

Curatorial Care: The Art of Noticing

by

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practice.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the art of noticing as a methodological response to the need for deliberate models of care within curation. Stories of noticing are framed throughout this work as relational in nature, as acts of love and hospitality, as cultivating belonging, as interdependent, as countering indifference, and as a slow process. Noticing is presented as integral to the overall act of curatorial care through which art communities cultivate art institutions. The work turns to theoretical frameworks from Disability Arts and care theorists that support pathways for caring engagement in curation. These methodological explorations are articulated in practice-based examples from Toronto art institutions Workman Arts' and Tangled Arts + Disability, which includes an interview conducted with Workman Arts. The exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* (March 28-31, 2025) at Ignite Gallery (East) features the work of artists Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Naomi Beth Hill, Sophia Kyungwon Kim, and Don Kwan and acts as a case study for this explored methodology of noticing, serving as examples of the materiality of noticing embodied in the artwork and art practices of the four artists.

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Preface

The Art of Noticing was a public exhibition (March 28-31, 2025) that featured the work of artists Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Naomi Beth Hill, Sophia Kyungwon Kim and Don Kwan. This curatorial essay, support paper, and documentation of the exhibition are presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practice.

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Curatorial Essay

*Noticing Attunes Us to Worlds Otherwise*¹

Noticing re-imagines what care as a trusting, relational approach looks like, holding space for other possible promising narratives. The exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* welcomes everyone, together, to share-in, discern, and catch sight of stories of care: care of geographical landscapes, care of the body, care of personal and communal grief, and care of motherhood. We can understand noticing as attuning ourselves to others by noticing changes in behaviour, or as recognizing places of shelter within landscape, or as perceiving how to be generous while allowing for autonomy, or as activating material objects for social and political commentary. Care most markedly is reflected in noticing when it leads to action being taken. Listening accompanied by action is what noticing as an extension of care means. *Noticing* is deeply relational and is an act of love and hospitality which changes, grows, bends and leans as a caring action towards the other. I have come to understand noticing in this way, when I have held my children and come alongside them, when I have discovered new skills as a caregiver for family members living with Huntington's Disease so that someone else would not be alone, and when processing transgenerational and personal lived experiences of the complexities of health and the health care system.

¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, Heather Anne Swanson, Nils Bubandt, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Elaine Gan, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, 1st ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 10.

Noticing cultivates belonging, is interdependent, counters indifference, and is a slow, patient process. Noticing isn't of little or no consequence, but it is actually very potent and not something we just do. Noticing cannot be distilled into easily followed steps, or a contractual obligation, or a moralizing duty. Noticing is an art—in the sense of being a confluence of habits and a lived posture—that can be developed, and being exposed to this artwork has the potential to help us notice something about ourselves and others.

Though acts of noticing are often immaterial, we can look to the practices of artists Naomi Beth Hill, Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Sophia Kyungwon Kim, and Don Kwan to understand how materials and subjects in art can support undertakings of care through noticing. We can look to their artworks in this exhibition to understand the art of noticing in unique and imaginative ways that demonstrate how noticing is crucial to shaping healthy, heterogeneous art communities within institutions. Without imaginative noticing, care risks becoming stale, inflexible and devoid of creativity. Imagination is a key tool to building social resilience in times of change or crisis and allows groups of people to understand another's perspective, to empathize, and reflect on possible futures.² World building is about belonging and engaging long-term thinking and imagination for the flourishing of the community. The exhibition creates a space where the viewer can see that *The Art of Noticing* is bespoke and deeply personal; it is tailored to each individual and it is constantly creatively changing and adapting to needs as they arise. At the same time, the artists demonstrate how noticing as care-based practice is only possible through deeply rooted and communal approaches to relationality.

² Johanna Hoffman, *Speculative Futures: Design Approaches to Navigate Change, Foster Resilience, and Co-create the Cities We Need.*, 2022, 16-17.

As the curator, I make interpretive acts of noticing through this exhibition to foreground noticing. We embrace the ripple effect that noticing can have by engaging in topics of mutuality and interconnectedness that challenge human-centered views and traditional hierarchies. In this way, the artwork moves us beyond observation and past description because noticing is not about noticing everything, rather noticing is about togetherness. The viewer is encouraged to observe the varied perspectives on *noticing* present in this exhibition and how they overlap and inform one another and create a fuller and stronger community. Noticing collectively acts as a safeguard against systemic failures which can overlook, neglect or exclude. We notice alongside one another so that what we may fail to *notice*, someone else can *notice* for us.

Noticing cultivates belonging because caring for artists and art is about welcome, even within tensions. Naomi Beth Hill is a visual artist who through her work explores themes of caregiving and belonging found in geological landscapes.³ Hill isolates scenes from the surrounding landscape and those she neighbours with. She focuses on conceptual ideas about connection to people and places.

Hill's work challenges vertical hierarchies of categorization, individualism and capitalism through noticing small marine life in their watery environments, in the same way that some notice lichen⁴ or mushrooms.⁵ The tensions present in intertidal zones harken to what community looks like in institutions and is an example of how tensions can also

³ Naomi Beth Hill, accessed December 18th, 2024, <https://naomibethhill.com/about>.

⁴ Palmer, A. Laurie. *The Lichen Museum*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023. Print. 3-4.

⁵ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

create surprising places of care if we make room for many stories. There is a connection between noticing and belonging that is deeply upheld by community. Small creatures like lichen and mushrooms live in a supportive system and they belong to one another. They are interdependent, woven, and overlapping together like this seaweed on rock, reminiscent of light and shadow on paper. Hill elaborates on her art practice and the spaces of care which she is noticing through her work:

[w]ith each rise and fall of the tide, plants and animals existing within intertidal zones must survive extreme changes in water pressure and habitat. The curving formations carved into the intertidal zone by these same harsh conditions become shelters for marine life. I'm curious about the comfort these formations evoke in the observer even without knowledge of their function. Communicating in a forgotten language, the gentle forms tell us an ancient and ongoing story of caregiving.⁶

For example, *A Supportive System*, taken in 2024, is a photograph of a seaweed-covered rock which appears like a rounded and textured landscape. The lines of the green textured rock contrast against an even-toned pale grey sky. The rock's curves have been shaped by the tides going in and out over time as it slopes towards the muddy floor it sits upon. Looking closely reveals the seaweed strands have brought a softness to the rock's hard surface. The rock and tide create a supportive system for the seaweed to thrive. Tides go back and forth over the surface not only smoothing the ancient rock but also bringing into being the perfect environment for the seaweed to grow and proliferate over the entire surface. The ancient system of the ocean and the tides propagate this bright green flourishing and living grouping of marine life.

⁶ Naomi Beth Hill, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://naomibethhill.com/journal>.

Included here, *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)*, done in 2023, is a square photograph of an un-affixed collage created with ink, paper, light and shadow. This collage is part of a series of pieces that were created alongside photographs of tidal pools located on the shores of Nova Scotia, reinterpreting the intertidal zone, that liminal zone where ocean meets land. A light flare at the top of the photograph seems to shimmer off the surface of the work. An imperfect spherical dark black ink form, reminiscent of a tidal pool, fills most of the square frame. The inky paper form is not glued down, the edges visibly curve upwards and around it are thin slices of shadow. The image has a sense of impermanency because of the light and shadow dancing over it and because the artist has chosen not to affix the collage, almost communicating its own transience in time. This temporary, back and forth space constructs caring and protective environments for ocean dwellers even within the pressure filled environment of the movement of water.

Places of belonging are communities where interdependence is valued as crucial to the health of its members. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson's artwork and art practice can be considered an illustration of her familiarity with mutuality. The support that is received and given in this community is reflective of care that is specific and universal; care can make us feel good and it can also be oppressive, it is not always comfortable for the carer or for the one being cared for.⁷ Care and noticing is a practice and how it is done says a lot about us and about what we value as a society and people.⁸ The art of noticing is about developing a relationship with someone to the point where "disability

⁷ María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, 1st ed. Vol. 41. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 1-24.

⁸ Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 103.

justice' is simply another term for love" and that brings "access" and "access intimacy".⁹ For example, in this exhibition, Dickson's autobiographical work speaks to her lived experience with disability and illness. Dickson echoes the beauty and challenges of her daily life¹⁰, imparting her nuanced knowledge and experience to the viewer and listener.

In this exhibition, is a selection of four pieces from Dickson's first solo show titled *CRIP CARE: I live here instead*, done in 2024. The artwork is comprised of square etched copper plates and depicts crip intimacy, specifically the trusting and caring relationship a client has with their Personal Support Worker (PSW). As the inaugural Artist in Residence for the collaborative program between Tangled Arts + Disability and Workman Arts Dickson created these copper etchings of her line sketches. Both art institutions collaborated to transfer Dickson's autobiographical sketches onto the plates in an interdependent act of creation.¹¹

The first etching is titled *Caution Concern*, and depicts a scene set in the client's room. There is a stack of shelving in the corner, drapery and someone stands next to a bed gloved, masked, eyes down, and working. The figure sports a baseball cap and is holding tubes in their hands. *Pulling up Client*, pictures the same room but the focus is on the client who is lying on the bed uncovered with a pillow behind her head, their knee

⁹ Mia Mingus, "Disability is Simply Another Term for Love," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), November, 11, 2018, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love/>.

¹⁰ "About 'CRIP CARE: I live here, instead'", Workman Arts, Accessed February 6, 2025, <https://workmanarts.com/partnerships/artist-in-residence-tangled/crip-care/>.

¹¹ Tangled Arts + Disability, Accessed Dec. 18, 2024, <https://tangledarts.org/michele-dickson/i-live-here-instead>.

bent, there is a tube, a pad and the PSW's hands, who are caring for the client.

Nurturing Support, is an etching of the PSW who stands focused, eyes down, and caring for someone unseen in the image, just under the blankets. Lastly, *The Body's Needs* is a close-up image of the client's face, who looks contemplative, face up lying on their bed, eyes open. Dickson's poem, in the context of care, patience, and noticing is intimate and thoughtful. Some fetching words from Dickson's poem offer details and context,

As I lay here, soft, bedridden, being,
Rinsed, Humility in words spoken,
On my part, he administers soap

Quiet and unassuming, one could easily walk by and miss the artwork as nothing more than metal copper squares on the wall. The medium hides the vulnerability of the drawings, inviting only the few who want to look to truly see them. The plates themselves initiate a movement of noticing, once the viewer's body bends and moves to manage the reflection of the pieces, soft lines and storied sequences appear. Each piece takes time, patience, deliberate action, and intention from the viewer to see. In this action, the viewer mimics the movements of caregiving. The PSW moves, holds, and shuffles the client with attention to detail and supervision. In the artist's own poetic words,

From him, my sanity and hope, sometimes I fall -he
catches me, I found myself in him.

Soft and heavy lines shape tender quiet scenes of care with body, skin, bed, bedding, shelving, gloved hands, hat, mask, looping lines, tubes, gowns, glasses, and faces; these are windows into a private life. The etchings depict a reality that is not sanitized

yet is subtle and intimate and moving in its restrained details. The artwork etched into the copper plates draws out the act of noticing as the viewer is drawn into the crip reality, close and proximate—intimate even—to Dickson’s world, into her bedroom, participating in her interdependence with Curty, her PSW.

Inherently, mutuality counters indifference because of proximity. Dependence on one another makes it difficult to ignore when there is ill-treatment or neglect within a community. Don Kwan creates dialogues on themes of inclusion and representation that foregrounds stories of the Chinese diaspora in Canada.¹² He uses objects like take-out menus, lanterns, personal and historical photos, and transforms them into new pieces to engage intergenerational memory. Relevant to the piece in this exhibition, Kwan collects Chinese lanterns from various places and spaces, including closing restaurants and businesses across the country, and uses them as key materials in his artwork.¹³ This art practice counters indifference by noticing objects that are discarded or unseen, using them to create beacons that serve as a guide, warning, and celebration of Chinese diasporic stories in Canada.

Featured in this exhibition, *Lantern in the Woods* is part of a series of pieces that Kwan has done to remember and venerate his father after his death. The first lantern piece that Kwan hung outside for two years was made of wood and slowly fell apart from the elements. Documentation and the remains of this piece titled *Lantern in Decline* were

¹² Don Kwan, accessed January 23, 2025, donkwanart.com.

¹³ I first met Don Kwan when he purchased a vintage Chinese rosewood lantern from my parents, who had owned it for decades after purchasing it from a store in Sudbury, Ontario.

featured alongside many other of Kwan's work in the exhibition *Landscape, Loss and Legacy* (2023) at The Ottawa Art Gallery. In this exhibition, Kwan's work was displayed in dialogue with the City of Ottawa's Firestone Collection of Canadian Art (FCCA) creating an opportunity to reclaim stories that have been historically hidden within Canadian art and culture in order to ask, "What does it look like to belong in the Canadian Landscape?"¹⁴ More recently, Kwan was The Diefenbunker's 2024 Artist-in-Residence¹⁵ where he researched in the archives to uncover stories of essential workers during the Cold War era. The residency concluded with an exhibition titled *Hidden Heroes* which encouraged people to reflect on the various stories of the Canadian Forces Station, and how they have contributed to national history and can work towards equity, inclusion and diversity.¹⁶

The red lantern hanging in this gallery, like a banner, has widened its focus from the particularity of mourning the death of a loved one to connection with ancestors, the natural world, and landscape as a symbol of hope. For Kwan, noticing begins with the narrative of his father's death and moves out from there in concentric circles able to affect change within larger communities and institutions. The artwork fills in stories,

¹⁴ Ottawa Art Gallery, *Don Kwan: Landscape Loss and Legacy*, Accessed January 23, 2025, <https://oaggao.ca/whats-on/exhibitions/don-kwan-landscape-and-loss/>.

¹⁵ "Don Kwan Selected as Dieffenbunker's 2024 Artist-in-Residence", Dieffenbunker – Canada's Cold War Museum, Accessed January 31, 2025, <https://diefenbunker.ca/blog/2024-artist-in-residence-announcement/>.

¹⁶ Deifenbunker, "NOW OPEN: "Hidden Heroes" 2024 Artist-in-Residence exhibition, featuring the work of Don Kwan "Hidden Heroes" stitches and weaves together stories of unsung heroes", Instagram, video post, November 8, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCHwsadPtGe/>.

while using the ruggedness of winter to symbolically gesture towards the historical harshness of Canadian history towards Chinese immigrants.¹⁷

For instance, *Lantern in the Woods*, done in 2024, is a photograph of a lantern, digitally printed onto a 54 x 45-inch sheer organza fabric. The image is so diaphanous that the observer must really look to notice its details. Ghost-like, it hangs delicately in the room, featuring a see-through image of a red plastic Chinese lantern, electrified. The lantern glows as it hangs outside in the winter woods in front of a body of water. Open to the elements, the lantern's tassels of red, gold and jade hang in its cold setting. Intricate swirls of luminous filigree panels create the outside of the lantern's octagonal shape which houses the white lit lightbulb inside. At the peak of each corner of the lantern, the face of a dragon looks upwards. The trees and branches that are directly behind, above and below are detailed with fluffy, white snow, recently fallen and stuck to the length of every extending forest limb. Behind, the water ripples and on the other side is a shoreline with snowy trees. While *Lantern in the Woods* is fragile in appearance and reacts to the breeze of every passerby, it offers in its thin shadow, a strong and tangible sign of resilience even through very personal and communal loss in order to grasp toward a different and promising future.

Countering indifference is often a slow process of uncovering hidden stories from collective memory, a process of noticing the invisible, made visible. Noticing is not an

¹⁷ "Exclusion of Chinese Immigrants (1923-1947) National Historic Event," Government of Canada, December 5, 2024, <https://parks.canada.ca/culture/designation/evenement-event/exclusion-chinois-chinese>.

end in itself, it is an invitation to a slow, patient process in the direction of loving and caring for the other. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, through her drawing, painting, and textile work speaks to “feminist and mutualistic ideas”¹⁸. Her artwork pulls from her capability as a mother of four children, her experience as an immigrant and her past occupation as a police officer in Korea. Kim is impassioned by nature and ardent about its care. Her materials and art practice grow organically from her daily, repetitive, familiar responsibilities as a parent. She often paints from photographs she has taken while out on walks with her children. She particularly enjoys paying attention to the small, unnoticed beauties of nature such as flowers, grasses and of note here, mushrooms. Using organic lines and movement in her work, she echoes the lives of her hidden subjects, detailing these ordinary mysteries.

Echoing similar themes in Hill’s work, Kim challenges hierarchical, capitalistic, and individualistic understandings of communities and institutions through her noticing of mycelium and fungal networks and her exploration of motherhood. How the artist prepares, thinks, waits, and engages in their practice is crucial to the overall execution of the final piece whether it be a small paint study or a large ongoing layered project. It is in this slowed pace that artwork in process speaks to authenticity.

The life process of motherhood and mushrooms echo the process of art, highlighting that the act of noticing is a fluid and an unfinished journey rather than an end.

Mushrooms and motherhood both illustrate “precarity”, that dependence is networked

¹⁸ Sophia Kyungwon Kim, Accessed October 2, 2024, <https://sophia-k-kim.format.com>.

and contaminated with diversity.¹⁹ Parents labour in a way that is hidden and that pops up like a mushroom, one day needed and the next day gone, depended on and dependent upon others to survive. While there is joy in parenting and making art, more often than not, the process can be difficult, confusing, and chaotic, but it is within this ordinary messiness and that new discoveries are made. Parents not only act as a vital part of an interconnected and interdependent community, but they are also supported by the same crucial network that they are a part of. The complexity and intricacy of this webbing of relationships is so diverse that it is “unscalable” and messy with meaning.²⁰ Work in process does not assume a final product. Noticing shifts value from the end result to the slow process and the slow process itself is what shifts the noticing.

For example, Mushroom was painted as part of a set of studies in 2024 and is a small, gestural, and minimalistic oil painting of a light brown mushroom on canvas. Done quickly but not unfinished, it holds its own. The background of the work is painted in shades of brown, pink, and black. The mushroom grows from a decaying tree trunk, having waited under the surface until this very moment to pop up. The mushroom's stem is strong and is firmly in place, attached. One day the mushroom appears and the next it is gone. Under the mushroom cap, the gills are distinct and prove the focal point of the work, using light pink beige and touches of brown, they are defined with upward brushstrokes. The underside of the cap of the mushroom is key for identification in mycology. From the gills, the spores spread and the mushroom is propagated.

¹⁹ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-43.

Also in this exhibition, *Weaving the Unseen* is a textile artwork. Kim's daily practice of sketching figures is translated into textile representations of parent and child. Each is linked by textile strands, inspired by an invisible mycorrhizal network. The piece is meant to be shown in different stages of progress, a piece that is continually being added to and in this way, is a commentary on support networks and the unnoticed, unpaid daily maintenance labour of being a parent. Soft, pale, undetailed silhouettes, reach out, bend, lean and relax into one another. Interspersed with smaller child-like red figures that hang upon the larger motherly ones, a web is formed.

While the word *art* refers to the materiality of the work, that is the artist's practice, chosen mediums and subjects, art also describes for the viewer a stance of learning and leaning into relationships marked by care through noticing. Noticing is an orientation toward the other, human and non-human alike and creates interdependent webs of community. The artists dialogue with one another, creating a nuanced conversation around what noticing means, together sharing their own stories of community and institution.

Hill's artwork connects the viewer to geology and nature and how lessons of tensions are found in the tides, marine life, and speak an ancient language of care for the other. There is belonging in the back and forth of noticing, the pressure of relationships and communities. Dickson illustrates the depth of interdependent relationships through her art and poetry about her PSW. Noticing is about movement for and towards the other; it

is about generosity, trust and love. Kwan's work counters indifference by creating dialogues within communities and institutions about the Chinese diaspora inside the Canadian landscape. Noticing a story of familial grief extends outward into the lives of the greater whole, able to become a beacon of hope for a different future in art communities and institutions. Kim speaks to parenthood and the unseen support networks of mycelium and fungi. Noticing is finding value in the slow process, in the messiness of normal life, and all its needed and dependent connections, rather than in any prescribed result.

The art of noticing is integral to the overall act of care and is embodied in the artwork present in this exhibition and the art practices of the artists who made them. As we leave the art gallery, we consider what it means to catch sight of and notice our own stories and the stories of others, discerning our part in this network of support. Noticing is an art that is done together; it is not done alone, though it is concerned for the other in their singleness and complexity. What one notices, another may miss entirely. Noticing is ultimately relational. Noticing bends towards the other, valuing the web of support that diversity brings, and it is here that the art of noticing can enrich our lives as communities and within institutions.

Support Paper

*To call care a practice implies that it involves both thought and action, that thought and action are interrelated, and that they are directed towards some end.*²¹

Introduction

Noticing is the combination of thought and action that re-stories care as a trustworthy, relational method practiced in curation. The art of noticing is a methodological response to the need for deliberate models of care within curation. It arises from a commonplace critique that contemporary art can alienate the general public and that this exclusivity is experienced more acutely by specific communities.²² Noticing is paralleled and embodied in this project through the artworks, the curation of the exhibition, and the research. My project frames this art of noticing as relational in nature; it is an act of love and hospitality which is interdependent, cultivates belonging, and counters indifference through a slow and patient process. I maintain that the art of *noticing* is integral to the overall act of curatorial care through which art communities cultivate art institutions. Epistemological developments in access language and policy changes demonstrate ways for exhibitions, art education and programming within Disability Arts organizations to foster ongoing dialogue, relationship development, and collaboration between artists and curators.

²¹ Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 108.

²² I'm thinking here of mechanisms of exclusion as it relates to the intersectionality of race, class, gender, education, affluence. Exclusion is borne more acutely by marginalized communities that have historically faced this alienation, such as those with disabilities, illness, or experiences of mental health and addiction.

This thesis foregrounds *noticing* in curatorial practice through a holistic interdisciplinary approach that considers disability justice and care theory literature, art history, Disability Arts scholars and curators, arts programming and exhibitions, alongside a focus group interview and my own experience curating *The Art of Noticing* exhibition. Theoretical frameworks from disability justice writers, scholars and curators and care theorists allow us to engage topics of mutuality, interconnectedness and world-building that challenge anthropocentric views and traditional hierarchies. These methods of noticing are articulated in practice-based examples at Toronto art institutions Workman Arts' and Tangled Arts + Disability. A documented history of specific exhibitions at Tangled Arts + Disability is laid out as a case study of how the act of noticing causes shifts in decision making within a gallery setting. A focus group that I conducted with Workman Arts' staff, including the Executive Arts Director and Visual Arts Manager will reflect on how policy is continually updated at an institutional level in order to meet the needs of the over 500 artist members within their community. This focus group discussion reveals a deep commitment to the care of artists through the ongoing development of their artist members using supportive and adaptive policies, programming, education, exhibitions and festivals, as well as commitment to engaging in trust-based curatorial relationships with artists that are collaborative.

My research culminated in the art exhibition, *The Art of Noticing*, that acts as a case study for how noticing can be enacted as a methodology. Though acts of noticing are often immaterial, we can look to the practices of artists Naomi Beth Hill, Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Sophia Kyungwon Kim, and Don Kwan to understand how materials and

subjects in art can support acts of care through the act of noticing. Each artwork exemplifies noticing through their physicality and subject matter, showing how they potentially shape our understanding of what it means to notice as action.

Throughout this process I have understood, that as a curatorial method, noticing is concerned for the other and is demonstrated through a collection of habits, and a lived experience. We can trace what is noticed and follow it out towards what it means for care and community and see the effects of noticing on art institutions. Community life marked by care-full²³ noticing then becomes the mainstay or anchor within an art institution, demonstrated in the Disability Arts movement away from Outsider Art, and the example of the subsequent establishment and development of arts organizations like Tangled Arts + Disability and Workman Arts. These are the precedents that my exhibition is positioned within however, I do not consider *The Art of Noticing* a Disability Arts exhibition. Instead, I draw from Disability Art and Justice scholarship to assist my understanding of noticing as a curatorial method that can bridge care-full work in bringing together the work of all artists. Noticing is not about noticing everything; it extends beyond observation. Noticing is a practice that I have perceived, as an artist and aspiring curator, as a caregiver to family members affected by Huntington's disease, as a mother, and as someone who has transgenerational and personal lived experiences of the complexities of health and the health care system. As an academic, I began to take note of the art of noticing as a theoretical concept and as an art during my

²³ The use of the conjunction "care-full" is to emphasize the intentionality of care in an attentive and fulsome sense and not with a sense of caution that would normally be understood with the use of "careful".

classes²⁴ and my placements at Workman Arts. It takes togetherness and community to properly see across a space of time. I have learned from experience that what one person may notice, another may completely miss. It is noticing something that inspires action and there are real consequences to not noticing especially if we hold to the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and non-humans.

A lack of noticing can be as impactful as noticing. Not noticing can lead art institutions to arrest the vitality of an art community, making them unable to shift easily to meet needs as they arise, as seen in Brut Art and Outsider Art movements. Communities within art institutions need to be reflective of the relationships they hold and do not hold in order to change and adapt. During turning points, space must be held for tensions within community to be carried in tandem, allowing for growth and change to happen. Carrying these tensions in conjunction, leaves room for playful imagination that benefits all involved to grow into possible hopeful futures as presented in many designers' work who also contribute to the development of noticing.²⁵ Art institutions are what art communities look like over time and they are ideally thriving and relational communities

²⁴ Notably coming to fruition during the class *Design as Care* taught by Dr. Lori Riva at OCAD University, Winter 2024.

²⁵ For examples see, Tara, Bissett, (2022), *Conflicts of Care: Contesting Visions of Urban Reform in Toronto*, *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 47(1), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1095165ar>.; Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020.; “Design Justice Network Principals”, Design Justice, accessed August 2024, <https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles>.; Sara Hendren, (2020), *What can a body do?: how we meet the built world* (First hardcover.), Riverhead Books.; Johanna, Hoffman, (2022). *Speculative futures: design approaches to navigate change, foster resilience, and co-create the cities we need*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2022.; Huda Tayob, accessed March 11, 2025, <https://www.hudatayob.com/home>.

that are the slow, patient, and intentional social imaginaries of what is worth paying attention to.

Literature Review

An exploration of methods around noticing is seen throughout the work of care theorists and Disability Arts thinkers and writers. These disciplines are separate but noticing emerges as a common thread in this literature. In care theory, noticing is an action that is done interdependently, is often mundane and can easily go unnoticed and connects human and non-human worlds. In Disability Arts, noticing is the development of inclusivity around illness, disability, addiction and mental health with a focus on community that is disability-led from a place of love and hospitality. Tracing out these ideas leads to new epistemologies that inform the curatorial work of the exhibition *The Art of Noticing*.

Laying out the social and aesthetic context of this curatorial project begins with situating Disability Arts. Care in curation is not a new topic, indeed the etymological core of curation is derived from the word care.²⁶ However, care is often understood from a medicalized perspective or as an extension of social work and this can be problematic in the context of artwork. In the past, as was the case with Brut Art and Outsider Art, art

²⁶ For examples see Waard Ward Collective, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://www.waardward.com/>.; "Gudskul: Knowledge Garden Festival October 22-December 12, 2021", The Goldfarb Gallery, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://thegoldfarbgallery.ca/project/the-knowledge-garden/>.; "Take Care: five-part series", The Blackwood Gallery, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://www.blackwoodgallery.ca/program/take-care>; Dodd, J. Theodore, Richard E. Sandell, Debbie Jolly and Ceri Jones. "Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries" (2008).

that was made by those with experiences of mental health or disability was labeled as outside of the mainstream and unable to give political or social commentary; their art was relegated to a simple tool of the healing profession.²⁷ Eliza Chandler explains, “the inequities that our community faces are shaped by assumptions that disabled artists are unskilled, unprofessional, and lack artistic and political insight, beliefs that harken back to an era of “outsider art”.”²⁸ Inclusion through Outsider Art has historically been rife with ableism through institutionalism and locates work within specific schools of thought that is rooted in a dated understanding of disability and mental health. In 2018, the symposium *#Big Feels: Creating Space for Mental Health in the Arts* hosted by Workman Arts gathered artists and artworkers with mental health professionals to explore proper terminology and move away from the “[r]omanticization and fetishization of mad artistry.”²⁹ Disability Arts scholars, curators, and galleries have critically developed more inclusive epistemologies for artists. Here, we encounter language that becomes even more defined:

We use “disability arts” as an umbrella term to refer to art created by people who identify as D/deaf, disabled, mad, neurodiverse, and/or spoonie, and Indigenous peoples who identify with a decolonized understanding of embodied and enminded differences, as well as those whom medical diagnosis and pathologies have been thrust upon.³⁰

This new language and framework are essential to show the progression away from terms like Outsider Art towards a properly ordered, named, and varied approach to

²⁷ Eliza Chandler, Sean Lee, Lisa East, and Megan Johnson. “Insiders/Outsiders of Canadian Disability Arts,” *Epidemiology and psychiatric sciences* 32 (2023).

²⁸ Eliza Chandler, “Reflections on Crippling the Arts in Canada,” *Art Journal* 76, no. 3/4 (2017): 56–59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45142669>.

²⁹ Jenna Reid, “Asking Questions About Mental Health in the Arts”, Canadian Art, July 17, 2018, <https://canadianart.ca/features/workman-arts-bigfeels-symposium/>.

³⁰ Eliza Chandler, Katie Aubrecht, Esther Ignagni, and Carla Rice. “Cripistemologies of Disability Arts and Culture: Reflections on the Crippling the Arts Symposium (Editors’ Introduction).” *Studies in Social Justice* 15, no. 2 (2021): 173.

inclusive art in the gallery and museum setting. Looking to Disability Arts this thesis furthers the discussion on care in curation by utilizing frameworks of practice found in Disability Arts to flip the script. Instead of asking what can the arts do to include others I ask (and want others to ask) how Disability Arts contributes to a curatorial approach of care. Specifically, how does it contribute to noticing as an art of care that speaks not only to disability and mental health but extends to other topics such as geological landscapes, motherhood, and grief etc.

Curation notices when changes are needed at an institutional level, demonstrated in art movements like institutional critique. In her book *The Agency of Access*, Amanda Cachia explains that Disability Arts contributes to institutional critique and that she also draws from other disciplines when doing so,

there is a significant body of literature in other fields that also critique the museum, including museum studies, cultural studies, architecture and design, and anthropology. For this reason, the reader may consider that this is a book that adds a critique to museums from an interdisciplinary perspective, not least of which includes disability studies, as all those fields combined support how museums need to undertake the deep transformative work to begin to make their spaces more equitable.³¹

Like Cachia, I argue that curatorial care within art institutions should be approached from an “interdisciplinary perspective” in what I would say is a more holistic approach. Curation is an art that cares for artists and their work, I am suggesting that noticing is at the center of this care.

³¹ Amanda Cachia, (2025), *The Agency of Access: Contemporary Disability Art & Institutional Critique*, Temple University Press, 13-14.

Noticing as a dimension of care is grasped in the work of political scientist Joan C. Tronto. Tronto describes care as something that is practiced; it is given and it is received and the way we care says a lot about us, about what we value as a society and as people.³² Tronto argues for a shift from “autonomy or dependency to a more sophisticated sense of human interdependence”, while also tackling the inequalities present for those who do “the caring work in our society.”³³ Care is something that moves the carer away from the self towards the other and this implies “action”³⁴, “a practice and disposition”.³⁵ Tronto and Berenice Fisher define care as an “interweaving” and “complex life-sustaining web” that includes more than people but the environment, as well as objects.³⁶ Tronto and Fisher further break down care into four “phases”.³⁷ In the first two phases, the carer makes “note of a need” and then decides that action must be taken. The last two phases involve the actual practical day to day “care-giving” and “care-receiving”.³⁸ Noticing is part of the first steps of caring that put someone in the position to lean in towards the other. Noticing is the step that needs to be repeated over and over again in order to properly inform the other two phases of care that are described in Tronto and Fisher’s work. Without the first two steps, the day-to-day caring cannot happen and care cannot be received. I am arguing here that in this way noticing is cyclical and critical to properly caring for the other. Later, I will give examples in art institutions and art communities where these initial and critical acts of noticing have led

³² Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 101

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102

³⁵ *Ibid.* 104

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 105-108.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-108

to actual quotidian care-giving and care-receiving in the form of policy changes at an institutional level.

Philosopher María Puig de la Bellacasa's contribution to care theory expands Tronto's work and therefore helps to further clarify noticing as method. Puig de la Bellacasa argues that care is something at once specific and universal; it can also make us feel good or be oppressive for the carer and for the one being cared for.³⁹ Caring is not comfortable, it takes work, and is not easily done; it's messy, and it is draining, both physically and emotionally. There is an immense amount of trust that happens between the two parties when caring happens because care can also become overbearing and unjust and then is no longer care. Caring is an embodied action and because of this it has ethical and political implications.⁴⁰ Yet care work is often "devalued" and goes unnoticed.⁴¹ Care is something that is done alongside the other and implies relationship, something that Puig De la Bellacasa calls "thinking-with"⁴² and it is this sort of action that constitutes noticing together. In this way, the action of noticing is focused on the particularity of the individual but is also interdependent.⁴³ Relationships are not without struggle but as we care for the other these struggles have the potential to make relationships flourish with "heterogeneity" rather than causing breakdown.⁴⁴

Disability justice writers speak about care as something that is relational. Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha compares care models within complex institutions to alternative

³⁹ María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, 1st ed. Vol. 41. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 1-24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

forms of care found in grassroots movements and concludes whether one finds themselves in an institution or not, true care is about relationship formation.⁴⁵ Institutions are at a higher risk of not developing meaningful relationships marked by noticing and can easily seize up and not respond to needs of individuals within its community. As Mia Mingus has said “‘disability justice’ is simply another term for love” and that love is “access” and it isn’t just “technical and logistical access” it is “liberatory access and access intimacy”. It is this type of access that is relational in the sense that it is “done in the service love, justice, connection and community” and in this way has the “power to transform”.⁴⁶ The book edited by disability activist Alice Wong, *Disability Visibility: First Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century* documents stories about disability.⁴⁷ In the introduction Wong shares that the act of collecting and saving stories is what “led her to community” and here she describes community with words such as “political, “magic”, “power”, “resistance”, “hopeful” and “transform”.⁴⁸ Noticing is what a community does together, it is a collection of stories, that have the power to transform and resist in love and with hope to develop caring relationships.

Art institutions and curators should seek to develop this type of relationally based community that seeks to meet and connect with artists and their work. Speaking specifically about exhibition design and curation Amanda Cachia says it plainly:

⁴⁵ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oculocad-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5396334>, 79-80.

⁴⁶ Mia Mingus, “Disability is Simply Another Term for Love,” *Leaving Evidence* (blog), November, 11, 2018, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love/>.

⁴⁷ Alice Wong, (Ed.). (2020), *Disability visibility: first-person stories from the Twenty-first century*, Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi-xxii.

“sustained and long-term dialogical exchange with contemporary disabled artists is also critical for infrastructural change.”⁴⁹ Here Cachia suggests that any changes to exhibition design can only be successful if there is a long-term relationship with disabled artists. She further explains that there is “no such thing as a one-size-fits-all viewing or embodied experience at the museum”.⁵⁰ Building on this approach, I suggest that curation is bespoke. It is not about implementing the same design to meet as many needs as possible in one exhibition. Curation should focus on the diverse needs that may be present within the experience of the specific artists that a curator is working with. The curator’s ability to notice is directly related to the quality of the relationship they mutually develop with artists.

My methods also reflect on understandings of noticing that appear in the work of anthropologist Anna Tsing and other thinkers who are exploring the connection between human and non-human worlds. Tsing links her love of mushrooms to an “Arts of Inclusion”⁵¹ Noticing is explained here as an action of “taxonomy” done by a curator of fungi and the stories of a mycologist, through collecting, naming, labeling, drawing and watercolouring specimens. She writes that through these actions “we *notice* the diversity of life” and that “[t]hey guide our attention.”⁵² Noticing is used not only by naturalists but also by artists, like musicians and poets, who are interested in stories and use their work to focus attention.⁵³ A song or poem has the ability to “draw us into a

⁴⁹ Amanda Cachia, (2025) *The Agency of Access: Contemporary Disability Art & Institutional Critique*, Temple University Press, 5-6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹ Anna, Tsing. “Arts of Inclusion, or How to Love a Mushroom.” *Manoa* 22, no. 2 (2010): 191–203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41479491>.191.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 192-194.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 194.

world where we are able to notice.”⁵⁴ The practice of curating, in the same way uses tools to support the art of noticing as essential to telling the stories of artists and artworks during exhibitions and focus attention.

Inspired and by telling the stories of the matsutake mushroom, Tsing suggests a new way “to build connections between human and non-human well-being.”⁵⁵ Indeed she goes on to write, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruin* where she further elaborates about the implications of noticing stories as it relates to matsutake mushroom picking and how this has the potential to “open our imaginations”.⁵⁶ Noticing is “curiosity” which revitalizes “description and imagination” giving us the potential to “look for what has been ignored”.⁵⁷ The noticing I am speaking of in relation to curatorial practice is very similar to what Tsing is suggesting; it is a “reorient[ation] of our attention” towards “world-building” that is “not limited to humans”. The building of worlds is “polyphonic”, “overlapping”, and “layered” and will “show us potential histories in the making”.⁵⁸ Tsing speaks of “contamination” which is a result of “[c]ollaboration working across difference”.⁵⁹ Noticing is something that cannot be quantified because it is made of up stories and stories are messy, complex, nuanced with meaning, and “cannot be neatly summed up” or “scalable”.⁶⁰ In this way noticing for

⁵⁴ Ibid., 195.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁶ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015, 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 22-23

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37-43

the curator shifts the value from the end result to the process, and the process itself is what shifts the noticing.

Akin to the mushrooms and fungi in Tsing's work, lichen can similarly help us understand the art of noticing. *The Lichen Museum* by A. Laurie Palmer draws the conversation about care-as-noticing into the realm of art and institution. It is an art project that draws conclusions about humans and institutions through caring for the non-human world, prioritizing slow intentional, counter-cultural acts of noticing. One must slow down, stop, bend, crouch, and lean in to notice and observe lichen.⁶¹ This art project serves to "redirect attention to these mostly horizontally-oriented...beings in order to disrupt our human centered relations to space, time and knowledge."⁶² It does this by challenging "competitive individualism and the commodification of life and time, as well as the vertically oriented hierarchies by which we categorize, value and judge beings".⁶³ Observing lichen speaks to time that is "not productive".⁶⁴ This interdependent nature or "mutualism" speak to the practice of noticing as a communal act.⁶⁵ For this reason, noticing for the curator is done together. It is not an individual act but it is part of a network of relationships that inform the curatorial work. Observing lichens in the wild, just like observing small marine life in their watery environment, or mushrooms in theirs, often looks suspicious because it is a slow, close, intentional observation of something that occupies a very small amount of space and is often

⁶¹ A. Laurie Palmer, *The Lichen Museum*, University of Minnesota Press, 2023. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctv2vvsxb8>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-45.

overlooked. Watching is something that has become a dangerous and uncommon act and is looked on as being suspect and might be reduced to an act of loitering.

The world of observation or noticing opens up questions around interdependent relationships and can mirror how some people may be perceived as suspicious by simply being different. Noticing as an art is therefore different than surveillance, like in a police state. Noticing, because it is relational, is rooted in trust as opposed to surveillance, or simply watching, which are rooted in suspicion. Building trustworthy relationships for the curator is consequently of great importance. Through noticing, caring for something beyond ourselves can bring about new imagined futures of many worlds, not just one.⁶⁶ Building a literary overview of *noticing as method* requires an interdisciplinary dive into history, political science, anthropology, philosophy, disability justice writers, activists, artists and curators in order to develop an engaging understanding of what it means to be a flourishing community within an institution.

Exhibition Review

The methodology of noticing that I propose is indebted to curatorial precedents that specifically bridge the gap between contemporary art and people living with disability, illness, or experiences of mental health and addiction. Through a placement at Workman Arts⁶⁷, I noticed that the art organization cares for their artist community

⁶⁶ Ibid. 22-23, 118.

⁶⁷ I completed a 200-hour placement at Workman Arts, spanning two semesters of my MFA, from May – December 2024. I worked directly with the Amadeo Ventura, the Executive Art Director and attended staff meetings, events and met with city officials. Independently and in partnership with staff, I co-compiled and edited staff handbooks and created a general onboarding manual. I was also mentored by Fatma

members by perceiving, responding, and supporting their needs. Both Tangled Arts + Disability and Workman Arts are examples of art institutions upholding dynamic art communities rooted in care. They employ methodologies that utilize the act of noticing to care for their artist communities by making changes to exhibitions and art programming which leads to policy changes at an institutional level.

Noticing at Tangled Arts + Disability

The exhibition *Hidden* (2020), the subsequent exhibition *Undeliverable* (2021), and the development of a contractual change called the “care clause” at Tangled Arts + Disability are models of noticing within curation and an art gallery.⁶⁸ *Hidden* was curated by Gloria C. Swain. When something came up that meant that one of the artists could no longer participate, rather than replacing the artwork, Swain chose to instead speak about what it means “to hold space for someone who wasn’t able to be there.”⁶⁹ Using a wall of text titled “Holding Space” and an empty chair Swain wrote:

This is a space held for the artist who couldn’t be here today. Whether artists who suffer from invisible disabilities are our ancestors, those who have passed from systemic injustice and violence, those who are physically unable to be here because space is inaccessible or those who experience invisible struggles of mental health, this space is for them... Holding space is about allowing someone to take all the time they need to heal. It’s about assuring them they are loved, valued and irreplaceable.⁷⁰

Hendawy, the Visual Arts Manager and assisted to curate two main exhibitions including planning, working with artists, installation, budget, take down, floorplans and more.

⁶⁸ Access Anthology: Reflections on Disability Art and Culture, Tangled Arts + Disability, 2023.

⁶⁹ Carmen Papalia, Gloria C Swain, “The Root of the Word Curator is Care”, in *Access Anthology: Reflections on Disability Art and Culture*, Tangled Arts + Disability, 2023, 25.

⁷⁰ Wit, Lopez, “Hidden”, *Canadian Art*, March 31, 2020, <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/hidden-at-tangled-art-and-disability/>.

Swain noticed something and her curatorial relationship to the artists and the art institution extended in a deeper more nuanced way through this exhibition. *Hidden* was the last exhibition before the pandemic and *Undeliverable* was the first exhibition to open at Tangled after the pandemic.



Figure 1. Gloria C. Swain, *Holding Space*. Text. Photo taken by Michelle Peek Photography. Courtesy Bodies in Translation: *Activist Art, Technology Access to Life, Re-Vision the Center for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph*. "Hidden", *Canadian Art*, March 31, 2020, <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/hidden-at-tangled-art-and-disability/>.

The exhibition *Undeliverable* curated by Carmen Papalia was a partnership between the Robert McLaughlin Gallery and Tangled Arts + Disability and thus was presented in two spaces. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a longer than normal period of development before the exhibition. Papalia describes *Undeliverable*: it "challenges

institutional structures and centers mutual accountability.”⁷¹ Papalia wanted to "challenge the idea of a 'complete' exhibition" by having the exhibition open in stages, as a way to "center care" for the artists. Much of the work was large scale installations that needed more time than usual to complete. Papalia explains, “we just held space for works still to come with a label that said ‘Undeliverable’. I think just committing to the idea that a show can still change after opening was powerful and empowering.”⁷²

Noticing can be seen in the form of contracts within Tangled Arts + Disability which directly impacts the nature of the relationship between curator and the art gallery. The "Care Clause" is an assurance that Tangled Arts + Disability added to personnel contracts. It reads, "In agreeing to work together, Tangled Art+ Disability and the Employee recognize that the well-being of any individual associated with the duties detailed in this agreement is more important than any associated deliverable, and thus, all parties agree to take care of themselves and each other to the best of their ability." It's "a statement that [the] organization values the health of the people working for it more than the things they do or create". Making “an official declaration of values” through this change to the contract is not something that management took lightly but ultimately did to protect people and explains that the “organization exists within them [people], more than any piece of art.”⁷³ Noticing that the health of curators and art

⁷¹ Exhibition, Undeliverable, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, accessed March 1, 2024, <https://rmg.on.ca/exhibitions/undeliverable/>.

⁷² Carmen Papalia, Gloria C Swain, “The Root of the Word Curator is Care”, in *Access Anthology: Reflections on Disability Art and Culture*, Tangled Arts + Disability, 2023, 23-26.

⁷³ Cyn Rozeboom, “Considering the Care Clause,” in *Access Anthology: Reflections on Disability Art and Culture*, Tangled Arts + Disability, 2023, 31 - 32.

workers directly impacts their relationships with artists and their work is critical to centering care within art organizations.

Noticing at Workman Arts

Workman Arts (WA) employs similar methodologies to Tangled Arts + Disability through their education programs, the *Being Scene Exhibitions* and the *Rendezvous with Madness Festival*.⁷⁴ It is through building its community of artists that they put forward artwork for exhibitions that speak to current social and political issues. Research involving an hour-long focus group interview with WA was completed with approval from the Research and Ethics Board at OCAD University. The goal was to document the noticing that WA utilizes on a regular basis to care for their artist members.

In a focus group interview with WA, the Executive Director, Amadeo Ventura and the Visual Arts Manager, Fatma Hendawy, both speak about the care of the art organizations' artist members and the role that noticing plays.⁷⁵ Ventura explains: "The mission of Workman Arts is to work with artists living through mental health experiences and addiction and helping them through peer-to-peer programming, events, exhibitions and festivals." Hendawy believes "the role that the organization is playing in the art landscape of Toronto is really important." Ventura explains that since Workman Arts started in the eighties and that becoming an artist member gives you a lifetime membership, not all of their over 500 members are active and that building community

⁷⁴ Workman Arts, accessed March 11, 2025, <https://workmanarts.com/>.

⁷⁵ Workman Arts Focus Group Interview, February 26, 2025.

is done through creating opportunities for members to “present their work and having fellow community members come out to support them”.

Hendawy explains that what makes Workman Art unique is that the quality of the artwork is not “the only priority” but it is also “the process around building community, around this process of representation and giving our members access to different...opportunities.” While working with artists, Hendawy allows for “deadline extensions or accommodation” and that the artists “know that there is room to accommodate” and “to hold that kind of safe space”. In the day-to-day rhythms of the organization Ventura says that WA notices the needs around them through their “membership manager that is available so members can call them up and voice their concerns” and through their “code of conduct to ensure that [they] have a safe space for everybody that participates”.

The engagement of Active Listeners is also a way that WA notices. Ventura explains that “Active Listeners are usually recruited from the membership” and that an “active listening” training course is offered yearly. Active Listeners are paid positions and they are present at all WA events from classes to exhibition openings “to help people that might have questions, that might get triggered by...a conversation or a film or a piece of artwork and to talk with that person that’s triggered and go through a healing process”.

Ventura notes that the WA Member Advisory Committee also helps support care within their organization. This committee is “made up of members that are there to listen to

member concerns, to give feedback and input on strategic development of the organization” and “also attend board meetings”. Ventura speaks about partnerships as being essential for “non-profits to work together and co-present” in order to “alleviate expenses and to coordinate resources.” Hendawy adds that artists need collaborative opportunities to help build their portfolios and art practices by networking with “other artists, curators and art professionals” and in this way “keep bridging this gap that might be created by the stigma around mental health.” When asked how care for the community plays a part in the curatorial methods utilized at WA, Hendawy describes her role as a “mediator/curator” that the artist’s “contribution...won’t be taken for granted or misunderstood or misrepresented.” She sees her role to lead the artist as “thinking together” about what might be possible with the artwork while making sure that the artist does “not lose the conceptual framework and strengths of their work”. She concludes, “I think all of these conversations, thinking together, being together and building that trust between me and the artist is really what builds care.”

I asked both Ventura and Hendawy to reflect specifically on what noticing means to them in their role at WA. For Ventura noticing how “someone enters the space at a specific time. Being aware that we all are human and we all have different experiences...different upbringings...different perspectives...and listening to each other is important”. Hendawy conveys that noticing seems to be connected to “wisdom” and that noticing involves taking action. She describes the process of trying to discern when and how to speak about what we notice, especially as it relates to her curatorial work. She says that noticing as it relates to interacting with artists is a “sensitive process”. She

ponders saying, “It’s a delicate matter, it’s something for us to really think about...what do we do in this external-internal process of noticing.”

This focus group contributed to my understanding of noticing by documenting WA’s commitment to building community through relationship development supported by sustained dialogued with their artists members in order to create art programing, education, exhibitions and festivals. Collaborative conversations are formed within working relationships between artists and WA staff (including curators), and maintained through member run committees, peer-to-peer educational opportunities and active listeners that foster a culture of ongoing feedback. These established feedback loops allow for noticing to care-fully happen, leaving room for adaptability and changes as needed within the art organization.

Methodology, Installation, Concept/ Design

Methodology

My curatorial methodology is informed by care theorists and Disability Arts, and it centers around the art of noticing as a learned practice and expands the immersive experience I gained through my two placements at Workman Arts. Noticing is a posture that plays itself out in many different ways as a curator. Focusing on the idea of telling stories that overlap and entwine was important as I searched for the artists and artworks that would be included in this exhibition. I was not trying to accommodate everything and everyone but was specifically focusing on meeting the particular needs and

requests of the artists, where they were at. A bespoke approach highlights the heterogeneity of the artistic practices showcased in the exhibition. Differences in approach help create an environment or space where the artworks and artists speak with diverse voices. For example, some artworks were accompanied by audio descriptions while others were not.

Noticing is the art of curating itself. The curator who works with artists uses tools to precisely notice the artists, the art, and the art practices. These noticing arts encompass the contracts and agreements, the phone calls, studio visits, emails, questions, didactics/booklets, curatorial statements, curatorial essays, artist statements and bios etc. The curator's tools facilitate noticing and as the curator excels at this skill it becomes an art. These tools help sustain noticing as a methodology and should strengthen the relationship between the artist and the curator. Agreements should change and adapt as needed. They are tools to understand one another, to develop meaningful relationships between artist and curator and must change and adapt as needed to support this mutuality and not impose or oppress or mis-represent the artist and their work. As the curator, I supported the artists through the process of exhibiting with clear communication, problem solving, listening, providing re-assurance, by asking questions, and by praising the value of their work.

Curating with care, as an art of noticing, embodied the same points as the exhibition: cultivating belonging, interdependence, countering indifference, and slowness. When curatorial challenges were encountered they were resolved through actions inspired by

referring back to above mentioned points. Artworks and artists were chosen intuitively and sometimes serendipitously while utilizing the tools of the trade to help guide my noticing. I approached the curatorial task using existing and new relationships with artists whose work spoke to the theme of noticing. I allowed the overlap of the literature, past exhibitions and current artwork and art practices to guide my decision making along the way, meeting and discussing regularly with potential artists what could be. I am not aware of comprehensive exhibition based on noticing. As one of its most significant qualities, noticing is also subjective to the individual experience of the curator alongside the artist(s). My exploration of noticing as a methodology and the active foregrounding of noticing within curation, draws much needed attention to the potential impacts of care-full noticing for contemporary art communities and institutions.

Installation: Concept/Design

The exhibition *The Art of Noticing* (March 28-31, 2025) featured work by artists Naomi Beth Hill, Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Sophia Kyungwon Kim, and Don Kwan, and was held on the East side of Ignite gallery, located at 100 McCaul Street, in the main building of OCAD University.

The title wall text was posted on the North side of the gallery, over a plinth which held the exhibition documentation. The exhibition was navigated using paper Exhibition Brochures, which provided a gallery map, didactics, artist statements and bios, and links with a QR code for audio recordings for Dickson's work. A QR code to the online version of the Exhibition Brochure was also posted on the plinth. While an Exhibition

Brochure rather than wall didactics were mandated by the gallery, this choice also served to meet accessibility needs as per the request of one of the artists. Installation was done over two days in order to prioritize the care of all involved and artists were consulted before and during regarding the display of their work. While considerations for exhibition design were informed by the Accessibility Toolkit developed by Tangled Arts + Disability and Humber College, not all suggestions were implemented.⁷⁶ For example, all wall artwork was hung at 56", which is higher than the recommended height in the Accessibility Toolkit. This decision was made due to the small size of most of the artwork and with informal consultation regarding Workman Arts' hanging practices and with the artists. Kwan's work was hung at 50", over a plinth, because it was sculptural and needed to be seen from a lower height at different angles.

All the artists were able to attend the exhibition's Opening Night, in one way or another. Two artists attended in person and two others attended online. A hybrid event was created by placing a laptop on top of a high plinth in the gallery and by setting up an online meeting. After opening curator remarks were done, people instinctively spoke to artists in person and to those attending online, some even giving impromptu tours of the gallery by picking up the laptop and walking around. The dialogues between those in person and the online artists were incredibly impactful, as one of the artists had never been able to attend their art exhibitions in the past. Allowing for a hybrid (online and in

⁷⁶ "Accessibility Tool Kit", Tangled Arts + Disability, accessed March 11, 2025, <https://tangledarts.org/resources/resource/accessibility-tool-kit/>.

person) exhibition strengthened relationships between those attending the exhibition, the artists, and their artworks.

The exhibition design begins with *A Supportive Network* and *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)* by Naomi Beth Hill, introducing strong, consistent and ancient themes of belonging. Belonging in Hill's artwork anchors the viewer in the theme of the exhibition—that wherever they are at, whatever tensions they bring with them, who they are and who they are not, that is part of what care is as an art of noticing. *Caution Concern, Pulling up Client, Nurturing Support,* and *The Body's Needs* by Michele Anne-Marie Dickson's allows the viewer to explore the idea of interdependence and the body. Visually viewers may see the connection between Hill's work and Dickson's work in colour, shapes and lines of the artwork. Four of eight pieces from her collection were chosen that focus on relationship. *Lantern in the Woods* by Don Kwan hangs from the ceiling in the middle of the space. Themes of relationship with ancestors, nature and the Canadian landscape are brought together in this piece. Since this work was not shown before, it was not clear until the piece was in the room where it should be hung. Walking around the organza piece was crucial to experiencing the works nuances and delicacy. Finally, while encountering Sophia Kyungwon Kim's artwork the viewer again is asked to contemplate familial relationships, specifically parenthood with artwork inspired by support networks and mushrooms. *Weaving the Unseen*, a process piece made of textile allowed the viewer to ponder the daily familial habits of life, echoing the slow ongoing practice of noticing. On the wall hung the sculptural textile artwork, displayed using lighting to create shadowy shapes of the soft figures. For this installation, Kim's

work formed the contour of a heart but as she adds more figures, the piece will transform into a different shape the next time it is shown. In dialogue with and directly across from the textile piece, hung the small-scaled *Mushroom* oil painting. This painting was given its own moment, with more dramatic lighting, allowing for pause at the end of exhibition.

Conclusion

Noticing emerges not only as focus of this thesis research—it extends to the method of curation used in the exhibition, as well as the artworks and art practices of the artists featured. The artists are noticing and the curator is noticing, together. Through my research, I have explored a curatorial epistemology of *noticing* by making “cross pollinating moves”⁷⁷ from Disability Arts that are generative to the curatorial discussion. Using the art of *noticing* to tell stories through the format of the exhibition we can care for people within an art institution. An interdisciplinary perspective extends our understanding of curation to be fundamentally relational.

The broader implications of this project are that when noticing becomes an act which is motivated by love for the other, the way that we thrive is interdependent, community led and ultimately creates access. Exploring the act of noticing within an art setting has implication for art communities and art institutions but also for institutions more broadly to un-silo and tell stories about how we collectively properly care.

⁷⁷ Suzanne Morrisette. Thesis meeting over zoom. October, 2024.

As a method, noticing helps the curator navigate care when it may be conflicting with institutional constraints. Hill's *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)* offers a helpful metaphor to think through these institutional tensions. The same incredible force and exacting conditions of the tide also generates spaces of care in the form of tidal pools where delicate marine life live and thrive. Along with the artist, I suggest that these are “an ancient and ongoing story of caregiving”⁷⁸ that must be paid attention to. Different constraints exist together but there is also a reminder here that the tides slowly do change the shoreline.

Noticing has the potential to create greater social accountability through a Disability Arts theoretical framework as it relates to the intersectionality of race, class, gender, education, and affluence. In this way, noticing is about discerning what people need to thrive. It is a multilayered conversation. Disability, illness, mental health, and addiction are connected to the intersectionality of lived experience. Noticing as a curatorial methodology foregrounds a relational approach that informs pedagogy and collective working together in order to build resilience and resistance in a balanced way within art institutions. There is potential to further expand this attention to noticing—as a method and act of love—within other social justice theoretical frameworks. Integrating methods of care-full noticing into the collective curatorial social imagination, alongside artists, makes it easier to hold our past, understand our present, and make decisions as art communities and within art institutions.

⁷⁸ Naomi Beth Hill, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://naomibethhill.com/journal>.

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Appendix A: Exhibition Documentation
The Art of Noticing (March 28-31, 2025)

Opening Night Photographs, March 28, 2025 6-8pm



Figure 2. Opening Night, The Art of Noticing at Ignite Gallery. Opening curator remarks. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 3. Opening Night, *The Art of Noticing*. The artist and friends are standing behind his artwork. Don Kwan, *Lantern in the Woods*, 2024. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 4. Opening Night of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing*. Image features work by artists Naomi Beth Hill and Michele Anne-Marie Dickson. Photography by Logan Rayment.

Exhibition and Artwork Images



Figure 5. View of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* on the East Side of Ignite Gallery. Artwork by Naomi Beth Hill, Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Don Kwan and Sophia Kyungwon Kim. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 6. View of the exhibition *The Art of Noticing*, featuring the title wall text and artwork by Naomi Beth Hill, Michele Anne-Marie Dickson and Don Kwan. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 7. View of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* featuring the hanging textile work *Lantern in the Woods* by Don Kwan, and the oil painting *Mushroom* by Sophia Kyungwon Kim. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 8. View of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* featuring *Lantern in the Woods* by Don Kwan, *Caution Concern, Pulling up Client, Nurturing Support*, and *The Body's Needs* by Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, and *Weaving the Unseen* by Sophia Kyungwon Kim. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 9. View of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing*, featuring the title wall text, *A Supportive System* by Naomi Beth Hill, and up-close view of *Lantern in the Woods* by Don Kwan. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 11. Naomi Beth Hill, *A Supportive System*, 2024. Image courtesy of artist.

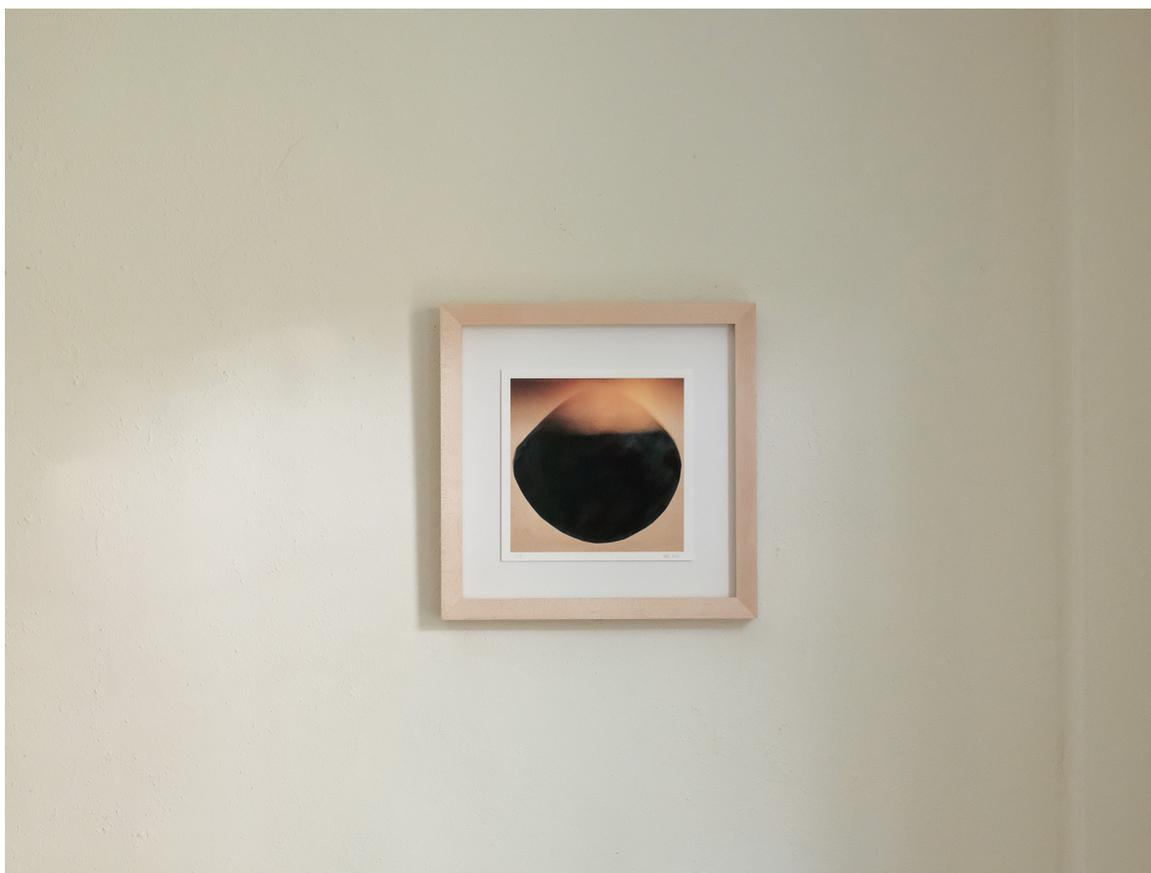


Figure 10. Naomi Beth Hill, *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)*, 2023. Archival Print on Hhanemule William Turner 100 cotton, 310gsm paper with archival ink. Print 8" x 8". Frame 13" x 13". Image courtesy of artist.

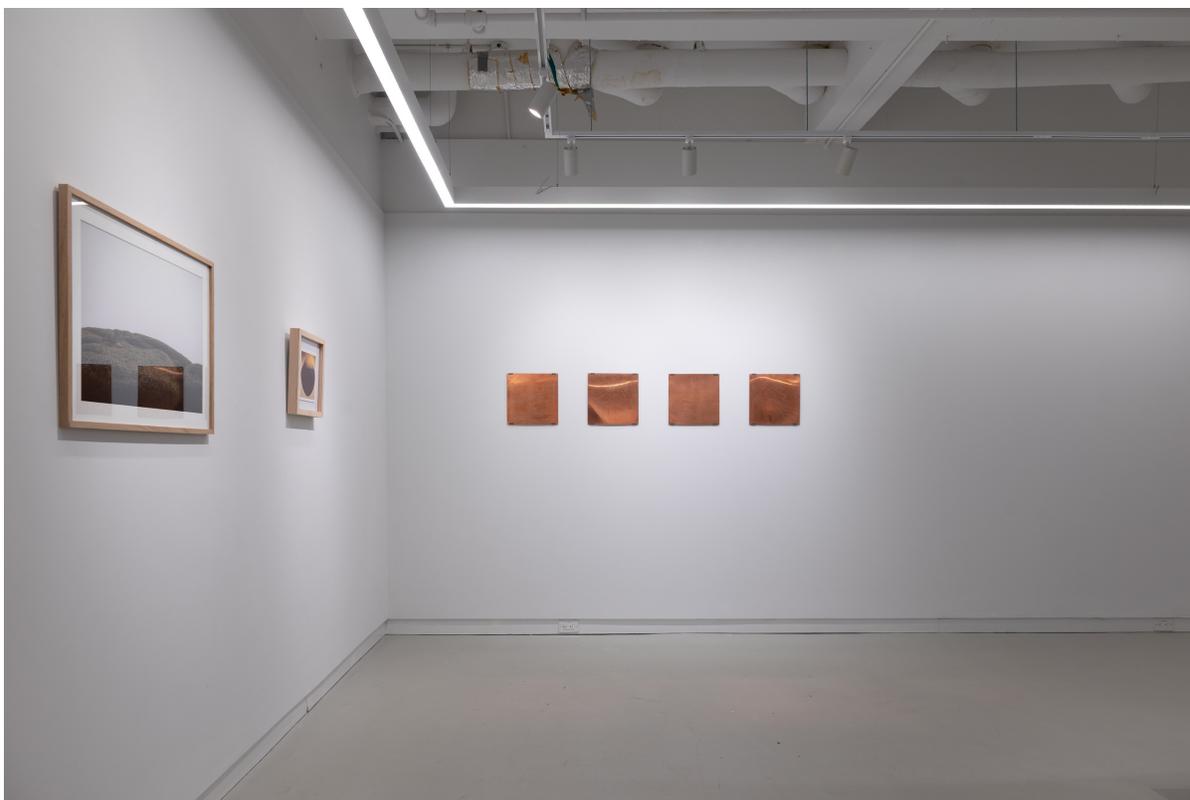


Figure 12. View of *Caution Concern*, *Pulling Up Client*, *Nurturing Support*, and *The Body's Needs* by Michele Anne-Marie Dickson. Side view of work by Naomi Beth Hill. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 13. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Caution Concern*, 2024. Copper Etching. 12" x 12". Photograph by Laiken Breau.



Figure 15. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Pulling Up Client* and *Nurturing Support*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12". Photography by Laiken Breau.



Figure 14. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *The Body's Needs*, 2024. Copper Etching. 12 " x 12". Photography by Laiken Breau.



Figure 16. Don Kwan, *Lantern in the Woods*, 2024. Digital Print on organza fabric. 45" x 52.72". Image also features *Weaving the Unseen* by Sophia Kyungwon Kim. Photography by Logan Rayment.

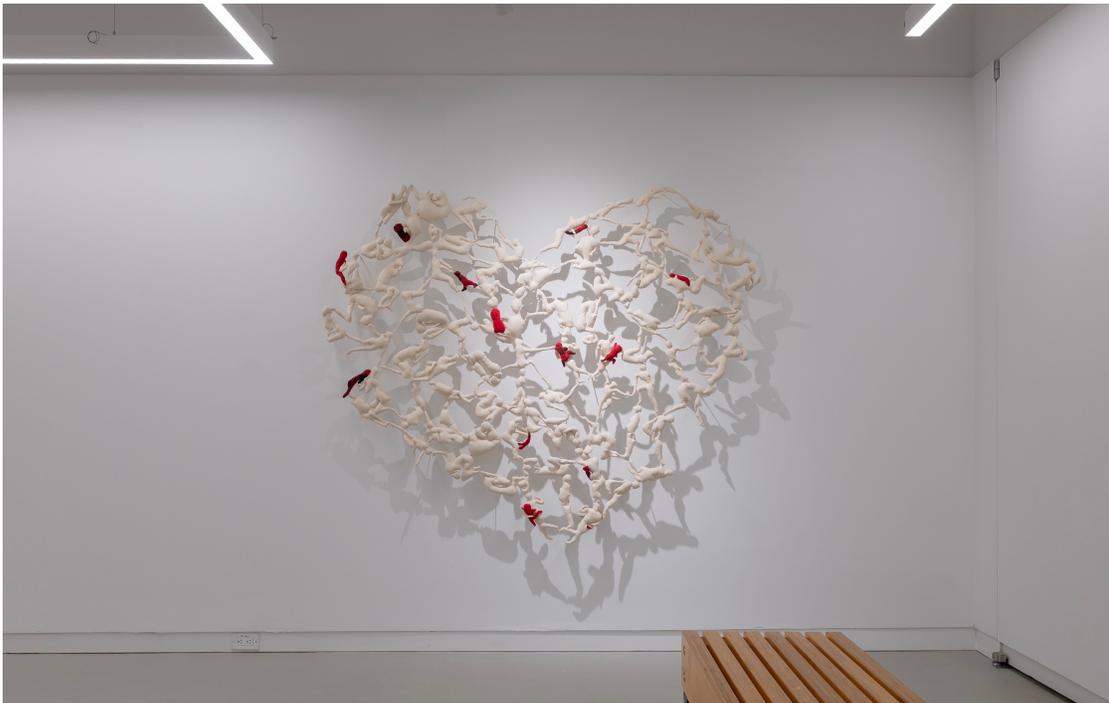


Figure 17. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, *Weaving the Unseen* (work in progress), 2025. Unbleached cotton, outgrown baby clothes, stuffing, thread. Variable dimensions. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 18. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, *Mushroom*, 2024. Oil on Canvas. 9" x 12". Image courtesy of artist.

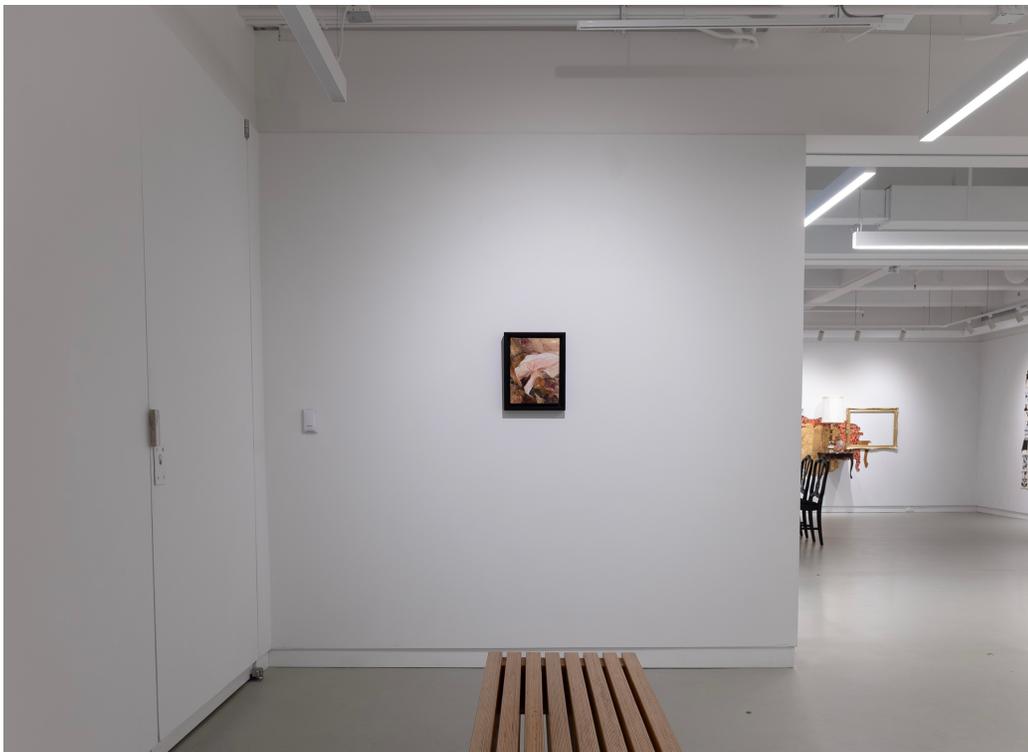


Figure 19. View of the exhibition, *The Art of Noticing* at Ignite Gallery (East) featuring the oil painting *Mushroom* by Sophia Kyungwon Kim. Photography by Logan Rayment.



Figure 20. View of the exhibition *The Art of Noticing*, for scale of artwork. Photography by Logan Rayment.

Work in Progress Photographs



Figure 21. Installation of *The Art of Noticing* in progress.



Figure 22. Installation of *The Art of Noticing* in progress. Hanging Don Kwan's artwork as per artist specifications.



Figure 23. Sophia Kyungwon Kim installing her work, *Weaving the Unseen*.

Appendix B: Exhibition Brochure and Promotional Material

The Art of Noticing



The Art of Noticing

Michele Anne-Marie Dickson

Naomi Beth Hill

Sophia Kyungwon Kim

Don Kwan

March 28 - 31, 2025

Curated by Renée Anne Bouffard-McManus

Ignite Gallery, OCAD University

Gallery Hours

March 28 | 1 - 8pm

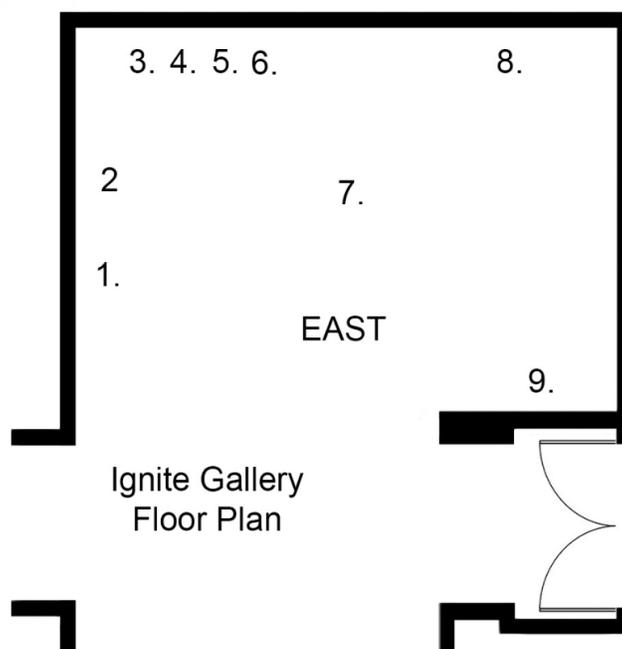
March 29, 30, 31 | 1 - 5pm

Introduction

The Art of Noticing is a group exhibition featuring art practices that embody what it means to notice. Artists Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, Naomi Beth Hill, Sophia Kyungwon Kim, and Don Kwan engage with themes of belonging, interdependence, countering indifference, and slow process. Noticing re-imagines what care as a trusting, relational approach looks like, holding space for other possible promising narratives. The exhibition welcomes everyone to share-in, discern, and catch sight of these stories of care: care of geographical landscapes, care of the body, care of personal and communal grief, and care in motherhood.

Scan to read the Curatorial Essay.





Ignite Gallery
Floor Plan

1. Naomi Beth Hill, *A Supportive System*, 2024. Archival print on Hhanemule William Turner 100 cotton, 310gsm paper with archival ink. Print, 16" x 24". Frame, 28" x 34".

2. Naomi Beth Hill, *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)*, 2023. Archival print on Hhanemule William Turner 100 cotton, 310gsm paper with archival ink. Print, 8" x 8". Frame, 13" x 13".

3. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Caution Concern*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

4. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Pulling up Client*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

5. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Nurturing Support*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

6. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *The Body's Needs*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

7. Don Kwan, *Lantern in the Woods*, 2024. Digital print on organza fabric. 45" x 52.72".

8. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, *Weaving the Unseen* (work in progress), 2025. Unbleached cotton, outgrown baby clothes, stuffing, thread. Variable dimensions.

9. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, *Mushroom*, 2024. Oil on Canvas. 9" x 12".

Exhibition List & Artist Statements

1. Naomi Beth Hill, *A Supportive System*, 2024. Archival print on Hhanemule William Turner 100 cotton, 310gsm paper with archival ink. Print, 16" x 24". Frame, 28" x 34".

Artist Statement:

Photograph of Knotted Wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) seaweed covering a large rock formation in an intertidal zone, Kingsport Nova Scotia.

2. Naomi Beth Hill, *Intertidal Zone III (Salt Marsh)*, 2023. Archival print on Hhanemule William Turner 100 cotton, 310gsm paper with archival ink. Print, 8" x 8". Frame, 13" x 13".

Artist Statement:

Photograph of an unfixed collage – ink shape on paper, light. Forms and compositions encountered in intertidal zones are photographed and then reinterpreted using ink and paper collage. For this work, I introduced sunlight and shadow over the collages and then photographed the temporary compositions.

3. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Caution Concern*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

Transcript of Artist's Audio Statement:
With this drawing, I show the PSW applying a tube, working diligently and the client just waiting. There is [a] kind of caution, maybe a little bit of concern in this drawing.



4. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Pulling up Client*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

Transcript of Artist's Audio Statement:
In this drawing, I show the PSW grabbing the under pad and pulling up the client. There's a lot of patience and caregiving and care in this drawing.



5. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *Nurturing Support*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

Artist Statement:
With this drawing of the PSW, I tried to convey nurturing, support, patience and caregiving.



6. Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, *The Body's Needs*, 2024. Copper etching. 12" x 12".

Transcript of Artist's Audio Statement:
This last drawing shows the client's face and they're kind of pondering and taking time. There's umm... maintenance for the PSW every day, maintenance of the body and the body's needs.



Scan QR codes for audio of artist statements.

Text by Michele Anne-Marie Dickson, 2025.

Devotion

We have a deeply Spiritual respect for each other,
 As I lay here, soft, bedridden, being,
 Rinsed, Humility in words spoken,
 On my part, he administers soap,
 Onto my cloth, pressing my radiant
 Flesh, smooth and supple, beaming
 From days of love, his Godliness
 In his hobby, treatment of me, I am his gift to himself, his driven
 meaning, caused
 By trusting; I assume that you cannot understand my gratitude,
 my daughter's loyalty, I am in awe.
 I admire his constant care, his stories of his father and mother,
 gleaning,
 From him, my sanity and hope, sometimes I fall—he catches me,
 I found myself in him.
 The gifts he has touched me with are without
 Remuneration, I won't count their cost.
 He dries my thirst, and supplies me waters,
 I say his name: Loved Light, with me here,
 My life is precious because of him, he
 Has filled me with The Goddess of Compassion, I enter beaming,
 I can't help But Love him with Depth,
 I will always quietly remember,
 My devoted, sacrificing, illuminated caregiver, P.S.W.,
 father figure, Curty L. Henry,
 My brother in God.

Scan the QR code for audio.



7. Don Kwan, *Lantern in the Woods*, 2024. Digital print on organza fabric. 45" x 52.72".

Artist Statement:

"Lantern in the Woods" is a symbolic work that looks at themes of memory, ancestral veneration, resilience, and my connection with the natural world and the Canadian landscape. The piece centres around a gesture of honour and remembrance for my ancestors, it allowed me to contemplate and reflect on their historic struggles and triumphs over a long duration of time that spanned all the seasons. The red lantern serves as a beacon of luck and hope, casting light on the past make me feel present and helped me to inform the future. It made me think of those who came before, who overcame adversity against all odds.

Nature in this work acts as both a metaphor for life's hardships and as a reminder of the cycles of change. The passage of each season, symbolized the brutality of life's challenges, but also the beauty of growth and renewal of life in spring time.

The lantern, flickering in the wilderness, acts as a reminder that even in the harshest of times we can find ways to illuminate hope and shed light on our stories.

8. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, *Weaving the Unseen* (work in progress), 2025. Unbleached cotton, outgrown baby clothes, stuffing, thread. Variable dimensions.

Artist Statement:

"Weaving the Unseen" is an installation that visualizes the hidden power embedded in domestic labour, care work, support structures, and interdependence. As a mother, artist, and immigrant, I constantly navigate the tension between my creative practice and the undervalued, essential acts of caregiving and household work. In response to this tension, I translate my daily drawings into soft fabric figures, reflecting how repetitive, seemingly insignificant gestures accumulate over time, forming the foundation of care, resilience, and interconnected support systems, while simultaneously realizing my identity as an artist.

Inspired by the mycorrhizal network, my work draws parallels between the unseen networks of fungi and the unnoticed efforts within domestic and caregiving spaces. Just as fungi create sustainable cycles in ecosystems, acts of care reshape human life, revealing resilience and adaptation.

Through this installation, I make visible the quiet effort that sustains us within human relationships. It reflects not only my experiences as an immigrant mother of four but also as a grown child who benefits from the invisible support of my parents. Weaving the Unseen challenges dominant narratives of productivity and proposes an alternative understanding of care, maintenance, and support as powerful forces that sustain and strengthen the world, encouraging a reconsideration of their value within capitalist and patriarchal structures.

9. Sophia Kyungwon Kim, Mushroom, 2024. Oil on Canvas. 9" x 12".

Artist Statement:

Mushrooms emerge from decay, delicate yet resilient, sustaining entire ecosystems through unseen labour. Their quiet existence mirrors the hidden work of caregiving and creation—nurturing life in the background, often unrecognized. As a mother of four, I see myself reflected in these quiet forces of nature, tending to the needs of others while longing to be seen.

This painting marks my return to art after two years of silence—years spent carrying and caring for my youngest child. I remember walking with my baby strapped to my back, lulling him to sleep with each step. The rustling leaves, the whispering wind, and the steady rhythm of my footsteps formed a lullaby that cradled both of us in nature's quiet embrace. In those moments, I, too, felt held—finding solace, regaining strength, preparing to reemerge.

When I picked up my brush again, my hands were stiff from absence. To ease back into painting, I turned to old photographs from that time. The image of white mushrooms sprouting from a decayed tree trunk struck me deeply. They had laboured unseen beneath the earth, only to surface in quiet defiance. In them, I recognized my desire—to break through, to claim space, to reassert my presence as an artist. Through layered textures and organic forms, my work explores the unseen labour of nature and its parallels to human perseverance. The gentle yet determined push of mushrooms toward the light reflects my life—seeking space to grow, to exist, to thrive.

Artist Biographies

Michele Anne-Marie Dickson is a disabled, self-taught, multi-disciplinary artist, poet, and writer of fiction and non-fiction, and she lives with a positive mindset. She has overcome many obstacles, as well as living on ODSP, but she maintains a strong ethical way of being. She works in pastel, coloured pencil, acrylic, printmaking, graphite, watercolour, and pen & ink. Michele is invested in anti-colonialism and does what she can to honour local Indigenous peoples. She has chronic and mental illness, where her art encompasses the struggles that come with her lived experience. Michele identifies as a Deaf, low vision, Asexual, crip, spoonie, and plus-sized artist. After a hospital injury, Michele began to use her non-dominant left hand to draw and is now ambidextrous. Michele attempts to demonstrate feelings of surrender, hope, passion, joy, and love with the daily challenges of being disabled and ill in her work. Beauty, darkness, and suffering is also present in all her work.

Naomi Beth Hill is a visual artist whose work examines themes of geological and domestic caregiving in conceptual, still life and landscape imagery. Naomi's primary medium is photography but her practice extends into paper collage and cyanotype. The puzzle of articulating intangible concepts in a medium typically employed to document the material world has led Naomi to develop nontraditional photographic methods and techniques. Even so, walking and photographing the physical landscape underpins and anchors Naomi's more experimental work. Isolating natural forms with her lens has become contemplative, observing how time spent in nature changes one's perception of existence and belonging.

Sophia Kyungwon Kim, a Toronto-based visual artist and mother of four, is pursuing an MFA at OCAD University, building on her BFA in Drawing and Painting from the same institution. Her art, shaped by mutualism, ecological interdependence, and symbiotic relationships, draws inspiration from her diverse life experiences, including her former role as a police officer in Korea and her journey as an immigrant mother. Passionate about nature, Sophia explores the entangled relationships between organic and synthetic materials, emphasizing the delicate balance of collaborative survival. She uses oil and acrylic to capture often-overlooked entities, focusing on mushrooms—organisms that thrive through interconnection and mutual support. In a world of constant change, she aims to reveal subtle stories within nature, urging viewers to recognize the intricate web of coexistence that sustains life.

Don Kwan is a third-generation Chinese Canadian, who turns to his own experiences and challenges of being a gay, East Asian artist as a way to ground in broader conversations about identity, representations, and intergenerational memory-making in the diaspora. Kwan regularly draws from common and powerfully symbolic found objects and forms. He redeploys them in provocative, and playful ways; delivering complex, and nuanced concepts in an open framework for interpretation that evokes both familiarity and wonder.

Kwan is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, his work is found in public and private collections across Canada, including the Royal Ontario Museum, Tom Thomson Art Gallery and the Ottawa Art Gallery. Kwan is especially known in Ottawa, where he and his family have contributed richly to the vibrancy of the nation's capital art scene for decades; he is the founder of the Chinatown Remixed Art Festival.

Acknowledgments

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The Art of Noticing is a public exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practice.

OCAD University is located on the ancestral territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabeg and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and create.

Promotional Material

The Art of Noticing

ARTISTS:
MICHELE ANNE-MARIE DICKSON
NAOMI BETH HILL
SOPHIA KYUNGWON KIM
DON KWAN

CURATOR:
RENÉE ANNE
BOUFFARD-MCMANUS



NAOMI BETH HILL, "A SUPPORTIVE SYSTEM": PHOTOGRAPH OF KNOTTED WRACK (ASCOPHYLLUM NODOSUM) SEAWEED COVERING A LARGE ROCK FORMATION IN AN INTERTIDAL ZONE, KINGSPORT NOVA SCOTIA.

GALLERY HOURS:

MARCH 28 | 1PM - 8PM
MARCH 29, 30, 31 | 1PM - 5PM

March 28-31

Ignite Gallery, 100 McCaul St.
2nd Fl.

Opening Night

March 28 | 6pm - 8pm

Figure 24. Promotional material used for posters, for social media and websites.