

BIOGRAPHIES

Jennifer Rose Sciarrino's sculpture, video, and installation works consider the living world through its entanglements in nature and technology. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Ruffled Follicles and a Tangled Tongue* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge (2019); and *But both are sensitive*, Projet Pangée, Montréal (2019). Her work has been included in exhibitions at venues including Art Museum, Toronto (2016); Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto, Mississauga (2015); Jackman Humanities Institute, Toronto (2015); Oakville Galleries (2015); Bâtiment d'art Contemporain, Genève (2014); Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2014); and The Power Plant, Toronto (2011, 2013), among others. Sciarrino lives and works in Toronto, and is represented there by Daniel Faria Gallery.

Julia Paoli is the Director of Exhibitions & Programs at Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art.

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Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art
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Cover image: Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, detail from *from root to lip (Pollen)*, 2019. Courtesy the artist.
Interior image: Jennifer Rose Sciarrino, detail from *from root to lip (Cells)*, 2019. Courtesy the artist.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

SESSION: Natasha Myers
Thursday 25 July 2019, 7PM

Rendering Life Otherwise

Getting out of the Anthropocene, this era marked by colonialism and capitalism's violent excess, will demand a deep reckoning with all our relations, especially our more-than-human kin. But what about our kin that is vegetal, fungal, or microbial, or perhaps too tiny, too remote or too slow to sense? How can we get to know these creatures well, when much of the knowledge we have about these forms of life is bound up with the mechanistic sciences, with their reductive techniques and constraining stories about life? This hands-on workshop explores movement and imagination in the work of rendering life otherwise.

Natasha Myers is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at York University, director of the Plant Studies Collaboratory, convener of the Politics of Evidence Working Group, and co-founder of Toronto's Technoscience Salon. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Rendering Life Molecular: Models, Models and Excitable Matter* (Duke, 2015). Her current projects speculate on the contours of the Planthroposcene, with investigations spanning the arts and sciences of vegetal sensing and sentience, the politics of gardens, and the enduring colonial violence of restoration ecology. Since 2015 she has been working with dancer and filmmaker Ayelen Liberona on *Becoming Sensor*, a research creation project to invent protocols for an ungrid-able ecology of the happenings ongoing in the ancient urban lands around Toronto.

SESSION is a project modelling itself after an incubator that invites cultural practitioners to engage with questions that emerge out of a given exhibition. Space is limited; to register for this event please inquire in advance: office@mercerunion.org

SESSION is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group



THE
READY
COMMITMENT

SPACE: Joi T. Arcand
Continues until 10 August 2019

Joi T. Arcand's *I was born with butter in my mouth* is the final edition in a series of commissioned image works for SPACE—a billboard project located on the east façade of Mercer Union.

Joi T. Arcand is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with Great Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan (2005). Recent solo exhibitions have been presented at Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff (2017); ODD Gallery, Dawson City (2016); Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (2014); Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon (2014); Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2013); and Gallery 101, Ottawa (2012). She is founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine, *kimiwan* (2012–14); and in 2017 curated the group exhibition *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101, Ottawa.

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Mercer Union enjoys a unique position at the forefront of contemporary art in Toronto and Canada—a vantage cultivated over our 40-year history. As we celebrate our achievements, we extend our deepest gratitude to our community. Thank you to our audience, artists and supporters: our success is a direct result of your ongoing commitment and engagement with the organization.

In anticipation of the big 4-0, we are asking you—our friends and followers—to give us the gift of time. \$1.01 for a minute; \$60.27 for an hour; \$1446.52 for a day... With your support, we aim to raise \$40,000 to help Mercer Union thrive in 2019; marking four decades of groundbreaking contemporary art, and many more to come.

We are grateful to all those who have generously contributed to this ongoing campaign. Your commitment allows us to build upon our inspired legacy as we celebrate this milestone year.

To make a donation towards Mercer Union's 40th Anniversary, please call the gallery at 416.536.1519 or visit our website at www.mercerunion.org

40 years of Mercer Union.

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Jennifer Rose Sciarrino:
from root to lip

22 June – 10 August 2019

Opening Reception Friday 21 June, 7PM



Installation view: *Ruffled Follicles and a Tangled Tongue*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, 2019. Courtesy the artist.

*Making kin is perhaps the hardest and most urgent part.*¹

from root to lip presents Jennifer Rose Sciarrino's formal inquiry into the notions of entanglement and techno-organic hybridity that have long been tended to by feminist writers of critical thought and science fiction. In a series of sculptures referencing biotic matter—seeds, spores, cells, pollen, bacteria and yeast—Sciarrino interprets scientific imaging and illustration of such phenomena towards new fictions in blown glass and carved stone.

Posed at the tips of long steel armatures that twist and bend towards one another, these budding figures emerge from a low-lying platform that anchors this environment. Here, Sciarrino figures the dazzling morphology of the less-than-visible biota through shifts of scale and substance, architecting anew the relational space between human and nonhuman actors vital to a living world.

How might artistic practice approach post-anthropocentric imaginings to provide compelling alternatives to those shaped by current rhetoric surrounding the Anthropocene? Beginning with the suggestion that exchange is a promise latent in adjacency, *from root to lip* advocates for a distributed, entangled future that is grounded in synchronicity and co-becoming.

An interview between Jennifer Rose Sciarrino and Julia Paoli

JP | Let's begin with the material considerations in your work. You've had a long history of working with the qualities of complex living and inorganic structures in your practice; often these require instruments of magnification or flights of the imagination to be made visible. What guides the way you cast these references into the space of art making and the materials you choose to work with?

JRS | The organic forms evoked in this body of work are small—pollen, yeast, cells, bacteria, seeds and spores—and if scale were a measure of significance then in many ways these would be inconsequential. I'm interested in the crucial role they individually play in making the world liveable for human and nonhuman entities. We share the story of living and dying with these structures, and in many ways we are made up more of them than what we can safely call ourselves. So how can we begin to understand the magnitude of such matter relationally, and should we try?

JP | I wonder then, as an artist, what apparatus or material language you've found that permits the construction of a situation where such considerations could take place? This exhibition seems to be one response.

JRS | In this work, the process of making these microscopic units of life tangible is also the process of writing them as fiction. Through interpretation of scale, coloration, the gestural lines that suggest their communication and so on, it is this fiction that I think functions as an apparatus in my work. It has allowed me to approach questions of entanglement and kinship in the space of art making.

My gravitation towards the materials themselves was intuitive with this body of work, and I wanted to see how well their inherent characteristics would cooperate to dramatize the installation. In all the ways that heaviness or fragility are so readily attributed to these materials, suspension and balance set up the visible precarity of the installation to welcome the possibility of a different bodily response.

In terms of process, one of the most gratifying aspects of working with stone—whether chisel shaping, grinding, sanding, polishing—is that my physical effort and investment was returned by the material itself, through its willingness to be shaped. It's an incredibly generous process. Glass, on the other hand, is a material that I continue to find hugely perplexing. For *Pollen* and *Archaea 1 & 2*, I worked closely with Tsunami Glassworks, who interpreted and produced each shape based on 3D models I had generated. If you look at microscopic images of bacteria or pollen, you'll notice that their translucency carries the qualities of glass, so it was a natural choice to move in that direction.

JP | If I think about your work's sustained interest in mimicry, I can draw a line through the years from *Proposal for a Mountain Formation* (2011) and the crystalline series *Mineral Specimens* (2011), through to this exhibition; where does your interest in bridging the appearances of dissimilar substances come from in this body of work?

JRS | I wonder if it comes from being a prop maker for many years? I'm formally trained in photography not sculpture, and continue to work across video and installation. So when it comes to techniques, I'm always researching independently and collaboratively, how best to interpret ideas and execute forms as I imagine them.

The references I work with are drawn from scientific material though the result is never acquired through primary observation or ideation. I rely on various devices of interpretation to bring them to fruition. Approaching the complex geometry, patterns and fibrous characteristics of organic matter through sculpture is a challenging process, but

studying this complexity closely has always given me a better understanding of my own body and its processes. The types of alabaster I chose to work with here share some of these connections directly. I have thought of these forms as organs many times while making them. I wanted the tones and patterns of the stone to suggest such a fleshiness or essential quality. Plant life, and the false coloration schemes commonly used in stills of magnified specimens, informed the greens used in the glass forms. That said, this mimicry you're speaking of should not be considered exactitude; the sculptures are speculative of the forms and relationships with and among microscopic phenomena.

JP | Your work often evokes movement through iteration and gesture; I'm thinking of examples such as *Leaning Structure* (2012), and *North Facing on December 21st* (2014). In this new body of work, the metal functions as requisite support as well as implied motion line; how do you reconcile the fixity of these art objects vis-à-vis the slippery and emergent properties of the living world in focus?

JRS | I first came to think of the stems/armatures while learning about plant grafting. It's such an old and fascinating technique in our meddlesome relationship with other species. It can bear more productive yields and produce incredible beauty in plant life. There is a reference to this in *Pollen* for example, where the brass is a graft welded to the steel, with little scions that also function as support. As I was working through these sculptures and thinking about how they may communicate with one another, the armatures became an opportunity to work through that outside of language. I love that bodily gesture is such a simple, yet powerful and nuanced mode of communication. How would the chemical exchange between these living forms be interpreted as movement, and how could that then be transposed as gestural line? One sculpture may take on passivity, while another may appear in anticipation of an encounter, reaching for contact; still another may appear as if ready to strike, and so on. But those physical or behavioural attributes that I've implied are not always what another will see, and I'm interested too in how different interpretations can unfold in these gestures, based on who is looking and how the forms are arranged.

JP | I have read this body of work as a gesture towards Donna Haraway's recent use of bacteria and fungi as metaphors for making kin. Your objects—artifacts of biological material bending and twisting towards one another—seem to suggest that entanglement and alliance may be at the center of a speculative-feminist-future. This resonates with me as a full embodiment of kinship outside of genealogy. How do you think through the potential of a more entangled future?

JRS | I think of Haraway's work alongside all the good science fiction I have read that makes it possible to think forward with care. Haraway, and others including Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and Karen Barad, as well as writers like Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler and N. K. Jemisin demonstrate the urgency of working through societal and ecological issues, not just with acquired expertise but with intuitive intellect and great empathy. We need their voices to assemble a toolkit for imagining entanglement towards an embodied sense in order to develop practices of making kin with human, non-human and more-than-human entities effectively. As with any relationship we want to protect, we can start by listening and work towards collaborating and growing together. Maybe we can write a multitude of possible answers and even more questions to get closer. We can try something and if that fails, could we try another approach?

In this body of work, I've tried to imagine these relations in a tangible manner as a primer. The narrative I've been building around them of communication includes their collaboration, (dis)agreement and curiosity with one another. In this way, each is growing and moving, perhaps very slowly, and we are just catching them in a single instance of an otherwise longer transformation. I see these sculptures as curious metaphors, ready to animate exchanges with each other, including those visiting. Kinship outside of genealogy would require the conditions that sustain the individual to also be hospitable to the group as a whole.



¹ Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 1 May 2015; 6 (1): 165.