

# The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park

## 2022 Company of Ideas Forum

13-16 June 2022

### **‘In the Shadow of the Endgame’ Art and Crisis**

We are finally emerging from one of the gravest crises in centuries. The Coronavirus pandemic has killed millions of people, damaged the global economy, and transformed many aspects of life in perhaps irrevocable ways. The last two years have also provoked important questions about the function and value of art during catastrophes — questions that have long been integral to the mission of the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park.

Born only months after the detonation of the atomic bombs in Japan and growing up in the fraught geopolitical landscape of the Cold War, Jeffrey Rubinoff came to see his work — and art in general — as a counterpoint, and potential solution, to the world’s most intractable crises. Towards the end of his life, he was preoccupied by the threats posed to our species by nuclear weapons and transgenic engineering. He could never have predicted that a pandemic would soon join their number.

At this year’s Forum — the first since the start of the pandemic — we explore the relationship between art and catastrophe. We will reflect on the vast artistic consequences of Covid-19, but also examine how other crises, both past and present — shaped, and were shaped by, visual art. We will interrogate a cluster of questions that include, but are not limited to:

- Do crises make art more or less necessary?
- How do social catastrophes undermine or damage art?
- Should artists address the major crises of their times?
- Do major social events permanently change art?
- Can art be therapeutic in times of crisis?
- How can art help us make sense of major historical crises?

# Agenda

Tuesday 14 June	9:00 am	Welcome by JRSP Board Chair, Betty Kennedy Introduction by JRSP Manager-Curator, Karun Koernig
	9:15 am	Dr James Fox <i>Introduction: Jeffrey Rubinoff &amp; the Shadow of the Endgame</i>
	9:45 am	Dr Joshua Fitzgerald <i>Art in the Time of Cocoliztli: The Indigenous-Christian (Re)Shaping of Recovery in Illness-Ridden New Spain, 1520 to 1670</i>
	10:30 am	Dr Rosalía Romero <i>Rosendo Salazar and Mural Painting after the Mexican Revolution</i>
	11:15 am	Coffee Break
	11:30 am	Dr Parysa Mostajir <i>Beauty or Justice: Art in the Struggle for Racial Uplift</i>
	12:15 pm	Group Discussion
	1:00 pm	Lunch
	2:00 pm	Student Presentations followed by questions
		Jessica Ziakin <i>Illuminated Wisdom: Art and Spirituality</i> (Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria)
		Anna O'Meara <i>Situationists and the Nuclear Question</i> (Jeffrey Rubinoff Scholar in Art as a Source of Knowledge, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria)
		Zahra Karamad <i>Born of Crisis: Hybrid Architecture in C20th Iran</i> (Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria)
		Megan Austin

*The Radical Feminist 'Happenings' of Womanhouse*  
(Department of Art History and Visual Studies,  
University of Victoria)

Dersu Yazicioglu  
*Osman Hamdi Bey's painting, Genesis*  
(Department of Art History and Visual Studies,  
University of Victoria)

Wednesday 15 June 9:00 am

Luis Jacob  
*An Artist Ponders Catastrophe*

9:45 am

Melia Belli Bose  
*Art, Therapy, and Crisis*

10:30 am

Adrian Blackwell  
*Architecture against Housing Alienation*

11:15 am

Coffee Break

11:30 am

Dr Paul Walde  
*Art, Environment, and the Climate Crisis*

12:15 am

Group Discussion

1:00 pm

Lunch

2:00 pm

Student Presentations followed by questions

Roopa Kanal  
*Aftermath of an Earthquake: Nepali Artists Respond*  
(Department of Art History and Visual Studies,  
University of Victoria)

Barbara Clerihue  
*'They Were Going to Die Anyway': Challenging Ageism in Theatre*  
(Department of Theatre, University of Victoria)

Jaiya Anka  
*Sacred Evocations: Countering the 'Turkish Threat' in Sixteenth-Century Italy*  
(Department of Art History and Visual Studies,  
University of Victoria)

Connor MacKinnon  
*Historical Fiction in Historical Reconstruction*

(Department of Visual Arts, University of Victoria)

Max Keene

*Art as a means of combatting alienation*

(Department of Visual Arts, University of Victoria)

3:30 pm      Final Remarks

## Presentation Abstracts

**Joshua Fitzgerald**

***Art in the Time of Cocoliztli: The Indigenous-Christian (Re)Shaping of Recovery in Illness-Ridden New Spain, 1520 to 1670***

To date, studies of art and architecture from the period after the Spanish invasion of Mesoamerica of 1519 have largely focused on aesthetics, composition, and transcultural forms of instruction for Native artists in European artistic traditions. Less is understood regarding the influence of cyclical epidemics on art, especially how Indigenous artists—survivors of disease endgames—envisioned aspects of illness relating to places or healing spaces so crucial to recovery in times of crisis (Magaloni Kerpel, 2014). To better understand the past to inform the present realities, this paper examines the theme of persistence in community sense of place in artwork from the nadir of Indigenous populations in Mesoamerica/New Spain. It will examine documents and artforms created by Nahuas (Nahuatl-speakers, the language of the so-called ‘Aztecs’), from close readings of pictorial manuscripts to *in situ* analysis of Mexico’s earliest Nahua-Christian convents, with a focus on spatial awareness. Nahua cultural survivance is inspirational against the backdrop of introduced diseases from Europe at the time. From 1520, the first Smallpox outbreak, to 1670, eleven massive infection cases erupted, intervening upon the lives of builders and artists. Amidst the traumas, they produced some of the most valuable works of cultural heritage in the history of Mexico. Nahua artists-scholars and architects applied new and old techniques to produce art and archive ancestral knowledge, seen in didactic sculptures and church ornamentation as well as illustrated parchments and books. For instance, the thousands of hand-drawn and painted illuminations in the famed *Florentine Codex* (c. 1577)—an essential encyclopaedic volume and work of art from the crucible of one of the worst outbreaks, the 1576-1580 *Cocoliztli* (‘illness’ in Nahuatl). Informed by Nahuatl written accounts and the latest Mesoamerican archaeology, I locate ethno-spatial aspects of Nahua sculpture and painting and, in doing so, shed light on the ways that communities reframed conceptions of healing after catastrophes.

**Rosalia Romero**

***Rosendo Salazar and Mural Painting after the Mexican Revolution***

In this talk, I explore the art theory and painting of the Mexican anarcho-syndicalist Rosendo Salazar (1888-1971). Scholars have recognized Salazar’s contributions to the organization of anarchists, syndicalists, and far left activists during and after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Yet Salazar was also a painter and wrote extensively about the role of art in post-revolutionary Mexico. Drawing on published and archival sources, I focus on Salazar’s role as a proponent of modern art in the 1920s and 1930s. Emerging in reaction to the crisis of the Mexican Revolution, Salazar developed a unique theory of muralism and style of painting as Mexico transitioned out of the conflict. In contrast to muralists who supported the Communist party, including Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, Salazar argued that anarchist philosophy and politics provided the key to understanding mural painting and its relation to the Mexican state-building project. His vision crystallized in published work about murals in Mexico City as well as the subject matter and form of his paintings created between 1929 and 1939, a period when this anarchist leader transformed himself into a self-

taught painter. He exhibited his work in Mexico City, and his were some of the only paintings of that time which explicitly reference anarchism. Salazar's writings and paintings offer a framework for considering the entangled histories of radical politics, art, and state-building after a prolonged and violent crisis.

### **Parysa Mostajir**

#### ***Beauty or Justice: Art in the Struggle for Racial Uplift***

In 1926, amidst unrelenting racial oppression in the United States, W. E. B. Du Bois proclaimed to the annual conference of the NAACP that art would be an indispensable weapon in the struggle for social justice. In an African American literary journal from the same period, another leader in the Harlem Renaissance, Alain LeRoy Locke, argued that art would lead the way in confronting the condescension of their White oppressors. But behind this apparent agreement lay a fundamental conflict, not over *whether* art could be used in the struggle for social justice, but *how* its liberatory potential was to manifest. While Du Bois insisted, "I do not give a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda," Locke objected that we "must choose art and put aside propaganda." Their disagreement reveals a deep tension that can arise when communities turn to art in the midst of crisis, between those who would pursue aesthetic beauty as an intrinsic source of human flourishing and those who would instrumentalize that beauty in service of another, no less important ideal—justice.

### **Luis Jacob**

#### ***An Artist Ponders Catastrophe***

Who I am, and who I take myself to be -- my subjectivity -- is experienced as something 'internal' to me. Peruvian-Canadian artist Luis Jacob argues that this is deceptive. Subjectivity does not emerge from deep inside oneself. Rather, subjectivity is produced 'externally' -- by the social practices in which we are enmeshed. Subjectivity, in other words, is social. Shared urgencies (such as climate change) are predominantly framed by means of a language of "catastrophe". This social practice tends to generate certain types of subjectivity -- anxious, polarized, escapist, or fascinated by scenes of destruction -- that also tends to perpetuate those urgencies. Primarily, these are the forms of subjectivity that are socially available; and yet, other forms can also be created! Drawing on an ongoing dialogue with Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine, Jacob will discuss various social practices -- including the City of Toronto's profound sense of historic amnesia, which fosters a-historicist subjectivities that perpetuate two hundred years of colonization. This dialogue is an attempt to produce subjectivity otherwise, by means of mutual self-exposure enacted by two artists: one, Indigenous; the other, an immigrant settler.

### **Maria Belli Bose**

#### ***Art, Therapy, and Crisis***

Recently, two deadly garment factory disasters in Dhaka, Bangladesh—the 2012 Tasreen Fashions factory fire (117 killed; over 200 injured) and the 2013 collapse of an eight story complex of clothing manufacturers (1,134 killed, over 2,500 injured) — inspired a series of artworks addressing globalization, gendered labor exploitation, memorialization, and the

power of empathy. I discuss the work of four visual artists: Robin Berson, Taslima Akhter, Reetu Sattar, and Dilara Begun Jolly. Each engages in physically and/or emotionally challenging creative processes, including videoed enactments of repetitive garment production labour, weaving the names and faces of diseased workers into saris, and displaying personal effects such as family photographs salvaged from the ruins. In this way, they call attention to the human cost of so-called “fast fashion” and agitate for moral responsibility in the face of these disasters.

Addressing two of the 2022 Company of Ideas Forum’s salient questions (“Can art be therapeutic in times of crisis?” and “How can art help us make sense of major historical crises?”) I consider how visual art can expose the causal dimensions of structural violence and socio-economic power imbalances while also memorializing, expressing solidarity, and aiding with community healing.

### **Adrian Blackwell**

#### ***Architecture against housing alienation***

Canada is suffering from a deep housing crisis. Housing is no longer seen as something to be inhabited, but rather as an asset that will increase in value faster than the rate of inflation, creating an impossible situation in which most people can no longer afford to live in many places in Canada.

The financialization of housing is only the latest acceleration of a process that commenced with colonial land dispossession, which violently attacked Indigenous ways of knowing and doing and attempted to replace them with land conceived as private property. Settler-colonialism in the lands now known as Canada participated in a global process of experimentation about new forms of ownership which were born in the contact and conflict between settlers and Indigenous people. Modern fee-simple property which emerged from this engagement is itself an historically specific construction, unique in its rights of exclusion and exchangeability. This novel form of property in which something as fixed and rooted as land is subject to alienability and is thrown into circulation, is the root of what David Madden and Peter Marcuse have named “residential alienation.” Housing alienation is threefold: alienation from community, ecology, and creativity. It describes both the substandard housing and failing infrastructure that colonial governments have built for Indigenous communities and the poor quality and unaffordability of urban housing for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada today.

Architecture is a way of imagining how to better inhabit space. Building on the ongoing curatorial work of Architects Against Housing Alienation, this talk will suggest ways in which can architects practice differently, in order to address this crisis of housing alienation in a meaningful way.

### **Paul Walde**

#### ***Art, Environment, and the Climate Crisis***

Throughout the last 27 years, my multidisciplinary studio research has been concerned with the interconnections between the environment, identity, and technology; amplifying cultural gestures in order to reveal their place within nature and conversely, by capturing natural

events through cultural apparatus. I'm interested in how natural and cultural events shape our perceptions of specific places and add significance to moments in time. Accordingly, environmental crises are upending our relationships with the land and forcing us to rethink these relationships on a fundamental cultural level. In 2003, while developing the curriculum for a new visual arts program in the Yukon, I first witnessed the early signs of climate change in melting permafrost and realized almost immediately the potential implications of the release of billions of tonnes of frozen methane gas into the atmosphere would be. This realization added an urgency to my engagement with the landscape and environment, and profoundly influenced my work from that moment on. This concern and engagement led to the invitation to be the first artist in residence at Western University's Biotron Centre for Experimental Climate Change Research in 2008, where I studied with scientists from numerous fields dedicated to this research. I've consciously chosen to approach this issue in a poetic manner, sharing my fascination with the natural world while implicating culture and its connection to the environment, as a way to highlight what is truly critical about environmental issues without resorting to didactic, pedantic, or blame focused messaging. This aesthetic approach has allowed me to reach a diversity of audiences in different ways than perhaps are possible through conventional modes of activism. During this presentation I will discuss several past works that address various aspects of the Climate Crisis including its relationship to deforestation and habitat loss and close in previewing some new work that continues and expands upon this research.

## Speaker Biographies

### **Dr Joshua Fitzgerald** **University of Cambridge**

Joshua Fitzgerald is a Jeffrey Rubinoff Junior Research Fellow in History and Art History at Churchill College. He specializes in the science of learning and material culture relating to Mesoamerica (especially the "Aztecs") and Colonial Latin American history. In June 2019, he received his PhD and certification in Museum Studies from the University of Oregon (UO), and he recently finished a Getty Foundation internship with the Getty Research Institute (GRI) where he helped to develop digital scholarship for the Florentine Codex Initiative and was the GRI co-organizer for a teacher training workshop "The Florentine Codex: Teaching the Conquest of Mexico through Indigenous Eyes" with the UCLA Latin American Institute. Joshua's research is based on written sources, art and architecture created by Nahuas (speakers of Nahuatl), and his interests include place-identity theory, human-animal lore, natural science, and cultural history relating to the early transatlantic world. His primary focus explores pre-colonial modes of learning, and, beginning with European contact, how those modalities adapted to novel education systems introduced by doctrinaires. His first book project offers new insights about cultural imperialism by examining learning environments, which, in situ, were primed for place-based pedagogy that helped to preserve of local heritage alongside Spanish-Catholic catechism.

### **Dr Rosalía Romero** **Pomona College**



Rosalía Romero is an art historian of Latin American modern and contemporary art, specializing in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. She is currently working on a book manuscript, titled *Anarchism and Revolutionary Art in Greater Mexico, 1890-1940*, which examines the relationship between anarchism and modern art in Mexico, the U.S., and South America. Her research has been supported by the Fulbright-García Robles Commission, the Swann Foundation at the Library of Congress, a Getty Research Institute library grant, and the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin. She received her doctorate from the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University and is currently an Assistant Professor in the department of art history at Pomona College.

**Dr Parysa Mostajir**  
**University of Chicago**

Parysa Mostajir is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Chicago. Her research analyzes the relationship between the cognitive processes of science and the aesthetic processes of art, and frames them as complementary, mutually irreducible, and fruitfully interactive sources of understanding. Engaging debates in aesthetics, philosophy of science, and the history of philosophy, a consistent thread of her research is in theorizing the forms of discovery and communication that occur via aesthetic means, and the way this aesthetic discovery and communication functions to create, sustain, and transform elements of shared human reality. She recently won the Jane Addams Prize for excellence in feminist philosophy from the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, and she will soon be joining an international research project on scientism at Case Western Reserve University.

**Luis Jacob**

Luis Jacob is a Peruvian-born Toronto-based artist and curator whose work destabilizes conventions of viewing and invites a collision of meanings. He studied semiotics and philosophy at the University of Toronto. Since his participation as an exhibiting artist in Documenta 12 in 2007, he has achieved an international reputation — with exhibitions at La Biennale de Montréal (2016); Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2015); Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College, Pennsylvania, and Limerick City Gallery of Art (2014); Centro Párraga, Murcia (2013); Witte de With, Rotterdam, and Taipei Biennial (2012); Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art, Toronto, and Generali Foundation, Vienna (2011); Kunsthalle Bern, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2009); Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, and Hamburger Kunstverein, Hamburg (2008); and Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2007). His curatorial work includes *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto* (2016) at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. In 2015, he co-curated the conference "This is Paradise: Art and Artists in Toronto" with Barbara Fischer in collaboration with Kitty Scott.

**Maria Belli Bose**  
**University of Victoria**

Melia Belli Bose is Associate Professor in Art History & Visual Studies, and a specialist in the visual cultures of early modern and contemporary South Asia. She received her PhD in 2009

from the University of California, Los Angeles and her undergraduate and master's degrees from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Melia has spent several years in different parts of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, studying languages, conducting research, and hiking in the Himalayas. Her research and language study have been supported by the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Asian Cultural Council, and the American Institute of Bangladesh Studies.

Melia's first book, *Royal Umbrellas of Stone: Memory, Politics, and Public Identity in Rajput Funerary Art* (Brill, 2015) examines chhatris (funerary memorials) commemorating members of the royal Hindu Rajput community in northern India. Melia holds an interest in the arts of death and memorialization throughout Asia. In 2014 she guest-edited and contributed to an edition of the journal *Ars Orientalis* titled "The Arts of Death in Asia," which included articles on the subject from China, Japan, India, Thailand, and Central Asia. Another of Melia's research interests is intersections of gender, power, and art throughout Asia. She edited and contributed to the volume *Women, Gender, and Art in Asia ca. 1500-1900* (Routledge, 2016), which offers essays on women's roles as makers, subjects, collectors, and commissioners of art from across Asia. She has also published refereed articles and book chapters on Maratha painting and architecture; recent Buddhist art and architecture in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh; contemporary Bangladeshi art, and Rajasthani folk songs.

Although her research focuses on South Asian art, Melia also greatly enjoys teaching a diverse range of undergraduate and graduate courses on the arts of China, Korea, Japan, and the Islamic World.

**Adrian Blackwell**  
**University of Waterloo**

Adrian Blackwell received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Waterloo and his Master of Urban Design from the University of Toronto. He is an artist and urban and architectural designer whose work examines the relation between physical spaces and political/economic forces. He has exhibited his work at artist-run-centers and public institutions across Canada, in the 2005 Shenzhen Biennale, the 2011 Chengdu Biennale and at London's Architectural Association. In 2007 he was a member of the winning team in the international competition to renovate Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square and has won awards for his architecture and urban design from the Canadian Architect, Toronto Urban Design Awards, Design Exchange and I.D. Magazine. He has curated exhibitions, including *Detours: Tactical Approaches to Urbanization in China* and organized symposia such as *Architecture and Spectacle in (Post) Socialist China*. He writes regularly about the intersections of art, architecture, urbanism and his current research focuses on architecture's political potential, urbanization in contemporary China, the disappearance of public housing in North America and the constitutive paradoxes of public space. Before joining the University of Waterloo, he was a visiting professor at Chongqing, Michigan and Harvard universities and an assistant professor at the University of Toronto. He has been a member of Toronto's Anarchist Free School and the Toronto School of Creativity and Inquiry and is a co-founder and co-editor of the journal *Scapegoat: Architecture / Landscape / Political Economy*.

**Paul Walde**  
**University of Victoria**

Paul Walde is an award-winning artist, composer and curator who lives in Victoria, Canadian ləkʷəŋən territory. Originally trained as a painter, Walde's music and sound compositions have been a prominent feature in his artwork for over 20 years. He is best known for his interdisciplinary performance works staged in the natural environment, often involving music and choreography. The documentation of these events is frequently used as the basis of Walde's sound and video installations which have been the subject of exhibitions nationally and internationally.

Current and recent exhibitions include: Alaska Variations at Indexical, Santa Cruz, CA (2022); HYPER-POSSIBLE: The 3rd Coventry Biennial at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, UK (2021-2022); Ecologies: Song for the Earth at Musée des Beaux-arts de Montréal (2021); Weeks Feel Like Days, Months Feel Like Years at the Anchorage Museum, Alaska and One Mile Gallery, Kingston NY (2020); Tom Thomson Centennial Swim at Touchstones Museum in Nelson, BC (2020); and Summer Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Art, London (2020). Walde's work can be found in public and private collections in the Canada and the US including the Musée des Beaux-arts de Montréal, The Anchorage Museum, and Museum London.

Walde is a graduate of the University of Western Ontario (BFA) and New York University (MA). In addition to current grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the BC Arts Council, he is the winner of The Prescott Fund Award from the National Arts Club in New York City and the Kenny Doren Award from ED Video in Guelph. He is an Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of Victoria where he was also the recipient of the University's REACH Award for Creativity and Artistic Expression. Walde is also a founding member of Audio Lodge, a Canadian sound art collective and Experimental Music Unit a Victoria-based sound and music ensemble.

## Further Information for Participants

Company of Ideas Forums are not conventional academic conferences. They are ambitious but informal events, designed to bring together people from all corners of intellectual and creative life.

Participants are encouraged to take intellectual risks that normally they might be reluctant to take. Speakers and delegates are expected to make propositions, to test out big ideas, and to engage in genuinely interdisciplinary conversations.

### **Academic Speakers**

- Presentations should be no more than 30 minutes, and should be spoken (either with or without notes), but not read. All presentations will be followed by discussion.
- Papers should be intellectually challenging but accessible, targeted at a mixed audience of academics, students, artists, and members of the public. Speakers are asked to frame their talks within the larger issues of the Forum.
- Please put any audio or visual files required for your presentation on to a USB stick. Karun Koernig will upload them to the system on the morning of your session.

## Student Speakers

Student sessions will take place on both afternoons of the Forum.

Participating students are required to prepare a ten-minute presentation. Each set of presentations will be followed by questions and discussion.

Students can choose to talk about any topic, but are required to directly address one or more of the following questions:

- *How can art help us make sense of major historical crises?*
- *Can art be therapeutic in times of crisis?*
- *Are artists obliged to address the major crises of their times?*

Student speakers are encouraged, where possible, to make reference to what they have seen, read or heard at the JRSP.

**Note to all speakers:** the Forum will be live-streamed at the following address:

<https://www.lumeraevents.com/rubinoff>