

Tanya Lukin Linklater: My mind is with the weather

5 June – 28 August 2022

Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square

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My mind is with the weather

Consider the importance of breath. The quiet act of breathing when a person is at rest usually goes unnoticed, yet it is fundamental to life. It also links us inextricably to our shared environment, to the bodies of other species. With each breath, we inhale the respiration of trees, linking us into a circulatory system of extra-human connection that spreads outwards from deep roots up into the clouds. If one thing marks our current moment, it is surely a heightened awareness of breath, and how it might be taken away—by an unseen respiratory illness, by acrid smoke from burning forests, and by the violence of injustice.

When encountering the work of Tanya Lukin Linklater, one is brought back repeatedly to an awareness of breath. We see the artist breathing silently alongside Alutiiq and Unangan belongings in a museum's storage collection. We hear the breath of dancers as they move, in quiet concentration or exhaling sharply to rhythmic stepping across the floor. The sense one gets from the work is that breathing—having the space to breathe, an attention to breath—has a particular vital significance that goes beyond a mere function of the body. This is so not just with breath, but also movement, song, sound, silence, being together, and being in nature. In Lukin Linklater's work, these “small” moments—often overlooked—are emphasised as a vitally important means of protection, a way to withstand the ongoing colonial violences to which Indigenous communities are subjected and work towards processes of wellbeing and repair.

'My mind is with the weather' is presented in partnership with the Toronto Biennial of Art, a free city-wide art event taking place across the city and GTA from March 26 to June 5, 2022. It has been organised in collaboration with the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. An exhibition catalogue with new writing is due to be published in the spring of 2023.

Oakville Galleries gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario and the Corporation of the Town of Oakville, along with our many individual, corporate and foundation partners.

Born in the Kodiak archipelago of Alaska, Lukin Linklater has lived and worked in Nbisiing Anishinabek territory in northern Ontario for more than a decade. Over this time she has developed a multi-layered and diverse body of work in performance, installation, sound, film, and dance. She also writes, with a powerful practice of prose poetry, which sits alongside and often enters into her gallery-based work. For *My mind is with the weather*, her first solo exhibition at a public museum, she is showing three recent films, one of which draws from a highly autobiographical text included in her recent book of poetry *Slow Scrape*, and a sculptural installation, which was developed with the artist and architect Tiffany Shaw.

For each of these artworks, she has drawn in a community of others, directing, sometimes mentoring, and facilitating complex choreographies of production, even when this has required creative solutions for remote working during periods of lock-down. Often she works with members of her family—including her children—as well as her wider community and others with whom she fosters long-time relationships, such as the dancers Ivania Aubin-Malo, Ceinwen Gobert, the filmmaker Neven Lochhead, and the violinist Laura Ortman. These are familial and friendship circles that are nurtured and sustained over time. They represent a considered intention on the artist's part to nurture an ethic of care, one that is actively anti-colonial and rooted in Alutiiq ways of being. This set of principles—of kindness and responsibility towards others—underlies every element of Lukin Linklater's work, both in her method of working and the “finished product”. It is as fundamental to her work as breathing is to life.

An amplification through many minds takes as its subject the repatriation of cultural belongings from colonialism, a concern that runs through a number of Lukin Linklater's recent works. Commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the film begins with the artist visiting Alutiiq and Unangan belongings in the collection storage rooms of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. More than a “research visit”, her presence there is an act of love and generosity. She breathes with, listens to, touches, and reflects on a collection of small sewing bags and baskets, treating them as though they were—in the artist's words—a “community of people” separated from their homelands. “It would be better if they were home”, she reflects in the film.

For the second and third part of the work, scores for movement were created based on language that came to the artist after the experience of visiting and being close to the objects in the museum. We see three dancers in open rehearsals for camera at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's White Box, and one dance “performed” in the empty storage rooms of the Museum of Anthropology amid rows of locked cabinets. As the scrolling text explains, these bags and baskets—which were meant to be handled, to be held close to the body—are treated with pesticides when they enter the museum, rendering them forever toxic to human touch. One can imagine the dancer's rhythmic stepping and vigorous breathing transcending the museum's sterile air to bring them closeness and warmth, healing and home.

Most of the film is wrapped in protective silence. For the main part, the sounds we hear are limited to the movement of bodies scraping and stepping across the floor. While we see the artist speaking, we never hear her reflections spoken aloud. Instead, we are privy to an accompanying text which runs through the film. This shares excerpts of her thoughts, as well as insights into the process of making the film. In the final scene, we read about the forest fires that impacted filming. As an epilogue of sorts, it offers a profound reflection on the far-reaching impact of colonial violences, stretching from the institutional practices that have torn these baskets and bags from their homelands to the current crisis of environmental collapse.

Commissioned for the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial, *Indigenous geometries* (2019) draws on the subterranean Alutiiq homes of South West Alaska, where Tanya Lukin Linklater grew up. It has been made with laminated ash wood local to the Chicago area, which was curved into components called spines, in reference to traditional Alutiiq steam-bending techniques.

The impetus for the work first came about in 2018 when a group of Indigenous architects came to Lukin Linklater after a talk and asked her a question about how she might imagine a space for Indigenous performance. The time she spent with that question and subsequent conversations with Métis artist/architect Tiffany Shaw that came about when Lukin Linklater invited her to join the project, were a vital part of how the work was conceived. Also important to her thinking was a series of short texts on American Indian theatre, which was written in

1969 by faculty and students at the Institute of American Indian Arts, and which Lukin Linklater had been reading at that time.

Bringing these questions, readings, and conversations into alignment, *Indigenous geometries'* vessel-like form was originally used for performances by violinist Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache) and dancers Ivanie Aubin-Malo (Maliseet) and Ceinwen Gobert. During their enactments, the dancers individually disassembled some of the spines by laying them gently to one side and moving within the work to the otherworldly reverberations of Ortman's violin.

For the presentation at Oakville Galleries, two spines from *Indigenous geometries* have remained at Lukin Linklater's home. With this resonant gesture, the artists point to the work that is being done to keep the home intact. To maintain one's space can be an act of resistance and a necessary protection, not only from federal violence, but also the strictures of the museum.

Indigenous geometries is considered a piece of contemporary Indigenous architecture. In reference to Indigenous material culture and construction methods, such as an Alutiiq home, it carries within it a specific worldview that exceeds the kinds of environments we usually encounter in a gallery. According to this understanding of the world, the artist tells us, sound and touch enters into and stays within the objects and materials around us. We therefore ask our audiences to be mindful of the words they speak nearby the work—to ensure they embody principles of kindness and responsibility towards all living things.

This moment an endurance to the end forever, 2020 builds on from where *Indigenous geometries* leaves off, using the two spines the artist has kept in her home as a starting point. Lukin Linklater began filming this work just as the first lock-downs occurred at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It opens with a view of the artist in her home performing a sequence of movements alongside the two spines that she has kept in her home. Shot on super 8 film (the classic home movie medium prevalent in the 1980s when the artist was growing up), the work reflects on notions of home, and the continued work Indigenous communities are undertaking to ensure its protection and repair.

For the second part of the film, the artist worked again with dancers Gobert and Aubin-Malo. Their movements were choreographed remotely in rehearsals over zoom (due to the pandemic), and then filmed at the side of a river. Stretching from sunrise to sunset, the work evokes the course of one day.

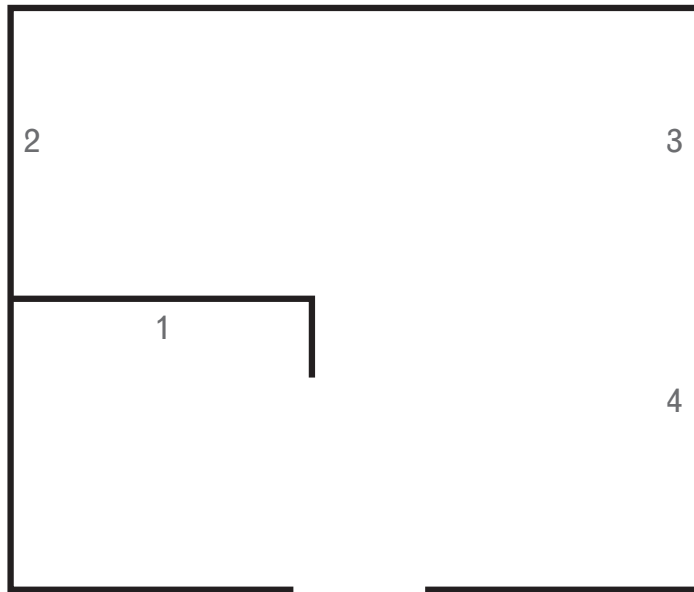
One of the major structuring elements of this film is the notion of breath. Drawing on Alutiiq breathing traditions, the artist and dancers together concentrated on textures and tones of air that move outwards from the body. They reflected, for example, on the density of breath when it is close to the body and earth, and its dissipation into the atmosphere as it moves outwards towards the cosmos. The work was created at a time of widespread protest against the police killing of George Floyd, outcry against state violence inflicted on Indigenous communities, and when smoke from forest fires and respiratory illness rendered breathing unsafe.

The subject of breath, then, becomes a direct way to address the current moment we're in, as well as a way of moving towards health, healing, and repair.

The title of the work is taken from the following text written by Tanya Lukin Linklater:

We inhale swell heave billow fall. We exhale shiver pulse weep echo. This breath, this life all around us. We yearn for moments that are only ever now with no memory and no end, no density of time in the body. We sense feel discern an endurance an insistence a continuance a history that is ever present and always now. We inhale song, breathe language. We exhale sigh pant gust gasp, sounding. We recall a sigh shared amongst strangers. We reach for a breath repaired. This moment an endurance to the end forever.

Language has been a major element of Lukin Linklater's work from the beginning of her career, with written texts—some transcribed from oral histories told by relatives—in Cree, Alutiiq, and English forming part of installations and films, and providing the score for sound and dance choreographies. She also has a writing practice that sits alongside her work as a visual artist, and in 2020 published a book of prose poems entitled *Slow Scrape. , not like us. Not like us*, (2021) draws from two particular pages of that book, excerpts of a highly moving autobiographical text reflecting on movement, home, family relationships, the experience and memory of childhood and how it is made and unmade in images and words.



- 1 Tanya Lukin Linklater
An amplification through many minds, 2019
Single channel projection with sound
36 minutes, 32 seconds

With Ivanie Aubin-Malo, Ceinwen Gobert, Eungie Joo, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Danah Rosales, and Jovanna Venegas. Camera and edit: Neven Lochhead.

A commission for SFMOMA in cooperation with the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. With support from White Water Gallery and Queen's University. Curated by Eungie Joo and Jovanna Venegas.

- 2 Tanya Lukin Linklater
This moment an endurance to the end forever, 2020
Single channel projection with sound
23 minutes, 17 seconds

With performances by Ivanie Aubin-Malo, Ceinwen Gobert, and Tanya Lukin Linklater. Camera by Duane Linklater, Neven Lochhead, and Eric Robillard. With support from Canada Council of the Arts.

- 3 Tanya Lukin Linklater and Tiffany Shaw
Indigenous geometries, 2019
Cold rolled steel, laminated ash, paint, matte polyurethane, hardware
84" x 107" x 107"

- 4 Tanya Lukin Linklater
, not like us. Not like us, 2021
Single channel video with sound
11 minutes, 21 seconds

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Oakville Galleries would like to thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for the open conversation around truth and reconciliation.