Care and Climate Justice

Co-edited by Sarah Hamill
and Izzy Lockhart

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Gabriela Salazar: *Observed* (January 24-February 27, 2024), The Gallery at Heimbold, Sarah Lawrence College

Shanequa Benitez: *"But It's Ours": The Redline Between Poverty and Wealth* (March 5-April 10, 2024), curated by Nina Serrano '25, The Barbara Walters Gallery and the Center for the Urban River at Beczak, Sarah Lawrence College, co-sponsored by Groundwork Hudson Valley

Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger: *Perennial Land: The Data Forest* (March 21-May 16, 2024), curated by Patricia Cazorla, The Hall of Fame Art Gallery at Bronx Community College

Groundings: Care and Climate Justice (Emily Johnson, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Courtney Desiree Morris, Sarah Rosalena) (March 26-May 12, 2024), co-curated by Sarah Hamill and Izzy Lockhart, the Gallery at Heimbold, Sarah Lawrence College

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The Gallery at Heimbold, Sarah Lawrence College

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Introduction: Care and Climate Justice

Sarah Hamill and Izzy Lockhart

> Art is part of the struggle to reclaim a future that is not about the future at all but a present in which Indigenous territories, stories, bodies, and sensualities are unoccupied and uncivilized: I want to live there; that is where I live.[1]
>
> — Joanne Barker, "Decolonizing the Mind," 2018

To care — as labor, as ethic, as the quite unglamorous, everyday reproduction of life — is critically undervalued and unrecognized. On occasion the absolute *everywhereness* of care slips into mainstream visibility: the start of the Covid-19 pandemic was one such moment, when a crisis in the racialized and feminized economy of care was thrown into harsh relief. Care needs dramatically outstripped resources, and traditional institutions for providing care — the state, the market, the nuclear family — were found to be lacking, or stretched. Care, as a problem, was suddenly visible on a large scale.

But we're talking in generalities. For so many, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated an existing care crisis. For so many, care has always been fraught. For so many, care has been something you *do* for little or no compensation, but not something you reliably receive. It's in these zones of manufactured scarcity that counter-discourses and practices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, disabled, queer, immigrant, and feminist care exist. On the experimental, improvisational care webs of the disability justice movement, for example, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha describes the "ways we are attempting to dream ways to access care deeply, in a way where we are in control, joyful, building community, loved, giving, and receiving, that doesn't burn anyone out or abuse or underpay anyone in the process" as alternatives to the abusive systems of the state or "often, our biological families — the two sources disabled and sick people have most often been forced to rely on for care."[2]

Like the pandemic, climate change can be read in terms of a planetary care crisis, exposing and making visible a systematic devaluation of care in the past century and the generation of unfathomable care needs in this one (including, as we have good reason to fear, care needs related to more regular pandemics).[3] Likewise, the expertise and vision for caring otherwise on a rapidly changing planet can be found among those who have long endured environmental crises on this continent, now centuries deep into settler colonialism

1. Joanne Barker, "Decolonizing the Mind," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* Vol. 30 No. 2 (2018). Accessed April 11, 2024 https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2018.1502308

2. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 33.

3. On this process of devaluation, Nancy Fraser claims that "every form of capitalist society harbours a deep-seated social-reproductive 'crisis tendency' or contradiction: on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies." Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (July/Aug 2016). In an ecological sense, capitalism's attack on social reproduction manifests in its externalization of the costs of carbon-based fuel into our common climate, the toxification of lands and waters, and its depletion of human and more-than-human capacities to engage in reciprocal care activities.

and racial capitalism. The hijacking of foodways, the toxification of water and air, attacks on shelter and stability, attacks on social reproduction, the fostering of illness and disease, forced displacement — all such environmental crises were familiar to Black and Indigenous communities centuries before the accepted beginnings of the "climate crisis." At the time of writing, all of the above are now inflicted on Gazans in a convergence of violences that *must* be emphasized as environmental if we are to begin to unravel all the many ways that state violence has an environmental aspect, and all the ways that environmental disaster is not "natural" disaster.

Since care as an idea is politically neutral — *for who doesn't care for care,* asks Shannon Mattern — we combine *care* with *climate justice* to emphasize the anti-colonial, anti-capitalist heart of the care traditions that inform this exhibition series.[4] An injunction to care without critical rigor and historical analysis could mean almost anything. Of course, carbon-capturing techno-optimists arguably *care* about climate too. Let us not forget the harmful ways that "care" has been leveraged in the service of Indigenous boarding "schools," family separation, the asylum, paternalistic humanitarianism, the creation of national parks founded on Indigenous dispossession, and militarized border regimes — the latter especially pertinent in the era of climate change, as fascist solutions to "care" for national populations, by strengthening borders, are presented as an answer to climate refugees.[5] But as María Puig de la Bellacasa reminds us, we should not "give up on care because it is enlisted in purposes we might deplore" but instead "have its meanings debated, unpacked, and reenacted in an implicated way that responds to this present."[6]

The *Care and Climate Justice* exhibition series is interested in modes of care in the present moment that are sensitive to long histories of environmental injustice, since it is impossible to consider the climate of the environment without the climate of racism and settler colonialism, without the legacies of enslavement and the dispossession of Indigenous lands and waters. Christina Sharpe writes in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* that "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and the climate is antiblack."[7] We must therefore insist on *climate* and *justice* as inseparable terms. Climate discourse is dominated by an understandable urgency, a fixation on solutions, but *care* in this sense is an attention to everything– peoples, lands, ecologies, worlds, ways of being — at risk of getting forgotten or, worse, sacrificed in the rush to address our planetary crisis.[8] Of course the mining industry is already talking about energy transition in terms of a critical-mineral *gold* rush.[9] A "zero carbon" or "green" or "renewable" world can be just as extractive and colonial.

4. Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance and Care," *Places Journal* (November 2018). Accessed April 11, 2024 https://doi.org/10.22269/181120

5. Journalist Christian Parenti describes such climate fascism as "politics of the armed lifeboat." Parenti, "The Catastrophic Convergence: Militarism, Neoliberalism and Climate Change," in T*he Secure and the Dispossessed: How the Military and Corporations Are Shaping a Climate-Changed World*, eds. Ben Hayes and Nick Buxton (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 35.

6. María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 10.

7. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 104.

What would it look like to imagine a future that reckons with and cares for the injustices of the past and present? One such injustice is epistemological, in the settler refusal to recognize Indigenous peoples, cultures, and knowledges as both contemporary and future-bound. In response to this consignment of Indigeneity to an unchanging past, Cannupa Hanska Luger's sculptural installation, *Art-I-Fact* (2020), insists on the contemporaneity, the nowness, of Indigenous weapons, technologies, and tools. *Art-I-Fact's* vibrantly colored ceramic shapes resist the historical deadening and capture of such objects when displayed in museums as ethnographic installations. Not artifacts, these aesthetic objects have an active voice.

In a similar gesture, Luger's video, *Future Ancestral Technologies: We Live* (2019), depicts two figures wearing colorful regalia constructed from found sports equipment, pieces of crocheted blankets, and ceramics. They walk slowly through the land while a voice narrates a future in which Indigenous populations have remained behind on a devastated, extracted earth, left to create new cultures, new rituals of belonging to the land. A narrator describes this speculative future that exists after the end of colonization. The regalia is said to "blind us and make us deaf and prevent us from talking. They remove all the senses that we invested in as human beings and force us to feel once again."[10] The regalia produces a world of attentiveness and healing, a world that does not align with the scenes of post-apocalyptic violence that tend to dominate American cultural imaginaries of climate breakdown. Instead, Luger conjures scenes of true Indigenous and planetary liberation now that "the colonizer has left" and "all the notions of land ownership are gone." Luger's future is grounded in the past and present, in the recognition that Indigenous peoples "have survived so far," have already survived and resisted centuries of the apocalyptic genocides of settler colonialism.[11] As Grace Dillon, following the work of Anishinaabe scholar Lawrence Gross, explains: "Native apocalyptic storytelling [...] shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing and a return to bimaadiziwin [the 'good life' and a state of balance, in the language of the Anishinaabe]."[12]

"We were not supposed to be here," as Emily Johnson put it, describing her *Quilt Beings* (2022) as "maps to the future" or "endurance into the future."[13] Johnson and her collaborators organized numerous gatherings in which community members collectively stitched quilts, inviting people to write on individual square panels their wishes for the future. Writing about one gathering with a group of refugees, Johnson describes listening and learning "about the boats some of them took, about no food for weeks, about not being able to

8. See Kyle Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," in *Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, eds. Brendan Hokowhitu, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Chris Andersen, Steve Larkin (New York: Routledge, 2021).

9. For a report on the "gold rush" of energy transition, see Nick Bowlin, "A Good Prospect: Mining Climate Anxiety for Profit," *The Drift Magazine* 10 (July 9, 2023). Accessed April 11, 2024 https://www.thedriftmag.com/a-good-prospect/.

10. For the full text, see page 57 in this volume.

11. Cannupa Hanska Luger, as quoted in Bella Trigg, "These Native Artists are Decolonizing the Future," *The New School Free Press*, March 23 2024. Accessed April 12, 2024: https://www.newschoolfreepress.com/2024/03/23/these-native-artists-are-decolonizing-the-future/.

stretch from a curled position unless a choice was made to lie in the water."[14] When worn by dancers, the colorful quilts cloak the performer's body and tulle covers the face. Moving through everyday spaces, the *Quilt Being* tells a story of a being that has endured. In her book, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Kathryn Yusoff points out that "If the Anthropocene proclaims a sudden concern with the exposure of environmental harm to white liberal communities, it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization and capitalism. The Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence."[15] Black, Brown, and Indigenous futures emerge out of these histories, continuing and building worlds that have always existed alongside and outside of settler colonialism, that have endured anyway, in spite of it. Johnson's day-long quilting events model forms of gathering and belonging that take place outside of extractivist, proprietary visions of land, home, and being.[16] Such gathering is a manifestation of the cultural and political practice of "Native survivance" — what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor describes as the "continuance of stories" and an "active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion."[17]

Gathering is an ethic at the heart of Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger's looped video installation, *Perennial Land: The Data Forest* (2024), which invites its audiences into a restful, contemplative, and immersive space, surrounded on three sides by lush images of Earth's forest environments. These images are interspersed with climate data and scenes of human-planetary relations gone awry, the visual grammar of the Anthropocene. Cabrera and Duverger specialize in public, interactive video works that break down the "uni-directionality" of artistic communication, so that audience members are positioned more as creative collaborators than an inert "audience."[18] Even as *Perennial Land* serves harsh reminders of anthropogenic destruction, it also summons hope for other ways of being. Over-stating human destruction can reinforce an ideological binary of nature/culture and obscure long histories of reciprocal care on this planet; *Perennial Land*, on the contrary, both hails and builds a community invested in responsible co-existence.

These works model joy and pleasure as possible — even necessary — in the face of climate grief. Gathering her friends together in a ritual that centers Yoruba religious traditions, Courtney Desiree Morris asked them to coat their bodies in large quantities of honey, in and above a bathtub, resulting

12. Grace Dillon, "Introduction: Imagining Indigenous Futurisms," in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, edited by Grace Dillon (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 9.

13. Emily Johnson, Lecture at Sarah Lawrence College, March 26, 2024.

14. Emily Johnson, about Quilt 2, see this volume, p. 43

15. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018), xiii.

16. Sarah Jane Cervenak writes of gathering as "imagin[ing] another kind of living, another kind of house and oikos, unmoored from an assertion of ownership or presumptive givenness." Sarah Jane Cervenak, *Black Gathering: Art, Ecology, Ungiven Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021), 16.

17. Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

18. Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger, Lecture at Sarah Lawrence College, March 26, 2024.

in a five-channel video installation, *Oñí Ocan* (2023), here presented as one channel. Seen against a background of kaleidoscopic images that transform through the video, bodies touch themselves, embrace, and take pleasure in the sticky sensuousness of the honey. Love, Morris has said, is the flip side of grief: "we can only grieve what we love," what we care for — in this way, care becomes "a practice of refusal," a way to resist settler colonialism's systems of violence.[19] *Oñí Ocan* disrupts Euro-American art histories that exoticize and objectify the body to instead imagine the body's sensuous materiality and ecology. The work makes palpable concepts of ecosexuality, theorized by Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle, who appears in the video — here the body is seen in its felt joy and tactile mess, questioning where "the body begins and ends."[20]

There is a slowness to viewing this work, as we are plunged into a world of Black joy, of bodily sensation — a world Shanequa Benitez also constructs in paintings of her community of Yonkers, New York in her series *"But It's Ours": The Redline Between Poverty and Wealth* (2023-24). Her paintings use collage techniques reminiscent of Romare Bearden — in one, newspaper articles about housing segregation and calls for equity form a background to the government's 1930s neighborhood rating scale. In another, collaged faces shift in scale, bodies that are subject to police surveillance and discriminatory anti-loitering laws. In these works — which explore environmental injustice and "slow violence," making visible the experience of extreme temperatures, the lack of access to green spaces, and inadequate healthcare that afflict low-income communities, all forms of systemic racism that stem from histories of redlining — Benitez also takes care to shed light on belonging, play, and pleasure.[21] A group poses for a picture in a basketball court. Dancers, in pink, traverse the frame. Someone rests in front of a Bodega. These works ask viewers to slow down, notice, and listen to the sounds, textures, and sensations of Black life in Yonkers. Author Tina Campt defines a Black gaze as "not capitulating to *only* be known" by the forces of white supremacy. She writes of "the creativity, ingenuity, cunning, and courage that allow us to acknowledge the forces that would define us, and yet not succumb to that definition."[22] Benitez's paintings and photographs visualize a community made invisible by histories of systemic racism and anti-black oppression, but do so through the framework of community, joy, and sensual, tactile pleasure.

Morris's 2016-2019 photographic series, *Solastalgia*, also visualizes unseen histories, here of her familial hometown of Mossville, Louisiana, which was taken over by the petrochemical industry in the 20th century.[23] Morris pictured her-

19. Courtney Desiree Morris, Lecture at Sarah Lawrence College, March 26, 2024.

20. Annie Sprinkle, Beth Stephens, and Jennie Klein, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth as Lover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 189.

21. Rob Nixon defines "slow violence" as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all." Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

22. Tina Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 23.

self inhabiting the empty spaces and places that her family used to live in and frequent: an empty lot, a pool, a church, an abandoned house. Wearing a hoop skirt, walking through a cemetery and a wooded area, she conjures an archive of a Black and Indigenous past. Responding to philosopher Glenn Albrecht's term "solastalgia," which describes "the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment," Morris's series invokes a haunting loss of a familiar landscape due to human-induced climate crisis.[24] Her photographs invite us to see the living history of the land, a land marked by multiple histories of loss.[25]

In three woven textiles, *Above Below* (2020), Sarah Rosalena pries apart the entrenched vantages and histories that shape past, present, and future visions of land, landscape, and place. As Rosalena describes it, these thick, large-scale textiles were "made using computer code to project and reshape satellite images of ice from the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter — a spacecraft orbiting Mars — from a neural network based on earth."[26] Woven on a mechanized Jacquard loom and a manual TC2 Digital Weaving Machine, the textiles mix computerized production with human error. In these translated images (in which one pixel becomes one thread), the colors blue and red infuse each other: Earth comingles with AI-generated images of Mars, a narrative of past and future settler colonialism. Installed at angles a short distance from the wall, the textiles are meant to be seen from both sides, with viewers encountering up close their confusing recursions of blue and red — whirling, churning, seeming to recede into a void and protrude as a topographical form. Rosalena used AI technology to disrupt technologies of mapping and satellite surveillance. She writes: "AI-generated hallucinations of land decenter humans structured by hierarchies. They exist beyond the cartographic imagination and white-settler subjectivity."[27] What are the technologies, Rosalena asks, that shape settler colonial visions of the past and its imaginations of the future? The blurry, layered surfaces of *Above Below* invite modes of viewing that exist outside of surveillance and cartography, asking us to see anew.

In the tactile, multilayered world that Gabriela Salazar constructed in her *Leaves* series (2023-24) installation, the artist returns to the familial role of caregiving in the face of climate crisis and a pandemic, linking care to a "radically domestic ecological thought," as Camille Dungy writes in her book *Soil*: "This planet is home to us all. All who live in this house are family. What folly to separate the urgent life will of the hollyhock outside my door from the other lives, the family, I hold dear."[28] Made by casting sheets of water-soluble paper with things tied to her intimate world — leaves and branch-

23. Courtney Desiree Morris, "Seeing Stories Beneath the Surface," *NACLA: Report on the Americas* (Fall 2021), 283.

24. Glenn Albrecht, Gina-Maree Sartore, Georgia Pollard et. al, "Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change," *Australasian Psychiatry* Vol. 15 No. 1 (2007). Accessed April 11, 2024 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/10398560701701288

25. As Morris writes, "my goal with this work is to incite the viewer to cultivate a visual reading practice that allows you, as Heather Davis suggests, to '[see] a disappearance.' I want the viewer to become practiced in seeing the unseeable." Courtney Desiree Morris, "Seeing Stories Beneath the Surface," *NACLA: Report on the Americas* (Fall 2021), 287.

26. Sarah Rosalena, in "Collapsing Portals: A Conversation about Geographic Imaginaries: Sarah Rosalena and Kathryn Yusoff," *Sarah Rosalena: In All Directions*, ed. Kris Paulsen (Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, 2023), 17.

27. Ibid., 19.

es, food scraps, her architect parents' drawing stencils, rusty nails, screws, hinges, and brackets, and her daughter's building toys — these paper sculptural reliefs appeal to a haptic knowledge of the world and call attention to the values of small things. The surfaces of the *Leaves* series also hold the colorful stains of objects like nails and purple onions, and bear the imprints of objects, as Salazar made rubbings of leaves and stencils on top of the cast paper. Molded, rubbed, and made to bleed into the page, the things of her domestic and familial space are doubly or triply indexed. Hung on four walls to mimic the windows in the artist's apartment, the *Leaves* evoke an enclosed room. With Brio bricks and wooden train tracks, the works cite the acts of care that go into maintaining a home with a small child — the slow observation of time passing that can be one experience of caregiving. Fragile and fleeting, *Leaves* also echoes the impossibility of holding onto the ephemeral material world. Care here is an attentiveness to the present moment: it is to observe the world from the inside out.

To care for another being, thing, or place is to unlearn the individualism, profitism, and colonization that is central to racial capitalism. It is, as Achille Mbembe says, to "open oneself up to the possibility always already there of becoming (an)other."[29] These artworks suggest a decolonial, planetary aesthetic of "radical openness of and to the world, a deep breathing for the world as opposed to insulation," as Mbembe describes it.[30] They imagine modes of kinship and collaboration, envision alternate futures that are informed by, and seek to undo, histories of violence, and activate slowness and attentive looking and listening as movements towards repair.

28. Camille Dungy, *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023), 130.

29. Achille Mbembe, "Thoughts on the Planetary: An Interview with Achille Mbembe," *New Frame*, 6 September 2019. Cited in Judith Butler,: "Creating an Inhabitable World for Humans Means Dismantling Rigid Forms of Individuality," *Time Magazine*, April 21, 2021.

30. Ibid.

Sarah Hamill is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art and Noble Foundation Chair in Art and Cultural History at Sarah Lawrence College. She is one of the co-coordinators of the Mellon Foundation "Humanities for All Times" grant for the Sarah Lawrence Interdisciplinary Collaborative on the Environment, in collaboration with Bronx Community College. She teaches and writes about modern and contemporary sculpture and photography.

Izzy Lockhart is a 2022-24 Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Sarah Lawrence Interdisciplinary Collaborative on the Environment. In Fall 2024, Izzy will take up a position as Assistant Professor of English at New York University. Izzy researches and teaches twentieth-century and contemporary literature across the fields of the environmental humanities, energy studies, and Native American and Indigenous studies.

Detail from, Courtney Desiree Morris, *Guardian*, *Solastalgia* series, 2019, Courtney Desiree Morris photograph printed on canvas.

Isabelle Duverger and Laia Cabrera

Laia Cabrera is an award-winning filmmaker and video artist based in New York, working in the fields of art Installations-new cinema. Her wide range of artworks, from traditional and experimental filmmaking, visual poetry, interactive art and immersive projection mapping installations, has been commissioned by major institutions and presented worldwide in leading venues, art galleries and festivals. Identity and consciousness have been constant themes in her work, exploring concepts of otherness, symbolism, and hope, the art of seeing and the nature of belonging

Isabelle Duverger is an award-winning French painter and installation artist based in New York. Her work includes paintings, public art, immersive interactive video installations, video-art and animation. Her work is focused on the relationship between emotions and body language, the observation of patterns, imaginary landscapes and how the human presence interacts in it, and the pursuit of new languages through technology.

Their innovative work explores new ways of using space and the visual imaginary as a tool for narrative storytelling and audience connection, driven by both scenographic and dramaturgical aspects and crafting immersive content experiences. Recent installations include World's largest video interactive public art installation "The Now" (Times Square, New York), the interactive "Dream-e-scape" (Flutter Gallery, Los Angeles; Microwave Festival Honk Kong; Film Criticism Conference, Riyadh), and immersive visual poem "Qualia – You Matter to Me" (Prelude Festival NYC). Their work was presented in Spring/Break Art Show, Times Square Plaza, St John the Divine Cathedral, NJPAC, Teatros del Canal, Madrid, Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Center, Barcelona, Tempietto Di Bramante, Roma and Hong Kong City Hall.

Perennial Land: The Data Forest is conceived and directed by Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger
Original music composition by Nana Simopoulos
Cinematography, Editing and Visual Effects by Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger
Additional Visual Effects by Caryn Heilman
Spacial Sound Design by Ander Agudo
Curated by Patricia Cazorla

Conversation with Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger, Interviewed by Meena Mangroo '25

Edited by Prof. Patricia Cazorla
(Lecturer at the Art & Music Department of Bronx Community College)

About the interviewer:

My name is Meena Mangroo, Digital Design AAS candidate at the Bronx Community College. I moved from Guyana to the Bronx, New York, about two years ago. Because of the abundance of natural resources and wildlife in my home country, adjusting to the different environments here took me a long time. New York is a big city. The Bronx is the greenest of the five boroughs; as such, I've learned about and explored Wave Hill, the New York Botanical Garden, the immense Van Cortlandt Park and the breathtaking Pelham Bay Park coastline. These are all captivating places to visit, but unfortunately my commute is filled with pollution, which brings terrible air quality to our treeless residential streets.

So, I was beyond excited that Prof. Cazorla was presenting *Perennial Land: The Data Forest*, by Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger, at the Bronx Community College Hall of Fame Art Gallery. As a self-proclaimed tech nerd, I am intrigued by how creativity can transform the data of human impact on Earth into an art form.

What does care for the environment/ nature mean to you?

Nature is our surroundings, but occasionally we overlook our integral connection to it. This delicate equilibrium of existence is unpredictable yet adorned with intricate patterns. It encompasses the weather, the enigmatic depths of the ocean, the small tree by our home, the air we breathe, and the macro- and micro-cosms. In essence, the environment and nature are indispensable for human survival, well-being, culture, and the planet's health. Safeguarding and preserving these invaluable resources are a shared responsibility that demands collective action and stewardship to benefit both present and future generations.

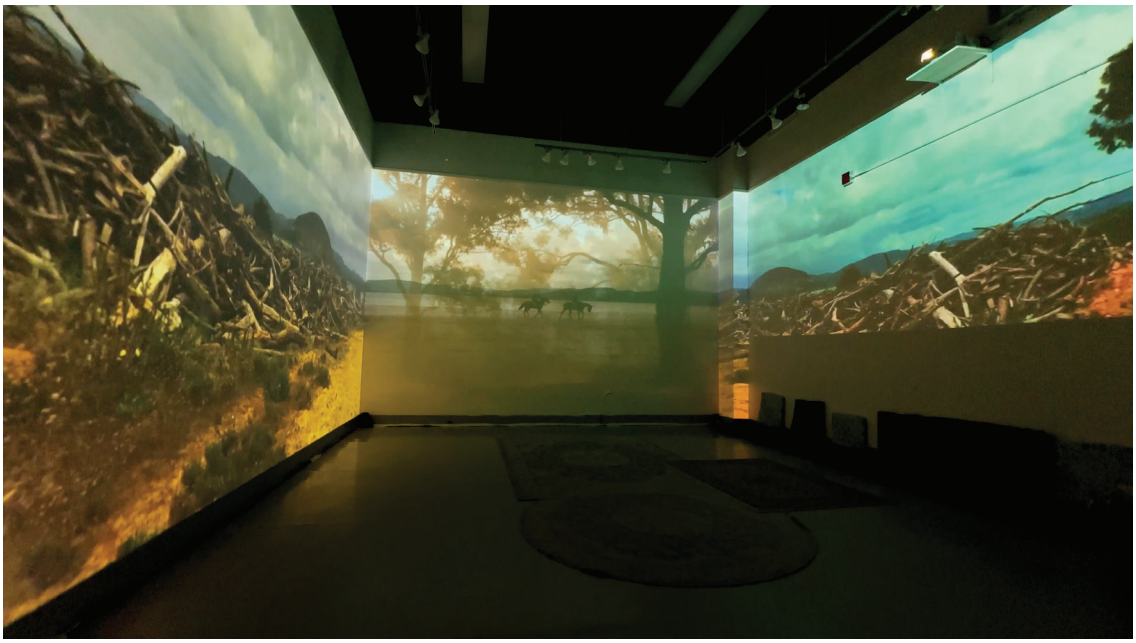
The experiential installation you are presenting at the Hall of Fame Art Gallery focuses on the importance of data-driven insights into human's impact on nature. Tell me a little about the process of obtaining these data and what you have gained from the research?

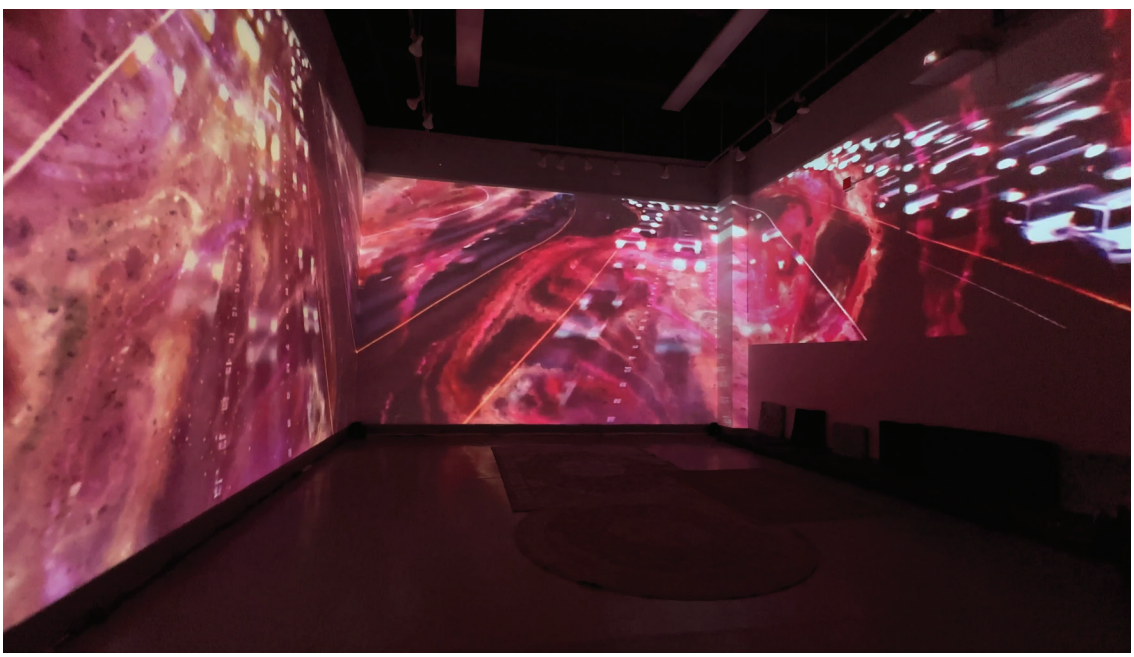
About ten years ago, we worked with The Center for Urban Science + Progress (NYU-CUSP), the first of its kind, and realized how much data was being generated. The program was training students to analyze data, make them actionable, turn them into solutions and policies. Data had ceased to *be abstract*.

And about a year ago, the seed for an installation about the data forest was planted in our mind. While talking to NGOs about an installation on information collection about climate change, we were given pointers to all kinds of data streams. All of it is accessible, by the way. We came to realize that, while the governments had all the means necessary to take action, the policies were absent, even if the information had previously been processed and was ready to use. Our goal was to produce an installation that clearly demonstrates the overabundance of data and available solutions.

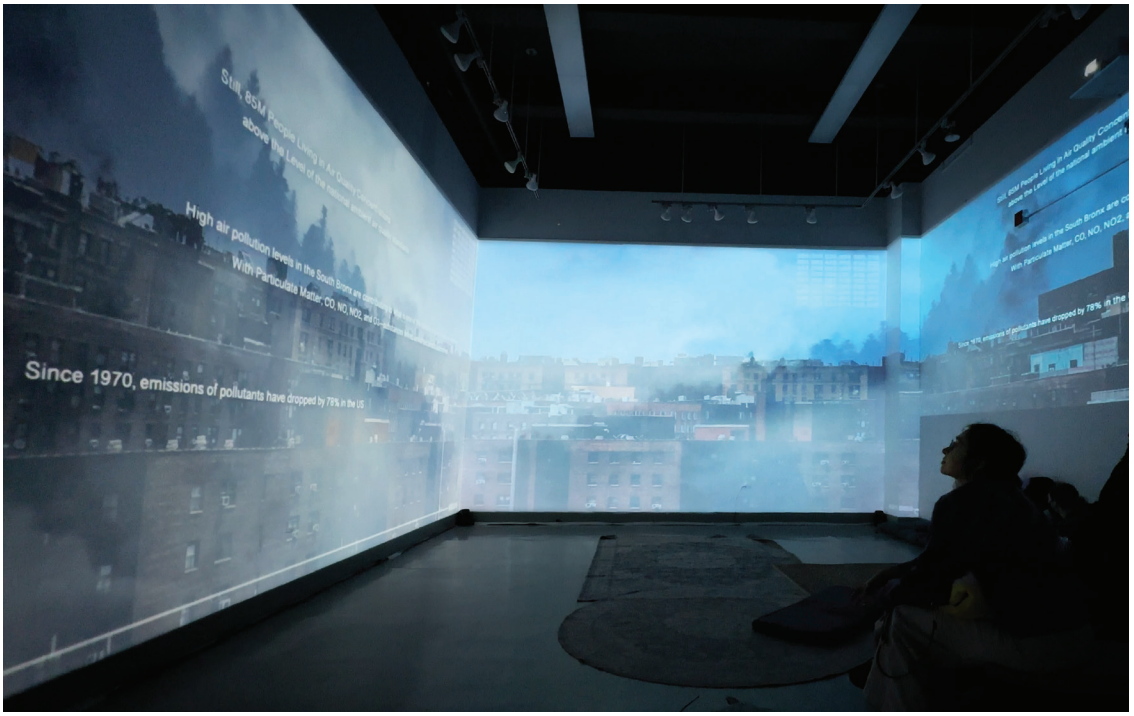
How did you decide to incorporate these finding into your artwork?

The first question we asked ourselves was how to make an artistic video installation about these themes. We are looking at how climate change has influenced species and wildlife, exploring fire, floods, and ecosystem changes, and the connection between nature and human health, where law, science, and biodiversity interact. How do





(Top and bottom): Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger, *Perennial Land: The Data Forest*, immersive installation, the Hall of Fame Art Gallery, Bronx Community College, 2024.
Photo: Isabella Duverger



(Top and bottom): Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger,
Perennial Land: The Data Forest, immersive installation, the Hall of Fame Art Gallery, Bronx Community College, 2024.
Photo: Isabella Duverger

we manage our wilderness as the planet's climate continues to warm? The conditions that create that ecosystem may not be there in the future.

We were also asking how we can envision a future of decolonized technology with tools for justice and rights? How can we promote ethical data practices, foster digital inclusion and accessibility, and cultivate critical consciousness? We aim to foster a sense of affection for nature and acknowledge its deep-rooted and intricate connection to human cultures. All those findings and questions are poetically addressed with a powerful visual scenery.

What was the conceptual and technical workflow like between you two?

We've been collaborating for the past 15 years to create visual narratives and poetry, working in video installations with the idea of going beyond the frame to create a scenery from moving images, to create immersive cinema, light, and storytelling, in which the audience can submerge themselves in a multidimensional way. We have evolved to interactivity and augmented reality to create agency and explore new narratives. Ultimately, a sense of you-have-to-have-been-there immersion is the most important draw of interactive storytelling, an eye-opening experience. Where are the limits of our understanding of emotions? How do we connect to others? How can this new form of storytelling be used for more inclusive stories? We no longer live in a world of the single tale.

Identity and consciousness have been our long research projects, aimed to revitalize and strengthen the intercommunication of different artistic languages. Our projects have been exploring new ways of using space and visual imagery as tools for storytelling and audience connection. We are driven by a deep fascination in the potential of new technology to bring a soulful and organic world to life, to reach the point where it becomes (and fuses with) art.

As filmmakers and video artists, we constantly film what we see and gather footage for future projects everywhere we go. From there, when a project arises, we continue filming in the direction of the project. The collection of footage is like the collection of data; we organize them, correlate them, find connections and a plot around them. We then work one after the other, preparing and setting a timeline with the material we feel will build the piece. This is mostly Isabelle's work. Then Laia jumps in with her vision and works on the flow of the ideas and the narrative. This process of editing and layering is a back-and-forth between us, which also goes into building the storyline.

As we begin to shape a structure that resonates with us, we engage in a deep dialogue with our long-time collaborator Nana Simopoulos, a composer and multi-instrumentalist, about the emotional journey we aim to convey. This process, honed over many years of collaboration, never fails to enrich us.

Finally, one element that develops in parallel is the site-specific installation design, the layering, and the conceptual display of the piece. We love the challenge of attractive architectural spaces and the poetics of change. We can invent with our imagination. It is a vision of the world where everything lives not in space but immersed in a network of relationships. These relationships define space.

How do you think this exhibition differs from other awareness efforts for climate justice?

The justification of decision-makers for the lack of action is always the need for more data and the lack of actionable data regarding nature. We generate so much data nowadays, and so much of this data, such as temperature records, CO2 levels, and sea level measurements, have already been processed and analyzed. These data provide clear evidence of climate change and a path for climate action. This piece, which is a poetic view of the overflowing data generated, is an attempt to show how data is right there at our fingertips, for us to take action.

We interweave the urgency of climate change with the hopeful vision of decolonized technology and show how one can inform and empower the other. We use met-

Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger,
Perennial Land: The Data Forest, immersive installation, the Hall of Fame Art Gallery, Bronx Community College, 2024.
Photograph: Isabella Duverger

aphors, allegories, and evocative imagery to create a narrative that resonates emotionally and intellectually and to represent the complex challenges, potential solutions, and collaborations.

The installation aims to achieve a deep emotional connection with visitors through interactive displays, immersive experiences, and thought-provoking visuals. These elements allow visitors to appreciate the significance of using data to make informed decisions for a sustainable future, sparking a sense of urgency and responsibility.

And finally, what do you hope the BCC community and the public will take away from this exhibition and your artworks?

Our work embodies visual poetry, aiming to connect with the public on an emotional level. Through installations like Perennial Land, we aspire to foster a vision of harmony between nature and humanity. By intertwining artistic expression with powerful themes, we seek to create a video installation that triggers dialogue, inspires action, and offers a glimpse into a more sustainable and just future, supporting initiatives that include monitoring localized air pollution in the Bronx, tree planting, and engaging young people in environmental action.

We envision *Perennial Land* sparking conversations among artists, students, scientists, community leaders, and more voices to reflect on the experience and enrich our collective expression.

About the Hall of Fame Art Gallery: The Hall of Fame Art Gallery at Bronx Community College is committed to showcasing diverse and innovative works of art while providing a platform for engaging with contemporary social and cultural dialogues. Through exhibitions and events, the gallery aims to inspire and foster creativity in the Bronx community and beyond. The gallery is funded in part by the Art & Music Department of Bronx Community College, the BCC Art & Music Consortium and BCC, Inc.

Detail of Laia Cabrera and Isabelle Duverger, *Perennial Land: The Data Forest*, immersive installation, the Hall of Fame Art Gallery, Bronx Community College, 2024.
Photo: Isabella Duverger