, 2.

HOW TO SEE IT HOW TO SMELL IT HOW TO FEEL IT

during the crisis. This point highlights tensions between the illnesses and trauma – manifesting as depression, anxiety, nightmares, paranoia, dissociation – felt by Flint residents, and the neglect, gaslighting, and endangerment enacted by governments and those in positions of power. A community’s economic, social, and political capital are also factors in considering the preventability of environmental crises.¹² These factors are discussed in the study on the Flint water crisis,¹³ considering the positionalities represented in the city’s demographics (majority Black population, highly impoverished, and many of its residents disabled).

As Battle notes in *the air we breathe*, part of what urgently needs to be addressed is “invisible” environmental damage. However, crises like those at Flint and Shoal Lake 40 show that visible damage and emergencies – brown tap water, a community isolated within a frozen lake – may still be neglected and mismanaged. In both cases, community members have expressed anger and a lack of trust towards the governments that failed to keep them safe, taking steps to sue their corresponding governments and officials. Additionally, considering that the “Global South” has disproportionately borne the brunt of climate change fueled by “Global North” countries for many years,^{14,15} the question of who feels

12 John Eligon, “A Question of Environmental Racism in Flint,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/us/a-question-of-environmental-racism-in-flint.html>.

13 Ezel and Chase, 11.

14 Chris Rose, “Canada Urged to Prepare for ‘Climate Migrants’ in *Warming World: New Report*,” *The Narwhal*, November 10, 2014, <https://thenarwhal.ca/new-report-urges-canada-prepare-climate-migrants-warming-world-ccpa/>.

15 *1.5 Stay Alive*, directed by Lucian Segura, (2015: Green Planet Films).

the climate crisis, and how, comes up again. Many feel physical and emotional traumas of environmental disaster at varying degrees. Others may feel unaffected, apathetic, and entitled

Although Battle's exhibition focuses on air quality and weather, all of our natural systems are connected. As atmospheric pollution warms our planet, sea levels rise around the world; pollutants are absorbed into and warm the ocean, and an increase in extreme weather events ensues.^{16,17} As conditions change in our air and atmosphere with increased pollutants, land, plants, insects, land animals, marine life, our food, our bodies – everyone on the planet is affected.¹⁸ Throughout her video *the air we breathe*, Battle comments: "Maybe you can hear it in my voice," referring to pollutants in the air. "My nose was itching. My lungs felt tight."¹⁹ In *FORECAST*, Battle presents various questions and prompts that aim to activate our senses to be more attuned with the health of our environments, not only relying on our vision to detect visible dangers. Her work mentions our sense of touch, taste and, primarily, our sense of smell. Acknowledging the correlations between smell and memory, and memory and affect, it could be said that *FORECAST* also engages our "sense" of memory. Since all our natural systems are connected, perhaps a way to sense what's going on in the air includes learning to recognize other sensory symptoms within ourselves, and other ecological symptoms within our environments.

Timescale affects when we realize a crisis, and how crisis conditions become normalized. As the experiences of those who have lived through an environmental disaster demonstrate, looking back at the start of a crisis can be associated with grief and trauma. One hopes that these are not the only enduring affects that people in the future have to look back on, when they recall stories and memories of the first half of the 21st century. A pathway to a better future includes leaning into the realities of suffering – acknowledging and being activated by both tangible as well as less visible pain experienced not only by oneself, but also by our networks of communities, connected as we are by the air we breathe.

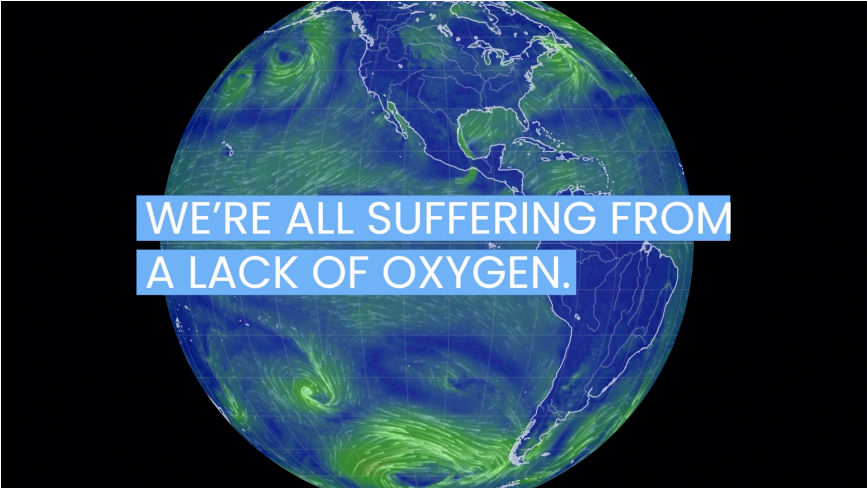
16 *Subject to Change*, directed by Wiktoria Ojrzyńska, (2010; Change and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VupDgO-4kC8>.

17 *1.5 Stay Alive*, directed by Lucian Segura.

18 For instance: Battle notes in a forthcoming article that as carbon dioxide levels continue to rise, plants will contain less protein and other nutrients and become richer in carbohydrates. Additionally, she describes how pollution to our atmosphere is changing the growing zones and seasonal cycles of plants. See Battle, "seeds are meant to disperse [to get to the future, a return to the past]," *Ecologies in Practice - Environmentally Engaged Arts in Canada*, ed. Elysia French and Amanda White, (Waterloo: Wildfire Laurier University Press, 2024) 74-75.

19 Battle, *the air we breathe*.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS NOT EQUALLY DISTRIBUTED



WE'RE ALL SUFFERING FROM
A LACK OF OXYGEN.

Bibliography

Connected: *The Hidden Science of Everything. Episode 3, "Dust."* Directed by Alyse Walsh, hosted by Latif Nasser. Released August 2, 2020, Netflix.

"Our History." Shoal Lake 40 First Nation. Accessed February 15, 2024. <https://shoallake40.ca/our-history/#:~:text=In%2019%2C%20the%20aqueduct%20to,an%20old%20native%20burial%20ground.>

"Out-of-Province Wildfire Smoke Prompts Special Air Quality Advisory for Most of Manitoba." CBC News. Last modified September 5, 2023. [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-special-air-quality-statement-wildfire-smoke-1.6956806.](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-special-air-quality-statement-wildfire-smoke-1.6956806)

Battle, Christina. "Seeds are meant to disperse [to get to the future, a return to the past]." *Ecologies in Practice - Environmentally Engaged Arts in Canada*, edited by Elysia French and Amanda White, 74-75. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2024 [forthcoming].

Battle, Christina. "the air we breathe." Vimeo, January 5, 2023. Video, 09:19. <https://vimeo.com/786698421>.

Carty, Magan. "World on Fire: 2023 is Canada's worst wildfire season on record — and it's not over yet." CBC News. Last modified September 4, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/world-on-fire-canada-s-worst-wildfire-season-on-record-1.6946472>.

Delisle, Raina. "'I Can Feel Your Breath': When Covid-19 and Environmental Racism Collide." *The Narwhal*, March 19, 2021. <https://thenarwhal.ca/covid-19-environmental-racism-canada/>.

Eligon, John. "A Question of Environmental Racism in Flint." *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/us/a-question-of-environmental-racism-in-flint.html>.

Ezell, Jerel M., and Elizabeth C. Chase. "Forming a Critical Race Theory of Environmental Disaster: Understanding Social Meanings and Health Threat Perception in the Flint Water Crisis." *Journal of Environmental Management* 320 (October 15, 2022): Article 115886, pages 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.115886>.

"Flint Drinking Water Response." United States Environmental Protection Agency. Accessed February 15, 2024. <https://www.epa.gov/flint>.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, editors. "An Inventory of Shimmers." *In The Affect Theory Reader*, 1-25. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Kennedy, Merrit. "Lead-Laced Water In Flint: A Step-By-Step Look At The Makings Of A Crisis." NPR, April 20, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/04/20/465545378/lead-laced-water-in-flint-a-step-by-step-look-at-the-makings-of-a-crisis>.

Lobo, Arpan. "Flint Residents Reach \$25m Settlement with Engineering Firm in Water Crisis Lawsuit." *Detroit Free Press*, February 1, 2024. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2024/02/01/flint-residents-class-action-settlement/72435816007/#>.

Martens, Kathleen. "Shoal Lake 40 Sues Canada, Winnipeg for Years without Drinking Water, Road Access." APTN News, July 30, 2023. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/shoal-lake-40-sues-canada-winnipeg-for-years-without-drinking-water-road-access/>.

Murembya, Leonidas and Eric Guthrie. "Demographic and Labor Market Profile: City of Flint." Lansing, Michigan: State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget, 2016. https://milmio.org/_docs/publications/Flint_City_Demographic_and_Labor_Mkt_Profile.pdf.

Muñoz, José Esteban, *The Sense of Brown*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

Orzyńska, Wiktoria, dir. *Subject to Change*. Released 2010; Change and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand. Video, 33:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VupDgO-4kC8>.

Rose, Chris. "Canada Urged to Prepare for 'Climate Migrants' in Warming World: New Report." *The Narwhal*, November 10, 2014. <https://thenarwhal.ca/new-report-urges-canada-prepare-climate-migrants-warming-world-ccpa/>.

Segura, Lucian, dir. *1.5 Stay Alive*. Released 2015; Green Planet Films.

Simmons, Kristen. "Settler Atmospheric." Member Voices, *Fieldsights*, November 20, 2017. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/settler-atmospheric>.

Thompson, Sam, and Talha Hashmani. "Shoal Lake 40 First Nation Sues Winnipeg, Feds over Impacts of Diverted Drinking Water." Global News, Last modified July 26, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9857262/shoal-lake-40-first-nation-sues-winnipeg-feds-diverted-drinking-water/>.

Yu, H., M. Chin, T. Yuan, H. Bian, L. A. Remer, J. M. Prospero, A. H. Omar, et al. "Saharan Dust Fertilizing Atlantic Ocean and Amazon Rainforest via Long-Range Transport and Deposition: A Perspective from Multiyear Satellite Measurements." NASA/ADS, December 2015. <https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2015AGUFMEP42A..05Y/abstract#:~:text=The%2028%20Tg%20of%20dust,timescales%20of%20decades%20or%20centuries>.

EXHIBITION HOURS

Monday - Friday between 12:00 and 4:00 pm from February 29 until April 12, 2024 (closed March 29).

AFFILIATED RESOURCES & EVENTS

Participatory postcard project: Take a postcard, write your air quality observations, and add it to the *Learning the Signals/Change is Coming* display on the wall outside the gallery!

Library resource guide: Explore the artist's recommended reading list at libguides.uwinnipeg.ca/FORECAST

Artist talk: Friday, March 8 at 11:00 am CT on Zoom

Life of Fire Talk by Amy Mazowita: Tuesday, April 2 at 8:30 am CT on Zoom

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gallery 1C03 is on Treaty One Territory, the homeland of the Red River Métis and the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininew, Anishinew, Dakota and Dene peoples. Our water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

Gallery 1C03 is deeply grateful to artist Christina Battle for the opportunity to host her powerful and timely works at The University of Winnipeg. We also wish to thank Mariana Muñoz Gomez for her thoughtful response to the exhibition. We extend our appreciation to Amy Mazowita for agreeing to speak about her "Life of Fire" photo research project as part of the exhibition program. Thanks to the University's Art Gallery and Collections Technician Jamie Wright for installing the exhibition, to University Librarian Michael Hohner for preparing the library resource guide, and to the gallery's student attendants for welcoming visitors to our space.

Gallery 1C03

1st floor of Centennial Hall, The University of Winnipeg

515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9

Phone: 204.786.9253 www.uwinnipeg.ca/art-gallery

Images and text © Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg, the artist and the author, 2024.



THE RESILIENT MEMORY OF SMELL

before it actually starts raining.

LIST OF WORKS

Artworks are listed in order of their appearance, beginning with the pieces along the north side of the gallery and continuing clockwise. The final work is displayed outside of the gallery on the wall opposite the entrance. Dimensions are in inches and listed as height x width x depth. All works collection of the artist.

the air we breathe, 2023, four silk/poly fabric banners & LED lights, approximately 36" x 60" each.

the air we breathe, 2023, beeswax, cotton, activated carbon, cards, natural silk and cotton, variable dimensions.

the air we breathe, 2023, video. Run time: 9 minutes, 9 seconds.

the air we breathe, 2023, silk/poly fabric banner & LED lights, approximately 96" x 48".

the air we breathe, 2023, two silk poly fabric banners & LED lights, approximately 48" x 36" each.

the air we breathe: smells and tastes, 2023, video.

Run time: 14 seconds.

Learning the Signals/Change is Coming, 2023/2024, postcards, variable dimensions.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Christina Battle is an artist based in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), within the Aspen Parkland: the transition zone where prairie and forest meet. Her practice focuses on thinking deeply about the concept of disaster: its complexity, and the intricacies that are entwined within it. She looks to disaster as a series of intersecting processes including social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic ... which are implicated not only in how disaster is caused but also in how it manifests, is responded to, and overcome. Through this research, Battle looks closer to both online models and plant systems for strategies to learn from, and for ways we might help to frame and strengthen such response. Much of this work extends from her recent PhD dissertation (2020) which looked closer to community responses to disaster: the ways in which they take shape, and especially to how artistic and online models might help to frame and strengthen such response.

Battle's practice prioritizes collaboration, experimentation, and failure; she has a B.Sc. with specialization in Environmental Biology from the University of Alberta, a certificate in Film Studies from Ryerson University, an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, and a PhD in Art & Visual Culture from the University of Western Ontario. She collaborates with Serena Lee as SHATTERED MOON ALLIANCE and has exhibited internationally in festivals and galleries as both artist and curator, most recently at: Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta University of the Arts (Calgary); Gallery 44 (Toronto); The Blackwood Gallery (Mississauga); Window Winnipeg; The Grantham Foundation (Quebec); The Art Gallery of Burlington (Ontario); and The Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oshawa, Ontario). Learn more about Christina Battle at cbattle.com.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Mariana Muñoz Gomez is an artist, writer, curator, and settler of colour based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Treaty 1 Territory. Their practice explores place, identity, and language, and these topics' intersections with coloniality, temporality, and relation. They are Managing Co-Editor of *Carnation Zine* and their writing has been published through platforms including , *Public Parking*, *C Magazine*, and *Terremoto*. Learn more about them at marianamunoz.ca.