WINTER/SPRING 2023

LEARNING GUIDE

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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THE RIVER RUNS SLOW
AND DEEP AND ALL THE
BONES OF MY ANCESTORS

HAVE Risen to the
SURFACE TO KNOCK AND
CLICK LIKE THE SOUNDS
OF TREES IN THE AIR

A. K. BURNS

OF SPACE WE ARE...

ANNA TSOUHLARAKIS

THE NATIVE GUIDE
PROJECT: COLUMBUS
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Water is in constant flux. Through a cycle of evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and collection, water changes form, moving across the planet and connecting bodies of water. Water also flows through our human bodies, connecting us to one another and to the more-than-human world.[1]

In this guide, water is a subject in the artists’ work, as well as a metaphor that informs the design and writing process.[2] Mirroring the water cycle, we emphasize the flow between the artists’ distinct practices. The use of circles and watermarks in the design is similarly a gesture towards fluidity and nonlinearity.

Water has power. It is life-giving, and it can be destructive. We hope to utilize the potential of water for interconnection, so that we may build a world characterized by thoughtful ways of being in relation.

Listen to artist Hope Ginsburg describe her understanding of water. 🎧
It can often be a challenge for people to confront and comprehend the enormity of climate change, let alone to envision solutions. As writer Amitav Ghosh argues, “let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.”[3] If the climate crisis is one of the imagination, can artists help us to imagine otherwise? Artists like those featured in this learning guide help reorient perspectives, particularly the capitalist mindset of land as property, pointing us towards other ways of being in relation with one another and the planet. They may, we can hope, help us find “a differently perceivable world, an intangible space of emergence, where rivers converge into the flow and the muck of life otherwise.”[4]

Each of the exhibitions featured in this learning guide will also generate a series of public programs and events. Check out the Wex calendar for up-to-date information.
HOW TO

This guide is intended to support visitor engagement with Wex exhibitions and can be used in tandem with the exhibition gallery guides. The learning guide offers points of divergence, reflection, and extension on major themes and works among the exhibitions, particularly around the themes of water and **porosity**.

Throughout the guide, users will find guiding questions, prompts, and related resources surrounded by **negative space**, a gesture towards the potential in the void. This space is an invitation to you to add your own words, images, and connection points.

Each exhibition’s section has an overview, images, guiding questions, and a resource list with key words. We invite you to explore these resources in the Wexner Center Store, Ohio State University Fine Arts Library, and the Columbus Public Library.

Watershed map of the Columbus area, generated using the **USGS National Map Viewer**. Click on the link or image to build your own!
HOW TO

You may notice that the “I”s in the titles are an ice blue, in contrast to the rest of the text. Like the shimmering transitions of the video in Meditation Ocean, the “I”s in this guide are meant to play a dynamic role. By fading in and out of focus, each “I” asks you to consider your changing place and perspective in the world. We also refer to the collection of important “I” words below.

Glossary terms are bolded. Links are bolded and underlined. Click to explore relevant sites and resources!

Books 📚 Articles 📄
Online 📲 Video 🎥
Audio 🎧

INTERBEING INTERDEPENDENCE IMMERSION INUNDATION INTERCONNECTION INCLUSION INTEGERSALENAL INSTABILITY INTERUPTION
Chiedza Pasipanodya, “Ngozi: We Might Listen for the Shimmerings” (2022)
- movement, perspective, perception, embodiment

Amitav Ghosh, The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016)
- climate justice, artists, imagination

- nature, social justice, relationality

- climate justice, humanities, war, Anthropocene

- climate justice, relationality, rhizomes, digital humanities
Recognizing the disproportionate and catastrophic effects of climate change on marginalized communities, what are strategies for justice? What does a world where we equitably live with the consequences of capitalism, globalization, and environmental degradation look like? How do these bodies interact in each exhibition? What forms of embodiment do you notice or experience?

By body, we refer to bodies of work, bodies of water, and the bodies we inhabit. How do these bodies interact in each exhibition? What forms of embodiment do you notice or experience?

A collective, arrangement, or pattern composed of individual points or beings (see also: ecosystem; relationality).
A contested term for our geological era, one in which humankind (*anthropos*) has altered the environment to such extremes that it will be readable in the fossilized layers of earth for eons to come. Exactly when the **Anthropocene** began—and who gets included in the category of *anthropos*—is a subject of debate. Some scholars place the start of the **Anthropocene** at the invention of nuclear bombs, others at the Industrial Revolution, and still others at 1492 with the colonization and conquest in the so-called “New World.”[5]

“For me, **shimmering** speaks vividly to the way someone moves in and out of time and space, constantly aware of their changing nature and the shifting perspectives of this subjecthood, constantly aware of the oppression that colonial, patriarchal cultures vigorously enforce on **bodies** and beings to stay the same—when nothing ever really stays the same, when things are always in motion, always being born and dying simultaneously. **Shimmering** offers a lens through which to imagine **bodies**, identities, and spaces constantly moving in and out of focus.”

- CHIEDZA PASIPANODYA[6]
In visual art: the compositional space around the subject matter; the “background,” unused space that might not even get noticed. Though often considered to be empty space or absence, A.K. Burns prompts us to think of **negative space** as a space of potential and transformation. To engage **negative space** is to shift the center, to pay attention to the non-human, and to embrace a sense of possibility.

**Glossary**

**Negative Space**

In visual art: the compositional space around the subject matter; the “background,” unused space that might not even get noticed. Though often considered to be empty space or absence, A.K. Burns prompts us to think of **negative space** as a space of potential and transformation. To engage **negative space** is to shift the center, to pay attention to the non-human, and to embrace a sense of possibility.

**Ecosystem**

A complex network or community characterized by inter-dependence.

**Breathing**

A necessary biological function of human life and a focal point of mindfulness practices. Using different **breathing** techniques can reduce heart rates and cultivate a sense of calm. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the exchange between bodies (see also: **porosity**) has new, dangerous connotations. Like water, **breathing** is a source of vitality and destruction.
GLOSSARY

WORLD-BUILDING
The practice of realizing or envisioning a new world for oneself, the environment, and society.

INDIGENEITY
Refers to the identities and experiences of Indigenous peoples; while localized, also suggests global links between diverse Indigenous cultures.

DISPLACEMENT
Often a sanctioned consequence of unchecked urban or technological development; a form of forced removal; a loss of community and way of life.

MORE-THAN-HUMAN
A term that expands the idea of what constitutes life-including plants, rocks, water, and more. “More than” shifts the focus from human beings to planetary interbeing, rejecting the mindset that people are the most important creatures.
The quality of permeability and exchange, an example of which might be the **porosity** among the artistic projects of A.K. Burns, Hope Ginsburg, and Sa’dia Rehman. What do we learn from these connection points, where one artist’s work seeps into another’s?

The state of interbeing, interconnectedness, kinship. **Relationality** asks us to recognize and respect the ways in which we are beholden to one another and to the many worlds we inhabit (see also: ecosystem, constellation).

What of scars, both internal and external? What does a dictionary definition of **healing** erase, overlook, move too quickly past? What is the role of community, generational/biological/geological time, of forgiveness, stitching, intention, sleep? What might the Earth need to **heal**?
**Meditation Ocean**

**Overview**

*Meditation Ocean* is an ongoing project created by the Meditation Ocean *Constellation*, which includes artists, writers, educators, meditators, musicians, curators, divers, and scientists. It is conceived and directed by the interdisciplinary artist *Hope Ginsburg*. The project’s first iteration, *M.O. Turtlegrass Meadow* (2023), grows out of Ginsburg’s longstanding relationship with, and her 2022 residency at, the Wex.

*M.O. Turtlegrass Meadow* builds an immersive, underwater experience that invites visitors to meditate on what *healing* can look like at individual, community, and planetary scales. The installation situates viewers on the ocean floor, where the swaying of surges (underwater waves) and sea life echoes the rhythm of *breathing*, a *bodily* necessity taken for granted in our daily lives but one that becomes acutely present with scuba gear on the seabed. In keeping with the project’s emphasis on *climate justice* and accountability, the artist will produce a climate impact report for the exhibition at the end of its run to document and acknowledge the ways in which artistic production has material consequences on our world.

How can we practice buoyancy as we also seek to be grounded?

What lessons does a sea sponge hold for how we interact with and learn from the world?
In a December 2022 conversation, a group of M.O. Constellation members respond to questions about the project and their practice. Listen to the recording for the full conversation.

Hope Ginsburg: Artist/Director
Jennifer Lange: Curator/Producer
Matt Flowers: Director of Photography
Alexis McCrimmon: Editor and Colorist
Joshua Quarles: Composer and Sound Recordist

"We keep blossoming out with the complexity and ambition of each project."
- MATT FLOWERS

"I’m building a fictitious but also incredibly real ocean and creating a landscape... I feel like it’s this creation of opportunities."
- ALEXIS MCCRIMMON

“Throughout this project there has been a theme of challenges turning into incredible opportunities.”
- JENNIFER LANGE
“I’m embracing the properties of water and thinking about fluidity and porosity...I need to be fluid. I need to be agile. I need to be willing to float.”
- ALEXIS MCCRIMMON

“Like music, water is complex and ever-evolving. It can be very slow but also there’s no tempo. It’s very fluid.”
- JOSHUA QUARLES

“In your scuba gear, you don’t hear a lot other than your air bubbles and the ocean current, but when you hear an actual recording, there’s a lot more crackling and high frequency information.”
- JOSHUA QUARLES

“That crackling is the microscopic animals in the reef...I saw a headline the other day about fish speaking to each other...there’s a lot of actual noise happening underwater...When you’re down there, it is an insular experience, and you feel so connected to your breath that it is the dominant sound...just your breathing.”
- MATT FLOWERS

“I was very happy to be forced to embrace the unpredictability of water.”
- MATT FLOWERS
DIVING WITH A PURPOSE

**Diving With a Purpose** (DWP) provides training and support for underwater archaeological projects. *M.O. Turtlegrass Meadow* divers Rachel Stewart and Riane Tyler are a DWP Instructor and DWP CARES Lead Instructor, respectively. DWP specializes in shipwrecks related to the African slave trade, with the goal of providing more complete documentation and interpretation of histories of slavery. Many of the divers are African American, and the organization provides an opportunity to “find their own history and tell their own stories,” in the words of Tara Roberts.[7] Roberts shares more about her experiences on the team in a National Geographic article and a podcast. The National Museum of African American History and Culture collaborates with DWP in the **Slave Wrecks Project**.

To learn more about the transatlantic slave trade, explore records from the digital initiative **SlaveVoyages**, including interactive maps and a timelapse of the forced displacement of enslaved Africans.

Screenshot from SlaveVoyages interactive timelapse. A map of the world, centered on the Atlantic Ocean. Color dots denote ships crossing from Africa to the Americas during the slave trade.
How can practice of mindfulness help us cultivate a sense of non-separateness and interdependence? How does artwork help us see the connections between far-flung environments like the coral reefs of the Florida Keys and our own, landlocked experiences in Columbus?

Meditation Ocean Constellation, M.O. Turtlegrass Meadow, 2023 (still). Six-channel video installation, 67 mins., looped. Image courtesy of Hope Ginsburg. Six people in scuba gear hold hands and float in a circle above the ocean floor.
“Water: Become aware of the water available to you at this moment. Perhaps your hand can touch the condensation on the outside of a glass; your fingers can dip into a river; you are floating on or submerged in a large **body** of it. The water available to you might be that in your body, the moisture in your mouth. The sweat rolling down your back.”

- **LILY COX-RICHARD** and **MICHAEL JEVON DEMPS**, **LIBRARY OF RADICAL RETURNS**

“Gradually opening our eyes and moving in space like elegant octopuses displaying their tentacles, or flexible jellyfishes basking in their transparency. Bringing Water with us wherever we go. ‘I am Water and Water is in me.’”

- **NICOLÁS DUMIT ESTÉVEZ RAFUL ESPEJO OVALLES**

“Marine mammals, evolutionarily, are those that have chosen the water. They are our **relatives** who came with us from ocean to land, then returned to ocean. No thank you, they said. We will swim. Are humans marine mammals, when in the sea?”

- **SARA SMITH**

“As this experience closes, you’ll begin to float again, along a different current, feel yourself, from time to time, a jelly-bodied sea creature. A **body** held by the environment, taking shape in thick fluid.”

- **GM KEATON**
“For this meditation, if possible, place yourself in a peaceful and comfortable environment where you are able to hear sounds clearly. Note the higher humidity, the clearer sound, such as in a greenhouse, in the bathtub, or underwater. In fact, we can hear sound at four times greater speed, and ten times higher pitch in water than on land.”

- NAOKO WOWSUGI

“What do we want to breathe? Clean air and clean water. How do we know we belong here? We are breath and body. Inhale, take less. Exhale, give more.”

- RACHEL HILTON

“As you ground yourself, imagine the gentle pull of gravity as you emerge from the waters until you are back on shore. Feel the energy of the sand and ocean beneath your feet, and carry that energy through your body during this final scan.”

- RIANE TYLER

“Allow your thoughts to come and go
Like waves kissing a sandy shore
Some thoughts may linger
Others may easily float away
Let them be and keep breathing.”

- TIFANI KENDRICK
The divers’ bubbling breath reminds us that our well-being and the ocean’s health are interdependent. At least half of the oxygen we breathe comes from the ocean. Yet human-induced climate change through the burning of fossil fuels threatens the ocean with excess heat and carbon. The effects, which include ocean acidification, changes in storm and precipitation patterns, altered currents, and a rise in sea level impact life on land and underwater, including coral reef ecosystems. We share a reliance on the ocean’s health with the countless species that live there.

“I am a multiverse
You are a multiverse
We are inhaling we are exhaling
We are a multiverse”
- DEJA REDMAN and MONIQUE MCCRYSTAL

Learn more about the impact of climate change on the ocean from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
How can we conceive of wellness in human and more-than-human terms?
Alexis McCrimmon, *Ocean of Interiors* (2020)
- environment, memory, poetry

- relationality, climate justice, anti-racism

Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, “*What I Know About the Ocean*” (2020)
- climate justice, anti-racism, futurity

- becoming, climate justice, phenomenology, relationality

- healing, climate justice, relationality
DIVING INTO THE WRECK

First the air is blue and then it is bluer and then green and then black I am blacking out and yet my mask is powerful it pumps my blood with power the sea is another story the sea is not a question of power I have to learn alone to turn my body without force in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget what I came for among so many who have always lived here swaying their crenellated fans between the reefs and besides you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck. The words are purposes. The words are maps. I came to see the damage that was done and the treasures that prevail. I stroke the beam of my lamp slowly along the flank of something more permanent than fish or weed

- ADRIENNE RICH (1973)[8]
The title of Rehman’s exhibition - "the river runs slow and deep and all the bones of my ancestors have risen to the surface to knock and click like the sounds of trees in the air" - is an excerpt from a poem by the artist’s sister, Bushra. Family is also a thread that connects the artworks; using paper, charcoal, plaster, water, denim, and rebar, Rehman tells the story of their family’s displacement by the construction of the Tarbela Dam. Videos from the artist’s March 2022 trip to Pakistan show the family’s visit to the flooded site of their past home, Khar Kot. Through material processes of cutting, stitching, etching, and disintegration, Rehman conveys the fragmentation and erasure of displacement. At the same time, they construct a narrative and an ephemeral landscape that speak to connection and emergence.

In earlier artworks, Rehman has referenced family connections and addressed the cultural experiences of Muslims in the United States. For instance, in the 2005 installation Lotah Stories, Rehman used audio recordings to share narratives that communicated the pressures of cultural assimilation.[9] Likewise, in their 2017 MFA thesis, This is My Family: An Erasure, Rehman investigated identity and incorporated storytelling through the use of family photographs and relics.[10]
How are land, water, and grief entangled in Rehman’s work?

Sa’dia Rehman, Still from *There isn’t a stone I don’t remember*, 2022. Two channel video. Courtesy of the artist and their family. This photograph depicts an emerged stack of Quran text, bound together and to a large rock at the bottom. Submerging Qurans in running water is considered one of the most respectful ways to dispose of damaged Qurans, as it is said to allow the ink to run—erasing the holy text, and rendering the once sacred page into a blank canvas.
Tarbela Dam

Built on the Indus River, the Tarbela Dam is the world’s largest earth-filled dam.[11] The construction of the dam, financed by the World Bank, caused the displacement of an estimated 96,000 people from 184 villages in the 1970s. Intended to regulate the river, support irrigation, and generate hydroelectric power, the dam project also included the creation of a 260 square kilometer reservoir, which flooded the valley and submerged entire villages. [12] Today, this lake features tourist attractions, including a boating point and picnic spot. In the winter, when the water is low, the evidence of what once was—homes, shrines, graveyards—becomes visible again.[13]

Sa’dia Rehman, Tarbela Dam Spillway, 2022, digital photograph. Courtesy of Artist. A landscape image of a dam with a water reservoir in front.

How might we reflect on histories of imperialism without reproducing imperial ways of thinking?
Sa’dia Rehman, *Khanpur Dam Sign*, 2022, found object, public sign, wood, paint, stencil. Courtesy of the artist. Image of a rectangular wooden sign, with blue text on a white background, reading 'Khanpur Dam Project', then listing the 'salient features' in writing.

**PROTEST SIGNS**

Rehman’s hand-painted artworks/signs/poems reference historical signage posted near dams in Pakistan. Rather than providing information for tourists (like the Khanpur Dam sign below), the text on Rehman’s signs stems from their conversations with family and community members. Rooted in the experience of land as a site of familial memory, these poetic meditations spark multiple interpretations, including a protest of forced displacement.
We handed over 200 rupees hot pakoras the stand owner allowed me to take photos as long as I posted them on Instagram, 2022, ink and wall paint on wood board, 48 x 36 x 1 ½ inches. Courtesy of the artist. Black text on white background reads “We handed over 200 rupees hot pakoras the stand owner allowed me to take photos as long as I posted them on Instagram.”

The Land/wrinkled/ dried/broken/swelling/
The Veins, 2022, ink and wall paint on wood board, 30 x 40 x 1½ inches. Courtesy of the artist. Black text on white background reads “The Land wrinkled dried broken swelling The Veins.”

a village my father walked to/shepherding his own buffaloes/hanging out on the River/gossiping with friends, 2022, ink and wall paint on wood board, 30 x 40 x 1½ inches. Courtesy of the artist. Black text on white background reads “a village my father walked to shepherding his own buffaloes hanging out on the River gossiping with friends.”
Sa’dia Rehman, *Hemorrhage* (detail), 2022, artist’s, sister’s, and partner’s jeans. Courtesy of artist.

“Denim is made using excessive amounts of water in industrial factories along rivers. So I collected discarded denim—my own, my sister’s, and my partner’s. I sliced the denim into strips and sewed them together, layering one atop another, side by side, on the way, until it became a long river-like banner.”

Cutting and stitching together jeans from family members, Rehman constructs a river of denim. Informed by José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of “disidentification,” Rehman uses collage as a method of dismantling normative ideas, then building new meaning through the reassembly of fragments.[14]
The following quotes are Rehman’s written responses to learning guide research questions, as well as excerpts from their MFA thesis.

“In working with imagery that is often marked foreign, my work challenges the position of the universal.”[15]

“I’ve always been interested in the structures around us, not simply dams, but family, nation, borders. And how those infrastructures impact who we are and the desire to rearrange and take them apart as we live within them. Even though the environment is a new focus in the work, harm and survival are themes that go back to the beginning.”

“I critique socially constructed barriers on different scales: the globe, the nation, the family and the body.”[16]
“For me, site, like body, is not static but constantly changing. A site—or a sub-site, meaning, a space within—can be replicated, destroyed, remade. It is different depending on where you stand or who you are. There is a dynamic and endless cycle that happens when the physical body moves through place.

I documented my family revisiting the site of displacement. Their visitation is a remembrance and a letting go. My documentation is a commitment and a dispersal.”

“While I am working with my family’s displacement, I am aware that displacement is happening on many scales and in many ways and by various processes of so-called development. These are long historical and contemporary phenomena in the United States and around the world.”

“Such timelines are evident everywhere you look: push out, destroy, build, influx.”

“Think of the area in Franklinton called The Bottoms, partly named after its low-lying land and flood-risk from the Olentangy and Scioto rivers. A 2004 floodwall was built to protect the neighborhood, but at the same time displaced residents from three public housing projects. This contributed to gentrification: policing and glass buildings.”
Beyond the Ash Rains

What have you known of loss
That makes you different from other men?
- Gilgamesh

When the desert refused my history,
Refused to acknowledge that I had lived there, with you, among a vanished tribe,
two, three thousand years ago, you parted
the dawn rain, its thickest monsoon curtains,
and beckoned me to the northern canyons.
There, among the red rocks, you lived alone.
I had still not learned the style of nomads:
to walk between the rain drops to keep dry.
Wet and cold, I spoke like a poor man,
without irony. You showed me the relics
of our former life, proof that we’d at last
found each other, but in your arms I felt
singled out for loss. When you lit the fire
and poured the wine, “I am going,” I murmured,
repeatedly, “going where no one has been
and no one will be... Will you come with me?”
You took my hand, and we walked through the streets
of an emptied world, vulnerable
to our suddenly bare history in which I was,
but you said won’t again be, singled
out for loss in your arms, won’t ever again
be exiled, never again, from your arms.”

- AGHA SHAHID ALI[17]
- memories, imperialism, photography, museums

- technology, displacement, progress

- Indigeneity, climate justice, activism

Jose Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1999)  
- identity, queerness

Nina Lakhani, Who killed Berta Cáceres?: Dams, Death Squads, and an Indigenous Defender’s Battle for the Planet (2020)  
- Lakhani book talk at UC Berkeley in 2020  
- technology, Indigeneity, climate justice
Multimedia artist **A.K. Burns** works within the realm of the “speculative present” and argues that we can’t build a future without first building the conditions in the present out of which that future can be born; in other words, we must create the conditions for change now. A.K.’s speculative present is a **world-building** endeavor, an act of science fiction realized in part through a four-part saga called **Negative Space**. The four videos in the series, accompanied by a series of collages on mirrors that act as archives for each installment, feature human and **more-than-human** “acting agents” whose actions and settings offer an opportunity for reorientation, and that aim to pull us out of the existing present into a possible present. Central to this reorientation is an insistence on the instability of boundaries, such as those between the human and the **more-than-human**, along the gender binary, and those separating **bodies**.

*Of Space We Are...* is Burns’s largest exhibition to date, featuring sculptural work alongside a selection of **Negative Space** videos and related collages. The project emerges from a durational and relational engagement with people, places, and histories. *What is Perverse is Liquid*, the final installment of **Negative Space**, premieres in *Of Space We Are...* and considers water’s properties of leakiness, fluidity, and flow.
“The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming. The vacuum is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be. The quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hiphops, whimpers, whines, screams, are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt, but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption, dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being, an indeterminate symphony of voices. The blank page teeming with the desires of wouldbe traces of every symbol, equation, word, book, library, punctuation mark, vowel, diagram, scribble, inscription, graphic, letter, inkblot, as they yearn toward expression. A jubilation of emptiness.”

- PHYSICIST AND THEORIST KAREN BARAD[18]
A.K. Burns, *What is Perverse is Liquid*, 2022 (still). Video, 35 mins, looped. Commissioned by the Wexner Center for the Arts. Two people, one with a stick over their shoulder, wade through a swamp.

More from Geo Wyex, composer who scored the soundtracks for *Negative Space*.
“She never cared which name you used or gender. Honestly when you look that fabulous, who really gives a damn? This is a position I personally feel deeply aligned with. I have no real interest in policing how people name me or gender me. Flamboyancy has long been the tool of choice for queer and marginalized bodies. I deflect and enchant your determining gaze by ‘workin it’—with a swish and a snap!”

“At this hour, the exposure is violent and our bodies become terracotta-like. I’m over it. This kind of beauty is exhausting. The only thing we desire is to put water in, or on, our bodies.”
- A.K. BURNS, “What is Perverse is Liquid” (2014)[19]

“What water wants to do—what it does naturally—is run. It wants to flow. What humans want to do is control that flow. We want to dam it, bottle it, and ultimately sell it. In the game of water politics, arresting the flow is the opening move. Thus, the importance of the leak.”
- A.K. BURNS, IN CONVERSATION WITH COLE J. GRAHAM (2022)

“...the thing I am most interested in exploring through this work is difference: a belief in the liveliness, temporality, and inevitable difference of all matter.”

Burns questions value systems, including the canon of Western art history. In *Living Room*, the second installment of *Negative Space*, Burns references *The Death of Marat*, a political painting from 18th-century France, to help us consider the body’s threshold for survival.

What are the toxins in our (political) environment today?

What other art historical references can you spot as you watch *Negative Space*?
How can an artistic project be an act of world-building, akin to science fiction?

Ursula K. Le Guin argues, "Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive."

What is the role of pleasure in changing the world?
A recurring motif in *Negative Space* is the Chelsea Manning jacket, which represents the idea of “transitioning” and of the data leak. Together, these ideas combine in the figure of the “leaky body.” The “leaky body” is one that is indefinitely and actively in transition, not one that has transitioned.

Just as there are leaky bodies, Burns introduces “leaky thought,” through which we can question power imbalances and how we define the world. “Leaky thought” flows; one question leaks and slowly unravels into the next. “Leaky thought,” like the “leaky body,” is porous and remains in transition.

- A.K. BURNS’S description of “the leak” as told to Wex Exhibitions Intern COLE J. GRAHAM
A critical component of the *Negative Space* project is the visual archive that Burns creates in a series of Mirror Collages. At the end of each iteration of *Negative Space*, Burns reflects, synthesizes, translates, and expands on the theoretical questions at the core of each video, layering and transposing digital sources, images, newspaper cutouts, and more.

What elements from the video still are recognizable in the accompanying collage? What is the effect of using mirrors as the backdrop?


OF SPACE WE ARE...

RESOURCES

- science fiction, anarchy, **world-building**

Jill Casid, “Necrolandscaping” (2018)
- **anthropocene**, death, environment, gender, queering

Karen Barad “*What is the Measure of Nothingness?*” (2020)
- indeterminancy, void, vacuum, (non)being, intra-action

- labor, feminism, gender

- identity, transformation, continuum, gender
In *The Native Guide Project: Columbus*, Anna Tsouhlarakis— an artist of Navajo, Creek, and Greek descent—draws on an existing series of work and expands the boundaries of the Wex. Her text-based installation covers interior walls of the building, spilling out to the exterior and to locations around Columbus. Throughout, readers are confronted with humorous and unsettling declarations that challenge conventional discourse around *Indigeneity*. Each iteration of the project stems from an engagement with place, including local communities and histories of *displacement*. *Breath of Wind*, a video work on view in The Box in early 2023, draws attention to interconnected histories of climate catastrophe and settler colonialism.
Collected Prompts for Discussion and Writing

- How can we practice buoyancy as we also seek to be grounded?
- What lessons does a sea sponge hold for how we interact with and learn from the world?
- As we consider the science of climate change, what entangled social histories can also be found in the ocean?
- How can practice of mindfulness help us cultivate a sense of non-separateness and interdependence?
- How does artwork help us see the connections between far-flung environments like the coral reefs of the Florida Keys and our own, landlocked experiences in Columbus?
- How can we conceive of wellness in human and more-than-human terms?
• How are land, water, and grief entangled in Rehman’s work?

• How do family narratives, archives, and relics emerge in *the river runs slow*?

• What are the connections between *displacement*, immigration, and assimilation?

• How might we reflect on histories of imperialism without reproducing imperial ways of thinking?

• What do shared genes (jeans) mean?

• What becomes possible when we shift our attention from the subject to the void?

• How does *Negative Space* leak beyond the gallery walls into our own environments?

• How can an artistic project be an act of *world-building*, akin to science fiction?

• What is the role of pleasure in changing the world?

• How might attending to place in new ways challenge colonial habits?
WORKS CITED


[16] Rehman, “This is My Family,” 1.


REFERENCES


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