University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

5-2021

-rhiza.

Katherine E. Watts
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Watts, Katherine E., "-rhiza." (2021). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3601.
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3601>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

-RHIZA

By

Katherine E. Watts
B.Sc., University of Southern Indiana, 2007

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In Studio Art and Design

Department of Fine Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2021

Copyright 2021 by Katherine E. Watts

All rights reserved

-RHIZA

By

Katherine E. Watts
B.Sc., University of Southern Indiana, 2007

A Thesis Approved on

March 19, 2021

By the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director, Rachel Singel, M.F.A.

Ying Kit Chan, M.F.A.

Michael Johmann, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to our
Mother Earth,
and all of her many beings.
Thank you for this life energy
that I have so graciously
been given.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents Laura and Eric Watts, for my beautiful life. I will forever be grateful for the lifetime of unconditional love, support, and inspiration that you have given me. To my partner Callie, I could not have done this without your encouragement, tenacity, devotion, and love. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything. A huge thank you to Grama Evelyn, Jason, Hayden, Aunt Alice, Uncle Corry, Aunt Jan, Uncle George, Tess, George, Grama Watts, Poppy, and Tim for your collective support, encouragement, and love. Much appreciation to Hite Art Institute and its faculty for three years of education, opportunities, and unforgettable experiences. Thank you to my Mentor, Professor Rachel Singel, for your guidance, encouragement, and for always believing in me. Many thanks to my committee, Professor Ying Kit Chan, Dr. Michael Johmann, and Dr. Tomas Maloney. Thank you, Erica Lewis, Brylee Eddy, and Monica Stewart, for all of your help, support, and friendship throughout this endeavor. Thank you, Koreloy Mcwhirter and Bruce Greene, for your love, wisdom, and mutual appreciation for our Mother Earth. Thanks to Professor Mary Carothers for your support, Professor Brett Anderson for your guidance and inspiration, and Theresa Berbet, Professor Scott Massey, Barbara Hanger, and Linda Rowley for everything.

ABSTRACT

-RHIZA

Katherine E. Watts

April 30th, 2021

-rhiza is a collection of work that focuses on an immersive experience of local ecology and the dichotomous relationship of humanity and nature, presented through the artist's eyes, ecophilosophy, mycology, ecofeminism, and metaphor. An installation of experiential work, *-rhiza* consists of videography, printmaking, photography, musical elements, both found object and natural item sculptures, and poetry. This compendium of work addresses humanity's apathy towards the ecological imbalance and how this affects our fundamental interconnectedness with all life.

Based on explorations of local waterways and the recognition of human consumerism's pressing issues, *-rhiza* attempts to present the urgent matter of rising waste levels and the ever-present impact this has on the biosphere. This body of work seeks to create a dialogue between humanity and nature, present the idea of non-duality of beings, reroute common thoughts of anthropocentrism, and promote a realization of the larger *Self* - the Earth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION: THE DISCONNECT.....	1
THE MEANING OF NATURE.....	6
HIDDEN TREASURES: INORGANIC OBJECTS.....	13
ORGANIC MATERIALS.....	24
REASSEMBLAGE AND THE PROCESSES.....	29
CONCLUSION: THE SOLUTION IS WITHIN US ALL.....	38
REFERENCES.....	43
APPENDIX: A LIST OF IMAGES FROM -RHIZA.....	45
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	65

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Katherine E. Watts. <i>Monotropa uniflora</i> or ‘Ghost Pipes’. Photograph. 2019.....	2
2. Khalil Chishtee. Plastic Bag Sculpture. Trash bags and found plastic items. 2007....	16
3. Tan Zi Xi. Plastic Ocean. 26,000 found plastic items. Installation. 2017.....	17
4. Katherine E. Watts. Recycling Failures. Installation. 2021.....	18
5. Chris Jordan. Albatross Chick. Photograph. 2008.....	19
6. Mandy Barker. Locations of recovered Marine Plastic Debris. Digital map. 2021.....	21
7. Mandy Barker. 276 pieces of plastic found in the stomach of one 90-day-old Albatross chick from Midway Island, North Pacific Ocean. Photograph. 2012.....	22
8. Nils-Udo. Clemson Clay - Nest. Pine trunks, clay, bamboo. Pigment Print. 2005.....	28
9. Katherine E. Watts. Phenotype Home with Primordium. Found bird’s nest, found pacifier, dried mushroom, plastic needle, gold leaf, gold thread, glass rods. 2021.....	28
10. Marcel Duchamp. Bicycle Wheel. Wheel and stool. 1963.....	31
11. Katherine E. Watts. Golden Daze. Found tricycle, dried flowers, dried pink oyster mushrooms, wood conk mushroom, resin, moss, gold leaf. 2021.....	32
12. Sarah Lucas. Dame Zero. Installation. 2018.....	33
13. Katherine E. Watts. -rhiza. Installation. 2021.....	33
14. Inside cover of <i>Shantyboat: A River Way of Life</i> . Ink drawing. 1977.....	37

INTRODUCTION: THE DISCONNECT

Do we have the courage to face the realities of our time? Allow ourselves to feel deeply enough that it transforms us and our future? Come with me on a journey through the eye of beauty, across an ocean of grief, and beyond. - Chris Jordan

The earth is in distress. *Our* planet is hurting, because of us, our greed, behaviors, and actions. *We* are all part of this problem, and we see and experience the signs daily. Every time we go outside, turn on the television, go on vacation, take our dog for a walk, or check our cell phones, we feel the earth's turmoil. Extreme heat, ice caps melting, flooding, superstorms, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, hurricanes, raging fires, microplastics, oil spills, and droughts is only a small list of what ravages our earth at any given point.

The majority of people worldwide will experience these feelings and think to themselves, 'How does this directly affect me? What can I possibly do as a single individual to help remedy this situation?'. What we as humans can do collectively is reflect upon our past, reduce our overall consumption rates, re-use 'single use' plastics or recycle them, be an advocate for change in social structures and habits, consider our future and the futures of the children, have sympathy for the earth and the human race as a whole and know that we all come from the same planet. A vast ecosystem beyond our understanding connects us all.

We can also learn to understand the fungi kingdom and study the immense impact that it can have in assisting with the problems that we have created. Not to say we should

take advantage of these fungi, but rather work alongside them and learn from them to help create more efficient remedying situations for ecological disasters.

The word -rhiza is used as a suffix and comes from the Greek word *rhíza*, meaning 'root(s)' or 'to root.' For this exhibition, I draw inspiration from the word *mycorrhiza*, meaning 'fungus roots,' used in the word *mycorrhizal*. Mycorrhiza is used when referencing the relationship between mycelium and green plants or tree roots. "The term mycorrhiza was coined in 1885 by German biologist Albert Frank...In his views, plants and mycorrhizal fungi were bound in an 'intimate, reciprocal dependence'...Mycorrhizal mycelium...enable the entire nourishment of the tree from soil."¹

Another situation in which mycorrhizal relationships occur is with a plant species called *Monotropa uniflora* or 'Ghost Pipes.' These are plants that have lost the ability to photosynthesize, in other words, the ability to acquire nutrients from the sun. In return, they have created a relationship with neighboring mycorrhizal fungal networks to obtain these nutrients and energy to survive. Nearly 10% of all plant species share the same technique as this mycoheterotroph. These types of mycorrhizal relationships are happening around us, at all points in time and throughout the entire biosphere.

¹ Sheldrake, Merlin. *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*. Illustrated, Random House, 2020.

Figure 1. *Monotropa uniflora* or 'Ghost Pipes'. Photographed by the artist in North Carolina. 2019.

Mycelium is essentially the underground root network for mushrooms. A mushroom can be compared to the 'flowering body' of fungi, similar to the fruit on a tree or a plant's flower. Merlin Sheldrake, mycologist and author of *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our World, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*, wrote, "Mushrooms dominate the popular fungal imagination, but just as the fruits of plants are one part of a much larger structure that includes branches and roots, so mushrooms are only the fruiting bodies of fungi, the place where spores are produced." The mushroom is also what could be considered the 'sex organ' of the species because it is the part of the fungus used to create genetic material (fungal spores) to spread about the earth by various means.

Fungi produce around fifty megatons of spores each year - equivalent to the weight of five hundred thousand blue whales - making them the largest source of living particles in the air... We all live and breathe fungi, thanks to the prolific abilities of fungal fruiting bodies to disperse spores. Some species discharge spores explosively, which accelerate ten thousand times faster than a space shuttle

directly after launch, reaching speeds of up to a hundred kilometers per hour - some of the quickest movements achieved by any living organism.²

I chose the title *-rhiza* for this exhibition because of the mycological aspects of the body of work and how mushrooms can help us aid in the healing of our earth within the realms of both fungal and human capacity. I also chose the title *-rhiza* for the literal and metaphorical ‘roots’ reference, and the innate relationship that needs to be recreated between humans and these said ‘roots.’ References made to mycorrhizal relationships throughout *-rhiza* are metaphors for the possibilities of the human race having the potential to re-create a long-lost balance with nature again.

² Sheldrake, Merlin. *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*. Illustrated, Random House, 2020.

Spirit of love
That flows against our flesh
Sets it trembling
Moves across it as across grass
Erasing every boundary that we accept
And swings the doors of our lives wide -
This is a prayer I sing:
Save our perishing earth!

Spirit that cracks our single selves -
Eyes fall down eyes,
Heart escape through the bars of our ribs
To dart into other bodies -
Save this earth!
The earth is perishing.
This is a prayer I sing.

Spirit that hears each one of us,
Hears all this is -
Listens, listens, hears us out -
Inspire us now!
Our own pulse beats in every stranger's throat,
And also, there within the flowered ground beneath
 our feet,
and - teach us to listen! -
We can hear it in water, in wood, and even in stone.
We are earth of this earth, and we are bone of its
 bone.
This is the prayer I sing, for we have forgotten this
 and so
the earth is perishing.

- Barbara Deming, excerpt from *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*

THE MEANING OF NATURE

*I could not be a poet without the natural world. Someone else could. But not me.
For me, the door to the woods is the door to the temple.
-Mary Oliver*

Replace *a poet* with *an artist* in Oliver's quote, and therein lies the art practice that I follow. Where I grew up as a child and how I was raised within that situation are essential parts of the artist I am today. The processes and items that I choose to create with are often influenced by my childhood. I was raised in a very free, unbridled, yet comfortably structured and safe environment in Fredonia, Indiana. These lands and forests are free from air, water, noise, and light pollution. I was able to run naked in the rain, eat from our beloved organic garden, and interact with a plethora of domesticated and wild flora and fauna. I was nurtured with charming homemade toys, clothes, and homegrown meals. I was raised in a home, a home like no other, that enabled me to think, live, and speak freely. I never take my idyllic childhood for granted, nor do I ever miss a chance to express my gratefulness for it.

As a small child, my Mom took me to various hidden, magical places such as greenhouses, family farms, and food co-ops. I was allowed to explore the premises at will, as long as I was within earshot of a Mother's beckoning call. I would discover new species of flowers, befriend barn cats, observe bird's nests, and be consumed by the smell of an empty, greenhouse baking in the sun. These wondrous places further nurtured my immense love and curiosity for all beings and also for the sheer thrill of exploration and foraging.

In the summer of 1985, as an infant, I was lovingly swaddled and placed in the bow of our 1955 Mahogany Chris Craft runabout. My parents on either side of me, cradling me from any danger, we launched into the Ohio River and began our journey upriver to Payne Hollow. My Dad tells me that we went to visit poets and artists Harlan and Anna Hubbard several times. This time in particular, they welcomed us into their home.

As I crawled on their living room floor, I became fascinated with my new surroundings and made many 'cooing' sounds. Harlan said, in his high-pitched voice, "Now there is a sound we haven't heard in this house in a very long time," and smiles at Anna as she nods in agreement. This story of visiting the Hubbards that I have heard many times over the years has become an essential part of my art practice.

My Dad has carried the same copy of *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life* by Harlan Hubbard in his car for decades. He references this book like some would reference the Bible. I have since become a proud owner of this very same book. It has helped guide me throughout my journey through graduate school. The experience of reading *Shantyboat* and knowing that I was in the presence of the Hubbards, whom both had adamant love, reverence, and respect for nature and all of her creatures, has shaped the creation of *-rhiza*.

To him (the shantyboater), the river is more than a means of livelihood. It is a way of life, the only one he knows which answers his innate longing to be untrammelled and independent, to live on the fringe of society. His drifting downstream is as natural to him as his going old in the stream of time. Away from the river he languishes as if taken from his natural element.³

³ *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life*. 2nd Edition, University Press of Kentucky, 1977.

Harlan and Anna Hubbard, their art and way of life, were a large part of my artistic inspiration as a teenager and young adult. Through my Dad first and then imparted unto me, this information has carried on from young adulthood and into my life today. As I grew older, I became inspired by many more artists and authors that I aspire to be like in my artistic practice. One of those authors is the poet Mary Oliver.

When I was a child, living in a small town surrounded by woods and a winding creek - woods more pastoral than truly wild - my great pleasure, and my secret, was to fashion for myself a number of little houses. They were huts really, made of sticks and grass, maybe a small heap of fresh leaves inside. There was never a closure but always an open doorway, and I would sit just inside, looking out into the world. Such architectures were the capsule of safety, and freedom as well, open to the wind, made of grass and smelling lives leaves and flowers. I was lucky, no one ever found any of my houses, or harmed them. They fell apart of the weather, an event that caused me no grief; I moved on to another place of leaves and earth, and built anew.⁴

This poem could not be any more accurate to my childhood. The only difference between Oliver's poem and my personal experience is that it was a winding river (the Ohio River), not a creek, although there were many creeks nearby. In the backyard of our house, a cliff is home to many previous decades-old dumpsites. As a child, this was an absolute treasure trove of magic, full of possibilities to construct and incorporate into my 'houses,' as Oliver would say, whereas I called them my 'forts.' This is the beginning of my love for both nature and the fascination of stories that could be told from thrown away objects. This is also the beginning of the relationships that I would learn to create with nature and found objects throughout life.

I also spent many hours in the woods and by streams and ponds in the countryside...roaming freely on my bicycle. My friends and I had a freedom that few children now enjoy.⁵

⁴ Oliver, Mary. *Upstream: Selected Essays*. Reprint, Penguin Books, 2019.

⁵ Sheldrake, Rupert. *Science and Spiritual Practices: Transformative Experiences and Their Effects on Our Bodies, Brains, and Health*. Reprint, Counterpoint, 2019.

Nature is many different things or experiences to different people. Nature takes on many distinct names and characters. She⁶ is referred to as Nature, Mother Nature, Earth, Mother Earth, our ecosystem, the trees, the air, the water, and everything around us and inside of us. There are many different viewpoints on how we treat her. There are many unique references to her and experiencing her, such as 'being *in* nature,' 'being *with* nature,' or '*experiencing* nature,' all meaning something different to each person.

I believe that nature is an entity, a state of being, a relationship, an experience, and a Mother to us all. She is something that you can love dearly, or you can despise for 'cruelty', as humans call it. She is an unfathomable number of tiny organisms. However, she is one whole being, the original and all-mighty macrocosm. She is a minuscule part of an incredibly vast solar system. You can experience her with all of your senses and beyond, and yet, we know very little about her.

We know some things about the earth from scientific observation or individual experience. Some things we theorize, such as the general makeup of her core and her various layers, but there are things much more profound and powerful than we could ever imagine happening at all times. The connection that we can have with nature is available to everyone regardless of any difference factor. Nature is quite literally everywhere and anywhere, all of the time; all you have to do is *look* and *listen*.

⁶ I will refer to the earth and nature with the pronoun she for the remainder of the thesis.

Some would classify nature as a being or an entity that we are all connected to. According to essayist, poet, novelist, and playwright Susan Griffin, she refers to nature as:

Sunlight pouring into plants, ingested into the bodies of fish...into the bacteria, into the fungi, into the earth itself, because we know ourselves to be made of this earth, because we know sunlight moves through us, water moves through us. Because we know ourselves to be made from this earth. See this grass. The patches of silver and brown. Worn by the wind. The grace reflecting all that lives in the soil. The light. The grass meeting the soil. With roots, deep in the earth... our cells filled with water. Like the mud of this swamp... Because we know ourselves to be made of this earth, and shaped like the earth, by what has gone before. The lives of our mothers.⁷

Some speak of nature as what it has become in more recent times. German abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, and visionary Hildegard von Bingen, also known as Saint Hildegard and the Sibyl of the Rhine, said:

Now in the places that were meant to be green there is no more life of any kind. There is only shriveled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of peoples. The earth should not be injured! The earth must not be destroyed!⁸

Mind you, von Bingen was born in the year 1098, so unfortunately, this treatment of the earth has been happening for quite some time. Hildegard von Bingen was just one of the people recording such abuse that nature endured during this time.

Nature can be observed through spirituality or a feeling of connection; the connection between every single being is always and ever-present. Mary Oliver said it very simply "I believe everything has a soul...In the natural world - I feel at ease; nature

⁷ Griffin, Susan. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Reissue, Counterpoint, 2016.

⁸ Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, et al. *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Second Edition, Second edition, The Golden Sufi Center, 2016.

(is) full of beauty and interest and mystery, also good and bad luck, but never misuse." Misuse is precisely what we have done and still do to the earth, but she would never misuse us.

When relating to nature, humans' overall apathy towards her is of great concern to many scientists, activists, environmentalists, ecologists, and myself alike. This is why I chose to create bodies of work addressing such topics as pollution, the lacking relationship between humans and nature, presenting the idea of non-duality, and anthropocentrism.

The consequences of human apathy towards the earth have been and will continue to be severe. In Andree Collard's views, "It is clear that the word 'nature' does not so much define what we see but *how* we see. The hunter loves not nature but how he feels in it as he stalks his prey. Thus, nature is a state of mind and a cultural convention."⁹ I would have to agree with this statement wholeheartedly. Nature has digressed from something that we need, love, respect, live, and cooperate with, to something of cultural convention, *something* that we use for our gains, abuse, and misuse, and treat like she is something outside of us, when in reality, she *is* us.

These examples are what the terms 'nature' and 'earth' mean to a variety of people or groups of people, but what can be done about the *state* of nature? What can we

⁹ Collard, Andree, and Joyce Contrucci. *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth*. First Printing, Indiana University Press, 1989.

do as humans to better the situation, if only by a small amount? Writer and professor John Seed in *Thinking Like a Mountain* says,

If we wish to reunite with nature, the first requirement is that we have the intention to establish this contact. ...when we realize we are acting not just from our own opinions or beliefs, but on behalf of a larger Self - the Earth - with the authority of more than four billion years of our planet's evolution behind us, then we are filled with new determination, courage and perseverance, less limited by self-doubt, narrow self-interest and discouragement.¹⁰

We have to be fully, or at the very least, somewhat *aware* of the dire situation before we can learn to amend it in any way. To be in a state of awareness is beneficial for humans collectively, individuals, and all of life. It can be the start of trying to bring the balance back to where it is supposed to be; the balance of all life on earth.

You must first be still
and seek an awareness within yourself,
before you can truly experience
the interconnectedness of all beings.

¹⁰ Seed, John, et al. *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*. Philadelphia, PA, New Society Publishers, 1988.

HIDDEN TREASURES: INORGANIC OBJECTS

I love the unpredictability of found materials and enjoy the inventiveness necessary to transform them into a sculpture. I try wherever possible to use materials that are reclaimed, things with a history that have been discarded and might otherwise end up in a landfill.

-Michelle Reader, found object artist

A significant and vital component of *-rhiza* is found inorganic objects, or as I like to call them, hidden treasures. A total immersion into the forests and landscapes and experiencing these surroundings with every sense is an essential part of my practice. The smell of plants and forest, the feeling of the tree bark and leaves within my hands are taken into account. The sun, snow, or rain that bears down on my skin, and the sounds of rustling branches, swaying grasses, and birdsong are recognized wholly. I taste the sweet, clean oxygen-rich air that the trees so selflessly provide, and the innate beauty and despair is seen everywhere. When in the woods alone, I am reminded of Wendell Berry's poem entitled *Spring*:

A shower like a little song
Overtook him going home,
Wet his shoulders, and went on.¹¹

¹¹ Berry, Wendell. *ENTRIES: Poems*. 1st ed., Pantheon, 1994.

My scavenging explorations primarily occur within three different riverbanks and surrounding forests: old Leavenworth and Fredonia banks, Angel Mound's boat ramp and trails in Evansville, and the Falls of the Ohio fossil beds in Clarksville, all located in the state of Indiana. I have also explored Patoka Lake, my Aunt's Vero beachfront in Florida, along Highway 1 beaches in California, my Aunt and Uncle's creek beds that run through their farmland in Horsebranch, Kentucky, in Burnsville, North Carolina, along the Glass River, the creeks and rivers in the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Foraging/exploring/scavenging is one of my most cherished and precious pastimes. It is a meditative journey that I use to help create a connection with *myself*, the earth, and nature. When scavenging, I tend to choose romanticized items that tell a story, are colorful, or have been around for quite some time and have rather severe elemental damage to them. Rummaging through what I call 'new trash,' such as soda bottles, snack bags, cigarette filters, or Styrofoam when searching for items that I will incorporate into my work, is common. I collect as much of this 'new trash' as I can to recycle or put in the proper waste receptacle.

Many found elements have been collected and incorporated into *-rhiza*, such as bicycles, tricycles, bicycle wheels, baby bottles, medicine bottles, mooring line (towboat rope), and many other small plastic toy items. The bicycle and tricycle elements can be interpreted however the viewer wishes. However, for myself, these elements are nostalgic, something from the joyful past that someone experienced, threw away and has since forgotten.

The plastic-filled baby bottles are a direct metaphor for the major companies who are knowingly poisoning our children through advertising, heavy metals, microplastics, and genetically modified foods, all for profit. The medicine bottles are a representation of western medicine and medical system. We, unfortunately, live in a reactive society, not a proactive one. Being proactive about our health and well-being is usually criticized or frowned upon because there is no need to 'get better,' only to maintain our current state of health, whatever that may be.

Lastly is the mooring line, which is a rope used in assisting towboats to remain tethered to a dock. Much of the time, the ropes are cut off and discarded into the river, where many are found during my explorations. Shards and pieces of the line are incorporated into the work to indicate yet another way humans deliberately poison the earth and directly affect its fragile and intricate ecosystems and waterways.

Many artists work with trash, found objects, and ocean plastics. Some of them consider themselves environmental artists or ecological artists. However, I gravitate towards the artists more like myself for inspiration. These artists care about the earth, the environment, and the ecosystem. However, they are driven more by emotion, reaction, metaphor, and relationship. In my artwork, I actively try to produce an awareness, memory, and a realization of a relationship with the earth that exists within every human. A few inspiring artists who work with inorganic found objects are Khalil Chishtee, Tan Zi Xi, Chris Jordan, and Mandy Barker.

New York resident Chishtee creates very evocatively figurative sculptures out of used plastic shopping bags. "People throw their garbage or filth in these bags, but I

record/store my finest emotions in these bags." A powerful message from Chishtee that resonates with me is:

In art, one has to be the voice of one's own time, not an echo of another era. We live in the age of plastic, and plastic bags are the most ordinary form of this material. It goes back to the Sufi approach of my upbringing where worth does not depend on what you inherit, it depends on who you are. Anything made out of bronze, wood, stone or painted on a canvas carries the appearance of being worth looking at, because of its history, but if one can change the impact of that history, one is an artist.¹²

Figure 2. Khalil Chishtee. Plastic Bag Sculpture. Trash bags and found plastic items. Life-size. 2007.

¹² Pcarvalho. "Plastic Bag Sculptures by Khalil Chishtee." *I Lobo You | Boca Do Lobo's Inspirational World Exclusive Design*, 29 Sept. 2016, www.iloboyou.com/plastic-bag-sculptures-khalil-chishtee.

Tan Zi Xi is another artist who works specifically with ocean trash. She says,

I think the human species is myopic; we don't really look at how we are treating the environment cruelly or not using our finite resources judiciously. I want to communicate a more futuristic perspective on how our habits now will determine the future and on the kind of legacy we will be leaving behind. Mankind has the capability to recreate a new space, but we will be stuck in a terrain that is covered with toxic waste.¹³

Xi has a graphic design background, but after working in a clean-up in the Pacific Ocean, she decided to create an immersive installation consisting of 26,000 collected and suspended pieces of plastic. This installation prompted me to create a suspended collection of trash, *Recycling Failures*.

Figure 3. Tan Zi Xi aka MessyMsxi. Plastic Ocean. Installation. 2017.

“I believe that *Plastic Ocean* is a piece of installation that can...hopefully create an encounter where one starts to consider the consequences of our individual wastes and

¹³ “Artist Tan Zi Xi On Her Installation That Brings Together Nature And Technology” *Verve Magazine*, 13 Sept. 2019, www.vervemagazine.in/arts-and-culture/artist-tan-zi-xi-on-her-installation-that-brings-together-nature-and-technology

overconsumption culture”¹⁴ I also hope to create and bring forth these same reactions within my viewers, through *-rhiza*.

Figure 4. Katherine E. Watts. Recycling Failures. Installation. 2021.

Another artist I mentioned previously is Chris Jordan. Jordan is an American artist, photographer, and film producer who creates very moving work about humans' mass consumption and its adverse effects on the earth.

Jordan visited landfills and recycling centers to photograph vast piles of discarded products such as cell phones, chargers, circuit boards, crushed cars, glass bottles, and other consumer goods. Jordan transformed these billowing piles into seductive abstractions, whose beauty is at odds with the reality that discarded items consume resources in the recycling process and propel a stream of residual waste into landfills, wastewater plants, and the atmosphere.¹⁵

¹⁴ Suresh, Vaishnavi. "Tan Zi Xi's 'Plastic Ocean' - Vaishnavi Suresh." *Medium*, 3 June 2018, medium.com/@vaishnavisuresh/tan-zi-xis-plastic-ocean-185080534c8.

¹⁵ "Chris Jordan –." *Art Works for Change*, 2004,

Jordan also created a documentary titled *Albatross*, filmed 2,000 miles from any continent on an island in the Pacific Ocean. This island is where Albatross birds migrate to mate. Jordan photographed what became of these birds as a species since humans have severely polluted the oceans with plastics and chemicals of all kinds. The following picture is what was found inside a 90-day old Albatross chick.

Figure 5. Chris Jordan. *Albatross Chick*. Photograph. 2008.

Jordan said, concerning the experience of photographing these birds and this situation, “The experience was devastating, not only for what it meant for the suffering of

www.artworksforchange.org/portfolio/chris-jordan.

the birds but also for what it reflected back to us about the destructive power of our culture of mass consumption, and humanity's damaged relationship with the living world."

One final artist that will be discussed and referenced, who uses plastics from mass human consumption, is Mandy Barker. British photographer Barker has been traveling the world for over ten years, photographing and documenting marine plastic debris. She has published several books, won many awards, has been published and recognized by National Geographic and Time magazine, and is the recipient of many exceptional awards. One important quote from Barker, which resonates throughout my work, is,

It is unlikely that my work will stimulate and raise awareness for every viewer, however if it engages and delivers some part of the message to just a few, then in my opinion, it is successful. If I had created these series to be placed in a box unseen, they would still have been initiated with the same tenacity and determination for spreading their ultimate message. This motivation comes from within.¹⁶

What drives me to create my work, made from found objects and waste, is my interest in mixing science with art and vice versa. Several main focuses of *-rhiza* are mycology, facts about human consumerism, and inorganic waste. With scientific facts and study in mind, Barker creates and lets science heavily influence her work. By science, I am referring to facts, statistics, and collaborating with scientists and biologists. Barker says, "...I feel it is important for artists in all media to be involved with crucial issues, whether environmental, humanitarian, political or otherwise; I believe that art has the power to connect people and help in some way to create change."

¹⁶ Barker, Mandy, and Richard Thompson. *Altered Ocean*. OVERLAPSE, 2020.

For example, Barker's following image is of a chart that indicates everywhere she has collected marine waste.

Figure 6. Mandy Barker. Locations of recovered Marine Plastic Debris. Digital map. 2021.

Barker also studied and photographed Albatross birds and chicks. She made the artistic choice to take the 'rawness' out and added a more specimen-like feel to it by photographing the plastic found in the chick, excluding the carcasses that Jordan included in his photographs and documentary.

Figure 7. Mandy Barker. 276 pieces of plastic found in the stomach of one 90-day-old Albatross chick from Midway Island, North Pacific Ocean. Photograph. 2012.

Barker includes many scientific facts, figures, and statistics throughout her work, such as, “A plastic bag is used for an average of twelve minutes before disposal. When a bag enters the sea, the most common hazard to animals is through digestion. Sea turtles often mistake bags for their favourite foods jellyfish and squid, when seen floating in the water column.”, “Between 290-300 plastic bags are used per person per year in the UK...A plastic bottle takes 450 years to decompose, and that’s only if it stays in its original form and is not manipulated in any way, such as extreme heat that will turn it into microplastics.”, and “Every nine minutes, plastic weighing as much as a blue whale (about 300,000 pounds) ends up in the ocean.”¹⁷

I have incorporated Barker’s collected facts into this thesis to bring to the forefront one of the main reasons I create the work that I do - to help create human empathy towards nature and the earth. I believe that more humans need to be aware of

¹⁷Barker, Mandy, and Richard Thompson. *Altered Ocean*. OVERLAPSE, 2020.

this dire situation. Other facts about plastic waste that I feel are relevant to the creation of *-rhiza* are, (Polystyrene) The most significant and alarming offender to impact on marine life. When released into the environment, it will never decompose or degrade to a non-recognizable form.”. “One-third of caught fish now contain plastic. Chemicals used to make plastic, such as Bisphenol-A (BPA), can be absorbed by the human body, causing cancers and altering hormones.”¹⁸ Also, “Nearly a million plastic beverage bottles are sold every minute around the world. In 2015, Americans purchased about 346 bottles per person (totaling 111 billion).¹⁹

¹⁸ “Surfers Against Sewage | Environmental Charity Tackling Plastic Pollution.” *Surfers Against Sewage*, 18 Jan. 2021, www.sas.org.uk.

¹⁹ “Plastic.” *Container Recycling Institute, 2021*, www.container-recycling.org/index.php/factstatistics/plastic.

ORGANIC MATERIALS

It is no longer regarded as romantic but exceedingly realistic to fight for every tree, every plot of undeveloped land, every stream as yet unpoisoned, every old town center, and against every thoughtless reconstruction scheme. And it is no longer considered romantic to speak of nature.” - Joseph Beuys, from his 1973 Manifesto.

Other forms of found items that I scavenge for and incorporate into my art are organic materials, such as living and dried mushrooms, moss, a bird's nest, seed pods, flowers, weeping willow branches, cow bones, and rose stems. By incorporating both organic items and inorganic found objects in *-rhiza*, I am attempting to showcase the relationship between the two (inorganic items and organic objects) and to help fight the general dichotomy that is associated with nature (organic) and the 'man-made' (inorganic).

Mushrooms and mycology play a prominent role in *-rhiza*. As mentioned in the introduction, the word rhiza is used as a suffix and comes from the Greek word rhiza, meaning 'root(s)' or 'to root.' Mushrooms or mycelium imagery, physical usage, and sound recordings are all incorporated into *-rhiza*. Specific artworks that incorporate mushroom elements include *Golden Daze* (Pink oyster mushroom cluster on the seat, grown and dried by the artist eluding to a feminine shape, and foraged polypore wood conk mushrooms cut and set in resin to form a 'wheel' for the missing wheel of the bike, thus 'completing' the bike again or 'fixing it'), *Golden Daze II* (white oyster mushrooms on the seat, aside moss and also on the structural bar, foraged and dried by the artist), *Recycling Failures* (Reishi and wood conk mushrooms, collected, and

dried by the artist, and then set in resin), *Ubiquity* (Pink oyster mushroom spores were printed onto handmade paper made from Reishi mushrooms), and *Different Parts of a Whole II, III, IV* (all manipulated photographs of local mushrooms found in Fredonia, IN). Mushrooms are also found in *Primordium* (a dried white oyster mushroom is used in place of the original pacifier nipple, and pink oyster mushrooms hanging from gold thread, grown and dried by the artist, symbolizing re-building or ‘patching up’ the plastic bags in the nest, through the use of mushrooms), and *Symbiosis* (music created by pink and blue oyster mushrooms, and the artist herself, as somewhat literal representations of the bioelectrical impedance of all of the organisms and the interactions that can occur that we are entirely unaware of).

Oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) and Reishi mushrooms (*Ganoderma lucidum*) are used throughout *-rhiza* and for a particular reason. Mushrooms belonging to the oyster family have been proven to break down and digest petroleum-based plastics and turn them into usable energy, carbon dioxide (which it stores in the mycelium underground to share with the neighboring trees and plants), and organic matter or soil.

(The) Oyster mushroom is one of the most common species of mushroom that is capable of eating plastic... Once the mushroom eats everything up, and there is no plastic left in the mushroom, it becomes healthy to eat. The studies are still being conducted for the safety of these edible mushrooms. Once they are found safe, they will solve two problems which are hunger and plastic pollution.²⁰

²⁰ “New Mushrooms Have Been Discovered That Can Eat Plastic.” *Fungal Futures*, 30 Mar. 2020, www.fungal-futures.com/new-mushrooms-have-been-discovered-that-can-eat-plastic.

Ganoderma lucidum (Reishi) was used throughout *-rhiza* for several reasons, one being that a large patch grew at the artist's residence and was readily available to be picked. Another reason is that they are soft, so they can easily break down and be made into paper goods or dried and set in resin. The third reason for their importance is their highly valued medicinal purposes. They are "Immune enhancing...anti-tumor, anti-viral, cholesterol-reducing, anti-fatiguing... (They) play an important role in anti-aging due to reducing damage from oxidative stress associated with free radicals... (It) helps with respiration, as this species enhances the oxygen-absorbing capacity of the alveoli in the lungs...This fungus came to be called the *Mushroom of Immortality*."²¹

There are several other reasons why mushrooms and fungus elements are incorporated into *-rhiza*. One of them being the sheer importance of the fungal kingdom to the human race.

The (fungi) are inside you and around you. They sustain you and all that you depend on. As you read these words, fungi are changing the way that life happens, as they have done for more than a billion years. They are eating rock, making soil, digesting pollutants, nourishing and killing plants, surviving in space, inducing visions, producing food, making medicines, manipulating animal behaviors, and influencing the composition of the Earth's atmosphere.²²

In other words, without mushrooms, there would quite literally be no humans or any other species that rely on soil to survive. We would not and could not exist without the ever-giving mushroom. This is an example of how today's anthropocentrism mentality can be discredited. Humans cannot possibly be at the 'top of the pyramid' if

²¹ Stamets, Paul. *MycoMedicinals an Informational Treatise on Mushrooms*. 3rd ed., China, MycoMedia Productions, a division of Fungi Perfecti, LLC, 2002.

²² Sheldrake, Merlin. *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*. Illustrated, Random House, 2020.

their reliance on another organism is so vital and necessary. Paul Stamets goes so far as to say, "Humans are more closely related to fungi than we are to any other kingdom...we are descendants of mycelium...mycelium is the Mother of us all. Mushrooms correct everything on earth; they support life, they carry life, they convert life..."²³

Another organic element that is incorporated into *-rhiza* is a bird's nest in *Phenotype Home*. Phenotype is a term used in genetics for an organism's observable characteristics or traits. This term includes many different variables concerning the organism's physical form and structure. This piece focuses on the term's reference to an organism's behavior and the products of such behavior, such as building a nest. The nest that I found and chose to put in *-rhiza* included plastic bags due to the bird's behavior and environment, which I did not add or manipulate in any way. Motherhood, childhood, and femalehood are all represented through this nest. I drew inspiration from Nils-Udo's Art in Nature, especially *Clemson Clay - Nest*, *Winter Nest*, and *La Couvée*.

²³ *Fantastic Fungi*. Dir. Louie Schwartzberg. Area 23a, 2019. Film.

Figure 8. Nils-Udo. Clemson Clay - Nest. Pine trunks, clay, bamboo. Pigment Print 131 x 200 cm. 2005.

Figure 9. Katherine E. Watts. Phenotype Home with Primordium. Found bird's nest, found pacifier, dried mushroom, plastic needle, gold leaf, gold thread, glass rods. 2021.

REASSEMBLAGE AND THE PROCESSES

Happiness can be a flow between a playful construction and a painful deconstruction, undulating from a hampering past into a liberating 'now,' escorting a meandering flood of twists and turns, caressing the velvet sand of dreamy beaches, or sometimes smashing into the rocks of reality. - Erik Pevernagie speaking of the work New York at arm's length of desire

When exploring, I am not only looking for specific items that are romanticized or that 'tell a story'; I am considering the process of deconstruction and reassemblage of each item that is discovered. Consideration of the object's usability, whether it will coincide or be incorporated into the work, which works will it be incorporated into, its recyclability or reusability, and how the interaction within the other pieces will come to be, are all important ideas to ponder. When creating the pieces for *-rhiza*, the combination and incorporation of items and objects that are not necessarily meant to be together, happens frequently. These actions and subsequent reappropriations create new relationships and new communication lines between items or objects that have never been communicated before that moment of reassemblage.

To quote Jacques Derrida:

What I will propose here will not be elaborated simply as a philosophical discourse, operating according to principles, postulates, axioms, or definitions, and proceeding along the discursive lines of a linear order of reasons. In the delineation of difference everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is a not simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a telos or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of the development of the field. Finally, a strategy without finality, what might be called

blind tactics, or empirical wandering if the value of empiricism did not itself acquire its entire meaning in opposition to philosophical responsibility.

Derrida refers to the literary world mostly, while I prefer to interpret his deconstruction methods and theories and apply them to my art-making processes. His creation of the word *différance*, meaning difference, and deferral of meaning, is fascinating; that the deferral of meaning is the same as the actual definition of difference.

After the deconstruction of items, the reassembling process begins either on paper in the form of a sketch or the literal, physical sense of construction. To give a better understanding of the concern behind this method on deconstruction and reassemblage, I will quote an excerpt:

Derrida rarely makes methodological statements, partly because his terminology is in a permanent state of flux (see 1972a, where *différance* is supplanted by 'dissemination'), but mainly because, like De Man, he does not regard deconstruction as a method to be applied to texts, but rather as a style of reading or criticism which works by teasing out the internal logics of the text...As the internal logic, contradictions and unseen confusions of the text are unraveled, the stability of meaning is undermined as it is shown to depend upon such oppositions as 'inside' and 'outside,' which can easily be demonstrated to be no more than a spatial metaphor. Given that 'inside/outside' is no more than a metaphor, deconstruction itself cannot be said to be 'outside' the logocentric tradition is it undermining; that work can be done only from within.²⁴

Two artists who incorporate the reassembling process like I do are Marcel Duchamp and Sarah Lucas. Duchamp did not want to create what he referred to as 'retinal art.' He wanted to use art to 'serve the mind.'²⁵ Duchamp was a very

²⁴ *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory (Penguin Reference Books)*. New Ed, Penguin Books, 2002.

²⁵ "Archived copy". Archived from the original on 30 September 2013. Retrieved 27 September 2013. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) at Metropolitan Museum of Art.

pertinent part of the Dada movement. The Dada movement came about after WWI and was a reaction to the atrocities of WWI. Artists creating during the Dada movement rejected logic and reason and prized the irrational and *anti-art*. Take *Bicycle Wheel* by Duchamp, for example; these are found and bought objects, or readymades, reassembled so that it is still recognizable, yet something 'new.'

Figure 10. Marcel Duchamp. *Bicycle Wheel*. Wheel and stool. 1963.

I want to compare my piece *Golden Daze* to this. I have added several elements to my main subject, including gold leaf, mushrooms, and other natural elements. I also created a 'new story' for the item, with a new aesthetic, not unlike *Bicycle Wheel*.

Figure 11. Katherine E. Watts. Golden Daze. Found tricycle, dried flowers, dried Pink Oyster mushrooms, moss, gold leaf, wood conk mushrooms, resin. 2021.

I can relate and draw inspiration from feminist artist Sarah Lucas because she uses found objects frequently throughout her work as well. I also relate to the fact that she uses ordinary objects to create something 'new.' This is also attempted in *-rhiza*; art is created from everyday items, thus creating something 'new' from something old.

She takes, as the title of this exhibition of her sculpture suggests, 'ordinary things,' like tights, or vegetables, or an old mattress, or bits of wood, or tables, or eggs, or kebabs, or boots, or concrete casts of boots, and she does something to them that can actually make you blush. She doesn't just take ordinary objects and say they're art. Quite a lot of the YBAs (Young British Artists), and the people they have influenced, do. They seem to think that if you say something's art, it's art, and if you say something's shocking, it is. They seem to forget that the person to decide whether something's shocking, or powerful, or moving, isn't the person who made it.²⁶

²⁶ Patterson, Christina. "Sarah Lucas: A Young British Artist Grows up and Speaks Out." *The Independent*, 20 Dec. 2012, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/sarah-lucas-young-british-artist-grows-and-speaks-out-7959882.html.

Figure 12. Sarah Lucas. Dame Zero. Installation. 2018.

-rhiza is based less on shock value and sexuality like Lucas's work and more on the hope of instilling an awareness within the viewer, considering their own lives and choices or how they could reduce their carbon footprint consumption levels.

Figure 13. Katherine E. Watts. -rhiza. Installation. 2021.

A large part of the found object reassembling process is gilding the items with gold paint or gold leaf. There are several reasons why I chose to do this, one being human's preoccupation with gold for thousands of years. Gold can be found in Greek mythology, within the Gold Rush, in Egyptian burials, in the form of gold coins, the

'Golden Age,' and the gold medal is the most cherished prize in the Olympics or any competitive arena. Another reason comes from a book about color within art:

Gold seems eternal; it can be continually melted and reshaped without losing any of its value...gold has a high status in art because of its inherent symbolic value of nobility and divinity. Gold is suited to everything sacred. Gold is not only a 'valuable commodity': it is the intimation of a place, space, and time beyond human...it helps the transcendence of the earthly level, transferring it to a higher context.²⁷

In 1983 - Gustave Moreau said, "Note one thing well: you must think through colour, have imagination in it. If you don't have imagination, your colour will never be beautiful. Colour must be thought, dreamed, imagined..." How the majority of past and present artists closely work with color themes or theory is essential to my research for *-rhiza*. This research played an essential role in my choice of the color gold throughout the installation. Gold was incorporated to unify the installation, create a more experiential environment, and create a single cohesive element.

No doubt there are a thousand different ways of working with colour. But when one composes with it, like a musician with harmonies, it is simply a question of emphasizing the differences...Colour helps to express light, not the physical phenomenon, but the only light that really exists, that is the artist's brain.
- Matisse²⁸

Some of the techniques and processes used throughout *-rhiza* are printmaking, videography, photography, and audio. Printmaking was found in the literal title piece *-rhiza*, located on the gallery's outside wall, *Mushroom Spore Print* woodcut, and *Anthropocentric Self-Cherishing*. Mushrooms naturally created the prints for the title wall. A spore print is created from 'catching' the spores on another surface, usually paper.

²⁷ Zuffi, Stefano. *Color in Art*. Abrams, 2012.

²⁸ Batchelor, David. "Colour." *Colour (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*, The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 98–99.

As mentioned previously, a mushroom ejects spores that contain its DNA structure in many ways to reproduce. When they are ejected straight down with nowhere to go but the surface it is placed on, a naturally occurring print is created.

In *Anthropocentric Self-Cherishing*, large pieces and tiny shreds of mooring line were collected, coated with an oil-based ink, and then ran through a printing press with paper on the bottom side of it to 'capture' the monoprint that would be produced. Gold leaf was then applied to the print, along with a piece of found, disintegrated, white plastic shopping bag. This is a representational collage of the current state of the Ohio River; also, a metaphor for how polluted the river is and yet can remain so beautiful to view and be in the presence of.

Videography is used in *I give what I can*; a series of two short films created by the artist, looped and projected onto the natural walls of the gallery's building, thus creating a relationship with its surroundings and the people moving in front of and around the projector. Videography is used in *-rhiza* to further the experiential aspect of the installation and provide an immersive experience that a photo cannot provide. The viewer can experience the journey alongside the artist and discover where the found objects are located and how they are collected. This experience provides more of a 'real time' encounter instead of an outsider's gaze, thus creating a feeling of inclusion.

Photography was used in *-rhiza* for documentation and aesthetic purposes. There is beauty to behold in macro photography by capturing life simply *as is* and *as it exists*. The saturation levels have been manipulated to accentuate the naturally occurring colors and pigmentation of the organic subjects. The photographs are another experiential aspect of *-rhiza*; seeing things from a 'worm's eye view,' or in this case, 'mushrooms eye view' is

critical to my practice. Mary Oliver so eloquently states, “Deep in the woods, I tried walking on all fours...At the end, I was exhausted and sore, but I had seen the world from the level of the grasses, the first bursting growth of trees, declivities, lumps, slopes, rivulets, gashes, open spaces...You must never stop being whimsical.”²⁹

Sound plays a significant role in *-rhiza*; whether it be music created from living organisms, sounds of nature, spoken word poetry, or ambient guitar sounds in the video, *I give what I can*. In the installation *-rhiza*, two pedestals housed a cluster of growing blue oyster mushrooms, a midi/USB converter, a converter, electrodes, and a laptop. These various elements captured the sound frequencies of the mushrooms and converted them into synthesizers or orchestral sounds in real-time. One electrode was placed on the artist's hand, another electrode was placed on a mushroom, the artist's free hand then touched a different mushroom located within the same cluster, thus completing the electrical 'circle.' As a result of this endeavor, the artist and the mushrooms made 'music' together. The title of this piece is *Symbiosis*, which means the interactions between two different and separate organisms. This music is a metaphor for the relationship that humans have the potential of creating with nature.

The poetry in *I give what I can* was written and performed by the artist and was inspired by Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, and Harlan Hubbard. The poem speaks directly to the artist's relationship with Mother Earth. Musical elements are also included, which are performed and recorded by the artist on recording software. Naturally occurring sounds of the artist's explorations and excursions, such as birdsong and wind, are

²⁹ Oliver, Mary. *Upstream: Selected Essays*. Reprint, Penguin Books, 2019.

recorded on-site and incorporated. The sounds are all kept at their naturally occurring volumes as not to manipulate the experiential aspect of the installation.

An excerpt from *Payne Hollow* by Harlan Hubbard which resonates within the work in *-rhiza*:

The road was neglected; the fields, unsuited to mechanized farming, became sprout lands. The great flood swept away all traces of habitation, the narrow, offside valley was deserted. Anna and I were attracted by the very conditions which caused it to be abandoned. We are unique among its inhabitants, not farmers, nor fisherman Norse shanty boaters in the excepted sense; yet closer to the earth than any of them, with true respect for the river in the soil, and for Payne Hollow. May it long remain as it is, not merely for our selfish enjoyment, but for the satisfaction it must give many people to know there is such a place. Few wild pockets are left along the river these days.³⁰

...few wilds pockets indeed, Harlan.

Figure 14. Inside cover of *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life*. Ink drawing. 1977.

³⁰ *Payne Hollow: Life on the Fringe of Society*. Gnomon Press, 1997.

CONCLUSION: THE SOLUTION IS WITHIN US ALL

We need permission in our minds and hearts and guts to accept that we are destroying the Earth and to feel the reality of who we are in that context; isolated, desperate, and powerless individuals, defeated by our old patterns of behavior before we have even begun to try and heal our lives and the Earth. Only then can we give ourselves permission to feel the power our culture denies us, to regain our intuitive sense of everything being in relation rather than in opposition to regain our intuitive sense of the deep miraculous pattern to life that opens to us as we accept it... There is no healing or transformation without connection. - Justin Kenrick, Interhelper of Great Britain

The intersection of activism and artistry, the intermingling of science and art, and the consideration of the dichotomous relationship of the 'internal' and the 'external' aspects of human beings all play a crucial role in *-rhiza*.

Many artists, attracted by the interdisciplinary holism, are intrigued by ecological analysis and environmental activism. They see opportunities for artists to uniquely participate in the environmental regeneration. Artists can shape a new aesthetic that combines a visual sense of place, a willingness to physically 'sculpt' living matter, and engagement in public life, and an eagerness to invent new syntheses of science, action, and art.³¹

Changing our belief systems as a society and as a species about anthropomorphism, the dichotomous relationship between humans and nature, and human apathy towards the earth may seem unfathomably difficult, but it is possible; because we are not individuals separate from this world. The earth is an extension of us and every person makes a difference with their actions, choices through their system of beliefs, and sympathy towards themselves, and other species. If one person changes their

³¹ *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology*. 1st ed., The MIT Press, 2001.

ways, the possibility to inspire others becomes much more of a realistic possibility, which could eventually lead to the inspiration of their family, coworkers, or friends.

“Anthropocene” defines the current human-centric epoch, wherein natural phenomena have been extensively exploited and reconfigured to suit human socio-economic purposes. As health ecologist Geof Rayner notes, “In the space of two hundred years, human society has taken over the driver’s seat of planetary evolution, and while this has had enormous benefits for many, it comes with consequences for ecological systems, for human health, and potentially for human survival.”³²

Many activists...often assume, mistakenly, that people do not change because they lack information and that the main job of activists is to provide the missing information. ...such numbness and apathy does not stem from ignorance or indifference; on the contrary, most of us are aware of the destruction of our planet at the deepest level. But we do not face it...for fear of experiencing despair...We fear it may overwhelm us. Moreover, our society has constructed taboos against the communication and expression of such anguish. (This) impeded our capacity to process and respond to information as we screen out or filter anxiety-provoking data. But such feedback is precisely what we need to adapt, to survive. ...despair, grief, and anger can be confronted, experiences, and creatively channeled. Far from being crushed by it, new energy, creativity, and empowerment can be released. ... (this allows us to experience) our fundamental interconnectedness with all life.³³

Many people hear the staggering facts of how humans affect the earth, and it becomes disheartening, overwhelming, and terrifying. It is ok to feel that way. Humans need to recognize this feeling, let themselves experience it, and then act upon it to help

³² Barker, Mandy, and Richard Thompson. *Altered Ocean*. OVERLAPSE, 2020.

³³ Seed, John, et al. *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*. Philadelphia, PA, New Society Publishers, 1988.

make a difference, even if only slightly. Then, replace apathy this is lost within consumerism, with empathy.

When humans investigate and see through their layers of anthropocentric self-cherishing, a most profound change in the consciousness begins to take place. Alienations subsides. The human is no longer an outsider apart. Your humanness is then recognized as being merely the most recent stage of your existence; as you stop identifying exclusively with this chapter, you start to get in touch with yourself as vertebrate, as mammal, as a species only recently emerged from the rainforest. As the fog of amnesia disperses, there is a transformation in your relationship to other species and in your commitment to them.³⁴

An optional path to an ecologically and environmentally proactive breakthrough is utilizing and creating a relationship with the fungi kingdom. "Fungi provide a key to understanding the planet on which we live, and the ways that we think, feel, and behave. They live their lives largely hidden from view, and over ninety percent of their species remain undocumented. The more we learn about fungi, the less makes sense without them." The ten percent of documented fungi have an immense impact on the environment and ecosystem. We have the potential to work alongside and with fungi in the aiding of breaking down plastics, removing toxic waste, and building soil infrastructure. Fungi are at the beginning of life and also at the end; they are in every part of the circle of life.

There are more species of fungi, bacteria, and protozoa in a single scoop of soil than there are species of plants and vertebrate animals in all of North America. And of these, fungi are the grand recyclers, the mycomagicians disassembling large organic molecules into simpler forms, which in turn nourish other members of the ecological community. Fungi are the interface organisms between life and death. (Furthermore,) fungi are the keystone species that create ever-thickening layers of soil, which allow future plant and animal generations to flourish.

³⁴ Macy, Johanna. *World as Lover, World as Self*. United States of America, Parallax Press, 1991.

Without fungi, all ecosystems would fail.³⁵

I invite you to ponder upon the sentence: "Without fungi, all ecosystems would fail." The ecosystem would not be stunted or misguided. However, a result of complete ecosystem failure would occur if fungi were to stop existing. *This* is just how important fungi are to the human race and how we are not at the pinnacle of a pyramid. Instead, we are part of a very magnificently intricate circle of life. If we do improve upon our behavior collectively as humans, undoubtedly, the earth will respond.

...life forms do not constitute a pyramid without species at the apex, but rather a circle where everything is connected to everything else. We must realize that the environment is not 'out there,' and that when we poison the air or water or the soil, we poison ourselves...This is not to deny our identity as humans, but rather...to place this identity within its proper perspective, within the larger perspective of our 'ecological' Self.³⁶

As Arne Naess, ecologist and creator of the theory of *deep ecology* says, "...deep ecology seeks to help us see and feel ourselves as intimately interrelated to an intrinsically valuable nature, so that when we harm nature we diminish ourselves."³⁷

Without Mother Nature and her many coexisting beings, we are nothing. Let us be more kind to her, to ourselves, and all living things. Let us come together and protect what is within us and all around us. Let us encourage and realize together the larger *Self*, which is

- the Earth.

³⁵ Stamets, Paul. *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*. Illustrated, Ten Speed Press, 2005.

³⁶ Seed, John, et al. *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*. Philadelphia, PA, New Society Publishers, 1988.

³⁷ Naess, Arne. *The shallow and the deep, long range ecology movement*. Inquiry, 16, 1973.

We are all made of this Earth.
The way in which we treat her
is the way we treat ourselves -
the way we treat
each other.

This is the interconnectedness,
the larger *Self*.
This is what will heal -
what will make us
whole again.

- Katherine E. Watts, from *-rhiza* gallery statement

REFERENCES

- Adams, Carol, and Lori Gruen. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
- Barker, Mandy, and Richard Thompson. *Altered Ocean*. OVERLAPSE, 2020.
- Batchelor, David. *Colour (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*. The MIT Press, 2008.
- Berry, Wendell. *ENTRIES: Poems*. 1st ed., Pantheon, 1994.
- Collard, Andree, and Joyce Contrucci. *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth*. First Printing, Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Flack, Audrey. *Art and Soul: Notes on Creating (Compass)*. Reissue, Penguin Books, 1991.
- Grande, John, and Edward Lucie-Smith. "Culture Nature Catalyst - Betty Beaumont." *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews With Environmental Artists*, State University of New York Press, 2004, pp. 151–61.
- Griffin, Susan. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Reissue, Counterpoint, 2016.
- Heartney, Eleanor. *Roxy Paine*. Prestel Pub, 2009.
- Hubbard, Harlan. *Payne Hollow Journal*. University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Kastner, Jeffrey. *Nature (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*. The MIT Press, 2012.
- Macey, David. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory (Penguin Reference Books)*. New Ed, Penguin Books, 2002.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Illustrated, HarperOne, 1989.

- Ober, Clinton, et al. *Earthing: The Most Important Health Discovery Ever! (Second Edition)*. 2nd ed., Basic Health Publications, Inc., 2014.
- Oliver, Mary. *Upstream: Selected Essays*. Reprint, Penguin Books, 2019.
- Qing Li, et al. *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness*. Penguin Audio, 2018.
- Seed, John, et al. *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*. Philadelphia, PA, New Society Publishers, 1988.
- Sheldrake, Merlin. *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*. Illustrated, Random House, 2020.
- Sheldrake, Rupert. *Science and Spiritual Practices: Transformative Experiences and Their Effects on Our Bodies, Brains, and Health*. Reprint, Counterpoint, 2019.
- Stamets, Paul. *MycoMedicinals an Informational Treatise on Mushrooms*. 3rd ed., China, MycoMedia Productions, a division of Fungi Perfecti, LLC, 2002.
- Stamets, Paul. “The Medicinal Mushroom Forest.” *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*, Illustrated, Ten Speed Press, 2005, pp. 35–57.
- Suresh, Vaishnavi. “Tan Zi Xi’s ‘Plastic Ocean’ - Vaishnavi Suresh.” *Medium*, 3 June 2018, medium.com/@vaishnavisuresh/tan-zi-xis-plastic-ocean-185080534c8.
- Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, et al. *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Second Edition, Second edition, The Golden Sufi Center, 2016.
- Williams, Florence. *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*. Illustrated, W. W. Norton & Company, 2018.
- Wilson, Stephen. “Ecology: Organic Life as a System.” *Information Art Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology*, edited by Stephen Wilson, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2002, pp. 129–46.
- Zuffi, Stefano. *Color in Art*. Abrams, 2012.

APPENDIX: A LIST OF IMAGES FROM -RHIZA

1. *Biomimicry*. manipulated photograph, fallen Weeping Willow branches, spray paint, found objects. 2021.
2. *I give what I can*. digitally filmed on the banks of the Ohio River in Evansville, IN. Filming, editing, music, and spoken word by the artist. 2021.
3. *Interconnected Mess of Excess*. Found mooring line, rib bones, lumber. 2021.
4. *Golden Daze II*. found object (Fredonia, IN river bank), moss, dried mushrooms, gold leaf, glass rods, fallen Weeping Willow twigs. 2021.
5. *Different Parts of a Whole I*. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.
6. *Golden Daze*. Found object (Fredonia, IN river bank), resin, polypore mushrooms, gold leaf, dried flowers. 2021.
7. *Different Parts of a Whole II*. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.
8. *Different Parts of a Whole IV*. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.
9. *Different Parts of a Whole III*. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.
10. *Symbiosis*. the music that was created was that of mushrooms and the artist “singing” together through the sonification of their bioelectrical impedance: A multimeter attached to the artist and to the mushroom measures the electrical impedance, then transforms the electrical signals into notes using a sound chip. The artist then uses a music editing program to transform the electrical signal into different musical sounds. 2021.
11. *Pure Gold*. found objects (Evansville, IN Ohio River bank), baby bottles, resin, dried flowers. 2021.
12. *Impure Gold*. found objects (Evansville, IN Ohio River bank), found pill bottles, resin, rose branches. 2021.
13. *Phenotype Home with Primordium*. found pacifier, gold leaf, dried pink oyster mushroom, glass rods, found bird’s nest and plastic needle, gold thread. 2021.
14. *Anthropocentric Self-Cherishing*. found mooring line monoprint, gold leaf, found plastic bag. 2021.

15. *Recycling Failures*. found bicycle wheels, found plastic objects and natural items (Evansville and Clarksville, IN Ohio River bank), resin, ink. 2021.

16. *Ubiquity*. acrylic, sharpie, powdered pigment, Pink Oyster mushroom spore prints, dried flower, found mooring line, handmade Reishi mushroom paper. 2021.

17. *Mushroom Spore Print*. woodcut print. 2021.

Biomimicry. Manipulated photograph, fallen Weeping Willow branches, spray paint, found objects. 2021.

I give what I can. Digitally filmed video on the banks of the Ohio River in Evansville, IN.
Filming, editing, music, poetry and spoken word by the artist. 2021.

<https://youtu.be/TqRFRmTe9Ck>

There is wilderness around me,
I can feel it.
Constant wilderness,
filling me with its light.
I am surrounded.

Enlightened by dawn.
In mourning by dusk.
Embracing me as her very own child, against her chest.

She gives life to me.
I give my life to you,
oh love,
oh, sweet heart of mine,
of yours,
of ours,
that we share on an unimaginable level.

I accept your bounty
and I give what I can,
but you do not need it.

I give what I can
without taking
without expectations,
but you do not need it.

She is all knowing.
The Creator.
The design that is,
the rose,
intricate and precious.
By her hands alone.

Together.
Apart.
Intertwined.
Oh love,
I give what I can,
even though you do not need it.
...and I get everything in return.

My art is loving the Earth.
We should be fearful.
We should be thankful.
We should listen.

There is wilderness around me,
I can feel it.
I am surrounded.

I give what I can. Poem, spoken word. 2021.

Interconnected Mess of Excess. Found mooring line, rib bones, lumber. 2021.

Golden Daze II. Found object (Fredonia, IN river bank), moss, dried mushrooms, gold leaf, glass rods, fallen Weeping Willow twigs. 2021.

Different Parts of a Whole I. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.

Golden Daze. Found object (Fredonia, IN river bank), resin, polypore mushrooms, gold leaf, dried flowers. 2021.

Different Parts of a Whole II. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.

Different Parts of a Whole IV. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.

Different Parts of a Whole III. Manipulated photograph on Arches paper. 2020.

Symbiosis. The music that was created was that of mushrooms and the artist “singing” together through the sonification of their bioelectrical impedance: A multimeter attached to the artist and to the mushroom measures the electrical impedance, then transforms the electrical signals into notes using a sound chip. The artist then uses a music editing program to transform the electrical signal into different musical sounds. 2021.

<https://youtu.be/rLIGwyGDKAQ>

Pure Gold, (Artist), *Impure Gold*. Found objects (Evansville, IN Ohio River bank), found pill bottles, rose branches, baby bottles, resin, dried flowers. 2021.

Phenotype Home with Primordium. Found pacifier, gold leaf, dried pink oyster mushroom, glass rods, found bird's nest and plastic needle, gold thread. 2021.

Phenotype Home with Primordium. Found pacifier, gold leaf, dried pink oyster mushroom, glass rods, found bird's nest and plastic needle, gold thread. 2021.

Anthropocentric Self-Cherishing. Found mooring line monoprint, gold leaf, found plastic bag. 2021.

Recycling Failures. Found plastic objects and natural items (Evansville and Clarksville, IN Ohio River bank), found bicycle wheels, resin, ink. 2021.

<https://youtu.be/Umrjaemn4c>

Ubiquity. Acrylic, sharpie, powdered pigment, Pink Oyster mushroom spore prints, dried flower, found mooring line, handmade Reishi mushroom paper. 2021.

Mushroom Spore Print. Woodcut print. 2021.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Katherine E. Watts

ADDRESS: 10829 S. Fredonia Circle
Leavenworth, IN 47137

DOB: Louisville, KY March 31, 1984

EDUCATION

& TRAINING: B.Sc. Graphic Design
University of Southern Indiana
2007

MFA Candidate
University of Louisville
2018 - present

AWARDS/NOMINATIONS:

2021	Undergraduate Mentored Research Award, University of Louisville, KY
2020 - 2021	Alice Eaves Barnes Award Nominee, University of Louisville, KY
2020 - 2021	Graduate Dean's Citation Consideration, University of Louisville, KY
2019 - 2020	Faculty Favorite Nominee, University of Louisville, KY

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

2021	Artist Talk University of Louisville Foundations, Louisville, KY
2020	Artist Talk for University of Southern Indiana Printmaking, Evansville, IN
2019	Representative for UofL Hite Art at the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts College Fair, Lexington, KY
2019	University of Louisville Steamroller Printmaking Event co-organizer, Portland, KY
2019	Judge for Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Louisville, KY

2007 One of two students chosen to work alongside Mary Beth Edelson
in her *Utopiana* project, New Harmony, IN

Selected Exhibitions:

2021 *MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Cressman Center, Louisville, KY
 2021 *-rhiza*, University of Louisville MFA Space, Portland, Louisville, KY
 2021 Mid-American Print Council 2020-2022 Open Portfolio, online,
 #MAPC2020openportfolio
 2020 “AFLOAT”, the Celebration of the Ohio River, River Basin Alliance
 Symposium and Summit, Waterfront Botanical Gardens, Louisville, KY
 2020 *Ecological Borderlands*, University of Louisville Hite Art, Louisville, KY
 2020 *Time Identity*, University of Louisville MFA Space, Portland, Louisville,
 KY
 2020 *Urban Legends and Myths*, University of Louisville Hite Art, Louisville,
 KY
 2019 *Detox*, New Harmony Gallery of Contemporary Art, New Harmony, IN
 2019 Louisville Visual Art Open Studio, University of Louisville MFA Space,
 Portland, Louisville, KY
 2019 *Afloat* Printmaking Portfolio Exchange, University of Louisville Hite
 Art, Louisville, KY
 2019 *Current//MFA New Works*, University of Louisville MFA Space,
 Portland, Louisville, KY
 2019 *Justice & Music (JAM)*, Red Barn, University of Louisville, Louisville,
 KY
 2019 *Criminal* Printmaking Portfolio Exchange, University of Louisville,
 Louisville, KY
 2018 *Phobias* Printmaking Portfolio Exchange, University of Louisville, KY
 2018 Louisville Visual Art Open Studio, University of Louisville MFA Space,
 Portland, Louisville, KY
 2018 *Katie Watts* body of work, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN
 2017 *Dapper Beasts*, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN
 (Organized by Brett Anderson)

COMMISSIONS:

2019 - 2020 Various local community member, personal commissions, Louisville,
 KY
 2015 - 2020 Various local community member, personal commissions, Evansville,
 IN and surrounding areas
 2015 Historical downtown Greyhound Stations painting for AXIOM
 Marketing/Advertising benefit, Evansville, IN
 2015 Mayor Lloyd Winnecke portrait for *A Toast to the Arts* benefit,
 Evansville, IN

TEACHING & WORK EXPERIENCE:

2019 - 2021	Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY
2018 - 2021	University of Louisville Printmaking Shop Technician/Monitor
2009 - present	Professional Musician, Katie Watts Music, Evansville, IN and surrounding areas
2018 - 2019	Permanent Substitute Music Teacher, Oak Hill Elementary, Evansville, IN
2017 - 2018	Administrative Assistant, University of Southern Indiana, IN