

Transmutations, Part I: Research Creation Collaborative Residency

Project Grant for the Canada Council for the Arts to create new collaborative work called *Transmutations* using porcelain, ephemeral sculpture and light installation, to take place from November 2021-June 2022.

Project Summary:

Transmutations is a collaborative research-creation residency between myself and ceramic artist Marie-Pierre Drolet. A new body of interdisciplinary work will be made from her pottery studio and a 2200-square-foot multipurpose room at Place des Artistes de Farrelton, QC. (PAF) -- an abandoned school turned rural arts cooperative. The residency combines experiments in which I will work with my living tapestries in new ways to interact with porcelain, installation, drawing and light projection.

Living tapestries grow through burlap using sprouted grain or seed (wheat, buckwheat, rye, clover). Root systems bind to fabric as living thread, transforming from germinated to sprouted grain, then drying to sweet smelling grass, mimicking a fleece-like texture. Grown from water, this living embroidery is an extension of the interconnected root system -- mimicking our human relationships -- made visible in a form to be perceived as land, skin, connection. These installations experiment with fibre as a living medium, demonstrating how textiles can exist outside of their traditional realm.

Porcelain is a white clay which, when thin enough, allows light to pass through. Porcelain's translucency offers a symbolic representation of the life within each of us. Porcelain tiles will be sculpted to allow varying degrees of light to pass through them -- patterns inspired by local natural geometries will guide the sculpture. Additionally, a body-sized clay bed will be carved with local river patterns, as inverted topography. Once glazed and fired, this mold will receive textile, seeds and water. Seeds take root in the clay mold to fill up the rivers. Upon maturity, they peel out of the mold to reveal embossed river patterns, beginning their drying process. Other experiments in

the clay bed will be done, including body prints and geometric patterns similar to the work done in the porcelain tiles.

Throughout 2020-2021, I've faced moments of isolation, doubt, insecurity, forced adaptation, family crisis and distress, lost contact with community, family, friends, yearned for physical and social exchange, and seen my mental health crumble. I've also experienced my resiliency in ways never seen. A symbolic transmutation through art is a way to turn the page, shed old stories, integrate new wishes into a situation that seems directionless. The only way forward is through the present, observing and initiating the passage towards a new mental and spiritual disposition.

This residency is social, spiritual, ecological. The pandemic's isolation has stripped us of our communities and this work renews connection to the natural world and a community-loved cultural space. Nourishing relationship to the beauty surrounding us creates a capacity to cure fear with action. We make and manipulate meaning from ecological processes and phenomena to find sense amid the challenges and uncertainties, as we face grief, loss of contact and heightened technological use. Living tapestries are examples of resilience: they are living, breathing, changing and responding always to their environments. Like humans, they cannot exist in isolation - the collective network is what provides strength.

This residency continues ongoing art production from my solo exhibit, Tributaries, funded by the Canada Council in 2018. This project is important for my artistic development as I delve deeper into new techniques and collaborations. The way Marie-Pierre and I each approach our work is innovative in how we engage with ecological themes in interdisciplinary ways.

This is my first artistic collaboration with Marie-Pierre. Last Fall, we worked on a project for Journées de la Culture and it went phenomenally well. The link between our respective approaches was immediately apparent: patterns, natural geometries, and art as a tool for social transformation, interconnection and dialogue. Our common values include: i-encouraging accessibility and promotion of artistic works to

the local and regional population; ii-supporting the creation, production and dissemination of projects fostering links between the arts and the community; iii-having deep ties to the people and places of the Gatineau Hills; and iv-the belief in the transformative power of art to uplift and heal.

Marie-Pierre is a highly skilled and talented ceramic artist, engaged in the community. I've always wanted to pursue my professional development by learning more about porcelain, firing and glazing from a professional and this is an unparalleled chance for that. My relationship with materials and the bioregion will deepen as I forage clay locally with her knowledge and expertise.

This will also be my first large-scale collaborative body of work in which creative exchange is present - in this case, interpreting Marie-Pierre's techniques in interdisciplinary, innovative ways. This is significant to me because I've never worked in porcelain or light to enhance an installation's potential.

My activities will advance my artistic practice in the following ways:

This is an internal risk I am creating for myself. I'll work with unfamiliar materials, such as light and porcelain; interpret Transmutations into a body of work; challenge my skill base and capacity to work with a wider range of mediums and knowledge; and expand my artistic vocabulary;

This grant program's mandate is to create new exploratory work, which is perfectly aligned with my art practice and methods of working. I will bridge traditional and experimental media (installation, illuminated porcelain, living tapestries, drawing, sculpture) and stretch my creative limits vis-à-vis art production and venue: i-lighting techniques are new to me; ii-I've never seen illuminated porcelain combined with ephemeral installation. This opportunity allows me to work with a light specialist, finalize details around portable and efficient display, and determine details for hanging and lighting.

I tend to work outside of institutions (i.e. in public spaces/outdoors), so this grant – by virtue of its mission – will provide me with an opportunity to create for a wider and more varied audience, thereby promoting and extending my creative practice within the region.

The artworks created will be carriers of story through which we imagine alternative ways of experiencing art - as it relates to interdisciplinary, non-traditional media and land art within an alternative public art forum. The project will allow us to explore techniques and media new to our careers, as we exchange conceptually on common themes.

Completing this new work as a professional artist allows me a formal opportunity to advance my ideas within an intentional framework and timeline. I would have fair compensation and support to encourage risk-taking. The growing cycle is a living process, influenced by temperature, light and various environmental factors. I would be required to step beyond my comfort zone to embrace the calculated risks and unknowns of creating a successful large-scale installation that is aesthetically balanced and striking.

The highest risk is in the fine balance of letting go just enough to embrace co-authorship with the very elements I rely on to create. I will maintain this approach throughout the whole process for the work to be truly alive.

My work is innovative to my discipline and the art world in general in that conceptually the work is alive and does not belong to me. I will be expanding on this idea as I interact and collaborate with Marie-Pierre's techniques in porcelain and light, which will allow us to create new possibilities for our repertoires and careers, with something hopefully to share with the public upon completion, in phase two.

PAF's multipurpose milieu offers a non-traditional space which will allow for creative experimentations with the tapestry because there is drainage on the floor for excess water. The scale is suited to my work because it will allow large-scale ecological

forces to be showcased to greater effect. This venue is conducive to the organic nature of my work, because natural phenomena cannot usually be accommodated in most spaces. The space will expand our creative potential.

Note: If phase one of the residency is successful, I would submit to various exhibition spaces within the Outaouais region, to travel as a nomadic exhibit in 2022-2023 for phase two, at which point I intend to apply for a Concept to Realization grant. Phase one's creative exploration will feed phase two (anticipated to begin in 2022/2023) as it builds on the exchange to eventually tour as a nomadic exhibit. Our intention is for the exhibit to extend across the Outaouais region: North - Kitigan Zibi; West - Pontiac (L'École en Pierre); East - Montebello (Centre d'action culturelle de la MRC Papineau); South - Chelsea/Gatineau. Phase one will therefore allow me and Marie-Pierre to create a clear proposal to ensure its dissemination in the coming years. I'm in the preliminary phase of confirming the partnerships. Phase two will incorporate a series of community-engaged events (artist talk/panel and creative workshop series). Working towards this goal throughout our residency time would push us towards reflecting on how diverse audiences (urban/rural) can experience contemporary art in ways that uplift, enchant, and empower.











Image credits: Marie-Pierre Drolet.

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