

**ABOVE
ABOVE
BELOW
BELOW**

Brian Lye

OXYGEN ART CENTRE

Exhibition Title

Above Above Below Below

Artist

Brian Lye

Dates

Residency

1 December 2020 – 30 January 2021

Exhibition

20 February – 20 March 2021

Exhibition Essay

Julia Prudhomme

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Brian Lye, still image from *Quartz Crystal on Loop*
(\$32+tax from local crystal shop), 16mm film scan, 2021

Back Cover

Brian Lye, still image from *Keyword Poems*,
16m film scan, 2021

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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

Oxygen Art Centre acknowledges with gratitude that we are located on the tum xula7xw / traditional territory of the sn'ayckstx / the Sinixt People. As uninvited guests we honour their ongoing presence on this land. We recognize that the Sinixt Arrow Lakes, Sylix, and Yaqaan Nukij Lower Kootenay Band peoples are also connected with this land, as are Métis and many diverse Indigenous persons.

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, Vancouver Foundation, Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance, Columbia Basin Trust, United Way, 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.



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GREETINGS

Dear Visitor,

Thank you very much for coming to see ABOVE
ABOVE BELOW BELOW.

This exhibition is taking place on the traditional territory/təmx^wula?x^w of the Sinixt People. I honour their ongoing presence on this land and feel privileged and grateful to be here.

This exhibition is informed by a continual process of conversation based research into crystals found in this region. I would like to thank all of the folks who generously sat down to speak with me about crystals. These conversations introduced me to new people, new ideas, and new considerations.

I did not expect my inquiry question of "what is a crystal?" to lead me in as many directions as it did. It has been rich and engaging to think about deep time, telepathy, animism, healing, language, and chakras. I have further deliberated mining, manufacturing, and mass consumption. I have pondered parenting choices, cognitive development, and colour frequencies.

For me, crystals are a gateway. They led me into an arena of infinite subject matter and reflection.

"Give a crystal to a kid."

Thank you again for coming,

Brian

REELS

Reel #1

1. Keyword Poems
2. It Came From Below – Exterior
3. Feeling for Colour Vibration
4. It Came From Below – Interior
5. Give a Crystal to a Kid
6. These Rocks Are 160 Million Years Old
7. Mountain Tops and Clouds
8. Running Water and Vegetation 1
9. Running Water and Vegetation 2

Reel #2

1. Throw the Brick, Watch it Land, Close Your Eyes,
Find the Brick
2. Baby Ruthie What Do You See?
3. Rock Freestyle 3378
4. Crystal Structure
5. Context – This Film Is Made On Traditional
Sinixt Territory
6. Crystal Healing
7. Quartz Minus Oxygen Equals Apple

Looping Projector

ROYGBIV Quartz

EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Oxygen Art Centre welcomed Brian Lye as Artist-in-Residence throughout December and January where he created works for the exhibition ABOVE ABOVE BELOW BELOW.

Lye's current body of work begins with crystals. Having conducted research for an experimental documentary on crystalline minerals across scientific, mining, and healing fields, Lye investigates the human and natural relation to crystals through discussion-based research. Interviewing experts on crystals from the region forms the foundational material for Lye's experiments in 16mm analogue film.

Fascinated by the semiprecious stones and their capacity for transmission, amplification, and new age applications, Lye draws upon his background in filmmaking and installation to create an immersive body of work on view in the exhibition, ABOVE ABOVE BELOW BELOW.

During his residency Lye experimented with traditional 16mm film titling techniques, growing crystals, developing film, and creating a series of projector installations. The title nods to the connection that materials we engage with everyday are derived from the earth, below, brought above for use, enjoyment, consumption.

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Twelve seasons of the witch: Notes on an exhibition

JULIA PRUDHOMME

To be sure, the crystals still give the world form, breaking up, being reduced to almost imperceptible fragments rolled by the waves, encrusted with all the elements dissolved in the sea which kneads them together again in steep cliffs, in sandstone reefs, a hundred times dissolved and recomposed, in schists, slates, marbles of glabrous whiteness, simulacra of what they once could have been and now can never be.¹

One.

The jester is the clown is the sad clown happy clown who enters the room making a scene, which causes discomfort among the crowd. The jester clown needs this performance. He needs this mask, this room, this set of rules, this distance to see. We see ourselves in the jester clown. We too sit among the straw and animals waiting for the rain to pass as Andrei Rublev dreams circular Byzantine dreams unknowing that the jester clown has already been taken away by a group of soldiers.² Or, was it Daniil who was asleep? Swimming in the river? Above above below below.



It Came From Below – Interior

Two.

‘Everything comes from crystal,’ I say, ‘even the music we’re hearing.’ But I know full well that the transistor’s crystal is imperfect, flawed, veined with impurities, with rents in the warp of the atoms.³

And every story a memory of an event in the history of the universe. This is how Italo Calvino’s *Cosmicomics* (1969/2002) is composed. Calvino takes inspiration from scientific “facts”—facts that at one time or another were considered true only to be evolved or debunked by further research.

¹ Italo Calvino, “Crystals,” *Cosmicomics*, pp.188-189 (1969/2002)

² *Andrei Rublev*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (1966)

³ Italo Calvino, “Crystals,” *Cosmicomics*, pp.188 (1969/2002)

And each story is narrated by *Qfwfq* who traverses the planet Earth through material, fantastical, and ultimately very human explorations of desire in relation to the ever-changing universe.

In particular, Calvino's story "Crystals" is a love story. Taking place across two seemingly divorced time periods—modern time and sometime in the early millennia before the Earth's crust forms—*Qfwfq* articulates a tension between his modern commute to work in what feels like a kaleidoscopic journey among crystalline glass structures erected across the landscape of downtown Manhattan and his memories wandering the early landscapes with *Vug* when crystals were still exposed.

Vug, *Qfwfq*'s partner from the before-times, is riveted by the imperfect structural compositions of crystals, whereas *Qfwfq* is compelled by the perfect and symmetrical structure of crystals. This philosophical opposition ultimately ends their relationship, and maybe also their connection to this expansive sharply angled landscape.

The tension is made manifest in *Qfwfq*'s inability to accept beauty in the uniqueness

of the imperfect crystal structure resulting in a repetitive, seemingly "perfect" modern life characteristic of post-war capitalist America. And so, this story is actually about longing rather than love. Longing for the tools to imagine ways out of this structure that privileges the perfect, the repetitive; removed from the land in both concept and material.

Human-nature experiences in this late stage of capitalism are often characterized as a return—a physical motion of turning around or turning backwards. Returns are also about dissatisfaction. To return an item implies a realization of no longer needing or wanting, or even, desiring something else. Throughout the pandemic dissatisfaction with the Western world's continued obsession with capitalism has become foregrounded alongside collective, immeasurable grief. Ever widening social inequities, structural violence and racism, and environmental catastrophe are written in deep scars across this landscape that we call civilization. Like *Qfwfq* we continue to reproduce such violent structures to a point where looking backwards feels nostalgic and looking forwards seems impossible.



Running Water and Vegetation 1

Three.

Black out. Black. OUT. The small dark enclosure startles our senses causing us to stop in place. As our eyeballs condition to the darkness, we notice the subtle glow of an orb next to us diffusing the shock. In fact the orb is not an orb at all but rather a salt lamp. Is it salty? This thought alone initiates the tongue to salivate. A kill spot or a nest? The generic cord connecting the crystalline pink to the wall extinguishes a bit of the allure. Aha! Electricity! But perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps this cord connects the crystal to something bigger—the Columbia River; the dam; the melting Kokanee glacier tops in springtime; the feeling of rain, again.

Four.

Piles of discarded devices in landfills, with somewhere among them a koosh ball still flickering, trying to transmit—do you copy, do you copy, do you read, do you read. 'I copy,' she said to the vibrating air, 'I copy, I copy, I read.'"⁴

ken burns effect vertigo apple computer default background landscape spinning beachball of death....

Five.

A mechanized looping device rotates the 16mm filmstrip into infinity. The device itself holds a warm glow from the projector-lamp alongside a strategically placed headlamp. We see each and every tiny frame of the stop motion animation.

The projection itself creates an infinity loop featuring spinning crystals as the star. Each crystal is meticulously centered in the frame rotating in a circular motion, each washed in a rotating ROYGBIV.

A continuous repetitive circle created by each crystal transfixes the viewer. Each shifting colour adds to the effect. Each colour aligns a chakra, embracing a formal



Mountain Tops and Clouds

but also nouveaux sensibility procuring a hallucinatory experience between desire and energy transference.

Six.

The artist converts the storage into a dark-room. And, the gallery into a screening-room, like a cave or growroom.

Through the film developing process he explores natural developing processes playing with combinations of liquids and solvents and enzymes.

A delay occurs between the moments when the artist records the film, develops the film, and projects the film. Sometimes the film is sent away only to be returned

again in a new state. By working within a set of predetermined variables, chance is held for a moment within each frame.

Seven.

*Zoom in: we're composed of trillions of tiny creatures. Zoom out: we're part of vast climatic, chemical, technical, biospheric ecosystems. By questioning the historical specificity of the category Humanity, one can better acknowledge its limitations: it has always been composed of hierarchies and categories both internal and external to the concept, which have failed humans and nonhumans alike.*⁵

3. Three salt lamp nightlights create a perimeter around the gallery. They are made in Pakistan, obtained from Hipper-son's Home Hardware in Nelson.

Eight.

A person stands in a vast snowy landscape. They lift an arm in the air, holding a brick. Perpendicular to the screen they throw the brick to the other side of the frame. The brick lands on the ground. Waiting a moment to see where it lands the person walks a straight line to the spot. Having reached the location of the brick the person

⁴ Patricia Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, pp.205 (2021)

⁵ Elvia Wilk, "All Systems Go," *ARTFORUM* (7 January 2021)

bends down to pick it up. The brick has now returned to the grip of the person's hand and within seconds is swiftly raised into the air again only to be thrown back to the other side of the frame.

The arc of the brick repeats with the body walking back and forth behind it creating their own horizon line. Bound by a set of rules, both person and brick, and now the icy landscape, we enter into a choreographed dance. We keep watching wondering if the reel or the movements might reveal an anomaly or render the repetition inert. Person and brick continue their routine over and over and over into infinity.

Nine.

On sound stock film a super high contrast black and white montage of rocks flicker into frame. Their negative form enhanced by the white glare of the sun; the surrounding foliage dark as seaweed in the Pacific.

Remnants of post-glacial mountain ranges; rubble, found in low, lichen-dabbled enclaves mimicking wild tombstones/ tombstones for the wild.



Throw the Brick, Watch it Land, Close Your Eyes, Find the Brick

Ten.

Ice begins to melt into water. A river gushes; a hammer shatters.

On top of a gingham laid grid the jester clown's gloved hand enters frame, turns and leaves, proposing a series of synchronized movements performed by fruits and vegetables and cheese.

A large carrot enters frame in an orderly manner only to be smashed by a hammer magically transforming it into many smaller, baby carrots.

Back and forth the food grow and minimize, in and out, back and forth.



Crystal Structure

Eleven.

Crystals are *the bones of the earth*.⁶

Reel #1 crystal healing ritual. A body is prostrate, horizontal, while a hand directs and moves crystals over corresponding chakras. Shifting from colour to black and white, the film brings focus to first breath, then the body, and finally an immense metaphysical shaking occurs as the figure releases energy from the red chakra. Energy stuck in the body.

Each crystal recharges on a geometric cloth.

The film ends with a blown-out sky.

⁶ CAConrad, *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (2014)

The reel ends. The projector keeps rotating. The projectionist stops the reel and turns off the lamp.

Twelve.

*Honey, don't get too close to the tv
Put your mask on and watch, watch the
magic pumpkin.⁷*

How was a Stonehenge rune extracted and installed in the factory basement of Silver Shamrock Novelties? In an attempt to harness the pagan ritual powers of the earthwork Conal Cochran mines the rune to create microchips that are installed in each Halloween mask. Harnessing the astro-astounding energy of Stonehenge the mask's wearer succumbs to brain damage when watching a Silver Shamrock Novelties commercial as Carpenter's synth soundscape loops us back and forth.

Cockroaches and snakes.



Crystal Healing

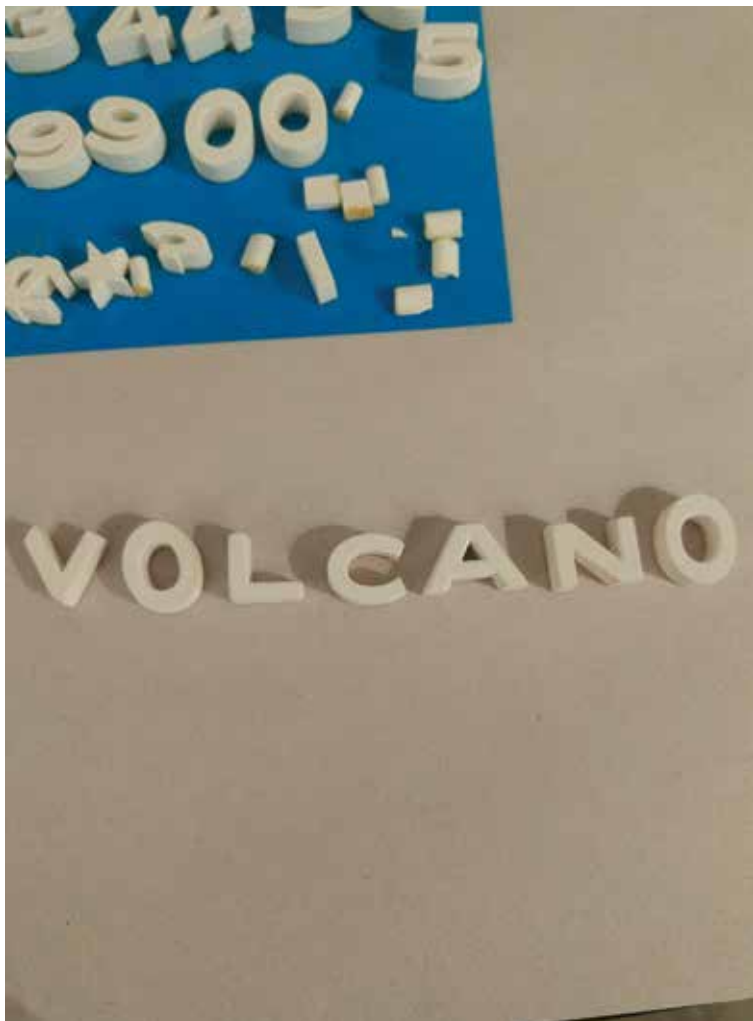
⁷ *Halloween 3: Season of the Witch*, dir. Tommy Lee Wallace (1982)



Brain Lye, Residency documentation, December 2020 – January 2021. Photos by Brian Lye.



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Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, Room 1, Exhibition installation, 2021. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, Room 1, Exhibition installation, 2021. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Baby Ruthie What Do You See?* Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Context – This Film Is Made On Traditional Sinixt Territory*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Crystal Healing*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Rock Freestyle 3378*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *It Came From Below – Interior*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Crystal Structure*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, *Above Above Below Below*, still image from *Give a Crystal to a Kid*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



Brian Lye, Above Above Below Below, still image from *These Rocks are 160 Million Years Old*. Photos by Thomas Nowaczynski.



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Brian Lye is a filmmaker, artist and educator living as an uninvited guest on the Traditional Territory of the Sinixt people. His lens-based works are preoccupied with magic, humour, and the everyday. He holds a BA in Film Studies and Japanese Studies from the University of Victoria, a Diploma in Screen Production from Sydney Film School, was a guest student at The Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, and recently completed a Master of Fine Arts degree in visual art from The University of British Columbia. His films and animations have won awards and screened internationally at venues such as Sundance Film Festival, Melbourne International Film Festival, The Contemporary Culture Centre of Barcelona, and LIVE! Vancouver's performance art biennale. He has been an artist in residence with the Klondike Institute for Art and Culture and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation.

Brian would like to extend his gratitude to Shelly Boyd, Aeja Goldsmith, Brad Gretchev, Sequoia Love, Angele Ortega, Carol Wallace, Akka, Ocean, and Kessler for sharing their knowledge and experiences with him. He would also like to thank Julia Prudhomme, Genevieve Robertson, the Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance, Zoe, Shiloh and Ruth for their generous support and encouragement throughout the process.

www.brianlye.com

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