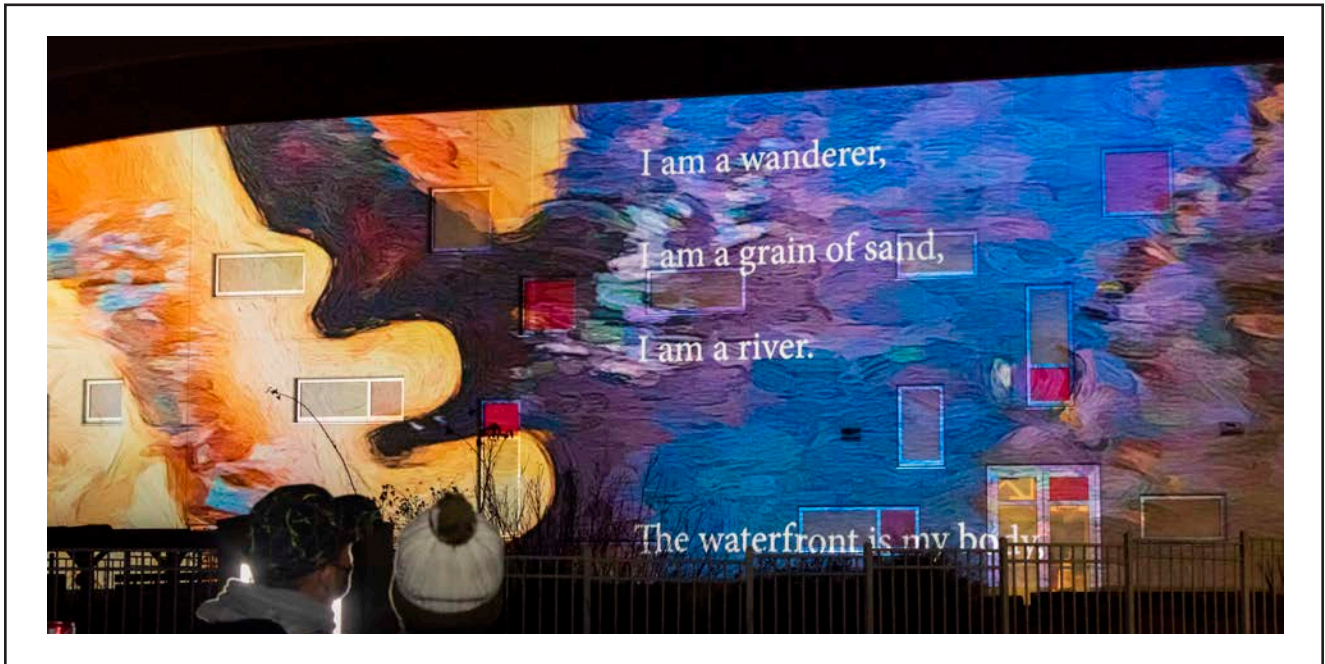


# SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

pr0phecy sun, Freya Zinovieff, Steve DiPaola & Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda

## BODY AS BORDER: TRACES AND FLOWS OF CONNECTION



### **A River with Many Branches: Sonic Ecologies in Deep Time**

BY SHALON T. WEBBER-HEFFERNAN

#### **Biographies**

**PROPHECY SUN**  
**FREYA ZINOVIEFF**  
**STEVE DIPAOLA**  
**GABRIELA ACEVES-SEPÚLVEDA**  
**SHALON T. WEBBER-HEFFERNAN**

pr0phecy sun, Freya Zinovieff, Steve DiPaola, Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda  
*Body as Border: Traces and Flows of Connection*, 2022

Single-channel audiovisual art installation

Image: Brian Giebelhaus

### *A River with Many Branches: Sonic Ecologies in Deep Time*

Shalon T. Webber-Heffernan

What is it that brings me here to stand like a rock in this river of sound?<sup>1</sup>

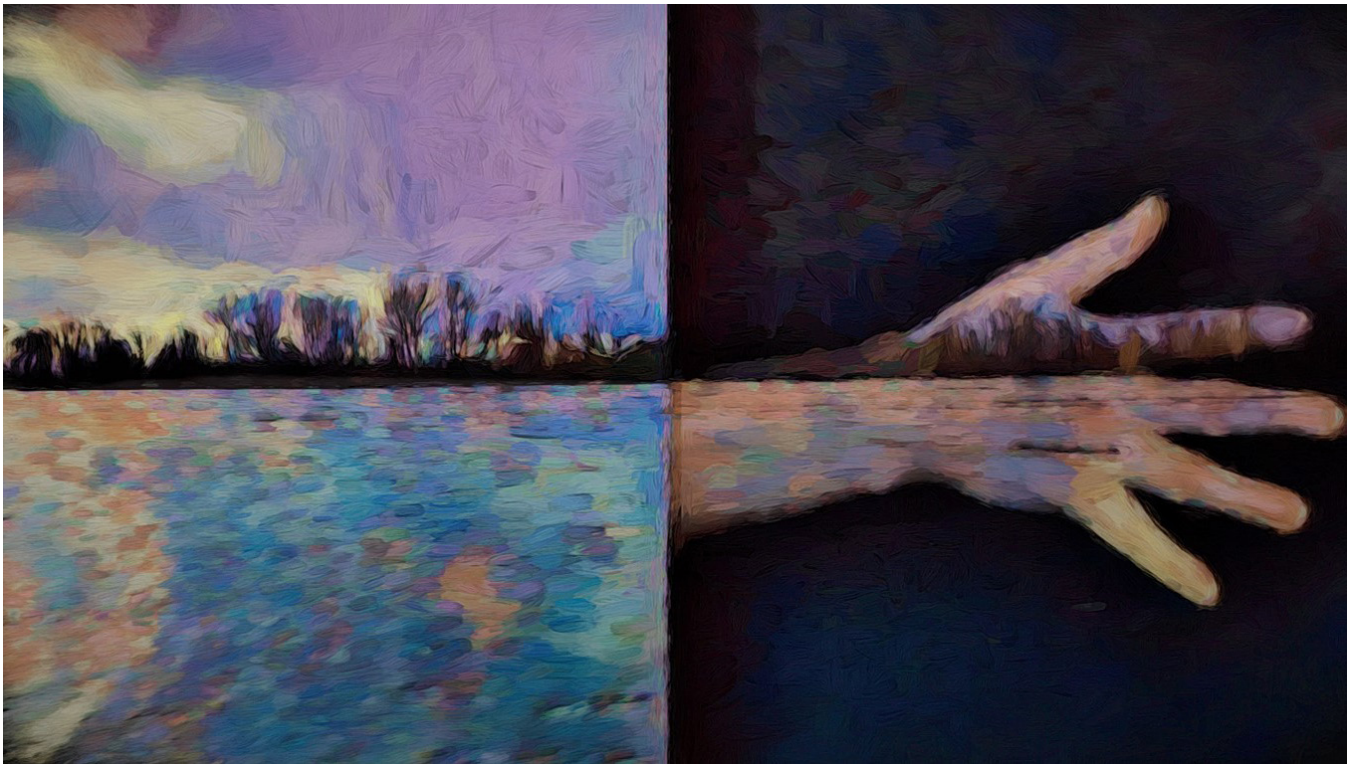
Robin Wall Kimmerer

When my daughter was a baby, we would lay her down on a mat by a window in our house and she would gaze in silent wonder at the strong bare branches of the black walnut tree in our backyard in winter. She seemed to have an almost mystical affinity for that tree. Like her, I too have stared in awe at the

branches of trees, fascinated and humbled by the striking resemblance between roots and boughs and the human nervous system, lungs, and brain carrying impulses and sensations—repeatedly surprised by how networks of neurons look remarkably like the natural environment. I am reminded of these mirrorings while experiencing Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda, Steve DiPaola, prOphecy sun, and Freya Zinovieff's collaboration *Body as Border: Traces and Flows of Connection*. The collaborators' diverse backgrounds as scholars, cognitive scientists, and visual artists coalesce here through video, sound, performance, and computational creativity. The large-scale, site-specific video projection and audio score create a potent and poetic matrix that unfolds in a 32-minute immersive experience.

By probing constellations between bodies, bacterial cultures, technology, and broader ecological and

aural landscapes surrounding the Fraser River, the project comes together as a composite. With its emphasis on invisible traces, such as those carried by way of a virus, *Body as Border* fits squarely within the contemporary biopolitical present of life in a global pandemic. It highlights the interrelationships between varying life forms that cannot always be seen or heard, revealing that invisibility far from denies their reality. This work can also be situated within feminist trajectories that explore the porous boundaries between humans and non-humans, artificial and natural entities, questioning how human forms flow over and bleed into digital realms. Expanding what constitutes the animate, the project pushes concepts of borders beyond physically demarcated and state-sanctioned dividing lines. It considers bodily borders as spaces of negotiation not necessarily reduced to geographic location,



prOphecy sun, Freya Zinovieff, Steve DiPaola, Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda, still from *Body as Border: Traces and Flows of Connection*, 2022, audiovisual art installation. Image courtesy of the artists.



Installation view of *Body as Border: Traces and Flows of Connection*, at Surrey UrbanScreen. Photo by Brian J. Johnson

illustrating how the vast scale of global politics and the tiniest of microbes play out in the borderlands of human and non-human bodies. Throughout, voices gently whisper provocations:

*What is the border of this body?*

*Human skin and river mud stretching beyond the horizon*

The SkyTrain's proximity to the screen is a compelling dimension of the experience. Crossing the Fraser River, the SkyTrain connects New Westminster with Surrey and is part of a complex transit system linking people in Vancouver's urban core with those in the surrounding region. The sound of the SkyTrain impacts the experience in situ, as the cacophony of

its motion whirring by temporarily mutes and muffles the audio for those present on location. At the same time, the images press upon folks who happen to be riding the train past the video at high speeds, like a dream, as they continue on to their destination.

*I am a traveller, a pilgrim, a wanderer*

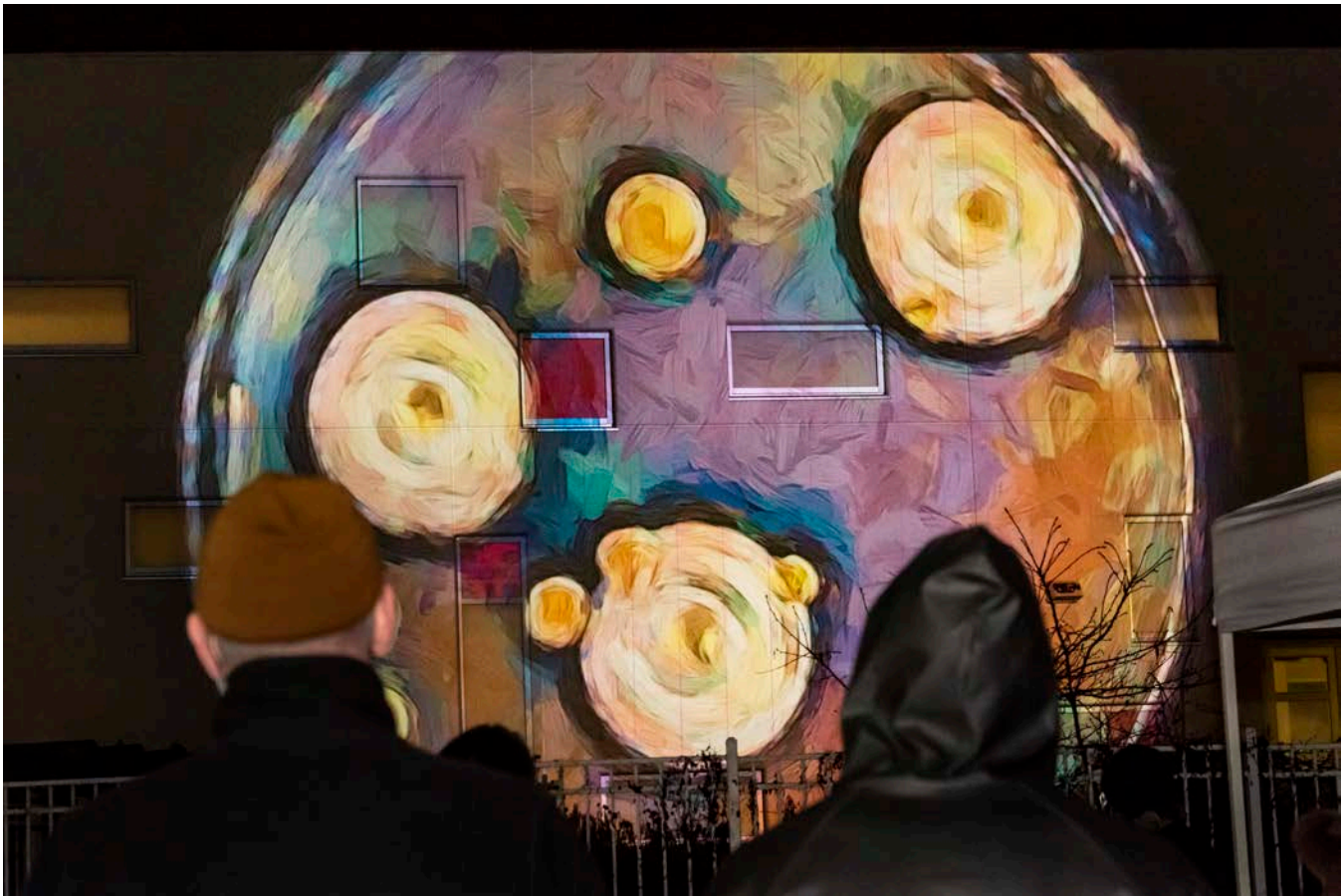
Together and individually, sometimes with children in tow, in rain, wind, or sunshine, the artists made multiple site visits around the Fraser River; specifically, Maquabeak Park and beneath the Port Mann and Alex Fraser bridges. To create the piece, they took photographs and collected video recordings, as well as sonic ecologies, voice, and text. The growth of bacterial cultures was also documented both

visually and acoustically, and sub-aquatic frequencies were made audible through the use of hydrophones. Contemplative editing strategies and composition evoke complex remembering across time, honouring the agency of the tributary and its constant flow of stories. The images and sounds sourced have been stretched and elongated, placing emphasis on the temporal nature of these long cellular transits, deep histories, spatial passages, returns, and pauses. An ASMR-like effect is produced by the audible crackle and trickle of water, soft hum of ghostly lullabies, feet crunching on ice, and what might be the knock of herring scratches or salmon cries. The audio-video outcome pays homage to ancient pathways and often unseen migratory thoroughfares of the more-than-human, such as the routes used

by nightly flights of crows or the murky underwater passageways of the white sturgeon. A kaleidoscope of rocks holds ancestral memories. Optical confusion ensues, blurring borders of perception: is this the world I'm looking at, or a pitri dish? Beakers holding growth and computer code spark questions. What is encoded in the body?

*I am a river with many branches  
Are my feet the clouds?*

The fertile kinship between land and bodies is prevalent throughout this creation, and a fecund and sticky stewardship is at play. Furthering the intricacies of this work, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools assist in the creation of painterly renderings, different levels of abstraction and styles generated by systems



Installation view of *Body as Border: Traces and Flows of Connection*, at Surrey UrbanScreen. Photo by Brian Giebelhaus.

that learn from existing digital images and texts. A dance between the computational and the biological incorporates improvised gestures of movement which act as seeds, feeding the AI technology. So while the work metaphorically and literally grapples with the bacterial, the viral, the cellular, and other living organisms, it also incorporates elements generated in a controlled AI environment.

*The waterfront is my body*

*I burrow in the earth*

*I am at the centre point of a delicate balance*

*Body as Border* makes an aqueous call for co-presence in a bodily now. It operates alongside other animals, lichens, mosses, bodies of water, minerals, and clouds, and reminds me of Donna Haraway's urging for the necessity of remaining in a "thick present" during global times of trouble and turbulence—an insistence that "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings"<sup>2</sup> It asks that we might become attuned to unseen symbiotic relationships and ephemeral infrastructures that connect and carry us through the vast interconnected networks of life.

#### Notes

1. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*. Penguin Books, 2021, 10.
2. Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press, 2016, 1.

### ***About the Artists***

prOphecy sun is an interdisciplinary performance artist and researcher based in Vancouver, BC. Her practice threads together choreographies, sound, and environment to create exploratory works that invoke deep body memory. Over the last ten years, she has been self-releasing music, choreography, compositions, and videos using smartphone technology. She has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally. She completed her PhD in 2021 at Simon Fraser University and holds a BFA and MFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She is currently a Jack and Doris Shadbolt Fellow in the Humanities at Simon Fraser University.

Freya Zinovieff underwent her MFA at University of New South Wales. She holds a first-class honors degree from Cambridge School of Art at Anglia Ruskin. Her research looks at how sound can mediate relationships to landscapes in the Anthropocene age. She is interested by the potential for digital audio technologies to reimagine the narratives of digital media, deep and cyclical conceptualizations of time, and how sonic art practices can explore human history and geo trauma. Freya has received multiple awards, including an Endeavour Scholarship and has exhibited her research across the globe in various formats, including writing, choral singing, and curating.

Steve DiPaola, working as a scientist and artist, uses computational models of creativity, cognition, and artificial intelligence to create generative and interactive art installations. He explores the uneasy interplay between what it means for humans to

perceive and emote in a modern computer era. DiPaola's art has been exhibited internationally at the A.I.R. and Tibor de Nagy galleries in NYC, Tenderpixel and LimeWharf galleries in London, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the MIT Museum, Cambridge University's King's Art Centre, and the Smithsonian. In 2021, he was elected to the College of New Scholars by the Royal Society of Canada.

Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda is a media artist and cultural historian with a research focus on feminist media art, aesthetics of interaction, and research-creation. She is the author of the award-winning book *Women Made Visible: Feminist Art and Media in post-1968 Mexico* (Nebraska Press, 2019). She produces video installations, sculptures, digital projects, print media, and live performances that investigate the body as a site of cultural, gendered, and techno-scientific inscriptions. She directs the Critical Media Art Studio at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology in Simon Fraser University and is a member of art/mamas, a Vancouver-based collective of artist mothers.

### ***About the Writer***

Shalon T. Webber-Heffernan is an independent curator, writer, and doctoral candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University. She is Educator-in-Residence at the Blackwood Gallery with the 2021–22 Curatorial Consortium where she created the Attunement Sessions, and recently curated an exhibition at Vtape. Shalon was Curator-in-Residence at the Curatorial Lab @ Sensorium (2019–20). Recent writing appears in *Comparative Media Arts Journal*, *Peripheral Review*, *Performance Matters*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, and *Canadian Theatre Review*.



#### About UrbanScreen

Imagined by artists and built by the City, Surrey's UrbanScreen is Canada's largest non-commercial outdoor urban screen dedicated to presenting digital and interactive art. UrbanScreen is an offsite venue of the Surrey Art Gallery and is located on the west wall of Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre in City Centre. The venue can be viewed from SkyTrain, between Gateway and Surrey Central stations. Exhibitions begin 30 minutes after sunset and end at midnight.

UrbanScreen was made possible by the City of Surrey Public Art Program, with support from the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Surrey Art Gallery Association, and the BC Arts Council Unique Opportunities Program, and is a legacy of the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad project CODE. Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council for its ongoing programming. UrbanScreen's 2015 equipment renewal was made possible by the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage / Government of Canada and the City of Surrey.

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