

# PLASTIC HEART

Surface All the Way Through

NOVEMBER 16, 2022 - MARCH 24, 2023

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EXHIBITION BOOKLET



Canadian  
Cultural  
Centre  
Paris

**This exhibition has been produced and is circulated by the Art Museum  
University of Toronto and the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris**

**Curated by The Synthetic Collective, Canada**

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

**The installation views in this booklet were made by Vincent Royer.**

**Credits photos: Vincent Royer, OpenUp Studio / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022**





Installation view of the exhibition "Plastic Heart". Credit photos: Vincent Royer, OpenUp Studio / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022

## PLASTIC HEART. SURFACE ALL THE WAY THROUGH CURATOR: THE SYNTHETIC COLLECTIVE

*Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through* is what happens when scientists and artists create a project together to build relationships and impact change in society, museums, and industry on one of today's vital issues: the impact of plastic pollution. The exhibition examines plastic in all its complexity, and the way in which artists have seized upon it and are now critically questioning its use. Plastic is presented here as art material, cultural object, geologic process, petrochemical product, and a synthetic substance fully entangled with the human body. The exhibition includes historical and contemporary artworks that relate to plastic as a politically loaded material, and investigations into the paradoxes of plastic conservation in museum collections.

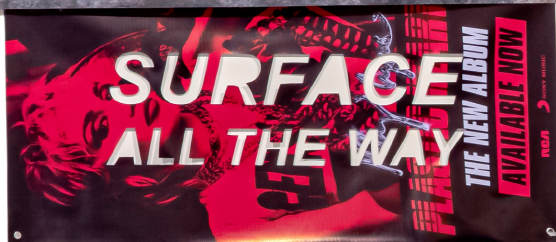
The Great Lakes in North America are home to 21% of the planet's fresh surface water, but the region is also home to pollution-intensive industry. The Synthetic Collective provides a first-ever snapshot of post-industrial microplastics pollution on the shores of the Great Lakes, while questioning our collective responsibility around the use of plastic and showing us how arts-based approaches to thinking and working can make viable contributions to environmental science and activism.

The exhibition was presented in the fall of 2021 at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. In this new version, completely redesigned for the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, the Synthetic Collective modified the original selection of works to limit the carbon footprint of transportation and added works by French artists to highlight the local context and discourses on plastic. This adaptation underscores the collective's experimental museum approach to reducing reliance on fossil fuels in exhibition production.

The Synthetic Collective is an interdisciplinary collaboration between visual artists, cultural workers, and scientists working together to sample, map, understand, and visualize the complexities of plastics and microplastics pollution in the Great Lakes Region.

*With Christina Battle, IAIN BAXTER&, Sara Belontz, J. Blackwell, Amy Brener, Hannah Claus, Patricia Corcoran, Heather Davis et Kirsty Robertson, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, Fred Eversley, Pierre Huyghe, General Idea, Kelly Jazvac, Kiki Kogelnik, Tegan Moore, Skye Morét, Meagan Musseau, Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo, Claes Oldenburg, Aude Pariset, Meghan Price, Alain Resnais, Françoise Sullivan, Catherine Telford-Keogh, Lan Tuazon, Joyce Wieland, Nico Williams, Kelly Wood.*

**An exhibition produced and circulated by the Art Museum / University of Toronto and the Canadian Cultural Centre.**





Hannah Uslus, water song, 2014

## PLASTIC HEART: AN EXHIBITION THAT TAKES ON ONE OF THE MOST CRUCIAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME

The exhibition "Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through" that we are proud to present at the Canadian Cultural Centre (CCC), is the result of a unique collaboration that combines scientific research with artistic creation. Curated by The Synthetic Collective, a collective of artists and researchers, this exhibition takes on one of the most crucial issues of our time: the impact of plastic pollution.

"Plastic Heart" traces the history of our relationship with plastic, and the evolution of this relationship. While plastic was long considered a revolutionary and innovative material, particularly used by 20th century artists for its elastic and malleable properties, today we are all aware of the threat it poses to the environment and the survival of life.

Based on a survey of pollution in the Great Lakes of North America - a region that is home to 21% of the world's fresh surface water - the artworks you are about to discover send a strong message to civil society, companies and governments who have a role to play in reducing the flow of plastic materials that pollute the planet and contaminate our ecosystems.

More broadly, "Plastic Heart" challenges us on our dependence on fossil fuels and invites us to transform more deeply our ways of producing and consuming.

I would like to thank all the members of the Synthetic Collective who made this exhibition possible, as well as Barbara Fischer, Director of the Art Museum of the University of Toronto, who presented it for the first time in 2021.

I would also like to thank the entire team at the Canadian Cultural Centre, especially our curator Catherine Bédard, who adapted this exhibition to the CCC gallery, as well as our cultural promotion officer Lisa Eymet, who designed this booklet.

Enjoy your visit!

Caitlin Workman - *Director of the Canadian Cultural Centre*



# AN EXPERIMENTAL EXHIBITION

**To reduce the carbon footprint and dependence on fossil fuels in cultural institutions, the Synthetic Collective explores alternatives for creating, developing and presenting exhibitions that address environmental issues and sustainability in both content and form.**

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As visitors walk through *Plastic Heart*, they can discover a number of clues that reveal these experiments: the holes drilled in the walls during the previous exhibition have not been filled in, the walls have not been repainted, the traditional vinyl lettering on the walls has been replaced by labels written entirely by hand, using natural inks...

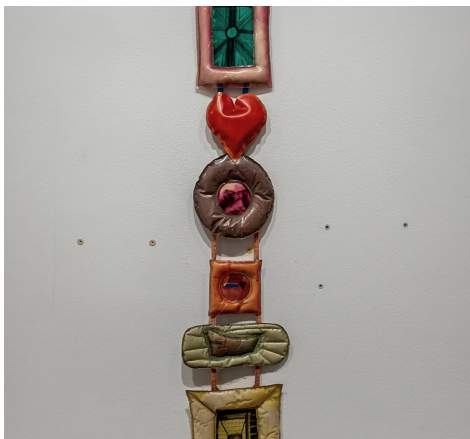
Other less visible decisions had to be made by the collective: whether it was to limit the weight and size of works shipped from Canada, or to work with artists based in and around Paris to reduce the carbon impact of transporting art...

To avoid buying or producing exhibition furniture, the materials used have been reduced to a minimum, reused, recovered... and a large number of second-hand objects have been sourced in Île-de-France by the French-Canadian artist Théo Bignon. He also created all of the exhibition's signage and the banners sewn from advertising panels.

In the gallery, the sum of the waste generated by the exhibition is collected in four black garbage bags, which visitors can see.



© The Synthetic Collective, 2022



Installation view of the exhibition "Plastic Heart" / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022



Installation view of the exhibition "Plastic Heart" / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022





# IN THE GALLERY

INVESTIGATING THE GREAT LAKES OF NORTH AMERICA • THE POLITICAL CHARGE OF PLASTIC • A REVOLUTIONARY MATERIAL

## 2 Synthetic Collective, *Chaise Polymère*, 2022

Rented bistro chairs, nylon zip ties, Rilsan®

At the entrance of the gallery, a tower of chairs from Parisian cafés stands in front of the visitor, inviting them to look up towards the glass roof.

After their first edition at the Art Museum of the University of Toronto in 2021, the Synthetic Collective was commissioned by the Canadian Cultural Centre to adapt the exhibition to the Parisian context, creating a collaborative work.

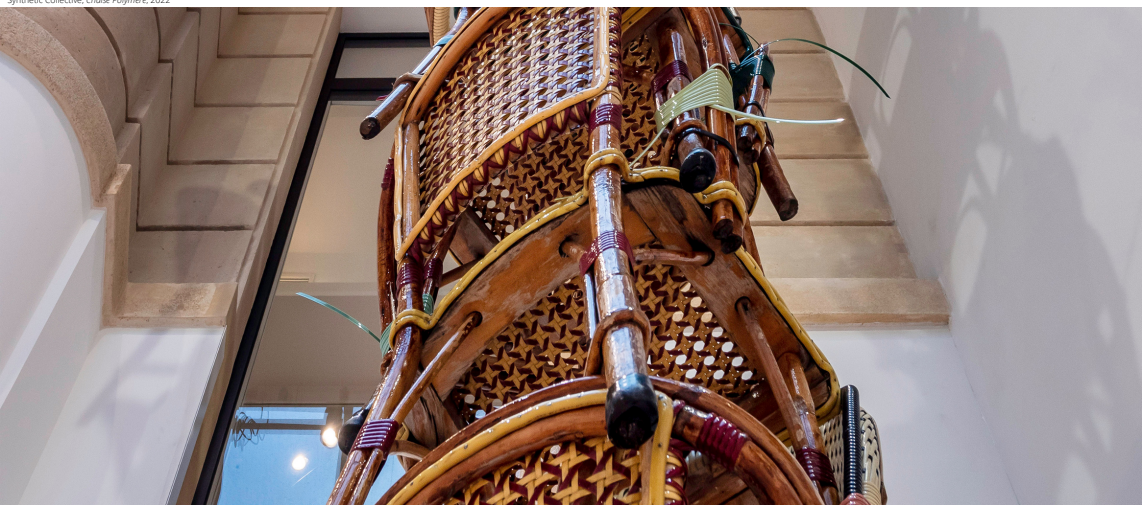
*Chaise Polymère* is a dizzying stack of bistro chairs rented for the exhibition. The colourful caning of these famous café chairs is made from Rilsan® Polyamide 11, also known as "French nylon". Rilsan® is a thermoplastic polymer developed and produced by the French group Arkema from castor seeds, a shrub native to tropical Africa. Arkema transforms the oil from these seeds into a polymer renowned for its high performance.

Marketed since the 1950s, Rilsan® Polyamide 11 is omnipresent in our daily lives: cosmetic products, BIC pens, sports shoe soles, medical catheters, etc. The Synthetic Collective draws our attention here to their presence in the urban furniture that is so familiar to us...



Synthetic Collective, *Chaise Polymère*, 2022

Synthetic Collective, *Chaise Polymère*, 2022







Sara Belontz, *Fragments and pellets from a 1x10m sample area*, 2019

**3 Sara Belontz, *Fragments and pellets from a 1x10m sample area*, Bronte Beach, Oakville, 2019**

Near the tower of chairs, the public is invited to sit at a Parisian bistro table to discover a colourful assemblage of plastic fragments and pellets under the glass.

Collected on Bronte Beach in Oakville (Ontario, Canada) by Sara Belontz, a geoscientist and member of the Synthetic Collective, these fragments are all waste materials fractured into small pieces under the effect of wind, temperature variations, humidity, UV rays, etc. The pellets are samples of raw materials from the plastic industry, designed to be melted and moulded into consumer products. During the industries' supply chain, these pellets escape into the environment, and end up in large quantities on the shores of the Great Lakes of North America.

**North America's Great Lakes are home to 21% of the world's fresh water, but the region is also home to highly polluting industry. Combining scientific and artistic methodologies, the Synthetic Collective recently conducted the first study of microplastic pollution on the shores of the Great Lakes since the post-industrial period.**

**4 Skye Morét, *Thank You to our Industrial Partners*, 2020**

Hyperlocally recycled polyethylene and polypropylene, galvanized steel wire, cotton rope, reusable steel screws.



Skye Morét, *Thank You to our Industrial Partners*, 2020

Skye Morét, a data visualist, was commissioned by members of the Synthetic Collective to visualize the results of their paper, "A comprehensive investigation of industrial plastic pellets on beaches across the Great Lakes and factors governing their distribution".

To communicate this complex data to the public, Skye Morét has chosen to represent the varying densities of plastic pellets collected on the shores of the Great Lakes through the use of resin crystals of varying lengths. The growths are planted on the wall on the surface of a large map of the Great Lakes region, showing the areas most affected by this pollution.

In keeping with the exhibition's focus on sustainability, Skye Morét collaborated with engineer Jake Hixson to make each crystal from recycled objects. Samples of these materials are displayed on the right-hand side of the map in small plastic bags.

## 5 Tegan Moore, *Permeations of a Dataset*, 2022

Salvaged nylon mesh tile backing, nylon cable ties, hail-damaged polycarbonate roofing, photodegraded corrugated plastic, pre-consumer plastic pellets, various fragments of plastic pollution, fake cigarette filters, speaker and sound (6 minute loop).

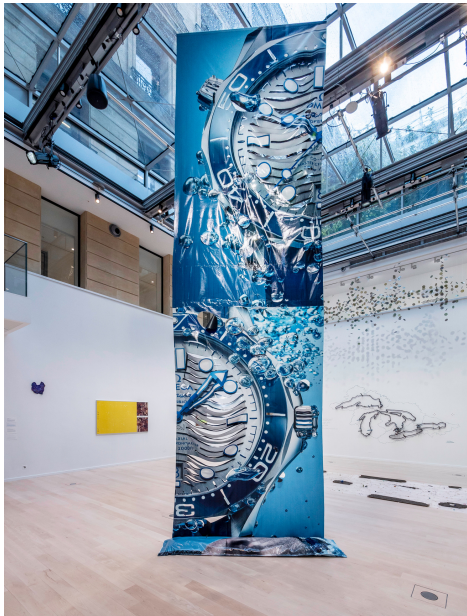
Artist Tegan Moore's sculpture on the ground is also a visualisation of data from the collective's survey of the Great Lakes shoreline. The work consists of 7,268 plastic pellets, all hand-collected from a 1.10 metre area on the beach in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

The wire mesh used has 5-millimetre openings and acts as a sieve to separate microplastics from macroplastics. In addition to the granules, there are black and blue plastic fragments eroded by atmospheric effects and UV rays, as well as a large quantity of fake cigarette filters. The ensemble reminds us that behind these objects and materials that are massively discarded in nature, there is a plastic material that cannot decompose naturally.



Tegan Moore, *Permeations of a Dataset*, 2022

**As an artistic and cultural object, as a geological process, as a petrochemical product and as a synthetic substance permeating the human body, plastic is a politically charged material. In recent decades, we have seen the emergence of environmental resistance movements, which echo society's growing concern about the toxicity of plastic and its consequences for health and the environment. The contemporary artists presented in the exhibition explore this ambiguous and complex relationship to the material through their practices.**



Kelly Jazvac, *Semon's Seaman*, 2020-21

## 6 Kelly Jazvac, *Semon's Seaman*, 2020-21

Salvaged billboard tarp, thread, sand, plastic pellets, aluminium.

In the centre of the gallery, a long, unstructured banner hangs from the glass roof like a curtain.

Canadian artist Kelly Jazvac creates works from plastic waste from the advertising industry. *Semon's Seaman* was made from a billboard made of polyvinyl chloride - a type of plastic that is ubiquitous in advertising and highly toxic - that promoted a luxury watch through a dramatic scene of escape into the sea.

By recycling photographs used in advertising, Kelly Jazvac develops an innovative practice that questions our relationship to images in a consumerist society, drawing our gaze here to the motif of the watch: both a symbol of the passing of time and of the climatic urgency we must face.



Amy Brener, *Omni-kit (merthol)*, 2017

## 7 Amy Brener, *Omni-kit*, 2017

Polyurethane resin, foam, concrete, pigments, found objects

Using moulding and casting techniques, Canadian artist Amy Brener fuses everyday objects into sculptures that look both familiar and strange.

In *Omni-Kit*, the artist encapsulates plastic objects (computer keyboards, tools, cutlery, small objects, etc.) in a layer of resin that forms a totem-like monument. The objects are embedded in the transparent material which freezes them in time, like insects preserved in amber.

This sculpture functions as a "time capsule": a future archaeological testimony of an era marked by overconsumption.



Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo, *The Hell of Copper*, 2008

## 8 Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo, *The Hell of Copper*, 2008

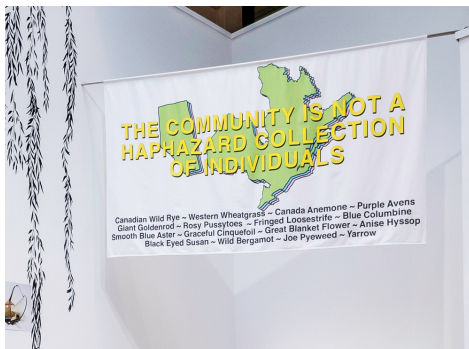
Colour digital print

*The Hell of Copper* is a photograph from a series by artist Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo of the Agbogbloshie landfill in Accra, Ghana. Thousands of people work every day in this huge dump where electronic waste from North America and Europe is piled up.

In this veritable computer graveyard, young workers insulate copper by burning electronic equipment and expose themselves to toxic fumes from lead, mercury, cadmium and PVC fumes.

Since 2003, the Burkinabe photographer has been interested in the living and working conditions in Africa, and tries to raise public awareness of health and environmental issues. Between photo-reporting and documentary practice, Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo reveals here the backstage of the waste management system of Western countries, which massively relies on these landfill sites kept voluntarily away: a form of neo-colonialism linked to waste treatment.





Christina Battle, *THE COMMUNITY IS NOT A HAPHAZARD COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUALS*, 2021

**9 Christina Battle, *THE COMMUNITY IS NOT A HAPHAZARD COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUALS*, 2021**

Digital print on organic cotton, animated GIF, participatory project with seed packs (grass and wildflower seed, mycorrhizal fungi), instruction set, postcards, website.

How can ecological crisis and environmental disasters be used as levers for social change?

Christina Battle's *THE COMMUNITY IS NOT A HAPHAZARD COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUALS* is a participatory project that examines how plants can help us clean up the soil affected by petrochemical industries. Going further, the Canadian artist also explored ways in which we can support this vegetation in return, in a true strategy of valuing and collaborating with living things.

The protocol is simple: by signing up for the project via a website, participants receive a "*Natural Vegetation Community Toolkit*". Each box contains a packet of seeds capable of "phytoremediation", which participants are invited to plant in the spring to decontaminate soils affected by oil.

As the Canadian plastics industry is concentrated in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, this participatory project is - so far - aimed at people these three provinces.

On the banner hanging in the gallery, the words *THE COMMUNITY IS NOT A HAPHAZARD COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUALS* stand out on a map of the Great Lakes region, above the list of seeds used in the project.



Nico Williams, *naabibi'ige*, 2021

**10 Nico Williams, *naabibi'ige*, 2021**  
Glass beads, thread

Nico Williams is Anishinaabe from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, and works in Tiohtià:ke I Mooniyang I Montreal in the field of art.

*naabibi'ige* is a sculpture made by the artist from an image of the Great Lakes region, deconstructed and then recomposed into beaded patterns.

Nico Williams is developing his multidisciplinary and collaborative practice around embroidery and beadwork, in reference to the manual work done by the Indigenous communities living in the Lakes region. Without knots or ties, the artist patiently weaves the beads together to create a solid, unified surface, reflecting a community composed of a multitude of individual elements.



Nico Williams, *naabibi'ige*, 2021

**11 Hannah Claus, *water song*, 2014**  
Digital print on acetate, thread, PVA glue, plexiglas

Hannah Claus is an English and Kanien'kehá:ka multidisciplinary artist and member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte First Nation. Her work *Song for Water*, which hangs from the gallery's glass roof, visually interprets the sound waves of a Mi'kmaq song in celebration of water. It consists of circular digital images suspended from wires, representing the surface of the Gesgapegiag'ig (Cascapedia), Getnig (Restigouche), Tlapataqaniiji'ig (Nova Scotia) and Sipug rivers.

By uniting water and song, this work is inspired by the kahion:ni or "wampum belts" traditionally used for ornamental, ceremonial, diplomatic or commercial purposes to represent agreements between peoples. The threads of the mobile sculpture continue below and above the circular images, reminding us of a certain continuity in our relationship to the world and to what surrounds us.

Sensitive to light, the digital inks gradually fade, reminding us of the changing and reactive nature of the materials used and reviving the idea of a living, sensitive work. As part of an exhibition that attempts to reduce its ecological footprint, this work by Hannah Claus has the particularity of being able to travel in a very compact way.

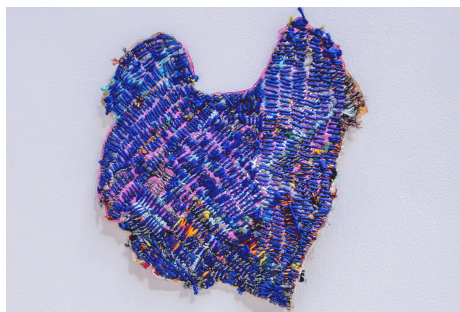


Hannah Claus, *water song*, 2014

**12 J. Blackwell, *Plastic Basket (B204)*, 2013**  
Plastic bags, yarn

Originally from New Orleans and now working in New York, J. Blackwell collects plastic bags, the ultimate symbols of overconsumption and waste. He reinvents them and transforms them into works of art using traditional embroidery techniques.

J. Blackwell describes these hybrid and colourful forms as "androgynous painting objects" halfway between sculpture and painting.



J. Blackwell, *Plastic Basket (B204)*, 2013



Catherine Telford-Keogh, *The democratic model of upward mobility saturated his fantasies of the good life, where Hal could languish in bed for years at the Holiday Inn watching National Geographic on piles of damp laundry and money*, 2017

**13 Catherine Telford-Keogh, *The democratic model of upward mobility saturated his fantasies of the good life, where Hal could languish in bed for years at the Holiday Inn watching National Geographic on piles of damp laundry and money*, 2017**

Mr Clean Multisurface Antibacterial Cleaner with Summer Citrus, Honey-Can Do, Vacuum Space Bag, Digital Print on Vinyl, Plexiglas.

Behind this long and descriptive title, Canadian artist Catherine Telford-Keogh evokes the life of Hal, a fictional character who evolves in an imaginary world where everything is consumable.

The fluorescent yellow liquid in the bag - real Mr. Clean cleaning product - evokes both the liquid food used by sportsmen and women and the water polluted by chemicals. The plastic Hoover bag acts as a container for this disturbing liquid, as a hygienic protective barrier or as a breeding ground for bacteria.

**14 Aude Pariset, *landfill still life*, 2018**

Low density polyethylene trash bag and shopping bag, partially digested by wax worms over a duration of three weeks and mounted on museum cardboard

For three weeks, French artist Aude Pariset brought wax worms into contact with a yellow polyethylene garbage bag and a shopping bag, presented here on the wall as a painting that evokes both an abstract painting and a still life.

Wax worms are small, whitish creatures, 1 to 2 cm long, also known as "false moths", which have the particularity of being able to digest polyethylene: one of the most widespread plastics, which takes several hundred years to decompose in nature. In the form of larvae, the wax worms have a micro-organism in their gut that helps them to metabolise the plastic into glycol, breaking down its chemical bonds.

Here, the yellow plastic bag and the shopping bag, partially digested by wax worms, have a surface dotted with holes. By mixing the human with the non-human, the synthetic with the animal, this work by Aude Pariset questions the possibility of using larvae to fight plastic pollution: a solution that nevertheless raises multiple ethical and practical problems.



Aude Pariset, *landfill still life*, 2018



When plastic entered the art world in the 1960s, many artists took up this new material, trying to push its limits, playing with its adaptable properties, even working directly with plastic manufacturers in factories.

By providing a historical overview of the integration of plastic into art, "Plastic Heart" also reveals how this material is now defying certain museum norms: the first historical works made of plastic are inevitably degrading, raising questions of preservation and conservation.



Kiki Kogelnik, *New York Street Performance*, 1967

**15** Kiki Kogelnik, *New York Street Performance*, 1967  
Silver Gelatin Print

Austrian painter, sculptor and visual artist Kiki Kogelnik has constantly questioned practices related to the body ,whether modified, commodified, fashioned or artificial, combining feminism and technology in a predominantly male art scene. Turning away from European abstraction, Kiki Kogelnik moved to New York in 1962, where she met American pop artists Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Tom Wesselmann, Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg. Influenced by their work, she became fascinated with the new technologies and materials available, experimenting with found objects, assemblage, vinyl (PVC) and polyurethane foam, developing a new visual language.

In this photo, the artist is performing on the streets of New York in 1967, wrapped entirely in cut-out foam sculptures in the shape of arms and legs.



The Plastic Arts 4 New Shows by Les Levine, 1967

**16** *The Plastic Arts 4 New Shows* by Les Levine, 1967  
Exhibition invitation

For more than 50 years, the work of Irish-Canadian-American artist Les Levine has taken on particularly varied forms, both in terms of techniques and media and in terms of the subjects he has tackled: the value of art, North American consumer society, etc. As early as 1962, he invented the concept of disposable art using modern materials such as polyextensible styrene to make casts of everyday objects and abstract forms.

In 1966, he exhibited thousands of coloured plastic reliefs, formed in a vacuum, which he sold for \$3 to \$6: a response tinged with irony to the great discourses of the art world, which would only be made of unique and necessarily precious objects.

**17 Eva Hesse in her Bowery Studio (reproduction), 1967**  
Water-based ink on cotton rag paper. Photo: Herman Landshoff

German-born American sculptor Eva Hesse is associated with the post-minimalist movement. Her experimental sculptures are inspired by the human body, intuition and repetition.

In 1967, she began to use unconventional materials, working closely with everyday found objects (rope, string, wire, etc.) and industrial materials such as latex, fibreglass and polyester resin.

Early on, she sensed the ephemeral nature and high toxicity of plastic, and said of the synthetic rubber she often used: "Rubber only lasts a short time... it's not going to last. I'm not sure what I really think about durability... Life doesn't last, art doesn't last."



*Eva Hesse in her Bowery Studio (reproduction), 1967*



*Fred Eversley polishing one of his sculptures, 1969-70*

**18 Fred Eversley polishing one of his sculptures, 1969**  
Water based ink on recyclable paper

Before becoming an artist in 1967, Fred Eversley - a graduate in electrical engineering - worked for Wyle Laboratories in California, building acoustic installations for NASA's Apollo and Gemini missions.

While his artistic practice developed in the 1960s and 1970s following a serious accident, his pioneering use of plastic, polyester resin, industrial dyes and pigments reflected the technological advances of the post-war period.

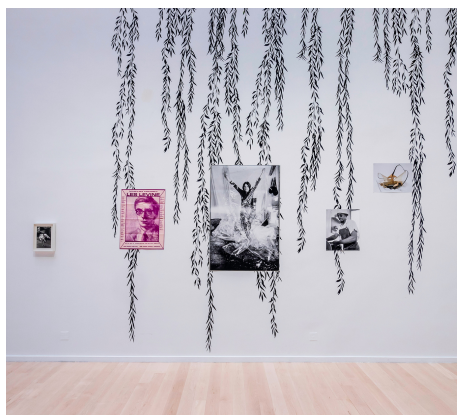
**19 Naum Gabo, Conservation Document of  
*Construction in Space: Two Cones*, 1936**

Water based ink on cotton rag paper / Courtesy of The Work of Naum Gabo, Nina & Graham Williams, Tate 2020

Born in Russia in 1890, Naum Gabo was a pioneering sculptor, designer, painter and printmaker who influenced many of the art movements of the 20th century. He initiated the development of Constructivism in Moscow, was at the heart of the debates on abstract art in Berlin and was one of the founders of the Abstraction-Création movement in Paris in 1931.

In 1936 he used cellulose nitrate and acetate to create his sculpture *Construction in Space: Two Cones*, making him one of the first artists to use plastic. At the time, this material was deeply associated with the idea of industrial innovation and the future.

Despite various attempts to restore the work at the Tate (London, UK), the preservation of *Construction in Space: Two Cones* is now compromised due to the volatile chemical properties of plastic, which cause the material to crumble.



Installation view of the exhibition "Plastic Heart".  
Credit photos: Vincent Royer, OpenUp Studio / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022

The advanced state of degradation of Naum Gabo's work is documented here by this photograph from the Tate's Conservation Department, reminding us of the need for conservators to better understand the degradation processes of plastics and rubber, industrial materials with a particularly unstable composition.

Naum Gabo, Document de conservation de *Construction in Space: Two Cones*, 1936





# UPSTAIRS, ON THE MEZZANINE FLOOR

CONTINUATION OF THE SURVEY ON THE GREAT LAKES • THE PLASTIC AT THE CROSSROADS OF ART, SCIENCE AND DESIGN • CONTEMPORARY VIEWS

## 20 Patricia Corcoran, *Alvin Shrunken Head*, 1995 Sharpie marker on expanded polystyrene mannequin

In the staircase leading upstairs to discover the rest of the exhibition on the mezzanine, a work is hidden in a corner.

Collected by volcanologist Wulf Mueller during a deep-sea dive along the Pacific Ocean ridge, this polystyrene mannequin head was given to Patricia Corcoran, Professor and Chair of the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Western Ontario. Selected by the Synthetic Collective and displayed here, it reveals the impressive and unexpected effects of intense water pressure on synthetic materials such as polystyrene.



Patricia Corcoran, *Alvin Shrunken Head*, 1995

## 21 22 Heather Davis et Kirsty Robertson, *Chemicals of Mutual Concern*, 2020 Inkjet on paper, derived from pollution

The Synthetic Collective's investigation of the shores of the Great Lakes continues on the gallery floor, where it unfolds along the mezzanine corridor with research by Heather Davis and Kirsty Robertson.

Printed with ink from pollution collected in the New York City underground system, small cardboard cards are pinned to the wall, listing treaties, legal agreements and public figures attempting to regulate the use of the Great Lakes: Anishinabek Nation Chief Water Commissioner Autumn Peltier speaking out about the lack of access to clean water for many First Nations communities, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation claiming title to parts of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, citizens of Toledo, Ohio, who are trying to obtain legal "personhood" in Lake Erie, the Women's Water Walk that takes place every spring along the Great Lakes to denounce chemical pollution of the water, the banning of plastic packaging on fruit and vegetables in France in 2022...



Heather Davis et Kirsty Robertson, *Chemicals of Mutual Concern*, 2020



Heather Davis et Kirsty Robertson, *Chemicals of Mutual Concern*, 2020



Kelly Wood, *Great Lakes: Accumulations*, 2020

On the same wall, the posters by Heather Davis and Kirsty Robertson are part of a series that demonstrates the extent of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes region, while drawing attention to the specific issue of plastic pollution in France.

- The first poster superimposes the map of the Great Lakes on the map of France, while pointing out that this region is home to 21% of the world's fresh water.
- The second poster provides a dizzying list of the chemicals used to produce plastic packaging in the Great Lakes region.
- The third poster provides a visual comparison of the value of the plastic industries (estimated at \$593 trillion) and the cost to society of plastic pollution (estimated at \$2.5 trillion).

**23 Kelly Wood, *Great Lakes: Accumulations*, 2020**  
Digital photographs, water based ink on cotton rag paper

Alternating with the posters, photographer Kelly Wood's *Great Lakes: Accumulations* series draws our attention to the accumulation of waste and plastic pollution in the Great Lakes, in collage images with a "shock" aesthetic.

**24 Pierre Huyghe, *Timekeeper*, 2002**  
Site specific wall installation (hole in the gallery wall showing layers of paint from previous exhibitions)

A wall installation created in-situ using the precise protocol devised by French artist Pierre Huyghe, *Timekeeper* delicately reveals the successive layers of paint hidden in the thickness of the wall. While the Canadian Cultural Centre only took possession of these premises in 2018, Pierre Huyghe's installation makes visible the passage of time while revealing the already significant number of layers of paint used, often made of acrylic latex-based polymers and resin binders.

Through this gesture, and in the context of this group exhibition, the work invites us to rethink our practices within cultural and museum institutions, to imagine more environmentally friendly modes of production.



Pierre Huyghe, *Timekeeper*, 2002



Joyce Wieland, *Home Art Totem*, 1966

**25 Joyce Wieland, *Home Art Totem*, 1966**  
Mixed media.

A Joyce Wieland was a self-described "cultural activist", particularly concerned with feminist issues and environmental struggles such as deforestation, water pollution, access to and exploitation of resources.

While integrating these social and political issues into the visual and artistic culture of the time, she used traditionally feminine techniques such as quilting: an assembly of several types of fabrics and quilted, sometimes embroidered, patchwork-like sewing techniques.

Here, *Home Art Totem* consists of small coloured plastic cushions sewn and stuffed with felt, photographs and documents collected by the artist... which take on the appearance of a totem dedicated to contemporary materials. The shiny plastic of the work has already suffered the passage of time, with its cracks and yellowing.

**26 Claes Oldenburg, *Tea Bag*, 1965**  
Colour screenprint, felt, plexiglas, rayon cord, laminated vacuum formed vinyl.

American pop art icon Claes Oldenburg is known for his enlargements of everyday objects, presented in the form of soft, monumental sculptures.

Made of two sheets of plastic moulded around a string and a piece of folded felt, *Tea Bag* takes the enlarged form of a dripping tea bag. Like the yellowing of Joyce Wieland's work, here too the plastic materials have degraded slightly and the colours have lost their brilliance under the effects of time.

In the context of the exhibition "Plastic Heart", this work also echoes a recent scientific article by researcher Laura M. Hernandez, which refers to the billions of micro- and nanoparticles present in tea bags, absorbed by the human body every day without their long-term effects on health being known.



Claes Oldenburg, *Tea Bag*, 1965





Françoise Sullivan, *Untitled*, 1968

**27 Françoise Sullivan, *Untitled*, 1968**  
Plexiglas.

Painter, dancer, sculptor and choreographer Françoise Sullivan is a unique and multifaceted Canadian artist whose practice is part of the "Automatist" movement: a group of dissident artists who emphasized expression, fluidity and intuition in post-war Quebec.

In the 1960s, Sullivan began working in Plexiglas, creating sculptures in a plastics factory where workers taught her how to shape the malleable material.

The series presented here is inspired by the movements of the body, which Sullivan also explores through dance and choreography. These minimal, translucent and colourful sculptures reflect the artist's fascination with the immense transformative capacities of plastic.



Françoise Sullivan, *Sans titre*, 1968

**28 Alain Resnais, *Le Chant du Styrene*, 1958**  
Digital version of the original film, 14mn, looped.

In 1958, the French director Alain Resnais directed the film *Le Chant du Styrene*, commissioned by the French industrial group Péchiney, a polystyrene manufacturer, which wanted a work in praise of plastic. The film opens with an image of a plastic bowl, and traces its creation back to the very origin of petroleum, with voice-over comments written in alexandrines by the poet Raymond Queneau.

Although plastic was still synonymous with progress at the time, some of the film's particularly sinister shots already underline the ambivalent nature of the material. Today, as we face the global effects of plastic pollution, it is possible to interpret this poetic and publicity survey as a first historical critique of this oil-based material.



Alain Resnais, *Le Chant du Styrene*, 1958



Alain Resnais, *Le Chant du Styrene*, 1958

**On the first floor, in the centre of the mezzanine, a number of plastic objects are displayed in glass cases, which may evoke the way in which scientific specimens are preserved and exhibited. These objects tell in their own way about different forms of exploration in art, science and design, around the possibilities of plastic.**

**29 General Idea, *Liquid Assets*, 1980**

Plexiglas, glass test tube in a printed clamshell box with label and die-cut foam inserts.

General Idea consists of artists Ronald Gabe, Slobodan Saia-Levy and Michael Tims, who all met in Toronto in 1969. Critiquing the art world and addressing social issues such as mass media, queer identity and the AIDS crisis, General Idea has developed an innovative practice over the past 25 years, through installations, videos, publications, drawings, paintings and sculptures.

Here in the window, "Liquid Assets" takes up the aesthetics of the dollar and functions as a Plexiglas cocktail glass holder in the shape of a test tube. This object comes from an installation conceived in 1980 by General Idea, "The Miss General Idea Pavilion Shop 1984", conceived as a place of sale that deliberately blurred the line between art and commerce.



General Idea, *Liquid Assets*, 1980

**30 Aarone deRoy Gruber, *Mini Cyclop-lexis*, 1969**

Vacuum formed Plexiglas and acrylic of various thickness laminated on an acrylic core.

***Component for a sculpture*, 1969**

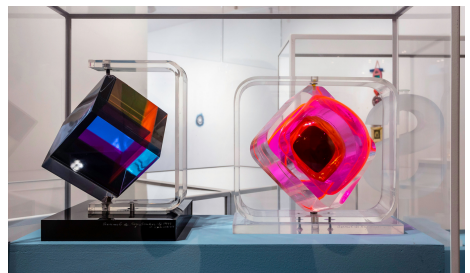
Tinted Plexiglas, acrylic, 13x13x10cm, molds and components for 2 1/2 bubbles and 1 1/4 bubbles, 4 objects

***Multiplex 4*, 1971**

Solid Acrylic (Lucite) 4x15x15cm, Acrylic samples, 5 objects, 10 x 10 x 10 cm, Solid Acrylic

An American painter and sculptor with a background in abstraction and constructivism, Aarone deRoy Gruber was one of the first artists to use Plexiglas and thermoplastic resins in the 1960s. She worked in a studio in the heart of the Engineered Products Inc. factory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: a company that made Plexiglas skylights, where she could use the moulding equipment to create a multitude of transparent, geometric and colourful sculptures.

Here, this collection of small objects, models and samples created by the artist provides an understanding of Aarone deRoy Gruber's research and creative process at the intersection of art, science and industrial design.



Aarone deRoy Gruber, *Mini Cyclop-lexis*, 1969



Aarone deRoy Gruber, *Component for a sculpture*, 1969 & *Multiplex 4*, 1971

### 31 *Plastinated hearts of a racoon and a mouse*

Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum

Plasticisation is a technique for preserving tissues and organs by replacing water and fat with plastic polymers. This process, developed in 1977 by the German anatomist Gunther von Hagens, became famous in the 1990s with the "Bodyworlds" exhibitions, which presented plasticised human and animal bodies. These exhibitions were highly controversial, both because of the process used, which interrupts the natural decomposition processes, and because of the question of the consent of those who gave their bodies to science.

Today, lamination is a widely accepted process for preserving specimens for scientific purposes: here, the hearts of a mouse and a raccoon are displayed in a glass case, reminding visitors that these laminated "objects" will surely outlive them.

### 32 *IUD Lippes Loop, 1957*

Polyethylene, barium sulfate

The "Lippes Loop" belongs to a generation of IUDs with original shapes, named after the gynaecologists who designed them: the Gräfenberg ring, the Margulies spiral, the Birnberg figure eight... Until the 1970s, when it was replaced by copper and took on the shape of a "T", plastic was the material used for intrauterine devices.

Here, the Lippes Loop IUD shown was inserted into a woman's body in 1957, where it was accidentally left in place for 40 years, until it was removed in 1997: a landmark in the history of contraception in North America.

### 33 *Tegan Moore, You are impossible, 2003*

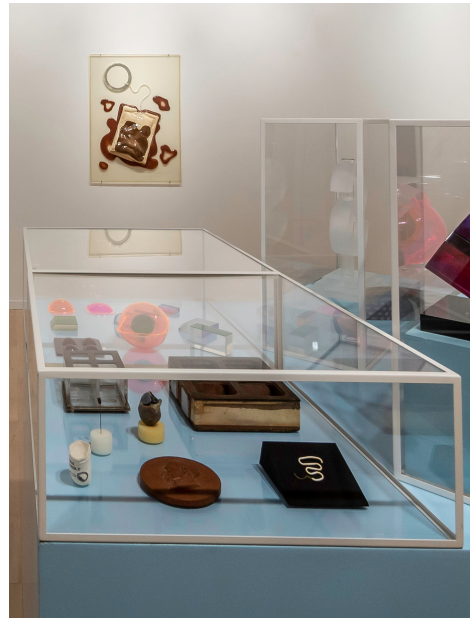
Sharpie marker on expanded polystyrene cup

Now a member of the Synthetic Collective, artist Tegan Moore has been exploring the limits of plastic since her teenage years. In 2003, she drew in marker on a disposable cup, which was then attached to a deep-sea sampling device. At a depth of 250 metres underwater, the changes in pressure deform the expanded polystyrene cup. Composed of 95% air, it was reduced to a fraction of its original size.

### 34 *Médailion de Saint Vincent de Paul*

Hardened wood

Produced between 1856 and 1920, "hardwood" is a thermosetting plastic made from a mixture of sawdust and blood from slaughterhouses. The Hardwood Society produced moulds for inkwells, plates, combs and decorative medallions, such as the one shown under glass with the effigy of St Vincent de Paul, the Roman Catholic patron saint of charities.



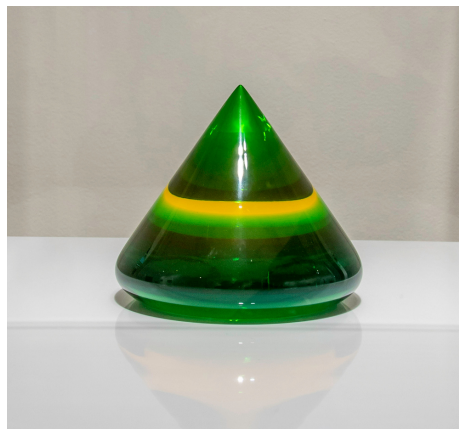


**35 Fred Eversley, *Untitled*, 1968**

Polyester resin

A former aerospace engineer who became a key figure in contemporary art in Los Angeles in the second half of the twentieth century, Fred Eversley developed a sculptural practice inspired by space mechanics and informed by the broad physical principles of light, space, time and gravity. Using centrifugal forces, he spins liquid polyester resin in moulds to create sculptures with a futuristic and spatial aesthetic. "Untitled" is one of Eversley's earliest sculptures, cast inside a plastic funnel that mimics the tip of the Apollo command module.

His abstract, three-dimensional works invite the viewer to come closer to better understand their subtle visual effects, playing with light and colour.



Fred Eversley, *Untitled*, 1968

**36 Iain BAXTER, *Landscape with Cloud*, 1965**

Thermoformed plastic sheet (cellulose acetate butyrate CAB)

Iain BAXTER is one of Canada's most influential conceptual artists.

*Landscape with Cloud* is part of an extensive series of landscapes created by the artist in the mid-1960s: landscapes sculpted in bas-reliefs, made of coloured thermoformed plastic.

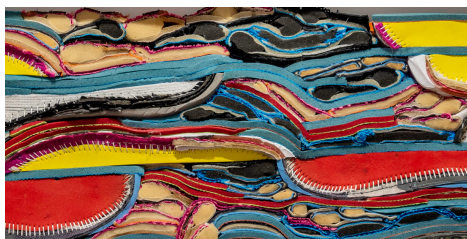
Through this series, Iain BAXTER reacted to the way in which plastic and industrial materials were beginning to systematically replace organic matter; and more generally, to the impact of humans on the natural world. By creating vacuum-formed plastic landscapes, the artist brings classical landscape painting into the modern, consumerist world.



Installation view "Plastic Heart"  
Credit photos: Vincent Royer, OpenUp Studio / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022



Iain BAXTER, *Landscape with Cloud*, 1965



Meghan Price, *New Balance 3*, 2017

**37 Meghan Price, *New Balance 3*, 2017**

Used athletic shoes (rubber, foam, cotton thread)

Meghan Price is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist. Her works - sculptures, prints, videos... - explore different ways of visualizing and experiencing the human relationship to the geological world.

"New Balance 6" is the latest in a series of works made by the artist from old sports shoes that have been collected, cut up and assembled on top of each other. The superimposition of textiles and coloured synthetic foams evokes a transverse view of the earth's crust, which is here composed of man-made materials: synthetic waste that seems to have penetrated the very composition of the soil, in a slow process of sedimentation.

**39 Meagan Musseau, *E'e for that Aunty magic of the Intergalactic L'nu Basket series*, 2019.**

Black ash wood, sweetgrass, plastic

Meagan Musseau is a visual artist of Mi'kmaq and French ancestry who is developing a practice that intersects new media with traditional art forms - such as beadwork and basketry - to explore notions of memory, language and relationship to the land, body and objects.

The "Intergalactic L'nu Baskets" series, from which this work is taken, combines the traditional practice of Mi'kmaq basketry with contemporary synthetic materials. Here, Meagan Musseau blends traditionally woven ash splinters, stems of sweetgrass - a plant native to the Northern Hemisphere - and bright orange ribbon.

For the artist, the addition of synthetic materials serves to highlight the difficulty for the Mi'kmaq people to access the natural resources of their ancestral lands, and to denounce the rapid environmental degradation that affects living things.



Lan Tuazon, *False Fruits*, 2020

**38 Lan Tuazon, *False Fruits*, 2020**

Found nested containers

Born in the Philippines and now living in Chicago, Lan Tuazon approaches waste like a scientist studying organic matter. Since 2015, the artist has been collecting hundreds of plastic containers, bottles and flasks, which she classifies and sorts by colour and size. She then cuts them lengthwise to make their "interiority" visible: once opened in half, she polishes their surface and interweaves them with each other.

With the series *False Fruits*, she presents on a shelf a set of coloured sculptures made according to the same process, which take the appearance of fruits and vegetables cut in half: pear, pineapple, lemon, banana, onion... Behind their playful aesthetics, these objects echo the recent scientific studies that have revealed the presence of plastic microparticles in our bodies, notably from the food packaging that contaminates what we eat and drink.



Meagan Musseau, *E'e for that Aunty magic of the Intergalactic L'nu Basket series*, 2019

# INFORMATION

This booklet has been conceived and edited by Lisa Eymet, from the texts provided by The Synthetic Collective. We thank the Synthetic Collective for authorizing the use of their texts.

## The Canadian Cultural Centre

At the heart of Canada's cultural diplomacy in France, the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris is dedicated to **promoting the most innovative contemporary Canadian creation in all artistic sectors.**

With a 160m<sup>2</sup> art gallery under a glass roof and a performance hall, **the Canadian Cultural Centre welcomes Canadian artists and performers throughout the year, through contemporary art exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, literary conversations, conferences and workshops for children.**

The Canadian Cultural Centre also **supports Canadian cultural programming throughout France**, accompanying Canadian and French institutions in their exchange and cooperation projects.

The Canadian Cultural Centre is also an active member of the **Forum des instituts culturels étrangers à Paris (FICEP)** supported by the **Ministry of Culture** since its creation in 2002.

## CONTACT

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## WHERE

*Centre Culturel Canadien*

130, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré – 75008 Paris

+33 1 44 43 21 90

[www.canada-culture.org](http://www.canada-culture.org)

## ACCESS

The Canadian Cultural Centre is accessible to people with limited mobility.

Metro: M9 (Saint Philippe-du-Roule ou Miromesnil) – M13 (Miromesnil)

Bus: 28 – 32 – 80 – 83 – 93

## OPENING HOURS

Free access from Monday to Friday, from 10am to 6pm. Last entrance at 5.40pm.

Installation view of the exhibition "Plastic Heart". Credit photos: Vincent Royer, OpenUp Studio / Canadian Cultural Centre, 2022

