

## Curatorial

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Someone, somewhere, long ago decided to smear one substance on to a substrate, and talk about it. That is the tradition I come from: mucking with things and talking about it. Sometimes this practice is considered art making and it has value. In simple terms art making is the altering of physical materials and constructing verbal context around these configurations. It seems to me that art making as a profession is an extraordinary phenomenon, that over the years this amazing privilege has been pedestalized among many people groups all over the world. I am not a true believer in the institution of art, but my activities would suggest that I am an artist.

When I was asked to guest curate this issue of TRANSMOTION, I thought about myself as a context, as an artist... but also, living in what is now called North America, a cis-gendered woman of Anishinaabe descent, and this list goes on. But mostly, I identify with this strange field I've stumbled onto. And as an artist, I occupy myself with studying materials, paying close attention to how materials react to one other. One might think that I discuss this material knowledge and the process of transforming or altering materials, but I favor instead the abstractions, metaphors and storytelling. Introducing the writings of others who have already included abstractions, metaphors and storytelling, I think it fitting to follow my false dichotomy and talk about physical materials, processes, environments and objects... of course, it is all storytelling in the end.

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The surface texture of paper is often called its tooth. A rough or heavy tooth allows charcoal to cut against the surface and provides more area for the particulates to bind. Likewise, an inked brush will skate across the surface of smooth paper, but a deep tooth will offer enough resistance to make clean lines. Resistance is important. Resistance sculpts. Assimilation is antithetical to resistance, to “survivable” but even in our resistance we might find ourselves conforming to a larger, dominant framework. Resistance is near the outer edge of some greater formation and resistance is the skin of our cause. In “An open letter about the premiere of *Bloody Bloody*

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*Andrew Jackson* in Minneapolis from Rhiana Yazzie” by Rhiana Yazzie, resistance to a performance is characterized as anti-free expression by racist playwrights who remain indignant under a self-righteous, ART-brazened banner. Here, Yazzie generously offers resistance to those who blindly lay claim to an “edgy” resistance themselves. These playwrights argue in favor of racist depictions, their cause is racism for the sake of racism... but they cry, “art!”

Back to teeth. When in the bush, my father sometimes chews dogwood in lieu of brushing his teeth. He claims bush wisdom, but my dad tends to make things up. I thought I'd check with my dentist, who supported the claim saying, “By all means, if you ever see dogwood growing in a ditch somewhere, go chew on it.” So, the jury is still out on that. My dentist also likes to make grand analogies between teeth and wood. Turns out our enamel is like hardwood, hard oaks and maples, but when worn off the tooth itself is more pithy, like softwoods. Coffee has a hard time staining the less porous enamel but stains the hell out of teeth when it's gone. I've digressed. The GIFS by Pallas Erdrich are hypnotic in action. They visually chew with jagged frame jumps characteristic of gifs. Erdrich has a background in media production and is prolific in the art of gif making. These images offer up vignettes of daily intimate moments, some sleight-of-hand observations, some are rather funny. The low viscosity of the frame rate combined with the slight observations seems like antidotes, urban wisdom, charms and quick advice that requires further investigation.

When I was in school one of my professors confessed to a seemingly mystic belief about wood. He contended that dead trees or dried wood maintains a cellular memory of water and that by applying water to it the wood is reminded of being alive. He talked about old, dried wood twisting and moving after becoming wet. Hardwood floor refinishers have a term called “Water Popping” that involves applying water to unfinished hardwood. This causes the grain in the wood to bloom or splay out and become porous enough to accept new stain. Allan J. Ryan's “Trickster Discourse in Narrative Chance: How Gerald Vizenor Helped Shape My Life in Academia” is a love letter or a confession of admiration presented in a timeline of Ryan's career. Vizenor's observed fluidity over a ridged plank, that of academia, creates an aliveness or an inspired space. Ryan charts and plots a careered interaction over the course of nearly thirty years, or time immemorial.

The act of carving in wood or stone is considered a *subtractive* form of sculpting. Additive and subtractive sculpting is analogous to positive and negative space in two-dimensional artwork. Although wood and stone can be jointed, glued or hinged together creating a continuous piece, it is the properties of clay that are valued for being versatile as both *subtractive* and *additive* forms for sculpture building. Wet clay adheres to itself and maintains its integrity as a unit until fired or let to dry. Text to the performance of “BLACKFISH” by Emily Johnson requires a slow and steady, methodical read. It is on the surface a story about a fish that nearly loses its form as a survival tactic and it is the first time that Emily Johnson's work has ever made me cry. I heard it performed on October 20, 2011 as part of a fundraiser event for the Indian Child Welfare Act Law Center in Minneapolis. The memory of it has stuck with me as additive in sculpture making terms.

Subtractive forms of sculpture-making is a difficult analogy. In “Honoring the Disappeared in the art of Lorena Wolffer, Rebecca Belmore, and the Walking With Our Sisters project,” Deborah Root helps us swallow our tears for a moment to discuss two artists who’ve used their platform of art making to admonish those willing to overlook the disappearance of and violence towards Native women in Mexico and Canada. Visual art is just that: visual. Inherent to visual art is its ability to make visible and place in our imaginations that which has been removed, disappeared or destroyed. Root's essay on the work of Lorena Wolffer and Rebecca Belmore breaks the borders that have carved-up our continent to discuss the works of two artists addressing violence towards our bodies.

There are five works in this section. I call them works because it seems to be a broad enough term to be inclusive of each contribution. Consider these works abstract for a moment. Each one builds up a series of positions (or images), gradually unpacking and unfolding complex ideas. I am unable to reduce each of them to bite-sized summaries. This lies beyond my abilities, as I tend to over-estimate ideas that are new to me. I have ruminated on a delicate metaphor between the transformations described in the various contributions I have chosen for this issue of TRANSMOTION and the transformative aspects of sculpted physical materials. The five works included here by artists and writers have offered resistance and transformation, or they’ve shone

a spotlight on the resistance of others, in the form of words and images. It is my understanding that this publication will exist in the world of pixels, temporary images that scroll across the smoking mirrors of tablets and screens. Please enjoy these contributions and spread them widely.

In solidarity,

Andrea Carlson, November 2016