

## Susie Johnston - Upgrade Submission 2023

*Matters of Entanglement: exploring making and metaphor as expansive ways of being and thinking.*



Fig. 1 Porcelain paper clay, discarded, broken measuring tool, Collaboration with Louise Ritchie, Hidden Door Festival 2021.

The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms.<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This research addresses a material, creative practice through which energetic forces, metaphor, notions of entanglement, vital materialism, and post-humanist ideas are explored. The research relates closely to age-old questions about ways of being and knowing, framed within contemporary modes of art practice. *Matters of Entanglement* reflects a body of artwork which positions *things*<sup>2</sup> at the centre and acknowledges the influence of Heidegger, in his 1968 work *What is a Thing?*<sup>3</sup>, the examination, and ultimately rejection, of a tradition of thinkers and makers who challenge systems of Cartesian, dualistic thinking as a dominant nature/culture<sup>4</sup> divide, is integral to this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 2005, Oxford University Press

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thing>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thing\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thing_theory)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature%E2%80%93culture\\_divide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature%E2%80%93culture_divide)

Binary thinking perpetuates the idea that nature can be controlled by humans. Kant, for example, proposed that the boundaries of human knowledge stopped at experience and therefore was critical of the idea of reality as independent of a human perspective. Organising the world in terms of dualisms privileges Western, white, heteronormative, patriarchal epistemologies based on reason and logic, which are both reductionist, divisive, and regressive. Logic and reason are not the primary drivers in this practice-led research but emerge *from* and *through* processes of engaging with and through things in the world, reflecting complex and diverse entanglements, and abundance of new possibilities of being in the world.



*Fig. 2 Clematis and cherry tree entanglement. North Inch, Perthshire, 2022*

The more one learns of this intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissues of plant and insect (an intricacy that has its astonishing moments, as when sundew and butterwort eat the insects), the more the mystery deepens. Knowledge does not dispel mystery.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain: A Celebration of the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland*. Canongate Books, reprint 2011.

## Personal Rationale for Undertaking a Research Degree

My research interests are the accumulation of many causal entanglements, namely social, political, biographical, educational, psychological, and environmental. A deeply ingrained memory I hold is from a period in my childhood in which I spent many months discreetly (and rebelliously) peeling very small areas of a floral-patterned wallpaper away from my bedroom wall. As I peeled the paper away, I created a new, mysterious pattern, an interplay between-under-and-over the surface. I was transforming the pattern and the pattern was transforming me through playful, tacit, and intuitive responses. This metaphoric touchpaper ignited a way of meaning-making through the senses, re-imagining, transforming, and re-presenting things in the world back to me.

The rationale for undertaking a research degree is anchored in an ongoing curiosity (and obsession) with what things both *reveal* and *do* in a framework of visual signification. The research continuously motivates me to be more attuned and sensitised to the vitality and wellbeing of earth systems. Through material engagements and metaphoric connections, I aim to explore aspects of loss, impermanence, vulnerability, and mutability across human and more than human worlds.



Fig. 3 *Thinking through painting*. 2020 acrylic, oil paint and compressed charcoal on card.

## Previous study

2022 - PGCAPHE, Associate module, University of Dundee  
2021 - LTHE, University of Dundee  
2021 - present, post-graduate, part-time researcher, DJCAD, University of Dundee  
2014 - 2015 MFA in Art & Humanities, DJCAD (distinction)  
1998 - 2000 MVA, Sydney College of the Arts (distinction), University of Sydney  
1999 - Glasgow School of Art MFA exchange programme  
1998 - Australian Post Graduate Award, University of Sydney  
1992 - 1995 BVA honours (first class) Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney  
1989 - 1990 Central St. Martins - Foundation course

## Relevant work

2010 - present -	WASPS tenant, self-employed artist, and educator
2019 - present -	Teaching, DJCAD
2015 - 2019	Part-time tutor and course assistant, MFA/AH, DJCAD
2004 - 2010	Touchie Studios
2002 - 2004	Glasgow Sculpture Studios
2002 - 2004	Freelance, GOMA, NAS, Glasgow Museums
2001	Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, artist in resident
1998-1999	Artspace, The Gunnery, Gallery Assistant

## Personal background



Fig. 4 *Dextral rotation*, repurposed truck inner tubes, clay modelling paste, matt emulsion. 1999, Artspace, Sydney.

My undergraduate art school training was in painting. I wasn't taught anything about *how* to paint as the privileging of ideas over all else dominated the content of the undergraduate programme. My work in second year shifted from the canvas to working in a sculptural context. This shift emerged as I had been trying to *impose* and force an idea from my mind onto a flat surface. The outcomes were neither resolved, interesting or open to interpretation. I didn't want to illustrate an idea. I wanted to expand connections and ideas through material engagements and their metaphoric associations both in terms of their vitalities and expanded agencies.

I started to work with found, repurposed, discarded objects, and paint continued to be an integral material within my explorations. This by no means resulted in resolved work simply because I moved away from the canvas but I started to be more playful, and open to material agency, uncertainty, embracing failures and happy accidents in the work. In playing *with* and tending to materials they allowed for unwieldy and surprising outcomes under a variety of conditions, bodily movements, emotional states, moisture, cold, light, and heat. The final outcomes, not pre-determined, became a way of sense and *non-sense* making of the world. The shift away from imposing concrete ideas onto a material formed the foundations for my work then and continues to sustain my emergent practice. Materials are the active participants in my works *becoming*.

## Background to the Research Project

In 2014 I matriculated on the MFA in A&H course directed by Professor Mary Modeen at DJCAD. This experience proved to be both challenging and re-affirming as I 'tended to' the roots of my practice and unearthed myself in doing so. The MFA demanded a rigorous attention to both practice and critical thinking. Jane Bennett's book *Vibrant Matter- A Political Ecology of Things*<sup>6</sup> became a significant text, nudging me towards skirting philosophies of vital materialism, speculative-realism, and object-oriented ontology. I researched hierarchies of knowledge production which privileged reason and predictability over irrationality and unpredictability. It was a profoundly unsettling and precarious year of grounding my research interests. Unpredictable outcomes are at the centre of this research project and demonstrate that thinking through conditions of uncertainty transform us. As Anna Tsing suggests:

Thinking through precarity changes social analysis. A precarious world is a world without teleology. Indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening, but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy makes life possible.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 5 Lifting of oil pipes from the seabed during a decommissioning of an oil field between Scotland and Norway, 2006. Image courtesy of John Kettles, Blast Design.

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke University Press, 2010

<sup>7</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. p20, Princeton University Press, 2015



*Fig. 6 Leaves of Three...Let Them Be. Repurposed mild steel pipes from oil field, rustoleum, oil paint, digital sound. 2015, MFA exhibition, DJCAD.*

### **The Research Project**

In 2019, as I began drafting a proposal for PhD studies I approached the local waste resource company, Binn Group. I was influenced by the work of Agnes Denes and Mierle Ukeles-Lederman working in ways which asked provocative questions, testing the limits of art by bringing their respective work into unforeseen environments addressing the human condition in relation to nature, consumption, labour, chaos, and late capitalism. I asked Binn if they might consider the sponsoring of materials for a practice-led research project. I presented some of the ways in which my work could reframe, question and re-imagine value systems and ideologies through the repurposing of waste materials, embracing a circular economy model and considering sustainability as more than a greenwashing terminology. I was offered a place at DJCAD with a pledge from Binn they would materially sponsor my research. I am neither an employee of the business, nor am I funded by them. I work autonomously but meet regularly with head of environment, Audrey Duckworth.

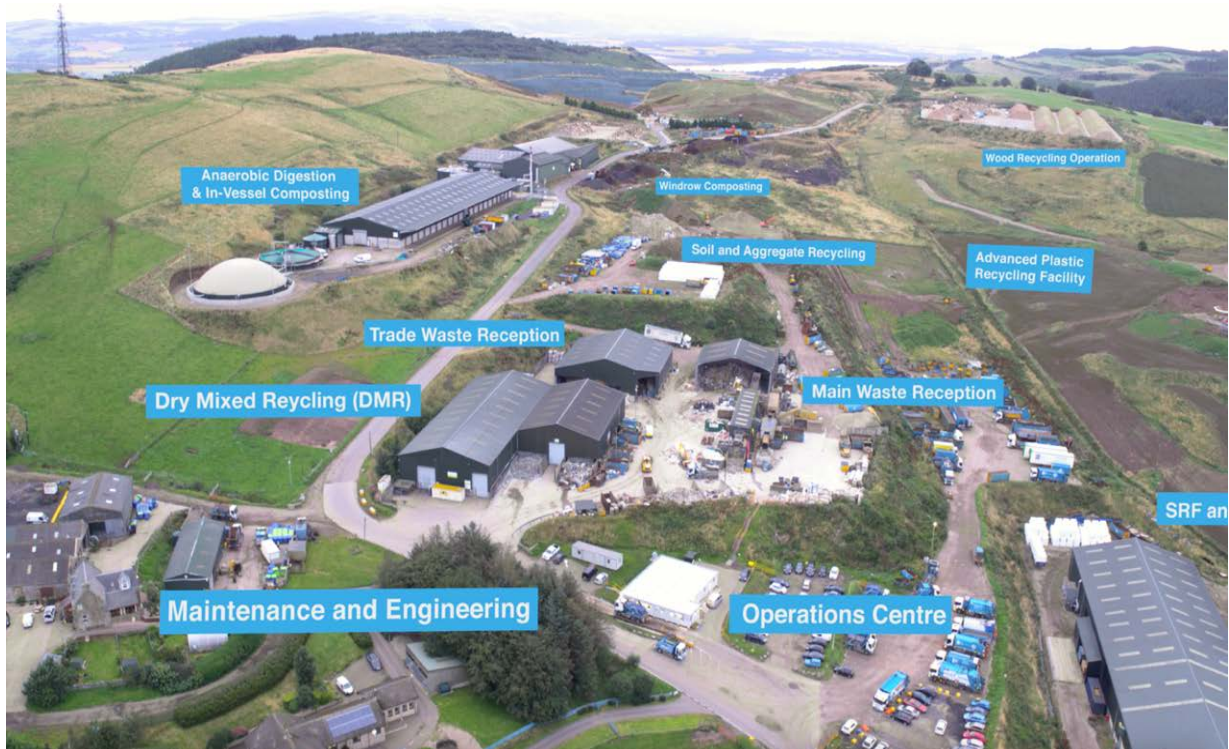


Fig. 7 Aerial view of Binn Ecopark, Perthshire

My voice is one spoken from the position of being a practice-led artist also engaged in teaching. My 'art writing' voice is somewhat uncertain and precarious. My research is rooted in a making practice, and I pay close attention to what materials do in a field of visual representation. In referring to something as an object, it can reinforce the subject/object dichotomy which re-energises binary thinking systems. For this reason, for this upgrade document, I will refer interchangeably to things and materials rather than objects.<sup>8</sup>

The project is one of collaboration, *with things*. In Ainissa Ramirez' book *The Alchemy of Us How Humans and Matter have transformed One Another*, she examines the rewiring of human brain function because of entanglements with inventions - from copper communication cables to silicon chips, a reminder that reality is always in flux as a direct result of agential<sup>9</sup> collisions. In a framework of creative practice realities *arise* between me and the materials. I work in ways which embrace uncertainty, messiness, and impermanence: all are vital and valuable to the flow and flux of emergent knowledges.

<sup>8</sup> *The concept of thing power offers an alternative to the object as a way of encountering the nonhuman world.* Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, preface, Duke University Press, 2010

<sup>9</sup> <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/agency.html>



## Research Questions

1. *How does a creative practice transform ways of knowing which extend to more-than-human frames of reference, incorporating a respect-for-all actants in a whole earth system, expanding possibilities of sustainable ways of living?*
2. *Where do object-oriented-ontology and vital materialism as two current theories, fail in their endeavours to decentre human privilege? Do they end up reaffirming the subject/object binary of which they claim to reject?*
3. *Can collaboration and open-ended processes be valued and embraced within a primarily profit driven business framework? How can these be implemented across creative practice and industry in ways which build trust, encourage dialogue, expand horizons, and reimagine realities?*



Fig. 8 Chris Jordan, *Midway: Message from the Gyre (Albatross)*, 2011

## Aims and objectives

My aims and objectives involve paying close attention to the nuances of interwoven actants in the biosphere in a world of both interrelated and co-dependent life forms and an entire earth system.

I will continue to engage in exhibition practice, teaching, writing, artist talks, conferences, and research expos over the next 3 years. The PhD will culminate in an exhibition and exegesis of 25-30,000 words. The written component will comprise a contextual review of both literature and art, the case for this unique approach underpinned with philosophical and anthropological references, illustrations of art and processes, reflections on making, and poetic responses which emerge through creative practice. The research will be notionally weighted between studio practice and writing as 70/30%. My aims and objectives remain to explore actants at work between human and more-than-human worlds through material engagement. I will continue to embrace a non-exhaustive reading of things and aim to challenge unconscious biases and ingrained thinking habits, giving rise to new ways of being in the world.



Fig. 9 Litter Catcher, 2022. Non-biodegradable materials, litter net, landfill site, now closed. Binn Eco Park, Collaboration with Amanda Adam.

### Binn Group- Aims and Objectives

Some of the aims with Binn have involved creating projects which address (the loss of) biodiversity through pollinator plantings, birch tree planting, newsletters, site specific works (sculpture and film), collaboration and a long-term vision for an ambitious sculpture path. The groups' vision is to make waste stream processes more visible, through the creation of a trail which incorporates permanent and ephemeral sculptures *in situ* at the park surrounded by processing plants.

I am part of the steering group which has been driving this project forward over the last 18 months. A significant aspect of the sculpture trail is to bring visibility to the wider community of the life cycles of things which we consume and dispose of. The intention behind the vision is to challenge perceptions and responses to the current environmental crisis and to consider matters of care for and with the earth. The implementation of a purpose-built education centre in the ecopark made from repurposed building trade materials is part of the vision.

## Research Focus

The research involves primarily a reflective creative practice, peer to peer conversations, ecopark and exhibition visits, listening to podcasts, online and live lectures, reading and writing.

Teaching is also a vital aspect of my research and generates both questions and answers in approaching different ways of learning and sharing knowledge. My research is on a part-time basis, with three days a week allocated to research between the studio, Binn, DJCAD and the technical workshops.

Concepts aligning with indeterminacy, uncertainty paradoxically situate my research as both focussed and blurred. Working across the industries of the arts and a waste business makes way for vital, interesting yet unsettling provocations, realisations, and outcomes. In a recent meeting with the board, I presented new works and realisations. Waste is considered primarily in terms of capital value within the industry and the conversations which unfolded attested to the power of art to challenge perspectives and ideologies about the impact of material agency to generate ecological thinking.



Fig. 10 *Crude*. 2020 *Crude oil and oil paint*.



Fig. 11 *Pre/sense* 2020  
*Discarded steel bucket, dried paint, and metal rope*

## Research methods

The methods for this project begin with attention *to* and *with* a material. It is observation, but more than that; it is acknowledging a participatory state of being with the material world, and active in an exploration of material flux and transformation. Uncertainty is a particularly well-trodden path for many practice-led artists and is integral to moving *in* and *through* the making process. In resisting a framework which privileges outcomes and predications over possibilities, I tinker, play with, and prepare materials. I look at, touch, knead, wrap, suspend, build, dismantle, cover, weld, glue, and paint and through a process of tacit engagement, new visceral and carnal knowledge is produced. This contrasts with a hylomorphic model of making.<sup>10</sup> My research methods embrace uncertainty as a place wherein I can question rather than assume. My questions are activated through unexpected material collisions, processes, and outcomes. Philosophical and anthropological texts help me to contextualise the work and find new pathways to traverse. The research is both multi-disciplinary and multi-sited, located between Binn Group waste resource company in rural Perthshire, technical workshops at the art college and my studio. By exploring intrinsic qualities of materials, which are often informed by human activity, consumption and disposal, agency is distributed and an expansive meshwork of interconnectedness between both human and more than human worlds is revealed.



*Fig. 12 The revealing of the medullary rays of oak trees. Whisky oak staves sanded with several sandpaper grades then oiled.*

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<sup>10</sup> "hylomorphism (Aristotle) involves imposing ideas from the mind onto a material. *Rather than reading creativity 'backwards', from a finished object to an initial intention in the mind of an agent, this entails reading it forwards, in an ongoing generative movement that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic.* Tim Ingold, *The Textility of Making*. Cambridge Journal of Economics 2010

## Contribution to knowledge

As the research is practice-led the contribution to new knowledge is enmeshed within both the artwork and the artistic processes. Allowing the outcomes with materials to become emergent, rather than imposing that which is pre-determined in my mind, gives rise to a heightened attunement of ecologies. This becomes a critical method of responding to-and living with-a wholly, more-than-humanly privileged world. It is nothing short of a kinder, more compassionate, and responsible way of living in a complexly inter-related world. The contribution to knowledge will ultimately involve challenging views about agency and the ethics of human exceptionalism.

This research may result in a body of work which demands attention towards the overlapping of human and non-human agency contributing to a reframing and reconfiguring of our relations to the earth and its inhabitants.

Many of the following methods have assisted me in testing outcomes for the benefit of further reflection and future activities.

- Site visits to Binn, skip trawling, working on the picking lines, land-based work
- Dialogue with Binn employees - knowledge exchange, cups of tea, break-chat (I will work with the Ethical Research Panel to ensure data protection and all ethics agreements are in place).
- Making - tinkering, assembling, re-assembling, painting, studio practice
- Technical support- metal, wood, and ceramic workshops.
- Community engagement- artist talks, workshops, Perth Creative Exchange, Birnam Arts, Pitlochry Festival Theatre
- Exhibition practice, solo and group shows
- Teaching
- Philosophical inquiry and anthropological close readings
- Collaboration
- Peer engaged writing retreats, seminars, discussions, online forums
- Site-writing, automatic writing
- Conferences/exhibition visits
- Meditation/ endurance swim training/mind-body-work
- OPD

## Research Summary

I withdrew from my studios at the start of 2020, for six months, due to a period of my mental health unravelling and looking after a poorly immediate family member during the first lockdown. The metaphoric 'pause' button which I pressed has provided further motivation to continue paying close attention to mind /body, nature/culture divisions, not as 'either-or' binaries, but as deeper evidence of the entangled webs of vital forces at work, reaffirming that precarity is necessary for any change and transformation. The research to date reflects primarily studio and exhibition practice sited within various galleries and at the ecopark. I completed the PGCAPHE Master's module in 2022 alongside teaching, embracing anthropological and philosophical texts interwoven across practice and I presented at the University of Dundee Arts & Humanities conference 'Multispecies Architecture' in December 2022.

In 2020 I planted 60 silver birch trees at the entrance to the Binn ecopark as a response to Diana Beresford Kroeger's book, *To Speak for the Trees*.

There is now an initiative approved by the board of directors in place to encourage employees to take time each week from their work to engage with their 'green team' visions. I will be compiling data and outcomes from these initiatives and will hopefully help to facilitate some events and some OPD sessions from outside the organisation. I have exhibited in 7 group exhibitions, one solo exhibition, given lectures and tutorials within DJCAD, two external artist talks and contributed to a conference at University of Dundee. Despite significant restrictions due to Covid 19 in 2020-2021 I have been able to undertake and fulfil the following projects in 2021-2022:

- 2021 *Momentum*, solo show, Perth Creative Exchange
  - Artists talk, UHI students, Perth Creative Exchange
  - Liminal, group show, St Margaret's House, Edinburgh
  - Hidden Door, *157 Reliquaries*, collaboration with Louise Ritchie
- 2022 Earth Day 22 April, pollinator planting event, Binn Group with employees
  - Weights of Responsibility, 3 person show with Jenny Pope and Louise Ritchie
  - Artist talk, Weights of Responsibility, Birnam Arts.

RSA open

*Litter Catcher*- sited work Binn Group entrance. Collaboration with artist Amanda Adam.

Tales of the Unexpected, group show, Lamb Gallery, Dundee University Archive project.

Interview with *The Courier*, Dundee, Women and the arts.

2023 Research Expo, DJCAD

I am supported in my work with a supervisory team from Social Anthropology, Dr. Mette High, University of St. Andrews, Philosophy, Dr. Undine Sellbach, University of Dundee, and fine art, Professor Modeen, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design.

The supervisory meetings have to date reflected the deep entanglement of all three disciplines as relevant for my research providing vital and expanded perspectives for reflection and rigorous consideration. I will write in response to sites, materials, and interactions. This method of working helps me to find my writing 'voice.' I plan to hold a series of site-writing workshops in various locations between places I visit, DJCAD and the Binn Group in 2023.



*Fig. 13 Planting of silver birch, Binn Group*

## Relevance of Research

Precarity, uncertainty, loss and fragility are reflected across multiple worlds within the systems in which we exist today. The following list encapsulates many actants evident in my research:

### A-Z of Research

Anthropocene

Biosphere

Collaboration

Destruction

Earth system science

Forces

Gaia

Hylomorphism

Intelligences

Juggling

Knots

Learning

Metaphor

Nature

Object Oriented Ontology

Post-humanism

Questioning

Respondence

Speculative science fiction

Thinking

Unpredictability

Virtual

Waymarkers

Xenial

Yardsticks

Zeitgeist



## Contextual Review – Artists

Artists of significance in this research (but not exclusively) include Phyllida Barlow, Joseph Beuys, Dorothy Cross, Yoko Ono, Cornelia Parker and Yin Xiuzhen. I include these artists for their deep exploration of precarity, trauma, uncertainty, fragility, and attention to material processes in their work.

### Phyllida Barlow

For me, sculpture is constantly about an object losing its identity in mid-making. Or it becomes rescued and has to reform itself, so there's something to be gained from that loss.<sup>11</sup>

Barlow creates large scale assemblages inspired by her surroundings which evoke fragility, precarity and playfulness. Her sculptures, often made from everyday materials, (wood, plaster, fabrics, cement and cardboard) demand intense scrutiny of their materiality and fragility and generate feelings of joy, empathy and humour. There is a sense of an invitation, when experiencing the work, to be privy to the minutiae of detail of her making process.



Fig. 14 Barlow, Phyllida, *Great Britain Pavilion*. 57th Venice Biennale, 2017.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hauserwirth.com/news/2294-simple-actions-conversation-phyllida-barlow/>



Fig. 15 Barlow, Phylidda, *Canvasracks*, Royal Academy 2018/19

## Joseph Beuys

Beuys' interdisciplinary practice has influenced my work for many years initially for his use of unconventional sculptural materials such as felt, fat, bees, blood, dead animals, and objects. His deep commitment to ecological thinking, enchantment and action, urban renewal, and sustainability is more potent than ever today as we hurtle towards mass extinction. The work *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* is a profound metaphor for the cycle of life and impossibility of locating truth through language.



Fig. 16 Beuys, Joseph, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, Performance, November 1965, Schelma Gallery, Dusseldorf.



*Fig. 17 Beuys, Joseph, Fett Stuhl/ Fat Chair 1964-1985  
Fat, metal hook and chair.*

### Dorothy Cross

I explore Cross' work as she addresses constant flux and transformation across lands, seas and bodies in her practice working with materials which operate as powerful and charged metaphors. Her work creates often ambiguous and unsettling provocations which address mortality and relationships with both human and more than human worlds.



*Fig. 18 Cross, Dorothy, Thimble 2002, silver thimble and walrus whisker*



Fig. 19 Cross, Dorothy-Table Telescope 2016  
brass telescope human skull  
and meteorite.



Fig. 20 Cross, Dorothy- Milking stool, gilded cast iron table,  
cow's udder, stool, 1995

## Cornelia Parker

My work is consistently unstable, in flux, leant against a wall, hovering, or so fragile it might collapse. Perhaps that is what I feel about my own relationship to the world. <sup>12</sup>



Fig. 21 Parker, Cornelia, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Steamrolled silver objects, Retrospective, Tate Britain 2022

<sup>12</sup> Quote by Cornelia Parker, at entrance to her retrospective, Tate Britain 2022



Fig. 22 Parker, Cornelia, 'Cold Dark Matter,' exploded contents of shed, Retrospective, Tate Britain 2022.

## Yoko Ono

*Mend carefully.  
Think of mending the world  
at the same time.*

*y.o.*



Fig. 23 Ono, Yoko - Mend Piece 1966/2018, Whitechapel Gallery

Yoko Ono's work *Mend Piece* is an invitation for participation. In inviting the audience to fix broken plates the sense of mending is two-way, both the plate and the person who is tending to the repair.

I am interested in exploring further ideas around reparation and healing through material agency and collaborations.



*Fig. 24 Ono, Yoko - Mend Piece*

Yin Xuizhen



*Fig. 25 Yin Xuizhen, Washing Derwent River, 2014 Tasmania*

The urgency of addressing environmental pollution and metaphoric ways of cleaning up the mess (as the ice blocks made from freezing the polluted water from the Derwent melt) is encapsulated in this powerful durational work by Yin Xuizhen. I am hoping to expand my material choices towards working with more ephemeral and temporal matter, compost, plants, liquids and gases.

## Literature

The following writers resonate deeply during this period of my research.

### Jane Bennett

Each human is a heterogeneous compound of vibrant matter. If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimised, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated.<sup>13</sup>

The book *Vibrant Matter* (2010) remains a literary anchor for me given Bennett's focus from human experiences of things to things themselves. Her work continues to help me focus upon the participation of nonhuman forces in the world creating change and transformation. I am interested in looking at the ad hoc ways that human and non-human collisions arise and demand that the distribution of agency lies not only as the province of humans. She is deeply committed to locating care, responsibility, and ecologically sound politics at the heart of her research and vital materialism provides a framework to consider entanglement and forces which generate events and situations in the world.

### Jorie Graham

Manacled to a whelm. Asked the plants to give me my small identity. No, the planets. The arcing runners, their orbit entrails waving, and a form on a leaf, mould, bells a bower- everything transitioning- unfolding- emptying into a bit more life cell by cell in wind like this sound of scribbling on paper. I think.<sup>14</sup>

Jorie Graham writes poems which address urgent political and philosophical issues in ways which reveal imprecision, errors of perception, and unclear thoughts as ways to remain open ended and to address vulnerability and frailty. The reading of the poems is neither linear nor fluid. Her work is both powerful and challenging and helps me to trust in writing processes which are both precarious and non-linear.

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<sup>13</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, a political ecology of things*, Duke University Press 2010

<sup>14</sup> Jorie Graham, Excerpt from her poem *Ashes*. P3 *Fast*, Carcanet Press, 2017.

## Donna Haraway

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds; what worlds make stories.<sup>15</sup>

Haraway's *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (2016) helps me to look at the world through the lens of speculative feminism, science fiction, evolutionary theory, geology, biology, and the arts. The speculative quality of her writing helps me to reimagine wholesome and vital possibilities of how earth systems might flourish and to not turn my back at the awfulness of the state of the world. She provides rays of light in an otherwise gloomy and dark reality.

## Tim Ingold

Contemporary discussions of art and technology continue to work on the assumption that making entails the imposition of form upon the material world, by an agent with a design in mind. Against this hylomorphic model of creation, I argue that the forms of things arise within fields of force and flows of material.<sup>16</sup>

Ingold's book *Making* is a major contributor within my research practice. In advocating for a thinking through making approach to knowledge production he opposes a mainstream, linear, pre-determined point of departure. He challenges academic methods of knowing through reason, logic, argument, and hypotheses and embraces the idea of being open to what materials (and the world) can teach us. Ingold helps me to trust that intuition, common sense, and the flows of material processes are paramount to ways of knowing.

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<sup>15</sup> Donna J Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble, Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016

<sup>16</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Textility of Making*, Cambridge Journal of Economics 2010, 34, 91–102 , 9 July 2009



## Eduardo Kohn

How other kinds of beings see us matters. That other kinds of beings see us changes things... anthropology cannot limit itself just to exploring how people from different societies might happen to represent them as doing so...seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs.<sup>17</sup>

In his book *How Forests Think, Toward An Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2016), Kohn provides an incredible overview through his fieldwork in Ecuador's upper Amazon, challenging the very foundations of anthropology and directly reflecting on what happens when we relate to other types of beings. His work is helping me to decentre the privileging of the human and to think about multispecies intelligences and the many harmonious ways in which we can co-exist alongside all beings.

## Tim Morton

You can't say an octopus is a toaster, or that global warming isn't real, or that it wasn't caused by humans, precisely because things are open and truthy. Things are exactly what they are, yet never how they appear, yet appearance is inseparable from being, so a thing is a twisted loop like a Mobius strip, in which the twist is everywhere, it has no starting or ending point.<sup>18</sup>

Morton's writing helps to acknowledge the seismic shift in subject/object dualisms and the impact of his terminology of *hyperobjects*<sup>19</sup> - of which humans are now forced to *react to* - with the examples of global warming, oil spills, The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, and the melting of the Polar ice caps. I have been influenced by Morton's argument that one of the biggest problems is using the term 'nature' which reinforces the idea that we are somehow separate or outside of the natural world. We are *of* nature.

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<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think, Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*, University of California Press, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, Green Ideas, Penguin Books, 2021

<sup>19</sup> *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013

## Anna Tsing

Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves.<sup>20</sup>

Anna Tsing's work is helping me reshape my research as she breaks down divisions between nonhuman nature and human culture reflecting upon the inextricable ties to the environments we inhabit. I am drawn to her work which does not premise knowing from a rational, human perspective. In the age of ecological breakdown and earth damage she commits to de centring the human by making the matsutake mushroom the protagonist in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, (2015). She considers tension and indeterminacy as integral for change and motion and helps to impact on worldmaking projects and creating new formations of power. She does not assume through predetermined logic the relationships between things but seeks to observe effects, parasitic/host relations and to reveal the friction and outcomes which are caused when they interact.

## Research and OPD training

**2023** Creativity for Researchers

**2022** Associate fellowship PGCAPHE

Introduction to Public Engagement

Drafting, editing and proofreading skills

**2021** LTHE

Getting to Grips with Referencing - How to Cite Right and Avoid Plagiarism

The Complete Researcher - PhD Launchpad (Year 1)

**2020** Enhancing Your Resilience

Understanding and Coping with Stress

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

The Writing Process - Getting Started with the Literature Review

**2020** SGSAH - submission - Finalist, student research funding process

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<sup>20</sup> Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at The End of the World*. P20 Arts of Noticing. Princeton Press 2015

## Appendix 1.

### Bibliography

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## Appendix 2.

*Commitment 2020* – work in progress, porcelain. (An overview of process)



The start of the research project began with a walk where I live, a park I spend much of my time in. Here there are many old and beautiful oak trees which started life as an acorn containing just one seed. When a seed is germinated, a taproot is produced anchoring the tree for the rest of its life. The seed sends a shoot towards the surface of the ground as the season changes and the frost abates. The oak tree is often represented as a metaphor for strength, stability, endurance, longevity, and resilience. I collected a small number of acorns which had fallen from the oaks and took them to the studio to look at, observe and work with. The acorn became the metaphoric seed I planted for the taproot of my PhD.

I made a two-part mould in ceramics and cast multiples the acorns, finishing by hand, each one different due to the varying wetness of the clay and the tools I had to hand. The acorns led me to researching the life cycles of trees and the work of the biochemist and botanist Diana Beresford-Kroeger through her book and film, *'To Speak for the Trees.'* She cites the role of the forests as critical in maintaining planetary health and her narratives come from a place of love, connection to the earth and hope. I cast and released each porcelain acorn from the mould, attending to each before firing. I started to think about measuring time through the acorns. I reflected on the time frame required to undertake a part time PhD. Based on a Gregorian calendar, 1825 days equates to 5 years. I continue to make acorns.

The fired acorns are intentionally unglazed. 'Commitment' is still an ongoing work in progress and will be completed in the culmination of my PhD research project. It has been exhibited in three iterations already, the Creative Exchange Perth, the RSA Open in 2022, and was illustrated as a front piece in the book *Decolonising Place Based Arts Research*. (2022)



Commitment 2021



Commitment 2021



Commitment 2022

### Appendix 3. Momentum 2021

Solo show at WASPS, Perth Creative Exchange.



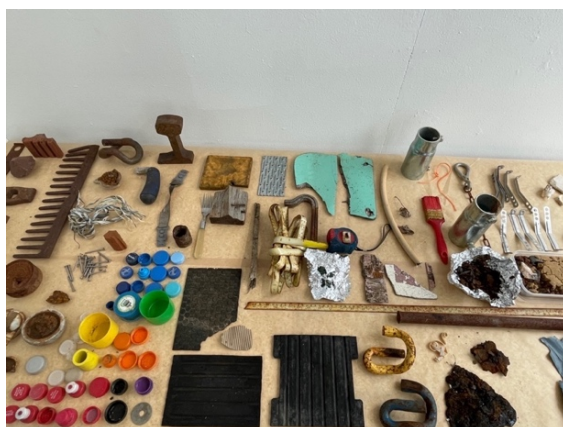
*Momentum*, Discarded materials sourced from Binn Ecopark.  
Repurposed paint, crude oil, oil paint. Emergency blanket, auger and oil drum, horseshoes.

### Appendix 4. Hidden Door 2021

#### *157 Reliquaries*

Collaboration with Louise Ritchie

Hoard of detritus collected from the site at Granton Gastower, Edinburgh.



*157 Reliquaries 2021*, Collection of detritus and reliquaries made for each found material.  
Image on right- Malcolm Finnie



157 Reliquaries, Hidden Door 2021



Bucket and clay, oil, and water-Hidden Door

#### Appendix 5. *Weights of Responsibility* 2022



Single repurposed wedding shoes, Velcro tape, crude oil, Birnam Arts



## Appendix 6. Tales of the unexpected.

Lamb Gallery 2022



When she coughed her ribs broke.  
When she stood up her legs broke.  
When the doctor tried to examine her, he broke her hip.  
That's how little is known about brittle bone disease.  
In Britain, hundreds of people have it. The worst affected die at birth but most babies survive into adult life.  
Some suffer as many as 100 fractures during childhood. Each one as painful and slow to heal as it would be in a normal child.  
There is only one place these children and their parents can turn to for support. The Brittle Bone Society.  
From our National HQ in Dundee we recommend specialists. Send out occupational therapists. Provide equipment. Pay hospital travel costs. Organise holidays. And promote research into a cure by keeping the only genetic database of brittle bone cases in the world.  
Even though a cure is a long way off, our staff are working miracles.  
Every month we hear from parents whose brittle bone children are now playing football, passing exams, getting jobs, even going snorkelling and abseiling.  
But we can't keep up our good work. The building we're in is



*Structure of Outcomes*

Brittle Bone Society Archive, University of Dundee

## Appendix 7.

DJCAD Research Expo. Matthew Building

Jan-Feb. 2023 Iteration no 2.



*Structure of Outcomes*. Porcelain, string.

Appendix 8. Posters and digital material for exhibitions and events

Susie Johnston *Momentum*  
*Matter, making, metaphor and meaning.*



Perth Creative Exchange, Stormont St, PH1 5NW  
 4 - 26 September  
 Wed-Fri 10-5pm Sat/Sun 1-5pm  
 or by appointment - tel. 07977246806  
 Closed Mon/Tues  
 www.susiejohnston.co.uk  
 Insta #susie\_johnston

**wasps\_** @waspsstudios waspsstudios.org.uk

**LIMINAL**  
 10 CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS  
 10 APPROACHES  
 20 November - 5 December  
 12 - 4pm

Cally Buchanan Susie Johnston  
 Andy Moir Sarah Knox  
 Lindsay Storstein Jane Dickinson  
 Jude Nixon Joan Prickett  
 Irene Jordan MaryAnne Hunt

Private View 19 November 6 - 9pm

ST MARGARET'S HOUSE (GALLERY 1),  
 151 LONDON ROAD, EDINBURGH, EH7 6AE.

FREE PARKING TO REAR OF BUILDING.

**HIDDEN DOOR**  
 Visual Art  
 Commissioned Project  
 SUSIE JOHNSTON  
 + LOUISE RITCHIE

uodmuseums  
 Dundee

**TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED**

An exhibition of creative responses to the University's archive and museum collections for Scotland's Year of Stories  
 Lamb Gallery, Tower Building, University of Dundee  
 8 August - 28 October 2022  
 Free Admission  
 www.dundee.ac.uk/museum

**Multispecies Architectures**

Postgraduate Symposium  
 University of Dundee  
 1 December 2022

Ashika Akemoku Tugiyane Kihappan 2019

University of Dundee

**DJCAD Research Expo 2023**  
 27 January - 18 February

Gallery South and North  
 Level 5 Matthew Building  
 13 Perth Road  
 Dundee DD1 4HT

**Free!**

## Appendix 9. Research Project Timeline

### 2023

January	Research Expo DJCAD, Level 5, Matthew Building.
February-March	Teaching, MFA. Site-writing-Binn Group  Site visit and lecture with Masters in Science and Visual Thinking students to Binn Group.
March	<i>Objects of Conviction</i> , two-person exhibition, residency, artist talk and Q&A with artist and researcher Ginny Elston, Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh
April	Earth Day 2023, Binn group community event  'Rammed Earth' workshop- with earthship builder, Ally Dawson
April-July	Pitlochry Festival Theatre, <i>Ways of the Tay</i> , Sculpture project with wider Perthshire community.
May-October	Binn Group working on site, site writing, working on picking lines and in the land.  Conference paper proposals
2024	Writing, studio practice, exhibition practice, and teaching. Conferences TBC
2025	Making work and writing up. Submission (25-30K word exegesis) and exhibition (yet to be confirmed re specifics of location or creative outcomes)

