

# ESKER FOUNDATION

Winter 2025



Esker Foundation is located near the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, a site known as Mohkinstsis, and a deeply significant place within Treaty 7 territory. We acknowledge that the Treaty 7 region is part of the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai Nations; the Tsuut'ina Nation; and the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, which includes the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Districts 5 and 6.

## Welcome

We begin this year with a trio of winter exhibitions featuring the work of Hangama Amiri, Erika DeFreitas, and Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi all curated in-house by Elizabeth Diggon.

All three exhibitions centre female experience in relation to family, gesture, and process. Hangama Amiri's *PARTING/فراق* features intricately layered textile compositions that muse on home, kinship, and memory. This exhibition will extend upon an ongoing body of work that focuses on the artist's personal history and diasporic experience. Erika DeFreitas' *and that break is the one that shows (to shift, a curve, to quiver)* will feature collage, photographic, and video work that commune with a constellation of women in a multi-part dialogue that transcends space and time. In the Black Box, we're honoured to present Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi's *The blue of the sky depends on the darkness of empty space behind it*, which features an immersive film developed in collaboration with the artist's mother, Thuyen Hoa, that focuses on retelling Hoa's journey fleeing Vietnam after the end of the American War via a near-calamitous sea journey.



For a reprieve from the grey of winter, Taïessa's installation, *variegata*, is open in the Project Space until 2 February. *variegata* offers a tangle of plant cuttings that appear to stretch their leaves toward the light in a vibrant, sun-soaked greenhouse. Each individual leaf is quilted and stitched from sheets of pressed felt, a slow process that points to the time, care, and material intuition required to nurture plants and is deliberately and self-reflexively asynchronous with the cadence of our current moment. Opening on 10 February is *With All Our Vernal Suns*, an installation by Banff-based artist Megan Feniak that expands on this theme; her new sculptural work explores how the eternal cycles of time transcend our seemingly fragmented lives through the quiet rituals that connect all living beings.

Our winter programs include artist talks, workshops, all-ages and family-friendly programs, and the return of community night on Friday 21 March from 6–8pm. Spring Community Night is an opportunity to visit the current exhibitions, enjoy a hands-on activity, join a tour, or catch up with friends with light snacks and refreshments. The Bookshop at Esker will host a hands-on comic writing workshop, *Comics: World Building, Storytelling and History*, on Friday 25 April with graphic novelist and editor Daniele Pieroni. Co-writer and editor of *AKLAS*, a comic anthology series, Pieroni will explore how comics foster dialogue, challenge traditional storytelling, and bring worlds and characters to life.

For details about these exhibitions and programs, as well as all of our winter events, please visit our website, social media (@eskerfoundation & @thebookshopatesker), or drop by the gallery—we look forward to seeing you soon.

### The Esker Foundation team

ABOVE:  
Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi, *Into The Violet Belly*, 2022.  
Film still. Courtesy of the artist.

COVERS:  
Front: Erika DeFreitas,  
*The Black Madonnas of Perpetual Murmurs 17*, 2023.  
Courtesy of the artist, and Christie Contemporary, Toronto.

Back: Hangama Amiri, *Woman in a Park*, 2022, detail.  
Courtesy of the artist, and T293, Rome.



## CURRENT EXHIBITION

# Hangama Amiri

## *PARTING* / فراق

25 JANUARY–27 APRIL 2025

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY 24 JANUARY, 6–9 PM

Hangama Amiri creates intricately layered textile compositions that muse on home, kinship, and memory. *PARTING* / فراق builds on an ongoing body of work that focuses on the artist's personal history and diasporic experience.

Following the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Amiri and her family fled their home in Kabul in 1996, which necessitated a period of familial separation. Her father worked in Denmark and later Norway, while Amiri lived in Dushanbe, Tajikistan with her mother and three siblings, before the family settled together in Halifax in 2005. This nine-year separation was marked by the frequent exchange of letters, snapshots, and gifts; messages that outlined the contours of her family's lives and offered glimpses into jobs, celebrations, or daily acts of care.

In the present, Amiri mines this archive of family photos, material fragments, and memories, translating them into lushly detailed textile collages that focus on her parents. For instance, *Woman Before a Mirror* recalls a photograph of Amiri's mother standing in a favourite outfit in the primary bedroom of their Dushanbe apartment. The details are intensely specific to this period of her life: the bedroom's wallpaper and furnishings evoke the prevalence of Soviet-era interior design and architecture in Tajikistan, a former Soviet Republic. Elsewhere, *Man With Vase of Tulips* is an imagined portrait of Amiri's father in an apartment in Norway, where he worked for a tulip producer. His tender embrace of the flowers in their vase speaks to their symbolic import as a source of income for the family, and situates them as a proxy for his labour and care.



Hangama Amiri,  
*Man with Vase  
of Tulips*, 2024.  
Courtesy of the  
artist, and T293,  
Rome.





Amiri begins each work by creating a black and white sketch, which is then rendered in colour, sometimes with notes indicating possible textile or colour swatches. The colour sketches are then distilled and enlarged into detailed handmade patterns, which become the basis for the final work; textile collages that combine painting, printmaking, quilting, and appliqué techniques. Amiri carefully selects textiles that speak to the specificity of her personal history, acknowledging the ways in which textiles, through their uniquely close relationship to home and the body, become perfumed with meaning and memory over time. Amiri's focus on textiles also nods to familial bonds—her mother taught her to sew, and her uncle was a tailor—and to long, diverse histories of feminist textile-based practices.

The resulting work can be read as the expression and excavation of memory, connection, and kinship through material and process. The family photographs and memories that form the basis of this body of work are twice translated: once through listening and remembrance, and again through material and gesture. Through the shared labour of conversations and collective remembering, Amiri's parents become crucial collaborators to her work. Amiri's process is also a profound act of witnessing: it necessitates that she reconcile with her parents' histories, and revisit childhood memories through the gaze of an adult. Through *PARTING/فراق*, Amiri offers viewers access to these memories: her familial history becomes shared collective knowledge. Cumulatively, Amiri's work celebrates and witnesses the immense labour required to care for a family amidst the trauma of migration and separation, and the bonds that connect kin across space and time.

Hangama Amiri,  
*Woman in a Park*,  
2022. Courtesy  
of the artist, and  
T293, Rome.

### Biography

Hangama Amiri holds an MFA from Yale University, New Haven, where she graduated in 2020 from the Painting and Printmaking Department. She received her BFA from NSCAD University, Halifax, and is a Canadian Fulbright and Post-Graduate Fellow at Yale University School of Art and Sciences. Her recent exhibitions include *Reminiscences II* (2024) at T293, Rome; *Circle of Friends* (2024) at Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto; *Quiet Resistance* (2023) at Moenchehaus Museum Goslar; *Rumi* (2023) at Aga Khan Museum, Toronto; *A Homage to Home* (2023) at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield; and Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present* (2023).

Amiri works predominantly in textiles to examine notions of home, as well as how gender, social norms, and larger geopolitical conflict impact the daily lives of women, both in Afghanistan and in the diaspora. Using textiles as her primary medium, Amiri searches to define, explore, and question these spaces. The figurative tendency in her work is due to her interest in the power of representation, especially of those objects that are ordinary to our everyday life, such as a passport, a vase, or celebrity postcards.

# Erika DeFreitas: *and that break is the one that shows (to shift, a curve, to quiver)*

25 JANUARY–27 APRIL 2025

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY 24 JANUARY, 6–9 PM

In 2011, a team of researchers examined the teeth of a woman who lived in medieval Germany sometime during the years of 1000–1200 AD. The researchers found hundreds of tiny blue particles within her dental calculus, which they determined to be lapis lazuli, a metamorphic rock prized for its intense blue colour often used to tint medieval illuminated manuscripts. The researchers deduced that this woman must have been a scribe who repeatedly licked her pigment-soaked pen nib as she worked on illuminated manuscripts, an area of work previously thought to be dominated exclusively by men.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange of artist and material, body and mineral, sparked a realm of exploration for Erika DeFreitas to extend her ongoing search for absences and omissions within the canon of art history. *and that break is the one that shows (to shift, a curve, to quiver)* brings together new and recent works that commune with a constellation of women in a multi-part dialogue that transcends space and time. DeFreitas' process is one of forging matrilineal connections; her work unfolds in conversation and collaboration with her mother, niece, and grandmothers. She also shares space with a more extended group of women of both personal and cultural significance who, in the artist's words, "exist in the margins."

The medieval scribe is one of many women present in *what is left resembles light and is restless—as we are seen*, a series of nine works that intuitively coalesce multiple veins of DeFreitas' research.

To begin this work, DeFreitas transcribed a chapter from a book of automatic writings called "Cautions"—a text of great personal resonance. Each page is then illuminated with images, fragments, and notes that speak to spirit photography and the occult, diagnoses of "hysteria" in 19th century women, and depictions of death and loss in medieval illuminated manuscripts.

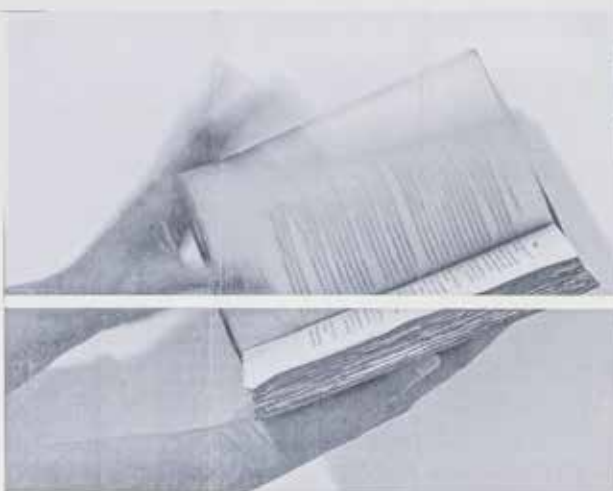
During a 2017 residency in Trinidad and Tobago, DeFreitas felt inexplicably drawn to the statue of the Black Madonna of La Divina Pastora Church in Siparia. After returning home, she learned that her paternal grandmother was amongst a community of women who tended to this statue. In response, DeFreitas created a series of petite, jewel-like collages intended to echo her grandmother's act of care; each collage offers an obscured portrait of a Black Madonna and is layered abundantly with images that reference textiles, florals, or jewels.

<sup>1</sup> Brigit Katz, "Blue Pigments in Medieval Woman's Teeth Suggest She Was a Highly Skilled Artist." *Smithsonian Magazine*, 10 January 2019.

Erika DeFreitas, *what is left resembles light and is restless—as we are seen*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Christie Contemporary, Toronto.



*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits  
whether they are of God. I John, iv. 1.*







Erika DeFreitas, *she returns in the midst of echoes*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Christie Contemporary, Toronto.



Erika DeFreitas, *the pause and mirrored peaks*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Christie Contemporary, Toronto.

The ritualistic process of making each collage allows DeFreitas to forge a relationship with the grandmother she didn't have the opportunity to know.

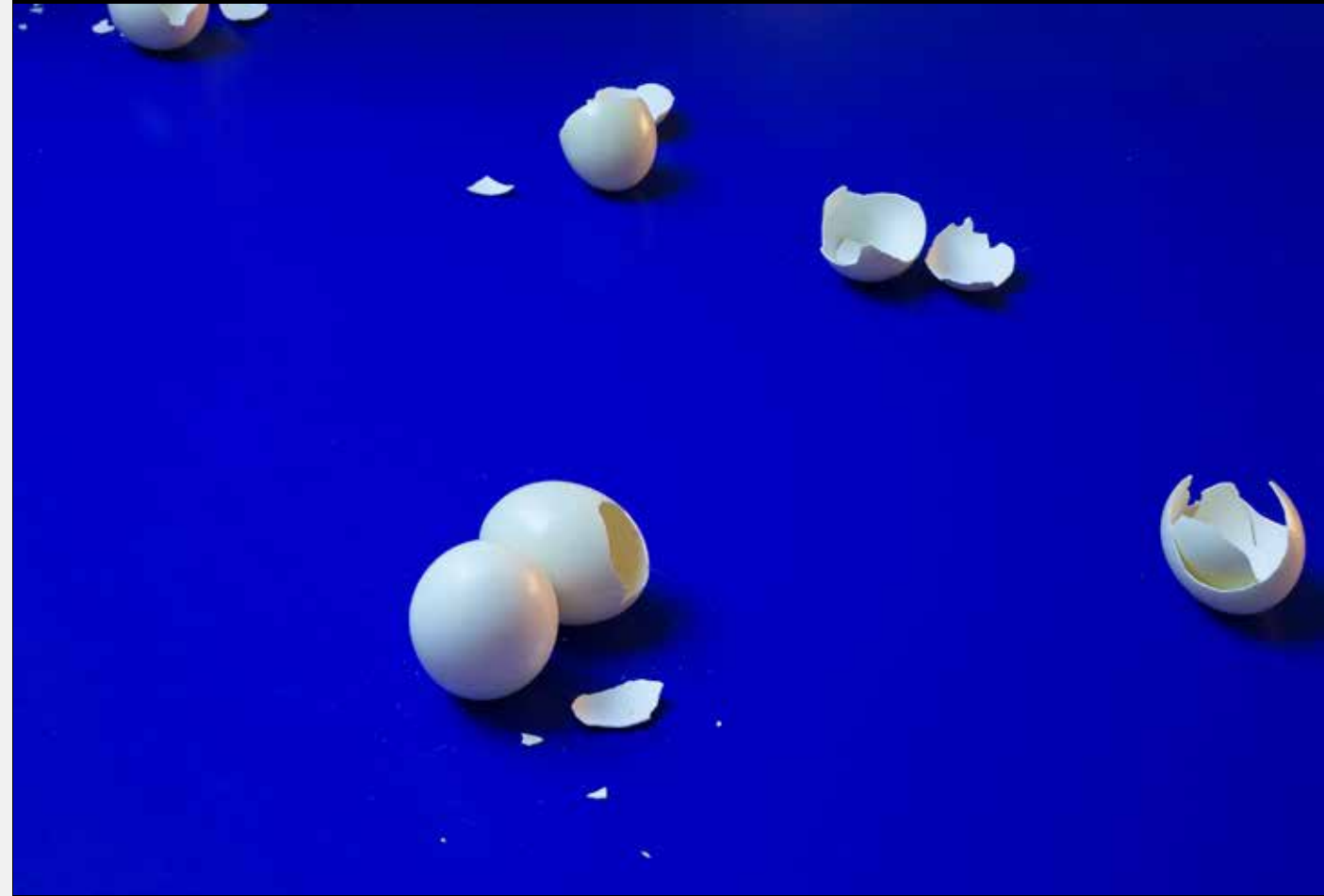
In a series of two videos, DeFreitas shares space with the unnamed subject of an 1870 painting by French artist Frédéric Bazille, *Black Woman with Peonies*. DeFreitas rearranges and reassembles paper cutouts of Bazille's painting—she engages with the woman's portrait in one video, the negative space left by her void in the other. These two poetic gestures witness the unnamed woman's labour and her obscured presence within the canon of art history.

The exhibition concludes—and gestures to the future—with a new series of photographs that were developed in collaboration with DeFreitas' young niece. *a mark is that which holds a quiet (Khaleh and Layla)* brings together several threads of DeFreitas' artistic interests: the female

form and its representation within the canon of art history, how meaning unfolds through collaboration and process, the revelatory potential of negative space, and the possibility of what is contained within—and despite of—absence or omission. Collectively, DeFreitas' work excavates presence within absence, and manifests kinship and memory within gesture and process.

#### Biography

Erika DeFreitas' interdisciplinary practice includes performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, drawing, and writing. Placing emphasis on gesture, process, the body, documentation, and paranormal phenomena, DeFreitas mines concepts of loss, post-memory, legacy, and objecthood. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including at Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery; Platform Centre for Photographic and Digital Arts, Winnipeg; Gallery TPW, Toronto; Project Row Houses and the Museum of African American Culture, Houston; Fort Worth Contemporary Arts; and Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita. DeFreitas holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.



## Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi: *The blue of the sky depends on the darkness of empty space behind it*

25 JANUARY–27 APRIL 2025

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY 24 JANUARY, 6–9 PM

Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi, *This undreamt of sail is watered by the white wind of the abyss*, 2022, installation view, Hamburger Bahnhof. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by: Jens Franke.

**A woman, dressed in orange against a blue screen, tenderly embraces a chicken in her arms. As the chicken clucks, the woman muses aloud whether they'd met in a past life.**



A photograph of a young woman flickers ever so briefly into view before the camera lens changes, bringing the protagonist into focus. A voice off-camera gently directs her to wait ten seconds before speaking again. Slowly, it becomes clear that the scene's protagonist is speaking to her adult child about her calamitous escape from Vietnam following the American War.

So begins *Into The Violet Belly*, Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi's filmic meditation on migration, transformation, and the intergenerational transmission of memory, and the centerpiece of her exhibition, *The blue of the sky depends on the darkness of empty space behind it*. Developed in collaboration with the artist's mother, Thuyen Hoa, *Into The Violet Belly* collages together multiple narratives, images, time scales, and sonic references. Fragments of Hoa's migration story intermingle with Vietnam's creation myth as the film drifts between documentary, mythology, and science fiction, blurring the boundaries between each. Crucially, both narratives remain incomplete—what is withheld is as potent as what is revealed.

Amidst these fragments, Nguyen-Chi offers glimpses of her process; strategically revealing snippets of blue screens and camera lenses, or conversations between the artist, Hoa, and other collaborators during shooting and editing. These glimpses speak to Nguyen-Chi's on-going investigation of the boundaries between memory, reality, and imagination, how these are blurred and transformed through the process of telling and "un-telling,"<sup>1</sup> and how memories can be transmitted between generations.

The installation of *The blue of the sky depends on the darkness of empty space behind it* envelops viewers in chroma key blue, a colour used frequently on film or television sets to allow for the layering of images during post-production. Chroma key blue offers a space of infinite possibility, both within the craft of filmmaking and the imaginative space of cinema. For Nguyen-Chi, the installation is not complete until it is activated by the audience. The chroma key blue situates us, the viewers, as active agents in the installation. We witness the performance of the protagonist's leap into an oceanic abyss and share space with both mother and daughter as they reflect on her journey, and the revelatory space between life and death, reality and fiction.

### Biography

Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi is a Milky Way-based artist whose practice mutates in and out of film, sculpture, installation, performance, and interdisciplinary research. Collaborating with characters in search of consciousness, language, and freedom, her recent body of work explores the aesthetic, political, epistemological possibilities of image and sound. Her work has been presented in both the art and cinema context, including Belvedere 21, Vienna; Centro di Musica Contemporanea di Milano, Milan; De Appel, Amsterdam; Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center, New York; Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago; Kunsthall Trondheim, Trondheim; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theater, Los Angeles; Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden; Villa Medici, Rome; Whitechapel Gallery, London; 12th Berlin Biennale; 20th Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival; 60th New York Film Festival; Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin 2023/24; 20th Reykjavik International Film Festival; 33rd Singapore International Film Festival; among other spaces. In 2023, she was included among the 20 New Talents in *Art in America*, nominated for the New:Vision Award<sup>2</sup>, and awarded the Jury Grand Prix<sup>3</sup> and Golden Lola<sup>4</sup> for *Into The Violet Belly*. Having studied Fine Arts at the Städelschule and film at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she is currently a PhD researcher at the Centre for Research and Education in Art and Media, the University of Westminster and a fellow at the Junge Akademie, the Academy of Arts, Berlin.

<sup>1</sup> Jade Barget, "Submerged Mothers: On Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi's Tidal Embrace," *MOMUS*, 21 February 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival.

<sup>3</sup> The 25FPS International Experimental Film and Video Festival.

<sup>4</sup> The German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.



## PROJECT SPACE

### CURRENT EXHIBITION

# Taiessa *variegata*

UNTIL 2 FEBRUARY 2025

*variegata*, Taiessa's ongoing body of work, offers a tangle of plant cuttings that appear to stretch their leaves toward the light in a sun-soaked greenhouse. These plants are crafted from ivory felt, an inert material intended to foil its organic counterpart. Akin to bleached bone, the specific tone of the felt nods to chimeral variegation in a plant's leaves. This genetic mutation renders a plant unable to uniformly produce chlorophyll—and can also exponentially increase the selling price of a plant cutting.

While plant collection and propagation may seem a benign pastime, *variegata* points to the linkages between commercial plant collection, colonial extraction, and 21st century capitalism. Modern European botany as a discipline emerged in the 18th century in tandem with the violent colonization of Indigenous communities and lands. Plants were extracted for study and classification, resulting in the erasure of Indigenous knowledges and the destruction of ecosystems. In the present, plant collection has exploded in popularity. Plant collection is often framed on social media as an aspirational act of self-care, while clippings of certain plant cultivars will sell online for hundreds of dollars.

Close inspection of *variegata*'s plant cuttings offers a glimpse into Taiessa's exacting process. Each individual leaf is quilted and stitched from sheets of pressed felt—a process that bears some semblance to drawing—and subsequently fixed into stillness with wheat paste. The inevitable slowness of this process is significant. The time, care, and material intuition required resonates with the process of nurturing plants—it is also deliberately and self-reflexively asynchronous with the cadence of our current moment. With this pointed emphasis on care, reciprocity, and moving with slowness and intention, *variegata* offers a pathway to imagining possible futures divested from capitalist modes of exchange.

### Biography

**Taiessa** (she/her) is a white settler and multi-discipline artist living in amiskwaci-wāskahikan, also known as Edmonton. Her artistic practice explores themes of nurturance, longing, exchange, and (im)permanence. Conceptually driven while rooted in process, she works primarily in printmaking and soft sculpture. Taiessa obtained a Fine Art diploma with distinction from MacEwan University in 2018 before completing her BFA at the University of Alberta. Examining colonial extraction and speculating cautionary futures, Taiessa seeks to problematize our relationships to collection and exchange—instead proposing an understanding of care that divests from colonial power structures. In surveying the commercialization of plant collection, Taiessa was selected as the 2022/23 Artist in Residence at Harcourt House Artist Run Centre. The resulting body of work, *variegata* was shortlisted for the 2024 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize, with additional exhibitions at The Art Gallery of St. Albert, and the Art Gallery of Alberta (upcoming). Taiessa is grateful for funding provided by the Edmonton Arts Council and Alberta Foundation for the Arts, her involvement in community organizing, and her experiences as Education Facilitator at The Works Art & Design Festival that further support and inform her work. Care and reflexivity motivate her artistic, administrative, and pedagogical practices within and beyond these engagements.



*variegata* was produced with support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Edmonton Arts Council, and the Harcourt House Artist Run Centre.



Taiessa, *variegata*, 2024.  
Photo by: Blaine Campbell.



## PROJECT SPACE

### UPCOMING EXHIBITION

# Megan Feniak

## With All Our Vernal Suns

10 FEBRUARY–8 JUNE 2025

*With All Our Vernal Suns* offers a vision of time and space that collapses the distances between the cosmic and the intimate, between the vast and the minute. Through carved and cast elements, Feniak invites us to a meditation on recurrent cycles—the slow tilt of the Earth towards and away from the sun, the flutter of wings that mark the seasons, and the quiet rituals of life that pulse through every living thing. Here, time is not measured in rigid, linear progression but in delicate, interrelated, rhythmic cycles.

At the heart of the installation lies a monumental wooden chain; its links have been slowly carved to resemble various species of moths and butterflies. The chain's Cuban link form, traditionally a symbol of strength and power, is transformed into an unexpected vessel for the ephemeral—an eclipse of moths, or kaleidoscope of butterflies—symbolic of the potency of the small, momentary, and fleeting. Their fragile bodies, committed to wood, challenge a conventional understanding of scale, and the linked form and weight of the chain describes a passage through time that is repeating in interlinked cycles.

Surrounding the chain, a field of miniature suns cast from bismuth bloom like flowers in silvery, iridescent hues; their vibrant, oxidized colours the result of an alchemy of heat and oxygen. The suns' forms draw from a deep engagement with cultural symbols of continuity, such as the meander motif used in Ukrainian *pysanky*, which serves as a visual language for eternity. For Feniak, the "eternal line" of the meander reflects the rolling motion of the Earth's orbit, a perpetual cycle of birth and renewal that mirrors the passage of time in both celestial and human forms.

Drawing inspiration from Byung-Chul Han's *The Disappearance of Rituals*, Feniak considers how the accelerating pace of contemporary life has eroded the rituals that once anchored us in time and space. In contrast, *With All Our Vernal Suns* envisions the seasonal rhythms of the Earth itself as an interconnected chain of rites that persist in governing the

natural world—including us humans. The elements of this work suggest time is not fragmented or accelerated, but remains part of a sacred, life-affirming ritual.

In the weight of the chain, the fragility of the moths and butterflies, and the radiance of the miniature suns, Feniak's installation conjures a poetic reflection on time as both fleeting and eternal. It asks us to consider how the smallest, most delicate moments—like the brief flash of a butterfly's wings—can open us to a deeper understanding of time, of ritual, and of the boundless cycles that shape all life.

This work was produced with support from Johnathan Onyschuk.

#### Biography

**Megan Feniak** is a multidisciplinary artist whose sculptures are rooted in traditional wood carving and folk-art forms. Through intimate, tactile processes and accumulative mark-making, her works explore desire, faith, and primordial relationships. Feniak earned her BFA from the Alberta University of the Arts, Edmonton, and her MFA from the University of Guelph. Her work has been exhibited at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge; Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto; Stride Gallery, Calgary; Hunt Gallery, Toronto; The Plumb, Toronto; Left Contemporary, Windsor; Support, London; and The Bows, Calgary. She has participated in artist residencies at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and the Badlands Art Department in Drumheller. Feniak is currently based in Banff, Alberta, on Treaty 7 territory.

The artist acknowledges the support of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.



Megan Feniak, *With All Our Vernal Suns*, 2024.  
Courtesy of the artist.





## ESKER PROGRAMS & ENGAGEMENT

Our FREE programs connect people with contemporary art and provide a wide variety of alternative access points to our exhibitions through experiential and exploratory learning opportunities. Through collaboration with artists and community partnerships, we encourage creative expression and meaningful engagement with the arts.

For the most up-to-date information for registration for our programs please visit:  
[eskerfoundation.com/program/current](https://eskerfoundation.com/program/current)



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Please review listings carefully.  
Registration is required to participate,  
unless noted otherwise. Space in the  
programs is limited.

LEFT

Participant at *Trans & Non-Binary Community Quiltmaking* with Levin Ifko. Photo by: CINIC Studio.

RIGHT

Visitors play the role-playing game *Gathering Storm* by David Blandy, in the exhibition *Constellations: Racial myths, land, and labour*. Photo by: Inaya Abbasi.



### TALKS

**Artist Talk with  
Hangama Amiri**  
Saturday 25 January  
1–2 PM

Join us for a talk and tour by exhibiting artist Hangama Amiri about her exhibition *PARTING/فراق*.

**Artist Talk with  
Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi**  
Sunday 2 February  
3–4 PM

Join us for a talk by exhibiting artist Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi about her exhibition *The blue of the sky depends on the darkness of empty space behind it*.

**Artist Talk with  
Erika DeFreitas**  
Saturday 8 February  
5–6 PM

Join us for a talk and tour by exhibiting artist Erika DeFreitas about her exhibition *and that break is the one that shows (to shift, a curve, to quiver)*.

### TOURS

**Conversational  
Exhibition Tour**  
Thursday 13 February  
6–7 PM

Join Esker Foundation Curators Naomi Potter and Shauna Thompson for a conversational tour of the current exhibitions.

**Behind The Scenes Tour**  
Thursday 3 April  
6–7 PM

Join Curator Elizabeth Diggon and Head Preparator Doug Haslam for a behind the scenes tour of the current exhibitions and learn about the work that goes toward curating and installing contemporary artworks and exhibitions at Esker Foundation.





**KIDS & FAMILY**

**Bring the Baby Exhibition Tour & Tummy Time**  
**Fridays, 21 February & 28 March**  
 12–1 PM

Introducing babies to works of art lays the groundwork for visual, cognitive, and language development.

Parents, caregivers and their babies are invited to join us for this relaxed baby tour in which babies will have time to freely explore the current exhibition and then enjoy ‘tummy time’ social fun on artist Yvonne Mullock’s extraordinary interactive sensory blankets, created especially for babies.

Recommended for children 2 years old and under, with their caregiver.

**Create Together Family Workshops**  
**AGES 0–12**

**Saturdays, 22 February & 29 March**  
 11 AM–1 PM

We invite families with children up to 12 years old to explore themes in our current exhibitions together through collaborative art-making, and creative experiences.

Each workshop introduces new mediums and techniques in all art forms.

Parents or guardians participate for the duration of the program. All materials will be provided.

One family ticket is for up to five members. Recommended for families with children up to 12 years old.

**Kids Studio**  
**AGES 7–12**

**Saturdays, 22 February & 29 March**  
 2–4 PM

Kids Studio is a series of hands-on workshops for children aged 7 to 12 where they independently explore creativity through process-based art-making, movement and play.

One parent or guardian is required to be present for the duration of the program unless otherwise indicated on the event registration. All materials will be provided.

Recommended for kids aged 7–12.

Bring the Baby Tour.  
 Photo by: Elyse Bouvier.

**WORKSHOPS**

**Stories are Stories are Stories: Intergenerational Storytelling Workshop with Erika DeFreitas**  
**Sunday 9 February**  
 11–2 PM

Join artist Erika DeFreitas in exploring how stories and memories connect generations. With only a faint memory of meeting her paternal grandmother as a child, a story told to her as an adult has led DeFreitas to believe that her grandmother has been communicating with her in small ways to forge a relationship between them that defies space and time. This program celebrates connections beyond the traditional parent-child bond—honouring elders, extended family, and chosen loved ones. Through storytelling and mark-making, participants

will reflect on how memories are preserved, transformed, and passed down, while also creating new moments that shape our shared histories. The artwork created in this workshop will be displayed in an upcoming Bridge Space exhibition.

Recommended for non-parent adults and their younger loved ones (8–18)—grandparents and their grandchildren, aunts and uncles with their nephews and nieces, and so on.

**Paper Cutout Collage Workshop: Family Memory and Diaspora with Emma Goudie**  
**Friday 4 April**  
 6–8 PM

We invite participants to reflect on our current exhibitions, and how each artist uses collage to make sense of fragmented histories in this workshop led by artist and Esker Gallery Assistant, Emma Goudie.

Family histories can be filled with mystery, pain, journeys, and celebrations. Sometimes our histories are complex and due to systems like migration, separation and the need for adaptation, intergenerational memories can be shadowed, hid away, and difficult to piece together. Collage offers a space to experiment, connect images that relate to identity, and the freedom to create, uncover, or cut up. Working with this medium may offer insight and a canvas to both narrate and explore your own stories.

Participants are encouraged to explore their own family folklore and are welcome to bring photographs or any printed material that makes them think of home and/or personal stories.

Recommended for ages 16 and over.

Participant at *Trans & Non-Binary Community Quiltmaking* with Levin Ifko. Photo by: CINIC Studio.

Emma Goudie, *Foraging Bracken Fern*, 2024. Photos courtesy of the artist.



**WORKSHOPS & EVENTS**



**Kids Studio Special Edition:**  
***Ponyo's Metamorphosis***  
 Sunday 2 February  
 11 AM–2 PM

Join exhibiting artist Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi for a workshop inspired by the 2008 animated film, *Ponyo*.

Nguyen-Chi's work *Into The Violet Belly* deals with the movement from land to sea, inspired by the evolution of whales; whereas the film, a tale about a goldfish, deals with the movement from sea to land—both films explore the relationship between the human and more-than-human, between children and parents.

Recommended for ages 6–12.

Visitors tour the exhibition *Constellations: Racial myths, land and labour* led by Margo Smith. Photo by: Audrey Tuazon.

**Spring Community Night**  
 Friday 21 March  
 6–8 PM

Hello friends and neighbours! Join us for an evening of family-focused exhibition tours, fun art-making activities for kids and adults, free refreshments, and a special one night only 25% Community Discount at The Bookshop at Esker.

Bring friends and family and drop in if you are in the neighbourhood!

Registration not required, all are welcome.

**BOOKSHOP AT ESKER EVENT**

**Concept to Comic:**  
***World Building, Storytelling and Histories* with Daniele Pieroni**

Friday 25 April  
 6–8 PM

Join graphic novelist and editor Daniele Peroni to explore the world of comics. Drawing on the rich cultural history of the medium and his personal journey from fan to co-writer and editor of *AKLAS*, Daniele explores how comics foster dialogue, challenge traditional storytelling, and bring worlds and characters to life. After a Q&A session, he will lead a hands-on page layout workshop, guiding you through structuring panels, integrating text, and crafting compelling visual narratives of your own.

Recommended for ages 16 and over.

**BRIDGE SPACE**

**A space dedicated to young people**

Launched in 2021, Bridge is for the young members of our community. It is a space to make visible the incredible work created by children and youth in programs, for youth-led curation, and a space to be claimed by young people for expressions yet to be imagined.



**UPCOMING IN BRIDGE SPACE**

**Stories are Stories are Stories: Intergenerational Storytelling**

**FEBRUARY ONWARDS**

This upcoming Bridge Space exhibition will feature artworks created by intergenerational participants in a workshop with artist Erika DeFreitas.

Artist Erika DeFreitas explores how stories and memories connect generations. With only a faint memory of meeting her paternal grandmother as a child, a story told to her as an adult has led DeFreitas to believe that her grandmother has been communicating with her in small ways to forge a relationship that defies space and time.

The workshop will celebrate connections beyond the traditional parent-child bond—honouring elders, extended family, and chosen loved ones. Through storytelling and mark-making, participants will reflect on how memories are preserved, transformed, and passed down, while also creating new moments that shape our shared histories.

Erika DeFreitas, video still from *an earnest weight in the crease*, 2017. 2 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Christie Contemporary, Toronto.



## UPCOMING EXHIBITION

# Caroline Monnet

## *Pizandawatc / The One Who Listens / Celui qui écoute*

24 MAY–24 AUGUST 2025

Curated by Mona Filip

Presenting a selection of works by Anishinaabe/French artist Caroline Monnet, this exhibition centres on a recent series of sculptures that explore language reclamation and intergenerational transmission through an engagement with the idea of land as a carrier of ancestral memory.

Meaning “the one who listens” in Anishinaabemowin, the title, *Pizandawatc*, comes from the traditional name of Monnet’s maternal family before surnames were changed by the Oblate missionaries at Kitigan Zibi, in the Outaouais region of Quebec. The title honours the artist’s great-grandmother, Mani Pizandawatc, who was the first in her family to have her territory divided into reserves. At the same time, the title references a receptive way of being in the world, reflected throughout Monnet’s artistic practice.

These new works extend Monnet’s considerations of time, oral histories, and knowledge sharing. Driven by an impulse to preserve language in durable physical form, Monnet counters the ephemeral nature of the spoken word, reclaiming the Anishinaabe language by materializing its soundwaves in layered native and industrial wood. Additional bronze works capture the shapes of weathered wood naturally modified by the elements. Meanwhile, Monnet’s embroidered works incorporating language evoke the connective power of nature and the resilience of Indigenous cultural expressions.

This presentation is a modified version of an exhibition originally presented at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

Art  
Museum  
University of  
Toronto



Caroline Monnet, *Okikad*, 2023. Bronze. Courtesy of the artist and Blouin-Division Gallery. Photo by: Charlie Leroy.

### Biographies

**Caroline Monnet** (Anishinaabe/French) is a multidisciplinary artist from Outaouais, Québec. She studied Sociology and Communication at the University of Ottawa and the University of Granada before pursuing a career in visual arts and film. Her work has been featured at the Whitney Biennial, New York City; Toronto Biennial of Art; KØS Museum, Copenhagen; Museum of Contemporary Art, Montréal; and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Solo exhibitions include Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Arsenal Contemporary, New York City; and Centre d’art international de Vassivière, France. Her work is included in numerous collections in North America as well as the permanent UNESCO collection in Paris. Her films have been extensively programmed at international film festivals including TIFF and Sundance. In 2016, she was selected for the Cannes Festival Cinéfondation residency in Paris. Monnet is recipient of the 2020 Pierre-Ayot award and the Merata Mita Fellowship of the Sundance Institute, and she was recently named Compagne des arts et des lettres du Québec. She is based in Montréal and is represented by Blouin-Division Gallery.

**Mona Filip** is a contemporary art curator and writer based in Toronto. Originally from Bucharest, where she began her artistic education, Filip received her BFA from the Corcoran School of Art, Washington, and her MFA from SUNY at Buffalo. Most recently as Curator at the Art Museum of the University of Toronto and previously Director/Curator of the Koffler Gallery, Toronto, Filip’s curatorial practice spans almost two decades and over forty exhibitions and site-specific projects, collaborations with guest curators, a broad range of public programs, and innovative educational initiatives. With an idea-driven and dialogue-focused approach, she collaborates with artists to produce experiential and immersive installations that transform the familiar gallery space, meaningfully respond to unconventional sites, and engage the public on sensorial, emotional, and intellectual levels. She developed first public gallery shows in Toronto of prominent Canadian artists such as Ghazaleh Avarzamani, Sameer Farooq, Karen Tam, and José Luis Torres, and first Canadian exhibitions of acclaimed international artists Raphaël Zarka (France) and Christian Hidaka (UK), Sigalit Landau (Israel), Esther Shalev-Gerz (France), Isabel Rocamora (UK/ Spain), Iara Freiberg (Brazil/ Argentina), and Joshua Neustein (USA).

# PERMANENT COLLECTION



Permanent Collection is Esker Foundation’s online publishing initiative. For each season of exhibitions, Esker commissions a response from compelling voices within or beyond the visual arts. We ask contributors to reflect on our current exhibitions as a means of generating new ideas about and connections between the artworks from a new perspective.

We see Permanent Collection as an expanded exhibition space that explores the points of resonance between and within exhibitions and disciplines. Permanent Collection offers a forum for experimentation, and for innovative, trans-disciplinary approaches to discussing art and exhibitions. As a non-collecting institution, Esker is defined by the conversations, ideas, and research that emerge around our exhibitions and programming—this is our model for a permanent collection.

Bridget Moser, *My Crops Are Dying But My Body Persists*, 2020, detail. From the exhibition *Like everything alive that we try to hold forever*. Photo by: Blaine Campbell.

## JUST RELEASED

Just released! *On Trying To Hold Forever* by artist and writer Levin Ifko is in response to our fall 2023 exhibitions *Care and Wear: Bodies Crafted for Harm and Healing*, and *Like everything alive that we try to hold forever*.

“Ideas of what bodies are considered ‘average’ are pervasive. From clothing sizes to public architecture, calculated averages are manufactured by human choice. These choices include everything from which objects we collect, the material used to make these objects, and the conclusions we draw from material collections.”

—Levin Ifko

# ESKER ELSEWHERE

*Like everything alive that we try to hold forever* has been developed as a traveling exhibition in partnership with Independent Curators International.

*Like everything alive that we try to hold forever* is curated by Elizabeth Diggon, Naomi Potter, and Shauna Thompson. The exhibition is organized by Esker Foundation and produced as a traveling exhibition by Independent Curators International (ICI). Funding for the exhibition tour has been provided by the generous support from ICI’s International Forum and the ICI Board of Trustees.

*Like everything alive that we try to hold forever* brings the work of seven artists together to reflect on ways that our human bodies exist in relation to non-human objects. These relationships are complex and interconnected, showing us how the systematic collection, consumption, and contextualization of objects impacts our understanding of self and others.

Through photography, sculpture, and video, the artworks in *Like everything alive that we try to hold forever* start to navigate the many issues that come with being human. Some artists conduct their exploration from an internal perspective, studying issues of identity, likeness, and self-authorship. Others reckon with the role of imposed knowledge systems in defining what is (and isn’t) human, addressing the biases and harms that are often entrenched within systems and collections under the guise of neutrality. By drawing parallels between the legacy of archaeology, colonialism, the potential

## AUDIO & VIDEO

### SELF-GUIDED AUDIO TOURS

Audio and video content about Esker exhibitions and artists can be explored via QR codes found on artwork labels throughout exhibitions or accessed via our website: [www.eskerfoundation.com](http://www.eskerfoundation.com)



Diane Borsato, *Gems and Minerals*, 2018  
Video with sound, 25 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

Installation view of the exhibition *Like everything alive that we try to hold forever*. Photo by: Blaine Campbell.

of AI, digital technologies, and the ever-blurring line between the self and the other, *Like everything alive that we try to hold forever* seeks to thread the complex reality of the human experience.

Originally presented in 2023 at Esker Foundation, and produced as a traveling exhibition by ICI, the exhibition will engage with each hosting art space through artworks that access the limits of human experience, push against it, or gesture toward a transhuman future.

For more information go to: [www.curatorsintl.org](http://www.curatorsintl.org)



Explore over twenty texts, musical compositions, poems, and gourmet recipes that respond to over forty exhibitions from the past ten years.



DISCOVER THE COLLECTION AND ARCHIVE AT: [permanentcollection.eskerfoundation.com](http://permanentcollection.eskerfoundation.com)



FIND THE RESOURCES HERE: [eskerfoundation.com/audio-and-video/](http://eskerfoundation.com/audio-and-video/)





The Bookshop at Esker is a cultural, literary, and retail hub at Esker Foundation. Programs and events have included book launches, performances, pop-ups, signings, readings, talks and panel discussions.

Visit the Bookshop at Esker at the gallery or online to order a copy of publications featured here, and browse all art books, limited edition artist totes, and pins. Shipping and local pickup are available.

BOOKSHOP AT ESKER & ONLINE [eskerfoundation.com/shop/](https://eskerfoundation.com/shop/)



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BOOKSHOP AT ESKER EVENT



CONCEPT TO COMIC: WORLD BUILDING, STORYTELLING AND HISTORIES WITH DANIELE PIERONI FRIDAY 25 APRIL, 6-8 PM

Join graphic novelist and editor Daniele Peroni to explore the world of comics. Drawing on the rich cultural history of the medium and his personal journey from fan to co-writer and editor of AKLAS, Daniele explores how comics foster dialogue, challenge traditional storytelling, and bring worlds and characters to life. After a Q&A session, he will lead a hands-on page layout workshop, guiding you through structuring panels, integrating text, and crafting compelling visual narratives of your own.

Recommended for ages 16 and over.



NEW PUBLICATION! HANGAMA AMIRI: A HOMAGE TO HOME

Published by The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2023.

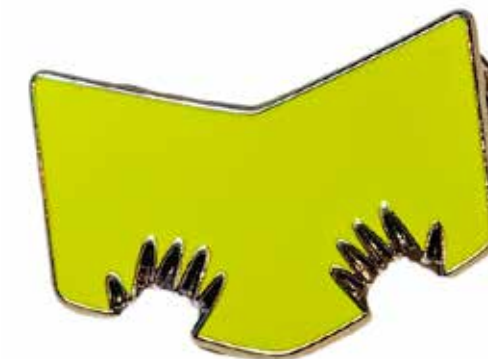
Hangama Amiri, an Afghan Canadian artist, creates vibrant textile works inspired by memories of her homeland and her journey as part of the Afghan diaspora. After fleeing Kabul in 1996 and settling in Canada in 2005, Amiri draws on her mother's sewing skills, her uncle's tailoring, and the colours of Kabul's bazaars. Sourcing fabrics from an Afghan-owned shop in New York City, she stitches large-scale pieces with frayed edges, reflecting the fragmented nature of memory. Her work highlights women's lives, capturing their resilience and amplifying their fight for rights in Afghanistan and beyond. Featuring an essay by The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum Chief Curator, Amy Smith-Stewart.

\$45



NEW PIN! NEST ENAMEL PIN BY SOFIE, AGE 12

The second release in our new merchandise series features designs inspired by unique drawings of our iconic Nest meeting space. A heartfelt thank you to the many talented young artists who contributed their wonderful creations. This season the selected artists' design will be showcased on an enamel pin, available through our capsule machine, as a standalone item, or as part of a set with The Nest Tote. All proceeds will support free programming at Esker Foundation.



THE BOOKSHOP AT ESKER PIN BY GUYGUYGUY

The signature commissioned design by artist and designer guyguyguy is in a new colourway! This is the third iteration since The Bookshop at Esker Launch event in 2019.

## CALENDAR: PROGRAMS & EVENTS

### JANUARY

**Friday 24 January**  
6–9 PM  
Opening reception

**Saturday 25 January**  
1–2 PM  
Artist Talk with Hangama Amiri

### FEBRUARY

**Sunday 2 February**  
11–2 PM  
Kids Studio with Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi

**Sunday 2 February**  
3–4 PM  
Artist Talk with Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi

**Saturday 8 February**  
5–6 PM  
Artist Talk with Erika DeFreitas

**Sunday 9 February**  
11–2 PM  
*Stories are Stories are Stories:*  
Intergenerational Storytelling  
Workshop with Erika DeFreitas

**Monday 10 February**  
Opening in the Project Space:  
Megan Feniak:  
*With All Our Vernal Suns*

**Thursday 13 February**  
6–7 PM  
Conversational Exhibition Tour with  
Naomi Potter and Shauna Thompson

**Friday 21 February**  
12–1 PM  
Bring the Baby Tour

**Saturday 22 February**  
11 AM–1 PM  
Create Together

**Saturday 22 February**  
2–4 PM  
Kids Studio

### MARCH

**Friday 21 March**  
6–8 PM  
Spring Community Night

**Friday 28 March**  
12–1 PM  
Bring the Baby Tour

**Saturday 29 March**  
11 AM–1 PM  
Create Together

**Saturday 29 March**  
2–4 PM  
Kids Studio

### APRIL

**Thursday 3 April**  
6–7 PM  
Behind the Scenes Exhibition Tour with  
Elizabeth Diggon and Doug Haslam

**Friday 4 April**  
6–8 PM  
*Paper Cutout Collage Workshop: Family  
Memory and Diaspora* with Emma Goudie

**Friday 25 April**  
6–8 PM  
*Concept to Comic: World Building,  
Storytelling and Histories* with  
Daniele Pieroni  
Bookshop at Esker Event

### PROGRAM CALENDAR

Scan the QR code to  
access the online calendar  
of free events, workshops,  
talks & tours!



## INFORMATION FOR YOUR VISIT



### FREE ADMISSION HOURS

Wednesday to Friday	<b>11–6 PM</b>
Saturday & Sunday	<b>12–5 PM</b>
Monday & Tuesday	<b>CLOSED</b>

### PARKING

Complimentary for 90 minutes.  
Come up to the 4th floor and register your  
license plate at the Esker front desk.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Esker Foundation is accessible via elevator  
access up to the fourth floor, which is available  
from the main floor and on all levels of the building.  
A swing door with an automatic door control into  
the gallery is situated adjacent to the gallery's  
revolving door. A single-stall, gender-inclusive,  
wheelchair accessible washroom is available in  
the northwest corner of the gallery, as well as  
wheelchair accessible public washrooms on the  
fourth floor of the Atlantic Art Block. There are  
accessible parking spaces in the surface parking  
lot at the rear of the building.

We all benefit from deeper, relational considerations  
of accessibility. If you have any questions or requests  
regarding access to the gallery or programs, please  
don't hesitate to contact us at **403 930 2490** or  
by email at [info@eskerfoundation.com](mailto:info@eskerfoundation.com).



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f X @  
@eskerfoundation

### PROGRAM REGISTRATION

Programs are free and open to all.

Please visit:  
[eskerfoundation.com/program/current](http://eskerfoundation.com/program/current)  
to register

### TOURS

To book a group tour for 10 to 30 individuals  
please go to [www.eskerfoundation.com/visit](http://www.eskerfoundation.com/visit)  
and complete the inquiry form. The programs  
team will be in touch by email.

Visitors and group leaders can also access  
our self-guided tour resources, which are  
available in the gallery, and on our website.

### CONTACT US AT

Telephone **403 930 2490**  
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