

Martha Poggioli

The Bug

June 21 – August 16th, 2026

An installation-in-process developed over the course of her month-long residency at lower_cavity, Martha Poggioli's *The Bug* addresses notions of emergence and transformation across technology, biology, and materiality. Poggioli posits the decaying post-industrial architecture of lower_cavity as a festering and fecund laboratory; a dark, subterranean research facility in which plant, animal, and unliving forms coalesce.

Arranged in lower_cavity's sublevel, the installation acts as a proxy for Poggioli's larger practice, extending across a series of cell-like brick chambers once used for the maceration of paper pulp. The first of these holds a pleonexic laboratory of material tests serving as introduction and index to Poggioli's research: containers of berries, liquids and studies produced with the buckthorn ink.

Buckthorn, its berries used in pre-modern Europe to create a sap-green ink, is today found in noxious, invasive abundance across western Massachusetts. For Poggioli, the plant's form and chemical potential (along with the Medieval practice of storing the ink produced from it in pig's bladders) serve as material and historical nodes in a larger constellation of references. During her residency, Poggioli foraged berries from buckthorn newly sprouting along highways and in local nature reserves, producing an early-season ink whose color ranges from urine-yellow to syrupy green.

In an adjoining chamber, a silicone bladder filled with a sample of the buckthorn ink is suspended: a reliquary of its own Medieval origins. Its anatomical form, porcine or human by turns, recalls how tightly these species and their internal structures have been bound across histories of medical science, artistic production, and domestic space. A catheter extends from the organ, slowly dripping ink onto the floor.

Further on, the space opens into a vaulted central chamber whose brick walls carry a patina of mossy green paint and efflorescent calcification. Two large cast iron sculptures occupy the space, each borrowing equally from the arms of intrauterine devices (which employ them to brace themselves against the walls of the uterus) and from the morphology of emergence shared by biologic structures as varied as fungal networks and nerve nodules. Suggestive of various stages of some gestation-like process, these sculptures have served a strangely prophetic function within Poggioli's practice: their protean shapes and toxic green coloration nudging the artist towards the notion of color itself as a form of materiality—one ultimately realized during her time here in Massachusetts, several years after these works' initial germination.

A series of three smaller brick chambers rounds out the installation; the first containing a cast brass patinated sculpture whose form is similarly hybridized from the design of medical implants and biologic structures. The final two interconnected chambers hold further elements of Poggioli's research and process, along with drawings and paintings produced with the buckthorn ink over the course of her residency.

List of works:

Central chamber:

bug #1

patinated sand cast iron

bug #2

patinated sand cast iron, latex, silicone, air, steel hemostat

Chambers 1 & 2:

sap lab

buckthorn berries, leaves and ink, various chemicals, glass and plastic jars

bladder green

buckthorn ink, cast silicone, silicone & plastic tubing, steel hemostat

Smaller chambers:

cervical spine simulation

patinated cast brass

limb echo

buckthorn ink on cotton

bug bone

patinated cast iron & silicone

bladder as spiral

buckthorn ink, silicone and plastic tubing & syringe

bug portrait

oil on board

colour study (for the bug)

buckthorn green ink on cotton

form study (for the bug)

buckthorn green ink on cotton

Martha Poggioli is an Australian artist, researcher and educator working across sculpture, new media and installation. Her practice engages with trajectories of industrial production, material culture and bio-technological experience. Her current research examines modes of transmission and emergence across time, material and scale. Poggioli lives and works between Paris and New York.

This project is supported by Foundation for Contemporary Arts. Metal castings were produced during Poggioli's time at the JMKAC Kohler Arts/Industry Residency in Foundry in 2024.