

wild

Exhibition Guide



Guest Curated by
Farah Yusuf

Carrie Allison
Omar Badrin
Catherine Blackburn
Emily Jan
Humboldt Magnussen



Textile Museum of Canada
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WILD

Wild features work by five emerging Canadian artists who make mischief of neat and tidy systems of classification. Through a range of textile processes and materials, these artists render fabulous flora and fauna that are defiantly aberrant, untamed, and uncultivated.

Carrie Allison honours endangered Indigenous plants of Nova Scotia through beaded sketches that contrast western systems of classification with Indigenous ways of knowing. **Emily Jan** expresses ecological concern for the world's oceans and rainforests through her felted bestiaries of imaginary creatures. **Catherine Blackburn** pays tribute to her late grandparents, their traditional way of life, and the land that sustained the Denesuline people for centuries. **Omar Badrin** confronts his experience of feeling alien as a visible minority through crocheted neon skins that are designed to stand out. **Humboldt Magnussen** engages costuming and ornamentation to defy masculine norms—their suite of helmets provides a safe space for personal transformation and the expression of a hidden inner nature.

Together, these artists push against established limits. Their imaginative creations propose new ecologies that—by their unique and uncompromising nature—are wild.

Cover Images:

Top L to R: Emily Jan, *Apologue I (Anteater)* (2016), Carrie Allison, *Beaded Botanical 3 (Sabatia kennedyana Fern)* (2018), Omar Badrin, *Model Minority* (2019)

Bottom L to R: Humboldt Magnussen, *Pearl and Log Helmet* (2014), Catherine Blackburn, *Aboriginal Classics Series (Ratroot)* (ongoing)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aberrant describes something that departs from an accepted standard.

Allegory refers to a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically of moral or political significance.

Apologue refers to a moral fable, especially one with animals as characters.

Bestiary refers to a collection of descriptions or representations of real or imaginary animals.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life present in the world at a particular time or place.

Blood memory refers to the idea that everyone carries ancient and ancestral memories in their genes.

Botanical describes something which relates to plants.

Classification refers to the process of organizing things according to shared qualities or characteristics. In biology, it is the arrangement of animals and plants in taxonomic groups according to their observed similarities.

Colonialism refers to the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Denesuline (pronounced as Den-a-sooth-leh-na) refers to Dene First Nations peoples from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

Documentation refers to the activity of recording facts relating to a particular subject.

Ecosystem refers to a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Empathy refers to the ability to understand and/or respect the feelings and experiences of another.

Endangered refers to a species that is at serious risk of extinction, meaning that it has the potential to soon have no living members.

Fauna refers to a typical collection of plant life present in a particular time or place.

Flora refers to a typical collection of plant life present in a particular time or place.

Hierarchical describes something arranged in a system in which groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

Homogenous describes things that have the same relative position, are alike, and of the same kind.

Hybrid refers to a thing made by combining two different elements. In biology, it refers to the offspring of two plants or animals of different species or varieties.

Indigeneity refers to the fact of originating or occurring naturally in a particular place.

Mi'kma'ki is the traditional and current territories of the Mi'kmaw Nation.

Othering refers to when a person or group of people have been intentionally and systemically marginalized.

Organism refers to an individual animal, plant, or single-celled life form.

Symbiotic describes an interaction involving two different organisms living in close physical association.

Taxonomy refers to the branch of science concerned with classification, especially of organisms.

Uncultivated describes something which has not been developed by systemic control. In agriculture, it refers to land which has not been used for growing crops.

Untamed describes something which is not domesticated or otherwise controlled.

Wild describes a life form or group of life forms existing in their natural environment, not tied to any imposing system of organization.



Image: Emily Jan, *Apologue VI (Octopus)* (2018), Wool, reed, silicone, resin, faux flowers and greenery, found objects

IDEAS IN THE EXHIBITION

CONNECTION TO THE LAND

The artists in *Wild* explore human connections to the land in relation to family and community, sharing personal narratives that speak to their ancestry and lived experience. They consider traditional and contemporary systems of organization that either honour the land and promote a relationship of respectful stewardship, or exploit it for resources that can be consumed and encourage human mastery over natural forces. The artists invite us to acknowledge systems, past and present, that have led to the destruction of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity; by understanding one's place within these systems individuals and communities can move forward in empathy with each other and establish new relationships with the land.



Image: Catherine Blackburn, *Trapline* (2019), Rabbit fur, glass beads, sinew, thread, painted metal traps, nails, wood beam

Catherine Blackburn's use of rabbit skins references her grandfather's labour as a trapper and fisherman, revealing a relationship of understanding and dependence between her ancestors and their local environment. Through personal memory of her grandparents and their traditional way of life, Blackburn's work explores the livelihood and identity of Denesuline people in connection to the land which has sustained them for centuries. The beadwork stitched into the rabbit skins suggest the blood of the animal, and refers to the concept of blood memory—an ancestral connection to language, song, spirituality, and teachings. Her beadwork is in honour of her grandmother's own beading practice.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the artists in *Wild* consider connection to the land? Consider their biographical information, personal experiences, materials and techniques used in their work, and the ways in which the work is displayed within the gallery space.
2. The 2019 Toronto Biennial of Art has put together what they consider to be a new kind of land acknowledgement, upon which all of the event's art and programming are created. Read their land acknowledgement (<https://torontobiennial.org/land-acknowledgement/>) and have a discussion about what it means to acknowledge the land on which we live and create.
3. Use this interactive map designed by *Native Land Digital* to learn more about the Indigenous territory of the land you live on: <https://native-land.ca/>. What treaties govern the relationships between Indigenous people and settler Canadians on this land?

SELF AND BODY

The exhibition features many wearable objects, acknowledging that how we dress and adorn our bodies can help us navigate through the world. We make sense of the world through our bodies—both internal ways of knowing and external influences can have impact on how we make sense of ourselves, our relationships with others, and the physical spaces we inhabit. These art objects serve as tools of protection, visibility, contemplation, ornamentation, and self-expression.



Image: Humboldt Magnussen, *Untitled* (2019), Inkjet print

Humboldt Magnussen's work is a collection of ornamented facial coverings referred to as helmets which are intended to defy norms of masculinity and allow for the making of a personal safe space. They are decorated with craft supplies from dollar stores and other found materials. The pieces offer a place of protection and personal expression, existing in critical engagement with the concept of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer +) safe spaces. The artist wears these pieces in a series of photographs taken at Hanlan's Point Beach on the Toronto Islands, a significant place to the LGBTQ+ community.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the artists featured in *Wild* make reference to the theme of self and body in work? What kinds of relationships and interactions with the world around them are they looking to express?
2. Design a wearable item to represent how your body interacts with the world, environment, and communities around it. Consider how this item would serve you and how others around you might respond to it.

SELF AND OTHER

Othering is a concept that refers to when a person or group of people have been intentionally marginalized, alienating them from a particular situation or livelihood. Some of the artists in *Wild* consider experiences of being othered through colonial, racist, and homophobic violence. They demonstrate resilience despite systems that aim to control their experiences and voices, and they find ways of holding true to their own way of being on their terms. Othering can lead to cultural loss and distortion of one's self-perception—but can also lead to acts of reclamation, remembrance, recreation, and celebration. The viewer is invited to consider their own experiences and the ways in which, through individual and collective action, they can challenge the systems which have sought to control.



Image: Omar Badrin, *Lacuna* (2018), Paracord, industrial fishing twine, mason's line and flagging tape

Omar Badrin repurposes materials significant to his past. Badrin was born in Malaysia, and moved to Canada after he was adopted as an infant. His work reflects on growing up as a person of colour in a relatively homogenous community in Newfoundland. Fishing twine in its characteristic references the Maritimes where he grew up, while mason's line stands in for years that he spent working construction jobs. The fluorescent colours of his chosen materials make it highly visible and attractive, though also very unnatural and potentially toxic. The high visibility of the work declares an outsider status and offers a way for Badrin to relate back to the body and to the subject of race without using actual skin tones. His use of crochet is both in reference to the regional craft heritage of Newfoundland and a connection to family, as Badrin learned to crochet from his adoptive mother, who in turn learnt the craft from her mother.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do the pieces in *Wild* demonstrate breaking from accepted standards and imposed systems of control? Consider the messages that the artists are communicating through the materials and techniques used in their work, as well as their use of elements and principles of design.
2. In what ways can individuals and communities come together to share their experiences and create systems of support? What examples of othering have you observed in your community or on the news? What are some ways that you can provide support?

DOCUMENTATION & CLASSIFICATION

Documentation and classification are ways of ordering the world around us, helping us make sense of complex relationships. It can also be used to exert control over people, environments, or narratives of the past. The perspective of the individuals or groups who are recording information, and their choice of media in the documentation, will affect how information is perceived by those who receive it. Artists in *Wild* invite the viewer to contemplate and question the systems that affect how we see and react to the world around us.



Image: Carrie Allison, *Beaded Botanical 2* (*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *pubescens*) (2018), Toho beads on linen

Carrie Allison's *Beaded Botanicals* is a series of beaded sketches of endangered plants native to Nova Scotia presented alongside the botanical specimens used for reference in the sketches' making—from the botanical collection of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. Allison honours the local plant life of Mi'kma'ki territory through the act of creation. She has fragmented the beading, calling attention to the plants' near extinction due to industrial development encroaching on their habitat. Allison's work celebrates Indigenous connection to the land and reveals the impacts of colonialism and capitalism on Indigenous communities and natural ecosystems in Canada.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some examples of the ways in which the artists in *Wild* make use of documentation in their work? How do they express what is being represented? How do they express what's missing?
2. How can it be decided that a record is an authentic representation of what it is documenting? Who gets to make this decision?
3. Go on a walk around your neighbourhood with your peers. As you travel from one place to another, document the things you observe. Take note of the objects, people or events that interest you. Compare these with your peers. Do you find more similarities or differences? Consider why some people choose to take note of one thing over another.

KINSHIP

Kinship describes relationship as a result of similar characteristics and shared origins between things. It is a togetherness that is fostered through common experience—in strength and in struggle. Some of the artists in *Wild* consider kinship through the use of traditional technique as a means of building relationships of honour and celebration with one's cultural histories and family members. Other artists give life to kinship in the expression of strength in community and the nuanced interconnectedness that allows natural environments to thrive. Kinship is important in building empathy and inspiring action that allows for healing and growth among our communities. This kind of relationship-building can engage with the past, present, and future,



Image: Emily Jan, *Apologue II (Birds of Paradise)* (2016), Textiles, resin, faux flowers and greenery, found objects

allowing for valuable knowledge to be shared within and between communities.

Emily Jan's *Apologues* is a collection of hybrid lifeforms inspired by the biodiversity of the Amazon rainforest. The fantastical additions and changes made to otherwise recognizable animals invite the viewer to consider these creatures and their relationships to the other life surrounding them. In a time of climate crisis and the burning of the Amazon rainforests, our willingness to hold compassion and respect for biological and cultural diversity is important as a new vision for the future is charted. Jan's use of natural dyes from Newfoundland in the installation *mappaemundi: one month in Newfoundland* considers inks as living things which change with time and in relation to their environments. Considering what has been changed by human contact and what remains in its natural state, the work reflects the material richness of the land and the human connections from which the featured materials were sourced.

Discussion Questions

1. Some of the techniques used to create the objects in *Wild* would have traditionally been passed on from one generation to the next through family members. What knowledge do you feel is important to pass on to the next generation? Why is this knowledge important to you?
2. Do you have relationships or experiences that you would describe as being of kinship? What are different ways in which one might communicate with their kin?

3. Visit a nearby park and identify objects that are of interest to you. Consider the relationships that these objects have to the rest of the park. What can you learn about the area based on the objects that you've found? What items are appropriate to collect and what should be left behind?
4. Consider how you can make your own art supplies out of found materials from your neighbourhood. How would this impact the art that you might make? For inspiration, read tips from Jason Logan on making inks from organic materials found around the city:

Solomon, Serena. An Inkmaker's Guide to Urban Foraging. *CityLab*. 4 Sept. 2018, <https://www.citylab.com/life/2018/09/make-natural-ink-book-urban-foraging/568711/>.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Farah Yusuf is an independent curator based in Toronto. Her practice explores themes of cultural identity, hybridity, language, and technology. She has held curatorial residencies at the Textile Museum of Canada and Humber College Galleries and currently works at the Centre for Emerging Artists and Designers at OCAD University. She is the recipient of grants and awards from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Association of Art Galleries, and the Ontario Arts Council. Curatorial projects include *of movement and dwelling* (2017), *Eutopia* (2016), *Occupy Space* (2016), and *Corpus Lucida* (2012). Yusuf holds an MA in Experimental Digital Media from the University of Waterloo (2013) and a BFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practices at OCAD University where she was awarded the Curatorial Practice Medal and Governor General's Academic Medal in 2011.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Carrie Allison is an indigenous multidisciplinary artist born and raised on unceded Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC), with maternal roots in High Prairie, Alberta. Carrie is currently situated in K'jipuktuk (Halifax, NS). She holds an MFA, a BA in Art History, and a BFA from NSCAD University. Her practice responds to her maternal Cree and Metis ancestry, thinking through cultural loss and acts of resilience, resistance, and activism. Her work is rooted in research and pedagogical discourses, seeking to reclaim, remember, recreate and celebrate her ancestry through visual discourses.

Omar Badrin is an interdisciplinary artist born in Malaysia, and raised in Newfoundland. Badrin is currently situated in Toronto, and holds an MFA from OCAD University and a BFA from Grenfell College at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. He was awarded a graduate medal for his work in the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design program at OCAD University. Badrin creates crocheted masks and skins out of non-traditional materials, speaking to his experience as a person of colour growing up in a predominantly white province. This work considers the complex feelings of otherness that come from experiencing racist violence.

Catherine Blackburn is a multidisciplinary artist and jeweller born in Patuanak, Saskatchewan. She is of Dene and European ancestry and is a member of the English River First Nation. Her work merges elements of traditional Dene culture with contemporary concepts and processes to create dialogue between traditional art forms and her own new interpretations of them. Catherine's work addresses Canada's colonial history through themes of family, loss, and memory, along with

connections to her personal experiences. Her work celebrates the lives of indigenous people and envisions a future in which their voices are of center.

Emily Jan is an artist and writer born in San Francisco, California, and currently situated in Montreal. She holds an MFA from Concordia University, an Honours BA from Brown University, and a BFA with High Distinction from the California College of the Arts. Jan has traveled to 35 countries and lived in four, including South Africa and Mexico. As a wanderer, naturalist, and collector of objects and experiences, she is guided in her work by the spirit of exploration, kinship, and curiosity. Emily works with materials such as wood, reed, cloth, silicone, and resin to create hyper-realistic installations of found objects inhabited by both handmade and found flora and fauna.

Humboldt Magnussen is an artist and curator from rural Saskatchewan, currently situated in Toronto. They hold an MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies from OCAD University and a BFA from Concordia University. They have exhibited their work across Canada and internationally. They are co-founder (along with Marjan Verstappen) of Younger Than Beyoncé (YTB) Gallery, a nomadic, D.I.Y. gallery for emergent and experimental art practices. Their work explores ornamentation and the investigation of queer spaces, authenticity and documentation. They are interested in how complicated notions of identity, gender, sexuality and LGBTQ+ community can be visualized.

MELISSA LEVIN EMERGING ARTIST AWARD

This award is in honour of Melissa Levin (1958-2015), renowned Toronto-based artist whose career was synonymous with her exuberant love of colour and pattern. An artist, filmmaker, documentarist, mentor, activist and teacher, she was a prolific chronicler and satirist of lesbian lifestyles. Often featuring Levin's partner, visual artist Nina Levitt, her works have been presented around the world. She was also a teacher in the textile department of Sheridan College, and at video-art workshops with LGBTQ+ youth and high school students. She had a love for the idiosyncratic beauty in found objects and held a great spirit of care in giving her findings new life.

The Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award was established in honour of Melissa's passion for mentoring emerging artists, sharing her legacy of artistic curiosity and exploration. The award is geared to help emerging artists conduct self-directed activities such as art production, apprenticeships, residencies or research. Successful applicants receive a monetary prize and the opportunity to take on a customized program of research supported by the Textile Museum of Canada.

Omar Badrin was the recipient of the Honourable Mention Award for the Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award in 2017, selected for his appreciation of textiles and his commitment to accessing and building upon traditional knowledge as an extension of his conceptual artistic practice. Catherine Blackburn was one of two recipients of the Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award in 2018, selected for her appreciation of tradition, innovation, colour, pattern and narrative.

Visit Melissa Levin's artist website here:

<http://www.melissalevinartist.com/>.

FURTHER READING

MORE ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Carrie Allison

Visit Carrie Allison's website: <http://www.carrie-allison.com/>.

Read about Allison's public beading circles working to bead sections of the Shubenacadie River:

Mullin, Morgan. Carrie Allison investigates home. *The Coast*. 15 Feb. 2018, <https://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/carrie-allison-investigates-home/Content?oid=12686151>.

Catherine Blackburn

Visit Catherine Blackburn's website: <https://www.catherineblackburn.com/>.

Read about Catherine Blackburn's body of work titled *New Age Warriors*:

Noyes, Jayda. Indigenous artist captures rising resilience from historical truths. *Daily Herald*. 17 Sept. 2018, <https://paherald.sk.ca/2018/09/17/indigenous-artist-captures-rising-resilience-from-historical-truths/>.

Emily Jan

Visit Emily Jan's website: <https://emilyjan.com/>.

Look into Emily Jan's illustrated books, *still life* (2015) and *A Denali Book of Hours* (2016): <https://emilyjan.com/bookstore>.

Humboldt Magnussen

Read Humboldt Magnussen's MFA Thesis: *Constructing Inclusive Masculinities*:

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/54849496.pdf>.

Read about Magnussen's work titled *Witness*, a photographic installation that re-examines an assault which took place outside a gay bar in their hometown:

Humboldt Magnussen: *Witness*. *Untitled Art Society*. 7 Apr. 2018, <http://www.uascalgary.org/archive/humboldt-magnussen-witness>.

Omar Badrin

Visit Omar Badrin's website: <https://www.omarbadrin.com/>.

Watch a video in which Badrin discusses his practice:

An Artist's Grotesque Portraits of Life as an Outsider. *Daily Vice*. https://video.vice.com/en_ca/video/an-artists-grotesque-portraits-of-life-as-an-outsider/5a55457d177dd4785659fb05.

MORE ABOUT THE IDEAS IN THE EXHIBITON

Connection to the Land

Use the *Native Land Digital Map*, an online Indigenous-run project: <https://native-land.ca/>.

Read this article in which professionals involved in the 2019 Toronto Biennial of Art discuss what it means to use a land acknowledgement as a guiding principle for curatorial and artistic work:

<https://canadianart.ca/features/a-new-kind-of-land-acknowledgement/>.

Read the Land Acknowledgment for the Toronto Biennial of Art here: <https://torontobiennial.org/land-acknowledgement/>.

The Climate Crisis and Climate Justice

Read this article by Beverley Jacobs, which focuses on racism systemically applied to the environment and the lands of Indigenous peoples:

Jacobs, Beverley. *Environmental Racism on Indigenous Lands and Territories*. 20 May 2010, <https://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2010/Jacobs.pdf>.

Read this article on climate change and how traditional knowledge can provide the solution:

Raygorodetsky, Gleb. Why Traditional Knowledge Holds the Key to Climate Change. 13 Dec. 2011, <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-traditional-knowledge-holds-the-key-to-climate-change.html>.

Safe(r) Spaces

Read through these Safe(r) Spaces resources assembled by McGill University:

Making safer spaces takes all kinds of work. McGill University. <https://www.mcgill.ca/edu4all/edu4all-themes/making-safer-spaces-takes-all-kinds-work>.

Consider this list of resources for anti-oppression by Toronto organisation ArtReach:

Anti-O and Equity Resources. ArtReach: Supporting Community Based Art Projects And The Young People That Make Them Matter. <https://www.artreach.org/antioandequityresources>.