

Worried Earth

Eco-Anxiety and Entangled Grief

September 12 - November 10, 2022

Curated by Erica Mendritzki | Assistant Curator Melanie Zurba

Connie Chappel | Laura Findlay | Natalie Goulet | Maureen Gruben
Jenine Marsh | Kuh Del Rosario | Xiaojing Yan

Worried Earth: Eco-Anxiety and Entangled Grief is an exhibition of work exploring how worry about climate change and ecological collapse is seeping into our lives and dreams, mixing with other fears and anxieties, and entangling with personal experiences of loss. In this ecosystem of grief, art is a place for picturing and shaping bad feelings, including bad feelings about the very act of making art. Each gesture of making is weighed against the desire to do no harm—and the impossibility of a harmless human life within the context of our extractive capitalist system. We grieve our own existence, as well as our eventual demise.

The works in this exhibition sit with and in this grief. They also sing of the ways that grief can open us up. We become capacious, raw, and changeable. We can follow our grief towards wilder and deeper feelings, towards greater empathy for the other beings with whom we share the planet, and towards and into the rhythms of life and death.

In curating this exhibition, I imagined I was making a kind of garden. Like a gardener, I made certain landscaping decisions—what should go where, what to bring in to this patch of earth—but much was outside of my control. The works of art in the exhibition exert their own energy and interact in ways that I couldn't entirely predict. When you, the viewer, step into this space, you are bringing your own ideas and worries and aesthetic intuitions with you. You become part of the ecosystem of *Worried Earth*, and perhaps when you leave the room, you'll take the seed of something with you, and its meaning will change and grow.

This entanglement of ideas—the way that one thought can curl around another, becoming part of a thorny bramble of hunches and research—has been crucial to my curatorial process. In thinking about art and eco-anxiety, my ideas have intertwined

with the thoughts and words and images of others, and for this I am profoundly grateful. Melanie Zurba has been my co-conspirator from the start of this project. Artists Natalie Goulet and Luke Fair have worked alongside me in many capacities over the past three years. Jennifer Gibson, Glen Johnson, Herlinda Dalayoan, Kyra Kordoski, Shannon Norberg, and others have all contributed, in one way or another, to making this exhibition happen. Melanie Zurba, Andy Park, Roberta Woodgate, David Busolo, and Lisa Binkley are my collaborators on the broader research project of which this exhibition is a part. My mother, Sheryl Mendritzki, made me at home in the garden and introduced me to environmental activism, and my father, Wolf Mendritzki, always let me raid his art supplies. The words and work of Ross Gay, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Suzanne Simard, David Suzuki, Hala Alyan, and Rachel Crummey were of particular importance in cultivating an intellectual habitat in which to grow the underlying ideas of this exhibition. My work is supported by and rooted in my family life: my dear ones, you sustain me.

I am deeply thankful to the artists of *Worried Earth*: Laura Findlay, Xiaojing Yan, Connie Chappel, Kuh Del Rosario, Maureen Gruben, Natalie Goulet, and Jenine Marsh. They have been generous with their time and work, and have kept me company in my own grief and anxiety.

Laura Findlay's verdant paintings take us out into the garden at midnight. They exist in the millisecond of a camera's flash—an instant of blinding illumination in the dark. Like laughter after a funeral, their colour is intense and raucous and fleeting—moments of light that wipe out the darkness, but only briefly. In a familiar world made strange and slightly menacing, we catch surreal glimpses of faceless birds, grimacing daisies, and fat white slugs slithering over a rose.

Findlay paints quickly, laying down colour in strokes that feel bold but also hurried: like there isn't much time, like it's now or never. This panic-tinged sense of urgency connects her work to our dizzying moment, in which any knowledge of the catastrophic extent of the damage we have done to our planet can be hard to reconcile with the pleasantness of a summer evening in the backyard. In Findlay's paintings, things seem both fine and completely wrong. We feel the vivid beauty of existence, and we know that we don't know what is lurking in the darkness of our immanent future.

Xiaojing Yan's "Lingzhi Girls" are busts made of mycelium, cultivated lingzhi mushrooms, and woodchips. With fungi erupting through their placid expressions, the twin "Lingzhi Girls" act as sentinels watching over *Worried Earth*. Both mushroom and human, neither living nor dead, the girls trouble taxonomy. Yan writes, "In Chinese mythology, it is believed that all things have spirit and are capable of acquiring human forms, magical powers, and immortality when they absorb the nimbus of the universe and the prime of the sun and moon. When there is a lack of energy during the transformation, they may still keep some of their animal or plant traits."¹ This resonates with the work of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, author of *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, who writes that "Human nature is an interspecies relationship."² Tsing asserts that no part of the human experience can be properly understood without reference to our complex

macro- and micro-interactions with companion species of all kinds. The “Lingzhi Girls” make this deep hybridity explicit, with human and fungi existing and making art in collaboration.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing speaks of the need to create “wonder in the midst of dread,”³ as we try to figure out how to continue living on a damaged planet. Like Xiaojing Yan’s “Lingzhi Girls,” **Connie Chappel’s** “Stone Lung” is an object of wondrous dread. The sculpture lurks on the floor of the exhibition space like a hybrid life form. The starting point was an uprooted stump of a birch tree that, when pulled from the earth, was found to be clutching a stone in its roots. Chappel added a found mannequin hand and a plastic hair net, and all these dead things together take on a haunted kind of creature-ly life. The hand is outstretched, offering what could be a benediction, curse or entreaty: *remember that we are connected, and that our fates are intertwined*. Our garbage, and our human arrogance, will come back to haunt us, so we need to figure out how to live with our ghosts.

Kuh Del Rosario’s sculptures are assembled from the stuff of daily life. Dryer lint, onion skins, turmeric, charcoal and salt are clumped together with shredded plastic netting, polystyrene, gyprock, and cement. Her work speaks to the chaos and thingy-ness of civilization, to the abundance of our detritus and the provisionality our assembled selves. Del Rosario’s sculptures have many lives: not only are they made up of used things, but her completed pieces are often taken apart and repurposed, shifting shape and taking on new forms. Del Rosario’s work reminds us of the inherent changeability of the world, and the necessity of re-imagining all our “givens.” Our social structures, our economic systems, and our many, many consumer goods could all be put together quite differently in the future. There is a crumbly optimism here—it’s not easy making something fresh from something rotten, or something just from something cruel, but there is still beauty in fumbling towards new forms of being together.

Maureen Gruben’s “Stitching My Landscape” (on view across from the main gallery space) shows a work of large-scale land art created by Gruben in 2017, in which 111 ice holes were connected by 300 meters of blood-red broadcloth zigzagging across an expanse of frozen ocean south of Tuktoyaktuk. This piece reverberates with personal and cultural experiences, drawing on Gruben’s memories of her brother tossing bloody strings of seal gut out onto white snow, as well as recalling the traditional Inuvialuit practice of hand-stitching facial tattoos.⁴ In Gruben’s work, landscape and body, ice and skin, thread and gut, become metaphors for each other, emphasizing the intimate connection of human, seal, and Earth. Her act of puncturing and stitching the ice reads as both wound and reparation, underscoring the human ability to not only destroy, but also tend to our environment. In its poignant beauty, it offers us an opportunity to meditate on what it means to heal and be healed by nature.

Natalie Goulet’s photographs grapple with a vertiginous sense of eco-anxiety. Her work explores and materializes the existential paradox of being an art-maker and a living person in a time when it’s hard to escape the conclusion that not making, or not being, might be better for the planet. Her work teeters on the edge of non-existence: using expired film stock, she takes photographs of melancholy people and landscapes,

and then subjects the often-distorted images to a range of maltreatments that push them nearly into the abyss of obliteration. In “vessels,” an image of the North Atlantic disintegrates into lacy bits where the original polaroid was dipped in water; in “roots bones and ashes,” a picture of old-growth forest has been microwaved into rainbow-hued ripples, and “a brief respite from fear” shows a figure in a landscape (a self-portrait) peeking through a hole in an overlaid polaroid that has been burnt to a crisp. In these gestures, Goulet makes explicit fears of forest fires, rising sea levels, and a warming planet. Goulet has described her frequent use of self-portraiture as an attempt to accept her own existence and to work through self-destructive tendencies:⁵ by making herself a muse, she can picture and safely enact forms of self-obliteration while also affirming the beauty of her fraught connection to the world.

There is a lot of talk at the moment about the “cost of living.” Usually, the turn of phrase is involved in discussions of rising gas prices, high rents, and expensive groceries, but **Jenine Marsh’s** work invites us to think about the phrase in other ways, connecting it to the same existential dilemma that underpins Goulet’s photographs. The invitation is subtle and easily missed: a tiny newspaper clipping with these words is affixed to a flattened coin, part of a wiry posy of dead daisies coated in rubber. Quietly, but insistently, Marsh’s delicate bouquets tie worries about inflation to the grief of living on an endangered planet and to questions about the nature—and cost—of money. The “leaves” of Marsh’s flowers are made of coins flattened on railway tracks. Under the weight of a rumbling train, cash becomes shape. When the faces of monarchs and symbols of nation and capital are obliterated by pressure, a magic and illicit transformation occurs. Marsh shows us just how easy it is to steal money’s meaning and to rebel against the crushing forces of colonial capitalism. Although her act of defiance is small-time and low-key, this is part of its magic. She makes rebellion accessible, and reminds us of our inherent capacity to lay flowers on the grave of systems that harm us, even before they’re fully dead.

I have been conscious, while writing this essay, of two intertwined temptations: one is the impulse to write towards hope, and the other is the beckoning abyss of despair. Neither, I think, is quite right. Our problems are too vast, our art and efforts too powerless, to make hope entirely credible. And yet despair seems like a failure of imagination. The works in this exhibition have helped me to think through the ways that hope and despair cling to each other, and wrap around one another like vigorously twisting vines. My grief and anxiety are entangled with my love for the world and for my children and their future.

So if you, like me, are worried about the Earth—if dread has become the climate in which you live and eat and (try to) sleep, if your eco-anxiety seeps into your political outrage and your fear of death and your many kinds of grief and your toxic consumerism and your COVID-fog and your capitalist ennui and your complete and utter exhaustion, then perhaps this exhibition will be a place where you can sit with all of that and feel...well, not better, exactly. But in good company.

Erica Mendritzki



Laura Findlay, *Fresh Fret*, 2022,
oil on panel, 23" x 21".

Jenine Marsh, *charm for the remainder 2*,
2022, flower, wire, altered coins, newspaper
clippings, hardware, solder, synthetic rubber,
acrylic UV varnish, 11 1/4" x 2 1/2" x 4 1/4".

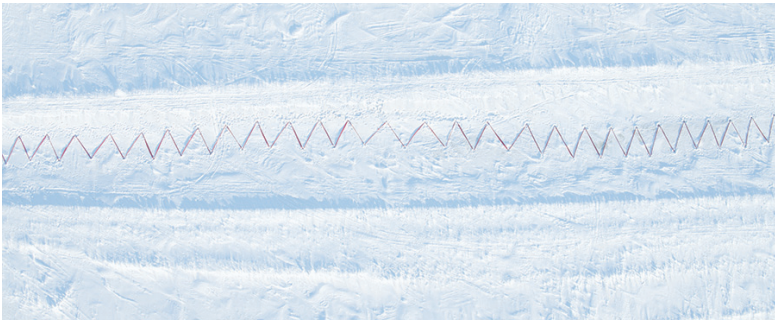


- 1 Xiaojing Yan, "Lingzhi Girl Time-Lapse" description, https://yanxiaojing.com/portfolio_pages/lingzhi-girl-time-lapse/ (Accessed 17 August 2022).
- 2 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species: For Donna Haraway." *Environmental Humanities*, 1 May 2012; 1 (1): 141 – 154.
- 3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Anna L. Tsing on Creating 'Wonder in the Midst of Dread.'" Interview with Ben Eastham, *Art Review*, 29 November 2021. <https://artreview.com/anna-l-ting-on-creating-wonder-in-the-midst-of-dread/> (Accessed 20 August 2022).
- 4 Kyra Kordoski, "Shift, Rise: Maureen Gruben's UNGALAQ (When Stakes Come Loose)." Kordoski writes: "Ibyuq has been a site of profound comfort and healing throughout Gruben's life. In 1997, she spent a night on Ibyuq with a friend. They had crossed the channel that winds around its base on a driftwood raft lashed together with a rope her father had given to her specifically for that purpose. That night, she used a needle and a thread coated in charcoal from their campfire to hand-stitch a traditional Inuvialuit facial tattoo that would ultimately consist of three lines on her chin: one mark for each of her sons. Thirty years later, in stitching the surrounding sea ice with red broadcloth, the artist has expanded an intimate, personal moment out into a communal, global context via entwined sculptural and performative events." Excerpt accessed via <https://www.maureengruben.com/stitching-my-landscape> (Accessed 1 September 2022).
- 5 Natalie Goulet in conversation with the author, 1 September 2022.

Xiaojing Yan, *Lingzhi Girl #15*, 2020, cultivated lingzhi mushroom, wood chips and mycelium, 19" x 18" x 16".



Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017 (printed in 2022 on Photo Tex adhesive fabric), 39" x 96"



Kuh Del Rosario, *MAPA SA MGA BALEYENA / MAP TO WHALES / CARTE AUX BALEINES*, 2021, Gyprock, cement, plaster, shredded plastic netting, bioplastics, pulped paper, charcoal, mycelium, sawdust, recycled rubber, resin, dried orange peels, dripped wax, pumpkin seeds, dried squash stems, turmeric, indigo powder, quilted plastic bags, pvc glue, table salt, found driftwood, ground charcoal, chia seeds, bird seeds, approximately 36" x 16" x 7 1/2".





Natalie Goulet,
roots, bones, ashes, 2019,
analog photograph on
aluminum panel, 10" x 10".

Connie Chappel,
Stone Lung, 2022,
birch tree root, granite rock,
vintage plastic mannequin
hand with metal fittings,
plastic hair roller mesh,
16" x 36" x 19".



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Connie Chappel is a Winnipeg-based multidisciplinary artist making sculptural work about environments in crisis. Combining plant-based materials with manufactured ones, she correlates tree survival with human behaviour. Chappel engages observations of destruction, neglect, and preservation as well as material evidence of history having passed. Her work presents tree morphism and suggests a warning and an urgency towards saving our urban tree canopy.

Kuh Del Rosario is a sculptor based in the unceded Indigenous lands of Tiohtià:ke / Montreal, QC, where she is currently pursuing her Master's Degree at Concordia University. Kuh Del Rosario has exhibited across Canada as well as participated in artistic activities in the Philippines. Her research investigates the potentiality of everyday materials as collaborators in worldmaking art forms.

Laura Findlay received her BFA from Concordia University in 2011 and MFA from the University of Guelph in 2014. Her practice encompasses painting, drawing, and installation, with recent exhibitions at Norberg Hall, Calgary; Egret Egress, Toronto; Galerie Division, Montreal; Arsenal Contemporary, Toronto, and Forest City Gallery, London. She lives and works in Toronto, Canada.

Inuvialuk artist **Maureen Gruben** employs an intimate materiality. In her practice, polar bear fur, beluga intestines and seal skins encounter resins, vinyl, bubble wrap and metallic tape, forging critical links between life in the Western Arctic and global environmental and cultural concerns. Gruben was born and raised in Tuktoyaktuk where her parents were traditional knowledge keepers and founders of E. Gruben's Transport. She holds a BFA from the University of Victoria and has exhibited regularly across Canada and internationally. She was longlisted for the 2019 Aesthetica Art Prize and the 2021 Sobey Art Prize, and her work is held in several national and private collections.

Natalie Michelle Goulet is a Canadian artist working within expanded realms of photography and image making. Of Scottish/French settler ancestry, she was raised in Northern Ontario (Treaty 9 territory) and currently resides in Kijipuktuk/Halifax. She holds an MFA from NSCAD University and a BFA in photography and film studies from the University of Ottawa. Her practice, although rooted in analog photography, consists of diverse material explorations, including the use of found objects and performance. Her work often revolves around concepts of instability and entanglement, and seeks an empathic approach to destructive human tendencies.

Jenine Marsh is an artist based in Toronto. Solo and two-person exhibitions include: Cooper Cole, Franz Kaka, and 8-11, Toronto; Lulu, Mexico City; Centre CLARK and Vie d'ange, Montreal; Entrée, Bergen; Interface, Oakland CA; and Stride Gallery, Calgary. Group exhibitions include: The Plumb, Toronto; Essex Flowers, NYC; Gianni Manhattan, Vienna; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; OSL contemporary, Oslo; Rupert, Vilnius; Night Gallery, Murmurs and Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles. She has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre (Banff CA), USF Verftet (Bergen NO), Rupert (Vilnius LT), and Vermont Studio Center (Johnson VT USA).

Xiaojing Yan is a Chinese-Canadian artist whose work embraces her sense of having a hybrid identity. Settling permanently in the Toronto area, her work reflects her journey through these various cultures, arriving at her own personal vocabulary. Her unique point of view unites the past and the present, encompassing culture and nature, art and science.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Curator **Erica Mendritzki** is an artist based in Kijipuktuk/Halifax, where she is an Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at NSCAD University. She is Co-Principal Investigator on the research project “Worried Earth: Creating vocabularies and rituals for climate grief through multiple knowledge systems and the artistic process” which is supported by the New Frontiers in Research Fund.

Assistant Curator **Melanie Zurba** is an Associate Professor with the School for Resource and Environmental Studies (SRES) at Dalhousie University, which is located in Kijipuktuk/Halifax. She is the Nominated Principal Investigator on the research project “Worried Earth: Creating vocabularies and rituals for climate grief through multiple knowledge systems and the artistic process” which is supported by the New Frontiers in Research Fund.

LIST OF WORKS

Artworks are listed in order of their appearance, beginning with the piece at the northeast corner and continuing clockwise around the gallery. Dimensions are listed as height x width x depth.

Natalie Goulet, *a brief respite from fear*, 2019, analog photograph on aluminum panel, 10" x 10".

Natalie Goulet, *roots, bones, ashes*, 2019, analog photograph on aluminum panel, 10" x 10".

Natalie Goulet, *vessels*, 2019, analog photograph on aluminum panel, 10" x 10".

Laura Findlay, *Bramble*, 2022, oil on panel, 60" x 48".

Connie Chappel, *Stone Lung*, 2022, birch tree root, granite rock, vintage plastic mannequin hand with metal fittings, plastic hair roller mesh, 16" x 36" x 19".

Jenine Marsh, *buildings and bridges*, 2022, flower, wire, altered coins, newspaper clippings, hardware, solder, synthetic rubber, acrylic UV varnish, 11 1/4" x 4" x 2 1/4".

Jenine Marsh, *cost of living*, 2022, flower, wire, altered coins, newspaper clippings, hardware, solder, synthetic rubber, acrylic UV varnish, 15 1/2" x 3 1/4" x 1 3/4".

Xiaojing Yan, *Lingzhi Girl #20*, 2022, cultivated lingzhi mushroom, wood chips and mycelium, 19" x 18" x 16".

Xiaojing Yan, *Lingzhi Girl #15*, 2020, cultivated lingzhi mushroom, wood chips and mycelium, 19" x 18" x 16".

Jenine Marsh, *charm for the remainder 2*, 2022, flower, wire, altered coins, newspaper clippings, hardware, solder, synthetic rubber, acrylic UV varnish, 11 1/4" x 2 1/2" x 4 1/4".

Jenine Marsh, *abstract peace*, 2022, flower, wire, altered coins, newspaper clippings, hardware, solder, synthetic rubber, acrylic UV varnish, 12" X 3 1/2" X 5".

Laura Findlay, *Fresh Fret*, 2022, oil on panel, 23" x 21".

Laura Findlay, *Drift*, 2022, oil on panel, 16" x 20".

Laura Findlay, *Catch*, 2021, oil on panel, 28" x 24".

Laura Findlay, *Aside*, 2021, oil on panel, 24" x 18".

Kuh Del Rosario, *MAPA SA MGA Balyena / MAP TO WHALES / CARTE AUX BALEINES*, 2021, Gyprock, cement, plaster, shredded plastic netting, bioplastics, pulped paper, charcoal, mycelium, sawdust, recycled rubber, resin, dried orange peels, dripped wax, pumpkin seeds, dried squash stems, turmeric, indigo powder, quilted plastic bags, pvc glue, table salt, found driftwood, ground charcoal, chia seeds, bird seeds, approximately 36" x 16" x 7 ½".

Kuh Del Rosario, *PANGARAP NG ASUKAL / SUGAR DREAM / RÊVE DE SUCRE*, 2021, Polystyrene, collected dryer wool, polyester fibres, table sugar, dried onion skins, dried orange wedge, dried courgette stubs, dried flowers bunched, plasticine, salt, resin, indigo powder, curry powder, dried ginkgo leaves, plaster, approximately 16" x 14 ½" x 7".

Wall opposite Gallery 1Co3 entrance:

Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017 (printed in 2022 on Photo Tex adhesive fabric), 39" x 96".

GALLERY HOURS

Monday - Friday between 12:00 and 4:00 pm from September 12 – November 10, 2022 (closed September 30 and October 10).

AFFILIATED EVENTS

October 20 at 2:30 pm: Panel discussion at The University of Winnipeg's Convocation Hall

October 20, 4:00 - 6:00 pm: Reception at Gallery 1C03. The exhibition curator and assistant curator as well as some of the artists will be present.

October 21 at 6:30 pm: Free film screening at Cinematheque (100 Arthur Street)

Presenting the feature-length documentary film "The Magnitude of All Things" (2020, directed by Jennifer Abbott), alongside a selection of short experimental films.

October 22 & 23: Walking events (details TBA).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gallery 1C03 is on Treaty 1 Territory. We are located on the territories of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Our water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

The exhibition is supported by the New Frontiers in Research Fund, and is part of an interdisciplinary research project on eco-anxiety and climate change-related grief. This research project is led by Co-Principal Investigators Melanie Zurba (Dalhousie University) and Erica Mendritzki (NSCAD University) with collaborators Andrew Park (University of Winnipeg), Roberta Woodgate (University of Manitoba), David Busolo (University of New Brunswick), and Lisa Binkley (Dalhousie University). The work is also supported by Research Associate Polina Baum-Talmor, and research assistants and graduate students: Lily Barraclough, Sara Boyd, Morgan Brimacombe, Luke Fair, Natalie Goulet, and Bryanne Lamoureux.

Gallery 1C03

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