FOREWORD

In June 2025, over 140 academics, researchers, curators, artists, and makers from across the Canadian prairies gathered at the Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts) in Mohkinstsis/Calgary. The gathering was the second symposium of the Prairie Art Network (PAN), which was established to address a lack of connection among artists, cultural workers, and academics in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and to celebrate the region's rich diversity of art and culture. Co-organized by the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at AUArts and Glenbow, PAN 2025 built on the success of the inaugural symposium hosted by the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Regina, University of Regina, and the Dunlop Art Gallery in 2023. The intention was to provide a platform for exchanging pedagogical, curatorial, and research strategies that respond to the transformations specific to the Prairies while also highlighting the art and culture emerging from local communities.

PAN 2025 welcomed forty-five speakers who shared their research and insights across seven panels. One of these sessions was "Creative Visions of the Land," co-chaired by Erin Sutherland and Susan Cahill. Through presentations from Namaakii Bee Bear Hat, Sherry Farrell-Racette, Skye Haggerty, and the collective of Zachary Ayotte, Christina Battle, Brennan Black, and April Dean, the panel foregrounded approaches to land that resist white settler logics of possession, domination, and extraction. The presentations featured artistic practices and research questions that prompted the audience to reflect on what it means to be on the land as an ethical and relational practice. We hope that part of the legacy of the symposium is continued reflection on being on the land in the Prairies, and we are very grateful to the panel organizers and presenters for their generous contributions and remarkable projects that continue to inspire new conversations.

—Tak Pham (curator, Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta University of the Arts) and Jocelyn Anderson (Director, JR Shaw Institute for Art in Canada, Glenbow)

Creative Visions of the Land

Susan Cahill and Erin Sutherland

GUEST EDITORS

Susan Cahill (she/her) is a white settler scholar who lives and works in Moh'kinsstis/Calgary on the traditional territories of the peoples of the Treaty 7 region. She is an independent filmmaker, curator, and Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Calgary, where she is also Department Head.
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The ideas that animate this Practices section emerged from a conference panel that brought together artists, practitioners, and scholars to consider shared questions, methods, and urgencies surrounding art, place, and land. Convened for the Prairie Art Network's second conference, held in June 2025 at Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts) in Moh'kinstis/Calgary (Treaty 7), the panel initiated a lively and generative exchange that revealed both the coherence of these concerns and the limits of the conference format for sustaining them. The conversations that unfolded called for a more extended and reflective engagement. The contributions gathered here build on that initial dialogue, deepening its critical insights while reflecting the multiple perspectives and approaches that emerged through discussion. Together, they transform a moment of collective inquiry into a focused intervention within ongoing scholarly and artistic debates. Although some original panelists were unable to participate in this publication, the shared conversations continue and will inform other future possibilities.

The works brought together here examine contemporary art projects grounded in creative and critical theorizations of land. Moving beyond white settler imaginaries that frame land as territory to be claimed, dominated, extracted, or owned, these pieces engage art-making as an ethical praxis of being on—and being in relation to—land. As panel organizers, we are influenced by many scholars, artists, and knowledge keepers who emphasize centring place and land through respectful, reciprocal, and relational frameworks, including Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's sharing of Nishnaabeg stories in her essay "Land as Pedagogy" (2014),[1] which explains how Nishnaabeg knowledge emerges through ongoing relations with land. Drawing from these teachings, we are encouraged to create space to consider how artists ethically centre land in their practices. The contributors situate their work within antiracist, decolonial, queer, and Indigenous frameworks, foregrounding land not as an inert backdrop, but as a dynamic site of relationality, responsibility, and accountability. While attentive to broader theoretical conversations, the section remains grounded in the regional context of the prairies, contributing to an expanding body of artistic and scholarly work that understands land as relational, contested, and lived.

In Namaakii Bee Bear Hat's contribution, the artist situates her visual practice within a living relationship to land, kinship, and responsibility. Drawing from Blackfoot, Dane-zaa, and Beaver Cree lineages, and from her upbringing in Mohkínstsis, the work unfolds as a personal and political land acknowledgment that resists institutional formulations in favour of embodied memory and care. Through collage and phototransfer, the artist traces how place, family, and intergenerational knowledge shape both identity and creative practice. The piece foregrounds land not as a static site to be acknowledged, but as an active presence that holds tension, history, and obligation—calling attention to Indigenous sovereignty, refusal, and the ongoing work of relational accountability.

Terraforming Earth is a collective project by artists Zachary Ayotte, Christina Battle, Brennan Black, and April Dean out of Amiskwaciy-wâskahikan/Edmonton (Treaty 6). *Terraforming Earth* documents the evolving work of a collective artistic inquiry that takes an improbable question—can seaweed be grown on the Canadian Prairies?—as a point of entry into broader considerations of land, climate, art, and responsibility. Emerging from sustained collaboration over several years, the project foregrounds process, conversation, and divergence, rather than resolution. Through writing, image-making, poetry, and speculative research, the contributors engage with deep time, environmental intervention, personal history, and ecological grief, situating their work within both local prairie landscapes and global climate imaginaries. This contribution brings together distinct yet interconnected practices that treat artistic labour as a form of collective thinking—one that resists extractive logics and opens space for speculative, relational, and alternative ways of imagining environmental futures.

In their contribution, "Creating Visions of the Land to Unsettler Pioneer Displays," Skye Haggerty reflects on a collaborative curatorial and artistic project that reconsider Indigenous projectile points beyond their conventional framing as archaeological artifacts. Drawing on museum work, family memory, and material experimentation through cyanotype processes, Haggerty's writing traces how arrowheads function as witnesses to land, labour, and colonial transformation, while affirming ongoing Indigenous presence. Engaging the work of Gerald McMaster and Tania Willard, they situate these stone objects within broader conversations about museum display, settler collective practices, and the violence embedded in land-clearing and historical narration. This piece ultimately proposes a mode of curatorial attention grounded in care, relationality, and process, one that listens to material culture as an active participant in remembering land and unsettling pioneer narratives.

Collectively, these contributions narrate and reflect on creative practices that insist on ethical modes of being-in-relation—to land, to community, and to the territories we occupy. Rather than offering singular conclusions or unified methodologies, the works gathered here model forms of attentiveness, care, and responsibility that emerge through making, collaboration, and sustained engagement with place. They foreground art not as representation alone, but as a way of thinking *with* land: one that is responsive to histories of dispossession, attuned to Indigenous presence, and accountable to the social and ecological conditions in which it operates.

Taken together, this Practices section offers both critical frameworks and creative propositions for engaging the politics of land and relations in contemporary art. It invites readers to consider how artistic practices might function as sites of listening, refusal, and reorientation, challenging extractive logics while opening space for relational, speculative, and future-oriented ways of working. In doing so, these contributions extend the conversations that began in Moh'kinstis/Calgary, not as a closed inquiry, but as an ongoing commitment to thinking, making, and living otherwise in relation to land.

ENDNOTES

1 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no 3 (2014): 1–25, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22170.