OVERLAP AND OUTLIERS

Schedule of featured artists

2020 August 1 - 16

Habit & Home: Leslie Vigeant

August 22 - September 6

The Kind of Calmness Chaos Brings: Andrea Alonge

2021

January 23 - February 7

Pangea: Hannah Newman

February 13 - 28

A Year of Isolation, Things Got Weird: Russell Borne, Atorie Bu, Henrik Soerensen

March 6 - 21

UMWELT: Marcelo Fontana

March 27 - April 11

If water had its way: Susan Murrell

April 17 - May 2

Slow Friction: Simon Boas with Kris Blackmore (as Midgray), Keith McGraw

May 8 - 23

We Gathered: Jeremy Le Grand

May 29 - June 13

When your sweat smells like heavy metals: Katherine Spinella

July 10 - August 15

Soft Ambition: Renee Couture, Carolyn Hopkins

August 21 - September 5

Whatsit Mystic Object Self-Reflection: Matthew Bennett Laurents

September 11 - 26

Thunderstruck 2.0: black hole sun: John Whitten as Thunderstruck Collective with Katherine Spinella, Michael E. Stephen, Kristin Hough, Morgan Rosskopf, Ashlin Aronin

October 2 - 17

Waiting for the Flood: Maria Lux

October 23 - November 7

Nobody's Fool: Curated by Ella Ray, featuring artists ariella tai, Kendyl Boyd, Azha Ayanna Luckman, Nia Musiba, Melanie Stevens, Mariah Green

November 13 - November 28

Hi Collaboration: Britney Connelly as Hi Collaboration with Russell Borne, Peggy Borne, Tim Kennerly

Foreword

fter witnessing a succession of artist-run spaces close, and the loss of opportunities that such spaces provide for emerging and mid-career artists, a small group of artists founded Carnation Contemporary in 2018. Carnation's mission is to create a self-propelling and sustainable gallery model that exhibits critically innovative contemporary art and fosters a creative community for emerging and mid-career artists in the Northwest (nearly one-third of Carnation's artists live outside of the Portland metropolitan area). We aim to form alliances with like-minded spaces throughout the country and be a beacon for our region and community.

We provide opportunities to artists who find it hard to break into the limited options afforded through more formalized institutions, or whose work does not conform to the art market of our region.

As a growing and adaptive member-run gallery, we create monthly exhibitions and programming that seek to expand what it means to be a contemporary art space. Since its inception, Carnation has exhibited over seventy-five artists (both within and beyond our member base) through solo and group exhibitions, gallery exchanges, and multi-platform projects programmed by our members. From performances that play with sculptural objects or collaborative site-specific projects to unsual treatments of more traditional forms of art-making, we champion a range of diverse artists and art practices.

Overlap and Outliers reflects on our second exhibition cycle (February 2020 to November 2021) through the eyes and intellect of five regional arts writers: Vicki Krohn Amorose, Graham W. Bell, Laurel McLaughlin, Ella Ray, and Eden Redmond. Each author selected a group of Carnation artists to write about, conversing with them and spending time with their work. The resulting essays illuminate commonalities and distinctions between member artists, and provide a valuable look at the way artists with varying practices exist together in a collective like Carnation's.

The essays that follow structure the book into five sections. In keeping with the title of this book, there is also an outlier: Ella Ray has the unique distinction of contributing two essays to this book; one on selected member artists, and the other on the exhibition *Nobody's Fool*, which she curated at Carnation in October 2021.

This book is generously funded by a Ford Family Foundation Grant, with assistance from the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) in managing grant funding distribution. We are grateful for this support; it allows us to further our goal of investing in regional cultural producers—arts writers, curators, and artists.

Question the Reach

Vicki Krohn Amorose

n art writer is a specialized type of translator, converting image to word while filtering the conceptual through their own perceptions. Back in 2019, I taught an experimental art writing workshop and now recall, with "never say never" clarity, telling the group that you cannot write about visual art without experiencing the work in its physical presence. The digital alone will not suffice; that would be the equivalent of travel writing without leaving your home. Then came this book project, Delta, and Omicron. I could only visit the artists and their art remotely. I found myself adjusting my creative dials and intuitive reach. As I continue to ponder those



Andrea Alonge Staying Out The Time, 2021 42 x 30 in.

curious filaments of connection, sensed but unseen, that allow understanding of any kind to occur between people, I know only that it begins with desire and is accomplished by will. These artists—Maria Lux, Renee Couture, Andrea Alonge and Matthew Laurents—endeavored to connect with me as I did with them, so this collection of essays is called "Question the Reach."

Everyone has biases when it comes to art. I am no exception, and the work of textile artist **Andrea Alonge** caused me to re-examine some of my presumptions. For this, I am grateful. In her show, The Kind of Calmness Chaos Brings, the initial stimulus to hit my eye was the artist's use of intensely bright colors which, at first, signaled "happy hippie psychedelic"—a prejudiced glance that belies the work's serious intentions. A muted color palette signals the somber and studied artist, so the opposite must be "true," right? Adding to my shallow first reaction is the humble history of fiber art itself: long associated with craft and female domestic work, the medium still pursues a spot at the cool kids' table of the art world. The remedy to knee-jerk appraisals of visual art is, as ever, to look more closely.

A close-up view of any section of Alonge's textile sculptures brings rewards. Viewing the work through a computer screen, I lean forward, hit the magnification zoom, and devour multi-layered patterns, stitches, embellishments, textures, movement, and shapes. I feel the tactile allure of the cloth intensely. This is, in fact, the idea that rests at the heart of this body of work; Alonge explores our desire to touch, to make contact with each other. She employs forms such as whirlpools, ribbons,



Andrea Alonge Reality Is Duality, 2020 50 x 56 in.

Andrea Alonge, In The Rays Of A Beautiful Sun, 2020 Dimensions variable

tunnels, and tubes to symbolize channels of flowing energy and give shape to the varying rhythms and course-corrections involved in our attempts to communicate.

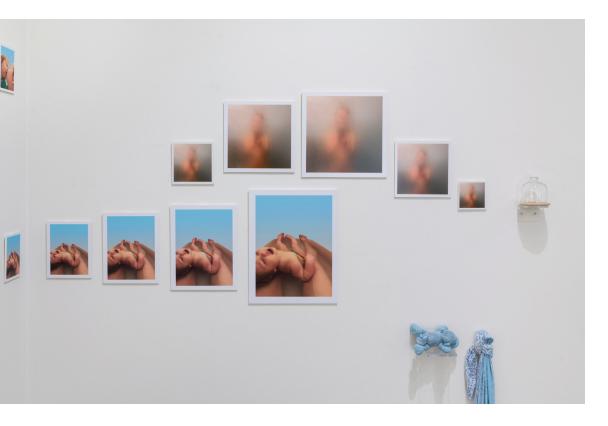
In the piece, Sometimes When We Touch, she unites multiple brick patterns in the box-like shape, and curving stripes of color cross paths to transform as they merge. The artist informed me that she is directly responding to the lines of communication between herself and her partner, exploring the notion of how "we" is conceptualized. The work, more broadly, conveys what it feels like for all of us who attempt to connect during pandemic times. The companion pieces, Touching from a Distance and

Staying Out The Time, suggest the invisible connections between our physical worlds, with their whirl-pool patterns and auras of floating fringe that tease the three-dimensional from the two-dimensional.

Andrea Alonge's skill combining colors and patterns is exceptional. Layers of analogous hues bump up against clashing shades, glittering trims, and neon flashes. Alonge collects pieces of patterned fabric, some vintage and costume, and composes them like found objects. She explains, "The mark of the hand and the machine, working together, is important to me; and the use of pre-printed fabrics allows me to connect to the hands of others." The artist thinks deeply about



Andrea Alonge The Kind of Calmness Chaos Brings, 2020 Gallery view



Renee Couture Soft Ambition, 2021 Gallery detail view

associations between textiles, global consumption, and technology. She views the loom as an ancient computer and weaving as binary code.

The artist is particularly enamored of what she calls "the visual of glitch," as when gazing at a pixelated screen, our eyes get confused and hurt a little as they undergo an optical push and pull. "If I look at the piece and my eyes glitch, I know it's working," Alonge tells me. As I dive into colors and experience a visual glitch, I also sense a mental flutter; maybe I got an upgrade in comprehension.

In her installation, *Soft Ambition*, **Renee Couture** exposes her personal experience of the artist as mother. Couture presents the daily rituals of playtime, naptime, bath time, and bedtime as markers of accomplishment in the routine labor of guarding another human life. The show combines photography, sculpture, and small-screen videos arranged in rhythmic patterns that carry the viewer through typical days of parenting.

The color palette throughout is "baby" blue and the flesh tone of the mother and child. Several of the sculptures are hand-flocked, an arduous process of first painting, then applying adhesive, and pumping the fuzzy material onto objects. A flocked

and deflated mylar balloon, hung from a dried bouquet, also flocked, takes on the suggestion of the body and the memories it holds. Acutely tactile, the medium evokes the interior of jewelry boxes, fragile holdings, protective of something treasured. A flocked fire escape ladder is collapsed on the floor, broken and unhinged. A single blue Zoloft pill rests under a bell jar atop a flocked surface, presenting the final ritual of the day. It strikes me that this artificial fuzziness is key to what Couture emphasizes here: The myth of blissful motherhood is a cultural cover. It hides the depths of a woman's yielding of time and attention, and her struggle with a forever-altered identity.

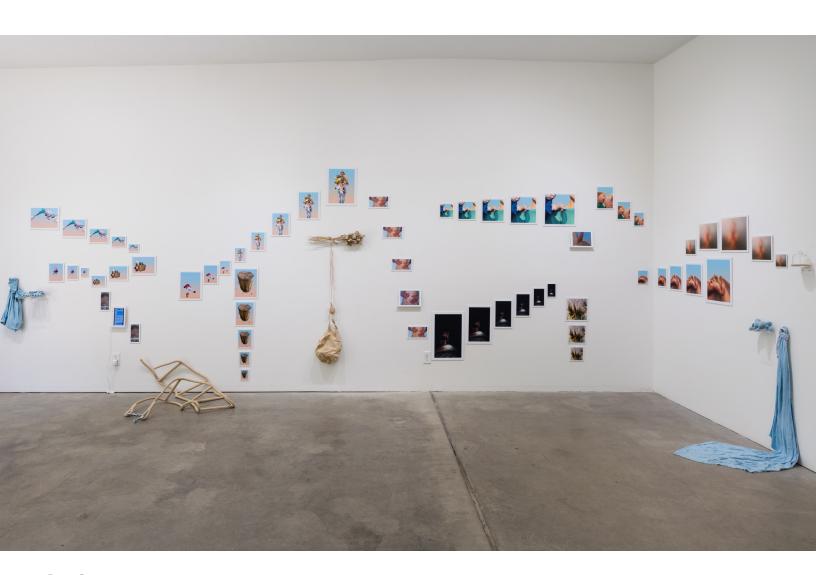
One video displays a close-up of the artist's hands resting on her bare torso as she breathes in and out, repeating the words, "I only have to get through this one minute." A series of screenshots capture daily digital moments such as, "Siri, how many minutes until noon?" and anxious texts from an inquiring mother-in-law. I feel the artist's tension. The modern mother has increased societal pressure when others feel free to watch and comment on the job she's undertaken.

The show carries a pervasive tenderness. Couture demonstrates protectiveness by obscuring her child's full face. She guards her daughter's privacy while capturing the toddler's odd postures of propulsion. Soft blue baby sandals, toes worn through, are displayed stuffed with pearls, like an offering to the small feet walking forward. In a series of photos taken in a darkened room, a sick child wants to be held by her mom. Naptime is usually reserved for the artist's studio work, yet she snaps the photo and surrenders to what is needed most.

A video shows the repeated action of baby pinching her mother's nipple, prompting the



Renee Couture Soft Ambition, 2021 Detail view



Renee Couture Soft Ambition, 2021 Gallery view

questions: Whose body is it? Where is the separation? In another photo series, the baby kisses a mirror. Babies do not perceive the image in the mirror as themselves; babies also cannot distinguish the difference between "mommy" and themselves. Reflected in the steamed-up mirror, the mother's body is only faintly visible; she is temporarily unrecognizable, lacking delineation.

While Couture reveals herself emotionally, she combines experiential overwhelm with an orderly composition of elements. I sense her determination to sort through the complexities required to live as a dedicated artist and mother. Truth-telling about motherhood is not only culturally suppressed, but it also bears the loaded scrutiny of family past, present, and future. It is, therefore, nothing short of heroic. The weight and confusion of motherhood, often invisible or deliberately hidden, is here made visible.

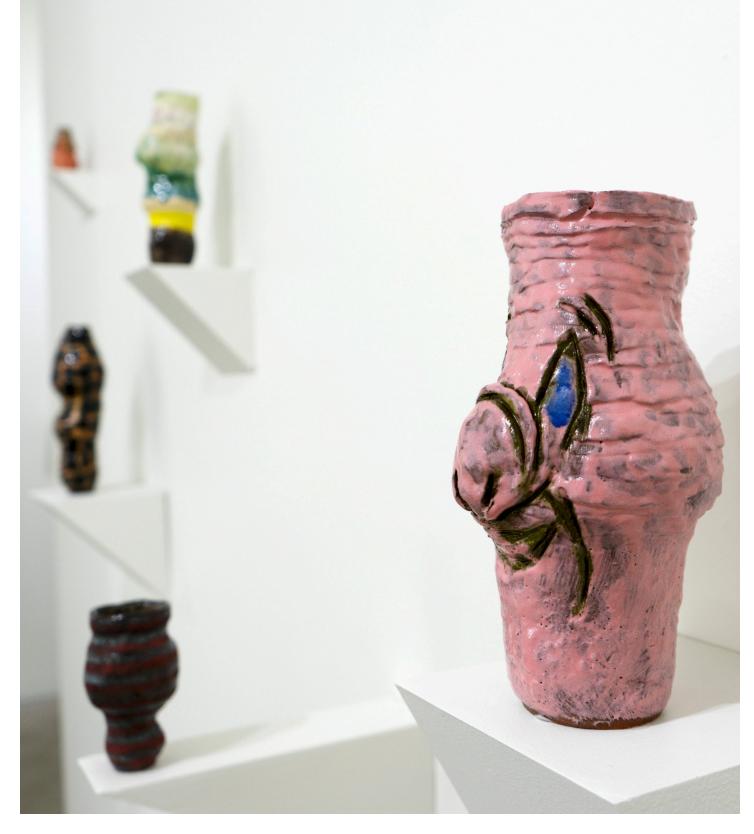
The medium of ceramics does not lend itself to spontaneity. The art generally requires well-planned construction and controlled steps of production from raw clay to glazed finish. Yet artist Matthew Bennett Laurents in his show, Whatsit Mystic Objects' Self-Reflection, displays ninety-four ceramic vessels brimming with energy, as though each arose from an automatic impulse. At first glance, one might think an object, such as Pinkerton, was made by a child; it is lumpy and oddly colored, lacking in elegance but not in appeal. When I view the vessels together, however, the space takes on the charged energy of cohesive presentation. Ranging in size from three to fifteen inches in height, the pieces rest atop individual wedge-shaped shelves, placed to create a pattern that leads the eye swooping across





Matthew Bennett Laurents Whatsit Mystic Objects' Self-Reflection, 2021 Gallery view

Matthew Bennett Laurents Wisebark, 2021



Matthew Bennett Laurents Pinkerton, 2021



Maria Lux Waiting for the Flood, 2021 Gallery detail view

the space in curious pursuit of what the hell is going on here.

There is no artifice, but I detect a method to the madness. Over-thinking adults like me have a very hard time playing, in the sense of truly connecting with the excitement of not knowing what will emerge. To this end, Matthew Bennett Laurents tells me that he has devised "systems of play" in his studio, such as building all the bases at once without thought of the finished work, or glazing the pieces at random. His connection with unfettered play is central to his process. The method succeeds; a sense of spirited and humorous freedom emerges from the single object and from the interplay between objects.

The artist shies away from making the work "about something" even though he has allowed a few symbols to emerge, such as the eyeballs scattered across *Vessel Form (Eyes)* and the six-pointed star in *Vessel Form (White Eagle)*. Defining and explaining the work might restrict the course of production, and the artist is wise to protect the creative flow. "I see myself as a channel for the work," he explains. "If I have a goal, it is to let go of ego." I am reminded of a Buddhist teaching that says, in short: when we laugh, we lose the ego. Matthew Bennett Laurents has intuitively utilized this idea, inviting us into a space where we can laugh at emotions we recognize in ourselves. Titles come

late in the process, after the installation is complete, and they delight my word-loving self: *Pancake Larry, Fatbrain Walter, Bozo Meister, Bobber,* and *Beanboi.*

It is hard to resist anthropomorphizing these pieces of clay, even the ones without faces. They ignite my own sense of play. I see them as distinct personalities who gathered to gaze back at the audience, fully present and pleased with their imperfection. They are sensitive but not delicate, off-center but balanced. They know who they are.

"What is de-extinction?" I ask artist **Maria Lux**, quoting a term used in her exhibition statement. It names the idea of bringing animals back from extinction, she explained, whereby enough DNA is extracted from frozen specimens to clone them using a surrogate. She added, "It's a fun word because it's just sort of inherently weird." The inherently weird is the life blood of Lux's current work. In her show, *Waiting for the Flood*, she brings into play her unexpected viewpoint and explores our collective preparation for environmental doom.

Lux adopts the drawing style of vintage horror and romance comics, collected in two volumes (Famous Monsters and Forward to the Past!) and here displayed as single pages. Combining text and visuals in this familiar form provides Lux the means to buffer foreboding themes and include citations from thinkers who inform her work. In one drawing, Lux quotes Theodor Adorno: "[Zoos are] laid out in the pattern of Noah's ark, for since their inception we have been waiting for the flood." Another drawing shows the Pyrenean ibex lying dead on a laboratory table with a quote from Jeffery Cohen: "Monsters are our children.

They ask us why we made them." The Pyrenean ibex was brought back from extinction but only lived for seven minutes; it's the only species to have gone extinct twice. The drawing, *Prepper*, imagines Noah's gossiping neighbors alongside a televangelist selling dehydrated survival soup in twenty-gallon buckets, declaring, "Dear god, it's good."

The exhibit also includes a witty series of photographs that mimics camera-trap photography, a method that typically produces "bad" and blurry images, and offers tantalizing glimpses of monsters caught on camera at night. "I want to show the animals outsized and monstrous," explains the artist, "so I built a miniature set." Trap photography implies the absence of humans as necessary for the presence of animals. The idea that human absence is required for the appearance of other species, taken to the extreme, is echoed in extinction studies. Survival food buckets are placed in the gallery as pedestals for toy animals, paired-up for their imagined Noah's ark and scaled as giants adjacent to tiny toy people. A metal storage shelf displays emergency canned goods like a knickknack collection, thoughts of catastrophe rendered charming and orderly.

Lux's extended investigation of monsters, extinction, animal ghosts, and doomsday prepping proposes that our fascination with monsters, and fictional spaces where humans deal with catastrophe, are ways of preparing ourselves for disaster. If an extinct species can be resurrected, it offers comfort that something may outlive our mistakes. The show's lateral-thinking narrative excites questions, with its cross-referencing themes, Biblical allusions, surprising connections, and sudden provocations of laughter. The visual



Maria Lux Waiting for the Flood, 2021 Gallery view



Maria Lux Camera Trap Photo, Mammoth, 2021 12 x 16 in.

components spark from concept to concept like a lively conversation that loops and lands on something you hadn't quite considered before. I am fascinated by Maria Lux's use of humor. She wields the power of the unserious as a type of intelligence, a method of flipping perspective, and a strategy for breaking the prescribed methods of thinking about environmentalism. Irreverence is a serious force.

Notes

- ¹Basbaum, Ricardo. "Post-Participatory Participation." Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry, no. 28 (2011): 90–101. https://doi.org/10.1086/662974
- ² Black, Hannah. "Go Outside: Hannah Black's Year in Review." ArtForum online. December 2020. https://www.artforum.com/print/202009/hannah-black-s-year-in-review-84376.
- ³ Grill, Genese. "Re-Materialization, Remoteness, and Reverence: A Critique of De-Materialization in Art." The Georgia Review 70, no. 3 (2016): 563–81. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44077738
- ⁴Hall, Gordon. "Object Lessons: Thinking Gender Variance through Minimalist Sculpture." Art Journal 72, no. 4 (2013): 46–57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43188633
- ⁵ Richard Schechner, "Drama, Script, Theatre, and Performance," The Drama Review: TDR 17, no. 3, Theatre and the Social Sciences (September, 1973) 5–36, 8.
- ⁶ Legacy Russell, Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2020) 7.

- ⁷ I am grateful to all of the artists, Hannah Newman, Simon Boas and Kris Blackmore, Russell Borne and Brittney Connelly, for discussing their artistic processes, methodologies, and projects with me over the course of December 2021 and January 2022, and whose perspectives and feedback I endeavored to incorporate into this essay.
- ⁸ See Joseph Beuys' work How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965 in Amy Tikkanen, "Joseph Beuys," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 15,2022, https:// www.britannica.com/biography/ Joseph-Beuys
- ⁹ Hannah Newman, Pangea: A Multimedia Epoch (Portland, OR: self-published, n.d.), 13.
- ¹⁰ About." Midgray. January 15, 2022, https://midgray.org
- ¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1983).
- ¹² Jeremy Le Grand, email correspondence with author, January 19, 2022.

- ¹³ Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," Artforum 10, (Summer 1967).
- ¹⁴ Jeremy Le Grand, email correspondence with author, January 19, 2022.
- ¹⁵ Brittney Connelly, conversation with author, January 13, 2022.
- ¹⁶ June Jordan, "Resolution #1,003,"
 in Haruko/Love Poems (London:
 Profile Books Ltd, 1993).
- ¹⁷ Legacy Russell, Glitch Feminism (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 149.
- ¹⁸ Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13 - 14.
- ¹⁹ Tina Campt, Listening to Images (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

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