

## Groundworking: A conversation with Alana Bartol, Ileana Hernandez Camacho and Tsēmā Igharas, moderated by Valérie Frappier

The following discussion with artists Alana Bartol, Ileana Hernandez Camacho, and Tsēmā Igharas uncovers each artist's impetus for their featured works in the exhibition *Groundwork* and how they respectively confront the complexities of extractivism. As embodied action is the driving catalyst for the works presented in the exhibition, the discussion also broaches the role performance plays in their respective practices, and how it can be used as a medium or strategy to bring focus to alternative ways of relating with land and thinking about our environments.

*The following conversation took place virtually over Zoom on March 15, 2021. The discussion has been edited for length and clarity.*

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**Valérie Frappier:** Before we dive right in, do we want to go around and introduce ourselves and where we're located? And share a bit about each of our practices?

I can start because I invited you all here. I'm located an hour's north of Tkarón:to/Toronto, in between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe, on the territory of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat. This is also the territory where the exhibition will be taking place, in so-called Toronto. I grew up here, went away for some while, and now I'm back. And to further locate myself, I am a white Franco-Ontarian settler. My ancestry is French settler ancestry on both sides of my family. And a bit about my research: this exhibition has been an important part in shaping my practice and where I want to go as a recent curatorial grad. Looking at art as a way to reframe how we think about our relationships with land, the earth more broadly, and rethinking those relationships. Through this exhibition, I'm [hoping to bring] people together in thinking about these pressing issues in relation to the environmental crisis.

**Alana Bartol:** I am coming to you today from Mohkínstsis, which is colonially Calgary. I've been a guest in Alberta for almost six years now. And that's informed a lot of the direction of my work. I'm located on Treaty 7 territory which is the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda Nations, and it's also Métis Nation Region 3.

I am white settler with various ancestries. Danish, Scottish, Irish, French, German, English and some sort of Eastern European that I don't completely know yet. It's been an ongoing

process of trying to understand my own ancestry and background. A lot of my work, more recently, has been around trying to understand what my responsibilities are as a white settler making work about relationships to this land, and living as a guest on Treaty 7 territory. And really trying to understand what my responsibilities are—as a settler and as a Treaty 7 person—to uphold those agreements and even understand what they are and the complicated histories around them.

Before I moved here, I was living in Windsor, Ontario for most of my life, although I also lived in the United States and further on the east coast of Canada.

A lot of the work I've been doing looks at resource extraction, looking at the oil and gas industry and, more recently, the coal industry. My work is also collaborative, working with different artists and community members to look at how issues of resource extraction are affecting people locally in different ways. But it also extends to more-than-human worlds, [working] with plants and thinking about soil and everything from microbial relationships and things that seem invisible to us, to large-scale communities that are impacted in different ways by resource extraction.

**Ileana Hernandez Camacho:** I'm in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke. I was born in Mexico City and I moved here in 2004 with my parents and my brother.

[In my practice] I'm very interested in camouflage, because of the experience that I had moving from one country to another, and then trying to understand that new society and that new way of thinking. [That experience] kind of made me think about how we interact with each other, and how we adapt to our environment, to the people that we know and relate to in everyday life and interpersonally. I didn't know that it was camouflage that I wanted [to explore] and I didn't really link it to that. But then one day, I was like, "Oh, yeah [that's it]." I'm very interested in camouflage as a way of survival. And not just physical camouflage, but also psychological and social camouflage. So now I'm working with that notion, this urge of trying to connect with "nature," as we call it. But then realizing that it's impossible for me to connect in a way that I would like, because of all the politics and ideas of how we are taught to think [about nature].

In my work, absurdity is very present all the time. I always create characters in my work and it's never really me. I think it's because I have had so many labels already [attached to my identity], and this would interfere with my work. So this is why I do characters.

Also coming from Mexico to Canada and everything that's happening with the mining [by Canadian mining corporations] over there, it's very intense. But I'm very interested in having this vision [where I'm thinking to myself], "Okay, I'm living in the country that's taking all the resources and then how does that translate to me?" And, it's like what you said Alana, about the responsibilities that we have, and then also knowing the story of Canada more and seeing how everything is built [and understanding the ongoing impacts of colonization].

**Tsēmā Igharas:** I am from Northern BC, or what is now known as Northern BC, from Tahltan territory. I was raised just south of there in Smithers, which is Wet'suwet'en territory. I'm phoning in from Musqueam Reserve which is in Vancouver, and I'm very thankful to be here.

My work tends to speak a lot about the materials that I'm using and where those materials are sourced from. And speaking about these connections to those places, people, issues, and politics through the use, consumption, or transformation of those materials. I've had the opportunity to work in many contexts, first showing work that was more related to Tahltan politics of mining, for instance, at OCAD University.

So I did my master's degree at OCAD a few years ago and I showed a series of works called *LAND/MINE* for my thesis project. It was speaking about a global politic from local materials and justifying these practices based in Indigenous harvests while questioning colonial mining and extraction. The work has developed to expand [towards speaking] about Indigenous futurities and about these alternative extractive realities. And I've also been going back to the roots of the project, speaking about materials and mine sites, and looking at other ore bodies.

So for one, just a connection to Mohkínstsis there, is a work called *Black Gold* about bitumen, which is currently showing here [in Vancouver]—creating a bit of a conceptual pipeline [between this conversation] and the very complicated politics in Vancouver, which is what first brought me back to spend a bit of time here. And there's also a project I'll be responding to in Montreal, actually, [which emerged from] a trip to Great Bear Lake to a uranium mine site there, speaking a little bit about uranium or these "atomic solutions." A lot of questions and navigating them through art. Because I think that, you know, these kinds of issues are so complicated that a really good way to speak to them is through artwork.

**VF:** I see all of you asking these really vital and important questions around extraction and relationships to land, and using your respective practices to do that. Can we move to discussing each of your featured works in the exhibition and how these works came to be?

**AB:** The video *TOTAL FIELD*, and the photograph [taken] while we were filming *TOTAL FIELD*, was a performance, essentially, that took place at different orphan well sites in Alberta, or what is now known as Alberta. It's part of a bigger project called the *Orphan Well Adoption Agency*. That project is ongoing and it's a fictional organization that I created that allows people to symbolically adopt orphan [oil and gas] wells.

Orphan wells are sites that have been orphaned—that's the language of the industry, that's what they call them—and are sites where the company went bankrupt, or declared insolvency, and they have basically been left abandoned.<sup>1</sup> By industry definitions, orphan

<sup>1</sup> Orphan Well Adoption Agency (OWAA) has expanded its definition of orphan wells to include abandoned oil and gas well sites.

well sites do not have any party able to deal with decommissioning, reclamation, and/or closure obligations. There's thousands of these across the province. But it's very expensive for companies to remediate and reclaim these sites, which could potentially contaminate groundwater, air, or soil. So it could be hundreds of thousands for a single site or maybe \$10,000 [to remediate and reclaim]—it all depends on how severe the contamination is. A lot of companies don't want to go through these processes, so they just abandon the sites, meaning that the well site is permanently dismantled but not reclaimed and remains the responsibility of the company that owns it.

So I thought this [work] would be an interesting way into these really polarizing conversations within this province around the oil and gas industry, where so many people really identify with the industry and rely on it. Coming in as an outsider, I just found it so difficult trying to really understand these issues and have conversations about them. Art [became a potential] way to create a space for these conversations to occur. I use humour in the work as well, as a way to hopefully disarm a little bit of that immediate wall that goes up a lot of the time when talking about these things.

A big part of my practice is using dowsing, which is also called water-witching and is part of my mother's side of the family. I come from a long line of water witches, where the women have been known to have this ability where they would take a dowsing tool out onto the land and use it to find [a place to] dig to find potable water. I found this really fascinating. It's also something that nobody does anymore in my family.



Alana Bartol, *Dowser*, 2016. Documentation of performance at orphan well site in Three Hills, Alberta. Photo by Karin McGinn. Courtesy of the artist.



So, I'm using dowsing as kind of a force within my art practice. I really see making art as a form of dowsing because part of dowsing is asking questions and it's a very embodied practice. I developed this character who is a dowser; that's her job title. And the idea with dowsing is that you walk on the land [using a forked branch or metal rods] and the branch indicates physically to you when there's something to be found. But it could be [used not just to find] water. People have used dowsing to find mineral ores. They've used it to find oil. So the practice has this really complicated history in connection with extraction. [The work brings up] these complicated questions around resource extraction, asking: How do we actually relate to land, and how do we understand what it's already communicating? How do we understand a relationship to land that is not just one-way [but as] a reciprocal kind of relationship? My work uses dowsing as a way to try and talk about that.

Also [as the dowser] I'm wearing these ping-pong balls over my eyes. That comes from parapsychology experiments that were done in the 1970s and 80s where ping-pong balls were placed over the subject's eyes to create this blank field where they couldn't see and white noise would be played. It was all about trying to create this space where people would potentially be able to access these other abilities, like maybe a psychic ability that we have by blanking out other senses. So that was the thinking about dowsing in relation to [these experiments], that we all have this ability to connect in these other ways but it gets repressed.

And so, in tapping into these intuitive ways of listening with your whole body.... What is the land already telling us?

**IHC:** For the project [*Corps roca*], I was doing a residency in Laval, which is outside of Montreal. I went to Laval to explore. It's in the suburbs, and there's a lot of malls and everyone uses cars and everything, but I didn't want to talk only about that, because we already know that it's there. And then I was walking and I saw this rock in the middle of a green part in the suburbs. And I don't know, there was something in that rock that really called me and I was like, "Oh, maybe this is a sacred rock." Because it was really well-placed and in this green park. And I don't know, I just felt like I had to approach the rock because I thought maybe it was really old. And I was looking for a [plaque], to see if there was a name or something. And then I saw there wasn't anything important about that rock, but for me there was something.

And then I couldn't stop thinking about that rock for weeks. I like a lot of sci-fi, and I went to the library and I saw this book. It was about these rocks in space that were talking and all that. So I was thinking like, maybe that rock was really talking to me. There was something in there.

So I started a story about the future where there's this society of rocks that are just waiting for us to die. And then they start a new society. In that story, the rocks tried to tune in with



Ileana Hernandez Camacho,  
*Corps roca*,  
2018–ongoing.  
Documentation of  
performance, as  
part of a residency  
at Verticale – centre  
d’artistes, Laval,  
Quebec. Courtesy of  
the artist.

us through harmony, but we were vibrating in a different frequency. Their main way of communication is through vibrations and sound. [The project is an] ongoing process that I’ve been doing since 2018, so I’m still building it [the rocks’ mode of communication].

And then I’ve been also doing my performances. [They] are like research into this project. So I ask people questions dressed as a rock, such as: “What would you say to a rock?” “How do you think a rock feels?” And I write and record the answers, and then I see how these answers influence my story (which is a representation of how, in the end, we build our life experience). And I made the costume like that because it could look like a rock, but not a real one, because it represents the contradiction in which we live and the system that we accept. So that’s why there’s something absurd about the costume too. And it’s plastic, which is not a mineral, but a derivative from fossil-fuel chemicals.

So I’m [continuing to build] this story now. That’s how *Corps roca* started and I’ll do performances, mostly outside just to ask people questions.

**TI:** There’s four different works. Two are part of an older series that I did in 2015 as part of the *(Re)Naturalize* series. For those who are familiar with the site, it’s called the Leslie Spit in Toronto. It’s a place that used to be a garbage pit for building the city and slowly, the lake has reclaimed the space and smoothed out all of this once garbage. Now there are these really beautiful forms, like bricks, that have become art objects unto themselves. And then in between, there’s quite a bit of rebar and it’s not a space to be naked and performing, but this was the inspiration that I had.

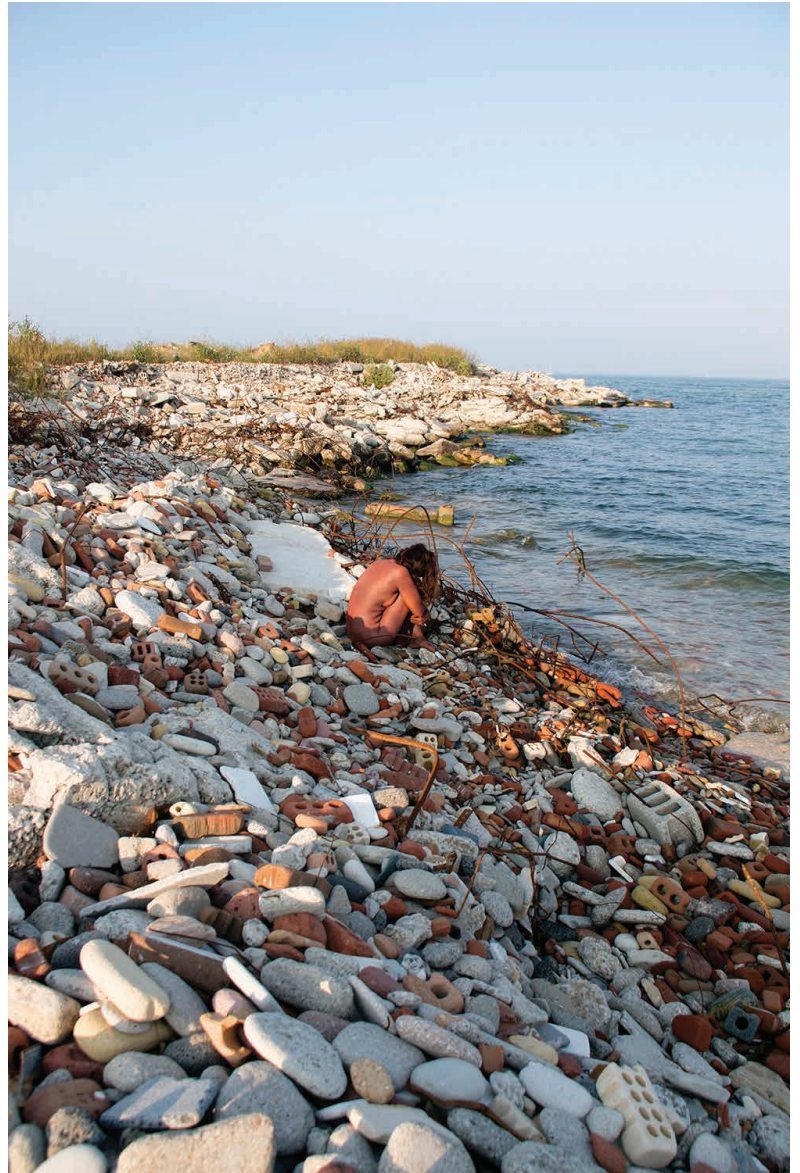
I actually had [just] come back from Chiapas doing a course on performance through the Hemispheric Institute of Performance & Politics called “Art, Migration and Human

Rights,” and was really called to do this performance and called to do performance in general. So I started to do performance after that trip. And one of the first ideas I had was to use this material—iron oxide—that I had been experimenting with for a few years before, because of the connections to the red mountains in my territory. There’s this idea that I was working with that the colour of the mountains and the colour of our blood are the same derivative of iron oxide.

I was trying to speak about this connection to land and our bodies while being in this landscape—a landscape that has been reclaimed and then renaturalized by the city. Now it’s a public park. And so I’m inserting my own body, inserting my Indigenous body, into this space as kind of a marker on the land. And this is a lot of what my performance [work] is about, this kind of interruption.

For me, this was a performance that I felt like I was called to do, but later, I can refer back to this work to say this is when I started talking about reclamation, and the land taking things back, and this work being a perfect example for that. And also how our bodies, and especially my body—which I have agency to speak about—can be a part of this conversation.

[Regarding] the other work: there’s an image that’s going to be on a billboard as part of the show [outside of Artscape Youngplace] for the CONTACT Photography Festival. This



T̓ēmā Igharas,  
*(Re)Naturalize No. 1 (Brick)*,  
2015-16. Photo by Jonathan  
Igharas. Courtesy of the artist.



is a performance called *real camo* (2019) and I'm performing in different poses on the quarry where my ancestors harvested obsidian. I use obsidian a lot in my work to speak about ancient and contemporary mining practices, and also as an example to show future generations a kind of alternative extractive reality.

The two sculptures *apocalypse later* and *to protect the womb from x-rays and colonization* were part of the future generations show [at Artspace, Peterborough, in 2018]. The show was trying to speak about some heavy issues of environmental apocalypse through humour. And also to speak about how I feel like there's some sort of hope for this environmental apocalypse which, through my research, had become about changing the mindsets of the future generations through teachings.

**VF:** I wonder if we could talk about one of the key questions of the exhibition, which is extractivism—both as a physical process and as a mindset—and how to counter it. Building from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's definition of extractivism, what does extractivism mean to you and how would you define its alternative?

**TI:** I have a little bit to say. Extractivism [or *extractivismo*] is also a movement in Latin America to protest extraction, to put that out there. Extractivism, how they're defining it, is



Tsēmā Igharas,  
*real camo*, 2019. Billboard  
on Shaw, Artscape  
Youngplace. On view May  
10 - June 17, 2021. Photo:  
Beau Gomez.



as taking. I also think that about a colonial mindset. So when I'm speaking about how to harvest in an Indigenous way, I think about this somewhat false dichotomy of the colonial mindset vs. the Indigenous mindset. I know that there really isn't just the two mindsets. But it does help to think about the way that a colonizer would mine is through a kind of taking, as a selfish way in acquiring territories and resources, whereas an Indigenous mindset, or an Indigenous approach, would be through balance and considering the relationships that would be affected by that extraction. So, I guess in some ways, relationship and responsibility are being considered in an Indigenous way of extraction, whereas the colonizer is thinking about the benefit of the Crown, or of the corporation, in the case of neocolonization.

**IHC:** I was thinking, in the same way as what you were saying [T̥sēmā], about what's happening in Latin America. And being in Canada, it's hard for me to feel good about [the reality] that I live in a place where they're extracting everything in various ways, and there's this part of me that's still attached to my origins while being here. I was thinking about this neocolonization, that it's through extractivism, and not only extracting from the land, but also in our way of thinking and in the opportunities that we have in a patriarchal society. [Not only] is it the stealing of resources and energy, but it is also the stealing of our [bodily] energy as well. And I was thinking about the alternative, which is to rebuild connections but through another perspective—through collaborations and being more aware about not just the environment but how we are to each other. It's about being less individualistic as well. I feel that [individualism] is also a part of extractivism.

**AB:** I would definitely echo a lot of that. When I think about extractivism, I guess I've been thinking through some of the current questions I'm working through with more recent work. If we're understanding ecosystems through a settler-colonial-capitalist mindset—and both of you already spoke to this—I've been thinking a lot about the [role of] language and English as a colonial language. It's the only language I speak, and it's also the language of some of my ancestors. In using dowsing in my work, I'm trying to think about our relationship with natural resources, or what are called natural resources. But even naming water or soil or air or the atmosphere or, you know, the plants, animals—calling these things natural resources and what that [implies]. To me, I'm thinking about how that just immediately sets up that dynamic of extraction and consumption.

For example, I was listening to a talk by Leanne Simpson and she was talking about this notion of the commons<sup>2</sup>—which I had also been reading about and thinking about as an incredible idea. However, she was talking about how the notion of the commons is actually being used as a way to create—and I can't remember exactly how she puts it—but basically create a divide between Indigenous peoples and their potential allies by the Canadian state.

<sup>2</sup> "Restoring Nationhood: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson," Simon Fraser University, YouTube, January 13, 2014, 26:00-29:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fH1QZQIUJIo>.



Tsēmā Igharas, photograph:  
*(Re)Naturalize No. 7 (Rebar)*  
 Acrylic print, 2015-16. Image  
 credit: Jonathan Igharas. *to*  
*protect the womb from x-rays*  
*and colonization*, moosehide  
 apron adorned with sewed  
 copper pennies, 2018.  
 Installation view at Critical  
 Distance, documentation by  
 Toni Hafkenscheid.

Saying “this is the commons, so this is for everyone,” instead of saying, “this is actually Indigenous land that needs to be returned to Indigenous peoples.” Just thinking about how this settler-colonial-capitalist, also patriarchal and heteronormative, mindset is overlaid on top of the land and embedded in all the dynamics it sets up in how we’re supposed to relate to the land, and in extension, each other.

So I’ve been thinking about the counterpoint to that: How do you build those relationships of reciprocity? And how do you understand how to be in relation with other things in your environment, in local context and in larger context? Part of it for me, as a white settler, is trying to interrogate how I create an authentic relationship to place while still being a colonizer, essentially. And how do I undo that [colonial] mindset within myself, and then extend that outwards to how I build relationships in the world.

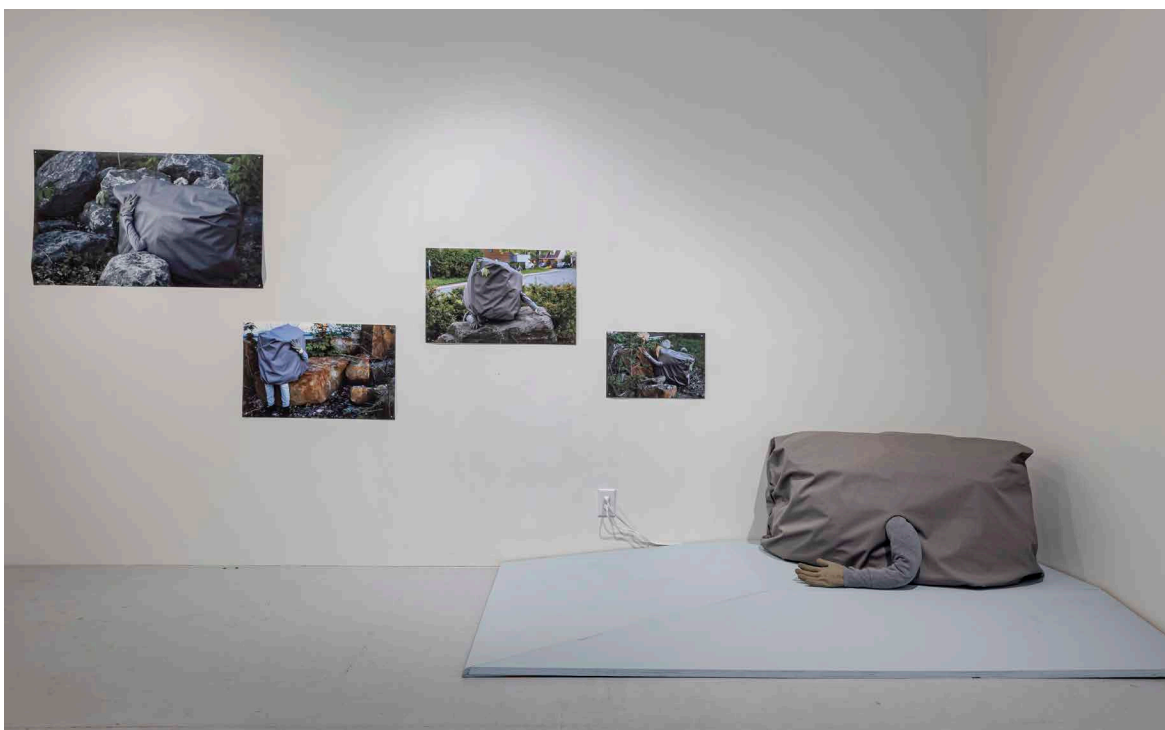
**VF:** I wonder if we could move into discussing how you each take up these questions around extractivism in your respective works in the exhibition. The other starting point to this exhibition was Laura Levin’s theorizing about camouflage as a performance strategy, and how I saw each of you enacting a kind of camouflage/infiltration strategy in your own very site-specific ways. What I find really generative about Levin’s theorizing around camouflage as a political performance practice is this working against binaries in multiple ways, such as foreground vs. background, body vs. land, human vs. non-human. There’s this kind of critical

teasing of those binaries that happens and camouflage, in the way that Levin presents it, provides a way to work against binary thinking.

Could each of you speak to how you see yourself using—and we don't need to call it camouflage—but what kind of performance strategy you see yourself using in your embodied works, and the way that that strategy is disrupting an extractive mindset?

**TI:** Performance is [a particular] medium for me. I justify [my approach] in that way. You know, I also see a woman's body, an Indigenous woman's body, as being a political statement in sites of extraction. And, I think, a really powerful interruption to those politics. But I am also very aware of the stereotypes of Native women's bodies and the land. And so these are the kinds of things that I think are there to negotiate [in the work].

**IHC:** I see [my use of camouflage] as a kind of survival. I was thinking about how to create connections through my work without having my physical self there. Kind of like disappearing while still being there [at the same time]. When I was asking questions to people in one of my [*Corps roca*] performances in a park, people were responding, "We don't talk to rocks." [I realized then that] language is also very important in the work. During my second research-performance, I changed my approach to the way I was asking my questions and then people became more receptive. But then I realized that, because they didn't see me as a person (and just as a rock), people felt like they could confess things to me. So for these people, they were like, "OK. This is a rock and I'm just going to offload a secret." And they started telling me these things that I don't think they would tell me if it was me [out of costume]. So there's two ways people [approach me while in the rock costume]: for some people, there



Ileana Hernandez Camacho, photographs from *Corps roca*, 2018; *Corps roca* costume, Mixed Media (fabric, paper, gloves, chicken wire) 2018. *Corps roca* ramp, 2021, mixed media (wood, bass shaker, amplifier, mp3, jack cable, paint). Installation view at Critical Distance, documentation by Toni Hafkenscheid.



was that connection, and with some others, they don't want to [engage].

In changing my form, it was also changing how the dynamics in the performance develop. And I think I'm still exploring that and these types of connections [and interactions] that I don't think would be the same if it was my body [out of costume].

**AB:** I definitely see the dowser character as kind of an infiltration into this oil-and-gas culture that I really see as so hyper-masculine. In one of the other works [*reading wild lands*, 2018], I created this really massive, industrial-looking pendulum sculpture that gets taken out to these sites that are now parks. They were oil refineries, but now they look like parks. I guess I'm just thinking about this now, in the context of the conversation, how these sites of contamination themselves are camouflaged by industry, by cities, and by the state. I think of it as green-washing, where it's like, "Oh look, there's grass growing here now, so it must be fine and healthy." And absolutely all the [ecological] relationships have been completely obliterated at these sites. It's so complex when you start to understand ecosystems and their relationships. Even just building soil; however many hundreds of years it takes for soil to build up these complex relationships that sustain certain plant life, insects, birds, and other wildlife. I feel like for me, part of the performance aspect and having these [dowser] characters allows me, to some degree, to tap into channelling something out of these sites.

But I see the *Orphan Well Adoption Agency*, which is another arm of this project, as definitely camouflaging itself as a bureaucratic



Alana Bartol, *OWAA Dowser's Uniform and Tools*, Copper I-rods, dowsing rod with band aid, ganzfeld goggles, suitcase with custom foam insert, coveralls with custom embroidered patches, 2017; *Dowser (performance at orphan well site in Three Hills, Alberta)*, framed photograph, 2016. Installation view at Critical Distance, documentation by Toni Hafkenscheid.

organization. It exists as a website and I've had people from the oil and gas industry contact me as the Orphan Well Adoption Agency because they think it's real and they think it's a legitimate thing. That's really interesting when that happens because I've tried so many times to actually reach out to people in the oil and gas industry for research purposes and of course they don't want to talk to you. So then, having this façade of an official-looking organization allows me to have conversations that I wouldn't otherwise have access to. And it's always interesting because it's not like [the corporations that reach out to the OWAA] actually want to remediate sites just for the good of remediating sites. They are interested in trying to find orphan wells that are still potentially producing wells so they can keep making money. It's this never-ending churning machine of people wanting to extract from the land. It's terrifying.

**TI:** Thank you both, I'm really taken by your work. I really love that people were like, "the rock isn't a person," which then made them OK with talking with you, [Ileana]. Or else, saying, "We don't talk to rocks." And then the irony that corporations are considered a person is really interesting in [relation to] your work, Alana. [Especially] if you're thinking about the business term of the corporation as being like a body in and amongst itself that could actually be orphaned. I think it's really interesting what our society deems a person or not.

**AB:** Yeah.

**TI:** And then also the [interplay between] camouflage and the corporation, I think is really interesting.

**IHC:** Ha!

**TI:** Yeah, I visited one of those [refinery-turned-park] sites too, and there's like a Ducks Unlimited tent, or a little viewing station, where really there are no ducks. It's like a charade.

**AB:** Wow, yeah.

**TI:** In Fort McMurray.

**AB:** Oh, in Fort McMurray. Oh wow. I've been wanting to go there to try to understand those issues.

**TI:** You can do the circuit. It's like a tourist thing, there's the outdoor museum [with] giant machines, and you go by all of the tailings ponds. And then along the route is a couple of these parks, or these renaturalization projects.

**AB:** Yeah. I did quite extensive research on these parks and it's sickening because obviously these corporations have so much money, but then the people who actually did the remediation—to whatever degree there could be—it was all volunteer-driven. So they [the

corporations] were really playing on this notion that is part of the corporate greenwashing bullshit. This capitalist idea of putting it back on the communities that are being affected by these issues to then volunteer their time and put all this effort into restoring these landscapes. It's mind-boggling.

**TI:** It makes so much sense in the capitalist, or corporate, mindset, to ease the guilt—if there is any. To ease the environmental guilt of the people who were involved [from the corporations].

**AB:** Yeah, definitely.

**TI:** It's kind of like a social capital.

**IHC:** Hmmm.

**AB:** Yeah.

**VF:** It's so interesting to see the new dimensions of camouflage that we're bringing up, and the multi-layered ways that you're adding to each other's thinking.

I wonder if there's any last things you wanted to share or contribute about the use of embodied performance as a way to confront these huge questions, about changing perspectives in how we think about land and our environments? And how site-specific performance can be used to amplify the voice of the non-human?

**TI:** Sometimes I feel like I am taking up space when I perform on the land actually, rather than giving voice to the materials. I feel like my sculpture work is where I'm more trying to give the voice to the materials, which doesn't usually have my own body present. But then I was thinking about an example that I use for justifying performance, which is the example of the protester. I think protest is a really powerful use of one's body to interrupt space, to confront corrupt societies. To physically stand guard or stand in place, and advocate for an issue that you believe in. So the protester is really where I get my inspiration for this interrupting of space and where I get influenced the most [for performance], because I think that the protester is a really powerful symbol and actually works to change the system.

**IHC:** For me, [embodied performance] is a way of exploring the trust that we have between each other. And how we build it or break it. I think that that was the first thing that I realized about performance. By putting myself there and seeing how people [respond to me] and if they trust me, or if I trust them, because that's also my body in there [the rock costume]. And then seeing what is this dynamic that's created with the use of the costume. I realized afterwards that, since my body [becomes] totally different, taking up space becomes easier. That's also another question I have, how does this thing that is more abstract—my body



costumed as a rock—have more presence than my body on its own? How does it interfere with power structures? Also, it is very important to me to take into account the power of clothing. We have used it for a long time to protect ourselves from temperatures, predators, etc. But in this case, it has become a protection against prejudice and as a catalyst for other perspectives.

**AB:** Sometimes I don't think of it as performing. I guess it's performance but, most of the time, no one's there. I'm at these places where no one's supposed to be. Sometimes I get permission, sometimes I don't. So there's an element of trespassing in some of the work with the orphan wells. Part of it [the embodied action] is trying to show these things that we're so disconnected from. Bringing some visibility to these sites because I think it's hard for people to visualize them.

I guess one of the reasons why it was so important to go to the sites was that it was the only way I could understand the issue myself. But I would also have these conversations with people in the city who felt like they couldn't say anything about the issue because their wealth or their privilege had in part been created by their family members being involved in it [the oil and gas industry]. So there was this weird allegiance to it in some way. But then, at the same time, they had never actually been to one of these sites, or they don't really know what they look like. So part of the work is trying to bring visibility to these places and spaces that are kept out of sight, and kept invisible.

**VF:** Thank you all so much for your work and taking the time tonight.



Clockwise from top left:  
Ileana Hernandez Camacho,  
Valérie Frappier, Tsēmā Igharas,  
Alana Bartol  
March 15, 2021

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