

fluid matters, grounded bodies

decolonizing ecological encounters



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Fluid Matters, Grounded Bodies: Decolonizing Ecological Encounters

Historically, colonial enterprises have violently linked land- and water-scapes with the bodies of women and femmes, queer people, and people of color in order to dehumanize them. By becoming dirt and water, such bodies have been equated with “natural” resources, made vulnerable to exploitation, extraction, and land theft justified along lines of race, gender, and sexuality. Yet such linkages, particularly in recent years, have been meaningfully appropriated by artists as acts of resistance that articulate new futures and magnify marginalized histories. Presenting the work of Farah Al Qasimi, Beatriz Cortez, micha cárdenas, Tessa Grundon, Joiri Minaya, Ada M. Patterson, Himali Singh Soin, and Alexis Rider among others, *Fluid Matters, Grounded Bodies: Decolonizing Ecological Encounters* engages with complex questions around impermanence, belonging, transformation, and erasure as they relate to human (and non-human) lives and the earth itself. The works of these artists are ecologically conscious, while their self-reflective, collaborative artistic practices emphasize notions of kinship as central to their counter-historical work.

For decades, artists have explored their relationships to the earth. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Women of Color like Ana Mendieta, Beverly Buchanan, and Laura Aguilar confronted the erasures

Cover Image: Joiri Minaya. *Continuum II*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist



Jiiri Minaya. *Container #6*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist

of their bodies, histories, and memories by imprinting traces of their presence in their surrounding landscapes. Drawing on these interventions, the international group of artists of *Fluid Matters*, *Grounded Bodies* relate to their environment(s) by reclaiming the earth as a medium while sharing stories that reflect the ecological experiences of broader sectors of the population; they confront the lingering effects of land, labor, and resource extraction while reckoning with the ghosts of colonial impulses that desire to instill binary modes of existence; they engage across media and artistic practices to magnify the glaring stakes of climate and colonialism while responding to the mass waves of migration across political state borders. While the earlier generation of artists was largely responding to the Land Art Movement of the 1970s, in which men claimed “natural spaces” as their cultural studios, the contributors

to this exhibition are particularly concerned with the contemporary challenges of climate change denial, land loss, and the specters of colonial violence that continue to haunt our ecological and political systems transnationally.

Rooted in feminist, queer, and trans ecocriticisms, this exhibition seeks to reckon with colonial logics, especially the binaries between nature and culture and within constructions of gender and sexuality. At the same time, the exhibition takes an intersectional approach to highlight the ways that communities are affected by climate crises—which are inextricably linked to colonialism—differently. As such, artists collectively respond to the subjugation and erasure of certain bodies in history, narratives, and visual culture—and the concomitant degradation of, and assault on, bodies of land and water, resulting in all-around loss. Refusing the colonial gaze, the artists of *Fluid Matters*, *Grounded Bodies* work from peripheral spaces in order to generate productive conversations and hopeful visions around the possibilities for sovereignty, sustainability, gender identity, and labor rights, all within an epoch of ecological crisis. Relationships with soil and water are explored in particular, as these elemental bodies are not only instrumental to biological life on earth, but also have been culturally linked with the most vulnerable bodies.

Some artists attempt to efface their own bodies by blending into the environment, at the same time emphasizing their distinction from it and

unwillingness to disappear. Some mergings of bodies and terrain are intentionally dystopic. Others re-imagine the art-historical canon, historical archives, or futures and cosmologies in an attempt to present counter-histories to exclusionary mytho-narratives. Many pieces present visually or contextually jarring, even dystopic contrasts, with bodies (i.e., human bodies, materials, terrain, etc.) that are out of time or out of place. Such highly staged artifice is meant to unsettle the harmfully comfortable idealistic narratives we have grown accustomed to, emphasizing that many human and land bodies are actually disembodied, alienated, or trapped in non-sustainable lifeways. The artists of *Fluid Matters*, *Grounded Bodies* pave speculative, reparative pathways toward equitable futures and safe living environments. By staging these works together, the exhibition ultimately seeks to imagine possibilities for a decolonial future, shaped by networks of care, kin, and reciprocity.



Farah Al Qasimi. *Um Al Naar (Mother of Fire)* film still, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist



Farah Al Qasimi. *Um Al Naar (Mother of Fire)* film still, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist

Beyond the Coloniality of Place



Joiri Minaya. *Vacation Stories from Online Dating Catalogues #1*, 2015 from *Postcards* series. Courtesy of the artist

As a mechanism of control, colonial logics transform places into grids and maps, while reducing the people, flora, and fauna residing therein into specimens for extraction and study. Despite the projection of such rigid systems, human and non-human agents alike, including land itself, regularly resist facile classifications; they exhibit hybridity and transgress arbitrary, man-made boundaries—flowing, jostling, merging, blending, and colliding. Through such (inter)actions these bodies subvert colonial legacies and confront ideological narratives.



Beatriz Cortez. *Glacial Pothole*, 2020. Courtesy of Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, CA. Photo by Paul Salveson



Joiri Minaya. *Container #1*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist

Bodily Presence and Absence



Joiri Minaya. *Containers* performance documentation, 2017.
Courtesy of the artist

Imperial forces flatten and marginalize colonized bodies, identifying and blurring them with the ecological landscapes that they destroy, obscuring or even erasing the presence of these bodies entirely. Through performance and new media that actively engage viewers, artists appropriate such flattenings. Artists make visible absences and erasures—particularly of the bodies of non-white, queer, trans, femme, immigrant, disabled people—creating new kinds of presences and ways of relating to (transformed) environments.



micha cárdenas in collaboration with Marcelo Viana Neto, Kara Stone, Abraham Avnisan, Morgan Thomas, Dorothy Santos, Wynne Greenwood and Adrian Phillips. *Sin Sol/No Sun still*, 2018. Courtesy of the artists

Counter-Histories and Mythologies of Place



Himali Singh Soin. *Mirror and Palette*, 2021 from *Brow of a God/Jaw of a Devil: Unsettling the Source of the Nile* by Himali Singh Soin and Alexis Rider. Courtesy of the artists

Colonial tactics disembodied landscapes, forcing biased historical narratives of supremacy and a monolithic culture that conceal abuse and destruction. Artists mobilize participatory multimedia and transdisciplinary methodologies to reckon with oppressive colonial histories. They unearth counter-histories and create new modes of knowing places through the fabrication of speculative, materially-engaged archives, and the re-telling of mythologies and folktales. As a result, these works play with time and blur the boundaries between history and memory, offering transcendence while remaining firmly grounded in place.



Himali Singh Soin. *Silt and Blood*, 2021 from *Brow of a God/Jaw of a Devil: Unsettling the Source of the Nile* by Himali Singh Soin and Alexis Rider. Courtesy of the artists



Tessa Grundon. *Tinctures of (Lost) Places*, ongoing. Courtesy of the artist

Kinship as Remediation



Tessa Grundon. *Contours* series, 2015. Courtesy of the artist

The creation of kin through an ethics of care promises an antidote, and a path toward remediating eco-biological and social systems alike, as well as the very process of knowledge production. Such decolonial recuperative practice urgently unfolds at the speed of trust—an engagement with communities of human and non-human beings, archives, and places that is markedly, intentionally *slow*, refusing the fast-paced rhythms of global capitalism and economic speculation.



Ada M. Patterson. *The Whole World is Turning* film still, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist



Ada M. Patterson. *The Whole World is Turning* film still, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist

Curatorial Note

The planning, research, and conceptual framework for *Fluid Matters, Grounded Bodies* are representative of a collaborative effort between all members of the curatorial team. The curatorial work for the exhibition took place during a tutorial taught at the Gallatin School by Patricia Eunji Kim in Spring 2022.

Credits and Acknowledgments

Artists: Farah Al Qasimi, Beatriz Cortez, micha cárdenas, Tessa Grundon, Joiri Minaya, Ada M. Patterson, Himali Singh Soin, and Alexis Rider

Curatorial Team: Anastasia Amrhein, Claudia Azalde, Cheyenne Bryant, Jasmine Buckley, Patricia Eunji Kim, Kaleah Mchawi, and Ally Swanson

Gallatin Galleries Production Team: August Ackley, Chase Adams, Nina Ahmadi, Jennifer Birge, Cheyenne Bryant, Jasmine Buckley, Traci Clapper, Glen Einbinder, Chloe Himmelman, Lillian Leopold, Karolina Ochoa-Montes, and Moon Warner

Exhibition Designer: Ian Sullivan

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Artist Biographies

Farah Al Qasimi (b. 1991, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) (she/her) works with photography, video, music and performance. She has participated in residencies at the Delfina Foundation, London; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine; and is a recipient of the Art Basel Miami Legacy Purchase Program Prize, the New York NADA Artadia Prize; an Aaron Siskind Individual Photographer's Fellowship; and the 2020 Capricious Photo Award. Her first monograph, *Hello Future*, published by Capricious in 2021, was shortlisted for the Aperture/Paris Photo Book of the Year Award.

micha cárdenas, PhD, MFA, (she/her) is an artist, as well as Associate Chair and Associate Professor of Performance, Play & Design, and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she directs the Critical Realities Studio. Her book *Poetic Operations*, out now from Duke University Press, proposes algorithmic analysis as a method for developing a trans of color poetics. She is co-editor of the book series *Queer/Trans/Digital* at NYU Press, with Amanda Philips and Bo Ruberg. She is a first generation Colombian American.

michacardenas.org

Beatriz Cortez (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist born in El Salvador and based in Los Angeles. Her work explores simultaneity, life in different temporalities and versions of modernity, the untimely, and speculative imaginaries of the future. She has had numerous solo exhibitions and has participated in group exhibitions nationally and internationally. She has received several awards, including the California Studio Manetti Shrem Artist Residency at UC Davis (2022); Longenecker-Roth Artist Residency at UCSD (2021); Artadia Los Angeles Award (2020); Frieze LIFEWTR Inaugural Sculpture Prize (2019); Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant (2018); and California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artists (2016), among others. Instagram: @beatrizcortezflores

Artist Biographies

Tessa Grundon (she/her) is a British artist working on both sides of the Atlantic. Her work is rooted in “place” using elements of the landscape to explore environmental issues. In recent years she has been based on Governors Island in NYC Harbor working with arts and science organizations including SWALE, Urban Soil Institute, NYU Gallatin’s Wetlab, Works on Water, Underwater New York and the Virtual Volcano Observatory focusing on engagement with the environment and education. She presently also works as a teaching artist with Artist Space on the Lower East Side. Other partnerships and residencies include Brooklyn Navy Yard, Art.Earth, I-Park, Wave Hill, PLACE Collective and Sail Britain. Her work is in private collections internationally.

Joiri Minaya (b. 1990) (she/her) is a NY-based Dominican-United Statesian multi-disciplinary artist. She studied art at the ENAV (DR), the Chavón School of Design, and Parsons. Minaya has exhibited across the Caribbean, the U.S. and internationally. She recently received a Jerome Hill Fellowship, a NY Artadia award and the BRIC’s Colene Brown Art Prize, and has participated in residencies at Skowhegan, Smack Mellon, Bronx Museum, Red Bull House of Art, LES Printshop, Socrates Sculpture Park, Art Omi, ISCP, Vermont Studio Center, New Wave and Silver Art Projects. [@joiriminaya](#)

Ada M. Patterson (b. 1994, Bridgetown) (they/she) is an artist and writer based between Barbados, London and Rotterdam. She works with masquerade, performance, poetry, textiles and video, looking at the ways storytelling can limit, enable and complicate identity formation. Her recent work considers grief, elegy writing and archiving as tools for disrupting the disappearance of communities queered by different experiences of crisis. Patterson was the 2020 NLS Kingston Curatorial and Art Writing Fellow. Recent exhibitions include *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 1950s – Now* at Tate Britain, London and *The Whole World is Turning* at TENT, Rotterdam.

Artist Biographies

Alexis Rider, Ph.D. (she/her) is a historian of science and the environment, whose research spans the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Her work centers the geosphere and cryosphere as sites of theorization and knowledge-making. Rider completed her doctorate in the History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania in May 2022, and is currently a fellow at the Institute of Historical Research in London. In addition to her academic work, Rider engages in artistic collaborations that explore human conceptions of the environment. She is also a potter interested in all things clay, glaze, and kiln-related. See more at alexisrider.com.

Himali Singh Soin's (b. New Delhi, lives between London and New Delhi) (she/her) multi-disciplinary work uses metaphors from the natural environment to construct speculative cosmologies that reveal non-linear entanglements between human and non-human life. Her poetic methodology explores the myriad technologies of knowing, from scientific to intuitional, indigenous and alchemical processes. Soin's art has been shown at Khoj (Delhi), Mimosa House, Serpentine Gallery (London), Gropius Bau, (Berlin), Anchorage Museum (Alaska), the Dhaka Art Summit and the Shanghai Biennale among others. She was the recipient of the Frieze Artist Award 2019. A solo exhibition of her work will open at The Art Institute of Chicago in December 2022.

Curator Biographies

Anastasia Amrhein, PhD (she/her) is an art historian, curator, and educator whose work focuses on ancient West Asian material culture and its reception. She is particularly interested in questions of materiality, divinity, gender and sexuality, and human relations with the (super)natural world. Dr. Amrhein has worked on curatorial projects at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Penn Museum, and NYU's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, where she co-curated the exhibition *A Wonder to Behold: Craftsmanship and the Creation of Babylon's Ishtar Gate* and co-edited the eponymous catalogue and collection of essays. She is currently guest-curating an exhibition on queenship, ancient and modern, at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Most recently, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology at Bryn Mawr College.

Claudia Azalde (she/her) is a NYU Gallatin graduate based in New York. She is an artist, designer and spatial practitioner. She was chosen as a 2022 fellow for Gallatin's Fellowship in Urban Practice, and will be spending the summer conducting research in Madrid. Currently, Claudia is continuing her exploration in the fields of biomaterials and multi-species worlding.

Cheyenne Bryant (she/her) is a NYU Gallatin graduate based in Atlanta, GA. She is a historian, artist, and aspiring cultural anthropologist whose work considers human encounters with memory, art, and materiality. She served as a curator for the Gallatin Arts Festival for two consecutive years. She also co-curated *Transformation!*, a Gallatin Galleries exhibition centered around Black theater and music. Currently, Cheyenne is studying the graveyards and burial practices of Southern Black communities.

Curator Biographies

Jasmine Buckley (she/her) is an NYU Gallatin graduate based in New York. She is an artist, curator, and designer. She's curated multiple exhibitions with the Gallatin Galleries, most recently student artist Jesses Mclaughlin's BA show *Every Time I Think of Something I Sneeze*. She also co-curated *Transformation!*, a Gallatin Galleries exhibition centered around Black theater and music. Currently, Jasmine studies how museum and gallery spaces interact with Black communities and artists.

Patricia Eunji Kim, PhD (she/her) is Assistant Professor at New York University and Senior Editor and Curator-at-Large at Monument Lab. Dr. Kim is currently writing the first book-length study on the visual and material culture of Hellenistic queenship from the fourth to second centuries B.C.E.—a corpus of materials central to a show that she is guest-curating at the Cincinnati Art Museum. She is also co-editor of *Timescales: Thinking Across Ecological Temporalities* (2020), *The National Monument Audit* (2021), and *Shaping the Past* (forthcoming).

Kaleah Mchawi (she/her) is a NYU graduate based in New York. She runs operations for In The Blk (@inthe_blk), a fashion non-profit co-founded by Victor Glemaud, Abrima Erwiah, and Virgil Abloh that is dedicated to creating and expanding spaces for Black individuals in the global fashion industry. Currently, Kaleah is studying the intersection of creativity and business in fashion.

Ally Swanson (they/them) is a NYU graduate based in Brooklyn. They are an artist, activist, and aspiring doula. They collaborated on The Gallatin Review's Prison Education Project, and their work is published in Gallatin's online publication, Confluence.

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