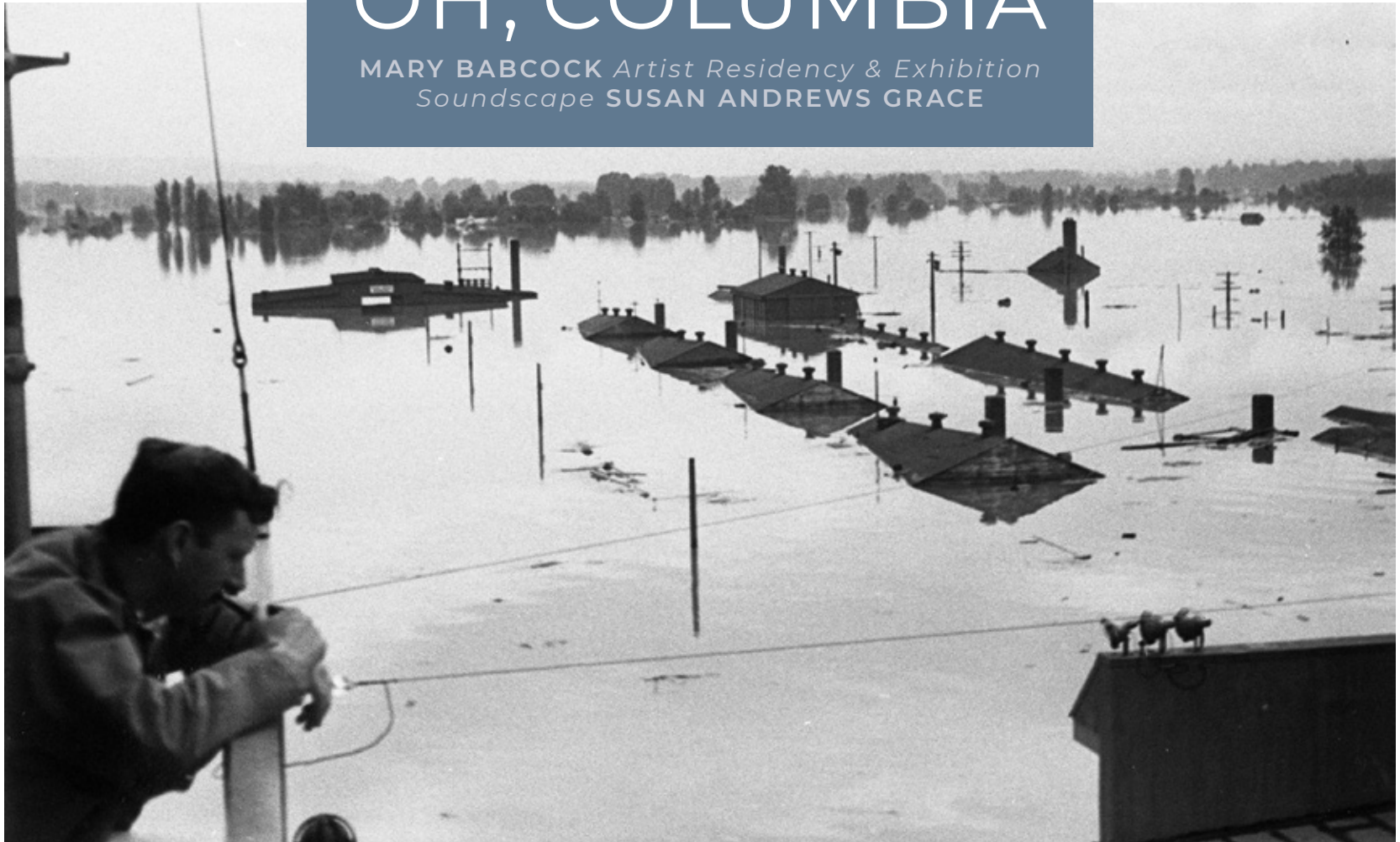


OH, COLUMBIA

MARY BABCOCK *Artist Residency & Exhibition*
Soundscape SUSAN ANDREWS GRACE



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Exhibition Essay

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OXYGEN ART CENTRE

Based in Nelson BC, Oxygen Art Centre is a rural artist-run centre that provides space and programming for artists and the public to engage in the creation, study, exhibition, and performance of contemporary art. Founded in 2002, Oxygen is an integral and long-standing cultural hub for artists of all disciplines. Oxygen's annual programming includes an Exhibition & Residency program and Education program, as well as events, presentations, readings, and workshops.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GRATITUDE

We acknowledge with gratitude that we are located on the unceded traditional territory of the sn̓saʔckstx, Sinixt Arrow Lakes, and the Yaqan Nukij Lower Kootenay Band peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of First Nations people on this land.

We are grateful for the financial support we receive from Canada Council for the Arts, BC Arts Council, BC Gaming, Province of BC, Government of Canada, Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance, Columbia Basin Trust, Osprey Community Foundation, Nelson Lions Club, and Nelson and District Credit Union.

We offer thanks to Elephant Mountain Literary Festival and other key partners including Hall Printing, Speedpro Signs, and Selkirk College for their support.

We especially thank all of our volunteers, donors, and members.

Special Thank You to Deborah Thompson, Carol Wallace, Randi Fjeldseth, and Shannon Murphy for your support on this project.

Cover image: Oregon Coast Guard – Historic photo of flooding of Columbia River at Vanport OR, 1948



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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Residency

December 7 – 21, 2019

Open Studio and Artist Talk with Mary Babcock

December 21, 2019

Exhibition

January 8 – February 1, 2020

Closing Reception and Artist Talk with Susan Andrews Grace

January 31, 2020

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Mary Babcock is a professor of Sculpture and Expanded Practices and Chair of Graduate Program in Studio Art in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Hawaii in Manoa. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona, BFA from University of Oregon, Ph.D in Psychology from University of Pennsylvania and a BA in Psychology from Cornell University. Her practice weaves together performance, textiles and mixed media into immersive installations. Babcock is interested in the intersection of art, contemplation and social activism. She holds the practice of mending as a central metaphor in her work. She has exhibited extensively in both solo and group shows around the world including France, England, Poland, Japan and Philippines. Her work is in public collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.

Susan Andrews Grace is a writer and visual artist. She holds a MFA in Creative Writing from University of Las Vegas and a BA in Philosophy from the University of Saskatchewan. She has published six books of poetry with her latest book, *Hypatia's Wake* due for release by Inanna Publications (York University) in the fall of 2020. Her poetry has been in several anthologies including *Rocksalt: An Anthology of Contemporary B.C. Poetry*. Her poetry has been published in literary magazines throughout Canada, U.S. and U.K. She regularly writes art reviews and catalogue essays for artists in the Kootenay region. She has taught in the Creative Writing Studio of Kootenay School of Arts and currently offers Creative Writing workshops at the Oxygen Art Centre where she is also one of the founding members. Her visual art practice includes textiles, mixed media, sculpture and installations. She has exhibited in solo and group shows regionally, nationally and internationally. Currently she is preparing for an upcoming solo exhibition at the Kootenay Gallery of Art. She has received several awards for both her writing and visual art including BC Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts and Columbia Kootenay Culture Alliance.

EXHIBITION STATEMENT

by Arin Fay

A landscape unfolds through the disarming domesticity of wax paper, and a map emerges mid-air. There is both a birds-eye-view and a boat on the sea vantage, amidst the resonance of voices and the running and rising of water. One is led from the pile of paper that we hear tearing in the corner to the linear lines of the non-continent on the floor of Mary Babcock's water-wound world, *Oh, Columbia* (2020).

The installation is tactile, intricate and auditory; a parchment epitome of place and space. There is a femal quality to the sheerness, the salt, the stitching and the sound poem that Susan Andrews Grace has created to attend, a symbiotic telling of a story that deserves another layer. Bernd Schulz writes of sound art as "an art form ... in which sound has become material within the context of an expanded concept of sculpture ... for the most part works that are space-shaping and space-claiming in nature" (Schulz 2002). Grace's accompaniment informs and augments without laying claim and lands on the installation like rain, punctuating its' parts.

The coast which circumnavigates the gallery puts the viewer in the water, as it were, immersed in the experience of what is being explored. Water connects all the vantages on view: Vanport, Oregon and Nelson, British Columbia via the Columbia River, and Greenland, through overt environmental ubiquity. 'Water is the First World' (Grace, 1991) and may be the last, the key that connects the coastal puzzle of Greenland to the confluence of events that flooded Vanport in 1948.

The cuts were to obliquely reference pixilation and the abstract process of mapping—like when you blow up a small image very large and the resolution breaks down. In doing so, I was playing with how completely incomplete my knowledge is of the landscape/waterscape/icescape—and that my own knowing is from abstractions (maps) created by someone else. I have no direct experience of this place. And interestingly, unlike many of the other maps I have of spaces where the coast meets the sea, the Greenland map I was working from simply dissolves at the borderline into whiteness—highlighting the limitations of what really happens at this boundary. Formally—I was interested in making a formal connection between the rectangular buildings in the suspended map and the mapping of Greenland (Babcock, 2020).

The topography of a place that does not exist is but one in a series of ironies that permeate the elements of the installation and haunt the majority of Babcock's work and her monochromatic 'wax paper musings.' The flooded town of Vanport, Oregon is recreated upon a substrate that is "resistant to changes in moisture" and sewn into existence like a quilt that brings no warmth. The children's voices intoning us to be calm, in a horror movie-esque whisper, are an unnerving echo. It is a beautiful abomination, a veil between worlds, and an alarm that unites the realms so inscribed.

There is something unsettling in the depiction of myriad events, and the connection between places, historical, environmental, and imminent. The politics of 'place' is part of the landscape, from "unusual meteorological events" to Jim Crow segregation. Leveling barriers until the levee breaks,

or is it the other way around? Water knows no bounds, and can quietly erode the foundation under our feet, just as it can forcefully obliterate the infrastructure and machinations of mankind. There is no Dutch boy with his finger in the dam element to what is being depicted within *Oh, Columbia* but we can hear the madman hammering away on the other side, heard through the garbled voice and overt obfuscation of Grace's sound poem. The artists unite in their complicit cause and effect pondering over rising tides and unstoppable forces and of men like Trump and Kaiser who ride such tides.

The creative cartography that Babcock employs reminds me of Agnes Martin's white on white on grey grids and squares, abstractions that represent very specific realities ('On a Clear Day,' 1973) but are most focused on the truth that such things represent or, as Martin has said, "My paintings are not about what is seen. They are about what is known forever in the mind" (A Matter-of-Fact Mystic, New Yorker, 2016). Babcock accomplishes both in representing knowable worlds but also the fragility, beauty and threat that define and erode them, echoed in the ocean surf and winding clock of Andrews Grace's sound poem. There is something medieval about the making of a map and charting not only the past but the present course of environmental, individual and evolutionary passage.

One of the most remarkable and mysterious technical advances in the history of the world is written on the hide of a 13th-century calf. Inked into the vellum is a chart of the Mediterranean so accurate that ships today could navigate with it ... with this map, it's as if some medieval mapmaker flew to the heavens and sketched what he saw — though in reality, he could never have traveled higher than a church tower. (Discover, Julie Rehmeyer, 2018)

Mary Babcock sketches what she sees from a variety of heights and with painstaking craft and unexpected materials. Her work both challenges and acquiesces to the constraints of space. Her previous installation 'Deluge' (2010; TheNightshed at Alderbrook Station, Astoria, OR) accomplishes this, as do artists such as Tomoko Shioyasu and her large-scale paper 'Vortex' (2011) tapestries, and the tangled red web of Chiharu Shiota's 'The Key in the Hand' (2015). Such installations transform space into a spectacle of seeing and knowing other worlds and events and feelings but with an edge of foreboding as they tend to challenge the predictable order of things.

What is most haunting about the siren song that is *Oh, Columbia* is not so much the disingenuous calm of the repeated warnings that time proved false but the deliberate building and layering and mending and caring for a world that the maker knows one day, will wash away...

THE RESIDENCY



Deborah Thompson (L) and Mary Babcock (R) during the residency, December 2019



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, installation in progress, December 2019



Carol Wallace (L) and Mary Babcock (R) installing "Vanport," December 2019



Mary Babcock, Deb Thompson, Carol Wallace installing "Vanport," December 2019



Mary Babcock, Deb Thompson, Carol Wallace installing "Vanport," December 2019



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, installation in progress, December 2019



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, installation in progress, December 2019



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, installation in progress, December 2019

THE EXHIBITION



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, detail, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Vanport," wax paper and thread, detail, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



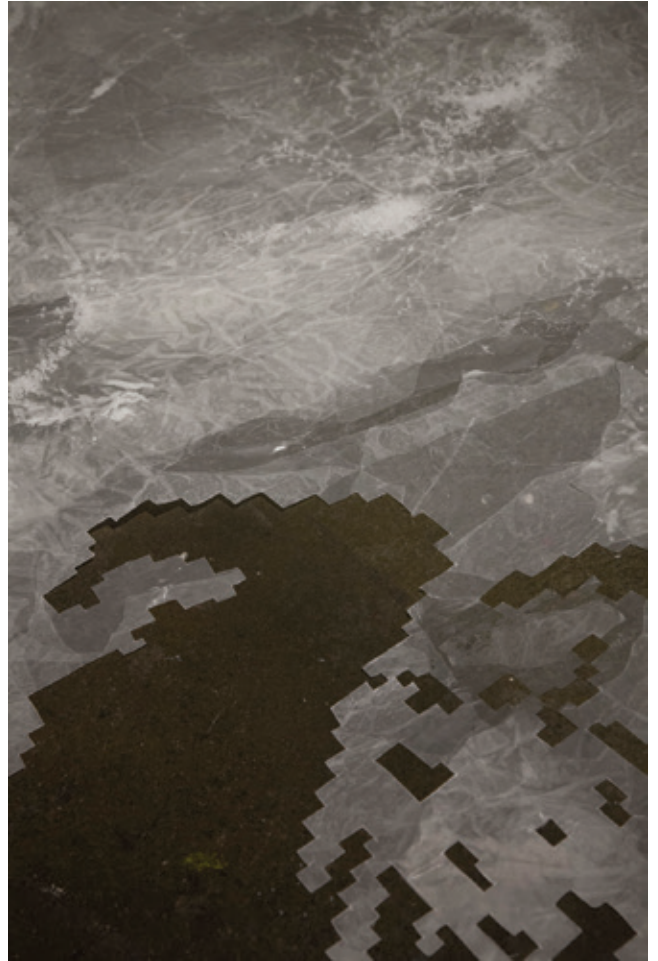
"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, January 2020



"Oh, Columbia" Exhibition, detail, January 2020



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