

Volume 44 Number 1 | Spring 2020

FUSION

A MAGAZINE FOR CLAY AND GLASS





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Muddy Waters



SW-180
Desert Dusk



SW-181
Night Moth



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Antique Brass



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Oxblood



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Speckled Toad

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A MAGAZINE FOR CLAY AND GLASS

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ON THE COVER

Anong Migwans Beam,
Four Manitoulin Colours, 2020.
Image courtesy of the artist

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Note from the President

On March 27th, the FUSION Board of Directors and I made a very difficult but responsible decision. In the best interests of our members, vendors, and supporters, and following public health advisories and the COVID-19 emergency declaration by the Government of Ontario, we cancelled the 2020 Annual Conference as well as this year's biennial *Breakthrough* exhibition.

As your President, I will use this time to work with the Board and FUSION staff, volunteers, and sponsors to begin planning our 2021 conference. Look forward to our annual gathering next year: it will be a bigger, better, and that much more special celebration!

A few answers to questions you may have. If you registered for the conference, you'll have received your refund; and if you registered using your FUSION Design Award, you'll have an additional year to use your award if this was the final year. If you made accommodation reservations with Victoria College, which have now all been cancelled, please contact the College directly with any inquiries, not the FUSION Office. If you paid entry fees for *Breakthrough*, full refunds have been paid.

The Board will advise members later this year on how we'll address this year's Annual General Meeting.

During this challenging time, I see our ceramic and glass communities support and inspire each other across Canada with virtual exhibition tours, online studio demos, curb-side pickup and delivery of supplies and beautiful work, artist and curator talks, conversations and hangouts, cooking and baking recipes, even play lists to warm up these early spring evenings. It shows the world what a great arts community we have here: We the North.

As has been said before, we will remember this as the best of times and the worst of times. Please stay safe. Stay healthy. Keep in touch with, inspire, and care for each other. And see you all soon.

Ann Allen is President, Board of Directors, of FUSION: The Ontario Clay and Glass Association. You can reach her at fusion@clayandglass.on.ca or 416-438-8946.

the rhino I know symbolizes the traveller who migrates from one place to another in order to search and find balance. What is common however, is a sense of isolation that is felt in our time during stay or travel. In this piece, the traveller exist with one foot in the circle of the past and one foot on the road toward the future. The calligraphies on the circle around the rhinos is this poem, in Persian:

می آمدن ز و می بدن از گ ار چه ی ا ه ب ش
دوبن نامگ نی ا دوخ ی ن ا ج ت خ س ه ب ا ر ا م

We pass the period of remoteness, yet we survive. Our toughness is beyond our expectation. Who am I? Tired of being myself, a maniac person who fights [conventional] wisdom. Shakibi Esfahani (16th century)



Aitak Sorahitalab, *the rhino I know series*, mixed clays, 2019. Image: www.aitak.ca. A visual artist and art educator/administrator, Aitak was a Participating Artist in the FUSION Mentorship Program 2018-2019 (Program Mentor, Susan Low-Ber).

Message from the Director of Magazine

June 2020 marks the end of my second and last term as a Board member of FUSION and as the Director of Magazine. I have met amazing people and made new friends. It's been a bittersweet experience, though: exciting, challenging and rewarding work yet, at times, disheartening.

My first undertaking as the Director of Magazine was to find an editor. After a comprehensive competition process, Margot Lettner was the successful candidate. I think that this was my most valuable contribution. Margot has made my job easy. She has done an amazing job diversifying the content of the magazine, bringing new and young writers on board, and introducing artists with different perspectives and diverse expressions of clay and glass art. Margot, and our designer, Derek Chung, have made *FUSION: A Magazine for Clay and Glass* more readable, relevant, and user friendly in a time of emerging diversity in artists' voices and tremendous change in online and print media.

This was one step towards modernizing the magazine. We also surveyed our members about its future directions; and received professional advice about how to make it more visually dynamic, accessible, and contemporary in content and coverage. My disappointment comes from not being able to complete this initiative; specifically, to make *FUSION* a fully digital web-based magazine that is available and read by a broad community of artists, reflective of and responsive to our times.

Money, money, money the will to move forward with our vision was there but, as so often happens in the arts sector, we needed resources. Insufficient financial and human resources have been a common theme for both the magazine and FUSION as an organization. As directors we take on a role – a responsibility – to “encourage and promote excellence and quality in clay and glass, provide opportunities for fellowship and a sense of community involvement, provide continuing education resources for members and people interested in clay and glass and to reach out, demonstrating tolerance, caring, and acceptance

for the diverse aspects of expression in clay and glass.” (FUSION mandate, established by our constitution, 1985).

I am proud to say that at the magazine, we took this role seriously. *FUSION Magazine* is available free to our members and is read in libraries and galleries, and by artists and curators, in Canada and the US. We now have contributors based across North America who write engaging, thoughtful, perspectives on the new and the historic in clay, glass, and intermedia arts. And, through our artist network (as well as in our hand luggage!), the magazine has now also travelled to the UK and Italy.

The world has changed so much since our last issue. I don't have a crystal ball, but I do know that by working together we can be a stronger voice of the clay and glass community to government, business, and the general public. During these uncertain times, *FUSION Magazine* is needed more than ever to help us share our stories and bring us together with our fellow artists across Ontario and beyond.

I leave the FUSION Board and the Magazine and take on the role of President of the Mississauga Potters' Guild. I'll miss being the Director of Magazine; but I look forward to continuing to work with FUSION, the magazine, and its terrific community of makers to seek out opportunities for innovative thinking, community action, and growth.

Sincerely,



Salina Szechtman was a Board member of FUSION: The Ontario Clay and Glass Association, 2016-2020, and Director of Magazine, 2017-2020. She now takes up the position of President, Mississauga Potters' Guild. A ceramic artist, you can reach her at president@mississaugapotters.com.



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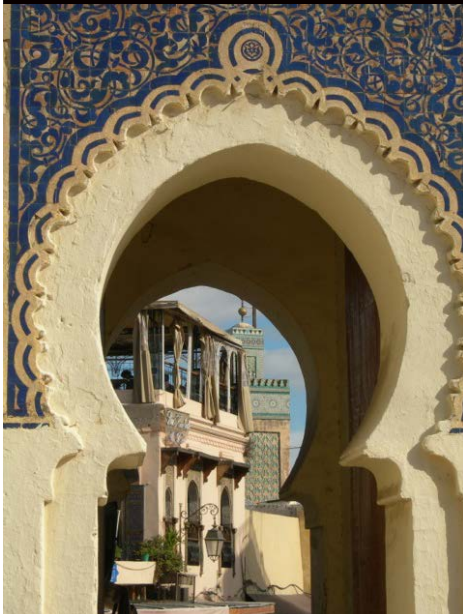
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Volume 44, No. 2

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Wellspring.

This Spring 2020 issue of FUSION Magazine looks deeply in as our outside has drawn away. In three arresting and beautiful pieces, artists Anong Migwans Beam, Oksana Berda, and Habiba El-Sayed (in conversation with M.C. Baumstark) offer meditation and reflection. Anong, Oksana, and Habiba are all new contributors to *FUSION*. We welcome and thank them. I also pay tribute to artists Ann and Carl Beam, Anong's parents, whose work and spirits join in.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Over the following pages, in "Wellspring," you'll find an image gallery of nine artists and eight works – sculpture, hybrid object, ceramic, photograph, vessel. Leonardo da Vinci once wrote that a poet would be "overcome by sleep and hunger before [being able to] describe with words what a painter can in an instant."¹

This issue also showcases the winners of FUSION's Spotlight for Featured Student Artists: Christy Chor, Clay; and Zihao Xiong, Glass. Breathlessly beautiful, technically accomplished, and engaged deeply in the conversations of our times, it's a pleasure to present such inspired work.

And so, to goodbye. For the past three years, as Director of Magazine, artist Salina Szechtman has championed fresh perspectives and professionalism at *FUSION Magazine* and as a member of the FUSION Board of Directors. I've been so very fortunate to have her as a publishing colleague and literary companion. She has enriched our work on behalf of ceramic, glass and intermedia artists in Ontario and beyond. She also taught me how to make a pinch pot.

Please read her message on p. 5 and know that the Mississauga Potters' Guild is fortunate to have her as their new President. And please welcome artist and Board Member Catharina Goldnau, who takes over from Salina and joins me in creating, with our contributors and designer Derek Chung, a forum for new, old, thoughtful, playful always engaging artists and their work.

May you find your own wellspring as our world turns.

Margot Lettner
Editor

¹ H.W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art*, 6th ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 613.



In recent years simplicity is weighting strongly in the process of my creation.

Kai Chan was born in war-time China in 1940. This childhood experience is a significant foundation in building his work, namely, looking for stability and peace. He moved with his family to Hong Kong in 1949 and, in 1966, immigrated to Canada. This changing of locations and countries has informed him in his art practice, the passage from the East to West regularly appearing in his work. The environment in Canada has also inspired his

appreciation of simple things: a newspaper, toothpick, spices, or tree branches from his garden become materials. His awards include the Jean A. Chalmers National Crafts Award in 1998, and the Prix Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in the Crafts in 2002. *Kai Chan: Spider's Logic*, a 35-year retrospective, toured in 2010.

Kai Chan, *Morning Star*, 2014, 76 x 74 x 11 cm, bamboo, dye, oil paint. Image and text: www.kaichan.art.

Wellspring

This Spring 2020 issue of *FUSION Magazine* lands at a time of great uncertainty, fear, and grief. Some of us speak of the time “when things get back to normal.” Others see a different time, a timely opening to conversations and actions about moving fundamental change in our values, re-enchancement to guide both our lives and our human print upon the earth.

Artists have always worked in the dark and in the light. Over these next few pages, *FUSION Magazine* celebrates nine artists for eight works – sculpture, hybrid object, ceramic, photograph, vessel – that take us there and beyond. Artists who, with all makers, remain part of our art collectives and communities and cultural work: you and your practice are the essence of who we are and aspire.

I build from shards and rough clay, putting the chaos back in order, giving birth to a new some...thing. An object of cultural significance, a jewellery box, a treasure chest, a bowl - but not quite. The porcelain shard flashes, fragmented canine, reminding of former splendour and questioning present value systems from a bed of dirt.

Catharina Goldnau, *Nesteggs*, 2018, stoneware, additions, porcelain, gold luster, 28 x 27 x 27 cm. Image and text: Catharina Goldnau, www.catharinagoldnauceramics.ca.

An award-winning graduate with a BA in Craft and Design with a specialty in Ceramics from Sheridan College, **Catharina Goldnau** explores transitions, juxtaposing traditions and materials in sculptural work that borders functionality. Forming clay by hand complements the intellectual task of manipulating clay and glaze chemistry. The effects of heat and fire play a pan-ultimate role in altering the piece, creating new forms



and surfaces, tearing and splitting in the fire. Resins and textiles may be employed to supplement final touches.

Avataq is part of a series exploring hybrid objects. This work reimagines the avataq; a traditional float made from one full sealskin that has been inflated with air, plugged, and tied off. The avataq is an important tool used in conjunction with a harpoon in traditional Inuit hunting practices, allowing hunters to track and tire marine animals in order to catch them. The work relies on the shared similarities of the avataq and foil balloon to also bring together the connotations both objects carry. The work becomes a means to call attention to a location or event by taking an inviting and accessible form, and a way to celebrate Inuit culture and traditions.



Couzyn van Heuvelen, *Avataq*, 2016, screenprinted mylar, ribbon, aluminum, helium. Image and text: www.couzyn.ca.

Couzyn van Heuvelen is a Canadian Inuk sculptor. Born in Iqaluit, Nunavut, but living in Southern Ontario for most of his life, his work explores Inuit culture and identity, new and old technologies, and personal narratives. While rooted in the history and traditions of Inuit art, the work strays from established Inuit art making methods and explores a range of fabrication processes. Couzyn holds a BFA from York University and an MFA from NSCAD University.

Every sensuous pull of clay shows [my] desire to present the preciousness of life, to anticipate new possibilities – reflecting on past seasons while fuelling [my] next steps.



Brenda Nieves, *Zephyr*, n.d. Image and text: www.Brendanievesart.wordpress.com.

Brenda Nieves is an emerging artist working in multiple mediums in her studio in the Mississauga Living Arts Centre. Her work has been shown in group exhibitions at the Gardiner Museum, Burlington Art Gallery, and Art Square Gallery, and is in private collections.



Meryl McMaster, *Murmur*, n.d. Image and text: www.merylmcmaster.com.

Murmur explores how language has constructed our identities. I was inspired by the natural phenomenon of a murmuration, which is a large group of starlings that collectively move as one being. I constructed a large swarm modeled after this occurrence and, from pages of North American history books, cut out thousands of paper birds in the shape of starlings. The murmuration represents our collective identity - we are all influenced by each other and our identities are strongly influenced by our stories and language.

*These histories have partly constructed the collective identities of Indigenous Peoples and European Canadians and they represent our relationship with the past and how such pasts are defined by the present. In *Murmur* I photograph myself as a method of understanding my autonomous existence outside of formations of collective identity; any insight, however, is thwarted by the fact that these collective notions of personhood at least in part determine my sense of self.*

I've decided to show the work as a triptych to illustrate movement within the scene but also to create a storyline. The sequence of the images is such that the progression of the

movement goes intuitively from right to left, counter to how we normally sequence things. This references, at first look, my walking into the past surrounded in a dream-like state by the cultural force of the murmuration. You may also see this as my exploration of the past. Alternatively, when viewed from left to right you see me being propelled into the present by the cultural force, landing firmly in the present and peering into the future through a gap in the swarm.

Meryl McMaster is a Canadian artist based in the city of Ottawa. Her work is predominantly photography based, incorporating the production of props, sculptural garments and performance forming a synergy that transports the viewer out of the ordinary and into a space of contemplation and introspection. Part of group exhibitions throughout Canada, the US and the UK, she currently has a solo touring exhibition across Canada titled *Confluence*. Her awards include the Scotiabank New Generation Photography Award, the REVEAL Indigenous Art Award, and Charles Pachter Prize for Emerging Artists.

I make jewelry the way I draw. That's one of the great things about metal, you can do that. [And] the scale, I could relate to. My interest had been in line, and I saw this as line coming alive and having its own life off the page. The fluidity of the metal [is] elemental, quite ethereal in what it can do. It didn't have to do with ornamentation. It had to do with magic things you could do, in that scale.

- Vivienne Jones in conversation with Barbara Isherwood, "The Jewelry of Vivienne Jones," September 27, 2000, and September 30, 2001, www.ganoksin.com/article/jewelry-vivienne-jones/.

A graduate of the Birmingham School of Jewellery and Silversmithing in England UK, **Vivienne Jones** has maintained a studio practice as a professional contemporary jeweller in Toronto since the 1980s, and was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts in 2003. She considers her formative years growing up in the natural beauty of Wales as an essential influence on the development of her work, exploring the qualities of her material through form, detail, texture and layering. www.viviennejones.com



Vivienne Jones and Susan Low-Beer, *circus II*, 2016, mixed media, 21 5/8 x 17 x 3 1/2 in. Image: David Kaye Gallery www.davidkayegallery.com.

Susan has always mixed forms and visual tropes from other eras and cultures, and so being in her studio is like being surrounded by quiet visitors from the history of art.

- Kelly Aitken, "Her Studios: a memoir of place," reflecting on Susan Low-Beer's *About Face* sculpture exhibition, David Kaye Gallery, February 23, 2012.

Susan Low-Beer has had a wide-ranging career as both a painter and sculptor, working in

clay with the figurative form since 1984 with a focus on the psychological and archetypal aspects of the human experience. A 30-year retrospective of her sculpture was held at the Canadian Clay and Glass Museum, Waterloo ON, September 23 - December 28, 2018, co-curated by Jasmine Jovanovic of the Art Gallery of Algoma and Stuart Reid. In 1999, she received the Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in the Crafts and, in 2000, was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. www.susanlow-beer.com.

My artistic work grapples with the body, my body as it has witnessed material and metaphysical landscapes changing and continually impacted, shaken and consumed by corporate resource extraction. What is important to me in making and presenting my work is to engage with and critique how the value of land and natural resources are created and assessed through Western measures of wealth (social, economic, environmental, power, ownership) and how these types of evaluations impact cultural lifeways in the Canadian wilderness, which is still considered an untapped frontier for natural resources. My praxis is sparked by strategies of Indigenous resistance to neo-colonization, embodied knowledge and everyday acts of decolonization as ways to understand the imaginary Canadian "true North" and industrial reverberations felt by those who live downstream.



Tsēmā Igharas, *What is Left*, ongoing project since 2015, Canadian pennies. Shown in *Black Gold*, 2019. Documentation: Katy Whitt. Image and text: www.tsema.ca.

Tsēmā Igharas is an interdisciplinary artist and a member of the Tahltan First Nation. She uses Potlatch methodology to create conceptual artwork and teachings influenced by her mentorship in Northwest Coast Formline Design at K'saan (2005-2006), her studies in visual culture and time in the mountains.

Grounded in a feminist interpretation of Greek myth and archetype, my work is deeply rooted in the material properties and processes of clay. The Wings series (2017-2019) recall the Greek mythological Nike, a winged female figure embodying the spirit of victory. The sculptures are vehicles for female protection, freedom, and empowerment.



Kathy Kranias, *Growing Wings*, 2017, hand built porcelain, 18 x 6 x 6 in. Permanent Collection, Global Affairs Canada Visual Art Collection (AWBZ), Canadian Embassy, Washington D.C. Image and text: www.kathykranias.com.

Kathy Kranias engages clay to explore movement, the body, and emotion through sculpture. Two of her recent ceramic sculptures are represented in the current exhibition *A New Light: Canadian Women Artists* at the Canadian Embassy Art Gallery, Washington DC, February 7-April 30, 2020. Global Affairs Canada Visual Art Collection has recently purchased five new sculptures by Kranias for the embassies in Beijing, Belgrade, Singapore, and Washington D.C.



Among Migwans Beam, my own bowls made from Lake Superior beach stones, 2020. All images courtesy of the artist

Nesting Bowls

I remember the smell of wet clay almost like my mother, its ozone-like smell, of thunderstorms and lightning. My parents were both artists, Ann and Carl Beam, and in my earliest years they were homeschooling me and travelling through the American Southwest, the Pacific Rim, and back to our family home in M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island. Everywhere we went, travel was punctuated by curious stops to rock cuts and roadside ditches. Gathering pinches of clay, flowing sands through hands to imagine grit. Even beach-side building and rolling pots in the crushed shell frit of the Pacific Ocean at winannish.

I watched them paying such attention to their natural surroundings. I think that we talk about being grounded maybe without realizing how exact the etymology of the word is. To have both feet planted firmly on the ground, to have earthy qualities. All of these statements speak to the soothing enduring qualities of clay, and earth pigments.

These days find me more than a decade past my father's passing, and my mother gone to dementia. As I raise my tiny family, and as



Anong Migwans Beam, gathering clays, Manitoulin Island ON

we all enter these strange and anxiety-filled times, I found myself reaching back to clay. Feeling the immediate comfort of placing a ball of tender porcelain in my hands. Watching my body memory, the intelligence of fingertips form and shape until a round bowl appeared, and then stood on its own.

I realize now the education I was privileged to receive from my parents; even though it had its hungry days, it was a rich childhood. I continue to

dig and explore with my two sons, the oldest born on my father's birthday. To be a builder, maker, in clay is to be part of the physical history of our planet in a very tangible way! It is also such a wonderful community that spans all our continents, and makes such lovely conversations, from Korean glaze masters to Santa Clara blackfiring wizards. The shared language we speak of heat and earth connects us to all our ancestors, and when we bring our children, to all future generations.

Anong Migwans Beam is a painter living and working on Manitoulin Island ON
www.anongmigwansbeam.com.



Clockwise from upper left: preparing pigments; processing cup-and-saucer red clays; slip drying; and red and cream clay gathered by me and my sons on Manitoulin Island ON, 2019



Clockwise from upper left: Carl Beam, my father, preparing clays and slips, New Mexico, 1983; Ann Beam, my mother, sanding a large handbuilt bowl; Carl Beam and Tiny Anong pit firing; and me with my Mum's bowl, 1983

For over 30 years, Ann Beam has worked in mixed media painting, ceramics and construction using recycled materials, with a focus on cultural histories of women's labour in building homes, in motherhood, cooking, and teaching. She founded the Neon Raven Art Gallery.

Carl Beam (1943-2005) works in drawing, watercolour, etching, non-silver photography, photo transfer, installation and ceramics. His work brings autobiographical, commercial, photographic, and art history references into contact to suggest dissonance between Indigenous and North American settler cultures.

Connection Stable

patience.

Oksana Berda, reminders, 2020.
All images courtesy of the artist

O What does this moment ask of artists? What tools are at our disposal?

These questions are my current wellspring. More specifically, I am fascinated with the way we are using technology to sustain the sharing of community experiences. I remember the first sweep of Facebook in my last year of high school, the first sweep of flip phones in my first and second year of university. But even with those powerful social changes I never felt the turn to technology as powerfully as I feel it right now.

My New Year's resolution this year was to prioritize community. 2019 was the second year of my taking painting full time and it was an incredibly lonely year for me. It's always been easy for me to slip into a natural isolation by burying myself in work and my routines. My new year, though, started differently. I began going to a lot of art shows, talks, and events. I started renting a studio to get myself out of my apartment and interact more with other artists daily. By mid-March, when we went into a lockdown indefinitely, I felt enormous gratitude for the start of this year.

Now that many of us are asked to self-isolate, there is an enlivened premium on in-person experiences. And, at the same time, a lot of creatives have quickly pivoted to putting together digital experiences and producing online content to fill the void. All major galleries are putting together virtual tours and exhibitions; artists are opening up and having live conversations; curators are deploying their skills to create deeper storytelling about the art they love.

It feels too obvious to say that this pandemic will change our industry: of course it will. But how will all this digital innovation and openness translate when the quarantine is over: how will we all do what we do?

There is an intense, palpable, earnestness about the last few weeks. All our anxieties and fears not only allowed to be expressed – they're encouraged to be expressed. I believe that this openness happened so quickly because we have a digital outlet. It feels like people are healing by taking this opportunity to express and confront their fears. Even the amount of conversation artists and small business owners are having about money is unprecedented.

This level of vulnerability is new. I was listening to an interview with a child psychologist and she was advising parents on how to talk to their children. Her suggestion was to bring up the more challenging conversations before bedtime because kids feel safer in the dark when their expressions and body language can't be scrutinized. I can't help but see a parallel. I imagine all of the social posts, texts, lives, Zoom conferences, and emails as confessions into the darkness, into the abyss of our empty cities. We've always needed each other; we've just been too scared to admit it. I wonder what we'll build, what we'll rebuild, together.

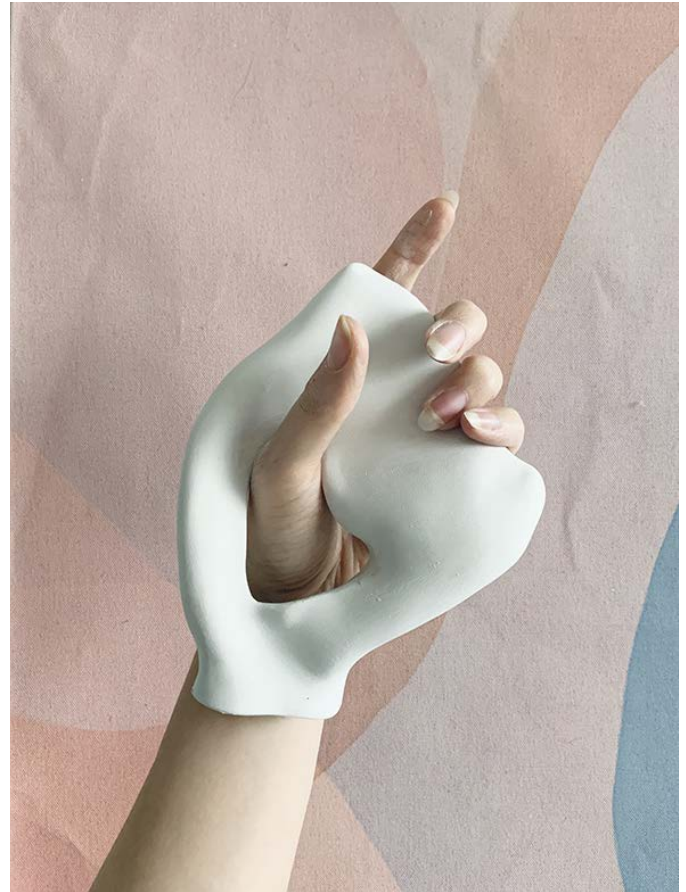
Oksana Berda is a Toronto-based abstract artist. She holds a Master of Arts from the University of New Brunswick in Creative Writing, which informs the narrative quality of her work. Through her paintings she explores our emotional relationship with exterior and interior landscapes. Berda is an avid hiker and gets her inspiration from trips to various parks surrounding Toronto and spending time on Lake Ontario. See more of her work at www.oksanaberda.com and on www.instagram.com/oksanaberda/.



Oksana Berda, studio scene, 2020



Oksana Berda, studio wall, 2020



Oksana Berda, sculpture in the works, 2020

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Considering Performance: In Conversation with Habiba El-Sayed

Habiba El-Sayed, *Insta Gratification (detail)*, digital collage, 2020. All images courtesy of the artist

How are you doing?
You know... considering.

We had to admit it felt odd to be discussing performance art in a time like this. A time where we're both working from home, where I'm sitting on my bed in Montana to interview Habiba in her parent's house in Ontario, where she's quarantining, and unable to work as her workplace (and studio) are closed.

We push forward. Habiba El-Sayed is an artist working in performance and ceramics with a knack for potent and visually striking work. I first encountered her work virtually, as Habiba was featured on the popular @potsinaction Instagram feed for their weekly theme: performance. Her 2016 piece, "Pushback," took place in a large public garden in Halifax, Canada, against a large iron gate; one made to commemorate a victory over "rebels" in the area, which Habiba realized was a convenient code for Indigenous peoples and, sometimes as well, for African Nova Scotians. Drawing from her own difficult experiences with racism in Halifax (Habiba is a Muslim woman of colour), the gate became a monumental metaphor for the barriers that prevent Indigenous folks, immigrants, and people of colour from realizing the promise of progressive multiculturalism in Canada. Habiba stood behind the gate and pushed, squeezed, and moved 800 pounds of red clay through its iron swirls and bars over the course of 6 hours, endeavouring to engage passers-by in a conversation about colonialism in Canada.

As she struggled against this massive



Habiba El-Sayed, Pushback, unfired clay, live performance, 2017

weight, using the gate like a meat grinder or extruder, people were out to have a good time. It was an all-night festival, Nocturne 2017, curated by Anna Sprague and Emily Lawrence, made for viral images and fun, much less for nuanced conversations. Soon, however, friends arrived to help explain and interpret the piece for interested viewers, "gatekeep" the responses of those less engaged.

That sounds exhausting, all of it. Experiencing racism through time as a student, transporting 800 pounds of clay, moving it through a gate with your body for six hours, and then trying to hold space for difficult conversations?

It was. It only began to be effective once we linked our labour ...

... and framed the piece," I interrupt. "Exactly," she says.



Habiba El-Sayed, Home Mark, unfired clay, bricks, water, found materials, live performance, 2018

Since “Pushback,” Habiba’s performances have mostly existed within fine art spaces, where the expectations of audience members are more defined. She uses written statements and titles more and more, inserting her own labour of conversation into her viewers’ engagement and interpretations, recognizing the role of the artist in educating.

I wish I could separate myself from the responsibility of political [art-making], but my lived experience is always at the forefront of my mind.... If you take the educational value of your work seriously, performance seems like the most effective way to gain engagement.

In 2019, Habiba performed “Destruction of a Chaise Lounge” while participating in *Wet: Performing Utopia-Z*, a performance-centered exhibition in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis - Saint Paul, Minnesota, as part of the National Council on Education in Ceramic Arts Conference (NCECA). Behind a large, wet, unfired, ceramic chaise lounge, Habiba projected altered images of Orientalist paintings that featured objectified women “of the East” in nude repose. In stark contrast to

the languid bodies behind her, Habiba, fully clothed, awkwardly positioned herself on the clay furniture, leaning and poking and pushing the chaise closer and closer toward destruction. It was dark and quiet, with the staticky projections only interrupted by small thuds as pieces of clay hit the floor. Beautifully and viscerally, Habiba was deconstructing the falsified Western canon of Muslim women in the arts.

For (a cancelled) NCECA this year, Habiba had planned to show a new work, “Insta Gratification,” which features her own selfies projected over architectural screens made of raw clay that crack, change, and flake throughout the exhibition. The work seems prescient in this time of COVID-19, where the performance of online identity is paramount to connecting with community and audience. Without online personas, we cannot easily access services like unemployment filing, or communities that exist through social media. But Habiba complicates the performance of identity by distorting and obscuring parts of the “selfies”: El-Sayed is in control of what we see, whom we think we know.

As an artist who performs with craft frequently, I ask Habiba how she feels amidst a strong wave of performative craft in the wake of the pandemic. We discuss new performances that are emerging: amateur sewists performing mask-making with images

and videos across multiple platforms; virtual workshops on sourdough bread on the rise. Some to share kindness with friends, neighbourhoods and communities; others to make things we thought would be provided for us as members of our public space, the commons. While well-intended, performing labour can have complicated consequences, especially when using craft practices. What are we saying when we “perform” productivity and labour in a time of crisis? Are we associating moral values with certain kinds of work? Are we romanticising unpaid labour?

I'm not surprised it's mostly women, but it seems like a performance of labour and values ... for something we shouldn't have to be providing [referring to the lack of available personal protective equipment during COVID-19].

These questions are never far removed from craft practices, and will be asked of us, again and again, as we navigate economic hardship and global uncertainty. For perspective, Habiba El-Sayed's performance work is largely unpaid; requires large amounts of unseen labour in preparation; and cannot be sold as a commodity. In fact, Habiba says that one of the most challenging parts of her work is the aftermath: finding organizations that can accept a raw clay donation, wangling its transport, and cleaning up after herself. And without work or a studio, she says, “I don't have the privilege of performing productivity” at the moment.

I ask what her creative practice looks like, now. El-Sayed reminds me that performance is equal parts labour and appearance – read, identity. Habiba tells me she's now taking the time to interrogate her identity with creative (and private) pursuits like poetry and cooking, absent the expectation of educating a wider audience, or moving massive amounts of clay.



Habiba El-Sayed, *Destruction of a Chaise Longue*, unfired clay, projection, live performance, 2019

Inspired by Islamic architecture and human vulnerability, Toronto-based ceramic artist Habiba El-Sayed uses a variety of materials, performance and temporal techniques to illustrate her concepts. Her work focuses on connecting to, exploring and interpreting aspects of her identity, particularly as a Muslim woman living in a post-9/11 world.

Habiba holds an Advanced Diploma from Sheridan College in Ceramics (2014) and a BFA in Ceramics from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (2016). She has received various scholarships, including the Clifford Scholarship (2014) and was accepted as an Artist-in-Residence in Ceramics at Harbourfront Centre in 2016. You can learn more about her work and contact her at www.habibael-sayed.com.

M.C. Baumstark holds her MA in Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Histories from OCAD University and is the Resident Art Historian for the Socially Engaged Craft Collective. She is an independent curator, critic, and ceramic artist, and currently serves as the Executive Director of the Lewistown Art Center in Central Montana.



FUSION MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT
FEATURED STUDENT ARTIST, CLAY

Christy Chor [WEBSITE](#) [EMAIL](#)

I care about the future of the natural world amid disastrous interventions by humans. Planet Earth is in danger. Survival of humanity is no longer guaranteed. My work reflects on causes and consequences of our ecological crisis; triggers the alarm bells of disaster; and galvanizes the audience into action to save nature for generations to come.

My body of work emphasizes the contrast between poetic moments and chaotic happenings in nature. With a combination of raw clays and non-biodegradable particles, I have sculpted a landscape, combining representations of natural elements such as clouds, waves, stones, sand, and fossils with elements of human industrial waste. The raw industrial ingredients and contrasting finishes work together and interact as a symphony of silent materials that speak for themselves. Clay is an essence of the earth; and ceramics, a magical play of earth, water, air, and fire. Water minimizes tension but also creates tenacity as it mixes with clay.

Like the interplay of fire and air, of water and earth, my works are a never-ending story evoking emotions deep inside the heart of viewers and, at the same time, giving them an animated catalyst to breakthrough boundaries.





FUSION MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT
FEATURED STUDENT ARTIST, GLASS

Zihao Xiong [EMAIL](#) [INSTAGRAM](#)

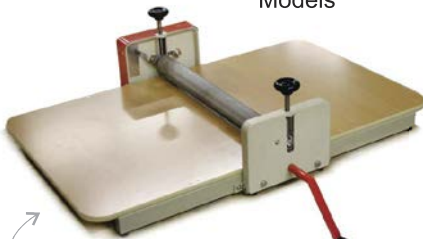
My work is an examination of identity, highlighting the difference between inner truth and external perceived identity. I was born in a city built in mountains in China, and grew up in a modern society while surrounded by the beauty of nature. As this unique duality fascinated me, I have a desire to find the link between contradiction and balance. Duality is always present in my world: the past is the future; science and theology come from the same source; artificiality is also a part of nature; the external world is the internal world. Most of my works use glass as a medium, as I believe that the transparency and natural fluidity of glass at high temperatures can be used to represent the creator's emotion and inner spirit.



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