



# **When Either But Not Both Are True** Miruna Dragan

# **Those at the Great River-Mouth** Carolina Caycedo

Examining nature symbolism, territorial resistance, and solidarity economies connected to land and water, two solo exhibitions by women artists trace the contours of embodiment and the agency of more-than-human worlds. Calgary-based Miruna Dragan's *When Either But Not Both Are True* explores the limits of human comprehension alongside material manifestations of the unknown, the underground, and the under-worldly. Exploring dreaming, divination, energy economies, and logic systems, the project engages human relationships with the natural world in order to question our interactions with the physical spaces we inhabit. *Those at the Great River-Mouth* is based on Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo's investigation of hydroelectric sites across Latin America, whose processes of land expropriation and environmental licensing have been marked by unprecedented environmental disasters and profound Indigenous resistance. Picturing water's living and life-giving capacities, Caycedo's work affirms nature's vibrancy beyond the narrow resource-driven logics of extractivism.

September 6–December 1, 2018  
Blackwood Gallery

Curated by Christine Shaw

# When Either But Not Both Are True

Miruna Dragan

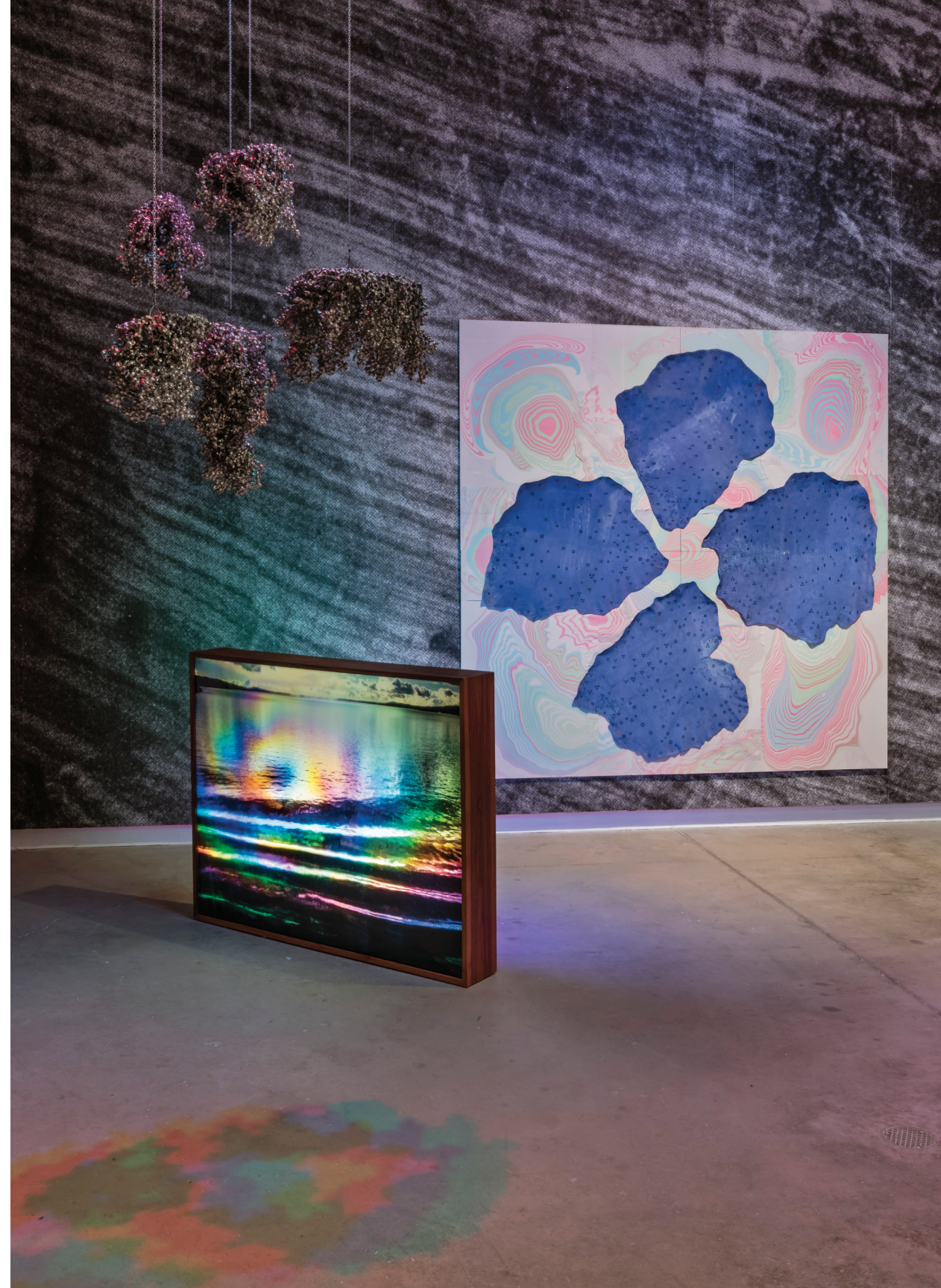
*Salt Wall*  
Halftone plotter printed wallpaper:  
salt mine wall, Salina Ocnele Mari,  
Romania

*In the Sage Telectic Waters, I See...*  
Water-cast aluminum forms for  
molybdomancy

*When We Stand on The Threshold  
Between Two Worlds, Our Soul Is  
Engulfed with Dreams (I & II)*  
Double-sided lightbox in walnut  
frame. Recto: photo-transparency,  
verso: red, green, blue LED lights



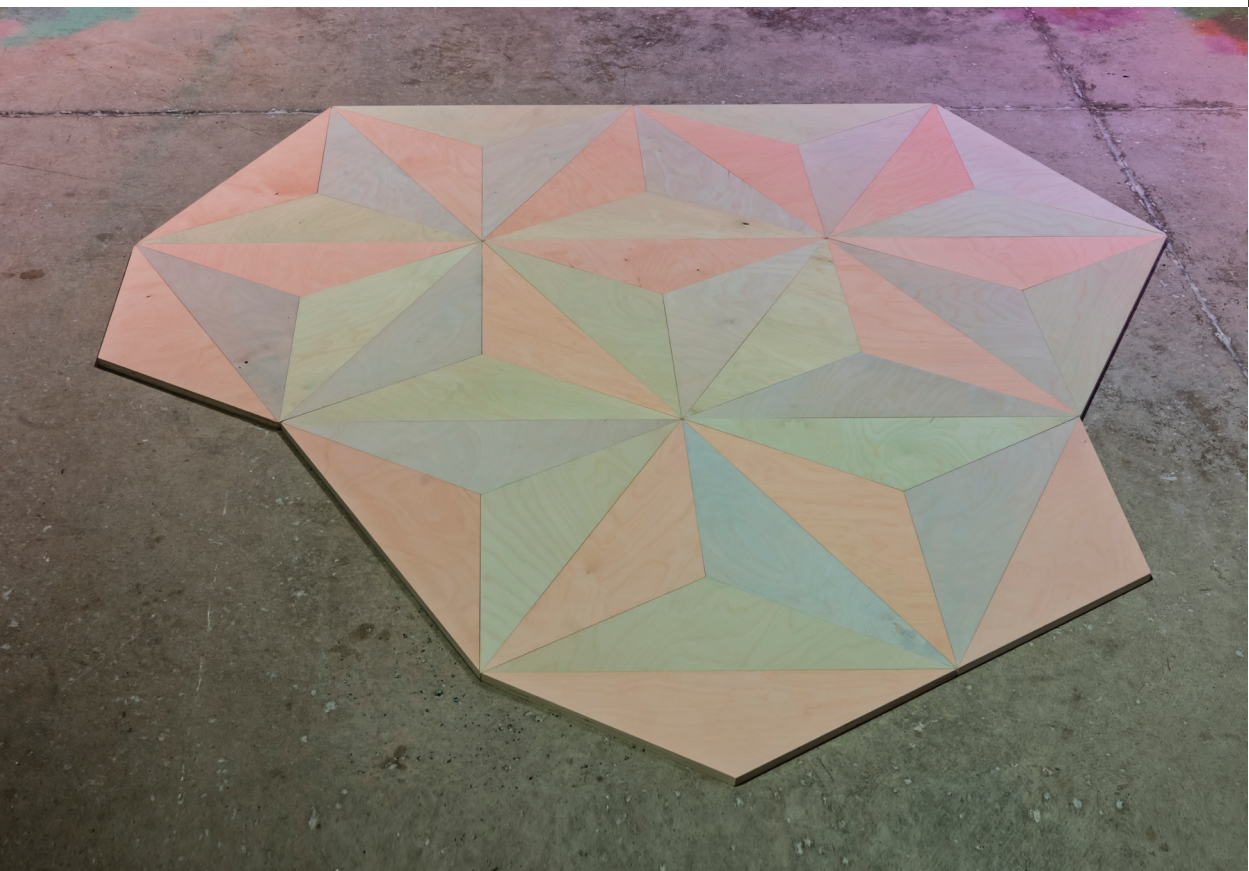
*... Because There Exists Another  
Name for Everywhere it is Possible  
Therefore it is True When Either But Not  
Both Are True... because there exists...*  
Logic symbols drawn on dyed  
lambskins on hand-pulled suminagashi  
marbled rice paper



*Saturday's Waters*  
Red, green, and blue stained Baltic  
birch floor mosaic

*Eyes Breathing In,*  
*Eyes Breathing Out (II)*  
Cyan, magenta, yellow vinyl on  
windows

*Cremated Names II – IV*  
Encaustic on paper, incised





*Visitation I – VI*  
Infinitely expandable wool rugs,  
rhizomatic Fibonacci tree of life  
(woven by Jolie Bird)

*Clay Stealing Clay; Pots  
Separated From Their Shadow*  
Collage on paper and red,  
green, blue pencil on paper  
(with Jason de Haan)

*The Vale of Avernus*  
Photographic print on metallic  
paper with kirigami

*Keeper*  
Carved spruce and mirror  
(with Jason de Haan)



# Who doesn't have a body?

Natasha Chaykowski

Recently, I went to a geomagnetic energy vortex in the Mojave Desert in California. Water from the well there tasted different and good, and the air sort of vibrated, although maybe my perception of these things was primed by expectation—placebo *affects*. The Latin etymology for placebo is “I shall please.” So I drank the cold water and felt the vibrations.

George Van Tassel, a notable twentieth-century ufologist and pilot, built a four-storey, nail-less and screw-less, sixteen-sided dome made from large swathes of Douglas fir on this vortex. He called it the Integratron, and it was meant to be a machine for time travel, gravity defiance, and cellular rejuvenation, the intricate plans for which were whispered to him one night by an extraterrestrial being from Venus. Van Tassel died suddenly just prior to the grand opening of his magnum opus, and now the structure stands stark and unusual against the arid landscape as a congregating place for tourists, curious passersby, New Age wine moms and serious spiritual pilgrims alike.

I went to the Integratron for a sound bath—an immersive, resounding trance-nap compelled by the droning reverberations of singing quartz-crystal bowls. Entering the Integratron is what you might imagine it could be like to enter a UFO on terra firma; the main floor is starkly furnished but replete with an altar, and the second-storey sound-bath area is accessible only by ascending a steep, wide ladder. Climb slowly up into the light. Upstairs, the smell is an intoxicating mix of burnt incense and old wood, and the firry buttresses of the perfectly symmetrical vault nestle sound bathers in the way the slender, curved bones of a rib cage cradle a heart. Small shards of sunlight penetrate the dome from the tiny windows. As I lay down with my head facing the centre of the room, Drathen, our guide for this

adventure and the conduit for the energy that plays the bowls, talked about the history of the edifice, the Benevolent Ones, and the untold mysteries of our universe. “Who do you love and who loves you, who doesn't have a body?” he asked.

In the Integratron, an “acoustically perfect, resonant tabernacle,”<sup>1</sup> the textures of sound become tactile and alive. They breathe and ebb: resolute undulations that seem to have no fixed origin. Their varied vibrations can be felt throughout the body—prodding bones and penetrating sinews. Rather than hearing the tones, it's like they touch the inside of the ear, grazing and rasping against my ears' cartilaginous surfaces and tenuous drums—a radically haptic thing. Strictly speaking, the immersive feeling of this bath is otherworldly: I took an involuntary hiatus from my body, from time, from place. Who doesn't have a body? Me, it felt, in this instance.

While once a tenant of the creaky house of nineteenth-century spiritualism—a residence of table-tapping, séance, and ectoplasm—out-of-body experiences are now well documented in neurology, and neuroscience broadly. Such experiences can be induced by a number of different things including psychedelic drugs, lucid dream states, meditation, and sensory deprivation. They are also often associated with near-death experiences: one of the hallmark sensations reported on the cusp of ceasing to be anything earthly at all, knowable only if one comes back to the confines of skin and cells. Climb slowly up into the light.

While neuroscience can tell us how electricity courses through particular cortical regions during out-of-body experiences, I'm reticent to believe that such empirical measuring is able to reckon with the way it *feels* to be outside of one's body, and the kinds of knowledge we may be able to access in

such a state. Time folds in on itself and seems to desist altogether. A minute could be an hour, three weeks, a year in a half—all measurements in vain. Wednesday already? Good thing time does not actually exist. There is a word in Romanian that might be the most sensitive way to describe the state of being outside of body: *liniște*. Peace, silence, quiet. Like a soft hum, if a hum were not a simple distortion of otherwise undisturbed air, but rather a limitless aether. A hum the colour of “cosmic latte,” a soft, almost pink, very light beige—the average colour of the universe.

Adrift, I saw my father, vivid, as a child in the 1960s, in a sunny place with my young grandparents—it had the colour of a memory and the timbre of a dream, but I wasn't dreaming and it's not a memory I could have possibly had: as though inherited, like my brown eyes. My grandparents aren't physically here anymore but they are people who I love, who don't have bodies. Can they still love me too?

I was a bit grumpy and very disoriented after the sound bath—unexpected, as I had imagined a blissful, bleary-eyed state of relax-

ation, post-bath. In thinking through why this might be the case, I wonder if it's that it was jarring to have to return so resolutely to a body, whose existence perplexingly enabled this experience in the first place. The discomfort of being firmly bound by skin and muscle. Be subject again to the slow violence of time. While our bodies are the temporary forms that allow us to be, they are also precarious, vulnerable: a burden accepted for the opportunity to exist as such. Our bodies, like this universe, are also infinitely unknowable: a shimmering collection of cells and carbon, nerves and neurons shuttling electricity, perceiving the weather, limbs falling in love, a heart thinking of justice. Is the body a distinct creature from the mind? Or are both part of the same cosmic economy? Either, but not both, are true.

Existential cramp notwithstanding, losing track of the contours of my body that day in the Integratron—via its vulnerability, through reverberating tonal frequencies encountering its surfaces—left me with some things to contemplate. Chief among them: the possibility of love outside of time, the possibility of love outside of body.

<sup>1</sup> Jody Rosen, “Welcome to the Integratron,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/20/style/tmagazine/welcome-to-the-integratron.html>







Carolina Caycedo, *Foresight Filaments* (installation view), 2017.

**Previous spread:**  
Carolina Caycedo, *Misi-zaagiing*,  
2018. Digital image printed  
on acrylic billboard, 72in x 108in.

## Those at the Great River-Mouth Carolina Caycedo

River and waterfall images are mirrored, altered and remixed to create a series of what the artist calls *Water Portraits* that conjure bodies of water as living entities, and as active political agents in environmental conflicts, rather than resources for human extractivism. The textile and cinematographic imagery builds upon Indigenous medicinal and shamanic visions, inviting the viewer to experience and find their own images; calling for a decolonization of the gaze by un-learning euro-centric and patriarchal artistic formal formats, such as the landscape, a chance to challenge our relationship to “nature.”

**Esto No Es Agua / This Is Not Water, 2015.**  
Single channel HD video, sound and colour.  
5:20 mins.  
Sound by Daniel Pineda.

*This Is Not Water* is the first of a series of short videos within the *Water Portraits Series*. It is a water portrait of the Las Damas waterfall in the town of Garzón, Huila in Southern Colombia. It acknowledges bodies of water as active social agents in environmental conflicts, inviting us to revise and decolonize our contemplative and utilitarian relationships towards landscape. The soundtrack is composed by manipulating the waterfall sounds, and mixing them with sampling of a traditional Indigenous millo reed flute.

**Foresight Filaments, 2017–18.**  
Sublimation print on canvas, cushion filling,  
390in x 29in x 29in.

Inhabiting the floor, these long snake-cushions invite visitors to lay upon them. They come from a pluriverse where processes of representation and of production of knowledge are not exclusively human. In many places of Latin America, the non-human evidences itself today: the fact that the earth is a subject with rights as determined in the constitutions or Bolivia or Ecuador, or that

in Colombia the Atrato River has also gained legal rights, are institutional manifestations of recognizing the more-than-human. But if you look at the everyday of Indigenous and rural communities in the Andean regions, and the Amazon Basin, among others, you will find sacred worlds, where water, rocks, stones, emeralds, fish, corn, and other non-human spirits are considered active social agents in the everyday socio-politics of the community.

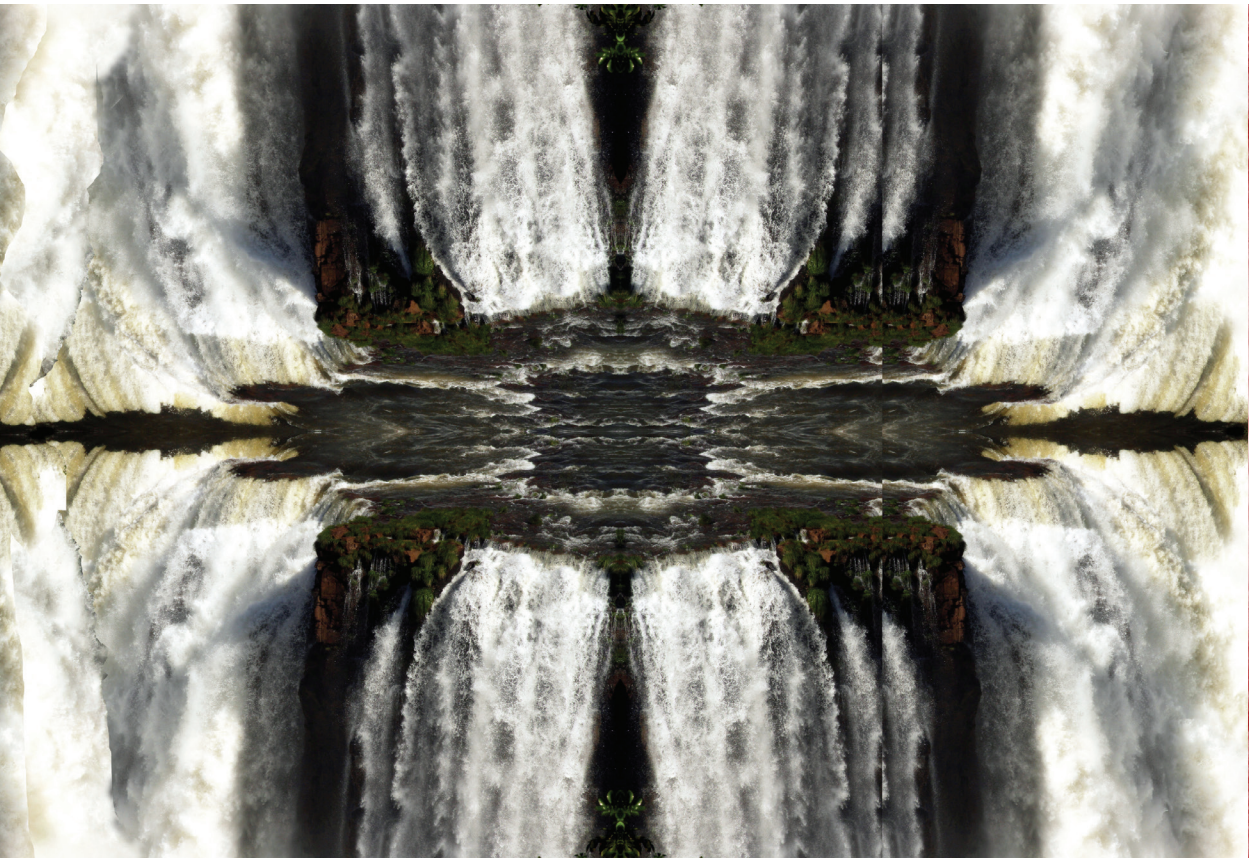
The Colombian sociologist Arturo Escobar calls this *Pensamiento de la Tierra* (Thought of the Earth). It manifests through a vast array of popular movements across the continent that are based on their unique and constitutive relation to localized nature and to their territories. For these communities, the rivers, the mountains, even the forest are like family, and they take on active roles in the collective efforts of territorial resistance against extractivist industries. For example, a river can overflow to halt the construction of a dam, or the ground can tremble to complicate a mine operation. So actually, I think that there are non-human worlds happening today. They have been happening for millennia, but colonial and extractivist structures have made great efforts to erase them.

**Misi-zaagiing, 2018.**  
Digital image printed on acrylic billboard,  
72in x 108in.

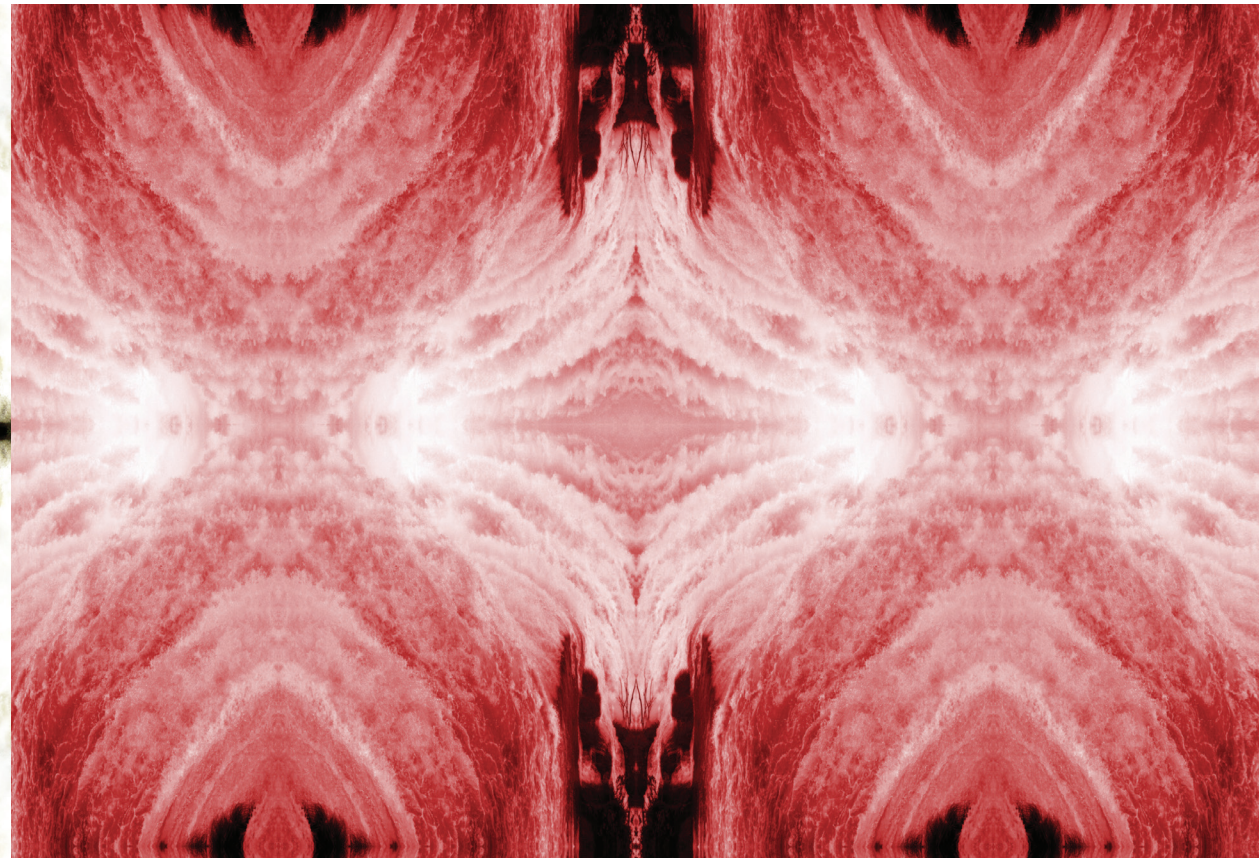
“Mississauga” comes from the Anishinaabe word *Misi-zaagiing*, meaning “[Those at the] Great River-mouth.” The image of flowing water unfolds, transforms, and mutates until it constitutes a new disposition which looks back and speaks to us. These new configurations of rivers and bodies of water are intended to expand the visual and mental space, where water generates its own form, face, and its own particular voice.



Carolina Caycedo, *This Is Not Water* (video still), 2015. HD video, sound and colour, 5:20 mins.



Carolina Caycedo, *Water Portraits Series*, 2015-16.



Carolina Caycedo, *Water Portraits Series*, 2015-16.

# A Fish-Eye Episteme: Seeing Below the River's Colonization

Macarena Gómez-Barris

## Seeing Like They Do

Over the past decade, the Spanish hydroelectric company Endesa has threatened territories in the Colombian Department of Huila with the construction of the Quimbo Hydroelectric Project. In 2008, President Alvaro Uribe Velez's neoliberal government (2002-10) sold ten thousand hectares to Endesa, legally handing over rights to land alongside the Magdalena River, territories that had been inhabited by Indigenous groups, Mestizxs, and local fishing and agricultural communities for generations. Eschewing their responsibility for resettlement and ecological mandates, the state office of the National Authority of Environmental Licenses has become notorious for systematically ignoring the land rights of local communities. As the ASOQUIMBO activist Jose Avila described it, "We lost everything, this land is what has supported

my family for generations and all we demanded was to be relocated or compensated fairly as stated in the environmental license."<sup>1</sup>

Mestiza Colombian multimedia artist Carolina Caycedo has worked both independently and alongside *Descolonizando La Jagua* (Decolonizing La Jagua, ASOQUIMBO), and *Rios Vivos* (Rivers Alive Colombia), anti-extractivist campaigns based on local membership that have spearheaded organizing against Endesa. The strategies of these local movements proliferate to include protests, marches, forums, press conferences, and legal pressure aimed at stopping both Endesa and the Chinese state-owned company Hydrochina from dredging and blocking the river. Overall, the objective has been to decolonize the river communities that have

been flooded with state agents, corporate workers, the military, dam builders, bulldozers, cement, and so forth, that have made artisanal and low-resource ways of life nearly impossible.

Since 2011, ASOQUIMBO's work has focused upon Endesa's disregard for local communities, and taking back lands along the Magdalena River that were illegally granted to the extractive corporation. More recent efforts have placed emphasis not only on the river's destruction and dispossession but also on the resilient and vibrant aspects of river life, such as the intertwined living that takes place between riverbank communities and their interdependent relation to the Magdalena River. In this announcement, for instance, there is a palpable expression of a future-oriented desire to recuperate land and place: "On March 14, 2015 we will initiate a great mobilization for the defense of the Magdalena River and the territories of life. We take a journey through the country from Macizo Colombiano to Bocas de Ceniza to reject the Master Plan that takes advantage of the River Magdalena. We do this to recuperate memory, identity, and culture by an entire nation that has constructed its life, territory, and history alongside the river."<sup>2</sup> Taking long walks alongside the Magdalena River as a mnemonic experience of community identity allows for the acknowledgment of the imbricated relation with and deep respect for the Magdalena River.

Such acts as organizing collective walks not only signal the importance of local land memory as constitutive of regional and national identity, they also point to how the river itself is enlivened by human activity that does not merely extract from its ecological life. Taking this insight one step further, we might imagine how the river possesses its own form of memory, as a witness to the dialectic between life and death of damming, as weighing in on the contradictions between converting value and devaluing, and as a source of flow

that energizes against its own erasure. Seeing, watching, knowing the histories of riverbank communities and being enlivened by their presence is a submerged perspective that one might imagine could emanate from the river. These submerged perspectives refuse to be limited by regional or national boundaries, as they are able to flow beyond the corporation's efforts at containment.

In the demand for legal accountability from Endesa over the past decade, transregional communities have compared and shared knowledge across national borders to support them in their legal battles. The Mapuche struggle against Endesa in the Bio Bio region of Chile began in 1996 and continues until today, marking an earlier era of hydropower expansion in South America. When ASOQUIMBO in the Cauca Valley learned about the successes and failures of anti-Ralco Dam struggles, it used knowledge of what worked there to combat Endesa on its own territories. Furthermore, as in the struggle against Ralco, ASOQUIMBO also coordinated its actions with International Rivers and other international NGOs, in effect strengthening its vertical and lateral alliances. Like the Magdalena River that transits through multiple regional borders, the flow of knowledge between affected Indigenous and rural communities moves freely in ways that facilitate the positive deployment of resistance strategies.

To combat the violent disarticulations and dispossessions required by the presence of the hydropower corporation over the past decade, ASOQUIMBO has taken an increasingly militant stance. Violent escalation in the extractive zone occurs through a familiar sequence of events: militarized dispossession leads to confrontations between local organizations and the state—conflict that is then followed by the state's criminalization of land and river defenders. The ASOQUIMBO case is legendary in this respect, in that there are currently dozens of river defenders who have been imprisoned

without trial or promise of release, in many ways replicating the violent scenes and media frenzies that have taken place in other sites around South America.

Through militarization of the extractive zone, corporate control is able to advance its capitalist agenda by dispossessing Indigenous and rural peoples of their territories. In Caycedo's visual and narrative work, she makes this link directly as she plays with the multiple meanings contained within the word "dam," using it alternatively as a verb, simile, noun, and metaphor. For instance, in Spanish the word *represa* is used for "to dam," and also for "to repress." A *represa* literally contains the river's natural flow as well as signifying the political repression against local land and river defenders. For Caycedo, then, extractivism cannot be sep-

arated from forms of violence and repression that are rendered invisible by current economic and political models. Attending to this colonial matrix, her work "explores the interrelations between social repression, and the planning and construction of water dams/reservoirs. Dams generally serve the primary purpose of retaining water by stopping the flow of a river. By analogy, we may think of repression as an instance of power that also interrupts the flow of social and community organization."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Caycedo's visual work does a kind of relational mapping of power that uncovers the epistemological, material, and bodily violence that thwarts biological life. It also reveals how the river's diversion does not block submerged perspectives and movements that look to defend local autonomy.

## Other Views: Fish-Eye Episteme

In *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that what underlies grave social inequalities in the current global configuration is the persistence of cognitive injustice—what I refer to as forms of perception—that have reproduced asymmetries through colonial systems, modern states, and global capitalism's economic rationale.<sup>4</sup> Western modernity, as de Sousa Santos maintains, devalues heterogeneous knowledge formations and reduces diverse life forms into a modern scientific perspective, underscoring both the limits of disciplinary knowledge as well as the erasure of the multivalent ontologies that express themselves within the vernacular practices of peripherally constituted spaces.

I find De Sousa's naming of cognitive injustice a useful point of departure with respect to seeing otherwise. "Cognitive injustice" refers to the constraining paternalisms imposed on the Global South through colonizing discourses and practices that con-

tinue to perceive these regions as purveyors of natural materials, and undervalue the heterogeneity of life embedded within local epistemes. De Sousa's larger contention is that multifaceted knowledge formations already exist, and it is the task of scholar-activists, and, I would add, artists and performers, to lift up those submerged epistemes and juxtapose them within a Western canon that cannot apprehend its own limitations.<sup>5</sup>

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, whose perspectivist insights have come out of a thirty-year ethnographic engagement, helps me to define such a point of view. His work both parallels and departs from subaltern genealogies and other Global South epistemes.<sup>6</sup> Moving beyond the object-subject divide, Viveiros de Castro's work increasingly poses a decolonizing challenge to Western anthropology, and to the reproduction of the human as a singular entity standing within a world of subordinate beings. Through ethnographic critique, Viveiros

de Castro offers Indigenous thought as a philosophical challenge to the classic European distinction between Nature and Culture. Inverting the signifiers of "multiculturalism," which has been the center of colonial/modern thought, to "multinaturalism," Viveiros de Castro references how Indigenous peoples acknowledge the co-existence of multiple perspectives in the human and nonhuman world. The fundamental conceptual shift of perspectivist theory, then, is to reorder the nature/culture divides of primordial immanence: reversing the order of universalism to follow that of nature, and particularity to that of culture.

Indigenous thought, as Viveiros de Castro shows us, has long been engaged with apprehending "reality from distinct points of view,"<sup>7</sup> and ontologically has organized its societies and spiritual practices accordingly. A constantly shifting imagination of the Other is not constrained or delimited through the privileging of *Homo sapiens*.<sup>8</sup> Viveiros de Castro's work not only moves us into the realm of decolonial possibility, it also pursues and elaborates a rescripting of European thought. More importantly, it proposes that agency exists within a multiplicity of vantage points that are irreducible. As Viveiros de Castro puts it about Indigenous perspectivism, "We must remember, above all, that if there is a virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is that of an original state of undifferentiation or 'undifference' (don't mistake this for 'indifference' or 'sameness' between humans and animals)."<sup>9</sup> This state of undifferentiation does not propose a unifying viewpoint but instead shows how the act of viewing can itself contain an agency that is not uniquely human. Furthermore, by conceptually naming multinaturalism, perspectivisms locate agency within the realm of the animate as well as the inanimate. Thus, in opposition to the gaze that is merely about ocular extensions of centralized power, perspectivist thought escapes the view of dominant visibility to encompass the modes of seeing that emerge outside of

the range of the human eye and its capture.

Recent work on posthumanisms and new materialisms has been important in shifting epistemes that function within European logocentricity and the human-centered approaches that much of European continental philosophy has laboured upon. Through a philosophy of vibrant objects, in which materiality enlivens through its active shaping of human and nonhuman events, Jane Bennett gestures to a nonhuman something else.<sup>10</sup> The expanded vocabulary of new materialist analyses are provocative. How can we read such work through the realities of marginality and expulsion faced in the growing extractive zones around the globe and through the regions that already experience biomatter as not separate from the human? How can we understand the human as already inscribed within the logics of coloniality?

There may indeed be an emergent consciousness about how to think about the natural world through other knowledge formations. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain about the new materialist turn, "We are finding our environment materially and conceptually reconstituted in ways that pose profound and unprecedented normative questions. In addressing them, we unavoidably find ourselves having to think in new ways about the nature of matter and the matter of nature; about the elements of life, the resilience of the planet, and the distinctiveness of the human."<sup>11</sup> Yet, Global South epistemologies and philosophies of race and racism, ranging from postcolonial and decolonial theories, to Indigenous critique, to Afro-based thought, to Black Studies to perspectivisms and relational models, have long anticipated the ways to differently imagine knowledge and perception as the foundation of planetary inhabitance. These other knowledge formations, when grounded in the material relations of social ecologies, form a sustained way to see and sense life otherwise. As Caycedo shows us, in the *Land of Friends* there is much to perceive anew.

## Other Views 2: Land of Friends

Yo no ten go ningun idea romantica de como era el pasado. Las cosas no estaban perfectas. La tierra quizas nose uso de la major manera. Pero en sf eso de ninguna manera es raison ni logica de supultar todo el territorio.

I don't have a romantic idea about the past. Things were not perfect. The land was perhaps not used in the best way, but that is not a reason or logic to drown a territory.

—Activist in *Land of Friends*

As a Latina, Mestiza, and once resident of the Magdalena River communities, Carolina Caycedo's point of view draws from Indigenous relational understandings of land that imagine these geographies as enlivened and enchanted by its social ecologies. An artist skilled in multiple techniques and media, Caycedo is obsessed with the micro-level of gesture, social texture, and embodiment that contrasts the transparent logic of an extractive view that leaves no place "undiscovered." In *Yuma: Land of Friends* (2014), a thirty-eight-minute video that experiments with the genre's conventions, Caycedo focuses on seemingly small images and micromoments of everyday life to highlight the tensions and struggles between local fishing communities and Endesa's conversion of the Magdalena River into hydroelectric power.

Importantly, the river was called Yuma by the Musica confederation whose inhabitants intermixed with the Incan extended empire several centuries before the river's discovery by Spanish colonizers. In 1501, it was renamed after Mary Magdalene. As a symbol of these palimpsest histories, vernacular objects from the Musica confederation have recently been unearthed by the dozens during the drowning of territories by Endesa.

Panning across a dense view of highland Andean landscape, Caycedo expresses great affection for the Yuma River. Indeed, the fertile landscape at the centre of *Yuma: Land of Friends* is an important way to feel the perceptual shift we are making against the extractive viewpoint and into a hybrid river nexus. Yuma territories are where Afro-Caribbean cultures meet the Andean region, and then one thousand miles further downstream find confluence with the Amazonian basin. By tracking these trans-regional spaces through long pans, Caycedo makes the river the flowing center of Huila residents' living.

Using her own photographs as intertextual stills, Caycedo opens the film with a satellite photograph of ongoing dam construction that has already blocked and diverted long stretches of the Magdalena. In the next scene, a large mosquito sits on a pair of folded hands. "I have no nostalgia about the past," an activist from Entre Aguas says. As he continues to talk, the soundtrack gets quieter to the point that his words are inaudible. In this way, human voices are de-centered and minimized so that visual ontologies that frame the river become the subject of emphasis within the film. About the Magdalena River, Caycedo narrates in a whisper, "It's also the golden thread, a sacred place where the ancestors and spirits dwell. Yuma's strait is especially magic. We all have our own quotidian rituals, our own goddesses and gods. They are among us."<sup>12</sup>

In the scene that follows, the director returns us to the satellite view of El Quimbo; her hand traces over the shadow terrain, the absent river, filling in the place where the river used to run before Endesa's construction in the Cauca Valley. The camera cuts to midlevel views of the river before holding for a full minute on a thick and squat waterfall that settles into a brown shadowy

pool of rock and ferns below. Then we are taken under the falls, into the beige then blue-gray space of moving water. We wait, holding our breath, acclimating, and we begin to see both clear spaces and those that are more opaque. We move with the ribbons of currents and the circling movements of oxygen below the water. We accept the fact that our sight is obstructed by the cloudy water, with pieces of leaves blocking the view, fleeting away, as small and then larger bubbles force us to try to find something familiar in the visual muck. In long takes that submerge the camera completely in the muddy water, the field of vision hovers in that transitional zone between the translucent and opaque, between oxygen bubbles and swirling currents.

The effect is remarkable: I felt as if I were seeing what a fish sees, perhaps itself an anthropocentric viewpoint. By dipping into the muck, Caycedo produced a fish-eye epistemology that changes how we might relate to Yuma as a sentient being, rather than as an extractible commodity. Coincidentally, the term "fish-eye" also refers to an extreme wide-angle lens shot in which the edges of the frame are distorted to a near circle, with the center of the image forming a pregnant bubble. Both meanings work for the kind of material and philosophical shift in perspective or "fish-eye episteme": an underwater perspective that sees into the muck of what has usually been rendered in linear and transparent visualities.

In *Yuma: Land of Friends*, Caycedo's camera often dwells on the movement of the brownish-green water, the moss-covered stones surrounding it. The river in Caycedo's perspective, inhabits a generative if turbulent landscape where the human, animal, and plant life that surrounds it lives off of its provisions. However, there is no illusion that the Magdalena River is an unspoiled utopia; its cold waters make swimming for long periods difficult; its small fish do not fetch a very good price in local markets; overall the terrain is rough and untamed, and

its currents dangerous to untrained swimmers and nonhuman animals alike. Yet, without lament, local knowledge accustoms to and becomes flexible with what the river offers. Submerged, from below, seeing out from underwater, how do we think about the complexity of ecology, humanity, and the conditions of other beings from the fish-eye point of view? And, as I elaborate upon throughout the book, how do nonnormative viewpoints from within social ecologies decentre the logocentric perspective of the human?

In a significant moment in the film, Caycedo's camera lingers on the verdant green space. We are in the river's brown flow, surrounded by loud insects and birds and immersed within a roaring river's soundscape. The camera holds this still shot for three minutes; we breathe with the river's flow. Suddenly, and with the disorientation that comes from unexpected inversion, the camera is turned upside down, our view flips 180 degrees. From the top of the screen the river continues to flow, and this is the moment that fabrication breaks down, the instant we know that Caycedo has constructed the river world as the protagonist. The flow of gravity shifts, and the safety of our distant viewing is finally pierced. Caycedo's viewpoint is not only off-kilter but completely inverted, fundamentally reordering the river before us. What is this mirrored being that flows continuously from the top of the screen, the triangulated ferns that signal some kind of otherworldly divinity? The gasping river, the inverted gaze we cannot move forward as we did before, now that we know of this place teeming, flowing, diverting our visions. The extractive view dissolves.

Earlier in the film, Colombian senator and opposition leader Jorge Robledo conjectures about the colonial and hydroelectric presence in the region. Offscreen, he states:

The key question is why did they come here? There are two theories. The

theory for idiots is that they came to save us from underdevelopment, uncivilization, and poverty. They came for one thing. The profit margins are higher here. Not that they can't use their capital and gain profits over there. The fact is that they gain more here, and under globalization policies they can move that money easily without the risk of it getting stuck so there is more motivation to come here, because in the current time there is not even the risk of a strike or a revolution.<sup>13</sup>

As he speaks, the camera remains focused on a still shot of the flow of the river. And then, when the interviewee begins to raise his voice and talk about something else, we no longer see him on camera, and instead the view returns to the river to become completely submerged within the brown water, as more foam streams to the surface. Robledo continues,

Y en la medida que han ido logrando, con la globalización que esa plata pueda entrar y salir libremente, sin los riesgos de quedar atrancada, con mayor razón intentan a venir más.<sup>14</sup>

And, to the degree that they have been able to, with globalization that money can enter and exit freely, without risks to forestall profit, giving more reasons for them to come and try the same thing again.

In the background track, the water echoes and finally drowns out the voice of technocracy, the flattening speech of a mansplainer; and, despite his solid analysis of the prevailing situation, what seems more important now, and again, is the river's voice. That is, Caycedo authorizes cognitive justice for the river itself, drowning out the global economy and its rationalized logic, and instead offers us the fish-eye point of view that sees below the surface.

In the scene that immediately follows, Caycedo introduces us to Zoila, an artisanal fisherwoman, who stands knee-deep within the Magdalena River. By moving from a fish-eye episteme to a local fisher, Caycedo emphasizes the web of local economies and perspectives. Behind the woman, the water flows at a surprising rate compared to her stillness. Zoila repeatedly throws out her net, casting it farther each time and gathering a few fish with each catch, the protein for the soup that she will later make for her children, grandchildren, and adoptive kids: "If there is nothing else to feed the kids, then you take these little catfish home, you make a cut here and take out the entrails, you cook them with onion and salt. Many times this makes for a nutritious broth; boil them for ten minutes and they are ready to eat."<sup>15</sup> The camera focuses on the small fish that Zoila catches, whereby the repetitive close-up of hands becomes the local perspective that resides within the extractive zone. This is not a stranger's land but a territory of friends.

This is an edited excerpt of "A Fish-Eye Episteme: Seeing Below the River's Colonization," from *The Extractive Zone*, Macarena Gómez-Barris, pp. 91-109. Copyright, 2017, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder. www.dukeupress.edu

- 1 "Colombia: Struggle against Quimbo Dam Reaches Critical Point," *Upside Down World*, July 17, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://upside-down-world.org/mainnews-briefs-archives-68/5397colombia-struggle-agronst-quimbo-dam-reaches-critical-point>.
- 2 My translation. The original reads, "El 14 de marzo de 2015 iniciaremos la gran movilización por la defensa del Río Magdalena, los Territorios y la Vida. Recorreremos el país desde el Macizo Colombiano hasta Bocas de Ceniza, en rechazo al Plan Maestro de Aprovechamiento del Río Magdalena recuperando la memoria, la identidad y la cultura de todo un país que ha construido su vida, su territorio y su historia alrededor del río"; ASOQUIMBO, Movilización El Río de la Vida. Accessed March 19, 2017. <http://www.quimbo.com.co/p/movilizacion.html>.

- 3 See Carolina Caycedo's blog and site "Be Dammed." Accessed January, 25, 2017. <https://carolinacaycedo.wordpress.com/2015/10/28/be-dammed-ongoing-project/>.
- 4 Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (2014).
- 5 de Sousa Santos makes similar interventions into the main discipline of Sociology as Herman Gray and my arguments in our edited volume *Toward a Sociology of a Trace*. De Sousa Santos's and our approach to sociology draw from interdisciplinary methods and attend to the importance of social theory and the cultural sphere not as a separate realm of analysis but as integral to theories and studies of political spaces, colonialism, nationalism, economic change, and a history from below that is critical of the flattening tendencies of empiricism.
- 6 Outside of the United States, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is increasingly taken up by US scholars who are perhaps more familiar with Nietzsche's philosophy on perspectivism that detracts from the idea that there is any one epistemological truth.

- 7 Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Perspectivism" (2012).
- 8 Following Levi-Strauss's work on myth, yet against the separation of nature and culture that it, in the end reproduced, in "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," Viveiros de Castro describes how "myths are filled with beings whose form, name, and behavior inextricably mix human and animal attributes in a common context of intercommunicability, identical to that which defines the present-day intrahuman world" (464).
- 9 Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Perspectivism" (2012).
- 10 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (2012).
- 11 Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms* (2010), 6.
- 12 Caycedo, *Yuma: Land of Friends* (2014).
- 13 Caycedo, *Yuma: Land of Friends* (2014).
- 14 Caycedo, *Yuma: Land of Friends* (2014).
- 15 Caycedo, *Yuma: Land of Friends* (2014).

# Biographies

**Carolina Caycedo** (1978, lives in Los Angeles) was born in London to Colombian parents. She transcends institutional spaces to work in the social realm, where she participates in movements of territorial resistance, solidarity economies, and housing as a human right. Carolina's artistic practice has a collective dimension to it in which performances, drawings, photographs, and videos are not just an end result, but rather part of the artist's process of research and acting. Through work that investigates relationships of movement, assimilation and resistance, representation and control, she addresses contexts, groups, and communities that are affected by developmental projects, including the constructions of dams, and the privatization of water and its consequences on riverside communities. She has developed publicly engaged projects in Bogota, Quezon City, Toronto, Madrid, Sao Paulo, Lisbon, San Juan, New York, San Francisco, Paris, Mexico DF, Tijuana, and London. Her work has been exhibited worldwide with solo shows at Vienna Secession; Intermediae-Matadero, Madrid; Agnes B Gallery, Paris; Alianza Francesa, Bogotá; Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen; and DAAD Gallery, Berlin. She has participated in international biennials including Sao Paulo (2016); Berlin (2014); Paris Triennial (2013); New Museum (2011); Havana (2009); Whitney (2006); Venice (2003) and Istanbul (2001).

**Natasha Chaykowski** is a writer and curator based in Calgary, on Treaty 7 territory. Currently, she is Director of Untitled Art Society.

**Miruna Dragan** (1975, Bucharest, Romania) is based in Calgary. With an intuitive approach, Dragan responds to observed synchronicities through a broad range of methods and materials, toward a subjective reimagining of archetypal myths and landscapes. Reflecting themes of dispersion

and transcendence, both as individual pieces and collectively within immersive environments, her works offer themselves as tools for mystical experience. Recent exhibition venues include Museo de la Ciudad in Queretaro Mexico (2012 & 2019), the Esker Foundation in Calgary (2013), the Alberta Biennial (2013), G Gallery in Toronto (2014), Nanaimo Art Gallery (2015), Southern Alberta Art Gallery (2016/17), Nickle Galleries at University of Calgary (2017), Division Gallery in Toronto (2017), and The New Gallery in Calgary (2017).

**Macarena Gómez-Barris** is Chairperson of the Department of Social Science and Cultural Studies and Director of the Global South Center at Pratt Institute, New York. She writes and teaches on social and cultural theory, decolonial thought, racial and extractive capitalism, social movements, queer and submerged perspectives, critical Indigenous studies, experimental film, and social/environmental transformation. She is the author of three books including *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* that theorizes social life, art, and decolonial praxis through five extractive scenes of ruinous capitalism upon Indigenous territories (Duke University Press, 2017). Macarena is also the author of *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas* (2018). She is currently working on a new book project called *Sea Edges: Military Capitalism, Extinction, and Decolonial Futures*. She has published numerous articles and essays in art catalogs as well as peer reviewed journals, including writing on the work of Julie Mehretu, Laura Aguilar, Carolina Caycedo, Regina José Galindo, Cecilia Vicuña, Francisco Huichaqueo, and Patricio Guzmán. She was also the Director of Hemispheric Institute for Performance & Politics at NYU and Visiting Fellow in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis.

# Acknowledgments

**When Either But Not Both Are True**  
Miruna Dragan  
**Those at the Great River-Mouth**  
Carolina Caycedo  
September 6–December 1, 2018  
Curated by Christine Shaw

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The **Blackwood Gallery** gratefully acknowledges the operating support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the University of Toronto Mississauga.



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\*Funding for additional staff support was made possible through the Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations program, Department of Canadian Heritage. The Canadian Museums Association administers the program on behalf of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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## Blackwood Gallery

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