YUKON PRIZE
for visual arts

2021
FINALISTS' EXHIBITION

Mark Kelly Photography

THE YUKON PRIZE: VISION

The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts will recognize excellence by Yukon visual artists and be a catalyst for the promotion of Yukon visual art across Canada.

The prize has three goals:

- To provide a financial prize of $20,000 to one Yukon artist that will help them focus full-time on creating art.
- To promote Yukon art and Yukon artists within the Yukon, nationally and internationally.
- To foster a culture of curatorial critique and discourse in the Yukon and encourage artists to be the best they can possibly be.

Our goal is that the award and exhibits of the finalists' works will create opportunities for Yukon artists. We hope it will inspire connections between Yukon artists and the visual arts community in the rest of Canada, providing increased visibility, artistic development and potential for sales. One of the six finalists will receive the $20,000 Yukon Prize. The others will each receive $2,000. The Yukon Prize is intended to be a biennial event. The Yukon Prize website will house an online gallery of the works of past finalists.

The Yukon Prize Committee

GETTING UP CLOSE TO KEN ANDERSON'S TWO PIECE INSTALLATION:
WHAT WE HAD WHAT WE HAVE WHAT WE TAKE WHAT WE ARE GIVEN WHERE WE ARE WHERE WE ARE GOING WHO WE WERE WHO WE ARE WHO WE WILL BE WHAT WE HAVE LOST AND WHAT WE HAVE FOUND THANKS NO THANKS; GUNALTHCHEESH DA KI EN CAW

NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

The Yukon Arts Centre is so pleased to be a part of the Yukon Prize, working with the artists, curators and the Yukon Prize committee.

I remember three key dates in the lead-up to the inaugural Yukon Prize. The first was a meeting with Julie Jai in the light-filled lobby of the Yukon Arts Centre. Julie came with an idea nearly three years ago of what it could look like to celebrate and support Yukon visual art. A privately funded prize of $20,000 and a dream of showcasing the best of Yukon artists and connecting them with some of the foremost Canadian curators. We were immediately excited to have a chance to be part of this ambitious project. This truly aligns with what we do here at the Yukon Arts Centre. The piece that we were perhaps most excited about was bringing Yukon work to a national stage. While we've been involved with touring Yukon work outside the territory, we recognize how difficult it can be to connect with the greater Canadian contemporary art world and we know the Prize will forge new roads for artists.

Next moment: Application form up on the Yukon Prize website and deadline set for the first prize. Committee members asked me how many applications we should expect. It was such a tough call. It was the first time for a prize like this in the territory and, while we worked hard to get the word out, it was unclear how artists would respond. I had conservatively guessed we'd hear from 40 to 60 artists. I clearly remember the morning after the midnight deadline, opening my computer to see 107 applications. The overwhelming response came from all over the territory, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with so many different mediums and approaches. Cue the excitement.

The third moment that seared itself in my memory was awaiting that list of the final six. I don't know if I've eagerly awaited any email as much as this. It did not disappoint. It's a real mix of established and lesser-known Yukon artists with varied practices from across the territory. These six artists are really pushing themselves and their artwork. Putting the exhibition together was a delight. My mantra was that I wanted to make this as difficult as possible for the curators, meaning I wanted to showcase each artist in the best possible light. I always hope that an exhibition at the Yukon Arts Centre can be a place for artists to experiment and step up their practice, and I believe we accomplished that. The artists delivered incredible works on a scale that required a structural engineer and full repaint of the gallery.

I write this as we prepare for the fourth big moment. The jurors will soon come to Whitehorse to see the works in person and award the first-ever Yukon Prize. While it was a monumental task to narrow the list from 107 to six (I can't imagine the difficult final decision), we are in tremendously capable and thoughtful hands. All the best to the jury, thank you to all who applied and congratulations to the final six!

Mary Bradshaw
Director of Visual Arts, Yukon Arts Centre

MESSAGE FROM THE YUKON PRIZE CO-FOUNDERS

We feel blessed to have found a life and community in the Yukon. We are grateful to the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council on whose traditional territory we live and create. Living as we do in both Whitehorse and Toronto—two extremely different places—has given us the opportunity to appreciate what is special about each place. One of the many things that has impressed us about the Yukon is the quality and diversity of the visual arts and the welcoming and inclusive arts community. However, we have also noticed that few people outside of the Yukon know anything about Yukon artists or Yukon art and that this important part of Canada's cultural narrative is being overlooked.

So we wondered: how can we bring Yukon work into the national dialogue about art, helping Yukon artists gain the recognition they deserve?

We noticed there was little opportunity for Yukon artists to engage with curators and arts professionals from outside the Yukon and thought that increasing these connections could help Yukon artists become better known and better supported in their development as artists.

We also know many Yukon artists who do not have the luxury of working full-time on creating art and believe they could develop significantly as artists if they were given the chance to focus on their art for a period of time.

These thoughts led us to imagine a Yukon prize for visual artists with a significant cash prize. It would be awarded biennially and it would recognize excellence in visual arts. We began discussing the idea with people from the arts community within the Yukon and across Canada and found there was much support for the proposal. In 2019, the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts Committee was formed and planning began for the inaugural 2021 Yukon Prize. The support and encouragement from committee members, the Yukon Arts Centre, the Yukon Arts Foundation, the Yukon Government, artists, partners, volunteers, donors and sponsors has brought the dream of the Yukon Prize into reality.

We hope this prize will encourage artists, provide a fun and engaging process for Yukoners and those outside the Yukon to learn about and appreciate Yukon art, and help us all to celebrate the creative spirit which animates and enriches our lives.

With gratitude,

Julie Jai and David Trick
Co-founders

YUKON PRIZE CO-FOUNDERS JULIE JAI AND DAVID TRICK

THE JURYING PROCESS

One of the goals of the Yukon Prize is to foster curatorial discourse and to make Yukon artists better known outside of the Yukon. There is very little discussion of Yukon art in the larger art world outside the territory. Curators, critics and collectors outside the Yukon have limited awareness of Yukon art. There is a tendency to assume that the three northern territories are all the same. Few Canadians could name any Yukon artists.

We believed that encouraging artists to submit their best work to a jury from outside the Yukon would be a first step toward making Yukon artists better known. Seeing the work of the applicants would bring jurors face-to-face with the quality, richness and diversity of Yukon art. Selecting the right jury would be critical to bringing credibility to this new prize and to the Yukon Prize finalists.

The Yukon Prize Committee had several meetings to brainstorm about who our "dream" jury would be. We narrowed it down to three outstanding, internationally known arts professionals. We thought "we'll never get these extremely busy and in-demand people," but we also thought "If we don't ask, we will never know. Let's dream big." So we asked.

Our top three choices for the jury were Ryan Doherty, Candice Hopkins and Gaëtane Verna. To our surprise and delight, all three curators agreed. We are thrilled and extremely grateful to have such wonderful arts professionals on our inaugural jury. Each has gone beyond what was expected. They provided immense support to the Yukon Prize, including committing to come to Whitehorse to select the winner. They were well supported by the jury moderator, Indigenous artist and curator, Heather von Steinhagen.

With the jury in place, we were ready to open the application process. Yukon artists were invited to apply between January 1 and March 31, 2021. To make the process as accessible as possible, we designed a straightforward online application form. We also partnered with the Yukon government, which funded photography for artists in Whitehorse and Dawson who didn't yet have professional-grade shots of their work. We offered advice on writing artists' statements on the Yukon Prize website (www.yukonprize.ca). We encouraged as many artists as possible to apply, regardless of their medium, or whether they were full-time or part-time artists. To this end, the rules specify that eligible artworks include painting, carving, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, electronic media, photography, textiles, glass, regalia, jewelry and drawing.

The criteria for the Yukon Prize were set out in the rules as follows: The prize recognizes excellence by Yukon visual artists. It recognizes artists whose work demonstrates technical proficiency and reflects a unique artistic "voice" in theme, method or practice, referencing traditions and/or the contemporary realm.

We were overwhelmed by artists' support for this new prize. From a total Yukon population of 43,000, 107 artists chose to apply. Applications came from Whitehorse, Dawson and more than half of the Yukon's 17 other communities. The 14 First Nations in the Yukon were well represented. The jury had its work cut out for them!

We feel fortunate to have had the benefit of an independent jury from outside the territory to judge the Yukon Prize. Mary Bradshaw, curator of the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery and a member of the Yukon Prize Committee, reviewed each artist's application for completeness. Apart from this, the Yukon Prize Committee was not involved in the jurying process. The Committee did not see the applications, or even find out who had applied. It was important for artists to know that the process would be completely merit-based and not subject to any potential influence, no matter how indirect or unconscious, by those involved in organizing the Yukon Prize. We were happy to leave the hard work of selecting the six finalists to the jury. As one of the jury members commented, "it was incredibly difficult to choose the six finalists from so many worthy applications."

Julie Jai and David Trick

RYAN DOHERTY

Chief Curator, Contemporary Calgary

It was an extraordinary privilege to be on the inaugural Yukon Prize jury and to be introduced to so many great artists. There is so much wonderful art being made in the Yukon that I wasn't aware of. I had an immensely difficult time narrowing the 107 applicants down. Having really only been familiar with a handful of these artists, I was delighted to have been introduced to dozens of new voices!

The Yukon Prize will shine a bright light on the exceptionally talented artists of the Yukon. The Yukon arts community is large, diverse and sensitively attuned to what it means to live within the unique conditions of this northern territory.

CANDICE HOPKINS

Independent curator, writer and citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Executive Director, The Forge Project in Ancram NY, Senior Curator for the 2021 Toronto Biennial of Art

It was a real honour to be a part of the jury for the inaugural Yukon Art Prize. As someone born in the Yukon, it was impressive to see the breadth of practices in the territory, ranging from fashion to photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, beadwork, graphic novels, carving and everything in between. The unique visions of Yukon artists stood out to me, visions that often reflected on the land itself, its deep traditions and ecologies. It was incredibly difficult to choose the six finalists from so many worthy applications and I am grateful to all who took the time to share their work with the jury.

Henry Chan Jr.

GAËTANE VERNA

Director of The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto

The Yukon Art Prize is an incredible endeavour which speaks of the engagement and the nurturing of a community of artists by ensuring that they receive the necessary support to survive and thrive.

The 2021 Prize is a window into the dynamic production of artists of the Yukon enabling the entire country and its arts communities to learn and engage with their artistic productions. The end, the creation of the Yukon Art Prize is a statement of solidarity and commitment to the strength of the arts being produced in the Yukon and its communities. In time the prize will be a legacy to our entire Canadian contemporary art field.

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

Mike Thomas

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

THE OPENING

September 18, 2021
The Yukon Arts Centre,
Whitehorse

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: OVERALL GALLERY SHOT; VIEWERS INTERACTING WITH WORKS BY KEN ANDERSON, AMY BALL, KRYSTLE SILVERFOX, VERONICA VERKLEY, SHO SHO ESQUIRO AND JOSEPH TISIGA

CREATING SPACE FOR YUKON VOICES:

RESOURCEFULNESS AND RESILIENCE

None of the six artists nominated for the inaugural Yukon Prize for Visual Art started creating because they thought they had something vital to say.

When Sho Sho Esquiro was five years old, learning to sew from her mother, she wasn't thinking ahead to solo exhibitions that would demand viewers examine their own role in systemic racism, and lead to people hailing her as an activist.

Ken Anderson didn't necessarily plan to exhibit his carvings or sculptures when he first made them. Even now, being out on the land, waiting for materials to find him is more important to his practice than what he calls "gallery-chasing."

Amy Ball didn't initially weave together visual art with performance, installation and narrative as a way of examining society. She grew up in a family that was heavily involved in the Dawson City arts scene. It felt natural to choose that as an occupation.

Veronica Verkley says part of her practice is observational. She records what's going on around her rather than what's going on inside her, using, in her work, cast-off items that have their own stories to tell.

Joseph Tisiga didn't spend his childhood collecting bedsheets and house paint because he expected to be reviewed by *Border Crossings* as an "enigmatic, forthright and fantastical multidisciplinary artist." He was just looking to fill the long, cold hours of one dark Yukon winter after another.

Krystle Silverfox looks at her work, in all its broad-ranging media, partly as a way of discovering her own identity. It surprises and delights her when people say her pieces resonate with them.

Still, the jury for this year's Prize heard something essential in each of their applications.

In fact, that can be said of each of the 107 applicants to the Prize this year, say Jurors Gaëtane Verna, Ryan Doherty

and Candice Hopkins. All three discovered artists and ideas they wouldn't have known if not for the jurying process.

It's strange to realize that, when you look at it by the numbers. According to 2016 census data, the Yukon has the highest concentration of visual artists of any jurisdiction in the country. Despite this, the rest of Canada knows very little about those artists. There are many reasons for that.

"I think our [media] does a very bad job at covering our country in terms of arts and culture," Verna says. "It's as if the citizens of northern places and the artists of northern places don't exist. There needs to be a greater national dialogue about what is the art that's being made in the different territories and the different places that are Canada, so even if I live in northern Quebec, I should know the interesting things that are happening in the Yukon."

There's something valuable that's lost when a northern perspective isn't included in that broader conversation. In fact, it's laughable to consider that we could have a complete cultural picture of Canada without that point of view.

"We're all part of the same country," says Verna. "We're all part of the world … and even though [these artists are in the North], their preoccupations are linked to all of our preoccupations. They're not these outer space people. They have the same problems, they have the same preoccupations and it's interesting to understand, from their perspectives, and to see how their perspectives on the world are relevant to our perspectives."

It might not shock Yukoners to hear it, but our perspective has a strong connection to land. There's broad diversity among the work of Yukon artists, says Hopkins, a citizen of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. But if there's one thing that echoes throughout the applications, one thing that could be called part of a Yukon aesthetic, it's the sense, sometimes explicit, sometimes underlying, of a very special relationship to place.

For Hopkins, that connection is clear whether it's being expressed via photo, landscape painting, installation, graphic novel, carving, or piece of clothing. And it makes sense to her.

"If you're living in a huge city, city actually cuts you off from your environment," she says. "In the Yukon, animals outnumber people, so you need to have a relationship to the land to live there and people know this. You need to have that intimate knowledge … It's absolutely extraordinary, not only just the landscape, but that there's an understanding that we have to live in tandem with a place in the Yukon. It's kind of the only way to live successfully there, is to live in relation to the land."

Even Ball, who says she doesn't really have what she considers a land-based practice, says it's impossible not to be influenced by being here. Years ago, working on a graphic novel in Germany, she returned to the Yukon, mid-project. It changed everything about the way the book, *Provenance*, ultimately came together. Ball doesn't think the land is imprinted on her, necessarily, but she does think she has to work to understand it. As that process happens, it comes across in her practice.

All six finalists say there are a variety of ways that being here, and being away from here, has impacted their work. On a very fundamental level, the Yukon dictates your materials. They can be hard to come by in the North. This is part of what Hopkins thinks led to another common thread she noticed during jurying—self-sufficiency. Ingenuity in how artists assemble their ideas.

Verkley, who moved North in 2007 from Ontario, enjoys combing the Dawson City dump for ephemera to use in her practice. When she was starting out, she says, it was cheaper and easier to use found objects. She thinks she'd continue to do that now, even if cost and supply weren't an issue, but who knows?

Tisiga, who grew up in the Yukon, and is a member of the Kaska Dena Nation, says the same. He currently lives in Montreal, but before moving, he'd order as much as he could online, supplementing with purchases from Arts Underground and the Office Supply Store. That only went so far, which was frustrating, though it helped with focus.

"It kind of had a really good influence as well because then I had to be a lot more resourceful," Tisiga says. "I had to really look at the type of work I wanted to make and that I could manage making. I focused a lot on work on paper, but I also did a lot of oil painting and sculpture and performance stuff, really, as a result of the limitations."

Another limitation is space. Not the kind you find when you're out on the land, but the kind you need sometimes to close yourself into in order to create.

A constant refrain among artists here has to do with the lack of available studio space. Ball is part of a collective that was established because a number of artists needed space, which was at a premium, and they stood a better chance together.

Tisiga worked for a while in a poorly-heated room behind a restaurant. He developed raging headaches from sharing the unventilated rental with a sign-maker who used enamels. Eventually he started working out of a car shelter, but it was hard to keep his paints the proper consistency outdoors.

That shortage extends to other kinds of space too. Verkley had to move to B.C. this fall when she couldn't find land for her cabin after a lease expired.

In the new year, Silverfox, who is Northern Tutchone and a member of the Selkirk First Nation, is moving to Dawson City from New Westminster, B.C., to teach at the School of Visual Art. The territory-wide housing shortage isn't making it easy to find a place to live. If she finds one, chances are the ever-increasing rents here will make it difficult. Local grants that allow for living expenses help artists carve out time to create without having to worry about day jobs, but only for a couple months.

Moving away can help. Not only with finding space, but with that thing artists are somehow never expected to concern themselves with—making a living. Being in a southern city means there are dozens of galleries to potentially show and sell your work.

Esquiro, who grew up in Ross River, and is of Kaska Dena, Cree and Scottish heritage, now lives in Vancouver. She says travelling taught her that her practice was financially viable.

“My pieces will go for $10,000 and up, and that’s a hard market. You can spend a month making something and you have no idea who’s going to buy it.”

Travelling to Paris for the J Autumn Fashion Show in 2014, and subsequently being featured in Harper’s and Elle, was the first time she felt there were buyers for her intricate, labour-intensive work.

Those opportunities to engage with the larger art world can also help drive development, according to Verkley.

“In a way, you’re kind of operating in a vacuum here,” she says. “You don’t really know what’s going on out there. But in another way, you’re just relying on your own ideas and your own wits. It can be freeing to not be trying to follow some kind of trend. Which is good, but then sometimes, I think it’s good also just to know what’s going on out there and be inspired or challenged or whatever by other people’s work.”

That interaction is key, says Doherty. For better or worse, careers in the arts are often about networking and getting known, something that’s hard enough without a geographic divide. But he says it’s also the responsibility of curators to make those connections, which is part of why he wanted to be on the Yukon Prize jury. If he were to come to the Yukon for studio visits, he might only have time to see the work of five artists. By jurying, he was introduced to dozens he can come back to himself, or refer to other curators.

Verna agrees, though she’s quick to point out that the jury isn’t God. Not this one. Not any of them. Juries don’t decide who is and is not great. They introduce criticality to creation, which is a huge part of what challenges artists to keep growing, expanding, improving and adapting. Criticality isn’t a negative—it’s a necessity and one that artists appreciate.

“I think there’s still a great respect for people that are in the know, outside curators and things like that,” says Anderson, who was born and raised in the Yukon, and has Tlingit and Scandinavian ancestry. “It’s an opportunity to kind of push yourself a little bit. To do new pieces. There is that part to it. It makes me want to do some different pieces and stretch a little bit.”

Which is the goal. Artists aren’t generally fans of competition, says Doherty, and that makes art prizes an interesting model. That’s why he likes the fact that the Yukon Prize includes an exhibition. Money is essential, but money runs out. If we want to create long-term sustainability for artists, there needs to be more than money.

To that end, the Yukon Prize aims to serve as a starting point by amplifying voices the rest of the country may not yet have heard; by recognizing that artists need to make a living; by mounting an exhibition that will hopefully travel beyond the Yukon, physically, and by word of mouth; by itself continuing to grow, expand, improve and adapt in the years to come, just like the artists it supports.

Amy Kenny

THE FINALISTS

TWO PERSPECTIVES
2021
BIRCH, ACRYLIC PAINT

Mike Thomas

KEN ANDERSON (KHÀTINAS.ÀXH)

Born in Whitehorse, Ken Anderson is of Tlingit and Scandinavian ancestry. He believes that art is about passion and the creative process.

Anderson works in a traditional Tlingit style. He enjoys the challenges of composition and creating balance within his art. He believes art should be interactive and representative of a living culture. He also believes that an artist should respect the artistic legacy that they are carrying on. Anderson credits his grandmother and the old masters as his inspirations.

Tlingit family and traditions are the foundation of the art he practices. He works from a place of respect and considers it a privilege to work in the traditional Tlingit style.

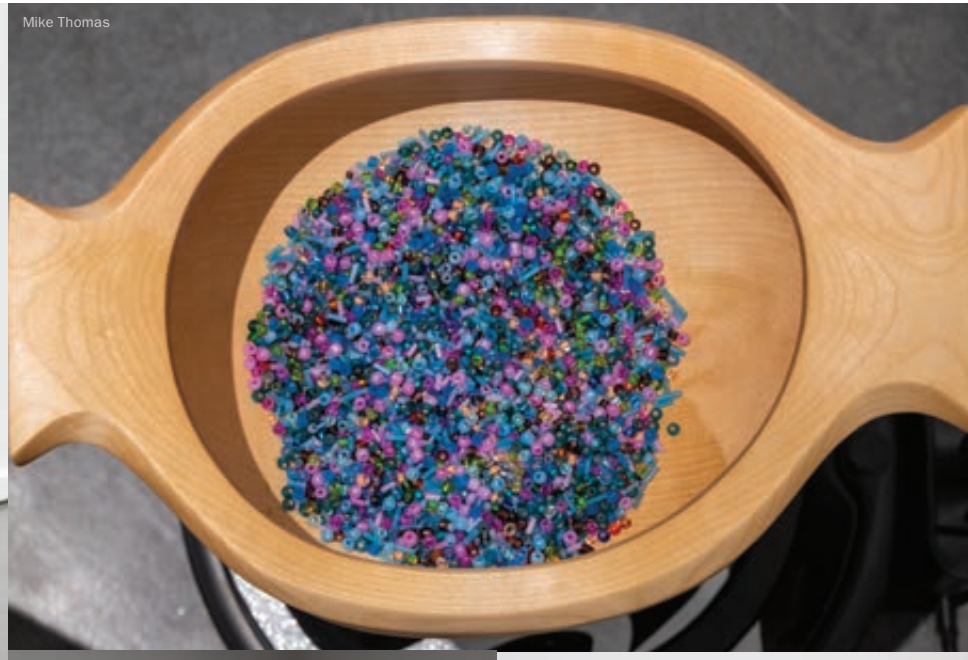
Over the years, he has moved from a place of focusing on the technical details of craft, including perfect symmetry, to a place where he is interested in inviting the viewer in by suggesting and provoking thoughts. It has become more and more about maintaining respect through the principles of the form while, at the same time, merging with the parallel path of society at large and asking them to participate in the conversation.

The works he has chosen for the Yukon Prize exhibition provide the opportunity for contemplation while still respecting the exacting standards of the foundational masterpieces that inspire him. These pieces engage with larger themes as they channel a living culture which has endured many obstacles. He strives to provide the opportunity for the viewer to interact, question and learn about the art, culture and history of an art form and a people, while representing something that was not always valued.

Mike Thomas

I WOULDN'T WANT ONE THROUGH MINE...
2018
WOOD, STEEL, COPPER
PART OF THE YUKON ARTS CENTRE COLLECTION

Mark Kelly Photography


Mike Thomas

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WHAT WE HAD WHAT WE HAVE WHAT WE TAKE WHAT WE ARE GIVEN WHERE WE ARE WHERE WE ARE GOING WHO WE WERE WHO WE ARE WHO WE WILL BE WHAT WE HAVE LOST AND WHAT WE HAVE FOUND THANKS NO THANKS; GUNALTHCHEESH DA KI EN CAW

2021

BIRCH, STEEL, ABALONE, BEADS,
AUTOMATED CLEANING TECHNICIAN

MOSQUITO BECOMES ME
2018
BIRCH, METAL,
ACRYLIC PAINT

Mike Thomas

I harvest all my own wood for anything that I'm carving, and that's all kind of part of the process for me, to go out on the land. You're looking around and you sort of don't find it, it finds you. That's part of the process for me, it's getting out there and thinking about all those people who came before.

”

WHAT IS
2021
BIRCH, ABALONE,
OPERCULUM,
ACRYLIC PAINT

AMY BALL

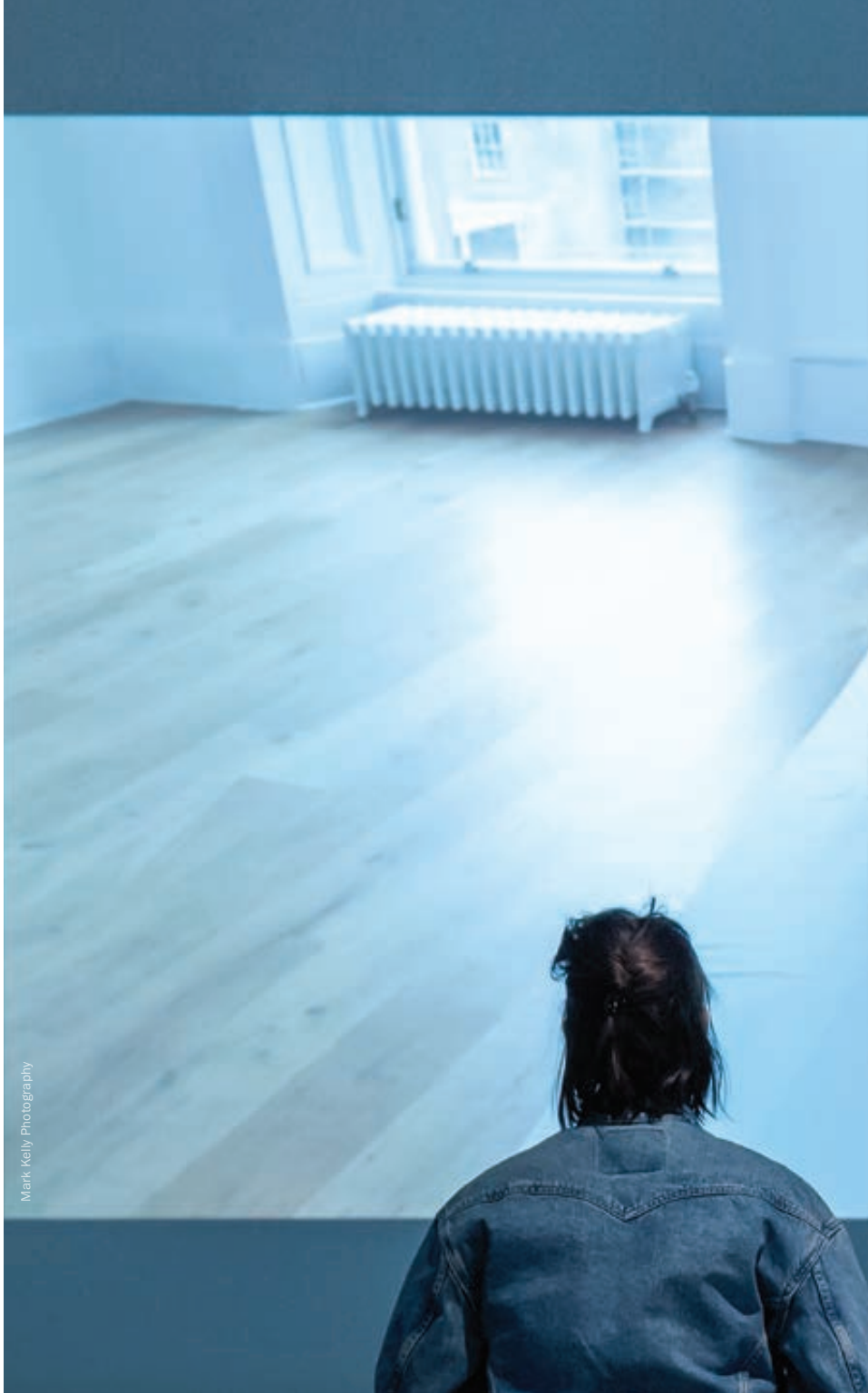
Amy Ball is a visual artist born in Dawson City, Yukon, Canada in 1987. Her artistic practice takes a critical and insightful look at the social architectures that shape the way we live, often using humour to scrutinize institutions and infrastructures emblematic of greater social dilemmas.

Writing is a fundamental part of her practice; her narrative and persuasive essays inspire her installations, short films, performances, and two and three-dimensional works.

She holds a Meistershülerin from the Staatlich Hoschschüle fur Bildende Künste Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in the class of Douglas Gordon, and a BFA from Concordia University in Montreal.

She works in a variety of mediums including performance, installation, text, printmaking and filmmaking.

She is a founding member of the community arts collective, Local Field School, and the studio collective, Jimmy's Place. Recent exhibitions and projects have included the satirical take-over of Dawson City's newspaper entitled THE SUN for the Yukon Riverside Arts Festival (2020), the solo exhibition *energy* at Neu Alte Brücke, Frankfurt, Germany (2019), the performance and solo exhibition *women* as part of ASSEMBLE at Haus Am Lützoplatz, Berlin, Germany (2018), and the solo show *powers* at Künstverein Göttingen, Germany (2018). In 2018 she published a graphic novel, *provenance*, in collaboration with Künstverein Göttingen and Broken Dimanche Press, Berlin, Germany.



Mark Kelly Photography

TO KILL A CHICKEN
2018
LOOPED PROJECTION

EXTRÊME
Unico
Pezzettoni
Unico
Pezzettoni
fèves
BŒUF
BŒUF

Mike Thomas

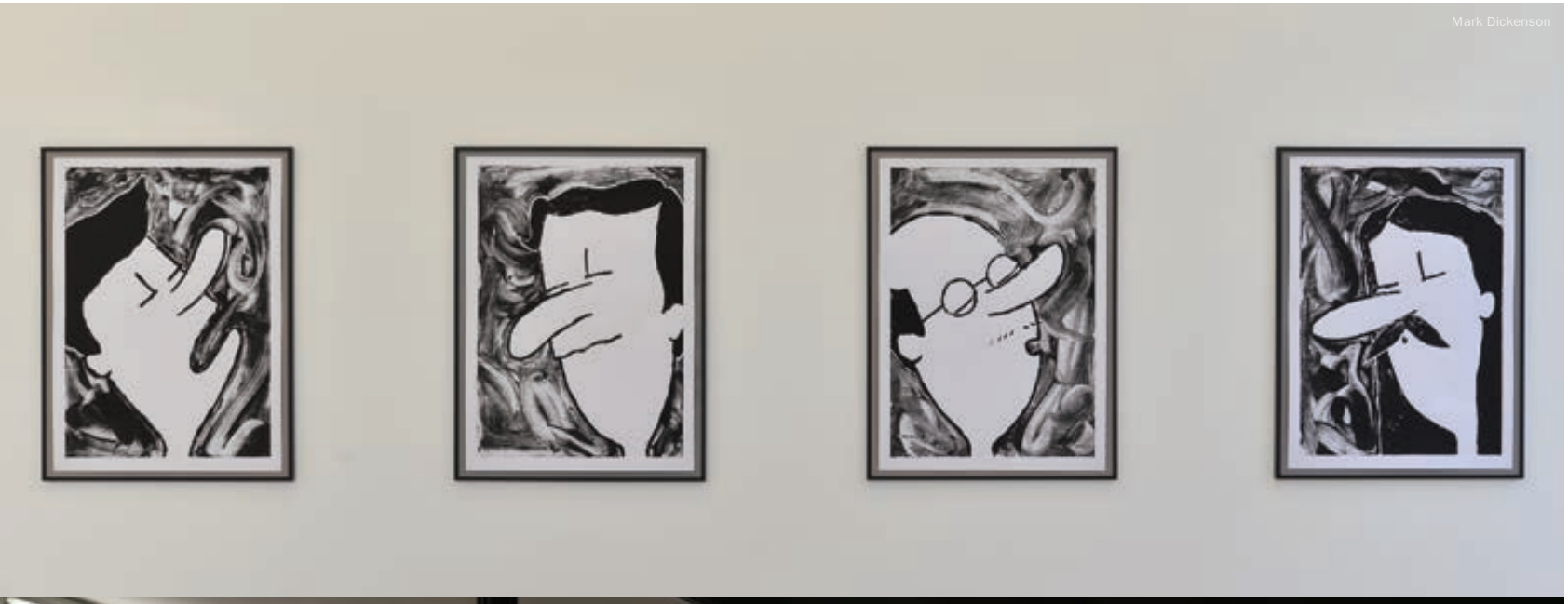
Viviana Abelson

Mark Kelly Photography

powers was born out of research into apocalyptic prepper communities. The stability of the bench, architectural in feeling, exists in stark contrast to the instability its contents represent.

”

POWERS
2018/2021
CERAMIC TILE, NON-PERISHABLE GOODS, SOUND INSTALLATION



Mark Dickenson

ENERGY
2019
MONO-PRINTS ON PAPER,
ACRYLIC WINDOW PAINTING,
ESSAY, LOOPED ANIMATION

Mark Dickenson

Mike Thomas

SHO SHO ESQUIRO

Sho Sho “Belelige” Esquiro grew up in the Yukon. She is of Kaska Dena, Cree and Scottish heritage. As an Indigenous artist, it is her life’s passion to express herself through her work, including textiles and painting. She feels a profound sense of responsibility to use her platform and work to address Indigenous issues and healing. Esquiro aims to constantly challenge her vision and skill level, and to carry on traditions passed down generation to generation.

Having had the privilege of learning lessons and skills from others, Esquiro recognizes the importance of mentorship. She has also made it a mission to create opportunity and spaces for those who come after her, and to work with youth and Elders.

Part of this is influenced by having developed her own practice after learning to sew, at an early age, from her mother, who is also an artist. Esquiro fuses contemporary and traditional techniques to create textiles that have been featured in museums around North America, including the Smithsonian’s Museum of the American Indian in New York and the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, where she currently has a solo exhibition confronting the theft and murder of Indigenous women and children. In 2014, she was selected to represent Canada at the J Autumn Fashion Show in Paris. She returned to France in 2019.

Esquiro’s work, which uses new and repurposed fur and leather, along with rich, natural fibres, 24-karat gold, platinum, porcupine quills, beads, embroidery and dentalium, has been featured in Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar and Elle. Esquiro is most proud of having had the opportunity and honor to be part of a fashion show in Whitehorse, where Yukon’s cherished elders, her most respected Mentors and inspiration, sat front-row.

GRACE/HALCROW
2016
SALMON SKIN, BEAVER TAIL, COWHIDE, STINGRAY, CARP, LAMB, RAYON, ROOSTER FEATHER

I don't feel like I'm an activist, but I don't have a problem with people saying that at all. I feel like there's so many important people that are on the frontlines and I feel like I'm doing my part where I am … just for me, speaking out about all these important things [through my work], all of a sudden I'm an activist? I mean, I'll take it. And I've come to realize and understand that, and accept it and honour it.

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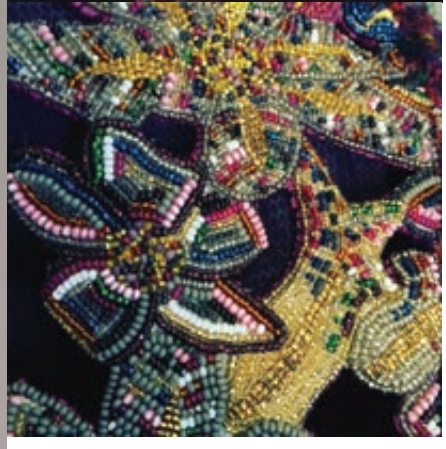
BULL BEAR.
A BLACKFOOT-PIPE CARRIER
2013
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Mike Thomas



ASCENSION
2017
LYNX PAWS, RECYCLED SILK WOVEN PRAYER SCARVES, LASER CUT RABBIT FUR, VELVET, SILK, SEED BEADS, PLATINUM BEADS, 24K BEADS, STERLING SILVER BEADS. SIZE 6
PART OF THE YUKON PERMANENT ART COLLECTION

Mike Thomas

Mike Thomas

DAY OF THE DEAD
2013
PENDLETON BLANKET, RECYCLED WOVEN
PRAYER SCARVES, COWHIDE LEATHER,
RAYON, MOOSE HAIR, SEAL SKIN,
GLASS CUT BEADS

KRYSTLE SILVERFOX

Krystle Silverfox is a member of Selkirk First Nation (Wolf Clan), and an interdisciplinary visual artist. Silverfox currently lives and works on the unceded territory of the Qayqayt First Nation (New Westminster, B.C.).

Silverfox holds both a BFA in Visual Art (2015); a BA in Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice from UBC (2013); also an MFA in Interdisciplinary studies from Simon Fraser University (2019).

Her artistic practice explores different materials, methodologies and symbols to create conceptual works. Silverfox is inspired by Indigenous feminism, trans-nationalism, de-colonialism, activism and lived experience. She is interested in using her artistic practice to better communicate through visual mediums.

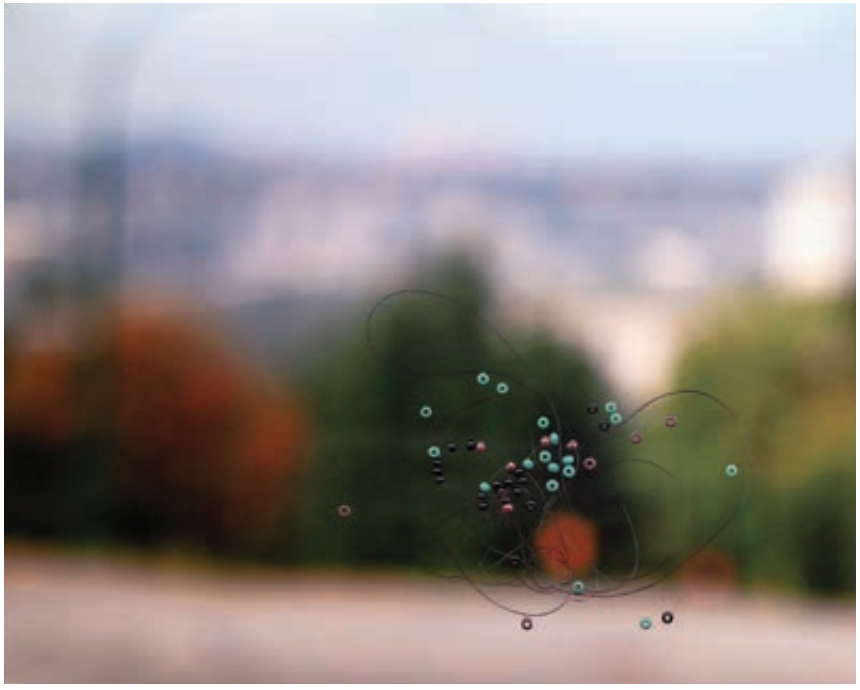
The works in this exhibition explore, variously, intersections of identity, land, resource extraction, belonging, and memory.

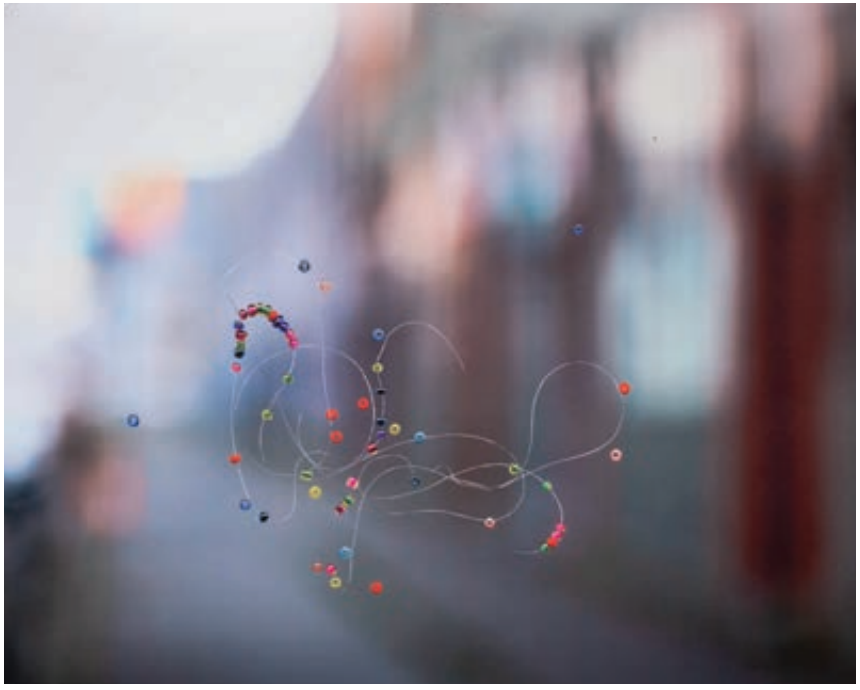
In 2022, Silverfox is moving to Dawson City to teach at the School of Visual Art.

Mike Thomas

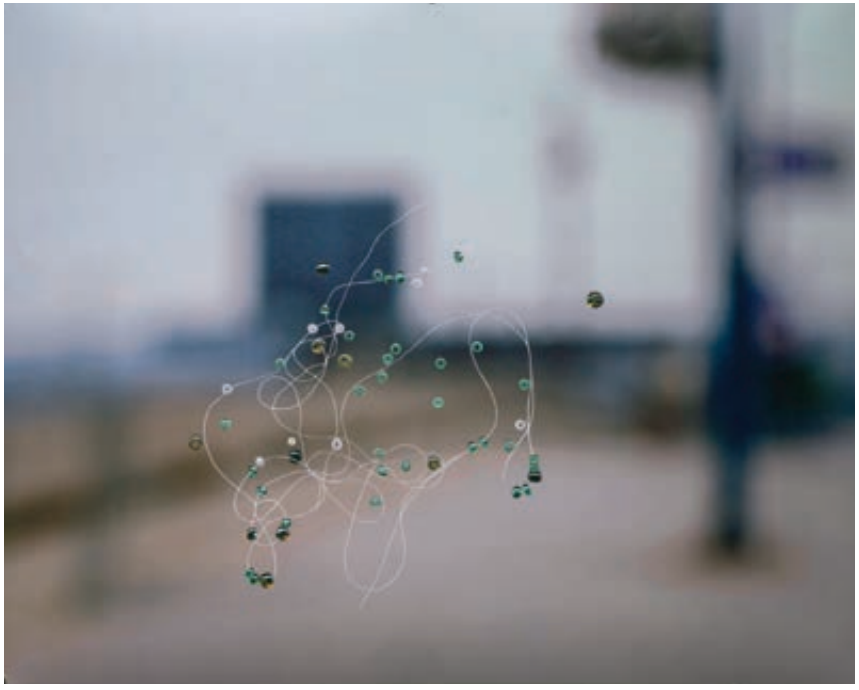
Mike Thomas

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD...
2019–2021
INSTALLATION
HBC BLANKET, COPPER PENNIES, WOOL, SPRUCE





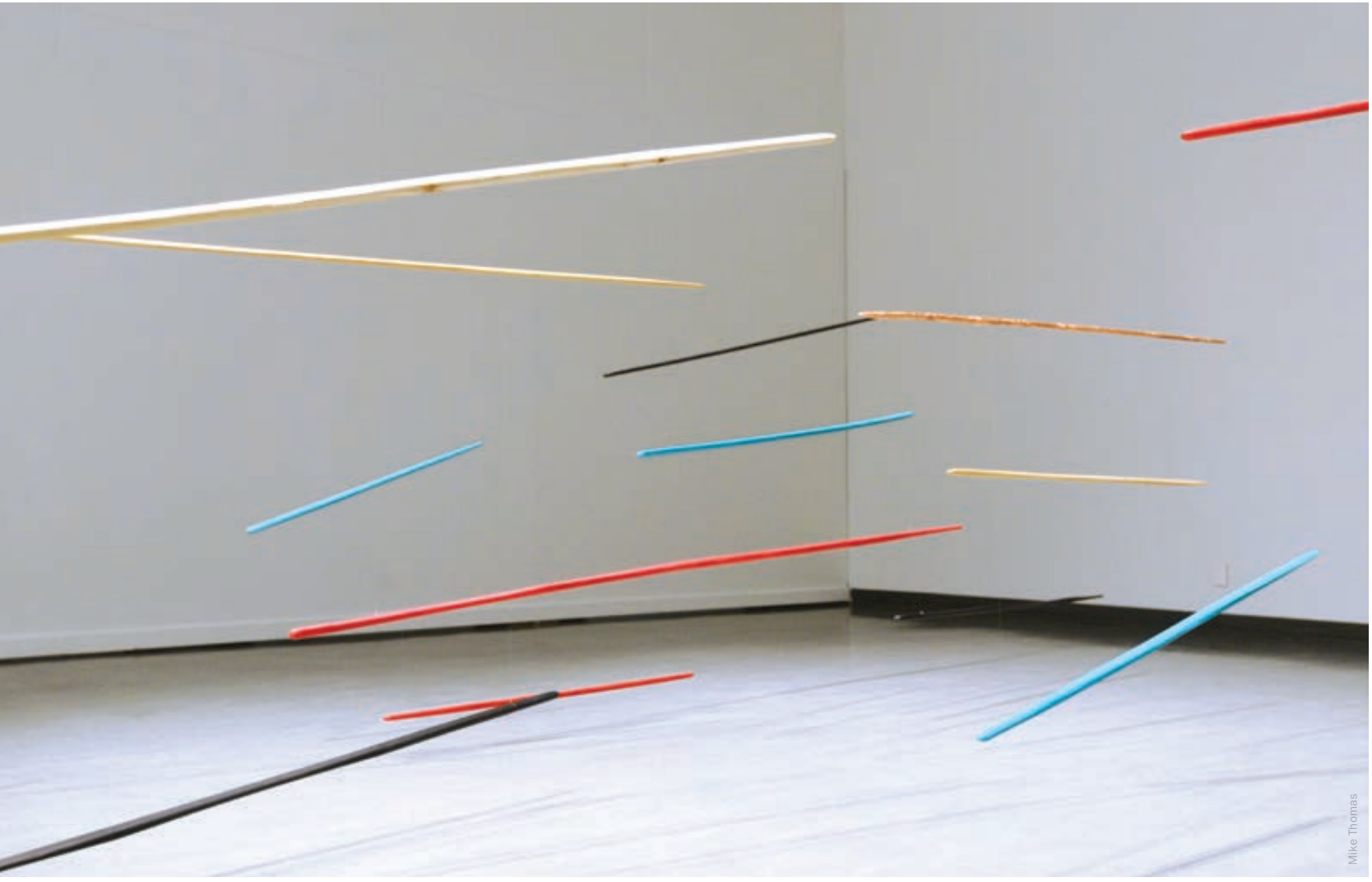
TTH'Í' YÁW NAN (THREAD BEADS LAND)
(SERIES OF 3)
2018–2021
DIGITAL PRINT



Mike Thomas

I do believe that identity is like a site under construction, where you never actually have a finished building. At the same time, it's also about deconstruction. So at the same time you're building your identity, you're also taking pieces away that you don't need anymore. And it's constantly changing identities. It's very fluid and you're not going to be the same person all the time. As an artist, I like exploring identity politics. It helps me to better draw my own boundaries, like, 'this is who I am.'

”



ETS'EDEGÉL' (SPEAR GAME)
2020
CEDAR, ACRYLIC PAINT, COPPER LEAF

Mike Thomas

JOSEPH TISIGA

Joseph Tisiga is a member of the Kaska Dena Nation. He maintains a multidisciplinary practice that is rooted in painting and drawing, and includes performance, photography, sculpture and installation. His work reflects upon notions of identity and the factors that contribute to this construct, such as community, nationality, family, history, location, and real and imagined memories.

His work is informed more by ephemeral qualities of living in the Yukon than by the land or aesthetic geographical characteristics that artists may typically respond to here. His interest is not in landscapes or nature themes, though land and traditional concepts are present throughout his practice. Thematically he tends to continually shift reference points to reflect on subjects involving, but not limited to, the biographical, notions of 'Indigeneity,' colonialism, art and social histories. He is motivated by an effort to contribute to the dialogue around First Nation/'Indigenous' identity and culture, and its complex intersections to the present world.

In this way, his practice is concerned with cultural and social inheritance, the mundane, the metaphysical and the mythological, often all at once and on the same surface. This conflation of interests and perspectives plays itself out in the artist's narratives, which are non-linear, cross-cultural and supernatural.

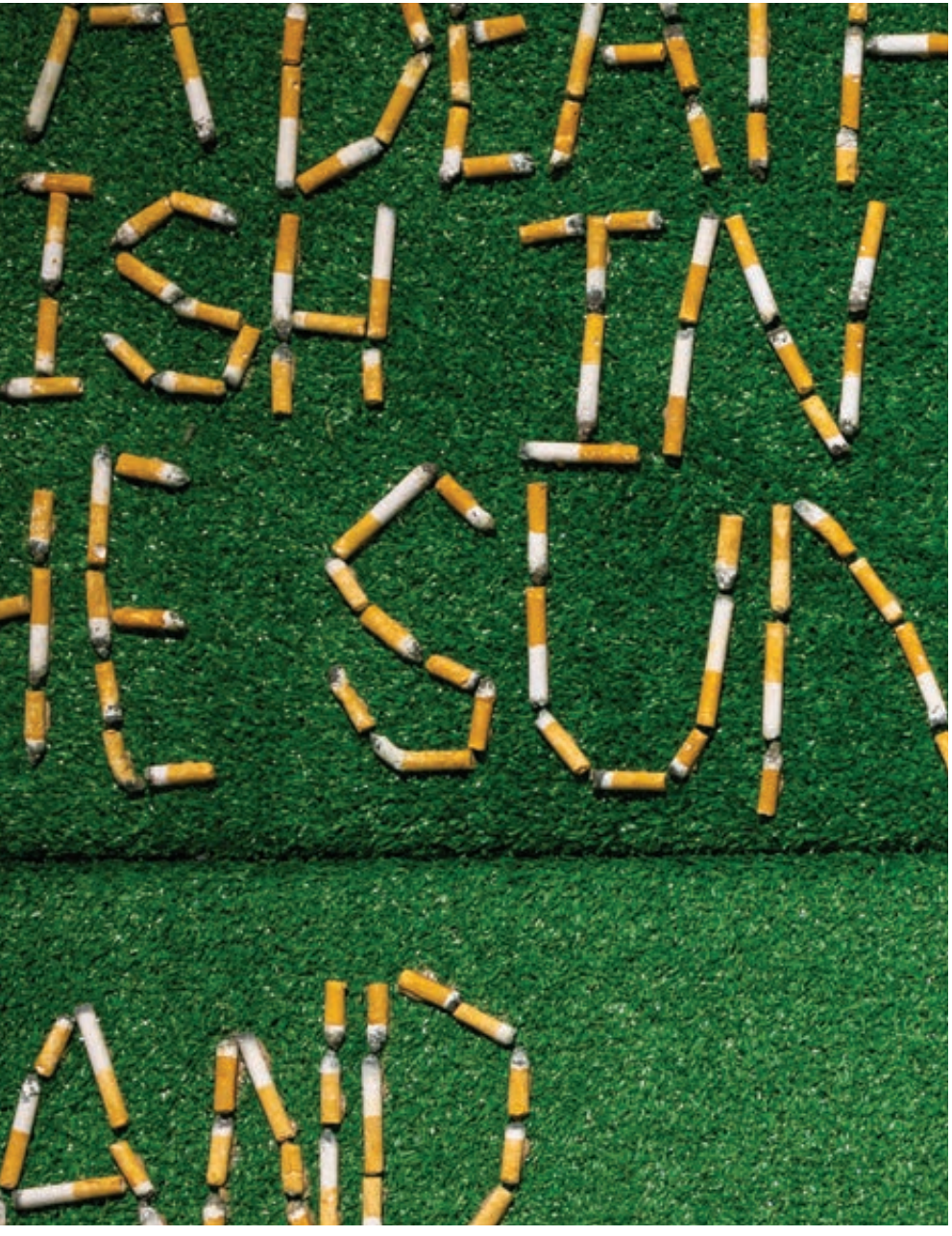
The works presented in the Yukon Prize exhibition revolve around his interests in assemblage. They contain common themes of symbolic narrativity that is found in much of his work, but they focus on more autobiographical qualities from a period when Tisiga was making a turbulent transition from Whitehorse to Montreal during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DREAMCATCHER
2020
WALL TENT CANVAS,
PASTEL, OIL STICK

THE BENEVOLENCE OF OUR NOMADIC ANCESTORS; CAMPS, MASKS AND MAPS
2019
ARTIFICIAL GRASS AND VARIOUS OBJECTS

GAUGING PROXIMITY IS CONSTANT
2020
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER

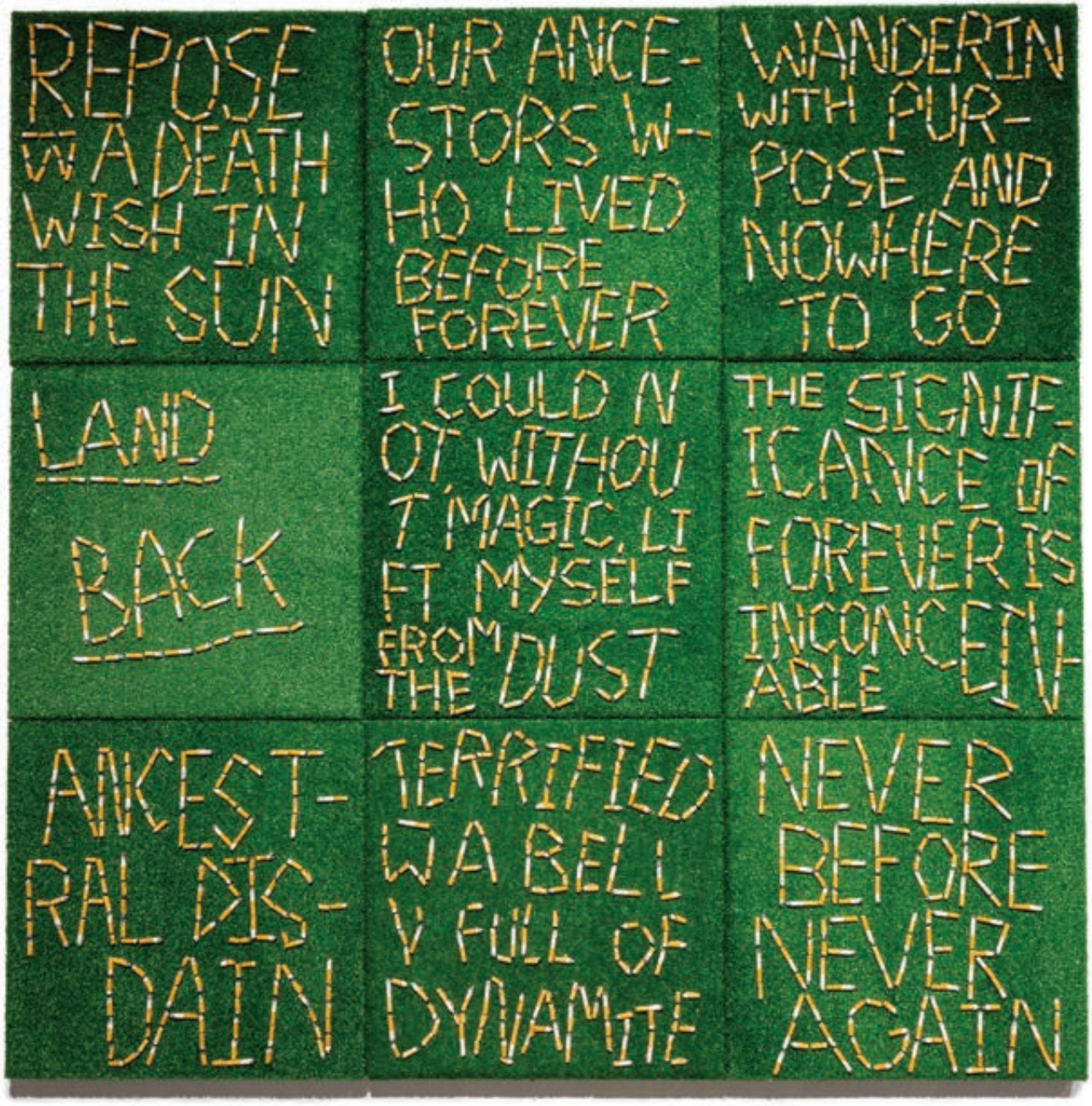
IN LIEU OF MONUMENTS HONOUR
2020
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER



The text for the astroturf pieces came out of notes that I took over almost a year, and are a seemingly disjointed collection of poetic or abstract statements, but provide subtext to the mental and emotional space of that time.

”

UNTITLED SERIES
(INSTALLATION OF NINE ARTWORKS)
2020
ARTIFICIAL GRASS, PLASTER,
WATERCOLOUR


REPOSE
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AGAIN

VERONICA VERKLEY

Veronica Verkley is a sculptor and media artist based near Dawson City Yukon, on the traditional territory of the Trondëk Hwëchin.

Her choice to live in the bush serves as observational practice that informs her work. She looks for patterns and narratives, tracing the comings and goings of the birds and animals who mark-make on the world around her.

Verkley is concerned with bringing the endless stories of nature into her work, offering a translation of what it means to be here via her ethereal, organic pieces.

Verkley shifts between installation, animation and kinetics. She scours the landscape for materials (bed sheets, hoses, cast-offs) to be used in creating flexible forms, often built around the gestures of animals and centred on their resilience in navigating human habitats.

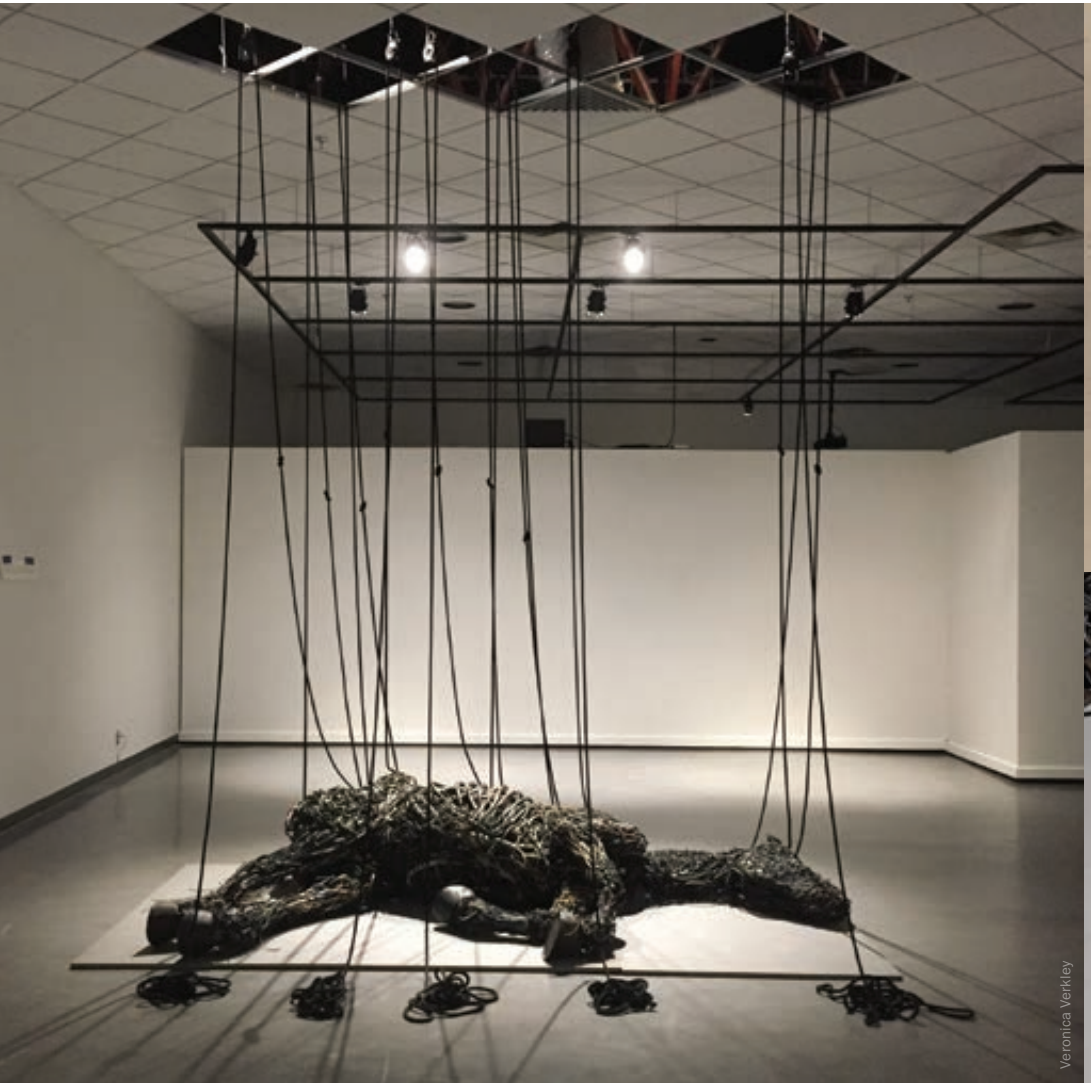
The process is laborious, with hand-weaving, wrapping and stitching mimicking the way animals or birds construct their dwellings and habitats. Subtle movement is implied through pose or multiples; or actualized, with pumps or motors.

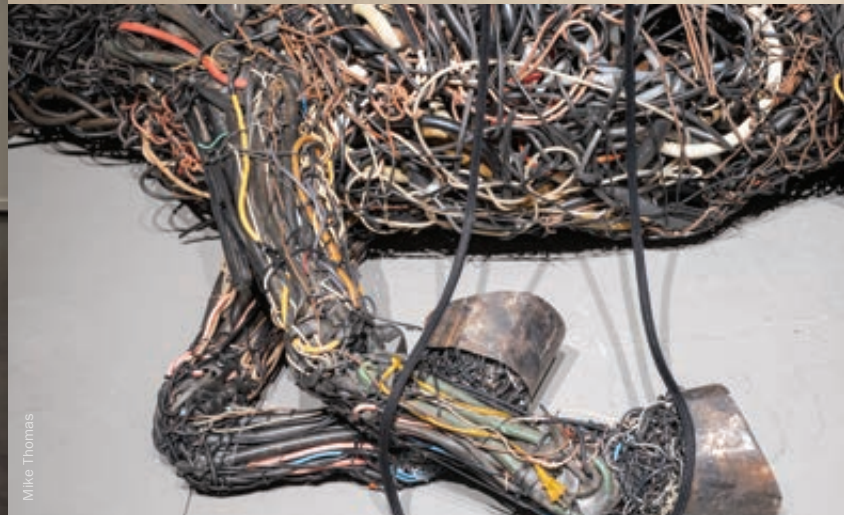
Parallel to this practice, Verkley has collaborated extensively in film, theatre and dance, with a focus on puppeteering and animatronics. She has recently returned to her practice full-time after holding a faculty position at the Yukon School of Visual Arts for many years.

Verkley has shown across Canada, including at Olga Korper (Toronto), the Esker Foundation Project Space (Calgary), McMaster (Hamilton), Ottawa Art Gallery, OK Quoi? (New Brunswick) and Video Pool (Winnipeg). Internationally, her work has travelled to Norway, Australia, the USA and Japan.

SUSPENDED ANIMATION
2021
ARMATURE: STEEL, POLYETHYLENE, HARDWARE.
BULK: SCAVENGED RUBBER, WIRE & PLASTIC.
RIGGING: ROPE, PULLEYS, HARDWARE.

Mike Thomas


Veronica Verkley


Mike Thomas

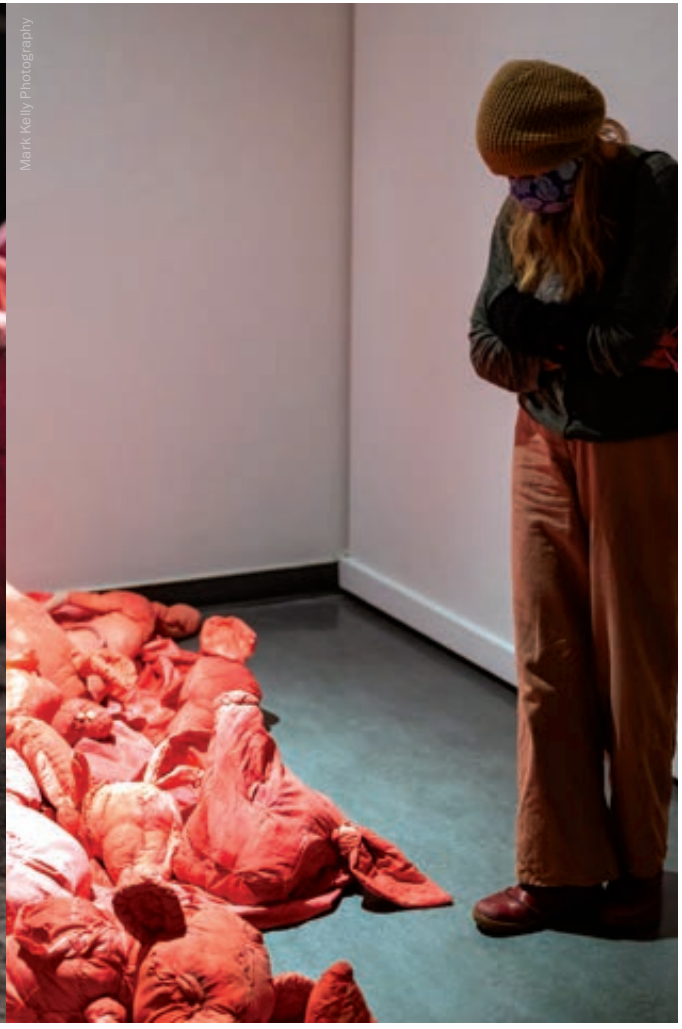
SUSPENDED ANIMATION
2021
ARMATURE: STEEL, POLYETHYLENE, HARDWARE.
BULK: SCAVENGED RUBBER, WIRE & PLASTIC.
RIGGING: ROPE, PULLEYS, HARDWARE.

It's very conscious, my using cast-off materials. Things that humans have thrown away, that are messing up the environment and messing up animals' lives, and then using those materials that are destroying the world to depict what is being destroyed. Initially, probably when I was just starting out, it would have been a financial thing that it was easier to use found materials, but now, even if I could afford new materials, I would be more interested to use found materials because they have their own history.

”

SECOND NATURE: FERAL
2017
AN INSTALLATION COMBINING AN IMMERSIVE SOUNDSCAPE, PROJECTED ANIMATION, AND THE REMAINS OF THE SET THAT WAS ANIMATED.
SET: DESTROYED HOUSE: 52 X 40 X 66" WOOD, PLASTER, INSULATION, METAL, PLASTIC, GLASS, WIRE, TEXTILES, FUR, WAX, PAINT, ORGANIC EPHEMERA.

Devon Berquist


Mark Kelly Photography

ALL THE KING'S HORSES...
2021
HOTEL BED SHEETS (DYED), STUFFING FROM
OLD PILLOWS, CARDBOARD, THREAD, HOSES.
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE: 24+ LIFE-SIZED HEADS,
BODIES & PARTS

KEN ANDERSON (KHÀTINAS.ÀXH)

AMY BALL

SHO SHO ESQUIRO

KRYSTLE SILVERFOX

JOSEPH TISIGA

VERONICA VERKLEY

YUKON PRIZE
for visual arts

GRATITUDE

We are grateful to these organizations and individuals whose support has made the first Yukon Prize for Visual Arts possible.

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YUKON ARTS CENTRE

YUKON ARTS FOUNDATION

Yukon

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