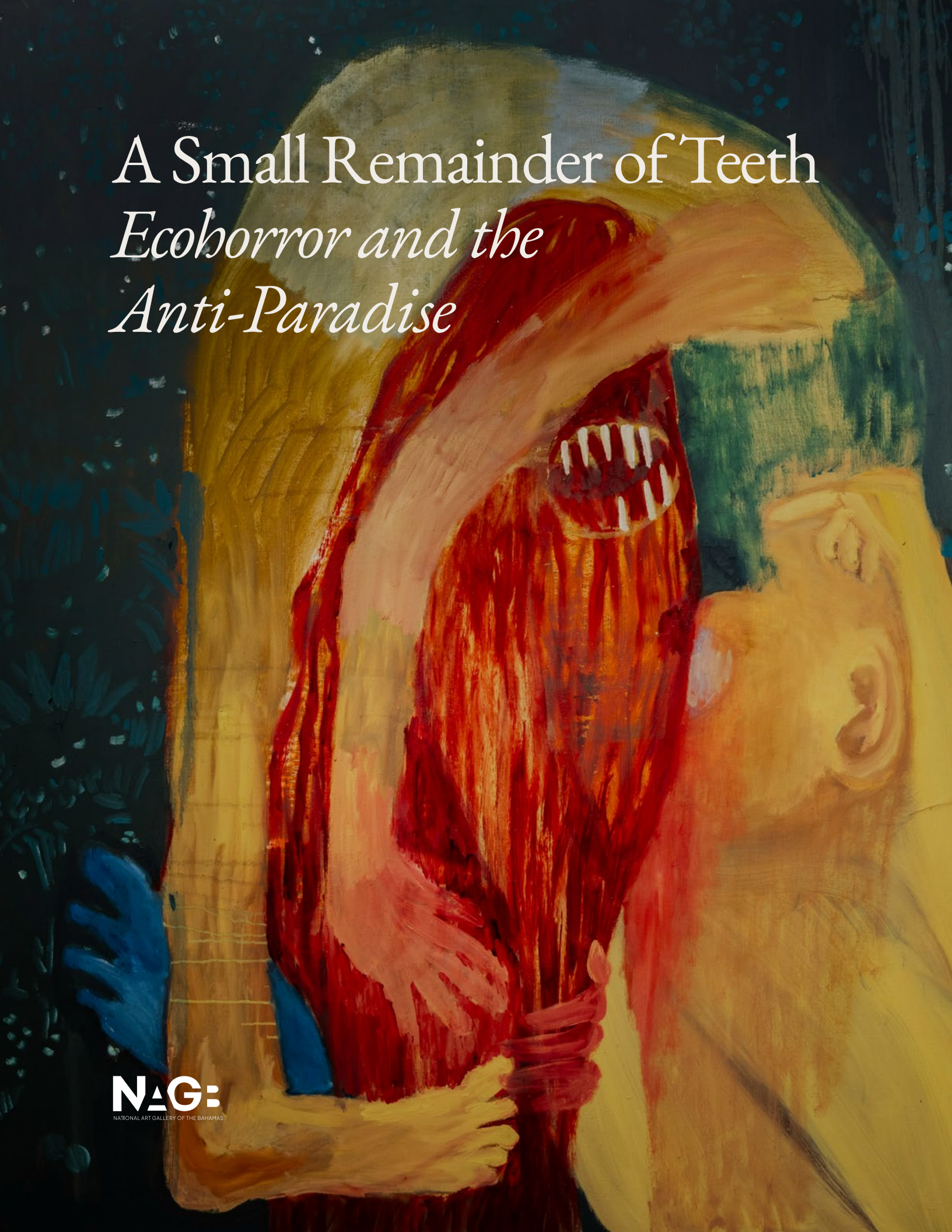

A Small Remainder of Teeth
Ecohorror and the Anti-Paradise

NAG:
NATIONAL ART GALLERY OF THE BAHAMAS

A Small Remainder of Teeth
Ecohorror and the Anti-Paradise

19 September 2024 – 17 February 2025

Artists

John Beadle, Blake Belcher, Stan Burnside, John Cox, Michael Edwards, Sonia Farmer, Dwight Ferguson, Kendal Hanna, Jordanna Kelly, Toby Lunn, Lavar Munroe, Holly Parotti, Matthew Rahming, Heino Schmid, Allan Wallace

Curator

Letitia Pratt, Associate Curator

Cover

Tessa Whitehead, *Mine*, 2018

Opposite

Sonia Farmer, *A True and Exact History*, 2018 (detail)

NAG:
NATIONAL ART GALLERY OF THE BAHAMAS

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Foreword

Richardo Barrett

I have always been fascinated by the environment, and this fascination only grew as I learned more about fine art. Like many of my peers, I was drawn to picturesque Bahamian landscapes, but I couldn't help but think they gave a false sense of beauty and did not truly represent the landscape I encounter in my everyday life. These works often feature flawless flowers in bloom all at once and serene, still trees with sunlight striking at just the perfect angle. The more paintings like these I saw, the more I noticed the emphasis on an "ordered" and clean nature as the pinnacle of beauty. It became engrained in my psyche. Perhaps this emphasis on beauty and perfection is a way to eschew the perceived "ugly" sides of nature—but what about the chaos, the rot, and the decay? The Bahamas is no stranger to the ravages and destruction of hurricanes. The broken, unkempt, and untamed land is just as fascinating, and more importantly, real.

A Small Remainder of Teeth spans three generations of artists who speak to this other side of Caribbean image-making. This cross-section is an indication of the generational impact the environment has on local communities as the region faces the horror of our current climate crisis. This reality is in direct opposition to the picturesque and is the central subject matter of the works featured in this showing.

The works in the exhibition focus on the sides of nature that are often discarded and considered undesirable, and lay bare the unwelcome side of our tropical paradise. For artists who create in this space, this is the stark truth: there is no sunshine without the rain. This show argues that the grotesque can be just as compelling a subject, waiting to be depicted with the same level of intention. My hope is that the work presented here encourages future generations of Bahamian artists to challenge the standards of paradise and the picturesque, embracing the multidimensionality of Bahamian life.

"*A Small Remainder of Teeth* [...] presents landscapes that are dark, unwelcoming, and disturbed, reflecting the unsettled fears around nationhood and histories of environmental subjugation."

Letitia Pratt

A Small Remainder of Teeth: Ecohorror and the Anti-Paradise

Letitia Pratt

In 1877, Sir William Robinson, then Governor of The Bahamas, commissioned Jacob Frank Coonley to take photographs of the island landscape for tourism advertising. This came shortly after a recent boom in visitors to the colony; the end of the American Civil War in 1873 saw up to 500 travellers to the islands annually. To capitalise on this momentum, Robinson's commissioning of Coonley was meant to advertise the islands as a safe, tropical escape—especially during winter—as the temperate climate was unchanging for most of the year. Dr Krista Thompson writes extensively on the photography produced by Coonley, along with other commissioned photographers such as James Osborne "Doc" Sands and William Henry Jackson. As such, the National Collection holds a wide array of pre-independence photography—from the expansive landscapes overlooking lush tropical trees to street scenes in Over-the-Hill, Nassau. As argued by Dr Thompson, these photographs served as a precursor to the tourism photography of the 1950s, from which photographers like Roland Rose and Doc Sands built their photographic language—scenes of untroubled, quiet towns and aerial shots of empty beaches still prevail within Bahamian tourism marketing to this day. A good example of this is the Coonley-attributed photo *Along the Shore, East of Nassau* (fig. 1), with its wide, open landscape and quiet mood; warm, bright light emanates the scene, and the road at its centre is wide and seemingly endless, waiting for the traveller to explore. In the distance, we see the promise of a horizon and a sea full of sloops. The aim of this photo is clear: to build the myth of a landscape that is friendly, tame, and open to traverse.

Fig. 1 Jacob Frank Coonley
Along the Shore, East of Nassau,
c. 1889
Albumen print
6 ⅝ in. x 8 ¼ in.
National Collection, NAGB

The aesthetics of Caribbeanness have long been negotiated throughout art history, with poets and

thinkers like Édouard Glissant discussing the power of the Caribbean imagination as a tool to upend long-standing mythos of coloniality. For The Bahamas, the tourism ad is the pinnacle of this tradition, as its very essence constructs an idea of the islands as literal paradise: a haven birthed from the imaginations of the traveller, devoid of the true histories and complicated ecological realities of the landscapes they inhabit. There is a long history of travel-artists using the motifs that are common in Coonley's photos, as Holly Byone outlines in *Traversing the Picturesque: For Sentimental Value*: "The Bahamas served the senses as inspiration, invoking nostalgia, sentimentality and even romance to many – but especially to painters, explorers, inventors, ethnographers, military personnel, cartographers and writers who came to study the sense of adventure and the exotic along with expansion in the New World." [1]

Fig. 2 Sonia Farmer
A True and Exact History, 2018

These perspectives have largely influenced how the local Bahamian have come to see themselves in relation to the environment around them. *A Small Remainder of Teeth* is an exhibition that challenges these aesthetic traditions and unearths the perspectives of locals who contend with the ecological realities of a contemporary Bahamas. It presents landscapes that are dark, unwelcoming, and disturbed, reflecting the unsettled fears around nationhood and histories of environmental subjugation. Framed through the conceptual lens of ecohorror, the show is a direct response to notions of the picturesque. It is an exhibition that embraces the grotesque.

The exhibition is partially inspired by Sonia Farmer's hand-pressed artist book, *A True and Exact History* (fig. 2), which holds an erasure poem of Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of The Island of Barbados* (1657). [2] The title of the show is spoken by

character FOUR: the island citizen, who laments over the embedded anger that the land holds:

> **FOUR:**
> **yet spring**
> **is not to be endured without spoyl**
> **these roots have a small**
> **remainder of teeth**
>
> **ONE, TWO, THREE & FOUR:**
> **feed upon**
> **the soil of this place** [3]

Fig. 3 Tessa Whitehead
Mop Monsters Thrice, 2019

While most of the speakers in Farmer's narrative are human – apart from speakers NINE, TEN, and ELEVEN, whose voices are of the islands and the nation— the speakers always reference the uncanny nature of being and living in an environment that is (re)negotiating methods of survival under imperialism. The poems result in a landscape personified, conjuring feelings of unease with violent, gnashing imagery. "To feed upon the soil" or "roots-teeth" are among many unsettling images within the text that reflect this embedded anger and transpose the capitalistic deterioration of the landscape upon the environment itself. The land is hungry. It wants to feed.

Farmer's use of erasure results in a text that problematises Ligon's writings, as tension emerges between the original phrasing and the clever interplay she creates. It is a playful way to abstract language and create new meanings that critique the original intentions of the author. In the case of *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, Richard Ligon's intention was to provide a "part guidebook, part candid travelogue, part serious natural history, and another part business manual" [4] to read-

[1] Holly Bynoe, *Traversing the Picturesque: For Sentimental Value* (Nassau: National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, 2019), https://hollybynoe.com/writing-blog/traversing-the-picturesque.

[2] Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London: Humphrey Mosely, 1657).

[3] Sonia Farmer, *A True and Exact History* (Poinciana Paper Press, 2018), 9.

ers, as he outlined managing a plantation during his life on the island. His depiction of the environment is rife with the colonial myth of the tropics and is not dissimilar to the travel-artists Bynoe outlines in *Traversing the Picturesque*. In fact, this literary tradition predates the colonial photograph and was one of the chief influences on the image-making of the new world. Cristopher Columbus's writings upon his arrival in Guanahani heralded this tradition and was the first instance of a traveller mythologising the landscape for colonial consumption. His writings thus became the blueprint for paradisical mythmaking. "All these islands are very beautiful and distinguished by a diversity of scenery; they are filled with a great variety of trees of immense height, which I believe to retain their foliage in all seasons," he writes in his letter to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. He assures them: "[...] yet the islands are not so thickly wooded as to be impassable."[5] We see these very ideas persist in Coonley and tourism works, notions that have shaped the western worldview of the Caribbean throughout history.

Glissant argues that the abstract is one of the best tools to upend the paradise myth while articulating the realities of living in and understanding our postcolonial state.[6] This is certainly reflected in Bahamian artists' negotiation of beauty and the aesthetics of the landscape—they either reject or adulate its radiance, but never do they ignore the myth of paradise. Farmer's tactic within *A True and Exact History* can be found throughout the entirety of the exhibition: the sixteen artists upturn, problematise, and critique this master narrative, creating new aesthetics of liberation. This methodology is especially resonant when we take into consideration the ecological problems of the region—the rising sea levels, the stronger hurricanes, the record-breaking heat

[4] Sonia Farmer refers to the text as such in an artist statement written for the exhibition *We Suffer to Remain*, where it was first displayed in 2018 at the NAGB. "With accompanying illustrations such as botanical drawings, architectural plans for a sugar mill, and even a fantastical topological map, this book is one part guidebook, one part candid travelogue, another part serious natural history, and yet another part business manual. [...] Indeed, since the landfall of Columbus, the Caribbean space has been and continues to be shaped and defined by the voice of the visitor who makes himself the protagonist of spaces occupied by other bodies, voices, and stories. As a person from the Caribbean, my poetic erasure of Ligon's book explores my preoccupation with the single Caribbean story, using erasure as a tool of disruption to investigate this existing narrative, question its inherent power structure, and make room for other marginalized voices."

[5] Cristopher Columbus, "Columbus Reports on His First Voyage," Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed September 2023, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/01427_fps.pdf.

[6] Édouard Glissant, "The Open Boat," in *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

index—in comparison to the serenity of the tourism ad. For the past ten years, there has been a consistent rise in warm water temperatures in the Atlantic, an increase that triggers extreme rainfall and hurricane impact. The Bahamas is among the most vulnerable nations to climate injustice, as most of the islands are below sea level and most of the population live in coastal communities.

How then, do we justify advertising the islands as a place of respite and wonder? Artists within *A Small Remainder of Teeth* use the horrific to deal with this cognitive dissonance. Carter and Soles argue that this tactic is common among postcolonial artists who desire to articulate their unsettled feelings about their environment, transferring their frustrations onto a landscape that is monstrous, hungry, and filled with wrath.[7] Split into four chapters— [1] Decay, [2] Anger, [3] Limit, and [4] Chaos—the show displays the many ways ecohorror permeates the Bahamian aesthetic: from the putrid malaise of the landscape to the boundaries enacted on residents by barriers of colonialism.

Fig. 4 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Fire up The Grill, 2024

Ugliness and Materiality: DECAY

as in **rot**
as in **erosion**
see also **dystopia**

Sharae Deckard defines ecohorror as "nature that oozes, claws, bites, swarms, strangles, creeps or seeps, splattering capitalism's environmental history into gory consciousness."[8] In the first chapter of the exhibition, Tessa Whitehead and Jordanna Kelly present landscapes that do just that: Whitehead's *Mop Monsters Thrice* (fig. 3, p. 15) depicts bushy woods that have literally grown teeth, prepared to bite and claw at anyone who approaches. Certainly,

[7] Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, "Ecohorror Special Cluster: 'Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All Be Dead,'" *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment 21*, no. 3 (2014): 509–12, https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isu085.

[8] Sharae Deckard, "Extractive Gothic," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Global Gothic*, ed. Rebecca Duncan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

it is not a welcoming environment, as there is no discernible path in the landscape: only more darkness, more shadow. The same is true of Kelly's *Childhood Nostalgia* series: paths are overgrown, pools are muddy and rotting, and the landscape seems wild and unapproachable. Kelly's work in particular upturns the tropical environments that are lauded in traditional landscapes, exemplified in the outdoor stove in *Childhood Nostalgia: Fire up The Grill* (fig. 4, pg. 17). A staple in Caribbean landscape iconography, the grill signifies domesticity and can be found in works that idealise the past, a nostalgic bend that Kelly plays with in her pieces. Jennifer Schell notes that ecohorror "regard[s] environmental problems with a complicated mixture of anxiety, horror, terror, anger, sadness, nostalgia and guilt."[9] The nostalgia in Kelly's pieces seem to reflect a time that either never existed or has been eroded by the persistence of the land over time. The "creepers" that smother the grill evokes the fear of the landscape becoming uncontrollable, disrupting modernity, a ravenous reclamation similar to Whitehead's *Mop Monsters Thrice* and their gaping, open maws.

This hungry rebellion is key to understanding many of the works in *A Small Remainder of Teeth*. They are constructed to look dirty, crumpled, or unkempt, and it is far from unintentional. Take for instance Matthew Rahming's *You know which one I am. You know why I'm here*: a hand is reaching into brackish water, a snake is coiled and ready to strike, perhaps because of the subject's intrusion into its space. The tension of the piece—the snake-coiled anger, the obtrusive hand, the foot stepping into frame—is further emphasised by the use of the burlap, a material unravelling at the edges, as if this very intrusion is the impetus for the unravelling of the snake's environment. The frayed burlap becomes the landscape

Fig. 5 Matthew Rahming
You knowo which one I am. You know why I'm here, 2023

itself. This "unkempt" finish is common throughout contemporary Bahamian art practices, most notably in the work of Heino Schmid and John Cox, who are also found throughout this exhibition and were coincidentally both mentors of Rahming, particularly Schmid.

Further to that point, many Bahamian artists use both paper and organic material in the pieces throughout the show, signifying a deep understanding of the delicacy and the ephemerality of the object and the environments they are depicting. Schmid in particular uses both materials to communicate the tension between self and nature. It is an attempt to release control. Many Bahamian artists struggle to find materials to use in their practice because of the lack of availability or financial constraints. The use of materials found in the environment not only points to Bahamian artists' ingenuity but to the deep symbiosis that the Bahamian people have with the environment around them. It also points to the knowledge that the artworks, like the landscape, are fleeting and hard to preserve, much like paper's deterioration over time.

Emotional Resonance: ANGER
***as in* fear**
***as in* resistance**
***see also* survival**

Another key feature of ecohorror is its focus on emotion. Sharae Deckard asserts that one of the main intentions in the genre is to use the landscape as a "vehicle for sympathetic identification and catharsis"[10] as artists contend with the current ecological realities. The islands of The Bahamas are the most at-risk to climate change, a fact supported by the reports by the Caribbean Climate Central and

[9] Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, "Ecohorror Special Cluster," *ISLE 21*, no. 3 (2014): 509–12, https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isu085.

[10] Deckard, "Extractive Gothic."

further corroborated by the landfall of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, one of the most destructive hurricanes the country has experienced to date. The Rt Hon Dr Hubert Minnis, former Prime Minister of The Bahamas, has openly stated, "We are in the midst of one of the greatest national [crises] in our country's history." This knowledge plagues locals who must contend with losing their homes to an environment destabilised by imperialism. In an article discussing the layered injustices suffered by peoples during a climate disaster, James L. Shultz et al. state that "Mental health consequences are among the most salient," and assert that, "Survivors who were directly exposed to extreme storm hazards during Dorian's impact are at elevated risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder. Those who sustained massive losses may develop major depression or anxiety disorders."[11] Ecohorror uses the environment to transpose these feelings of anxiety and depression onto the landscape—a tactic that has been common in Bahamian art practices.

Fig. 6 John Cox
Commute, 2010

A Small Remainder of Teeth showcases work that deeply resonates with the feelings of loss and anger that the Bahamian people experience because of climate change and hurricane devastation. In fact, this exhibition is not the first to focus on this crisis: the National Exhibition 5, curated by Holly Parotti and Jackson Petit, did the same; it was an open call to artists to respond to the theme of "The Carbon Footprint". John Cox's *Commute* (fig. 6) was created for that exhibition. One can argue, then, that Bahamian artists have been creating ecohorror for a very long time. In the second chapter of *A Small Remainder of Teeth*, this fear takes the forefront. For example, in Allan Wallace's drawings *Twisted Emotions* (fig. 7) and *Mental Apocalypse* (n.d.), the subject is literally being consumed by a chaotic and unrelenting environment. The expression is filled with anger and defiance, and at their core, these drawings subvert the myth of ease at every level. This personification is essential to ecohorrific works, and this display of raw emotion upturns the caricature of Bahamians as a predominantly 'friendly' and 'welcoming' people. Wallace's rendition is quite the opposite of traditional tourist photography, where the local is relegated to the background, little more than a scenic prop. In his piece, this consumption by the landscape is a rebellion against such erasure, and points to the frustration with the prevailing aesthetics of tourism and the pacification of the Bahamian subject. It is intertwined with the all-consuming fear of dealing with unstoppable ecological forces like hurricanes.

[11] James L. Shultz et al., "Double Environmental Injustice — Climate Change, Hurricane Dorian, and the Bahamas," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 39, no. 12 (2019).

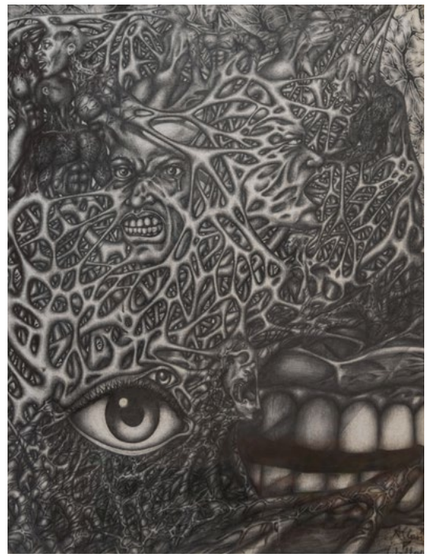

Fig. 7 Allan Wallace
Twisted Emotions, 1996

Final Thoughts: LIMIT And CHAOS

as in barrier	*as in* wild
as in boundary	*as in* turbulent
see also defense	*see also* freedom

This frustration forms the final two chapters of the exhibition. In sections Limit and Chaos, Bahamian artists contend with an environment that is both limiting and out of their control. This binary emerges from experiencing a nation that enacts boundaries on its people with the knowledge that nature does not adhere to such restrictions. Sonia Farmer's *A True and Exact History* also explores this idea through its display: multiple note-sized cards create an orderly grid—a "map" of sorts that points to this cognitive dissonance, as it ultimately fails to lead anywhere. It is a mishmash of abstracted words, much like Blake Belcher's *Untitled (Map Series)* (2017). They are muddled and unkempt. This playful back and forth between order and chaos is a motif that resonates

throughout the entire exhibition.

The conceptual bend of these last two chapters—and the entire exhibition—point to the failure of the paradise aesthetic when confronted with the real frustrations of a people trying to survive under climate change. By 1973, the year of Bahamian independence, there had been centuries of aesthetic programming into this myth: the serene beaches, the sanguine harbours, the exotic fauna. Ian Strachan asserts that paradise imagery is a tactic used to conjure up the mythos that the Caribbean landscape was free from local intrusion, ready to again be colonised by the traveller's participation in tourism. He quotes in *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean*: "In a mid-1990s postcard, the centuries-old erotics of conquest are zestfully demonstrated...but let us examine this picture [in the postcard] more closely. The beach is uninhabited...It is a sunny day; presumably as it always is. The land awaits the arrival of the tourist." [12] This aesthetic is itself a barrier; a "limit" to the freedom of true expression and emotion. Since independence, Bahamian artists have attempted to define ourselves beyond these boundaries and figure out what it means to be truly "Bahamian". The honesty within *A Small Remainder of Teeth* exposes the reality of living on these islands. In many ways, the final chapter, Chaos, speaks to the unstoppable force of both nature and the Bahamian creative spirit.

[12] Ian Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 30.

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“Schmid, Whitehead, and Kelly force us to rethink human responsibility towards the Bahamian natural environment and affirm its right to exist for its own sake, apart from the construct of paradise.”

Peter A. A. Bailey

Art, Ecohorror, and the Visual Rhetoric of Anti-Paradise

Peter A. A. Bailey

As Elizabeth Deloughrey, Renee Gosson, and George Handley have noted, "there is probably no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of human and botanic migration, transplantation and settlement than the Caribbean."[1] Europeans colonised the Caribbean islands, annihilated their indigenous populations through genocide and infection, then imported enslaved Africans and indentured Asians to clear and cultivate the colonies with introduced crops, even as indigenous plants were commodified and dispersed globally. Consequently, the very landscape of contemporary Caribbean post-plantation societies is a record of colonial violence and exploitation.

Yet, if landscape is a text that can be read to reveal the disruptions of coloniality, it is not always easily legible. Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant proclaims "landscape is its own monument" yet he also notes that this monumental "meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history."[2] Glissant suggests here the difficulty of discerning the pain and horror that underlies botanical history; to apprehend them we must go beneath what we see immediately. The very beauty of landscape tends to insulate viewers from its subtext, the story of how it came to be that way. Looking at nature in both real life and in art, we are lulled into thinking that what we see is what has always been—the landscape is eternal, ahistorical. Trying to imagine the pre-Columbian Caribbean, Jamaica Kincaid confronts the difficulty of envisioning a different landscape than the one she knows: "What herb of any beauty grew in this place? What tree? And did the people who lived there grow them for their own sake? I do not know, I can find no record of it."[3] The lacuna Kincaid confronts is one perpetuated by paradise discourse, "the ever-expanding and

[1] Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley, "Introduction," in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 1.

[2] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 11.

[3] Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 133.

ambitious imaginative symbolism through which the colonizers constituted the islands as tropical paradises."[4] As Deloughrey explains, "at the height of the process of altering and damaging island landscapes, tropical islands were interpellated in Edenic terms, removed in space and time from the urbanisation of Western Europe."[5] All Caribbean territories have been colonised by this rhetoric that removes them from history by describing them as Eden, Paradise, heaven on earth. Yet it is The Bahamas that has most relied on this rhetoric in images and writing to attract tourists; it is telling that the site of one of our major resort-complexes is Paradise Island.

Artwork gathered under the genre of "eco-horror" can critique and resist the mythology of paradise discourse, the romanticisation seen in tourist brochures. Such art might function in at least two ways: firstly, by representing nature as it is impacted by time and history and secondly by evoking emotional responses to the environmental violence inherent in creating the ideal and illusion of paradise. Artists of The Bahamas have arguably been creating these eco-horrific works. As Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles explain, the genre of eco-horror "assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity's relationship to the non-human world." In eco-horror, "horrific texts and tropes are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly."[6] In eco-horror, the repressed violence of environmental impact returns, weaponised by nature. Take for instance, Heino Schmid's *Landmines* (fig. 1), each of which is a whole dried coconut, its brown exocarp bristling with nails. In the current neocolonial visual economy of The Bahamas, coconut palms signify leisure and relaxation – for the tourist, they

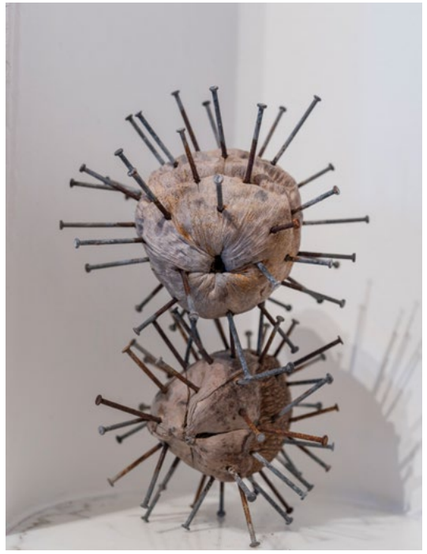

Fig. 1 Heino Schmid
Landmines, n.d.

[4] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

[5] Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, "Island Ecologies and Caribbean Literatures," *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 95, no. 3 (2004): 305.

[6] Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, "Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All Be Dead," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21, no. 3 (2014): 509–12, https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isu085.

offer shade on a beach, provide their water for cocktails with exotic names like sky juice or gully wash. Yet Schmid's found art takes on a threatening aspect – these are the fruits the coconut might produce in hostility against being used as an icon of paradise. Each seems to repel touch; as their name aptly suggests, they sit with a detonative potential, ready to launch their nails, like shrapnel, into onlookers. In eco-horror, nature fights back.

Schmid's strategic reversals of power might also be seen in Tessa Whitehead's landscape *Mop Monsters Thrice* (fig. 2). In this abstract work, the canvas is first washed in a dark yellow-green as of swamp-water; this background is overlaid with leaf-like splotches in dark and light sage. Black stria and jagged lines that resemble open-mouthed faces are interspersed among the sage, evoking fang-baring cacti or phantoms, perhaps the eponymous creatures of the painting's title. Part of what is disturbing about the work is the amorphousness of its subjects, which cannot be perceived with certainty. The dominating green suggests a sublime verdure in which sky, water, earth, and all animal life have been overgrown. Overgrown? Perhaps devoured is the better word. As the Caribbean colonies were initiated into mercantile economy, a ravenous capitalism led to the depradation of their old-growth forests. Woodlands were among the first casualties of colonial development, with hectares of trees felled in favour of plantations, the construction of domiciles, the fuelling of homes and industry, and the export of wood. Yet in these paintings, the decimated forests appear to flourish once more while the famishment of capitalism seems to have been transferred to the endangered trees themselves. The maw-like shapes that float throughout the scene reveal a portrait in which

Fig. 2 Tessa Whitehead
Mop Monsters Thrice, 2019

vegetal hunger threatens the onlooker; the preyed-upon trees have turned predatory, gaining an agency to redress the ways in which they have been violated. It is the generation of this eco-fear that might provoke the onlooker to adopt and promote more sustainable approaches to the flora.

A final way to think of eco-horror is as an artistic mode or genre engaging the concept of decadence. As Regenia Gagnier reminds us, decadence, derived from the Latin de (from) + cadera (to fall), is "a temporal category of the decline away from established norms"[7]; a decadent civilisation has decayed from its height. As an aesthetic term, decadence was first applied to the work of a network of nineteenth-century European writers and artists. Living at the fin-de-siècle, these artists experienced societal change at an unprecedented pace. The industrial revolution had brought urbanisation, production consumption and environmental degradation at novel scales. Simultaneously, the electorate expanded, granting democratic power to new groups: middle-class, working-class and non-white men. The abolition of slavery and the first agitations of the feminist movement upended conventional notions of racial and gender hierarchy. Advances in science threatened theistic certainty. The conflict with tradition that all these changes wrought felt like progress to some, but to others, this rapid onset of modernity seemed like a loss of life-guiding standards – in other words, decadence. Decadent artists depicted this anomie, social and environmental decay. While decadence is strongly associated with the European nineteenth century, critics now understand it as a recurrent artistic response throughout human history; decadent art may arise wherever social atomisation occurs because of "the decline of economic, social, religious, political, ethnic, regional and gendered traditions under the forces of modernization."[8]

[7] Regenia Gagnier, "Global Literatures of Decadence," in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11

Decadence opposes the timelessness and ahistoricity of paradise as the detection and diagnosis of decline requires a history. In certain anxious colonial accounts of The Bahamas and wider Caribbean, the natural environment is an anticolonial vector of decadence; the coloniser must constantly defend culture against the flora, fauna, geology, and meteorology of the region. As Robert Stilling reminds us, the gentility and prosperity of plantocratic rule depended on the archaic use of coerced labour to produce sugar; the abolition of slavery ushered in a modern era that affronted the traditional social and economic order of the slavocracy. Consequently, during "the decades following the emancipation of the slaves in the British colonies in 1834...white Creoles all across the region...began to panic. When the sugar-cane market collapsed, white Creole planters began to leave the colonies in droves. A landscape once depicted by nineteenth-century naturalists as a new, tropical Eden became littered with the ruins of abandoned plantation houses, sugar mills, and colonial forts."[9] As mentioned above by Grove, the projection of paradise onto the natural world required the land to be covered with an "ever-expanding and ambitious imaginative symbolism" that overlay the reality of what was seen by encouraging a static view of the islands. Decadence contains and ruins this symbolic cloak. Often, post-plantation representations of Caribbean landscapes do not cast this ruin as the mere result of human abandonment; instead, it is as if sentient nature eagerly conspires against the plantocracy and its works. Visiting depressed Caribbean colonies in 1889, the travel writer Lafcadio Hearn remarks:

[8] Ibid., 14.

[9] Robert Stilling, "Warramou's Curse: Epic, Decadence, and the Colonial West Indies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 3 (2015): 451.

> There is something in tropical ruin peculiarly and terribly impressive: luxuriant, evergreen, ever-splendid nature consumes the results of human endeavor so swiftly, buries memories so profoundly, distorts the labors of generations so grotesquely, that one feels here, as nowhere else, how ephemeral man is, how intense and how tireless the effort necessary to preserve his frail creations even a little while from the vast unconscious forces antagonistic to all stability, to all factitious equilibrium.[10]

Jordanna Kelly's manipulated photos exploring nostalgia, ironic studies that capture the neglected exterior spaces of a home or resort, may exemplify Bahamian decadence. They strongly evoke the decrepitude of sites such as The Royal Victoria and Montagu Beach hotels, the wreckage of downtown colonial residences such as Sunningridge. Each of those places testifies to fashions of Bahamian life and hospitality that have fallen out of step with contemporary modes of business and domesticity. Kelly's *Childhood Nostalgia: Be Careful in the Deep End* (fig. 3) focuses on a swimming pool, its stagnant water strewn with leaf litter and green with algae. Around the structure, sometimes dipping into the water, are fallen palm fronds and a tangle of shrubs, trees, and lianas, all growing free of a gardener's care. Pools are signifiers of leisure and luxury; keeping them clear and sterile requires an excess of money or time devoted to upkeep. For middle-class strivers, the backyard pool is a symbol of class ascendancy. For the tourist, the hotel pool is an escape from quotidian existence to tropical paradise. Yet in Kelly's work, the time of prosperity and leisure is past, it can only be recalled as a vestige of a vanished childhood. The algal bloom and overgrowth depicted evokes Hearn's

Fig. 3 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Be Careful in the Deep End, 2024

description of a world in which verdant nature effaces all memory of human effort, achievement or aspiration. This too, is an expression of anti-paradise, of eco-horror.

Traditional Bahamian landscape art has played a major role in fetishising and commodifying certain natural scenes to constitute The Bahamas as timeless paradise. The attraction of paradise imagery is clear – it is the foundation of the tourist industry and brings pride and pleasure to residents of The Bahamas who can imagine themselves inhabitants of Eden. Yet the paradise myth has its costs. The idea of eternal Eden prevents us from considering that nature has a history, that our idealised environment is shaped by the legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and diaspora. Not to know this history causes Bahamians to be alienated from the true nature of their homeland and to overlook their responsibilities as caretakers whose actions impact their natural heritage. Yet the eco-horrific works of Schmid, Whitehead, and Kelly constitute a counter-canon of anti-paradisiacal art that complicates our emotional and aesthetic engagement with nature. While the beauty of idealised landscapes might lead to a passive incuriosity or acceptance of the natural environment, the threatening, haunting, and destructive aspects of nature depicted in Bahamian eco-horror prompts a questioning, a stimulation based in discomfort and dread. Why is nature hostile towards me? How have I wronged it? What might I do to appease it, to reconcile with it? Tidwell and Soles argue that "ecohorror is not defined solely by human fear of nonhuman nature but is also frequently concerned with human fear for nonhuman nature."[11] The art of eco-horror may help get us to the place where the fear of nature can convert to the fear and care for nature. Schmid,

[10] Lafcadio Hearn, "A Midsummer Trip to the West Indies: Third Paper," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 77, no. 460 (1888): 628.

[11] Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles, "Introduction," in *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*, ed. Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 5.

Whitehead, and Kelly force us to rethink human responsibility towards the Bahamian natural environment and affirm its right to exist for its own sake, apart from the construct of paradise.

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Artists

John Beadle
Blake Belcher
Stan Burnside
John Cox
Michael Edwards
Sonia Farmer
Dwight Ferguson
Kendal Hanna
Jordanna Kelly
Toby Lunn
Lavar Munroe
Holly Parotti
Matthew Rahming
Heino Schmid
Allan Wallace
Tessa Whitehead

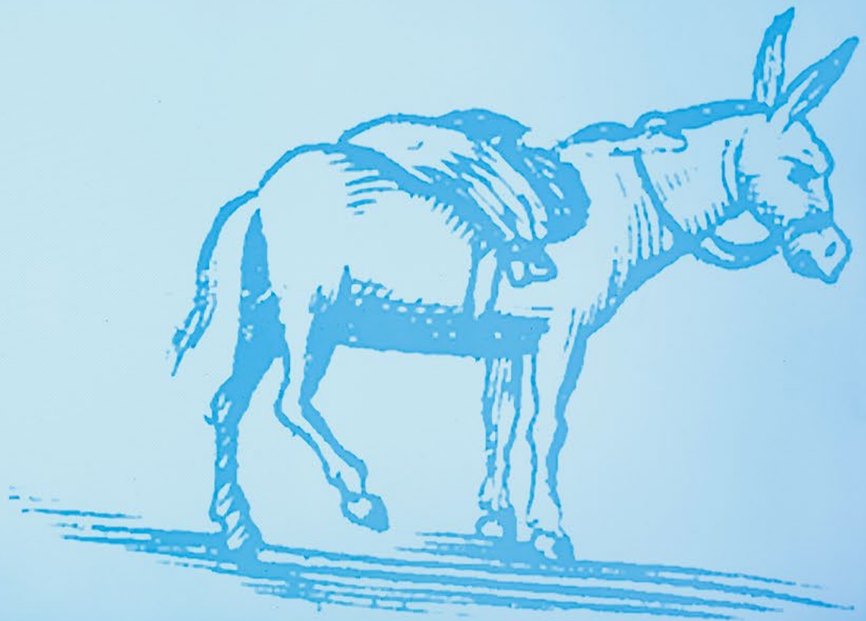
Installation Photography


Saint of a wild
mad land
The tenn Thoysande
Acres of Landewhich
Belongeth to the
Merchants of London.

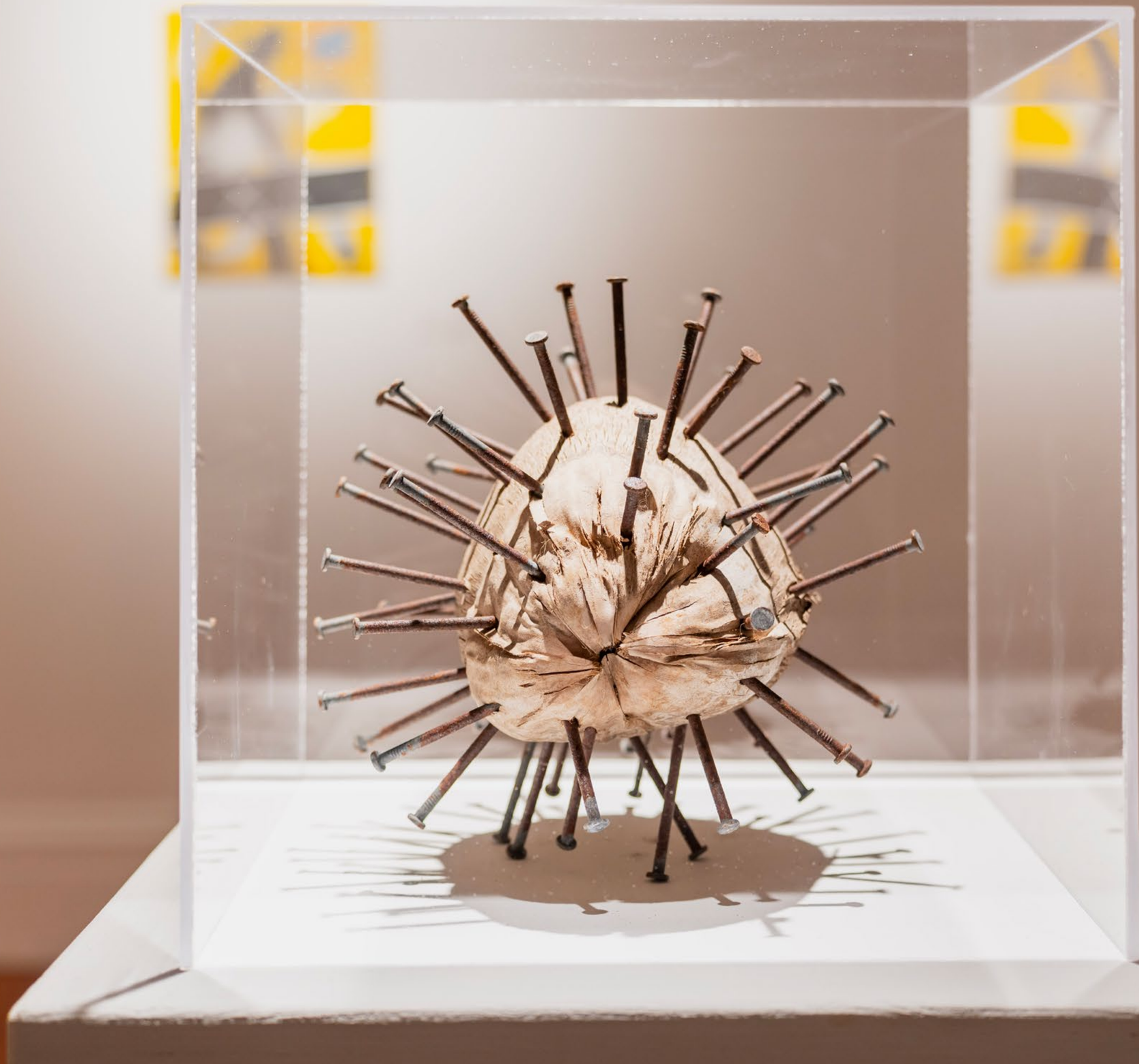

Saint of a wild
mad land


ONE—NINE:
I come now
to lose myself
in a name

THREE:
larded with
the fat of the past
many burst
in pieces



A True and Exact History: A Reading
Recoding of Video Performance

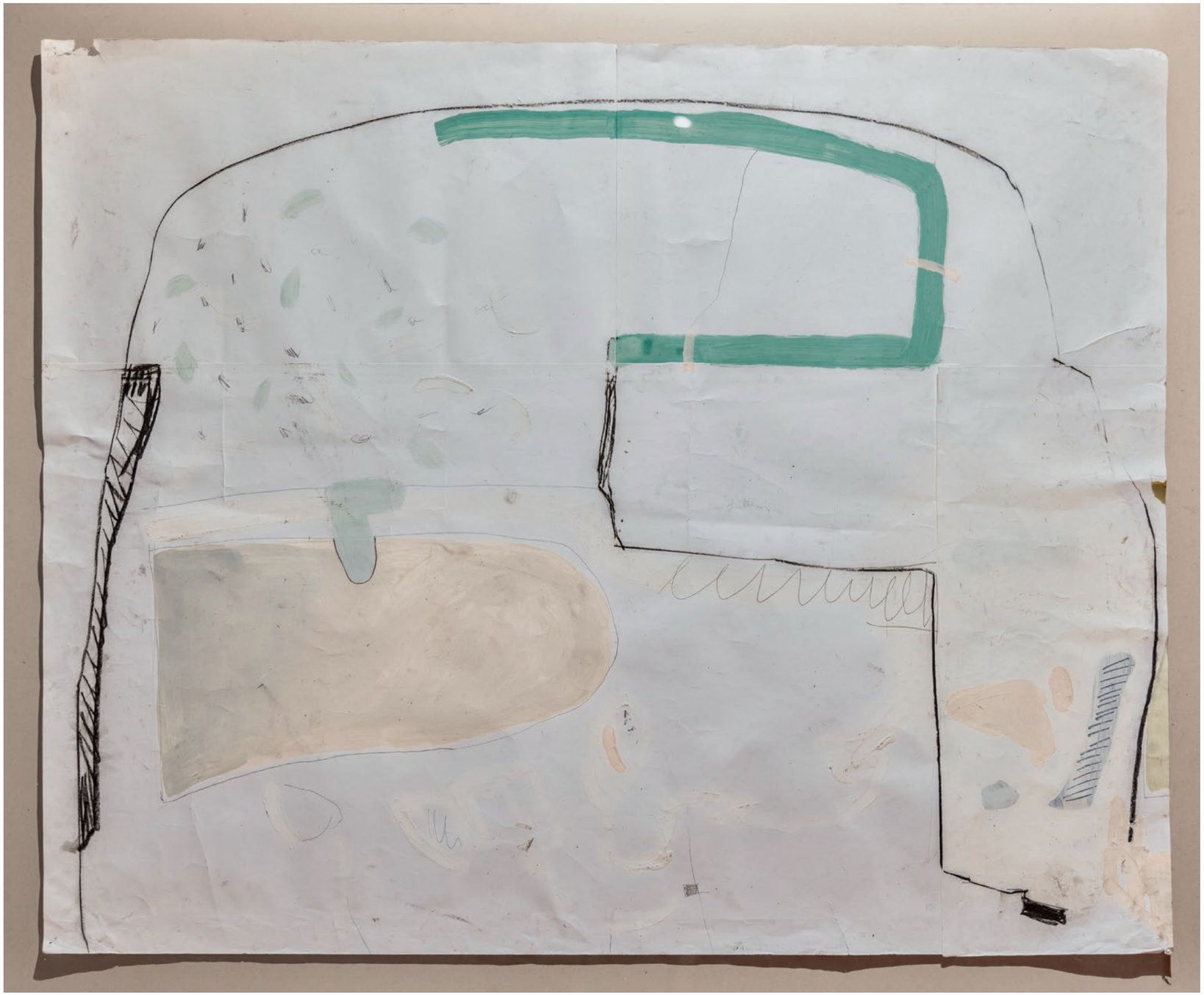



LIMIT
as in barrier
as in boundary
see also defense


EXIT

Plates

John Beadle
In Another Man's Yard, 2005
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
National Collection, NAGB



Blake Belcher
Untitled 4 (Map Series), 2017
Acrylic, charcoal, and pastel on paper
24 in. x 48 in.
Collection of Romel Shearer

Stan Burnside
Communion of Nature 1, 1997
Acrylic on linen
18 in. x 18 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

Stan Burnside
Communion of Nature 2, 1998
Acrylic on linen
18 in. x 18 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

John Cox
Commute, 2010
Reclaimed wood, rubber, and plexiglass
48 in. tall
Dawn Davies Collection

Michael Edwards
Untitled Drawings, 1-2, 2004
Mixed media on paper
10 in. x 14 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

Michael Edwards
Untitled Drawings, 3-4, 2004
Mixed media on paper
10 in. x 14 in
Dawn Davies Collection.

Sonia Farmer
A True and Exact History, 2018
Handprinted pages within handmade artist's box
3 in. x 13 in. x 5 in.
National Collection, NAGB

Sonia Farmer
Sit Down and Try to Be Someone: (This is not) An Interview with the Interior Designer, 2024
Poetic video, 3 min
Collection of the artist

Dwight Ferguson
The Seed No. 1, 2018
Coated wire
18 in. x 7 in. x 7 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

Kendal Hanna
Untitled, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
30 in. x 30 in.
Estate of Kendal Hanna

Kendal Hanna
Untitled, 2013
Mixed media on canvas
20 in. x 16 in.
Estate of Kendal Hanna

Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: *The Path to the Backyard*, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic paint, and organic material on Arches BFK paper
33 in. x 26 in.
Collection of the artist

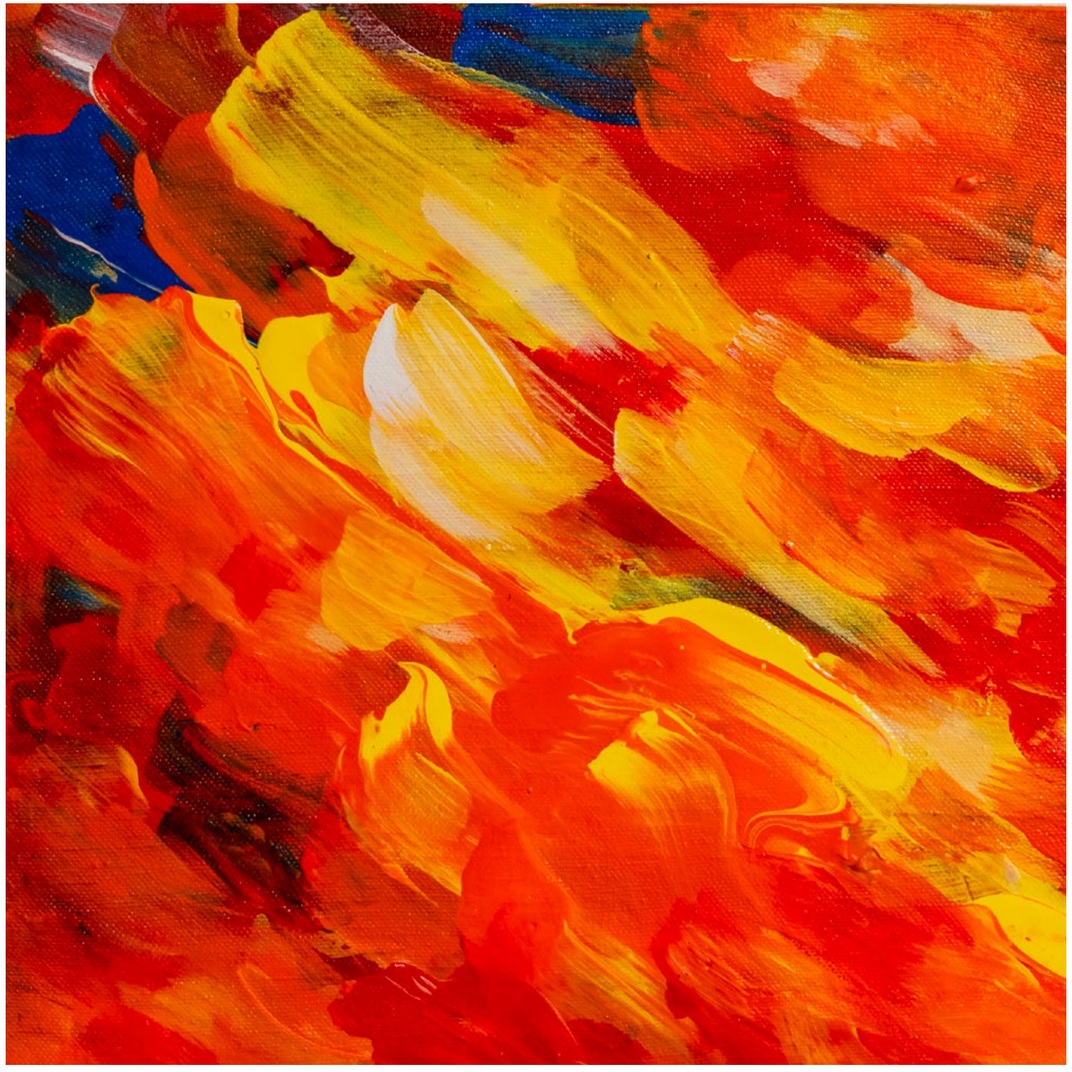
Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Time for Lunch, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic paint, and organic material on Arches BFK paper
33 in. x 27 in.
Collection of the artist

Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Fire Up The Grill, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic paint, and organic material on Arches BFK paper
33 in. x 27 in.
Collection of the artist

Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Be Careful in the Deep End, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic paint, and organic material on Arches BFK paper
33 in. x 27 in.
Collection of the artist

Toby Lunn
Smoldering River Sky, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
36 in. x 48 in.
Collection of the artist

Toby Lunn
Orange Sky 1, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
12 in. x 12 in.
Collection of the artist



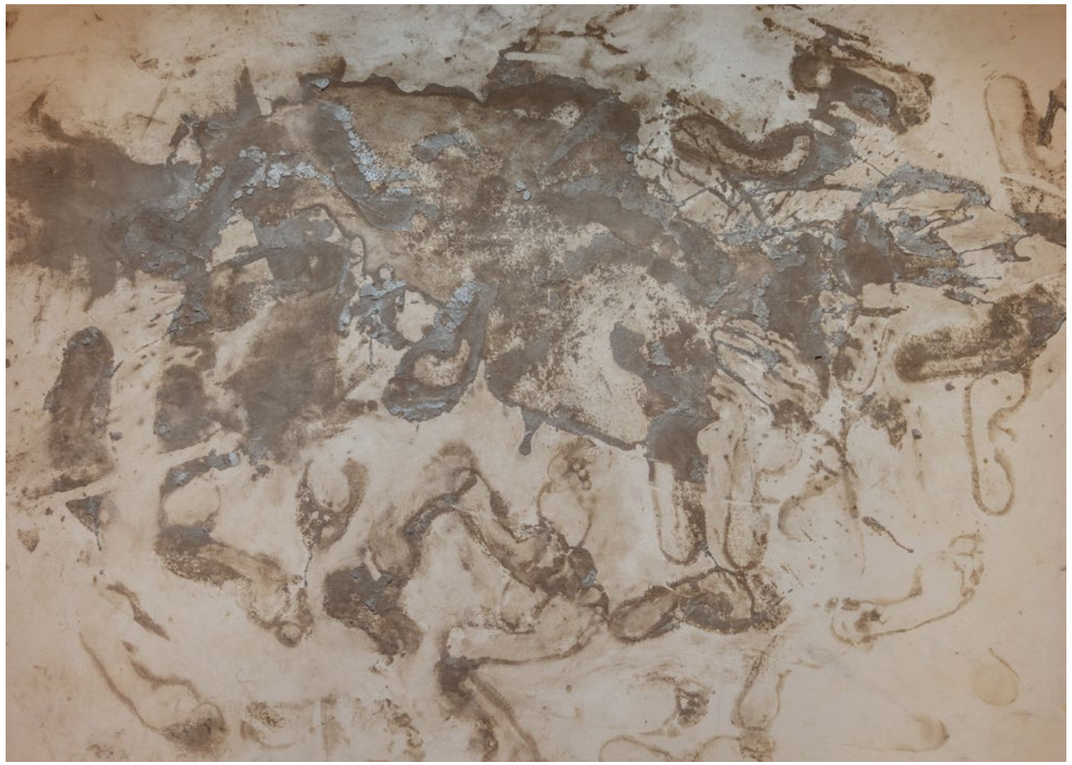
Toby Lunn
Orange Sky 2, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
12 in. x 12 in.
Collection of the artist

Lavar Munroe
Never Again Shall this Beautiful Land Experience the Oppression of One Another , 2012
Mixed media on plywood
57 in. x 52 in. x 11 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

Holly Parotti
Limit, 2007
Etching
25 in. x 15 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

Holly Parotti
Threshold, 2007
Etching
15 in. x 25 in.
Dawn Davies Collection

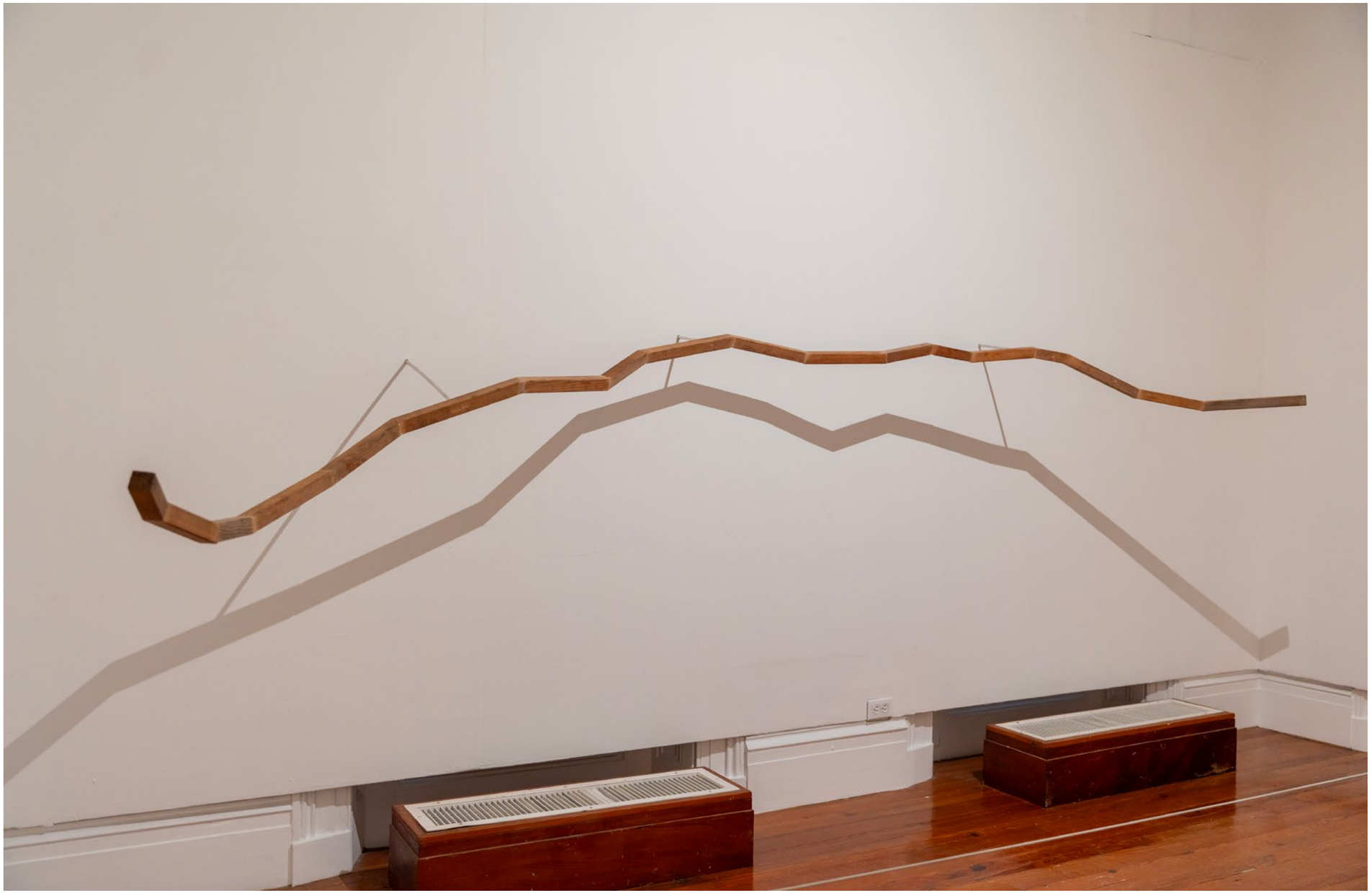
Holly Parotti
Verge, 2007
Etching
10 in. x 12 in.
Dawn Davies Collection



Matthew Rahming
Come through flushin Yard, 2023
Cement on canvas
53 ¼ in. x 67 ¼ in.
Collection of the artist

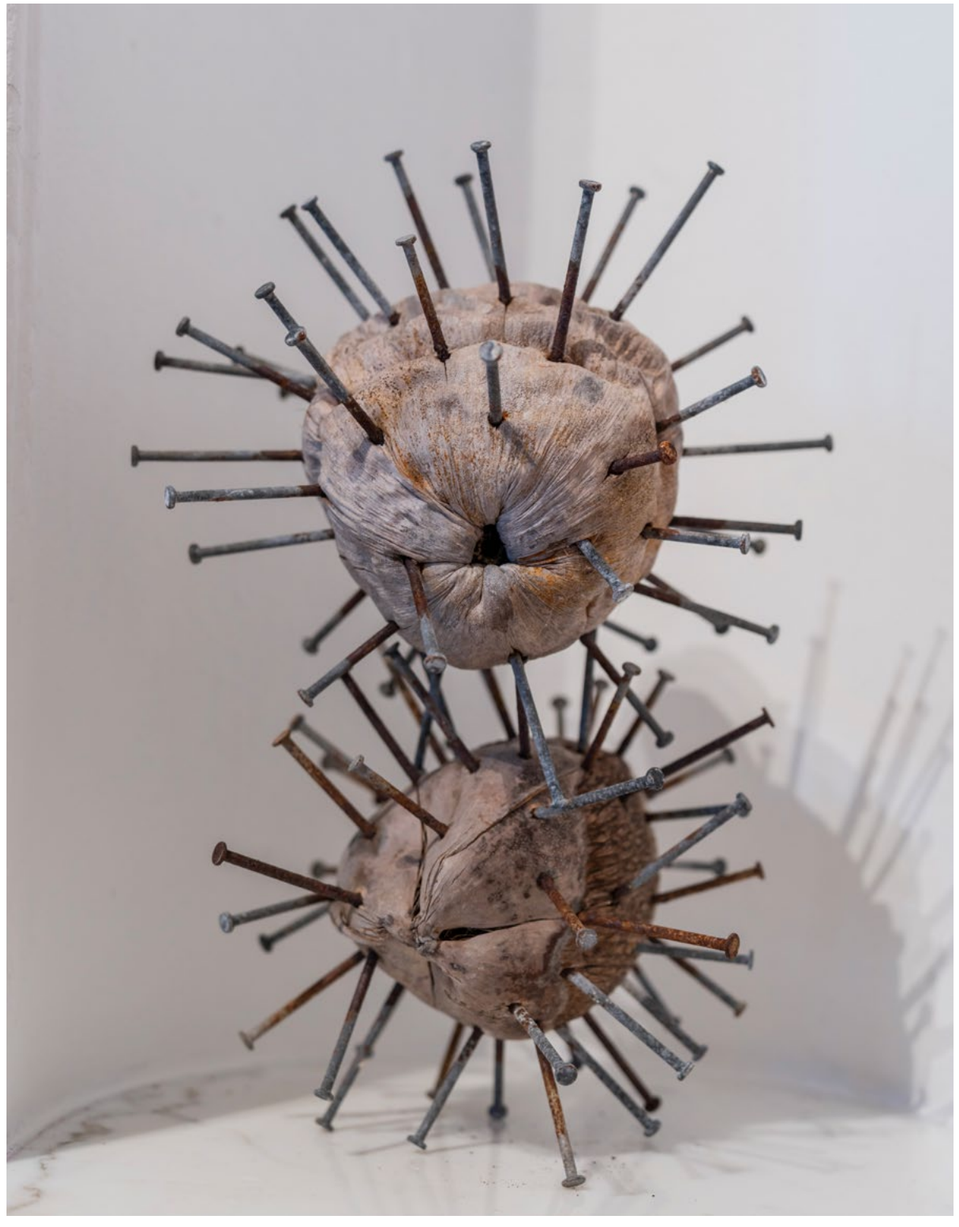
Matthew Rahming
You know which one I am. You know why I'm here, 2023
Charcoal and acrylic on burlap
65 in. x 89 in.
Collection of the artist

Heino Schmid
Full Moon, 2014
Acrylic on wood
48 in. x 48 in.
The Island House Collection



Heino Schmid
Horizon, 2024
Wood, glue, and acrylic
144 in.
Collection of the artist

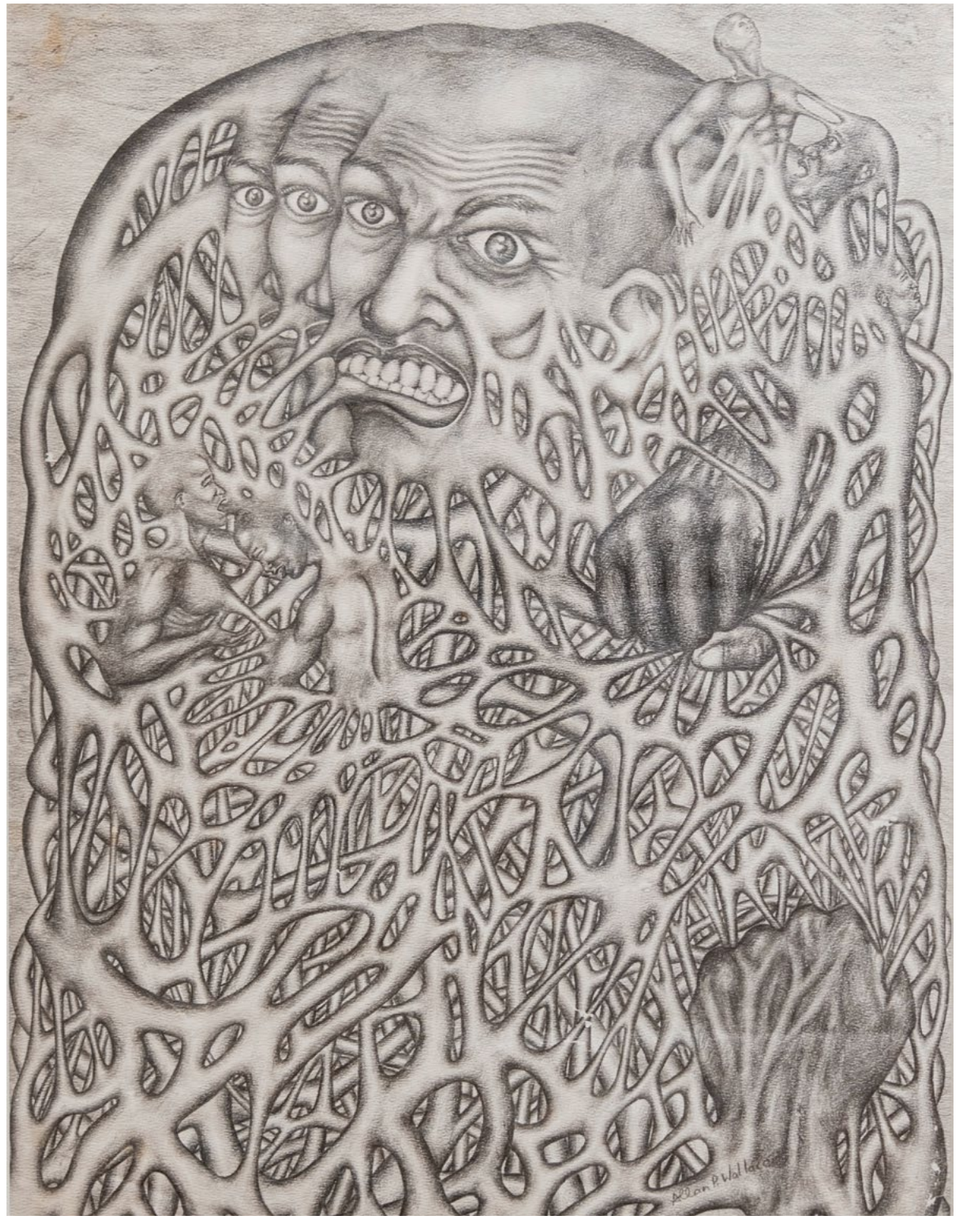
Heino Schmid
Home, 2022
Wood, acrylic, and organic material
12 in. x 48 in.



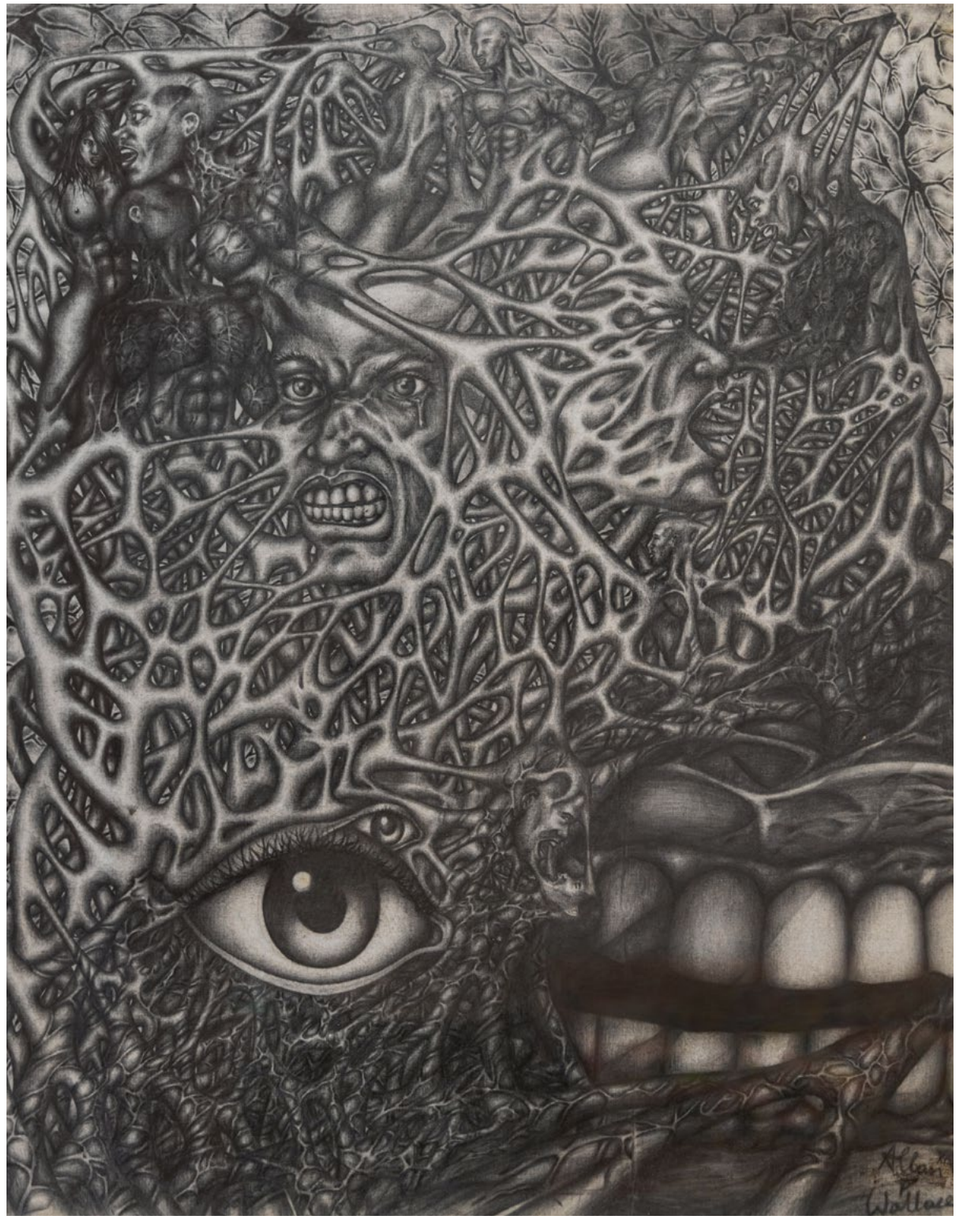
Heino Schmid
Landmines, n.d.
Dried coconuts and steel nails
Various dimensions
Dawn Davies Collection

Heino Schmid
Potcake 7, 2018
Acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper
52 in. x 42 in.
Collection of the artist

Heino Schmid
Potcake 8, 2018
Acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper
59 in. x 44 in.
Collection of the artist

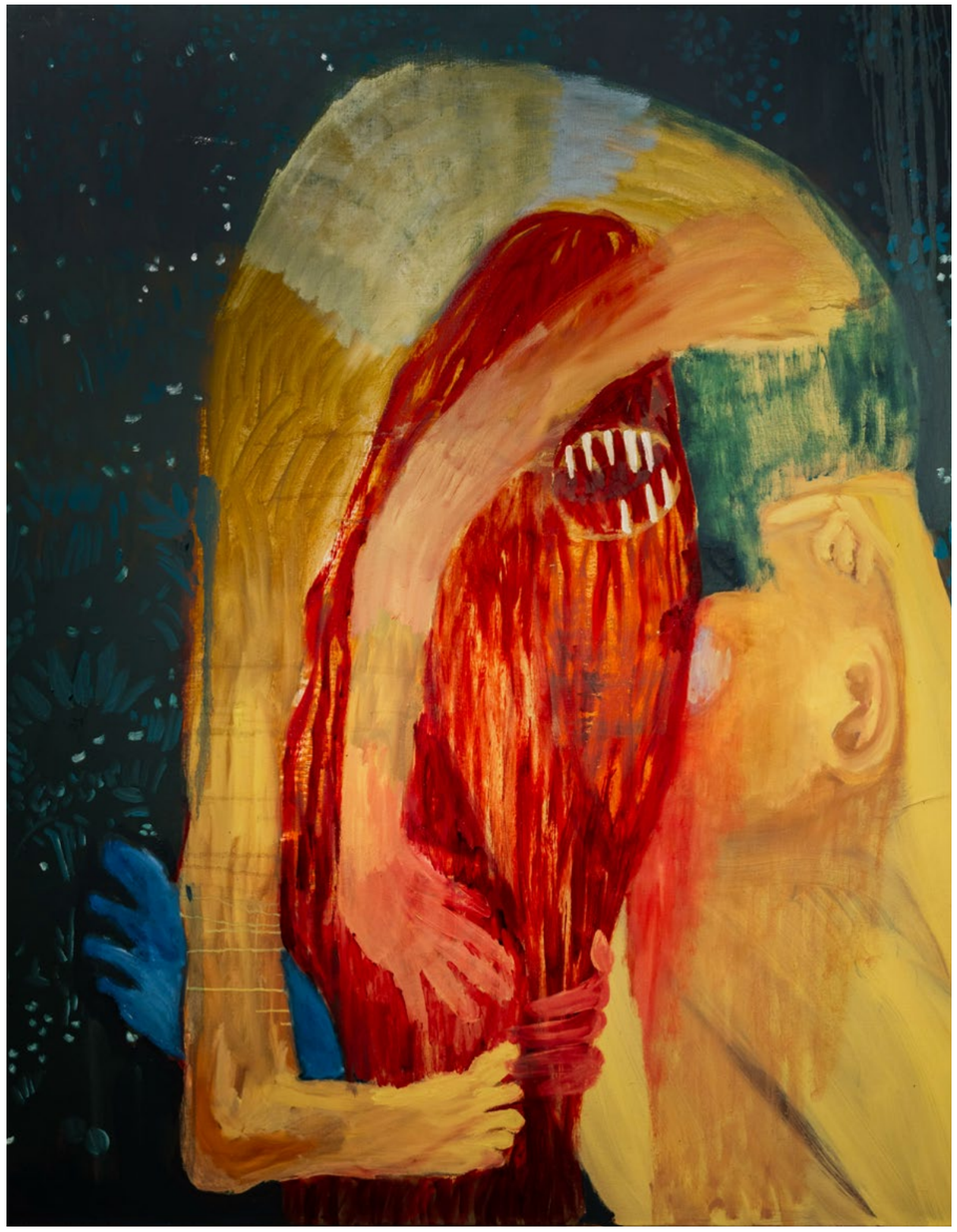


Allan Wallace
Mental Apocalypse, n.d.
Graphite on paper
32 ¾ in. x 26 ¾ in.
Central Bank of The Bahamas Collection



Allan Wallace
Twisted Emotions, 1996
Graphite on paper
31 in. x 21 ½ in.
The D'Aguilar Art Foundation Collection

Tessa Whitehead
I have too many teeth in my mouth, 2019
Oil on canvas
28 in. x 19 ½ in.
Collection of the artist



Tessa Whitehead
Mine, 2018
Oil on canvas
40 in. x 24 in.
Collection of the artist

Tessa Whitehead
Soft Ghost, 2019
Oil on canvas
36 in. x 24 in.
Collection of the artist

Tessa Whitehead
Mop Monsters Thrice, 2019
Oil on linen
60 in. x 60 in.
Collection of the artist

List of Works

1 John Beadle
In Another Man's Yard, 2005
Mixed media installation

2 Blake Belcher
Untitled (No. 4) Map Series, 2017
Acrylic, charcoal, and pastel on paper

3 Stanley Burnside
Communion of Nature, 1997
Acrylic on linen

4 Stanley Burnside
Communion of Nature 2, 1998
Acrylic on linen

5 John Cox
Commute, 2010
Reclaimed wood, rubber, and plexiglass

6 Michael Edwards
Untitled Drawings, 1-4, 2004
Mixed media on paper

7 Sonia Farmer
A True And Exact History, 2018
Handprinted pages within hand-made artist's box

8 Sonia Farmer
Sit Down and Try to Be Someone: (This is not) An Interview with the Interior Designer, 2024
Video, 3 min

9 Dwight Ferguson
The Seed - No. 1, 2018
Coated wire

10 Kendal Hanna
Untitled, 2017
Acrylic on canvas

11 Kendal Hanna
Untitled, 2013
Mixed media on canvas

12 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: The Path to the Backyard, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic paint, organic material on Arches BFK Paper

13 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Be Careful in the Deep End, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic, organic material on Arches BFK Paper

14 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Fire up the Grill, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic, and organic material on Arches BFK Paper

15 Jordanna Kelly
Childhood Nostalgia: Time for Lunch, 2024
Archival pigment print, acrylic, and organic material on Arches BFK Paper

16 Toby Lunn
Smoldering River Sky, 2024
Acrylic on canvas

17 Toby Lunn
Orange Sky 1, 2021
Acrylic on canvas

18 Toby Lunn
Orange Sky 2, 2021
Acrylic on canvas

19 Lavar Munroe
Never Again Shall this Beautiful Land Experience the Oppression of One Another, 2012
Mixed media on plywood

20 Holly Parotti
Threshold, 2007
Etching

21 Holly Parotti
Verge, 2007
Etching

22 Holly Parotti
Limit, 2007
Etching

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You know which one I am. You know why I'm here, 2023
Charcoal and acrylic on burlap

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Come through flushin', 2023
Cement on canvas

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Potcake 7, 2018
Acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper

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Potcake 8, 2018
Acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper

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Home, 2022
Wood, acrylic, and organic material

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Landmines, n.d.
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Wood, glue, and acrylic

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Acrylic on wood

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Graphite on paper

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Graphite on paper

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Soft Ghost, 2019
Oil on canvas

34 Tessa Whitehead
Mop Monsters Thrice, 2019
Oil on linen

35 Tessa Whitehead
Mine, 2018
Oil on canvas

36 Tessa Whitehead
I have too many teeth in my mouth, 2019
Oil on canvas

A Small Remainder of Teeth
Ecohorror and the Anti-Paradise

19 September 2024 — 17 February 2025

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NATIONAL ART GALLERY OF THE BAHAMAS