Emerging Art Writer's Program

This publication was designed and printed where the Bow and Elbow river meet, traditionally known by the Blackfoot name, Mohkínstsis and often referred to as the City of Calgary, Alberta.

The Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts) similarly rests on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the First Peoples of Treaty 7, including the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, the Tsuut'ina and the Îyâxe Nakoda First Nations, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. This region is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. We would like to acknowledge all the Nations and the original stewards of Treaty 7 who continue to care and advocate for the lands where we reside and create.

Tkaronto, where our mentor Steph Wong Ken is located, is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

This is the third iteration of the Emerging Art Writer's Program (EAWP), offered through the Illingworth Kerr Gallery for AUArts students. The program connects a group of students with instructors and professional writers to expand their approach to writing about contemporary art and to experience the process of turning a first draft into a finished, published piece.

This year's edition focuses on critical intersections between art and technology. Students in the program worked closely with faculty member Dr. Ashley Scarlett and mentor Steph Wong Ken. Over the course of six months, Ashley and Steph facilitated sessions on turning an idea into a story, conducting research, workshopping a first draft, peer reviewing, and pitching articles to publications. Students also had the opportunity to attend presentations by Jac Renée Bruneau, CMagazine Editor, and Maya Wilson-Sanchez, CMagazine Associate Editor. Students, faculty, and the mentor were all paid for their time and labour.

We were excited to work with eight students for EAWP 3:

Fayda Baillie
Natalie Melara Cisneros
Jonathan Creese
Jules Donner
Angela Lee
Nadia Perna
Luigi Pulido
Portia Scabar

As facilitators, we were struck by the creativity and brilliance of this year's participants, examining contemporary artists working in the realm of technology from a variety of perspectives and approaches. From generously reviewing each other's work to exploring the significant impact that contemporary technologies are having on art and everyday life, we appreciate the thoughtfulness and enthusiasm they brought to this year's program. We were also particularly impressed by student designer Harrison Sirois' creative vision and collaborative approach to the design process.

Thanks to C-Magazine for being our distribution partner for this iteration of EAWP.

We hope you enjoy reading these pieces as much as we did working on them.

Steph Wong Ken
Dr. Ashley Scarlett

Steph Wong Ken

Raised in Florida, Stephanie Wong Ken is a writer currently based in Tkaronto, the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Her writing has appeared in *Canadian Art*, *C-Magazine*, *Rungh*, *The Walrus*, *Maisonneuve*, *LUMA Quarterly*, and other publications. She's a contributing editor to *Colonial Imports*, a risograph publication with Yolkless Press, and sits on the board of The Bows.

Photo credit: Kaitlin Moerman

Dr. Ashley Scarlett

Dr. Ashley Scarlett is an assistant professor in the School of Critical and Creative Studies, where she contributes expertise across the fields of media studies, media art and moving image histories, and research methods. Dr. Scarlett's research interests lie at the intersection of art, technology and critical thought. Her writing has been published in a number of venues, including *Media Theory, Parallax*, *Digital Culture & Society*, *The Routledge Companion to Photography Theory*, and *Computational Arts in Canada 1967–1974*. Recently, Dr. Scarlett was the co-curator of *Contingent Systems: Art and/as Algorithmic Critique*, an exhibition and symposium at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery with proceedings published as a forthcoming special issue of *Afterimage*.

Emerging Art Writer's Program 3

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Rain in the Desert
by Fayda Baillie

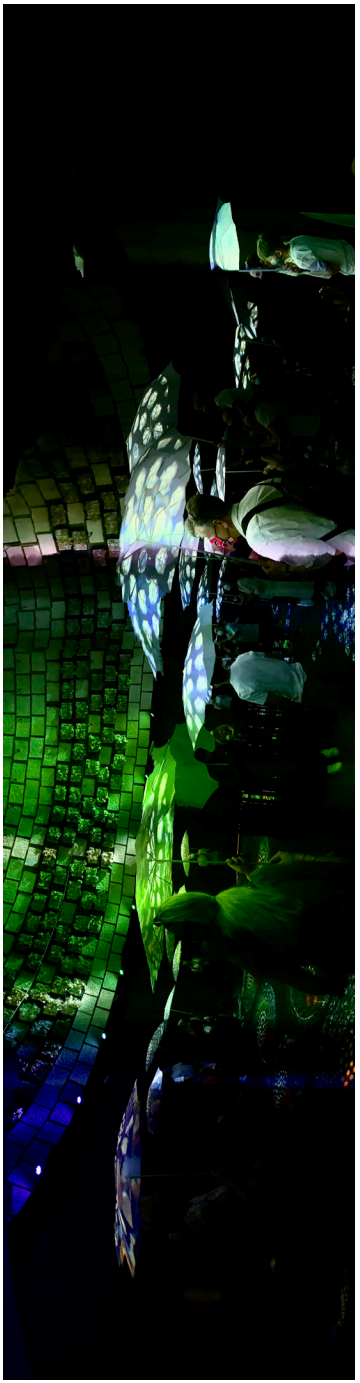
As an artist I think about materials and their toxicity, and how to work more sustainably by making better choices. Growing up as a Gen X'er, following in the footsteps of the Boomers, it was hard to imagine a future. When I was 18, I visited my ancestral home in the Beqaa Valley of Lebanon. On my grandparents' hillside terrace, I looked on in disbelief at the urban sprawl into the valley, a betrayal to future generations through the depletion of rich agricultural soil. Scientists and humanists agree that we have entered a new geological era—the Anthropocene—where population growth since the 1940s has exponentially changed the course of the planet and that we do not have enough resources to sustain human growth.[1] I thought of this when I visited the World Expo in Dubai, the first major Expo to be held in the Middle East. I was admittedly a bit cynical about the irony of a sustainability-themed Expo in the middle of the desert, not expecting to walk away feeling hopeful.

At the Dutch Pavilion, I walked down a ramp sunken into the ground, feeling a cool relief from the desert sun. Interlocking recycled metal plates from a port construction project that would have acted as a water barrier serve as a reminder of life in the Netherlands where 25% of the country live below sea level; it was an offering of wisdom that comes from a long history of adapting to the environment, made to a host country that is striving to live more sustainably in their own harsh environment. After being handed a white umbrella, I entered a large cone-shaped room built with cinder blocks. There was a well in the center of the room for capturing the nighttime rainfall from a chimney opening at the pinnacle of the cone. A multi-media presentation played and the white umbrellas above everyone's heads acted as projection screens, relaying a story of how the unification of water and energy creates food, allowing spectators to visualize the transformation of a desert city while contemplating the possibilities of change in their own urban space.

After the video, I exited the space to witness its transformation into a bright green cone of plants neatly organized in rows, contrasted against the dark metal walls of the building with streams of natural light flowing in. There was an ambiance that suggested that the climate had been altered, the air a little more humid.

The Dutch Pavilion brands itself as biotype,[2] a self-sustaining eco-system where food is grown through a natural thermodynamic process that generates water through the dehumidification of air. The roof of the building generated solar energy and allowed natural sunlight to filter through. As the temperature cools, night air descends the chimney and water droplets form. The process generated CO_2 that accelerated the photosynthesis of the edible plants lining the cone wall.

The Biotype at Dutch Dubai



Multimedia Presentation Inside the Biotype

Within the pavilion I was also able to visit the exhibition: *Channeling Change: Inside a Designers Brain* by Margaret Vollenberg.[3] It featured 15 artists who create using sustainable practices. By scanning a QR code, you virtually entered their studios to explore each artist's practice and learned more about their material research and designs. Here, I discovered *GROW*,[4] a film by Daan Roosegaarde. He takes you on a sensory experience through a performance of a brilliantly colored light show on agricultural fields; it is a specific recipe of lights he calls 'biolights.' Colored rays are orchestrated across fields at night as he pays his respect to the agricultural industry. The light 'endorphins' improve plant resiliency reflecting the resiliency of the industry that feeds us. I was reminded of the summer of 2020, making tabouli from my garden while facing yet another crisis that exposed our existential reliance on global food sources.

Lingering around this tiny green mountain in the Pavilion, not wanting to leave and filling with my own endorphins as I absorbed the moist air and as much information as possible, I read on about artistic innovations—furniture made from recycled toilet paper and pine needles, and clothing from algae—that demonstrate the impact that artists who are driven by values to lead change can have. Author and climate activist Ben Okri appealed to all artists during the last international climate summit that

in order to respond “to our most urgent threat requires new forms of creativity and human imagination.”[5] Feeding the growing population is what is at stake and in ongoing debates concerning genetically modified plants, the biotype is offering a vertically self-sustaining solution to regions that rely on imports; it is a move away from traditional horizontal fields. This does not come without controversy for the Netherlands as a net exporter of sustainable technologies, including sophisticated hydroponic operations and agricultural seed plants. They must try to find the balance between short term focussed decisions versus long impactful solutions. This is the double-edged sword of economy and sustainability, or, the “side-effects of prosperity”.[1]

The devastating 2020 port explosion in Beirut destroyed the grain silos again exposing a dependence on food. This winter the grain import arrived in Lebanon just in time before the Ukraine war. The pavilion may be host to a biotype of plants, but it is symbolically so much more. It is about elevating our consciousness around sustainable living not just through local solutions, but also through the collaboration of nations around technologies that have a big impact with a small imprint. The Expo message of nations collaborating and artists embracing a cross-sector exchange of technologies made me think of Okri’s call to decelerate, to work together to alter the way we use energy, to embrace more efficient technologies, and to start living as though it is us who deserve to be here, and that Earth owes us nothing.

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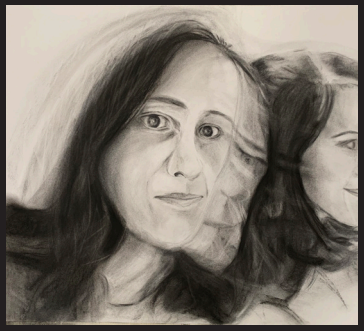

Fayda Khalek Baillie is a second year art student at AUArts. She is a painting major but considers herself a multi-media artist that enjoys research and broadening her understanding of conceptual art and finding ways to express her lived experiences. Before becoming a student, she studied science and business and enjoyed an international career that fueled her curiosity of different cultures. One of her passions is visiting exhibitions and museums. She feels inspired by art that explores the way humans interact with their environment, and aims to explore subjects on sustainability

Indigenous Protocols: Tega Brain's *Coin-Operated Wetland* by Jules Donner

00:30:07 "... some things that I always thought were profound actually existed in these indigenous epistemologies. They just weren't put into this crazy language. That philosophy uses. [...] all the materials for our computers come from the Earth, right? So all this technology is being made from materials, which we have a relationship with. Right. It's just that we don't by the time we get them in our hands, we don't see us ourselves as having that relationship."

– Jason Edward Lewis, Indigenous AI 101, The Radical AI Podcast.

Last summer all my aunties, uncles and cousins traveled to stay in Winnipeg at my grandparents' home for the first time in 15 years. Different household maintenance styles were evident. My Opa upheld his regular routine of laundry only on Sunday, reusing the water of the first load for the next two loads, and hanging all three loads on the beloved laundry dryer tree, cemented deep in the garden. I admired his modifications and their lack of waste, his engineering experience from years of building houses, and a routine structured by his values and what makes sense to him. My Opa and I may not agree on the same terms. We've argued quite a bit in the four weeks or less that we spend together each year. I know that shifts in language over time may account for some of this disconnect. The values we connect on are those can be shown through actions, such as his laundry system and routine.

Coin-Operated Wetland, featured in the show *FUTURES* at the Smithsonian Museum, is another invented laundry system, this time displayed as art. Presented as an installation by artist Tega Brain, the system is hooked up to a mini

wetland, one of the best cleaning systems. The associated didactic text describes: “Wetland cleaning technology merges with the coin operated washing machine, the wellbeing of both in question”. Through immediate proximity it marries Opas’ system to wetland filtration, a no-no to my Opa as the possibility of mess and dirt is unwelcome—the outside stays outside.

Viewing the work through online documentation, the space is structured by two perpendicular shelves of metal scaffolding. Coin washing machines on the right with a clear tub above, another tub in the corner, and the mini wetland on the left with clear pipes connecting them. Elevated a few feet up on metal industrial pipes, with water, dirt, and plants in clear containers, the setup is minimal, utilitarian, and polished. Signage directs the system. “Do not touch” is paired with details on how staff will operate and run the system at designated washing times. Viewers are directed to “seek reparations for wetlands destroyed and lost”. Another sign proclaims “attention” with a list of “NOs . . .” underneath. Fluorescent lights arch diagonally and horizontally on the scaffolding above, providing the marsh with its 12 hours of prescribed light per day. A clear pipe connects the water from the mini marsh to the washing machine, stepping up along the scaffolding lines, with another connecting from the opposite direction. The plants narrow and long leaves rest and reach against each other and out of the tank. I imagine the soft sound of water running, and how the laundry’s fragrance mingles with the wetlands' damp and deep scent.

This piece connects the materials used for technology and process, linking them directly with the environment, showing in miniature the effects of the relationships at play. The sources of the metals and plastic of the tubing, signage, and washing machines tug at me. Does this mini wetland miss its original ecosystems? Outside air and other cohabitants? It must.

“This project collapses the distance between human and the environment . . . the work poses questions around ecology, co-existence and the culture of engineering” details the corresponding text on Brain’s website. First shown in 2011, this is the second iteration of *Coin-Operated Wetland*.

Brain worked previously as a wetland engineer. She is now an artist focused on AI, technology, video and new media, exploring how technology can work with our natural environment, instead of against it. The tangibility and familiarity of the washing machine helps to process the theory and questions Brain offers. In my online research and viewing of the show, Brain values Indigenous ways of thinking to supplement her life and practice.

Tega Brain, *Coin-Operated Wetland*, wetland, laundromat, pump, tanks, signage, November 2021, photo courtesy of artist.

Professor Jason Edward Lewis, and organizer of the *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence* position paper contemplates:

00:31:51 "So but what if we start really thinking through that? And what does that mean? . . . What we're obligated to do is recognize that we have a relationship [with those materials and their reformations] and conduct that relationship mindfully. Instead of just assuming like we always do in the Western context, that nothing other than the human has agency and nothing other than humans really matters. And we don't have relationships with anything other than humans, except for maybe some pets. Right. And some plants."

This line of thought is straightforward, but is often ignored by popular culture, and considered to be hard for people to implement within their everyday lives. Lewis' discussion connects to questions raised by Brains' installation. These laundry systems foster the ideas of reconsidering our relationships to centering care for others and ourselves, what we consider both inanimate and animate, having what we need, and being thankful for this. We can exist in a more loving way, with systems that prioritize everything on the earth having what it needs to flourish.

There are many binaries that could fit here and be explored, outside and inside, dirty, and clean. But these are irrelevant and are not aligned with the way that I think. These binaries, even when exploring them in the beginning to take them apart, have roots that I can't get behind, like the lack of animacy in English. It oversimplifies and detaches in a dangerous way. What we believe to be inanimate, is still connected in relationships, disconnecting them in this way of binaries is to be questioned as well.

This implication of effort is a capitalist tool to deter, as there are already ways to act and live that follow to respect and keep integrity to all, as clearly displayed in *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence*. Interacting with these ideals in an everyday habitual way, such as through language or process is essential and enriching, what we've been denied and starved of for too long. While I wait to hang my laundry outside again this spring, I will continue to implement these remembered technologies of connection and thank my Opa for fostering awareness.

Jules Donner (they/them) b. 1998, is an artist, residing in Mohkínstsis, on Treaty 7 territories. They look forward to the rest of their life, currently guided by what makes them happy and content, regardless of expectations.

Digital Dress Up
by Angela Sunyoo Lee

Growing up, I was fascinated with the world of simulation and fashion. As a child, I immersed myself in the world of dress up. Whether it was playing with dolls and making paper clothing for them or hosting my own fashion show, I loved the idea of creating a story through clothes. As I grew up, that idea shifted into the digital realm, playing dress up games on the computer or playing life simulation games like *The Sims*. Like the paper dolls of my childhood, I loved customizing these digital mannequins and creating a story for them. Being an awkward, geeky kid with body image issues led to me living vicariously through dress up models and game characters. Simulated life and creating fashionable digital looks were an escape from my reality.

In a video entitled "I Wore Digital Clothes For A Week" Safiya Nygaard, a YouTuber who often covers different topics about fashion and trends, explains her experience with digital fashion. Nygaard describes an ad from a digital clothing store offering the chance to "create your first digital look" (0:47). The digital store, Dressx, has a variety of different clothes for purchase. Nygaard tries on multiple different looks on Dressx, such as "video outfits", animated pieces of clothing that are applied to your body by the program (16:35).

Inspired by Nygaard's video, I began to browse Dressx, which felt like shopping at a digital mall. In a physical mall, I step into a huge space and look at the storefront mannequins to see what interests me. In a digital mall, I can scroll up and down to see which catalogue image catches my eye, and instead of receiving purchased clothes in person, I receive them via email. Dressx is also available on an AR app, where I can "try on" some of these clothes before I purchase. I have anxiety about being in changing rooms and facing the fact that certain clothes don't fit my body, so I appreciated the option to do this online instead. With the AR app, the clothes automatically fit my body. Browsing the site, I noticed there was a mix of everyday clothes, and fantasy clothes, which reminded me of video game character outfits. According to theorist Nathan Jurgenson, "the term IRL (In Real Life) is a now-antiquated falsehood, one that implies there are two selves (e.g., an online self versus an offline self)" (Russell 29). With the option of trying on these fantasy looks, you can become a whole different person on the Internet. With the app, it felt like I was able to blur the lines between my online and offline self, as I was able to try on the clothes on an image of my actual body.

With that in mind, I got to the fun part—building the looks I would want my online self to wear. I decided on three separate looks—an outfit I would wear and purchase if it existed offline, an outfit I would want to wear, but not

Lee, Angela. *Outfit 3*. 24 Feb 2022.

Lee, Angela. *Outfit 2*. 24 Feb 2022..

Lee, Angela. *Outfit 1*. 24 Feb 2022.

All Images are courtesy of artist.

be brave enough to wear offline, and an ultimate fantasy look where I could become a futuristic K-POP star.

Outfit 1: Outfit of the Day

The goal of the first outfit was to create a look I would wear if it existed physically. However, this outfit reminded me of my childhood, mixing different patterns and textures together to create a collage type of look. With this outfit, I had some concerns about how it would look on me in real life. I worried about the size of my body with the fit of the outfit. Would it be tight fitting or loose? Would it affect how my body looks in any way? Looking at the results, I felt that it definitely changed my body—the outfit looked too loose and large on me, to which my body would look smaller than how I usually saw myself.

Outfit 2: The Bold and Brave

This purple blazer outlined with pearl embellishments is something I always imagined wearing. Whenever I see clothes like this in a physical retail store, I would be excited to try it on, but hesitate to buy it. I thought extravagant clothes like this only looked good on certain body types—runway models, who are thin, and well proportioned. Although eye-catching and unique, it also triggered my body issues, because I am not thin and as well-proportioned as a typical model. Despite these worries, this outfit made me feel confident and mirrored the image of myself I wanted to be—style-savvy and bold. To emphasize this confident version of me, I added several filters, like the purple hair, makeup, and sparkles in the background to complete the illusion.

Outfit 3: Dreams come true

The final outfit is my version of full fantasy—representing my ultimate digital self. Along with playing dress up, I was also immersed in K-POP as a kid—the idol stars who could do it all, but with style. Watching the style icons of K-POP, I started to pay attention to the outfits they wore, and often fantasized about wearing their clothes to become an illusion of style and beauty. Along with the clothes, I altered my body to fit the K-POP star look and used a cartoon filter on my face to create a futuristic K-POP avatar. Similar avatars are commonly used by virtual K-POP stars, like “K/DA” and “aespa”, who have a very cartoonish appearance. This look was very heavily edited compared to the other two and reminded me of my love for simulation games like *The Sims*, where I can fully customize the characters. The avatar fulfilled my fantasy and I felt this version of me would belong only in the digital world—a fantasy version of myself as K-POP Angela. With the body alterations and the filter, along with the over the top outfit, I was able to go beyond the constraints of my physical reality (Nguyen).

My concluding thoughts on my exploration of digital fashion are mixed—as a body conscious person, it was amazing to see how digital clothes fit onto my body, rather than having to try to physically fit into the clothes. Also, it felt nice to have a visual representation of certain outfits I would not feel comfortable wearing in real life. However, these versions of me felt so different from my reality, and made me question: "Is this even me anymore?"

During this process, I became the mannequins and dolls I played with as a kid. But when I put digital clothes on myself, I felt very removed from the process. I had to reconcile my body image issues and was not able to recognize the real-life version of me in these outfits, especially the full fantasy look. I created this "new" model of Angela, which felt like looking into a portal to another dimension, where I was living a dream that I can't have in real life. I'm envious of this version of myself, having everything I ever dreamed of. Given the possibilities of digital fashion and the ability to see myself in this way, I'm excited to log in more often.

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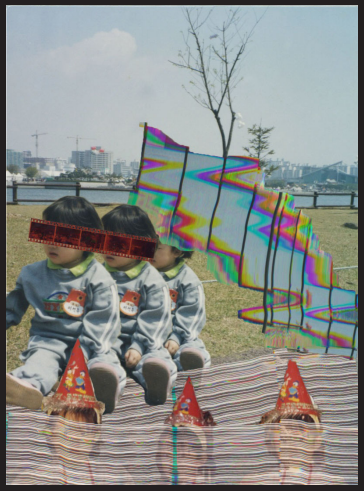

My name is Sunyoo Lee, preferably Angela Lee. I am a media arts student, currently attending the Alberta University of the Arts. I resonate with the word Teum, which defines many things, such as the passing of time, opportunity, moment, and an in between of spaces. Something very small, but definitive, like the transition between 11:59PM to 12AM. In my practice, I use video, sound, text, and collage, as well as using new media to simulate a glitch or error to reflect my idea of identity. I explore the ideas of cultural displacement and the feeling of being in between cultures through an Asian Canadian narrative.

We Contort Our Faces: On Zach Blas' *Face Cages* by Luigi Pulido

Note: If you are completing this application for a child under 18 years of age, remember all questions are about the child.

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UCI no.	
Case ID	
Current Act	Former Act
Certificate no.	
Return original document(s) ☐	Approved ☐

10 a) Please list all addresses inside and outside of Canada during your entire five (5) year eligibility period. Start with the most recent. If there are any missing days or peroids of time, your application will be returned to you.

1	From (YYYY-MM-DD)	Apt/Unit	Street No.	Street name	City/Town
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	To (YYYY-MM-DD)	Country or Territory	Prov/State		District
4	From (YYYY-MM-DD)	Apt/Unit	Street No.	Street name	City/Town
	To (YYYY-MM-DD)	Country or Territory	Prov/State		District

The face contorts when we fill out a government form. We bear a longing and unnerving gaze upon a piece of paper or screen that asks us to draw an image of ourselves we don't even recognize. The face bears expressions of I-don't-quite-remember or Is-that-how-that-street-is-spelled when we are faced with questions like what were your past jobs? or where did you last reside? When we finally see the filled-out form, how much of us do we recognize? Like a machinic sieve, the form grinds us into categories: sex, legal name, or places of residence. Our combined image is merely represented by tags and classifiers authorized by governments that demand us to be readable. However, we are readable only within those registers. We are not understood by our humanity, one filled with context, contradictions, and conundrums, which may be too difficult to read or turn into digestible data. To be legible under a system is to be partly understood. These systems reduce our faces and render us partly visible in favour of what can be read under the colonial gaze of authority. This selective visibility also materializes in technologies beyond a government form—in facial recognition, datasets, and other tools that capture our data to control us.

Writer Ruha Benjamin notes in *Race After Technology* that much of the tech sector operates under an ostensible

lens of objectivity, function, and optimization. In fact, the narrative of objectively breaking apart one's life into digestible pieces is why technology disproportionally affects people within racialized and minority communities.[4] Benjamin highlights how the tech sector pulls data from racially skewed datasets, with scholar Amy Sueyoshi noting queer records are more readily available in criminal documents due to the history of criminalizing homosexuality.[6] Thus, the flattening of our experiences within machinic systems begets the all too colonial notion of legibility. Technology re-affirms the colonial histories of power by rendering us incapable of deciding how we are visible, and by how much.

Artist Zach Blas contends with these complex notions of legibility in *Face Cages*, a series of 3D-printed biometric facial diagrams worn as masks by people within racialized and queer communities. Separate digital screens display videos of wearers bearing their respective masks while the physical masks lay enclosed within individual plexiglass cases. These masks are made of geometric lines indicating measurements between features of the face—distance between the eyes, the length of the nose, and the width of the lips—as a way to represent how the face is read by facial recognition systems. In turn, the wearer is unreadable in these systems as the mask conceals any measurable features.

The videos in *Face Cages* also function as an endurance performance, where wearers are subject to the difficulty of maintaining these masks on their faces. Sharp corners, odd angles, and uneven weight distribution add an element of real-world difficulty to the imposition of putting a mask on a face.

The amalgam of lines on Blas' masks creates a tension between how we understand our recognition of a face and how facial-recognition technology imposes a new paradigm to understanding it. Our visibility in the eyes of the system affects where we can live, the resources we have access to, and the jobs we can get. When a person wears *Face Cages*, their experience begins with the discomfort of visibility and endures into the real-lasting impacts of housing, access, and opportunity.

In a 2021 panel with curator and writer Legacy Russell, Blas discusses the differing ways we are visible and how this is reflected in his work.[1] His other works, *Video Mummy* (2004/2019), *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2012-14) and *SANCTUM* (2018) all contend with visibility and its relationship to consent and technology. He notes the impact of theorist Edouard Glissant on his practice, particularly Glissant's theory of opacity, where one must dance the line between legible and illegible when engaging with others, as being hyper-visible leads to

Zach Blas, *Face Cages*. Installation, transmediale: CAPTURE ALL. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany, 2015. Photo by Paco Neumann. Courtesy of the Artist.

consequences of domination or control of a person.[5] However, opacity is complicated by how registers of understanding, like sex, race, and class come about. Benjamin discusses the classification of race as a form of technology that has been used as a method for control.[4] To be racialized is to be marked as non-neutral and this is wielded as a technology to displace someone, like the Jim Crow Laws in the late 19th and early 20th

century.[4] Technologies like facial recognition are an extension of exclusionary practices, creating a new type of power struggle guided by classifications like race.

Blas' *Face Cages* reconstitutes power by putting masks on people who identify as racialized and queer. This is a defiance of the legibility of a face. However, the power of *Face Cages* does not lie within defiance alone. Frankly, the notion of these masks as a contrarian act nullifies the complexity of facial recognition into visible and invisible. During the process of filling out a government form, there are moments of recognition—Yes, I lived in that house or no, that's not how that's spelled. There are also moments of complete mystification where we fail to see ourselves represented accurately on the form. These variable moments are represented within *Face Cages* where we both see and fail to see the human elements of the wearer. This engages with the core of *Face Cages* as a reconstitution of power that moves away from violent, colonial systems of legibility.

The bearers of these *Face Cages* are tired. Contorted into different positions so as not to poke out an eye, or drop the mask, we again arrive at these contortions of the face where we stare aghast at how the wearers display the masks and present their identities to us as viewers. The onus of legibility emerges when we begin to engage with these systems that demand us to be legible, with little regard for choice or consent. Writer Levi Bryant notes that systems like bureaucracy are blind to the types of beings that fall outside these registers.[3] *Face Cages* calls out that blindness and highlights the shortfalls of biometrics when it falls onto the faces of non-white-cis-straight-abled-male identities. When these systems engage with us, our faces are too dark to be visible, our eyes are too small to register, and we risk losing grasp of our own visibility.

When we wake from the daze of staring at the textbox on a form, we recompose our face, regaining control of what's lost. *Face Cages* dissects how we engage with larger systems, where the balance of power does not lie favourably towards people within racialized and minority communities. We position our faces differently to abide by registers and to validate our existence through the geometric sieves of the masks. *Face Cages* goes beyond the binaries of visibility and invisibility and seeks a shift in power. As minorities existing in an increasingly surveilled world, our legibility lies in how much we are willing to contort our faces.

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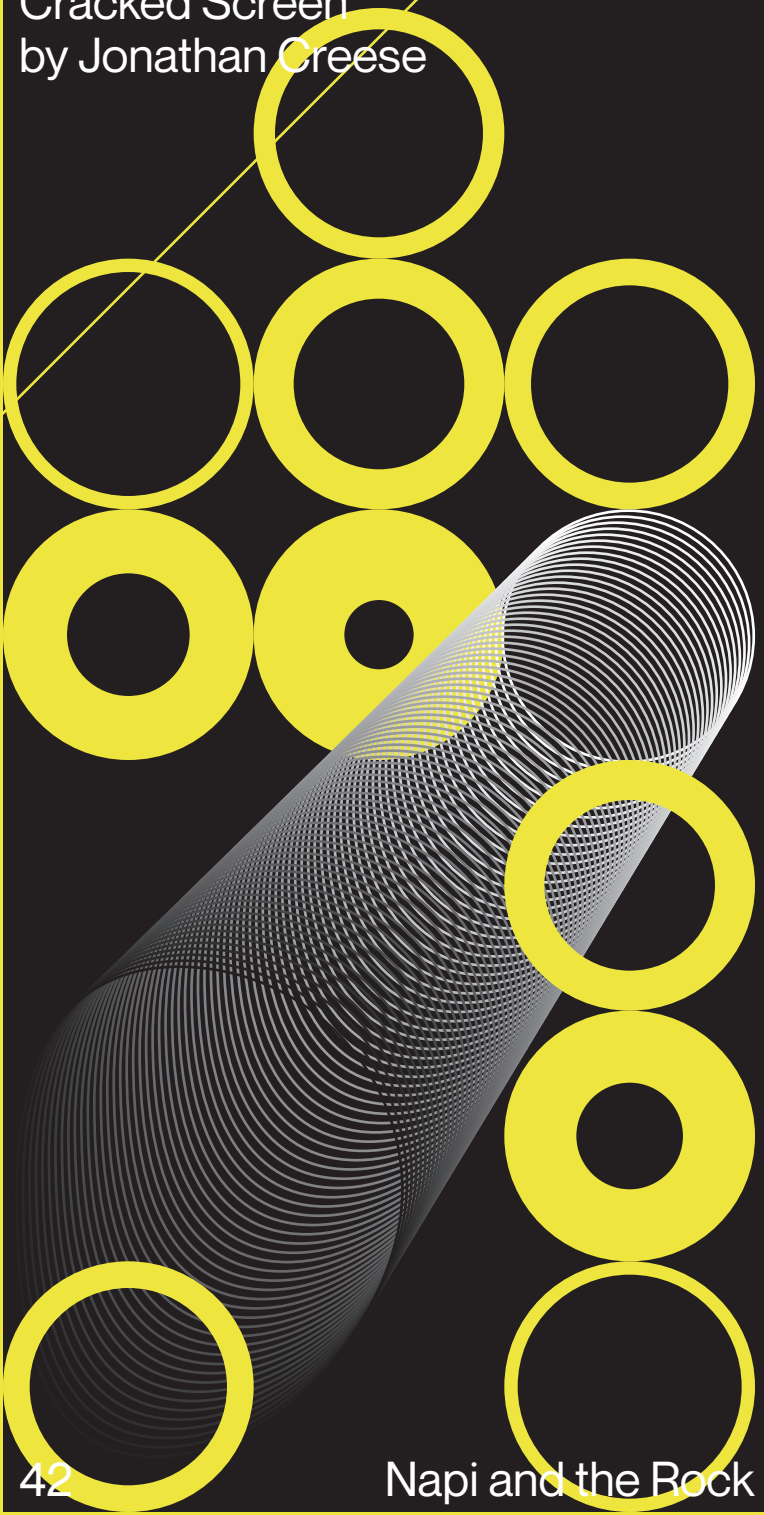
Luigi Pulido is a queer-immigrant interdisciplinary artist and writer that primarily contends with institutional structures, layers of visibility, and representation. His work is informed by histories of Conceptual Art, theatre, new-media, and text. He is completing his BFA in Sculpture at the Alberta University of the Arts.

Napi and the Rock on the Cracked Screen by Jonathan Creese



On the cracked screen of a cellphone plugged into the wall charging, the story begins.

There is an acknowledgement of the land, of the ancestry of the Indigenous Peoples who first called Southern Alberta home. A reminder that what we are about to see is something charged with the idea of reconciliation. It is not a white man's performance, though it takes place in the white man's setting, with the white man's instruments and digital broadcast technology. The performance belongs to the land, not one group of people, be they Indigenous or settler.

We see a theatre with spotlights leading the camera down towards the stage, where we would expect to see our performers. Instead, we are greeted by the orchestra, not relegated to the orchestra pit, taking the place of the performers. This world is one of solitude and even the orchestra is sparse in number, spread over the area of the stage as if invisible bubbles were keeping each performer secluded from one another. These are the story's current characters, much the same as the titular figures we are yet to meet.

We hear the hum of the bass, the cello, and the violins in harmonic dissonance, creating a feeling of eerie trepidation. The horn sounds its thematic notes, a familiar score that will be repeated throughout the production. The ears create

the unnerving sensation that contrasts with the banality of the orchestral figures. If we close our eyes our imagination takes control,

but when we open them, we are facing a screen in our cluttered bedroom.

We are in a state of a minor wanting to lead to a major, a musical sound that beckons to be relieved of its tension and resolve in a clean transition from the tense and dreary to the fulfilment of a major consonance. No fanfare, but resolution had in serenity, with the orchestral sound reflected in the final decisive motions of the conductor, as the broadcast fades to silence and darkness.

A drawn-out pause.

The pause is dark.

In this darkness we pause,

you pause,

I pause.

Tilt my head to the right angle to not catch the rays of the setting sun with my eyes as it assaults the flimsy excuse for textile that I use for drapes.

A pause

for dramatic effect,

A pause for the practicalities of the technology

Or a pause due to the simple act of fingers brushing against the screen as I hold the still tethered phone over my reclined body, rendering the production immobile by my own hands.

Ultimately, the scene lightens, and we return. The tone is different, the characters are different. But a story is being told again, this time not with the sounds of an orchestra enticing the imagination into action, but from voices and persons seen, speaking directly to us as if we were there in their presence.

Napi and his companion Kit Fox are on a journey. They come to rest under the shade of Big Rock.

A rock in our imaginations but also a rock on our screens. Imagining the rock brings forth images of the mountains kissing the sky, of giant formations that threaten but protect, that intimidate but also shelter. In reality, the rock is nothing like this, only a stage prop of board and glue and simple human engineering. It is a placeholder for the rock in our minds, a substitution for our imaginations.

Napi and Kit Fox awake and continue their journey, gifting Big Rock Napi's robe in thanks for the shade provided.

Time passes, the weather changes, a storm threatens to bear down.

Napi takes his gift back without permission from Big Rock.

The music does eventually return, more detached, asking us to imagine. But our eyes betray our mind and confront us with the artificiality of the entire exchange. The sound of thunder is drums and cymbals, the wail of the wind is horns and strings. We cannot imagine whilst we look, and we cannot look whilst we imagine.

The reality of a cracked screen and a lumpy pillow is keen to mock the artificiality of any illusion of the mind.

Big Rock is angered by Napi's action. A chase ensues.

My ears hear the vehicles on the street below my apartment building.

The spooky cry of the wind brought by another chinook as it blows through the high rises of the Beltline.

The movement of my roommate in the kitchen on the other side of the door, the clank of pots, the sizzle of ingredients placed in a hot oiled vessel.

Distractions abound and the imagination is broken, but the story continues, unperturbed by our conflict with concentration,

detached in its own reality. Not interacting with us but asking that we interact with it. No social contract between performer and audience,

just a pause, play and rewind button.

Gophers, beavers, deer and elk try to stop Big Rock but fail. He is too strong.

I keep the video playing as I leave the room to fix myself a meal, my hunger awakened by the late evening hour and the smells now drifting under my doorway. The performers continue expositing in the background, unaware that their audience has left their presence, whilst my mind begins to wonder.

. . . have to go to the bank in the morning . . . should really give Ma a call . . . got that project due on Tuesday . . .

My attention is only brought back to the story from chopping vegetables and thinking daydreams with the crescendo of the orchestra and the final thematic notes parped by the solitary horn.

I would assume that Napi and Kit Fox outsmarted Big Rock in the climax of the narrative. I do not know for certain.

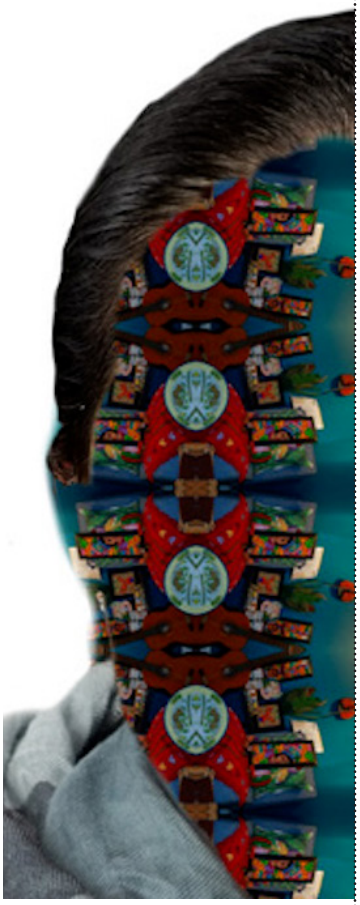
The credits roll, a food delivery ad plays, and the cracked screen shuts off after two minutes of inactivity.

Jonathan Creese is a Trinidadian artist, currently living in Calgary, Alberta, attending Alberta University of the Arts as an undergraduate student. He works primarily in the field of textiles, printmaking, photography and sculpture. Being an outsider to Canada, his work is a reaction to the environment, as he draws parallels and observes the differences from his lived experience in his homeland and the prairies and mountains of western Canada. Being interested in art forms beyond the visual arts, particularly storytelling, writing, music and theatre, he observes the connections that these medium have with societies understanding of culture.

Between two/dos Mundos
by Natalie Melara

A mashup is more commonly associated with music and digital culture, but the way I see it, the term could easily apply to the new process of creating where I sample from the digital and from the physical to create, as scholar J. Andrew Brown notes, "something that at once feels both familiar and new."[1] The term can also apply to my own multicultural background (Salvadoran/Canadian), which makes me feel like I have a remixed identity. Even though cultures can clash, they can also harmonize, just like two very different songs can be combined to bring together different eras, genres, and sounds. It is this harmony that I am interested in—the idea that influences are both necessary and important—but the real beauty lies in the in-between—where they come together to create something new.

Until the onset of the pandemic, my artistic practice mostly consisted of acrylic painting, but with no access to studio space, my iPad became my most accessible tool. I was so used to the physical acts of mixing paints and preparing canvases that creating digitally left me craving something tactile, a physical object I could then introduce into the digital realm. This desire led me to consider techniques used by artists like Jonathan Wolfe and researcher of creativity and design, Amit Zoran. Both Wolfe and Zoran draw on approaches from physical and digital art and combine them to experiment with their artistic practices.



Identity (2021). 1:05. Video (video st
paintings cover my face as ominou
of Natalie Melara

Fold pages back
along dotted line
and bring arrows
together

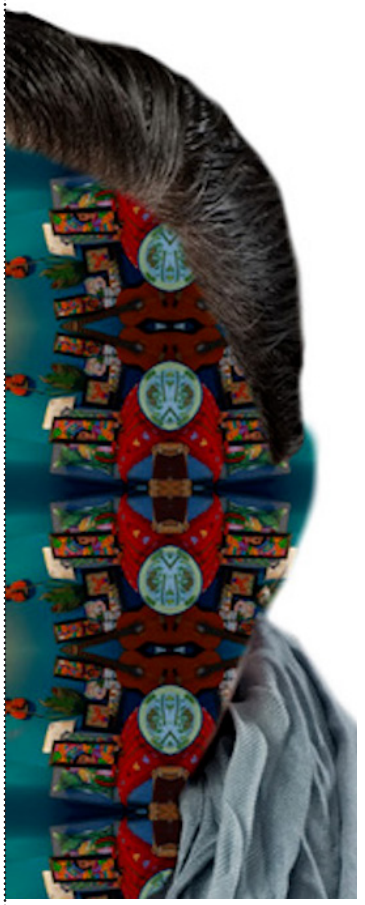
I had the pleasure of sitting down with Wolfe in a Bridgeland cafe to discuss their creation process and how they went from being a traditional painter to making artwork that exists between the physical and digital realms. They explained how their work would sometimes start as a rough sketch or scraps of paintings they then edit digitally so "it becomes something totally different." They note, "these small scraps of paintings become valuable because I can expand on them digitally even further than I could have normally . . . I will scan a painting 15 times—and I'll have a finished painting that I am happy with—but also have 15 images to work with throughout the lifespan of the painting."[2]

Wolfe's description of his digital process resonates with my own artistic approach; it's not about changing one or the other—it's about how they gain value from the interaction. New possibilities arise in the mixing and mashing of the physical and digital—and for me, when it comes to how I express myself, the mixing and mashing takes the form of "Spanglish." For example, I "parquear" my car instead of "estacionarlo" so that both my English and Spanish speaking friends understand what I mean. My playlists are filled with cumbia and country—and somehow on the dance floor the same two-step keeps me on beat. I also get twice the festivities in December because Navidad is on the 24th and Christmas is the 25th.

Digital Threads of Identity (installation view), Marion Nicoll Gallery, Calgary, AB 2021. Image courtesy of Natalie Melara.

Like Wolfe, artist Amit Zoran explores a new hybrid art form through his project "Hybrid Basketry"—where 3D-printed structures are designed to accept the development of traditional hand-woven patterns from Botswana, merging digital technologies and timeless hand-sewn craft. Zoran says that "we can infuse our excitement about technological progress with a need to remember the very soil from which it came."[3] In combining physical and digital approaches, the engagement from the artists' hands impacts the work's originality and uniqueness. The digital sphere provides a history only made possible by capturing each reiteration of a work—and then having the option to rework each of those layers by hand or with digital tools.

My two cultures have provided me with the opportunity to take the knowledge and wisdom from both sides and access them through a different perspective. In this way, I am able to elevate my understanding of what language,



ill). Patterns created from my
s heartbeats play. Image courtesy

customs and traditions can be. There is an intimacy I feel when I speak my parent's language and eat their food and listen to their music - and these traditions feel more saturated and rich when filtered through a Canadian lens. However, I am also free from adhering to cultural traditions that may not align with my own values and lifestyle. I get to pick and choose which layers will stay and inform who I am.

Merging the qualities of traditional art making and a digital practice leads to the creation of hybrid territory, a "contemporary practice that respects its double origins,"[4] in the same way I attempt to respect my double origins by retaining them and finding a way to merge them. The digital medium has "challenged notions of the artwork, audience, and artist."[5] By implementing similar techniques used by Wolfe and Zoran in my art practice, my work becomes a "contemporary practice" that simultaneously feels familiar—but also completely original and new. My identity calls into question what it means to be a Latina Canadian. My art practice has become a search for collaboration and unity between the physical and digital. Both my identity and my art practice are a result of a fluid interaction between two worlds.

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Natalie Melara (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Mohkinstsis/Calgary, Canada. Melara is the recipient of multiple awards including the New Zones Gallery of Contemporary Art Scholarship and the Joane Cardinal-Schubert Memorial scholarship, and has exhibited with the Art Gallery of Alberta, Marion Nicoll Gallery, Contemporary Calgary and Stride Gallery. She has obtained technical training in fashion design (Olds College, Olds, Canada) and architectural design (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Calgary, Canada) which informs the curiosity, development and exploration of her practice. Her artwork involves cultural investigation, feelings of displacement, and the formation of a hybrid identity.

Taken for Granted: A Review of DISNOVATION.ORG's *POST-GROWTH* Exhibition by Nadia Perna

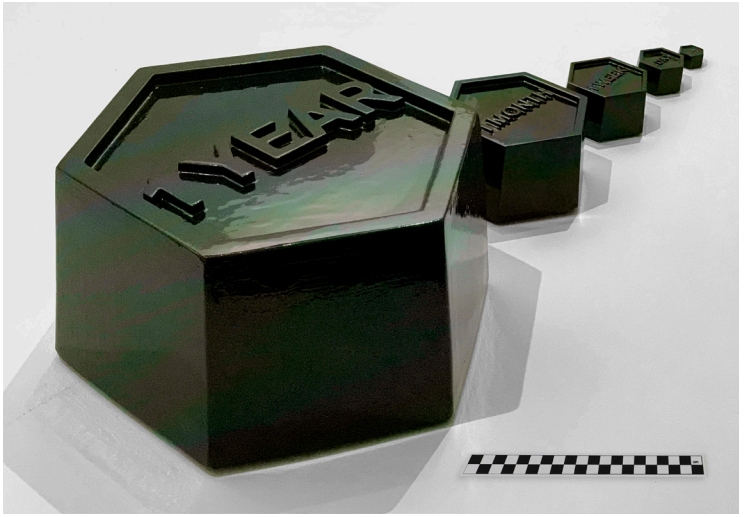
I tell myself individual actions don't matter when there are billionaires taking nine-minute joy rides to space, but when I look around my home, I can't help but notice the excess energy being used. There are three outlets within reach, and all of them are full. As of 2018, 91% of Alberta's electricity is being produced with fossil fuels.[1] It's not just cars creating emissions, my laptop is doing the same. Even as I consider how technology impacts the environment, it is hard to comprehend how much energy is required to power my lifestyle. Our technology-fueled lives are critically implicated in the technosphere, "the underlying mechanisms that power 21st-century life".[2] Phones, laptops, lights, all plugged in. Come on, hurry up and charge. I can't be late. Lifestyles associated with late-stage capitalism leave little time to consider these actions and their consequences.

Artist collective DISNOVATION.ORG (Baruch Gottlieb, Clémence Seurat, Julien Maudet and Pauline Briand) challenge the realities of a fast-paced and techno-positive world that compounds environmental degradation and inequality. They use art research, hacking, and conversation to encourage an understanding of post-growth narratives. In a growth-based economy, it is easy to become distracted and forget about all that goes into powering our lives. There are far too many deadlines to stop and think about the computers that are required to complete the work. A post-growth perspective shifts our sense of urgency toward the planet. Instead of measuring success by the growth of GDP, success is measured by the health of the planet and those who reside on it. DISNOVATION.ORG's *POST GROWTH* exhibition at iMAL in Brussels (2020-2021) breaks down the technological and political landscapes that are fueling the climate crisis by using a blend of practical theory, technology, and art to reveal the technosphere's reliance on fossil fuels while offering an account of the possibilities of a post-growth world.

As a part of the *POST-GROWTH* exhibition, *Life Support System* (2020) reveals the technology that is used in agriculture, and the energy required to maintain life. One square metre of wheat grows in an isolated agriculture system calculating the ecological costs of the technosphere and biosphere in food creation. The light from above represents the sun, flooding the darkened room and spotlighting the biosphere. Canisters and tubing are connected to the wheat, controlling the water being fed into the nutrient-rich soil. Panels display current energy usage as well as usage over the course of

a single growing season. Energy is calculated in kilowatts, water is measured in litres, and other aspects such as hardware and seed are measured in Euros. The process of putting a price on the biosphere exposes how it is taken for granted. In a world where technology is increasingly replacing traditional growing methods, it is imperative to value the effort required to grow our food. Shifting to technology does not take the strain off the biosphere; instead, it shifts the weight from sunlight to fossil fuels, which can be described as harnessing ancient sunlight energy.[3] *Life Support System* is a reminder that this is not the solution to solving the climate crisis because fossil fuels and the biosphere's resources are not infinite. Instead of an economy that sees the biosphere's resources as a commodity, a post-growth future requires that the Earth be respected and valued.

Energy Slave Tokens (2020) use tokens to help quantify the amount of energy used by the average European over the course of an hour, a week, a month, a year, and over a lifetime. The coins are made of petroleum and shine like an oil spill. The energy is quantified by comparing it to the human labour of an average healthy adult working 24/7. The average European is estimated to use the equivalent of 400-500 energy slaves 24 hours a day.[4] Comparing the coins to human labour allows space for reflection on how energy



DISNOVATION.ORG,
Energy Slave Tokens, 2020.

from the biosphere is constantly at work in our lives. It visualizes and encourages reflection on the labour of the Earth that is required to live comfortably. Technology has the tendency to be abstract and distant whereas the coins visualize the energy that technologies require to operate, rendering it tangible and solidifying the need for a paradigm shift. The technosphere's relentless energy consumption is no longer hidden, therefore it becomes impossible to ignore the role individuals play in complying with energy exploitation.

The exhibition doesn't scold. Instead, it forces viewers to question: do we continue to live the way we are? Do we continue a legacy of exploitation? Or do we instead denounce the system that treats Earth as currency and shift society to value the power and energy from the biosphere. Each individual person carries

the weight of an *Energy Slave Token*, but it is a societal shift that is required so that individuals no longer exploit the planet for energy.

The first step in confronting the urgency of the climate crisis is understanding the way the planet is taken for granted and realizing the need for a transition in all aspects of everyday life. There must be an understanding that the biosphere and people are exploited in technological advancement. Understanding this can be an important step in reflecting and then acting on the change required to prevent climate disaster. DISNOVATION.ORG reveals the hidden mechanisms behind technology and growth to get people to confront the urgent need for change. Both *Life Support System* and *Energy Slave Tokens* spur important reflection on what we take for granted and what must be done to adjust society away from exploitation as default. Their work doesn't accuse us of failing but instead demands action now. Sometimes, in the face of the climate disaster, I can't help but feel like my actions mean nothing, but if negative impacts can be weighed out so can positive ones. I am reminded of my impacts, their power, and the potential for change when the impact we take for granted can shift into an understanding of the ways we can, and must, change.

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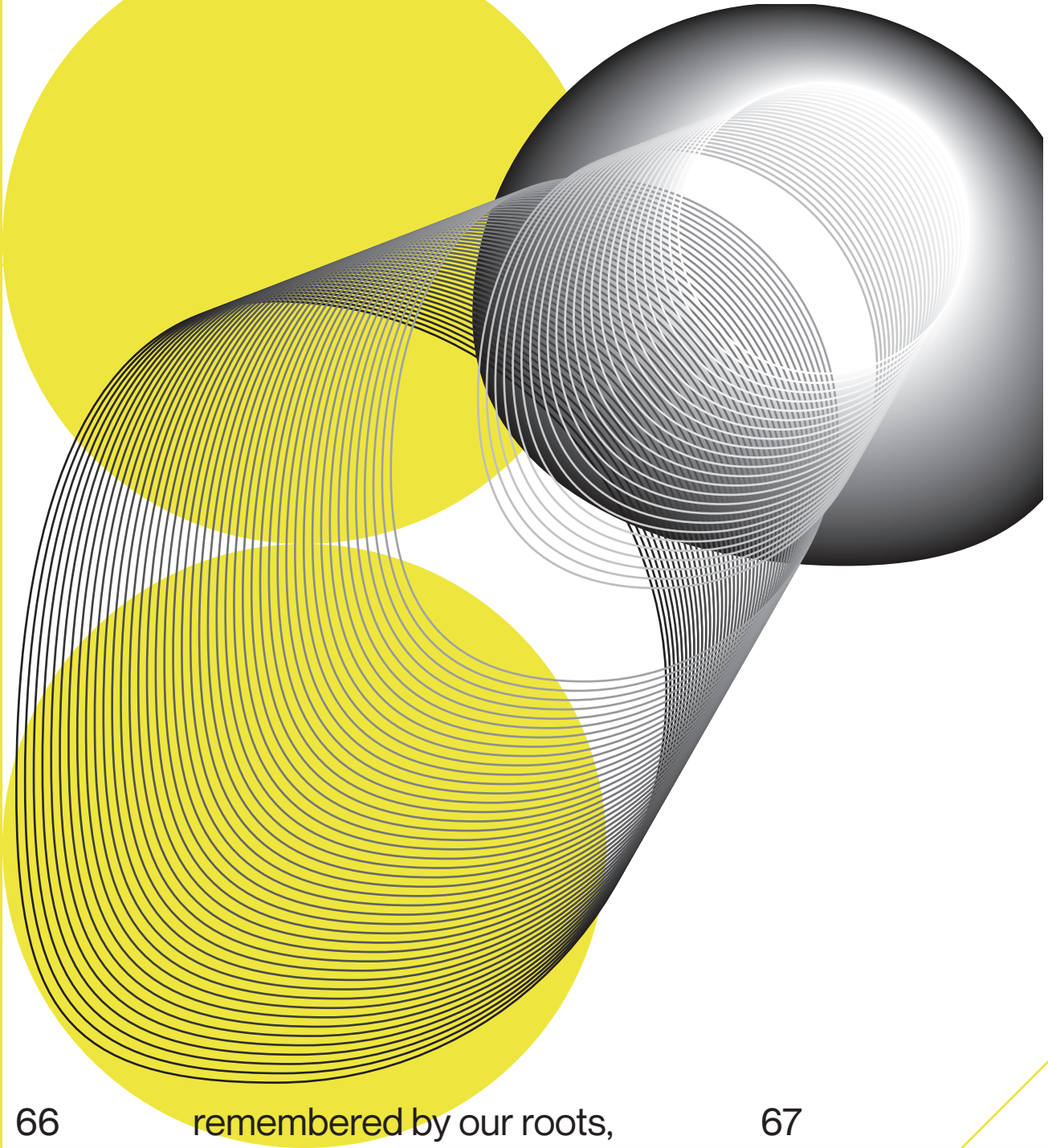
Nadia Perna is a designer, writer, and activist living in Mohkinstsis (Calgary). She is currently in her 3rd year at the Alberta University for the Arts, completing a bachelor of design with a major in graphic design and a minor in object design. She is an organizer with Fridays for Future Calgary, a youth-run climate justice organization. Her work, in all her chosen fields, centers around ideas of the intersectionality of a just transition and the role of empathy in designing a better future.

remembered by our roots, changed by our growth

by portia scabar



Growing up, I found myself struggling with the concept of gender and I spent much of my energy trying to force myself into a mold that could never fit. Many folks feel discomfort towards the contrasting sides of this concept. I felt that the gender binary did not always have the space that I needed for me to be myself. Yet when I took the time to understand gender as a spectrum, room opened for comfort and gentleness towards myself—I found a space that made sense to me. Now, consider the flux and flow of gender while also thinking about Sarah Ahmed's explanation of queering space; those who view gender within a spectrum often find themselves existing differently than the norm, this is due to no longer abiding by the social constructs in place, living authentically instead. A pertinent example of queering can be found within the art practice of DeVery Bess, a Mohkinstsis/Calgary-based drag artist who queers different aspects of contemporary Canadian culture. Their piece *Dragging out Mediacrity*, for example, challenges the colonial concept of exceptionalism; they question why we cannot be mediocre and why we cannot fail.

Many colonial ideologies have shaped our societal expectations and narrowed our understanding of the world, which in turn, forces us out of authenticity and into perfection. Within perfectionism the room for the mundane and average is removed. In response,

DeVery Bess, *Dragging out Mediacrity*, 2022. Image credit Han Sungpil. Image courtesy of Stride Gallery.

Bess' practice questions these ideologies and deconstructs their reasonings, thus seeking a more inclusive world for folks to exist within. Looking back at the images within Bess' body of work, we see Bess in poses that one may encounter on an influencers' Instagram page. The twist is that these images are then altered to shift the narrative at hand. Instead of attempting to show how great one's life is, Bess is having fun and invites folks to join them. The authenticity that Bess achieved in these photos speaks to shamelessly loving yourself regardless of the flaws that you may have, or how the world views you.

Bess uses angles to help shift the eyes of the viewer to create various levels within their images. These levels, in turn, lead us to question if our perfectionism is a performance. From outside of the gallery space, we are greeted by a hanging screen playing video clips of Bess interacting with the landscape and a vehicle while singing and striking poses. Inside of the gallery, the same video is playing on the reverse of the screen and eight images are hung on the wall beside the screen. These images feature Bess in many different poses with an orange Jeep parked in what appears to be an abandoned parking lot. The images all seem to be taken at eye level; the photographer is imitating Bess' movements to keep their eyes level with the camera. This makes

the viewer of the works feel as if they are in that parking lot with Bess, conversing with them. The level of intimacy between artist and viewer breaks the boundaries of perfectionism and allows both the viewer and the artist to see each other's vulnerabilities.

The honesty that Bess shows acts as an invitation into the mediocrity of life, into the average that all of us are. Once you are able to work through the uncomfortableness of not being the best, a weight is lifted off your shoulders. Bess shifts our understanding of gender and actively asks us to question the colonial systems around us. Why do we need to travel to the most expensive places to take photos when the abandoned parking lot 15 minutes from your house works just fine? Why do we need the newest car or clothes or material things when what we have works just fine? Why do we need to work at the highest rate of productivity at the expense of our health, both mental and physical, when a balanced approach works just fine?

Dragging Out Mediacrity focuses on mediocrity and other mundane aspects of life while drawing

viewers into the discomfort of not fitting into perfectionism. This work actively combats those ideals and leads us to examine ourselves. Looking into myself and asking these same questions, I found that I never felt that I was able to be average or mediocre; pressures from many different places shaped my inner dialogue and I became my biggest critic. My inner voice spoke beside the plethora of voices telling me that I needed to be better, be the best person and daughter that I could be. There was no room for exceptions or mistakes. However, as my generation grows, many of us are learning that the pressure to be the best stems from our parents and their own feelings of inadequacy. The so-called traditions that reinforce ideas of exceptionalism are carried out by those who are fearful of change, who are content in ignoring the traumas within their lives, which further perpetuates these toxic rituals.

Examining myself led to thoughts about "hustle" culture; a collective movement of working until you are at the top of the company, or at your peak level of success, often at the expense of your health, and relationships. These ideas often lead to states of burnout, where you are mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted. I spent the last 6 months being burnt out, attempting to complete courses, working a demanding job, as well as doing extra activities. I told myself that these things would look good on a resume and dove headfirst into them without thinking about the effects that this would have on my body and mind. Things began to fall through the cracks, and I could barely complete the things that I had committed myself to. This is the reality of forcing yourself to do too much. This is what exceptionalism and perfectionism does to people. Are you striving for perfection when you are doing just fine?

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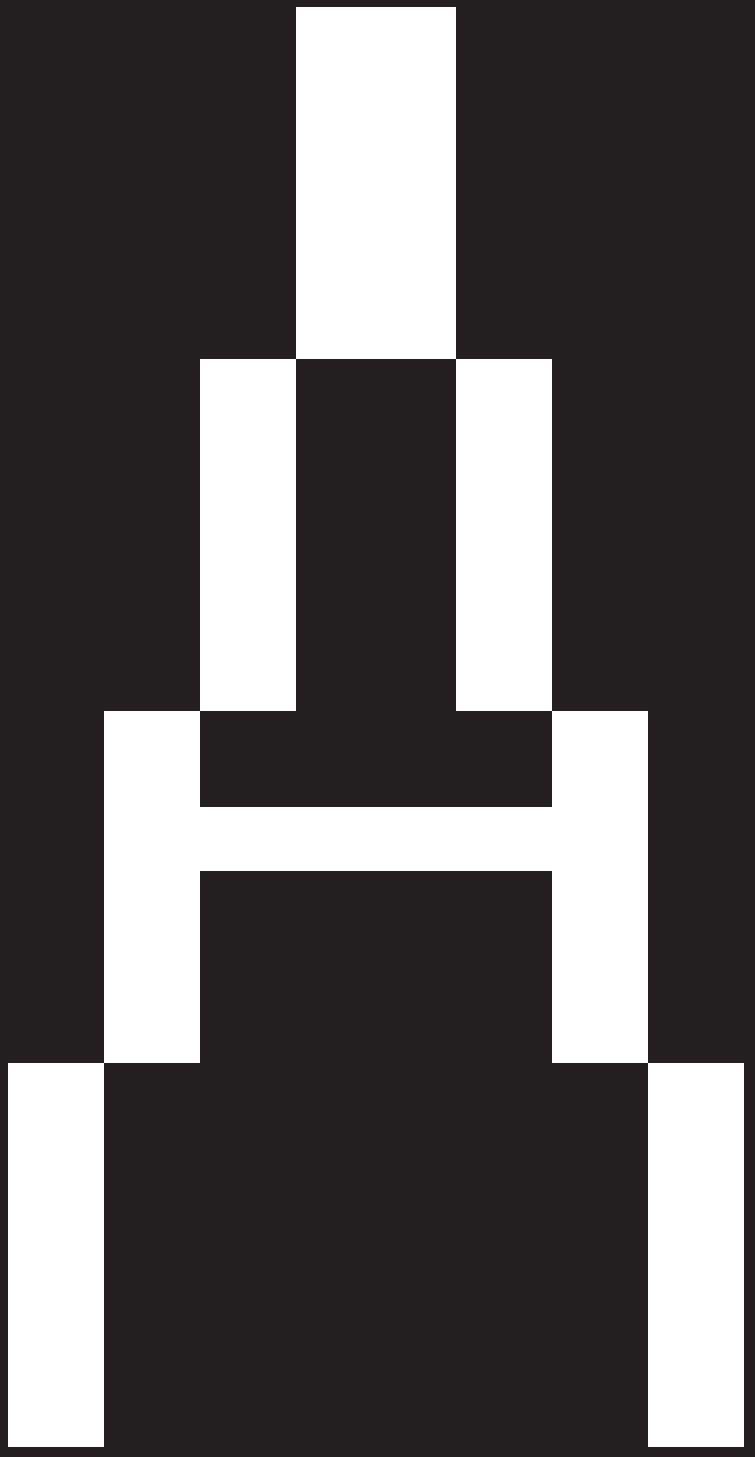
portia scabar is an interdisciplinary artist who is finishing their BFA in Glass (2023) at the Alberta University of Arts in Calgary/ Mohkinstsis. portia is currently interested in human connection, plant life, and the vast possibilities of root systems. Their work utilizes imagery of roots as a motif for how relationships are formed and navigated throughout life. portia's practice leans into experimentation, softness, healing, and finding joy in life. These concepts are the guiding factors for each piece, botanical life is the vessel, and the material could be anything.



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Public Programming and Outreach Assistant, IKG: Sara Perry-din

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