



## Main Space

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*An Observable Collapse Towards Another* curated by Rowan Lynch  
Benjamin de Boer, Andrew Hoekstra, Sara Kay Maston, Cadence Planthara  
September 7 – October 13, 2018

Taken and published in 1972, The Blue Marble is an image of Earth as seen from the Apollo spacecraft; it remains one of the most reproduced images in human history.<sup>1</sup> Viewers who felt themselves summarized within the image took note of the fragility of the depiction. As a result, the first fully illuminated image of Earth from space led to a proliferating concept of earthly sustainability. As a meeting site of visual, scientific, and popular culture, the photograph speaks to the ability of an image to reinforce slow-percolating ideological arguments. As a more contemporary point of reference, the term “Anthropocene” has passed the border between scientific and popular consciousness. As a proposed geological epoch primarily defined by permanent changes recorded in the earth’s geological record as a result of human activity, it provides a vital summary allowing for an understanding of far reaching consequences resulting from humanity's unsustainable preoccupations over the course of the last century.

The painting, ceramic, and object based works that make up *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* make reference to the deeply interdependent nature of ecology. As a branch of scientific thought, ecology deals with the relations of organisms both to each other and their environment. Coming into use in Germany in the late 1800’s, the word is composed of Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Al Reinert, The Blue Marble Shot, posted April 12 th 2011, accessed August 29th, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/04/the-blue-marble-shot-our-first-complete-photograph-of-earth/237167/>.

word *oikos* (house or dwelling) and *logia* (“study of”).<sup>2</sup> The collective ecological concerns featured in the exhibition investigate topics ranging from the inhuman perspective of echolocation, flora as metaphor within an exploration of identity, and an invocation of Toronto’s historic waterways through the folk practice of dowsing. While they are not overtly concerned with climate change, the overwhelming presence of anthropogenic climate change in relation to these topics stands as an intuitive extrapolation. As a phenomenon expanding past the scale of any one human life, an understanding of climate change calls for consideration of time and place distanced from an individual, anthropomorphic lens. The artworks on view offer representations of the natural world that aim to render visible both subjects and perspectives which humans are typically unable to access. In this manner they are capable of complementing this need, offering opportunities to consider narratives within contexts that are given permission, by the logic of the exhibition form, to remain in complex relation to one another.

The process of vitrification that takes place during the high temperature firing of clay results in a rock-like structure with a potential lifespan spanning thousands of years.<sup>3</sup> By virtue of this integrity, the ceramic objects created by Andrew Hoekstra, Sara Kay Maston, and Cadence Planthara produce an emblematic engagement with a deep material timeline. While formally recalling early life forms, the likes of whose fossilized remains can be found at sites like Canada’s Burgess Shale, Hoekstra’s *Feelers From the Grotto* is composed of ceramic complemented by a 3D-printed plastic segment, substances that share significant life spans. The hole-filled segments resting on the gallery floor give the impression that we are in the presence of the unearthed remains of an unknown life form.

Cadence Planthara’s cross-pollinating artistic practice involves a range of processes, including ceramics as both vessel and canvas. In her *Untitled composition (floral)*, the object’s three-dimensional possibilities are merged with applications of colourful markings resembling floral patterns, a theme that continues within the artist’s paintings. A floral coaster gifted by a family member served as the primary reference point for the *Flower Paintings 1-3*, acting as a

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<sup>2</sup> Schwarz A., Jax K., *Etymology and Original Sources of the Term “Ecology”*, (Springer, Dordrecht, 2011), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Finkelnburg, *Vitrification - Ceramic Arts Network*, posted January 15, 2018, accessed August 29th 2018, <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/ceramic-recipes/reference/vitrification/#>.

symbol the artist engages to approach ideas of identity and the genre of identity painting itself. Referencing the coaster, which in fact does not arrive from a tradition directly related to Planthara's ancestry, provides an indistinctness that serves as a method of interrogating the genre. The works make reference to far reaching connections not only present within South Asian diasporic experience, but also between the earthly materials of copper, dirt, and ceramic, and astrological forces. Through deliberate choices made in respect to their material composition, a spell has been woven within the paintings with respect to Venus, the planetary ruler of aesthetic attraction. Where compressed dirt collected from a Toronto park is bracketed by Venusian metal, and spanned with coconut fibre, the earthly joins with distant planetary bodies.

Sara Kay Maston's paintings present similarly lush imagery. Filled with flowering plants and washes of colour, the hazy spaces aim to embody the speculative viewpoints of their inhuman insect and animal inhabitants. Maston's investment in this theme relates to an interest in challenging the hierarchy of human vision through the production of a sensitivity to the multiple levels in which our environment can be understood and experienced. In her own words, painting "is a way to reinstate my relationship to memory, subjectivity, and a connection to the environment outside of the ubiquitous technological interfaces within our anthropocentric global infrastructure."<sup>4</sup> This is exemplified within the work *Eyes that See in the Dark*, where Maston has produced a projective sonar-based encounter with a human on an immersive scale. A foggy shape in the center of the composition hints to a redacted human presence that remains compositionally secondary to the translucent elements fluttering within the canvas. Unlike *The Blue Marble* photograph functioning on its intoxicating claim to the real, Maston's paintings are inventive representations untethered from the rules of interaction between light and lens. As an act of storytelling, they prompt an expanded sense of self that seeks to function as a humbling reminder of the individual limits of our perception.

Benjamin de Boer's work articulates another process of reassessment between a human subject and their environment. Dowsing rods constructed from carved pine, brass, and leather, rest near their associated natural resource as it cycles endlessly within Maston's ceramic fountain. As a divinatory folk practice used to seek out various resources including

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Kay Maston, Xpace submission, 2018.

water and mineral deposits, dowsing is a tool that resists an emphasis on efficiency. The rods instead allow their user to meander in connection with the hidden qualities within a landscape. De Boer has used these rods and charted his route along Toronto's Garrison creek on handmade paper, acknowledging the flows of water that exist within and below the city. Their presence in the gallery provides a material connection to natural forces, rendering an encapsulation of systems that predate, underline, and bracket our urban existence.

The perspectives and stories we find, absorb, and retell have great influence on the narratives we are able to recognize and construct. Dominant modes of storytelling emphasize individual conscience in place of social fate, but as evidenced by *The Blue Marble*, the stories we tell ourselves have proved capable of shifting. *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* seeks to join this collection of work as an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of social and environmental relations, while at once recognizing environmental collapse as an inevitable presence in our midst. In this case, "another" becomes a reference towards eventual, novel ways of living that are in store for our species. What humans have done to the planet can be summarized as reducing its capacity to host a diverse range of life, to the point where we have worked up towards our own name on an ill-fated list. In the face of such staggering uncertainty, "what is most significant about ecology is its ability to convert this often nihilistic rejection of the status quo into an emphatic affirmation of life."<sup>5</sup> *An Observable Collapse Towards Another* seeks to reinforce this reconstructive approach, while prompting consideration of humanity's role within cycles we have unquestionably altered.

- Rowan Lynch

This exhibition is part of Xpace Recent Grad Summer Residency program

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<sup>5</sup> Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, (Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1986), 92.