



ERRATIC BEHAVIOUR

27 January to 21 April 2024

Catherine Telford Keogh, Diane Borsato, Kelly Jazvac, Laura Moore,
Meghan Price, Robert Hengeveld, Tahir Carl Karmali, Ṭsēmā Igharas

Erratic Behaviour is an exhibition that brings together contemporary artworks that centre human entanglements with geologic events, processes or entities, acknowledging rocks as vibrant matter that shape our understanding of time and place. While some artworks playfully evoke the animacy of boulders and rocks, others point to a world that is increasingly shaped by the climate crisis and faced with dwindling resources.

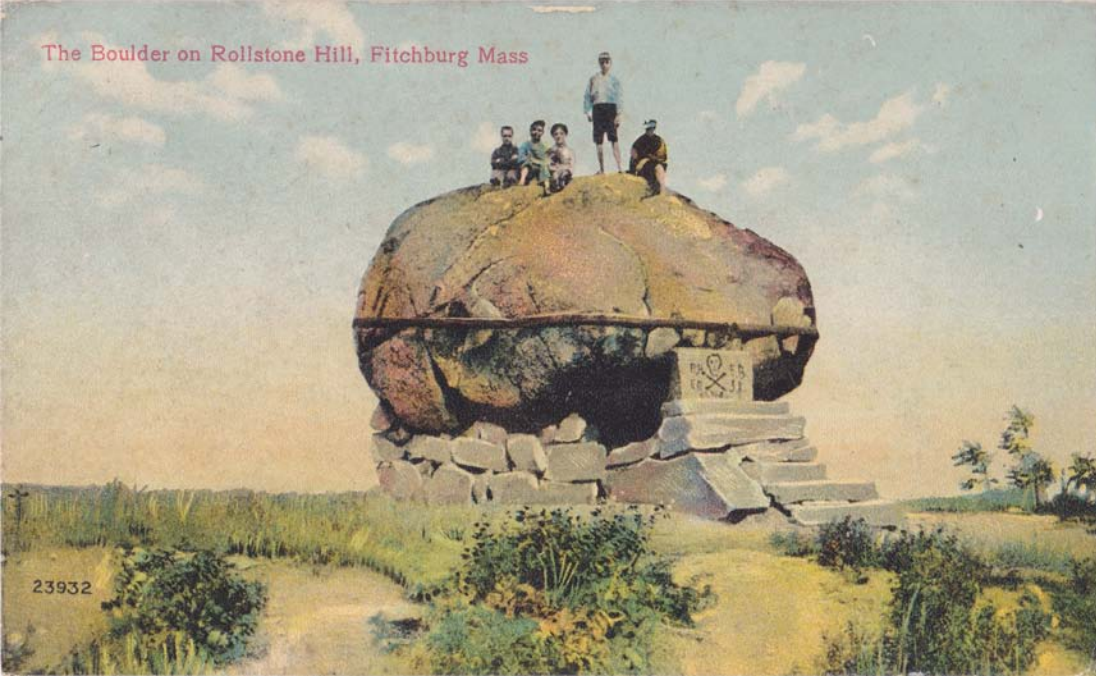
The dual meaning of the exhibition's title suggests that humans themselves are exhibiting the most 'erratic behaviour' of all—the industrial extraction, processing, consumption and disposal of natural resources has produced turbulent and unstable conditions. Many of the artworks brought together here resist dominant patterns of waste and consumption through a shared commitment to working with existing, found, abandoned, salvaged and reclaimed materials.

The featured artists offer a range of experimental approaches to the geologic, situating themselves and the viewer within the dynamic accumulation, erosion, flow, extraction and transformation of earth materials.

Katie Lawson
Curator



The Boulder on Rollstone Hill, Fitchburg Mass



Erratic Behaviour

By Katie Lawson

Rollstone is a glacial erratic—a large rock that migrated and was deposited in place as a result of changes in the ice sheets that once covered the continent during previous geologic eras. An erratic can travel hundreds of kilometres. Before Fitchburg, Massachusetts was settled in the eighteenth century, the Rollstone Boulder had already been a part of a slow-moving journey, hitching a ride on ice that once covered southern New Hampshire. The landmark would become a popular destination for hikers, but was threatened by both nearby quarrying operations and elemental erosion. Major cracks had formed by 1899, prompting attempts at repair with cement patchwork and the addition of the iron belt. By 1929, more drastic interventions to ‘preserve’ this giant rock were set in motion, having become a cherished part of local identity. Rollstone was blown apart in order to move and reassemble the resulting fragments in the town’s Upper Commons.

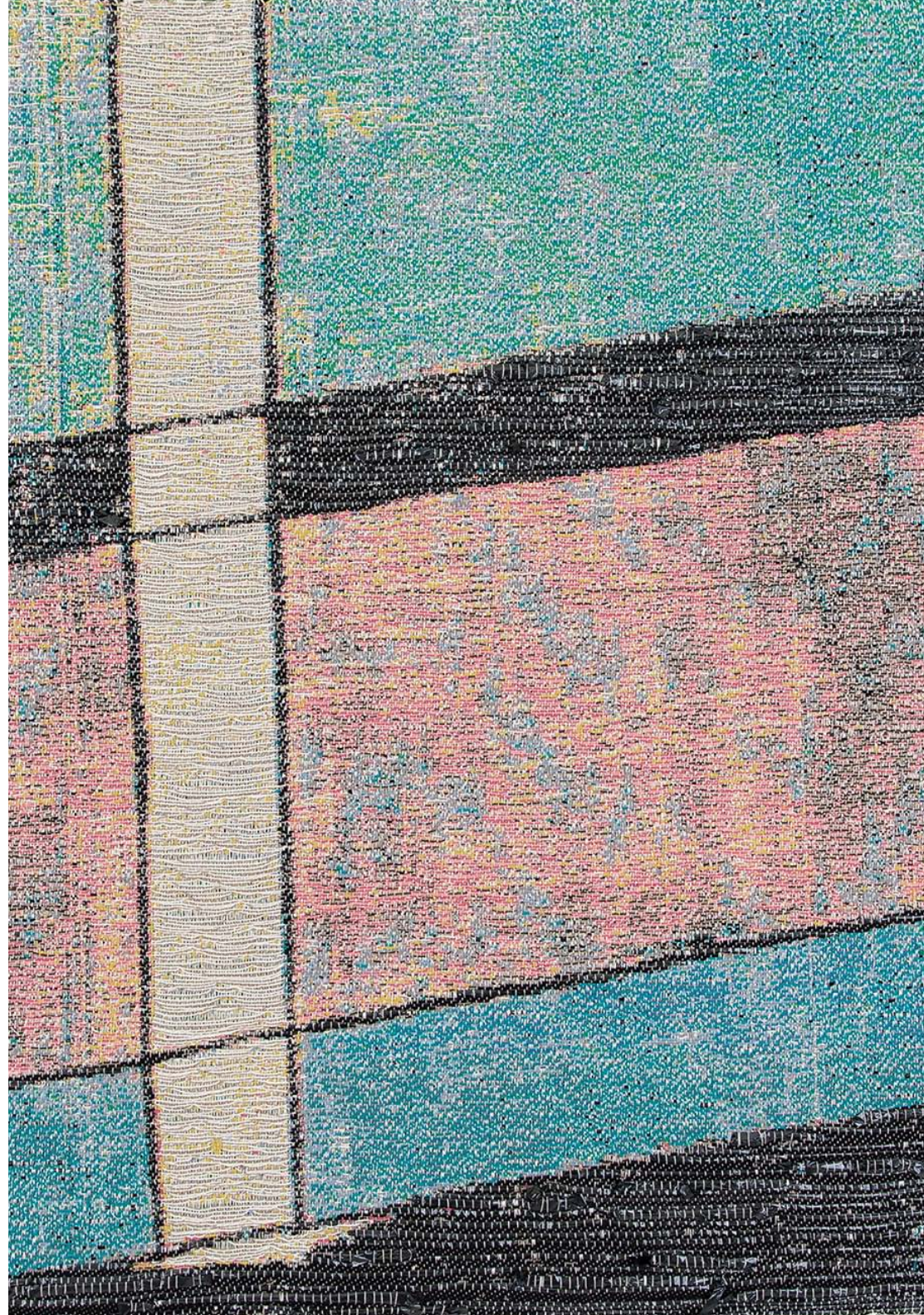
During a studio visit with Meghan Price in 2018, I was captivated by an unusual image as the artist handed me one of several antique postcards that she had collected from the early twentieth century. Depicted in one hand-tinted photograph is a large boulder that sits perched on a base of smaller rocks. A set of stairs lead to a plaque that shares the story of Rollstone Boulder. Five figures rest on top of this Fitchburg landmark and I imagine they might have found their footing thanks to the large iron band that is wrapped around the geologic body like a belt. The backside of the postcard offers clues to the peculiar history of this ten-foot-tall, 110 tonne piece of granite that has been subject to movement and transformation by both geologic and human forces.

Different moments in the story of this landmark are captured through the discrepancies in form it takes across the postcards that **Meghan Price** has collected—issued on various dates. As a series, *Every Body Is Moving* (2019) extends the artist’s long-standing interest in questions of time, geologic formations and human relationships with the Earth. Just as the erratic serves as a point of connection between two disparate places, these postcards once

travelled through the mail to connect human relations. The artist's postcard collection is featured in *Erratic Behaviour*, an exhibition that brings together contemporary artworks that centre human entanglements with geologic events, processes or entities, acknowledging rocks as vibrant matter that shape our understanding of time and place.¹ Works by Catherine Telford Keogh, Diane Borsato, Kelly Jazvac, Laura Moore, Meghan Price, Robert Hengeveld, Tahir Carl Karmali and Ṭēmā Igharas offer a range of experimental approaches to the geologic, situating themselves and the viewer within the dynamic accumulation, erosion, flow, extraction and transformation of earth materials.

In addition to loaning her collection of erratic postcards, Meghan Price is also represented in this exhibition through *Hitchcock's Coal* (2022), a series of three weavings based on details from an early 19th century scientific illustration by Orra White Hitchcock. Meghan's textiles are woven from ink on linen and video tape (usually a mixture of plastics and metal coating), bringing together the medium of one of America's first female scientific illustrator and her original subject, the strata of coal. For early geologists of Orra White Hitchcock's time, debates over glacial theory and erratic boulders played a major role in attempts to make sense of the landscapes around them and the most recent part of the geological record. Rocks tell stories when you know how to read them.

The brevity of human life is fundamentally at odds with the deep time of geology which means it is rare to witness the slow change of a landmass or movement of an erratic, but it does not mean these materials are static or fixed. **Robert Hengeveld's** *Where Phantoms Meet* (2017-2024) brings two large and lifelike boulders into the space of the gallery, oscillating between stillness and short-lived bursts of movement. Housed within each boulder, omni-directional robotic platforms have been programmed as dance partners—Ike and Obelix² perform a perplexing choreography, responding to one another and to the space around them. This durational performance falls silent in the moments of pause, while their movements are accompanied by the gentle hum of their engines. *Where Phantoms Meet* suggests that instead of understanding rocks





Like kittens.



as passive or inert, we might recognize them as a part of an active and ever-shifting relationship with humans and contemporary life. Robert's broader practice as an artist takes up the increasing disconnect between humans and the natural world, but with a refreshing sense of humour and a playful approach to the line between fact and fiction. While taken to a level of absurdity, the presence of these dynamic characters softens the separation of geologic and biologic bodies; we are, after all, composed of many of the same elements—like calcium, magnesium, iron and phosphorous.

In **Diane Borsato's** video work *Gems and Minerals* (2018), it is not the rocks that move, but the bodies of four human collaborators whose expressive performances interpret the origins and surprising quirks of specimens within the Royal Ontario Museum's gallery of Earth's Treasures. One performer slowly moves through a series of gestures alongside large-scale geodes in a site-responsive dance; contorting her body to mimic the various crystalline and bulbous forms. Among a sea of glass vitrines and display cases, there are few exposed specimens that visitors are invited to touch. In one such case, the performer removes her shoe and drags the sole of her foot along the rock's edge. The three remaining interpreters use American Sign Language (ASL) to share stories of "the hydro-geologist who keeps accidentally swallowing pearls, the guard who relieves his arthritis against the copper exhibit, the silver ore that attracts bats, and the asteroid on an ominous trajectory toward our future descendants."³ While at times fantastical or comical, the interpreters also reveal the darker side of our relationship with geological resources, attending to the violence of extractive industries and harmful impacts of multinational corporations—the very same ones who sponsor museum exhibitions and cultural institutions.

It is with Diane's work that the exhibition starts to reveal a possible dual meaning of the phrase *Erratic Behaviour*. With the works described so far, the exhibition's title playfully evokes the animacy of geologic entities, recognizing the ways in which all matter is lively, interconnected and in process. Meghan, Robert and Diane embrace a more fluid boundary between humans and

object, positioning geologic entities as significant relations within an entangled web of matter and beings. This, however, is not representative of the dominant worldview in the West, as we continue to impose a human-centric hierarchy that situates the geologic as passive and inert, the value of which is only recognized for its use in various industries dependent on the extraction, processing, manufacturing and waste of earthly matter. In a world that is increasingly shaped by the climate crisis and faced with dwindling resources, perhaps it is humans themselves that are exhibiting the most erratic behaviour of all—that is, in its colloquial use—it is turbulent and unstable. Much of the artwork found in this exhibition resists these patterns of consumption and waste through a shared commitment to working with existing, found, abandoned, salvaged and reclaimed materials. This is not only true of the artwork, but of the curatorial approach to exhibition design and methods of display, working with the materials on hand at the hosting institution.

The industrial extraction, processing and consumption of natural resources impacts fragile ecosystems and environments, but also the communities that these operations displace or depend on for labour. This aspect of the geologic is taken up by **Tahir Carl Karmali** with his series of textile sculptures *STRATA* (2017-2019), works that consist of raffia fabric dyed with a cobalt, aluminum and copper solution. The Nairobi-born and Brooklyn-based artist attends to the perpetuation of colonial strategies of material extraction in Africa for the benefit of the wealthiest nations—namely, the mining of cobalt in the Congo. Cobalt has become a key commodity and export as a metal used in the manufacturing of rechargeable batteries, but the dangerous labour of extraction is outsourced to local communities with little regard for human rights violations or ecological destruction.

The textile panels of *Muddy Heart* (2019) are suspended from a long copper pipe, overlapping one another and creating visual strata, a visual nod to the mineral stratification of the mining site. The artist describes a process of “reverse mining” to produce the dye solution, dismantling old American cell phone batteries purchased on eBay to salvage their precious metals. Now based in





the United States, Tahir's critical approach to the global supply chain moves beyond a conceptual engagement with the impact of industrial production on people and materials. He maintains a commitment to fair-trade sourcing and working with communities in the creation of his artworks—for *STRATA*, the artist sourced ethically produced raffia from artisans in the Congo, supporting traditional Congolese Kuba production.⁴ As the reality of an energy transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewables comes into focus, the true cost of clean energy is one of the most pressing issues of our time, given the exponential demand for the mining of cobalt and related precious metals that would make green energy possible.⁵

T̥ēmā Igharas similarly uses everyday materials to take up issues of industry, but firmly situated within the Canadian context. *high-grade copper anomalies* (2015-ongoing)⁶ consists of half-melted handfuls of pennies, producing small abstract sculptures that hover between what is recognizable as the one-cent piece and coppery obscurity. Even before the unit of currency was removed from circulation by the federal government in 2012, the penny was reduced from copper to a cheaper zinc composite in 1997, a manufacturing transition that Steven Cottingham reads alongside T̥ēmā's sculpture to "signify the

liquidity necessitated by capitalist economies."⁷ The relative value and meaning of this precious metal shifts depending on the context: as a member of Tahltan First Nation, the artist recognizes copper as one of the most culturally significant materials for Indigenous communities across Turtle Island; for mining corporations, it is a prized material for the accumulation of wealth in a free market. Much like the cobalt mines of Tahir's work, the extraction and processing of copper ores from igneous and sedimentary rock devastates ecosystems, producing a disproportionate amount of toxic waste. This comes in addition to continued colonial land theft, brutal security operations and human rights violations for workers. T̥ēmā's practice reveals links between the body and landscapes, proposing that everyday objects, like coins, connect us to the site of mines, forming a material connection between the individual and plunder of natural resources.

While a cell phone or a coin can sit in the palm of your hand, their links to earth materials less immediately obvious, geology regularly envelops us in the luxury materials that have become commonplace as flooring or counter tops. Vast planes of marble and granite link commercial and domestic spaces with their reliance on material funneled through construction firms and big box home improvement chains. Catherine Telford Keogh's recent work uses stone as



a material and conceptual anchor in conversations about the flow of materials through our world, doubling as a literal building block and key cultural signifier within a multi-billion-dollar industry. One slab of stone can tell a story of transformation through geologic time and uneven material migrations, having begun its life millions of years ago in the form of marine organisms, whose skeletal remains were gradually cemented alongside shells into beds of limestone, subject to extreme temperatures and pressures of ongoing planetary transformation. For her recent exhibition *Shelf Life* (2023), the accompanying text traces the particular path of the material used by the artist—quarried in Pakistan, the green Onyx was shipped to a distributor in the Bronx before moving on to various construction projects, including a Best Western Hotel in the Tri-State area. Leftovers from the shipment would circulate on Facebook Marketplace in a thriving second-hand local economy where Catherine would find them. By contrast to the long, slow journey of geologic matter, Catherine also enacts material experimentations with states of matter in life cycles closer to our own, whether that is the perishable vegetables suspended in ComposiMold® or compacted trash and plant matter.⁸

If the artworks in *Erratic Behaviour* were to occupy temporal positions, I might suggest that the work of Meghan Price, Robert Hengeveld and Diane Borsato are connected to the past through an engagement with deep time, geological movement and a fascination with the origins of earth materials, while Tahir Carl Kamali, Catherine Telford Keogh and T̄ēmā Igharas linger in our present moment, sensitive to the extraction, transformation and flow of matter within the web of capitalism in a globalized world dominated by consumer culture. But what will define human-geologic relationships as we look towards an uncertain future, particularly given accelerating planetary change?

In 2013, at the height of debates around the anthropogenic marker in the future rock record, artist **Kelly Jazvac** began a research project alongside oceanographer Charles Moore, geologist Patricia Corcoran and activists Noni and Ron Sanford and Megan Lamson on a type of stone they proposed to call 'Plastiglomerate'.⁹ This new kind of stone was created through the sedimentation



of melted plastic and natural materials like coral, sand, wood and volcanic rock, in the case of samples collected from Kamilo Beach, Hawaii—the shores of which are subject to deposits from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. In addition to co-authoring scientific articles on these peculiar objects, Kelly also displays them as a readymade artwork, existing alongside the artist's extensive bodies of work that use salvaged plastics. As objects in the gallery, they feel simultaneously familiar and strange, an embodiment of human and geologic entanglements; as a "new" kind of rock, they urge the viewer to consider the ways in which earth materials continue to transform alongside (and as a result of) us.

Is this the material legacy we leave behind in our wake? What might future beings make of the waste of contemporary life? **Laura Moore** offers a speculative alternative with her *Future Fossils* (2021), similarly uncanny objects that urge viewers to look twice. What at first might appear to be a display of somewhat ordinary rocks, covered in a light dusting of mossy foliage, the familiar forms of technological hardware emerge, seemingly embedded into



the surface or, as the title suggests, a fossilized specimen. In her practice, Laura has consistently attended to individual and cultural connections and memory through working with printed circuit boards. These are often salvaged from handheld electronics, obsolete or damaged devices of her own or those inherited or found abandoned. With the built-in obsolescence of technology, there is an abundance of material to work from. During a studio visit with the artist, the entanglement of humans and technology, and thus geology, is carefully mapped through material connections—that is to say, she might point to a work and have an origin story for both the rocky sample or model she is working from, in addition to the circuit board that may have come from a friend's Blackberry, Gameboy, or camera. These are erratic objects, ones that, one way or another, have moved through time and space to arrive here, offering the story of their own creation.

Notes

1. Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
2. The names given by Robert to the two boulders.
3. Borsato, Diane. "Gems and Minerals," *Diane Borsato*. Accessed 22 March 2023. <https://www.dianebersato.net/#/gems-and-minerals/>
4. Karmali, Tahir. "Collaborative Creation" Interview by Dani Shen. *BOMB Magazine* (16 Dec. 2019). Accessed 22 March 2023. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/collaborative-creation-tahir-karmali-interviewed/>
5. While the Democratic Republic of Congo has exceptional reserves of cobalt, this issue is a part of a globally entangled web of multinational corporations and geologic formations that hold desired minerals.
6. Previously exhibited as *What Is Left*.
7. Cottingham, Steven. "'Black Gold' — Ṭēmā" *C Magazine* (Summer 2021): 81-82.
8. These elements come together in two works that make their debut as a part of this exhibition, *Pallet/Palate with Expired Foxy® Iceberg Lettuce (2Q572517ZWL065FieldC3355)* (2024) and *Hardgoods & Dolly II* (2024).
9. Robertson, Kirsty. "Plastiglomerate," *E-flux Journal* (December 2016). Accessed 2 April 2023. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/78/82878/plastiglomerate/>

Featured Programming

Curator Tour with Katie Lawson

Thursday, 1 February

7:00 p.m., Free

This walking tour invites every body to become entangled within a web of matter and beings. Curator Katie Lawson will be our guide throughout, probing the boundaries of the human and non-human and grounding us amongst the erratic behaviour that produces such turbulent and unstable conditions around the world.



Opening Party with DJ Lance Black

Friday, 9 February

6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Members, with RSVP

7:00 - 10:00 p.m. All, Free

Come together to celebrate the opening of our new exhibitions, *Erratic Behaviour* and *Bangishimo: The Medicines We Carry*. Dance the night away with a special guest DJ. Several artists and guest curators will be in attendance.

Multi-Lens Existence with Dr. Jenelle Rouse

Thursday, 29 February

6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Free, with advanced registration

This interactive wordless workshop enables participants to broaden their horizons toward language and accessibility, exploring how we create a language of movement through dance using emotion and thoughts – without the use of any signed or spoken languages.

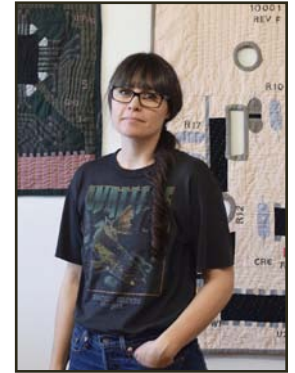


Artist Talk with Laura Moore

Sunday, 17 March

2:00 p.m., Free

Artist Laura Moore will focus on her fossil research that has taken her from Sweden to Alberta, exploring humanities complex relationship with technology, memory and the slippery terrain between transistors and tectonics.



Artist Talks are supported by:



Reciprocal Landscapes with Jane Mah Hutton

Thursday, 4 April

7:00 p.m., Free - with advanced registration

Landscape architect and researcher Jane Mah Hutton is joined by curator Katie Lawson for an evening engaging with material flows, reciprocal landscapes and geologic imaginaries. This program welcomes participation. Attendees are encouraged to bring their experiences and questions to share.



Visit kwag.ca for more information about our featured programs and to save your spot (as applicable).

Recommended Reading

- Beaton, Kate. *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2022.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Cusk, Rachel. *Marble in Metamorphosis*. Canberra and Melbourne: Molonglo, 2022.
- Ellsworth, Elizabeth and Jamie Kruse. *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life*. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013.
- Flynn, Maggie. "Trickle Down," *C Magazine*. Issue 152, 2022.
- Hutton, Jane. "Erratic Imaginaries," *Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Design, Deep Time, Science and Philosophy*. Ed. Etienne Turpin. Open Humanities Press, 2017.
- Hutton, Jane. *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2020.
- Jazvac, Kelly. *Plastiglomerates*. London: Durable Good, 2017.
- Kara, Siddharth. *Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers Our Lives*. New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2023.
- Liboiron, Max. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Macfarlane, Robert. *Underland*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020.
- Parika, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. St. Clair, Kassia. *The Secret Lives of Color*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017.
- The Classroom Drawings of Orra White Hitchcock*. Bolton: Palatino Press, 2014.
- Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. Oxford: Routledge, 2020.





KWAG Exhibition Acknowledgements

Exhibition Curator	Katie Lawson
KWAG Curator	Darryn Doull
Registrar	Jennifer Bullock
Lead Preparator	Lawrence Salza
Installation Technician	Soroush Dabiri
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We also recognize the contributions of KWAG staff at all levels of the organization. Every employee, volunteer and friend of the Gallery has an important role in the success of our programming. A full staff listing is available at kwag.ca.

Image Credits

- Cover: Tahir Carl Karmali, *Muddy Heart*, 2019. Raffia, copper and cobalt oxide. 152.4 x 111.8 x 15.2 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg 2: Tahir Carl Karmali, *Muddy Heart* (detail), 2019. Raffia, copper and cobalt oxide. 152.4 x 111.8 x 15.2 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg. 3: (Top) Meghan Price, *Every Body is Moving*, 2015-ongoing. Postcards from the collection of the Artist. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of Meghan Price and United Contemporary. © Meghan Price; (Bottom) Robert Hengeveld, *Where Phantoms Meet*, 2017-2024. Omni-directional robot boulders. Photo courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg. 6: Meghan Price, *Hitchcock's Coal 1*, 2022. Woven cotton and video tape. 80.6 x 72.4 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg. 7: (Top & Bottom) Diane Borsato, *Gems and Minerals* still (detail), 2018. Digital video with sound. 25:00 mins. Shot at the Royal Ontario Museum. Performers: Val Calam, Ralista Rodriguez, Lukas Malkowski and Sage Lovell. Video production by Jason Tan. Photos courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg. 10: Tahir Carl Karmali, *Rwenzoris*, 2018. Raffia, lithium, steel and cobalt oxide. 121.9 x 38.1 x 12.7 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist.
- Pg. 11: T̥ēmā Igharas, *high grade copper anomalies*, 2015-ongoing. Canadian pennies. Dimensions variable. Photo by KWAG.
- Pg. 12: Catherine Telford Keogh, *Hardgoods & Dolly II* (detail), 2024. Found compacted paper, misc objects, cement, rubber, packaging, sand and plant matter from Dead Horse Bay, extruded aluminum tubes, aluminum casters. 71.1 x 49.5 x 19.1 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist, by Katie Lawson.
- Pg. 14: Kelly Jazvac, *Plastiglomerate* (excerpt), 2013. Found plastic and beach sediment, including sand, basalt rock, wood and coral. Dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the Artist, by Jeff Elstone.
- Pg. 15: Laura Moore, *TL074CN*, 2021. Hydrocal gypsum cement, gouache and scenic foliage. 7.6 x 7.6 x 6.4 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist, by LF Documentation.
- Pg. 17: (Top) Bio photo of Katie Lawson, provided by the Curator; (Bottom) Bio photo of Dr. Jenelle Rouse, 2023, by Rae Rezwel.
- Pg. 18: (Top) Bio photo of Laura Moore, courtesy of the Artist; (Bottom) Bio photo of Jane Mah Hutton, courtesy of the speaker.
- Pg 20: Katie Lawson, *Gneiss boulder erratic: Fogo Island*, 2023. Digital image from 35mm film scan. Photo by the Curator.
- Pg. 21: Laura Moore, *CS04E*, 2021. Hydrocal gypsum cement and gouache. 8.9 x 6.4 x 2.5 cm. Photo courtesy of the Artist, by LF Documentation.

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Hours:

Monday: Closed to the public

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Sunday: 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

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