

2 MARCH - 13 APRIL 2019

*found/held* presents work by Alana Bartol, Lindsay Dobbin, Ursula Handleigh, and Pavitra Wickramasinghe. Taking capture as a point of departure, the exhibition treats photography not as a technical medium, but as a linguistic prompt.<sup>1</sup> Considering its etymology—photos + graphos—I invite you to situate these works in a conversation about drawing. As a practice, I liken drawing to language: always shifting, never complete, and continually confronting its own undoing. Each artist uses concrete materials—water, air, metal, paper—to capture phenomena—resonance, breath, energy, the fold.

With nods to science fiction, and disarming humour, Alana Bartol's video, *reading wild lands*, re-imagines dowsing as a technology for remediation of land contaminated by the upstream oil and gas industry in Canada.<sup>2</sup> *reading wild lands* features site readings performed by Bartol on two former oil refinery sites in Calgary, each undergoing or having undergone processes of remediation.<sup>3</sup> This video draws directly on another of Bartol's projects, *The Orphan Well Adoption Agency*, in which she invites the public to become caretakers of abandoned orphan wells.<sup>4</sup>

Dowsing (or water-witching) is a form of divination used to locate myriad information including ground water, metals, and oil, predicated on the dowser's being attuned to the locale in question. Considering dowsing to be a practice of listening to the site itself, Bartol explains, "In this work I am thinking a lot about how I (and other settler Canadians) are implicated in systems of oppression—organized around white settler colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—that are intertwined with environmental degradation, indigenous dispossession, and colonial violence." Complicating her familial history as both settlers and water-witches, Bartol's employment of this practice is deliberate. She is earnest in her care of these spaces, and uses the practice's controversy to highlight the absurdity of the task. Her performances privilege a practice disregarded by the same science that attempts—perhaps in as much vain—to remedy destructive environmental effects whilst nonetheless building new wells.

Lindsay Dobbin's practice of deep listening, and sustained engagement with the Bay of Fundy is reflected in *Arrival*, in which they build a spacious soundscape with two tones acting as wave cycles. This sound piece results from Dobbin's performance, *Drumming the Tide*, which they describe as a "six hour intertidal drumming pilgrimage."<sup>5</sup> Beginning at the water's edge, Dobbin struck their handmade drum each time the advancing tide met their body, and took a step forward toward the shore. Dobbin explains, "from low to high tide, these very simple and humble gestures grounded me in the experience as I became aligned with the (im)pulse of the ocean, entering a deep state of awareness where the rhythm was slow, cyclical and powerful."<sup>6</sup>

Held by an immense basin of red earth, the tides of the Bay of Fundy are the highest in the world. I was a witness to Dobbin's performance, during which as the tide approached a narrowing landscape, it overtook them despite Dobbin maintaining a constant pace. By the end of the performance, Dobbin was carried to shore, submerged to their neck. With *Arrival*, Dobbin aims to translate this experience to sound. They ask only that we listen, and through a sustained resonance, we can for a moment experience the pacing, immersion, and ritual of their experience with this place.

Ursula Handleigh uses camera-less photography and alternative experiential processes of image-making to record personal histories. *I can feel you forgetting* is a series of contact prints of breath. After carrying a piece of photographic paper on a daily journey to the Atlantic Ocean, Handleigh spoke into the paper at the water's edge before submerging it in the ocean. Fixed by sea water, the resulting images capture both the impressions of her hands and the humidity of her breath. She then transferred these images onto steel.

These photographic plates make visible the materiality of their surroundings. As living photographs, the plates continue to rust

over the course of the exhibition, essentially breathing oxygen from their environment as they form iron-oxide. By collapsing a durational experience into a single image, each photograph "counter[s] the photographic instant, expanding the fractional moment into a document of elongated time...capturing a fleeting moment, always in the process of disappearance, always failing in its attempt to preserve."<sup>7</sup> Tellingly, Handleigh's language in describing her work advances and recedes like the littoral spaces that are as much a part of her practice as is her breath. Relying on water to form a conceptual bridge between place and time, she retraces the elusive moments of her past, in her words, "recording stories that have been passed to me only through memory, of my ancestors whom I never met and were never documented."<sup>8</sup>

A dialectic of the interior/exterior is evident in all four artist's works. We watch as a subsurface energy animates Bartol's iron filings in *reading wild lands*. The tension is evident in the surface of Dobbin's drum, the containment of the Fundy, and the interior experience of our own listening to *Arrival*. We subvert this boundary as we add our own inhalations and exhalations while viewing *I can feel you forgetting*. This false duality is further complicated by the folding, crumpling, unfolding, and refolding in both Wickramasinghe's and Handleigh's work.

Through her material and technical choices—folding, laser and hand-cutting—Pavitra Wickramasinghe creates forms that are both strong and malleable. She is particularly interested in how the origami Miura fold—which uses creases in parallelograms to fold a flat piece of paper into a compact shape—can expand and contract like the surface of the ocean. With these wave patterns, she aims to prompt in the viewer a sense of being in more than one place at once, describing the sea as "an in-between place and a path to elsewhere."<sup>9</sup>

Inspired by reading about the disappearing skill of wave pilots (ri-metos), *Coral bones/La mer* is a return to these innate navigation skills and of the body to the environment. Specially trained in the ancient art of reading wave patterns, ri-metos use the complex arrays formed by waves resonating between the coral atolls of the archipelago to navigate by feel and sight.<sup>10</sup> Wickramasinghe says, "our capacity for orientation not only allows us to navigate our surroundings; it also influences our sense of place, home and even our sense of self... Humanity has managed to travel the world and even into outer space using technology in defiance of our innate navigation skills and in a sense removing the body out of the environment."<sup>11</sup> Her folds highlight the continuity of the sea; as much bound to a continuous energy as it is unbound in its expanse. Wickramasinghe's paper works are akin to the wave patterns themselves, made of two surfaces that never cross, but rather continue to fold in on themselves.

The artists in *found/held* make various attempts to record, align, map, trace, collect, maintain, care, and experience, sharing a phenomenological journey. Through varying materials as both subject and medium, each artist draws on a connection to the elemental experience of place—Bartol's site readings, Dobbin's attuned pacing, Handleigh's collected breath, and Wickramasinghe's mirroring of the waves' reverberation against land. Ultimately, they ask us for our time, inviting us to consider the passage of energy from storm to shoreline; to be submerged by tonal intersections; to acknowledge our impact; and to materialize time spent.

Katie Belcher, curator

adapted from the curatorial text in the accompanying publication, *found/held*.

This exhibition is part of the 2019 Capture Photography Festival Selected Exhibition Program.

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## FOUND/HELD

### BIOS

PAVITRA WICKRAMASINGHE is a multidisciplinary artist mainly concerned with new ways of conceptualizing the moving image and conventions of seeing. Her current work is an exploration of notions of traveling, fluidity of place and memory. She uses light and shadows as extensions of the projected image to create installations where the viewer occupies filmic space instead of being physically removed from the work. Wickramasinghe was born in Colombo and lives and works in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal.

ALANA BARTOL comes from a long line of water witches. Her site-responsive works explore walking and divination as ways of understanding across places, species, and bodies. Bartol's work has been screened and presented across Canada at Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff); InterAccess (Toronto); PlugIn ICA (Winnipeg); Access Gallery (Vancouver); M:ST Performative Arts Festival (Calgary); Art Gallery of Windsor; and Group Intervention Vidéo (Montréal), as well as in Romania, Germany, Mexico and the United States. She currently lives in Calgary, Alberta in Treaty 7 territory where she teaches at Alberta College of Art + Design.

LINDSAY DOBBIN is a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) - Acadian - Irish water protector, artist, musician, curator and educator who lives and works on the Bay of Fundy in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of Lnu'k. Born in and belonging to the Kennebecasis River Valley, the traditional territory of the Wəlastəkwiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy, Dobbin has lived throughout Wabanaki as well as the Yukon in Kwanlin Dūn territory. Dobbin's relational and place-responsive practice includes music, sound art, performance, sculpture, installation, social practices and writing, and is invested in Indigenous epistemologies and cultural practices, such as drumming. Through placing listening, collaboration and improvisation at the centre of the creative process, Dobbin's practice explores the connection between the environment and the body, and engages in a sensorial intimacy with the living land and water. As a passionate educator, Dobbin employs traditional and contemporary land-based practices, creativity, play and improvisation as tools for self-awareness, collaboration, experiential learning and community building—revealing that people and the environment are related in dynamic ways. Dobbin is also an active artistic collaborator, and has worked on projects with musicians, sound artists, dancers, visual artists and filmmakers.

URSULA HANDLEIGH is a Toronto-born artist, currently living and working in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Working with experimental photography, film and alternative processes of image making, her practice explores questions of identity, perception, memory and kinship. Using experiential photography and the personal archive as a foundation for exploration, her work addresses the ways in which we create personal histories, while challenging traditional methods of documentation. Handleigh received a Masters of Fine Arts from NSCAD University in 2017 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from OCAD University in 2012. Her work has been exhibited across Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia.

### EVENTS

OPENING RECEPTION & PUBLICATION LAUNCH  
1 March 2019 at 7pm

please visit [accessgallery.ca](http://accessgallery.ca) for future events held in conjunction with this exhibition

### WORKS

Alana Bartol  
*reading wild lands*, 2018  
(22 minutes 32 seconds) HDV 1080p.

Lindsay Dobbin  
*Arrival*, 2014  
(36 minutes), sound piece.

Ursula Handleigh  
*I can feel you forgetting*, 2017  
steel, rust, breath.

Pavitra Wickramasinghe  
*Coral bones/La mer*, 2018  
drawing installation, pen on paper, and laser-cut paper.

### NOTES

- 1 Capture, Vancouver's annual photography festival during which this exhibition is on view.
- 2 The petroleum industry in Canada is divided into three major components, ironically employing terms typically used to describe waterways: upstream, midstream and downstream. The upstream industry sources and produces crude oil and natural gas.
- 3 Inglewood Wildlands and Refinery Park (Calgary AB).
- 4 "In the upstream oil and gas industry, an orphan is a well, pipeline, facility or associated site which has been investigated and confirmed as not having any legally responsible and/or financially able party to deal with its abandonment and reclamation responsibilities." [www.orphanwell.ca/faq/](http://www.orphanwell.ca/faq/) accessed 15 February 2019.
- 5 Dobbin, Lindsay. [www.lindsaydobbin.com/drumming-the-tide/](http://www.lindsaydobbin.com/drumming-the-tide/) accessed 13-15 February 2019.
- 6 Dobbin.
- 7 Handleigh, Ursula. *Towards an Anthology of Memory*. A Thesis Presented to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in companion to the exhibition *I can feel you forgetting*. Master of Fine Arts April 2017. pp 14-15.
- 8 Handleigh, Ursula. Statement about *I can feel you forgetting*. Anna Leonowens Gallery, April 2017.
- 9 Wickramasinghe, Pavitra. Statement about *Coral bones/La mer*, 2018.
- 10 Tingley, Kim. "The Secrets of the Wave Pilots," *The New York Times* 20 Mar. 2016: MM52. Web. 13 Mar. 2017. accessed 13 February 2019.
- 11 Wickramasinghe.