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## How to breathe forever [Exhibition catalogue]

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# HOW TO BREATHE FOREVER

Mary Anne Barkhouse

Maryanne Casasanta

DaveandJenn

Li Xinmo

Qavavau Manumie

Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari + Felix Kalmenson)

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa

Ningiukulu Teevee

Flora Weistche



**ONSITE  
GALLERY**

01.16  
04.14.2019



# HOW TO BREATHE FOREVER



How to Breathe Forever underlines the importance and interconnectedness of air, animals, coral, humans, insects, land, plants and water. The belief that everything in the universe has a place and deserves equal respect is the core of this exhibition and positions our relations with others—including the ‘natural’ world—as active and reciprocal. The exhibition invites you to consider an expanded personhood that attentively collaborates and exchanges with all living things.

My upbringing and education, as a woman of Irish and mixed European descent, reflect Western worldviews based on a hierarchical system with humans at the top. As with many people, I have never been at ease within this model. My involvement in punk rock/hardcore, DIY culture, activism, art and education all express attempts to create a world I feel comfortable in. I try to envision a better world since it is obvious to me that mainstream Western worldviews are not working. These faulty worldviews embed in my subconscious and although I have experienced and created alternative belief systems and modes of living, I still strive to fully ‘embody’ the belief that everything in the universe has a place and deserves equal, active respect. Intellectually, I find it easy to understand this belief but it does not always occur naturally through my actions.

In this essay, ‘embody’ is defined “as the routines, habits, tasks and information our bodies ‘understand’ without conscious thought.”<sup>1</sup> In addition, I would like to note that consciously grounding this essay in the personal is a strategic, political act that bolsters experiential knowledge alongside multiple knowledge systems. Moreover, inspired by Flora Weistche’s capitalization of Caribou in her biography and the recent shift in our culture to capitalize Indigenous and Black, I have capitalized the race of animals and species of plants to present them with equal value alongside humans.

DaveandJenn; *For Actaeon (The Flower)* (detail); 2017; bronze, 23 karat gilding, polymer clay, fresh water pearls, plaster, acrylic paint; 19" x 20" x 13". Courtesy of the artists.

6 In attempting to embody this belief, the artworks in *How to Breathe Forever* inspire me and raise questions. How can I hear what animals, trees, air or a river has to say? How do I respond to them? Does everything have beingness? How do I respectfully learn from others' worldviews? Rocks, water, coral and some trees live for thousands of years, how do I understand their experience of time? Can I communicate with the spirit of things? What is the spirit of things? What does active, reciprocal respect entail? How can I breathe forever?

Inuit worldviews express a state of relatedness with the belief that people, objects and the environment are connected. Identity comes from connections. The land and waters are sacred. Time is not linear. Drawing from Inuit folklore, the intricate print and drawing compositions of Qavavau Manumie playfully reveal this worldview through hybrid creatures, flattened perspective, non-realistic scale and his combination of motifs that exist in the mind and physical world. His work, *Arniniq Inuusiq (Breath of Life)*, portrays interconnectedness and reciprocal relationships between plants, animals and humans.

Ningiukulu Teevee's images are also inspired by Inuit legends and mythology. Often humans, animals and fish become one creature. Her artworks come alive through repetitive patterning and colours and, at times, float between abstraction and representation. In *Deep In Thought*, a hand supports a Walrus' muzzle. The person's nail polish is a colour match for the Walrus' sad eye. When looking at the Walrus, I easily imagine what its muzzle feels like. Playfully resembling Rodin's, *The Thinker*, Teevee's human and Walrus appear to be thinking together.

*My Grandmother's Garden*, or *Nuuhkum Unihtaauhichikin* in Cree, is a brightly coloured, beaded Caribou hide that took Flora



Li Xinmo, *I Want to Breathe* (still), 2008, video, 14 mins. 31 sec. In collaboration with Zhang Minjie. Courtesy of the artist.

Weistche three years to create. The idea came to her in a dream, "I dreamt of my grandmother Helen sitting across the table from me, the Caribou hide laid out on the table. When I looked at it, I could see the three main flowers in detail."<sup>ii</sup> After watching the woodland Caribou herds dwindling in number, her father made a decision to stop harvesting them and brought home his last in 1979, the year Weistche was born. Thirty-nine years later, her father and mother gave the hide to her. Although she had not beaded in years, she had the dream and began.

With help from family and friends, she finished the intricate floral beadwork three years later when she was 39 years old. In stretching the hide on an Eastern White Cedar bent wood frame, she laced it 39 times. The foliage, florals and insects rise from the back of a Turtle, telling Weistche's version of the Indigenous Creation Story. The work is dedicated to all women who have made a positive impact on her life as well as Cree women and Indigenous women across Canada. I am moved by the story of the work's creation as well as the exquisite colours, the tactility of



Flora Weistche, *My Grandmother's Garden - Nuuhkim Unihtaauhichikan*, 2018, hide of the artist's father's last hunted Caribou, glass beads, thread, wood, 62.75" x 50.75" x 2" unframed. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Tristan Beauregard.

the materials, the many hours of labour and the energy invested by Weistche, friends, family, plants and animals. Through it, I hear many living things, human and non-human, speaking of the past and the future. I can hear the Caribou continue to speak as it did with Weistche's father years ago.

Since 2012, Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa has conducted intimate spiritist sessions. He describes them as follows, "I (and participants) try to contact the spirit world, specifically contact extinct species of birds. The project is a sort of imagination exercise."<sup>iii</sup> With no images or videos taken, Ramírez-Figueroa documents the experience through audio recordings, visual sound scores and drawings. *Séances With Extinct Species of Birds* is an ongoing project that prioritizes the supernatural, history, voice and the effect of human activity and climate change on birds, and asks— if we find a new way to listen can we hear birds, even extinct ones? Can we place importance on what they have to say? "lu lu lu lu lu ouuh ouuh?"<sup>iv</sup>

The immersive installations and sculptures of DaveandJenn include hybrid creatures within immersive magical settings that are simultaneously utopic and dystopic. Extremely beautifully crafted, I feel a sense of wonder when looking at the coral, insects, plant life, animal, human and bird forms within their sculptures. Their inclusion of a diverse array of creatures and use of highly valued materials, like bronze and gold leaf alongside polymer clay and tinsel, level the playing field and allude to the interconnectedness of all. Many components of the installation reference the air and land which is poignant as the viewer is physically situated within the artwork and thus, sharing its air. Their work leaves me wondering if their creatures evolved through genetic mutations resulting from exposure to radiation, pollution or extraction industries?

Li Xinmo, in collaboration with Zhang Minjie, researched and filmed mineworkers who had contracted silicosis in a Guangxi gold mine. Caused by inhaling large quantities of dust, the symptoms of silicosis include difficulty breathing and eventually coughing until patients die from asphyxiation. In their video, *I Want to Breathe*, a silicosis patient on the verge of dying appears in the lens, coughing continuously as he tries to breathe. Silicosis is among the most prevalent occupational diseases in China, killing migrant workers and leaving much of the country's soil and water contaminated. Worldwide, extraction industries are changing our landscapes and all that live on them. Captured on video, the sight and sound of the miner fighting for breath to stay alive is very powerful and raises pertinent questions about power, respect and equality for the land, air, animals and many humans within our continuing industrial context.

Pevjak — Rouzbeh Akhbari and Felix Kalmenson — created a new video work for How to Breathe Forever titled *Weak Enough to Hear* that imagines a day along the Euphrates River from the Ararat Mountain Highlands in Turkey to a small village above the Iraqi border. Multiple characters give the river voice: a young girl with loud speakers on her back; dirt that holds knowledge of a looting; an Imam who leads Islamic worship services; and a traveling tree. These varied characters create a complicated conversation about power—who has occupied the land, who is occupying the land, how is the land valued, who controls access to the land and who can use its natural resources.

Mary Anne Barkhouse's sculptures encourage a shift in perspective as they challenge us to view the rural and urban animals of the Boreal Forest and its southern counterparts through a contemporary lens of survivance. Caribou, Swift Fox and many animals are threatened by the continuing expansion of humans and industry into their habitats whereas; some animals such as Coyotes and Coywolves are thriving. In *Empire*, young animals of different species cohabit comfortably on lush velvet



Maryanne Casasanta: *Our friend, the winter citrus*; 2017; digital photograph, wood frame; 17" x 13"; Courtesy of the artist.



Qavavau Manumie, *Arniniq Inuusiq (Breath of Life)*, 2017, stonecut and stencil, 24.5" x 31". Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

territories. In a previous exhibition, Jennifer Rudder noted on the wall label for the work, "A baby fawn, beaver, shrew, coyote, lynx, raven and snow hare, coexist in biological synchronicity that allows for adaptation and survival. Despite their differences, the varied species live comfortably together in a large contiguous habitat, and human stewardship of that habitat is critical to their survival. They hunt, share food in pairs and alliances, and warn each other of danger ahead, in an example of ideal coexistence; a concept that some humans have lost. Barkhouse has stated that fragmentation of people or animals results in isolation, and contributes to the 'snuffing out of a culture.'<sup>v</sup> These young creatures are full of potential yet vulnerable and to thrive, a stable ecosystem is needed to nurture them."<sup>vi</sup>

Maryanne Casasanta's artwork emphasizes a lightness of touch that also gently invites a shift in perspective. This shift attracts me, as it provides altered ways to see and engage with all in her environment. Touching, feeling, smelling, seeing, listening to and interacting with things encourages respect. Casasanta's observations and experiments with process-based art making and learning, collaboration and physical movement use all methods of knowledge creation. The respect she has for a clementine comes through in her handling and photography of it. When watching a video of her playing with sunbeams escaping through her fingers I am as conscious of the beingness of the sun as much as I am of the artist.

The belief that everything in the universe has a place and deserves equal respect positions our relations with others—including the 'natural' world—as active and reciprocal. All the works in *How to Breathe Forever* inspire and help shift my perspective to embody this belief and provide new ways to hear, consider, connect with and learn from others.

My search for ways to shift and embody new beliefs owes a great deal to Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is diverse. My understanding of it reveals its crucial insights resulting from both observation and thought. I do not claim a deep comprehension of Indigenous knowledge as it is, in a large part, experiential and I am not Indigenous. The Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.'s, *Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples* blog describes Indigenous knowledge as adaptive, cumulative, dynamic, holistic, humble, intergenerational, invaluable, irreplaceable, moral, non-linear, observant, relative, responsible, spiritual, unique and valid.<sup>vii</sup> My experience of artworks, stories, music and scholarship from Indigenous people has been important to my quest to embody reciprocal relationships with all that breathe.

Animals, trees, water, earth and air have their own knowledge to share. It can be fun trying to discover their languages although often in Western culture it is difficult to feel validated in what you have learned. I know that being alone in the woods, laying on the grass, digging in the earth, smelling the musty decay and feeling the rough texture of tree bark centres my sense of self and my interconnectedness with all. Spending time with animals, trees, water, earth and air, observing them and trying to imagine the world through their eyes can change my ideas. I try to imagine what they want. I listen with my eyes, ears, hands and nose. I study things and physically pretend to be them (fish are fun). I move my body in relationship to things. As a result, I feel more connected with and comfortable in the world. As my worldview shifts to equally value humans and all beings, I experience time differently. My values and priorities shift. My community and relationships widen. What I am extends beyond my physical body.

With a shift of perspective, can we breathe forever?

**i** (BusinessDictionary). Retrieved October 31, 2018, from: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/embodied-knowledge.html>

**ii** Longchap, Betsy. Bell, Susan. (September 26, 2018), *Threads of a Cree life: Montreal student unveils epic full caribou hide beadwork*. Retrieved November 12, 2018 from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/cree-beadwork-moose-hide-unveiled-1.4839513?fbclid=IwAR3z9ZJyG3HVGnVi-wyJHLI5xQoGePZE50BnxjooBIOkrjXz97KONoMfu8g>

**iii** Ramírez-Figueroa, Naufus. (June 2017). *Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, Selected Works*. Retrieved November 12, 2018 from: [http://www.lafermedubuisson.com/media/fdb/173818-portfolio\\_naufus\\_june\\_2016.pdf](http://www.lafermedubuisson.com/media/fdb/173818-portfolio_naufus_june_2016.pdf)

**iv** Ramírez-Figueroa, Naufus. (June 2017). *Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, Selected Works*. Retrieved November 12, 2018 from: [http://www.lafermedubuisson.com/media/fdb/173818-portfolio\\_naufus\\_june\\_2016.pdf](http://www.lafermedubuisson.com/media/fdb/173818-portfolio_naufus_june_2016.pdf)

**v** (Mary Anne Barkhouse in conversation with Jennifer Rudder). (May 25, 2016)

**vi** Rudder, Jennifer. (September 2017). Exhibition Label for *Empire*, Esker Foundation

**vii** (April 6, 2018). *What Does Indigenous Knowledge Mean? A Compilation of Attributes*. [Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples]. Retrieved November 15, 2018 from: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-does-indigenous-knowledge-mean>



Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, *Concrete Poem Documentation of Bird Séances*, 2011 to present, series of five digital prints on Epson coldpress watercolour paper, calligraphy by Lester Mead, 20" x 29.5" each. Courtesy of the artist.



Mary Anne Barkhouse; *Empire*; 2017; wood, velvet, ceramic, glass, hydrocal; 12" x 3.5" x 9".  
Courtesy of the artist.

# BIOGRAPHIES

## Mary Anne Barkhouse (Minden, Ontario)

Mary Anne Barkhouse was born in Vancouver, BC but has strong ties to both coasts, as her mother is from the Nimpkish band, Kwakiutl First Nation of Alert Bay, BC and her father is of German and British descent, from Nova Scotia. As a result of her personal and family experience with land and water stewardship, Barkhouse's work examines ecological concerns and intersections of culture through the use of animal imagery. Inspired by issues surrounding empire and survival, Barkhouse creates installations that evoke consideration of the self as a response to history and environment. She currently resides in the Haliburton Highlands of Ontario.

## Maryanne Casasanta (Toronto, Ontario)

Maryanne Casasanta is an artist educator working in photography, video and performance. Central to her practice is the relationship between art and home, and art and life. Often documented through photos or video, performances of light gestures and subtle interventions propose ways of transforming a routine experience, promoting an active immersion—and reconsideration of—small, ordinary events. Maryanne observes other areas of research such as, process-based learning and art making, co-creation, and movement, which she explores by working alongside artists across a number of fields. She has exhibited widely and her projects have been supported by the Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council. Maryanne earned a BFA from OCAD University (Integrated Media, 2005) and holds an MFA from the University of Guelph (2014). She is currently a Master of Education candidate in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning program at the University of Toronto.



DaveandJenn; *No Horizons*; 2017; polymer clay, acrylic paint, silicon carbide, fibre, wire, acetate and dichoric film; 8.5" x 11.25" x 19.75". Image courtesy of Glenbow Museum, photo by Owen Melenka.

## DaveandJenn (Calgary, Alberta)

DaveandJenn (David Foy and Jennifer Saleik) have collaborated since 2004. Foy was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1982; Saleik in Velbert, Germany, in 1983. They graduated with distinction from the Alberta College of Art + Design in 2006, making their first appearance as DaveandJenn in the graduating exhibition. Experimenting with form and materials is an important aspect of their work, which includes painting, sculpture, installation, animation and digital video. Over the years, they have developed a method of painting dense, rich worlds in between multiple layers of resin, slowly building up their final image in a manner that is reminiscent of celluloid animation, collage and Victorian shadow boxes. They have been shortlisted for RBC's Canadian Painting Competition (2006, 2009), awarded the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta's Biennial Emerging Artist Award (2010) and longlisted for the Sobey Art Award (2011). Their work can be found in both private and public collections throughout North America, including the Royal Bank of Canada, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Calgary Municipal Collection and the Art Gallery of Hamilton.





Qavavau Manumie, *Chasing the Loon*, 2015, stonecut and stencil, 15" x 24".  
Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

### Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa (Guatemala City, Guatemala)

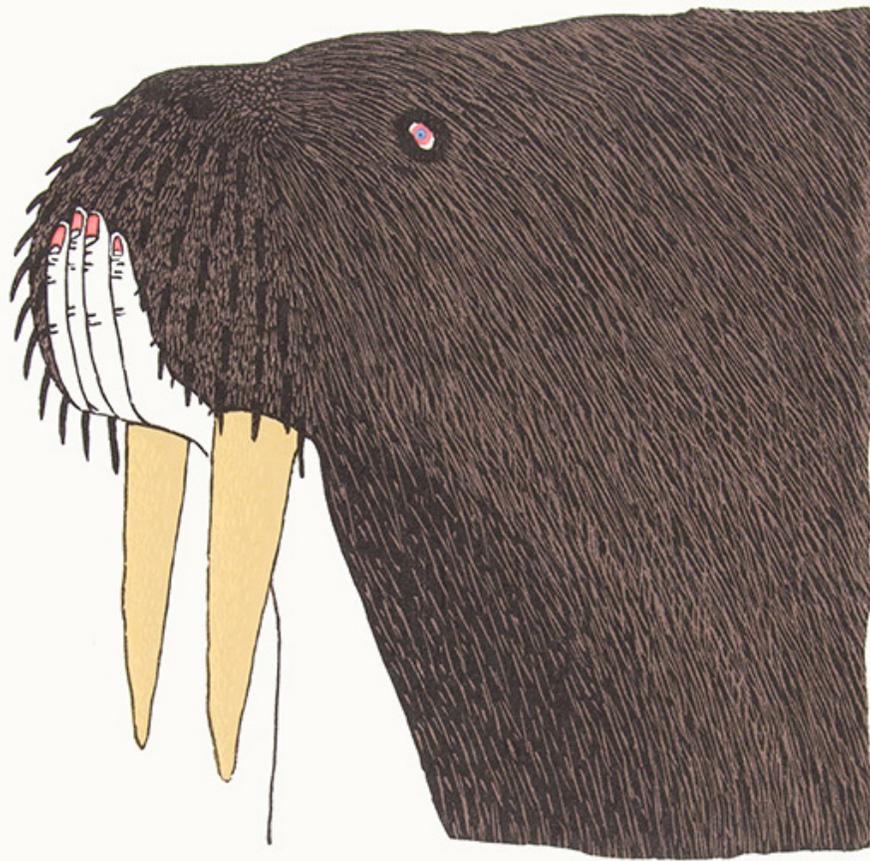
Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa was born in Guatemala City in 1978. He received a BFA in Media Arts from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver in 2006, and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2008. He was also a postgraduate researcher at Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, the Netherlands in 2013. Working in drawing, performance, sculpture, and video, Ramírez-Figueroa explores the entanglement of history and form through the lens of his own displacement during and following Guatemala's civil war of 1960–96. He has had solo exhibitions at Casa de América, Madrid (2011); Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart (2011); Gasworks, London (2015); CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (2017); and The New Museum, New York (2018). He has participated in the following group exhibitions: *A History of Interventions*, Tate Modern, London; *Gwangju Biennial*, South Korea (both in 2014); *Lyon Biennial*; *The School of Nature and Principle*, EFA Project Space, New York (both in 2015); *São Paulo Biennial*; and the *Venice Biennale* (2017). Ramírez-Figueroa lives and works in Berlin and Guatemala City.

### Ningiukulu Teevee (Cape Dorset/ ᐱᓄᓕᓕᓂᓂ, Nunavut)

Born in Cape Dorset in 1963, Ningiukulu Teevee has become one of Kinngait Studios' most celebrated artists and has established a reputation as one of the Canadian art world's major figures. Ningiukulu is self-taught and works primarily with coloured pencils and ink. Her images are derived primarily from her comprehensive knowledge of Inuit folklore, which she combines with often humorous images of westernized contemporary life in Nunavut. Ningiukulu Teevee's graphic drawings explore the relationship between abstraction and representation, particularly the interplay of patterns found in nature. Her work takes inspiration from traditional stories, as well as the changes she sees around her in contemporary Cape Dorset. She was shortlisted for a Governor General's award for her book *A/ego* in 2009. Her drawings are found in many major collections including the McMichael Collection of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, Winnipeg Art Gallery and others.

### Flora Weistche (Waskaganish, Quebec)

After witnessing the devastating decline of woodland Caribou, the year Flora Weistche was born, her father decided to stop harvesting this relative. This decision would mark ways in which she would come to know interrelatedness throughout her life. Of Cree heritage, Flora Weistche grew up on and with the Land of Waskaganish. Her family's last harvested Caribou hide inspired the rebirth of Weistche's beading practice—one she had begun at the young age of three and yet laid to rest for some twenty years. She was moved to threading glass coloured beads, to share the messages gifted to her through dreams by her late Uuhkim Helen. By way of beading, Flora Weistche braids relations crossing generations reaching toward plant, animal and human relatives alike. Currently, while finalizing her studies in Human Environment, Weistche lives and works in Tiohtiá:ke / Montréal.



Ningiuku Teevee, *Deep in Thought*, 2018, stonecut and stencil, 14.5" x 12.75".  
Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

## FREE PUBLIC EVENTS

Developed by Linda Columbus and Lisa Deanne Smith

**Saturday, January 19 at 1 p.m.**

### ***Collaboration as Process***

Panel talk with exhibiting artists Maryanne Casasanta, DaveandJenn and Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari + Felix Kalmenson)  
Moderated by Lisa Deanne Smith

**Wednesday January 30 at 7 p.m.**

### ***Take Care***

Workshop on plant-care and self-care, followed by a sound bath  
Featuring Darryl Cheng of House Plant Journal, curator/writer  
Geneviève Wallen and Kristin Weckworth of Kiko Sounds

*Limited availability; registration required*

Tickets available on Onsite Gallery's Facebook page as of  
Wednesday, January 9 at noon

**Wednesday, February 13 at 7 p.m.**

### ***Séance with Extinct Species of Birds***

Led by exhibiting artist Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa

*Limited availability; registration required*

Tickets available on Onsite Gallery's Facebook page as of  
Wednesday, January 23 at noon

**Wednesday, February 27 at 1 p.m.**

### ***Exhibition Tour in Spanish***

Guided tour of the exhibition led by Karina Roman Justo, Visual and  
Critical Studies student at OCAD U

**Wednesday, March 6 at 6:30 p.m.**

### ***Urban Animal Ecology***

Exhibiting artist Mary Anne Barkhouse in conversation with nature  
filmmaker Susan Fleming

**Friday, March 22 at 1 p.m.**

### ***Exhibition Tour in Farsi***

Guided tour of the exhibition led by Setayesh Babaei,  
multidisciplinary artist and designer in her final year at OCAD U in  
Environmental Design



**Onsite Gallery offers powerful,  
thought-provoking exhibitions of art,  
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