

FRASER
VALLEY
BIENNIAL
2023

Catalogue of the exhibition *2023 Fraser Valley Biennial* presented at The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, January 27 – May 6, 2023, and at our regional partners, the Abbotsford Arts Council, Kent Harrison Arts Council, Chilliwack Visual Artists Association, Langley Arts Council.

Curated by Candace Couse

Published by The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford
32388 Veterans Way
Abbotsford, BC V2T 0B3
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thereach.ca

Graphic design by Anjuman Grewal

ISBN 978-1-988311-33-3
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Cover image: Paula Funk, *Figure Drawing: Man on Stool*, 2022, embroidery floss on dropcloth, 18 x 18 in.



Selected Artists

Sarah Louise Brammer	Scott Moore
Olivia de Fleuriot Perry	Luke Pardy
Michael Doerksen	Amberlie Perkin
Amy Dyck	Devon Riley
Paula Funk	Laura Rosengren
Kat Grabowski	Ellen Scobie
Erica Grimm	Jennifer Shepit
Cara Guri	Shel Stefan
Davida Kidd	Tracie Stewart
Lorena Krause	Cobi Timmermans
Russell Leng	Qahraman Yousif



Curated by Candace Couse

STATEMENT FROM THE CURATOR

The body, as a subject, has reached heightened importance in contemporary art practice. One can argue that historically the body often has been taken too lightly: of course, it is ever-present, but its treatment was often uncritical and apolitical; its presence captivated human attention largely through beauty and its self-referential form. It is not until relatively recently in (that too-pervasive) Western thought that “the body” is recontextualized as “embodiment,” where lived, sensual experience becomes a—or the—preeminent site for knowledge. Even “mind” (made up of thinking and reason), that darling of philosophy positioned opposite to the body historically, is now primarily recognized to come singularly through a bodily engagement with the world. All thought, all knowledge, moves through the sensing, feeling body.

The body is taught, and it teaches. The body transforms environments through labour. It is the

slate on which scripts are written, and here the body keeps both secrets and score. It is porous, leaky, boundaryless, and thus not fully controllable by historical or dominant understandings. The body, in this context, opens as a site of meaning where it is understood as product and producer of biological or social limitations and constructs. In short, the body becomes a place for experimentation as it holds multiple and contradictory representations rich for exploration.

With this appetite for exploring the power of the body, I appealed to artists across the Lower Mainland, the traditional territory of the Stó:lō people (S’ólh Téméxw), for submissions to the seventh iteration of the Fraser Valley Biennial. The resulting exhibition comprises of outstanding artwork carefully selected from a pool of Fraser Valley artists asked to address this year’s theme. The works represent the diverse and deeply meaningful ways we think about and through

the body, exploring illness, gender, sexuality and disability narratives, the body as an organism, the body’s relationship to technology, the labouring body, the body as a site for pain and pleasure, and more. The exhibition speaks to the power of the body.

Since its launch in 2011, the Biennial has facilitated and contextualized local visual art practice while broadening the public’s awareness and appreciation of the immense creative talent that finds its home in the Fraser Valley. The full exhibition will premiere at The Reach from January to May 2023. Smaller, specially curated versions will be presented by regional partners throughout the remainder of the 2023 calendar year. This year, the Biennial welcomes two new presenting partners—The Langley Arts Council and the Fort Gallery—in addition to our long-time and highly-valued partners at the Abbotsford Arts Council, Kent Harrison Arts

Council, and Chilliwack Visual Artists Association.

I’m truly grateful for the opportunity to open myself and others up to a variety of strong, dedicated artists working the region. I would also like to spotlight the contributions of Kate Bradford, The Reach’s Assistant Curator, and the early work of Adrienne Fast, Curator of Art & Visual Culture. Both worked side by side with me on all facets of the Biennale. The depth and breadth of their collective experience and engagement were instrumental in creating such a strong show. Finally, I remain forever grateful to all the artists, organizations, staff, and viewers who collectively are the originators and meaning-makers of this particular encounter with “the body.”

Candace Couse
Abbotsford, BC
January 2023

Sarah Louise Brammer – Abbotsford

I have metastatic breast cancer and have been in treatment for two years. The artwork I am exhibiting is confessional, autobiographical, documentary and imagined. The work explores the resilience of the body in the face of illness and the often cold and clinical world of cancer treatment. Art, the imagined space and the dreamscape, becomes a place of healing and refuge, where the vulnerability and strength of the body can coexist.



Sarah Louise Brammer, *The Menu Part II*, 2022, mixed media sculpture, installation dimensions variable

Olivia de Fleuriot Perry – Abbotsford

I mend the accidental tears and cuts. Jude sees me using a needle and thread and tells me to be careful not to poke my finger.

The muted shades of nylon are soft to touch. I feel a sense of shelter when I place it on my lap. My hands gently hold the delicate fabric as I stitch the harsh open hole I made with scissors. I tenderly stab the fabric, repeatedly weaving the thread through in loops. The sharp needle threatens to pierce my skin. Jude watches with nervous anticipation. Hoping I take care of myself. Hoping I take care of the fabric. I feel his eyes on me, and I reassure him I am trying my best even if my best falls short. I lose my sense of place. I drop the fabric, and it slips off my legs onto the floor.

Jude jumps up and grabs it before I can. He puts it to his cheek and looks at me with knowing. Knowing my pain. Knowing my despair. He knows it. He has felt when I am lost with no map to bring me home. I am his sense of place, his home. His eyes stare into my own, and he hands the nude covering to me. He gently whispers, “Here you go, mommy. You got to be careful.” I respond, “I will try my best.” His words bring me back. I smile and wrap the covering over us, and he giggles. I hear Elias crying for me, and I leave Jude alone with fabric over his face, watching me walk away.

“Tomorrow will be no different from today” is from Brene Brown’s book, *Atlas of the Heart* (p. 103).

Olivia de Fleuriot Perry,
*Tomorrow will be no
different from today*,
2022, photograph,
24 x 30 in.



Michael Doerksen – Chilliwack

Bots is a large pile of life-size, featureless, red velvet ragdolls inspired by crowd conflict simulation software and body pillows. The title refers to *social bots* which are sophisticated internet applications that run automated tasks that mimic human behavior, such as like chatting, posting, and myriad other ways to manipulate information online. Ten of these bots are presented in a *dogpile*, which refers to both a physical act and a social media phenomenon wherein a crowd focuses derision at a single person. Online, this often involves deploying hordes of bots that artificially inflate the level of interest in an event.

The work embodies the distorting effect of social media in that its soft smooth surface is inviting, stimulating, and comforting, yet it superficially connects us to others that could be just lifeless, silicon-based programs. In the context of my art practice, this work is a formal departure from the hard materials and industrial methods of my prior work, while also expanding my use of figuration and group sculpture to examine contemporary social relationships involving crowds, both human and artificial.



Michael Doerksen, *Bots*, 2022, velvet, ploy-fill stuffing, 10 soft sculptures, approximately 65 x 24 x 10 inches each, installation dimensions variable

Amy Dyck – Langley

The book *No Bad Parts* by Richard Schwartz posits that there are many parts of us that work together as sort of a “family system,” making up the whole of us. Some of these parts of us can hold difficult memories and become protective of us and cause us to lash out, others hold our hopes or joy. These parts of us can come into conflict, such as when we feel torn between two choices.

Emerging from my psychological and material exploration comes a collection of female figures with depth, complexity, vulnerability, and strength. Pulling from lived experience with disability and C-PTSD, the creatures in the work are nuanced and strange, broken and fierce, and filled with conflicting parts as they figure out how to move forward and fight back in a world that can be rife with problems.

Amy Dyck,
Chaos and Order, 2021,
spray paint with charcoal
and oils on cradle board,
30 x 24 in.



Paula Funk – Abbotsford

Art is a way for me to explore narratives about the experiences of women in a complex and demanding social structure. Subjects are drawn from images seen in dreams, metaphors, and phrases harvested in conversation with other women. Realist figures on undefined grounds in a palette of saturated and pastel hues open up conversations on topics from gender roles to the ways women create wellness for themselves through connection and friendship.

Man on Stool is based on an image that came to me in a dream. Using the traditionally feminine craft of embroidery to depict this surreal figure within the construct of a live drawing studio is a way to layer messaging about gender, fantasy, and art historical rhetoric in a single simple image.



Paula Funk,
Figure Drawing: Man on Stool,
2022, embroidery floss on
dropcloth, 18 x 18 in.

Kat Grabowski – Langley

This work is from my series *Finding The Pieces*, which portrays a gathering of young women in a secluded cabin in the woods. This series alludes to the presence of nature and its connection to womanhood, however the focus is on the interior cabin environment which acts as a sanctuary that allows the women to exist outside the constraints of performative, conditioned behaviour, offering insight into the vulnerabilities and intimacies of the female experience. Created in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts degree at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, these images visualize a safe space for unpacking the religious ideologies imposed on young women within faith-based communities and how these ideologies shape their relationships with their female bodies and the spaces they inhabit.

Kat Grabowski,
Finding the Pieces 3, 2020,
analogue film, inkjet print,
30 x 40 in.

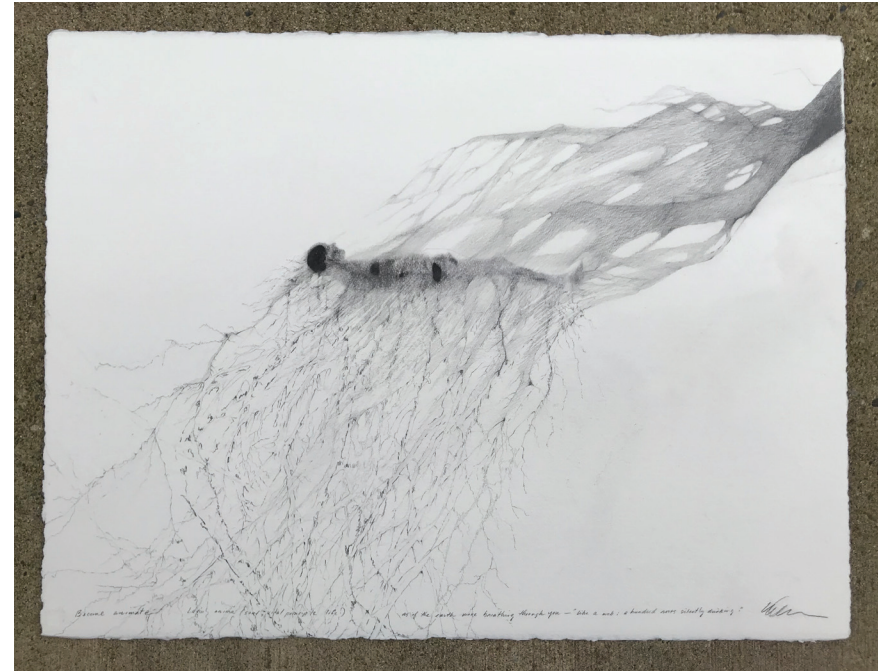


Erica Grimm – Abbotsford

Become animate, as if the earth were breathing through you was made to process a conversation with philosopher Heesoon Bai on climate change during the COVID-19 pandemic. This drawing is an elaborate field note, documenting our COVID walking conversation.

My purpose in this drawing was to materialize the “thick interconnectivity” that Heesoon suggests we reclaim in the face of the global climate crisis. Rather than sounding a high alert alarm to “fix” nature, Heesoon proposes another way. Become whole, she says; that is, become one with the ten thousand things. In an attempt to speculatively re-metaphor human earth relations, a human PET scan is shown fully entangled in a flow of circulatory systems. Branches become rivers, rivers become roots. It is an invitation to extend our subjectivity and imagine intersubjectivity, as if the earth were breathing through you.

Erica Grimm,
*Become animate, as if the
earth were breathing through
you*, 2021, graphite and road
sediment on rag paper,
22 x 30 in.



Cara Guri – Langley

My practice examines the transactional nature of portraiture: the information that is given to the viewer and that which is withheld. Through my paintings I question the conventions and tropes of historical portraiture by translating them into my current reality in a way that challenges and disrupts their original intent.

In this *Paper Dolls* series, print outs of idealized figures from the canon of Western art are cut out, crumpled and reconfigured into modified still lives before being retranslated back into paintings. These paintings complicate and question how and why these bodies were represented, and challenge the viewer to consider how they connect with the depicted figures. The subjects in my paintings hold space for themselves that the viewer cannot fully access, rather than existing to be looked at easily.

I am interested in the relative slowness of painting as a platform for consideration. I use the process of creating a piece to observe, consider, decode and recode the encounters that I have with both myself and the outside world, and to question what it means to see and be seen.



Cara Guri, *Introvert*, 2022, oil on panel, 21 x 29.5 in.

Davida Kidd – Langley

When I was a child, Dr. Suess's "Horton Hears a Who" left an indelible imprint on my imagination, introducing me to the notion of a tiny world on a speck of dust. Intelligent, "highly social microbial worlds which constitute and permeate us"¹ are now being re-examined in communion against our long-standing illusions of superiority. I imagine a near future where we exist symbiotically with new medical micro-species, to heal and regenerate. I was born just a few years after many were hit with polio and ended up in wheelchairs or worse, iron lungs. I now have two titanium hips, a procedure that may quickly become a thing of the past as our bodies, genetically altered, may evolve to rebuild themselves. I hope that Earth's organisms, of which we are a part, will have new dialogues with uniquely sentient microscopic communities that migrate back and forth, initiating mutually beneficial evolutionary exchanges. Given wings to do so, synthetic biological entities will almost certainly evolve independently. New Life.

Over the last decade, the recognition of complex language, interconnectedness, and cultures of plant and fungal life has become significant, ironically within the context of a virus that is not situated to be beneficial to us as a host. Yet, perhaps this virus could alter to become a beneficial ally. This piece is from a series in progress of images and sculptures exploring our relationship with imagined microbial communities.

¹ César E. Giraldo, *Microbes and other Shamanic Beings*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018), prologue.



Davida Kidd, *From Information to Imagination – The Sacrifice of Seeds*, 2022, digital print laminated wood, 20 x 28 in.

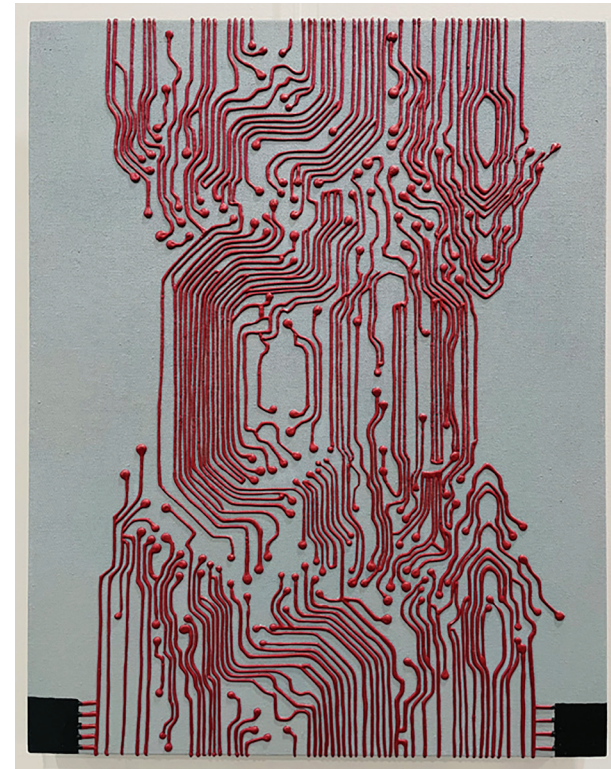
Lorena Krause – Langley

I explore electronic routes, systems and structures for social, personal, scientific, and cultural commentaries, while questioning the role that electronics play in our times and possible future. Circuits are a symbol of our times, that provide paths for energy to flow in networks that have created a new global landscape and paradigm for a different technological and scientific engagement.

An extensive experimentation allowed me over time to develop my own impasto formulas and volume techniques, applied by hand to create a sensory experience with paint structures designed also to play with shadow and light, blurring the line between two and three dimensions.

The visibly protruding line maps, tracks, and shapes in my work often represent global connected evolution and relate to the idea of data transference, fluidity, growth, time, impermanence, and transformation.

Lorena Krause,
Second Blood, 2021,
acrylic impasto on
canvas, 28 x 22 in.



Russell Leng – Langley

This work is part of an ongoing series that examines the contemporary amalgamated body. Forms overlap and collide to suggest figures in hesitant relationships with each other. At times, the stacked shapes find ways to prop up and hold each other in a supportive gesture. In other moments, figures exist as fractured beings, getting lost or reduced in the density of the painted surface. By pushing bodies together in close physical proximity, the work becomes a way to wonder what might manifest when we move toward a closer ideological, or emotional proximity as well.

Russell Leng, *Hold*,
2021, acrylic on
canvas, 60 x 48 in.



Scott Moore - Langley

With social and environmental challenges facing the earth, can we question how to re-calibrate our relationships with things and places? In my artistic research, I have been exploring methods of making that cultivate re-introductions to our existing realities. I create installations that combine physical and digital sculpture to encourage possibilities of re-establishing connections with current realities. These works reference the genre of still life paintings as a moment of defamiliarization for the viewer. Oranges, squash, apples, computer cables, hard drives, books, vases, flowers, etc., highlight the aggregate elements that compose our families. Taking notice of a kabocha squash, clay vase, or the cast of the digital sun resting on a cluttered dining room table becomes subscendent (moving towards relations) sites of connection, familiarity and relations, allowing the viewer a relatable scale to bring attentive care and reflection upon their place within a larger whole.



Scott Moore, *still life still (detail)*, 2022, digital projection, projector, plinth, book, hat, tablecloth, installation dimensions variable

Luke Pardy – Chilliwack

I use photographs to examine the ways local, social, and personal histories manifest in the contemporary every-day. My work is based in place and space and is informed by my experience growing up in a region often defined by its colonized traditions, and now questioning that inherited history.

Recently my work has focused on the legacies of industry in the Fraser Valley and the visual culture of labour. These bodies of work consider what is left behind after the labouring body.

The first series, *Tool Still Lives*, documents vintage hand tools as both specimens and artifacts. Inspired by catalogue photographs of medical instruments, these still lives encourage reflection on the intimate connection hand tools create between human and non-human bodies.

The second series, *Workbench*, focuses on the interaction between surface and the labouring body. This photograph magnifies the markings on an antique workbench made by the bodies of the labourers who have interacted with it through the years.

Luke Pardy,
Workbench 2, 2021,
inkjet print on paper,
43 x 34 in.



Amberlie Perkin – Langley

As an interdisciplinary artist my practice includes printmaking, sculpture, and installation as an intersection of kinship, nature, and grief. I am particularly interested in exploring the body as a wounded ecology, and experiences of embodied grief. My artwork explores how the natural world offers new ways to understand and respond to death, while providing a visual and material language to use in artmaking to articulate the complex and often abstract experiences of grief. My recent sculptures delve into the incredibly vulnerable territory of expressing death as it pertains to my own body, living with a reproductive disease which causes deep invisible emotional and physical pain, and the loss and grief that I carry due to multiple miscarriages.

My artistic process enacts the materiality of mourning and the longing to nurture, while expressing the tensions held in my body: its fragility and strength, barrenness and fullness, illness and recovery, suffering and hope. Building the hollow forms and repeatedly applying materials to their surface becomes a means to process and articulate loss while nurturing and tending to persistent ghosts. My sculptures are an exploration of lost kinship, the fragility and resiliency of the body, and an expression of embodied grief.

Amberlie Perkin, *Lullaby Keeper*
(*Songs for Sorrow*), 2022, mixed
media sculpture, 64 x 35 x 35 in.



Devon Riley – Chilliwack

In this series I explore the theme of ecofeminism and the impact of a patriarchal society on women and nature. Through the male gaze, nature and women are viewed and treated similarly. Both subjects have been seen as something we can control, exploit, and take from without giving back. To create this series of images I used techniques such as double exposures and light leaks with a plastic medium format film camera and a polaroid camera to create an imperfect, almost blemished effect throughout each image.

Devon Riley, *Leave No Trace*, 2022,
analog photography, 16 x 16 in.



Laura Rosengren – Chilliwack

There is a concrete physicality and a soft fleetingness, a strangeness and a familiarity to the images we carry in our bodies. I am interested in the crowded space of the interior and where it might open and when it becomes porous, how it permeates public. The works shown involve a mixed material approach to painting including oil, watercolour, felt, and wax that negotiate between modes of representational space.

My work considers how motherhood might enlarge and re-invigorate, rather than limit artistic practice. While my practice is often mapped by rapid calculations and measurements—the length of a TV show or nap, the space between meals and baths—it folds in an attentiveness to this fragmentation and disruption. There is slow walking, small collections, soft surfaces and crusty accumulations. Patching and weaving the fragments of time and materials.

Conjuring generations of mothers whose physical labour was often more pronounced and immersive, I use performative domestic gestures like scrubbing, stitching, grooming, and washing as methods for making paintings. Something is being done and undone and re-done, every day, and out of the apparent futility, something continuous and forming.

Laura Rosengren, *Growing Clear*, 2022,
diptych of watercolour, oil and felt on canvas,
40 x 30 in. and 24 x 12 in.



Ellen Scobie – Langley

In my art practice I work in two seemingly disparate fields: digital image-making, where I combine fragments of photographs into new compositions; and figurative sculpture, where I engage in the haptic process of shaping clay into representations of the human body. My practice straddles the ever-narrowing divide between life in the digital arena and in the material world. The figures I sculpt metaphorically reflect the impact of societal pressures, psychological stresses, and life events.

In *Figure with Box Torso*, I explore the effects of consumerism in our lives. Here, the entire torso has been subsumed by boxes and packaging, negating the body entirely. Yet there is strength in the posture and some humour in the out-stretched hand grasping for ever more stuff.

To celebrate the body with all its fleshy layers is an act of radical self-love in the face of relentless media directives to do otherwise.



Ellen Scobie, *Figure with Box Torso*, 2021, ceramic with cold finish, 17.5 x 11 x 5.5 in.

Jennifer Shepit – Abbotsford

My experience of disability has had a formative impact on my artistic development, and I have increasingly reflected on themes of disability and embodied experience in my work. I often hybridize abstract expressionist and figurative elements in scenes that look outward – at nature, human portraiture, and landscape – while referencing acts of experiencing, remembering, and narrativizing that take place in the body of the observer.

The painting *When the Body Disappears* is part of a series that explores the experience of depersonalization, which causes a feeling of the body being made up of “wrong” parts. I have experienced such episodes since childhood. The series reflects on that uncanny valley of disconnect between the internal self and the body, and the uncomfortable sense of being sent floating while the body rearranges, distorts, and eventually seems to disappear.

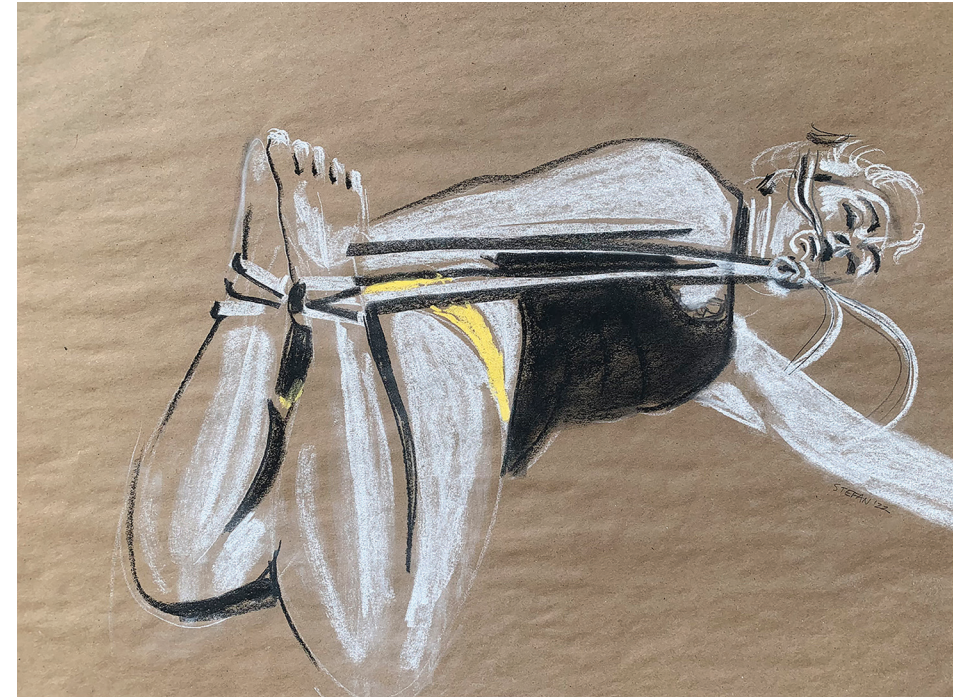
Jennifer Shepit, *When the Body Disappears #1*, 2022, watercolour, graphite, ink on paper, 14 x 11 in.



Shel Stefan – Lake Errock

My partner uses rope to self-tie as a form of bondage, which is, at once, a practice of kink sexuality (BDSM) and an exercise toward self-healing. For her, doing rope helps her ground, giving her body the feeling of being hugged, touched, and held without relying on anyone else. She gifts herself an intense experience which she finds fun, sexual, comforting, and empowering. Self-tying allows her to *remember, re-member* – herself, the contained sovereignty of her own body, her own pleasure, her own limits – and, to remember corporeal simplicity, a connection to a time outside of the grip of real-world ills and the stressors of trauma, which continually flood the personal and collective body/spirit/mind with an anxiety too great to hold.

These quick, live, drawing exercises were created in preparation for our art performance in Chicago in March 2022, entitled *Drawing, Tending, Tying*, recorded live at the Leather Archives & Museum.



Shel Stefan, *Sharon Doing Rope 1*, 2022, pastel on butcher paper, 20 x 24 in.

Tracie Stewart – Abbotsford

Воды (vody) means water in Russian and Ukrainian. When hearing and seeing the word "vody", I think of the body and embodiment. Bodies of Water, being Water Bodies. I am of Scottish and Doukhobor decent, and it's important to me to practice an old form of Russian language, my mother's no-longer fluid tongue. I sift through languages of horticulture and land-centric cultures. Learning Russian and Ukrainian is a step towards learning about being a Doukhobor passivist.

Walking a path of collaborative installation art and arboriculture, I arrive at the intersection of language and land. While working across mediums, I find deep roots in drawing. I strive to be a conduit for the voice of others and thrive while "thinking like a waterway."



Tracie Stewart, *Воды Body of Water*, 2022, graphite and pigment on stone paper, mounted on cradleboard, 9 x 12 x 2 in.

Cobi Timmermans – Abbotsford

I use photography and the body to work through and express emotionally traumatic experiences. *One Year Anniversary*, a series of 120mm film photographs, was shot exactly one year after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and reflects on the mental health issues that arose due to physical and social isolation. I took inspiration from the dramatic compositions and dark lighting of film noir, then used these to depict loved ones who were available to me within my immediate quarantine bubble at the time, in domestic spaces, confined and engulfed by their own shadows, homes, and private environments. The larger-than-life structures and shadows compared to the bodies emulate the overwhelming sense of doom and loneliness that accompanied the quarantine periods of the pandemic, as well as uncertainty about the future. As anxiety and depression rates rose, the negative emotional and mental effects of social isolation became obvious, as well as the lack of mental health awareness. Reflecting on this series over a year later, I wonder how community can be strengthened to ensure collective mental wellness when taking the necessary steps to ensure the physical health and safety of at-risk and immunocompromised community members.

Cobi Timmermans,
One Year Anniversary, 2021,
digital print on paper,
24 x 24 in.



Qahraman Yousif - Abbotsford

Totalitarian regimes seek to destroy human moral values by destroying the human body. In 1992 I was arrested and imprisoned in Syria for working with Kurdish student activists protesting for democracy and human rights.

A prison is where humans are stripped of dignity and spend their darkest days in claustrophobic spaces unfit for any living creature. It is where humans experience unimaginable pain that pushes the soul to flee the body due to brutal torture. I remember not having enough room to extend my legs, the cool temperature of the surrounding concrete, the barbed wire, the unbearable stench, and the sound of constant static on the guards' radio. The experience was isolating in every respect. Alone in my tiny cell, my fingers searched for any markings that previous inmates may have carved into the concrete surfaces. I looked for any signs of life. Instead, I found the walls haunted by traces of unimaginable suffering. Those marks left behind by others before me mirror the scars I carry long after I departed my cell.

Qahraman Yousif,
From the Dark Dungeon #4,
2021, acrylic on canvas,
32 x 26 in.



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