

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the Graduate Project Exhibition prepared

by: Valeria Sabina Rak

entitled: CECI EST RIEN (sans toi) / This is nothing (without you)

held at: MFA Gallery
Visual Arts Building VA-102
Concordia University, Sir George Williams Campus
1395, boul. René-Lévesque Ouest, Montréal, QC H3G 2M5

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts (Studio Arts – Print Media)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Names of the final examining committee:

<u>Erika Adams</u>	MFA Studio Arts Advisor
<u>Elaine Cheasley Paterson</u>	Faculty Examiner
<u>maya rae oppenheimer</u>	Faculty Examiner
<u>Marie-Pier Bocquet</u>	External Examiner

Approved by Erika Adams
Graduate Program Director

Annie Gérin
Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

Date and year October 4, 2024

CECI EST RIEN¹

This is nothing²

1 sans toi

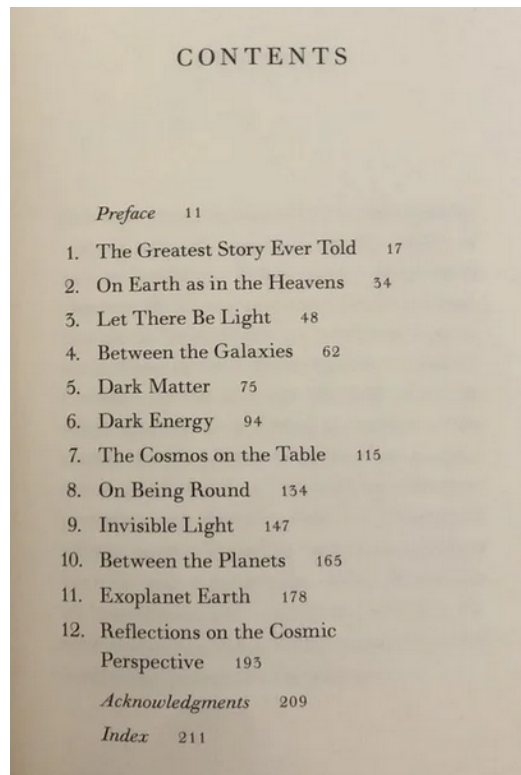
2 without you

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Who What When Where Why

Who	(Valeria) Sabina Rak
What	MFA 2020-2024 Print Media thesis exhibition Concordia University Montréal, Québec, Canada
When	October 1 to 5, 2024
Where	Presented in the MFA Gallery, Visual Arts Building VA-102 Sir George Williams Campus, 1395, boul. René-Lévesque Ouest
Why	(Art) works exploring various types of (artistic) collaborations, all conceptually based on chapters from Neil deGrasse Tyson, <i>Astrophysics for People in a Hurry</i> (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2017)



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Thank yous: Alex, Alli, April, Benoît, Catherine, Daria, Deanna, Donna, Eduardo, Elaine, Emilie, Erika, Everiki, Hei Lam, Helena, Ioana, Jenny, Julie, Léa, Lilia, Maureen, maya, Megan, Michael, Mitch, Nicole, Pauline, Pramila, Sabina, Sandra, Selene, Stefan, Stephanie, Stephanie, Zahra, and so many more.

Land Acknowledgement

There are so many mixed emotions as I study, live, create. What and where is home?

Since my mother has passed, my relationship to the place I call home (Tiohtià:ke/Montréal) has also changed, I can feel it coming more into focus.

People talk about having roots, not forgetting your roots, being lost without your roots, but I am so far removed from those roots who once gave me life. At the same time, I live day-to-day on a land on which for millennia other people have weaved roots from which I now profit; how do I relate to that history, labour and struggle?

A first-generation immigrant, I have been uncomfortable existing between two worlds all my life.

As the past is slowly leaving me, I find my other relationships getting stronger.

I belong more to the family I created here.

I feel I am at home in an old land that is not mine.

For immigrants, it is seen as a betrayal to leave emotional baggage behind.

I am choosing to refocus on what is beneath my feet, on the land that feeds me, on the knowledge that grows me, on calling others home.

I am one of billions.

Billions of billions

Languages

Tongues

Mother of words

that envelop the

tongues of one

the language of

billions of words.

I speak one of billions

billions of billions

of languages

of tongues.

I am the mother one.

I would like acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which I am writing this today. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations.

Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Collaboration 1: THE BIG BANG IN A BOOK / *Preface*



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

At one time or another every one of us has looked up at the night sky and wondered: What does it all mean? How does it all work? And, what is my place in the universe? (p. 12)

Collaboration Type

Collaboration with my older self, when I got my M.A. in Art History from Concordia University (2012)

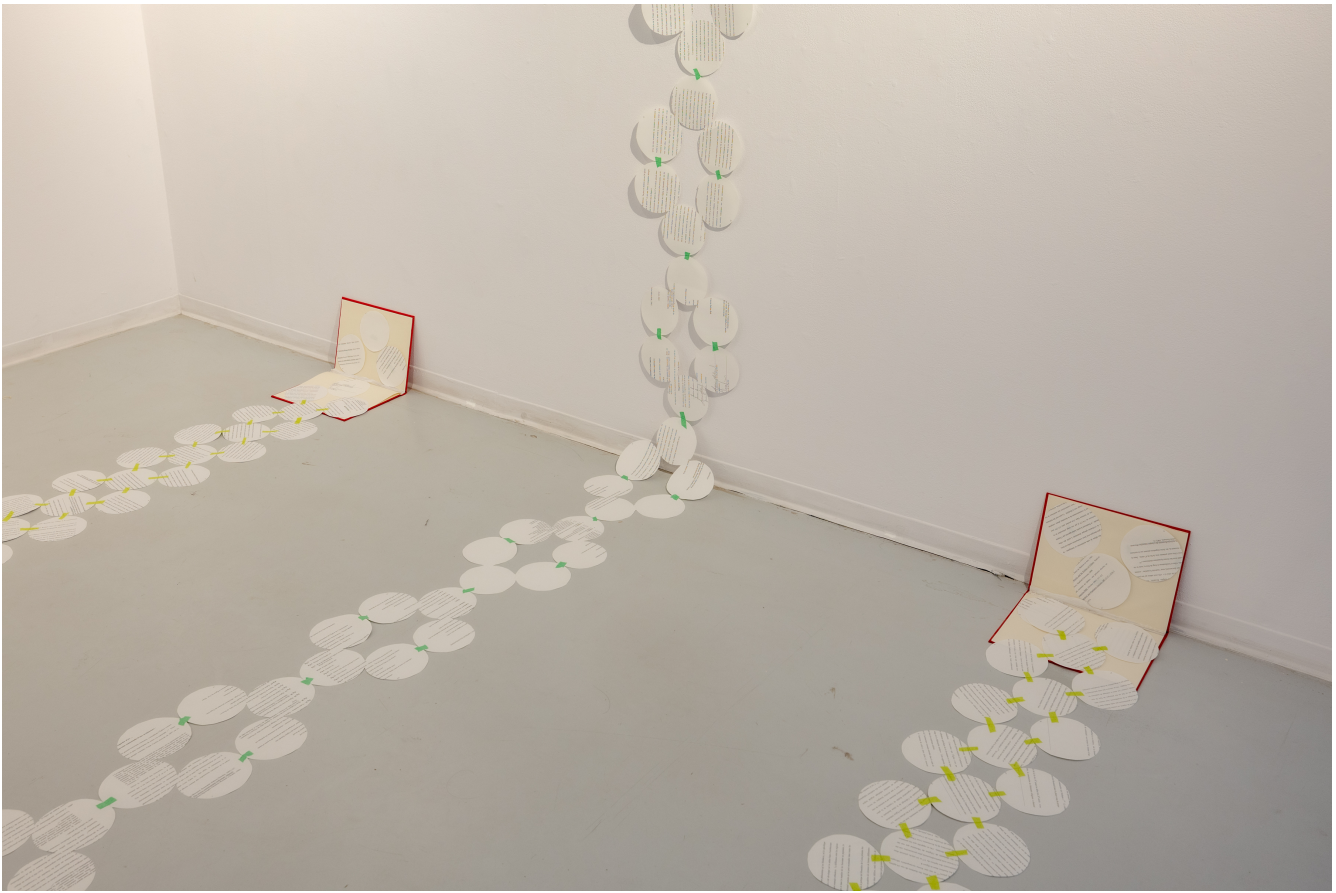


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

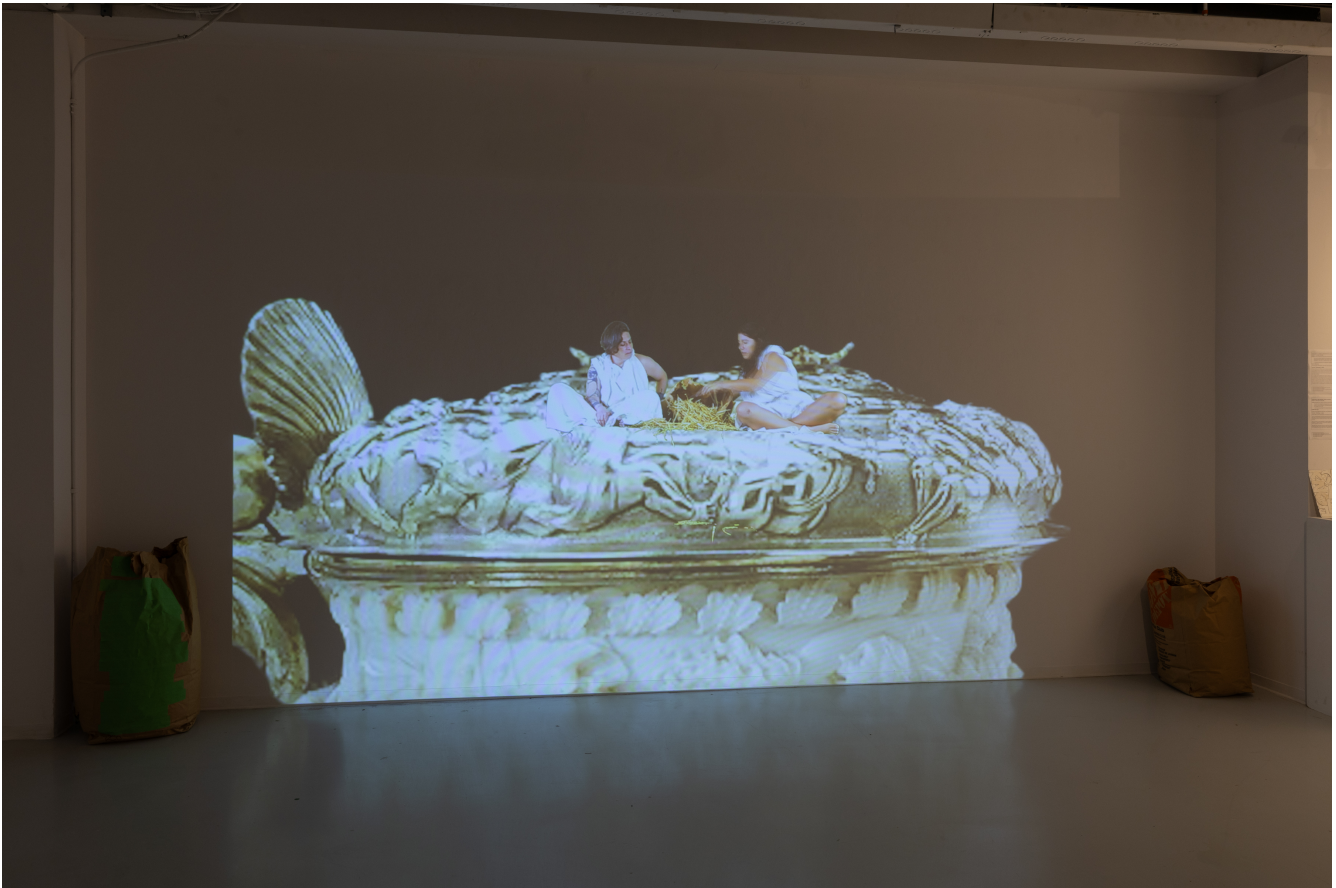
Materials / Methodology / Caption

For 22 years, I have had these three copies of my M.A. thesis, which I did here at Concordia in the Art History department. Things changed, I am different, I think differently. All this time, I never fit into the art history world, but I appreciate what it led me to. What did it mean, what does all our knowledge mean to us now? Does it help for us to find our way?

I felt the urge to take these thesis out and transform them. Include them into what is now my second Masters degree. But I have not once read them in these 22 years. They became objects, signifiers of the past. The intuitive process became such an obvious metaphor of transformation: of theory into practice, of past into present, of writing into space, of reading into other forms of knowledge (be them embodies, gestural, perceptual).

Starting at the M.A., a place as good as any, I present you the Big Bang of this MFA.

Collaboration 2: THE GODDESSES / Chapter 1: *The Greatest Story Ever Told*



<https://vimeo.com/1023020205> Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

We are stardust brought to life, then empowered by the universe to figure itself out—and we have only just begun. (p. 33)

Collaboration Type

Las Sabinas (collaborative duo with Sabina Gámez, MFA Intermedia student, Concordia University) Embracing a DIY approach, humour, absurdity, subversion, looping, repurposing, we use and reuse materials, images, and gestures. Our collaboration is based on games, where the game precedes the meaning, and is the modus operandi of the conversation between two women from different cultural backgrounds and generations, united as one historical entity, Las Sabinas. Our intention is to occupy and intervene into the galleries and museums where representations of the Sabine women are hosted. In search of our sisters, we will rummage through archives to unearth, converse, and disturb.



Tankard: The Abduction of the Sabine Women, and Samson and the Lion

Object Name: Vessel

Category: Metalwork

Date: 1697

Medium: ivory, gilded silver

Credit Line: The Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario

Object Number: AGOID.29189

Location: AGO, Gallery 110 Thomson European, Floor, Vitrine

Gallery Number: AGO, Gallery 110

Overall: 30.5 × 22.9 × 16.5 cm, 5.3 lb. (12 × 9 × 6 1/2 in., 2.4 kg)

<https://ago.ca/collection/object/agoid.29189>

Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Materials / Methodology / Caption

“I wonder if they have Sabines somewhere closer to here, like in Ontario.” “Yes, at the AGO they do, there is a tankard.” “What’s a tankard?” “It seems to be like a cup. With relief sculptures on it depicting what they call the abduction of the Sabine women.” “We need to conquer that.”, straw, Home Depot paper bag masked with green tape, lights, cameras, a green room, repetitive actions, mimicry of poses, laughter, climbing, trials and errors, ladders covered with green fabric, lots of hours at the computer for post-production, a string found at the bottom of the kitchen drawer that holds the bag together, bed sheets, belts, table, image of the tankard.

Collaboration 3: THE MOTHER TONGUE / Chapter 2: *On Earth As In Heavens*



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

The universality of physical laws tells us that if we land on another planet with a thriving alien civilisation, they will be running on the same laws that we have discovered and tested here on Earth—even if the aliens harbour different social and political beliefs. Furthermore, if you wanted to talk to the aliens, you can bet they don't speak English or French or Mandarin. Nor would you know whether shaking their hands—if indeed their outstretched appendage is a hand—would be considered an act of war or peace. Your best hope is to find a way to communicate using the language of science. (pp. 38-39)

To the scientist, the universality of physical laws makes the cosmos a marvellously simple place. By comparison, human nature—the psychologist’s domain—is infinitely more daunting. (p. 45)

Collaboration Type

Conversation with my mother

Materials / Methodology / Caption

I do not know how to communicate with my mother tongue. I tried 100 ways. I am more or less sure it resulted in anything but a visual performance for social media (https://www.instagram.com/p/C6MAGvrL4Ks/?img_index=1), which in turn through the performance of writing, I am offering as a performance of the tongue for its reader.

The Instagram post is hand written as a prayer book in an cover-less 50-page craft-paper book I made during a book binding workshop with artist Adeline Rognon at L’imprimerie, centre d’artiste in 2022.

Collaboration 4: THE PERIODIC TABLE OF STRAW / Chapter 7: *The Cosmos on the Table*



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

Only three of the naturally occurring elements were manufactured in the big bang. The rest were forged in the high-temperature hearts and explosive remains of dying stars, enabling subsequent generations of star systems to incorporate this enrichment, forming planets, and, in our case, people. (pp. 115-116)

[...] the organising principle for the chemical behaviour of all known and yet-to-be discovered elements in the universe [...] (p. 116)

Collaboration Type

Group work (Alli Melanson, April White, Ioana Dragomir, Megan Stein, Sabina Rak)

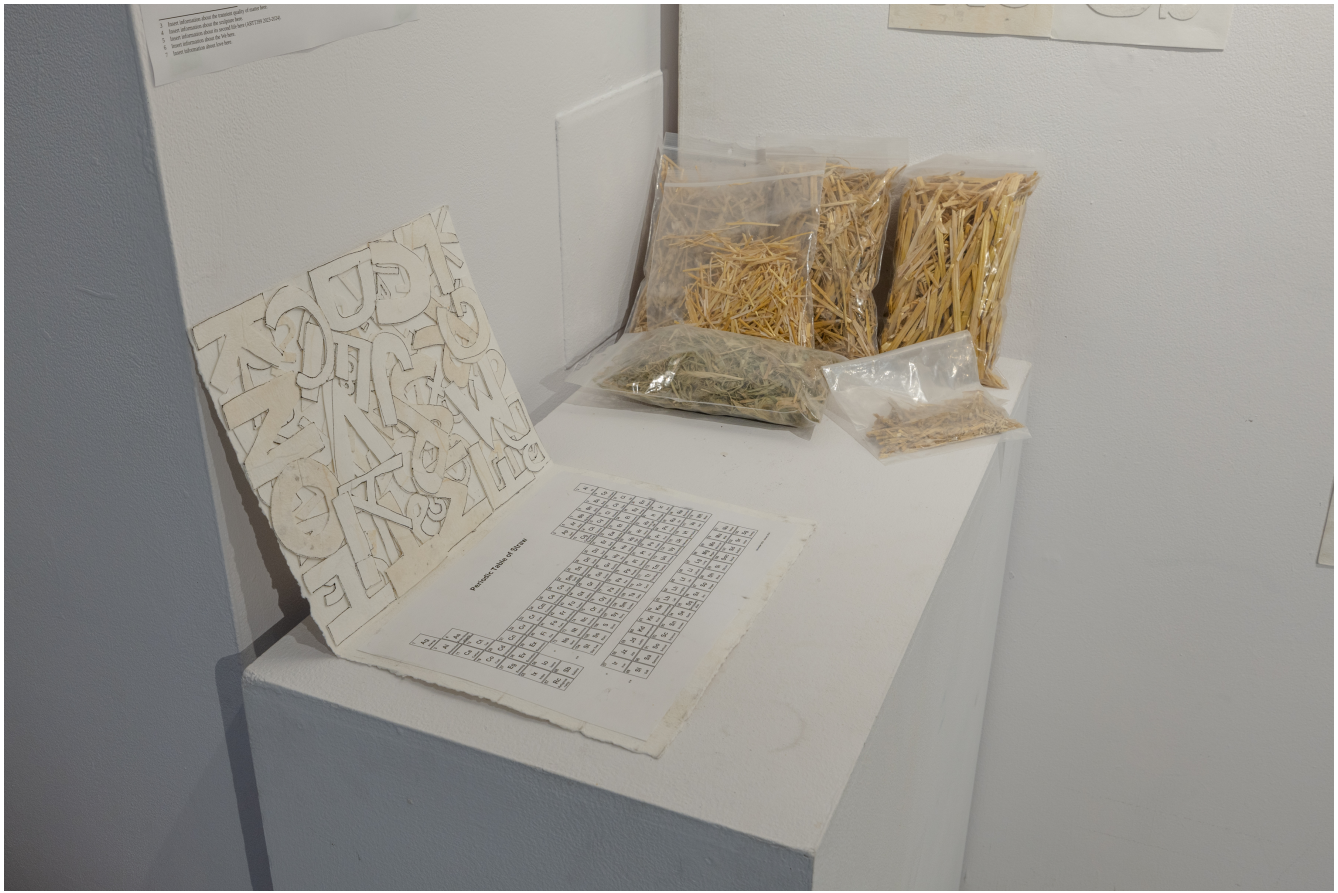


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Materials / Methodology / Caption

Periodic table of various materials that converged into one incarnation of being³.

There is the blotting paper that has been retired from the Print Media Department, Concordia University, after a long and productive life. Which was then taken on by Hei Lam Ng and used in the production of and experimentation with papermaking. And then, again, thrown into a recycling bin in the department, where I found it and exclaimed “Who on Earth would throw these out?” to which Hei Lam replied “Me actually” and then I rescued the sheets.

There is the straw, a former ingredient of a public sculpture⁴, found in my care. As a transition person from its public art site to another TBD installation⁵, I cared for this straw. Took it home, cleaned it, stored it, made sure it was well protected. Made it even the subject and object of a private community conversation.

³ Insert information about the transient quality of matter here.

⁴ Insert information about the sculpture here.

⁵ Insert information about its second life here (ARTT399 2023-2024).

Then there is the conversation, when we⁶ sorted it out, in spirit and body, over words and meanings and laughter and readings. Then the straw travelled back home, where it laid dormant while I thought about it conceptually. Now it is here, you can touch it if you want. It also lays sorted out, to be examined in five bags. Labour of love⁷. Then there is the stencilling, glue, and the tape that holds it all together before you.

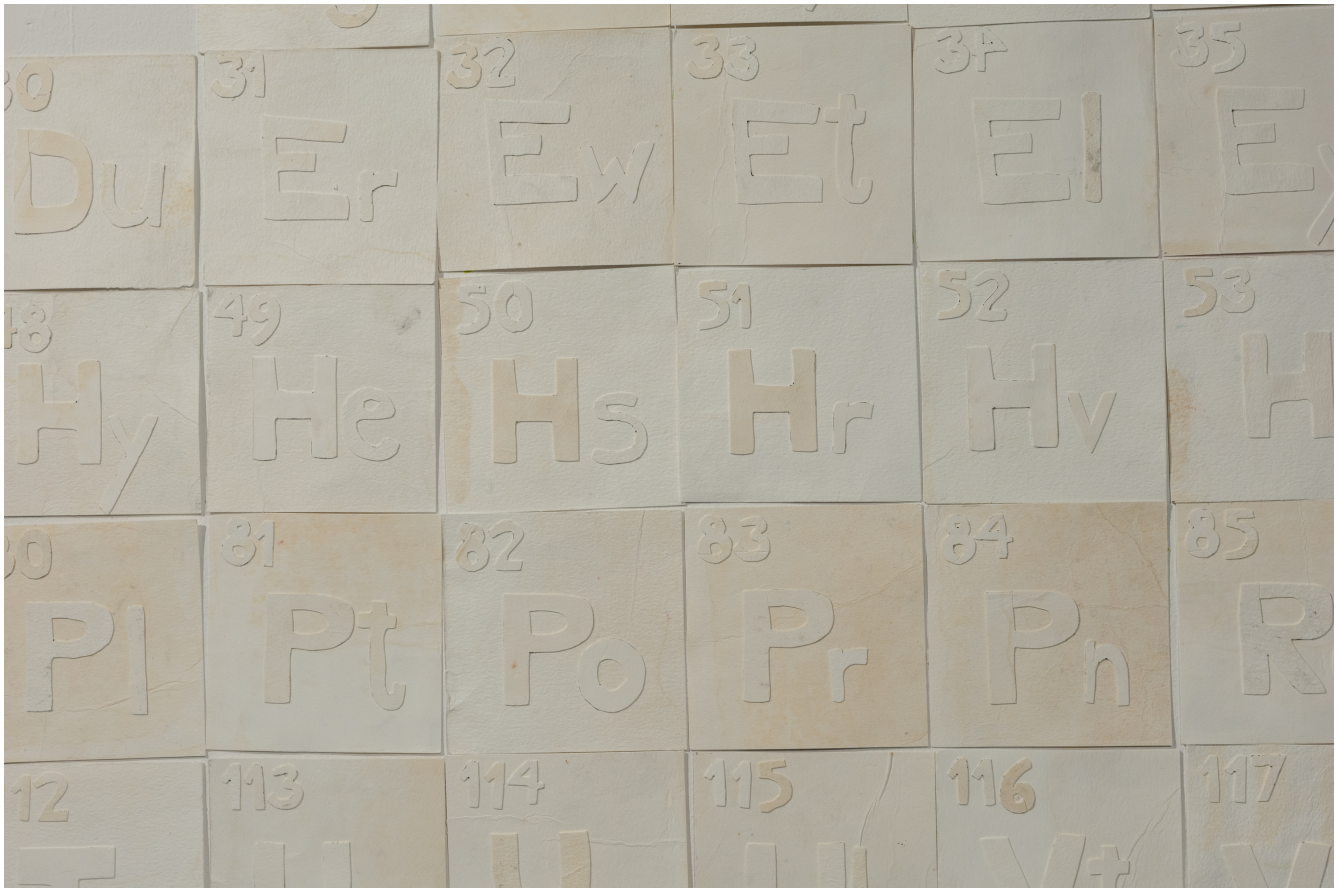


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

6 Insert information about the We here.

7 Insert information about love here.

1 Ag Allergy		Periodic Table of Straw																2 Ai Alli																	
3 Al Aluminium		4 As Antechinus stuartii										5 Ap April		6 Ar Artist		7 Bb Big Bang		8 Bh Birth		9 Bo Body		10 Cp Campus													
11 Ca Carbon		12 Ct Cat										13 Cg Catherine The Great		14 Ch Chemist		15 Cy Chemistry		16 Cl Chloride		17 Cs Class		18 Ci Clit													
19 Co Coat		20 Cd Compound		21 Cn Connection		22 Cv Conversation		23 Cr Core		24 Cm Cosmos		25 Ce Cross-leg		26 Cu Crust		27 Dm Dark matter		28 Ds Discussion		29 Dn Drain		30 Du Dust		31 Er Earth		32 Ew Egg white		33 Et Electrons		34 El Elements		35 Ey Energy		36 En English	
37 Eg Evening		38 Ev Evolution		39 Ex Explosion		40 Fi Fire		41 Fo Form		42 Fr Friendship		43 Fu Fusion		44 Gx Galaxy		45 Gr Garment		46 Gs Grass		47 Gv Gravity		48 Hy Hay		49 He Helium		50 Hs High school		51 Hr Horse		52 Hv Horse girl vibe		53 H Hydrogen		54 Ic Icon	
55 Ix Index		56 Io Ioana		*		72 Ns Nest		73 Nt Neutrinos		74 Nc Nucleus		75 Or Origin		76 Oy Oxygen		77 Pa Particle		78 Pe Pee		79 Pp People		80 Pl Planets		81 Pt Pot		82 Po Potato		83 Pr Print		84 Pn Proton		85 Ra Rat		86 Re Reaction	
87 Rc Religious camp		88 Sb Sabina		**		104 St Star Trek		105 Ss Stars		106 S Stool		107 Sy Story		108 Sm System		109 Ta Table		110 Tr Tarot		111 Tt They/them		112 Tm Titanium		113 Un Universe		114 Uy University		115 Uk Unknown		116 Vt Ventilation		117 Ve Vest		118 Wt Water	
				*		57 Ir Iron		58 Jz Jizz		59 Jd Judith		60 Kd Kindergarten		61 Kn Knot		62 Kw Knowledge		63 Lb Lab		64 Lh Laughter		65 Lf Life		66 Li Lithium		67 Lg Long		68 Mg Megan		69 Mo Molecule		70 Mu Mule		71 Nu Nature	
				**		89 Sl Salt		90 Sa Samosa		91 So School		92 Sc Science		93 Sn Screen		94 Se Seed		95 Sq Sesquiped- alian		96 Sx Sex		97 Sp Shape		98 Sh Short		99 Si Silicon		100 Soc Social		101 Sd Sodium		102 Sr Solar		103 Sg Sorting	

November 2023 - January 2024

Collaboration 5: HUMAN CIRCLE / Chapter 8: *On Being Round*

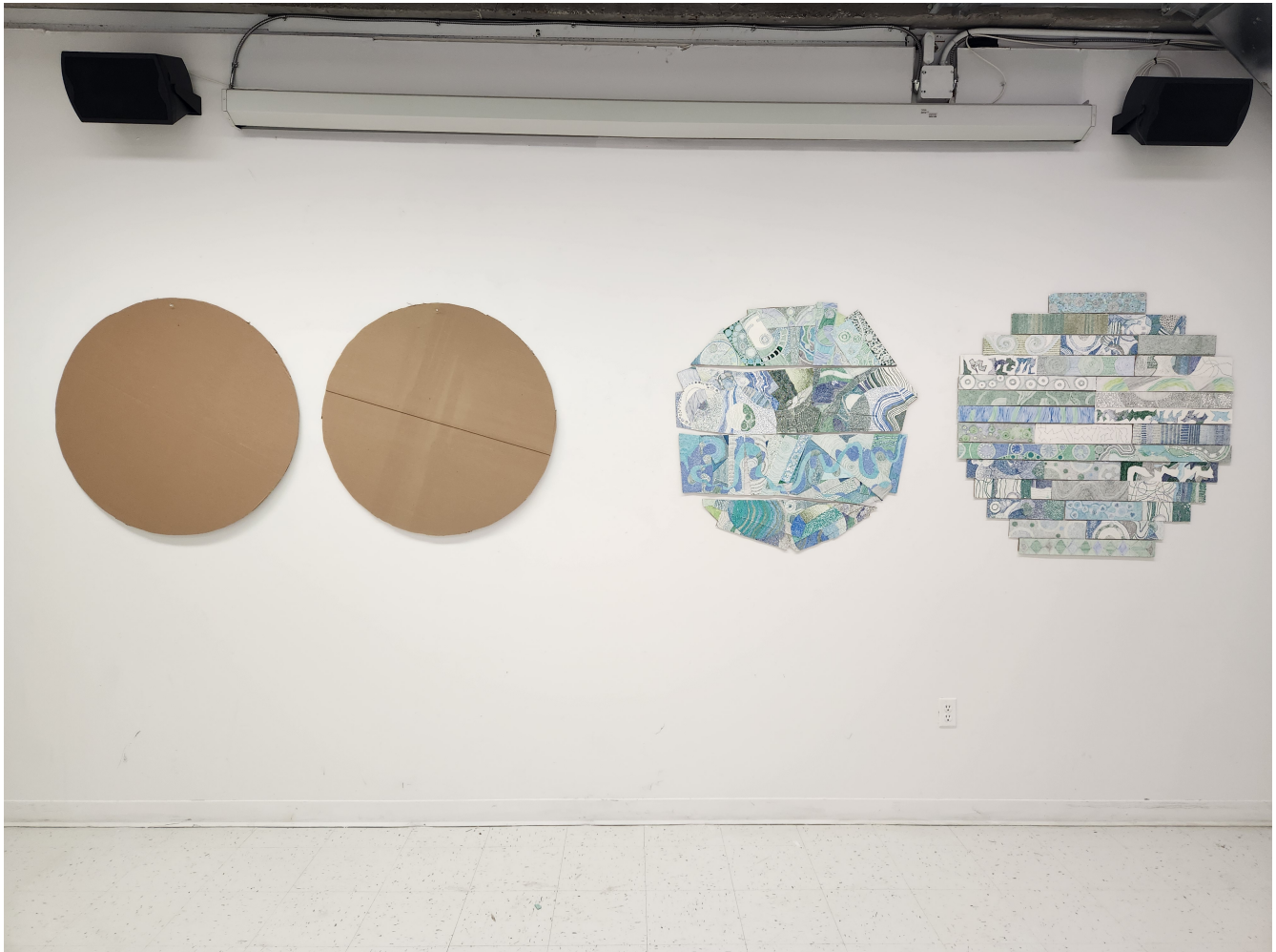


Photo : Sabina Rak

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

The sphere to end all spheres—the largest and most perfect of them all—is the entire observable universe. (p. 145)

Collaboration Type

Collaboration piece with Pramila Choudhary, PhD candidate, Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, Concordia University

Human Circle: A growing pattern of collaborations is a collaborative drawing project initiated and run by artists Pramila Choudhary (PdD candidate in Geography, Concordia University and textile artist) and Sabina Rak (MFA student in Print Media, Concordia University).

It is based on the idea of the circle. A universal symbol of both nothing and everything, of the individual and the universal, the circle stands here for the simplest form that, through addition and collaboration, can create an organic pattern.

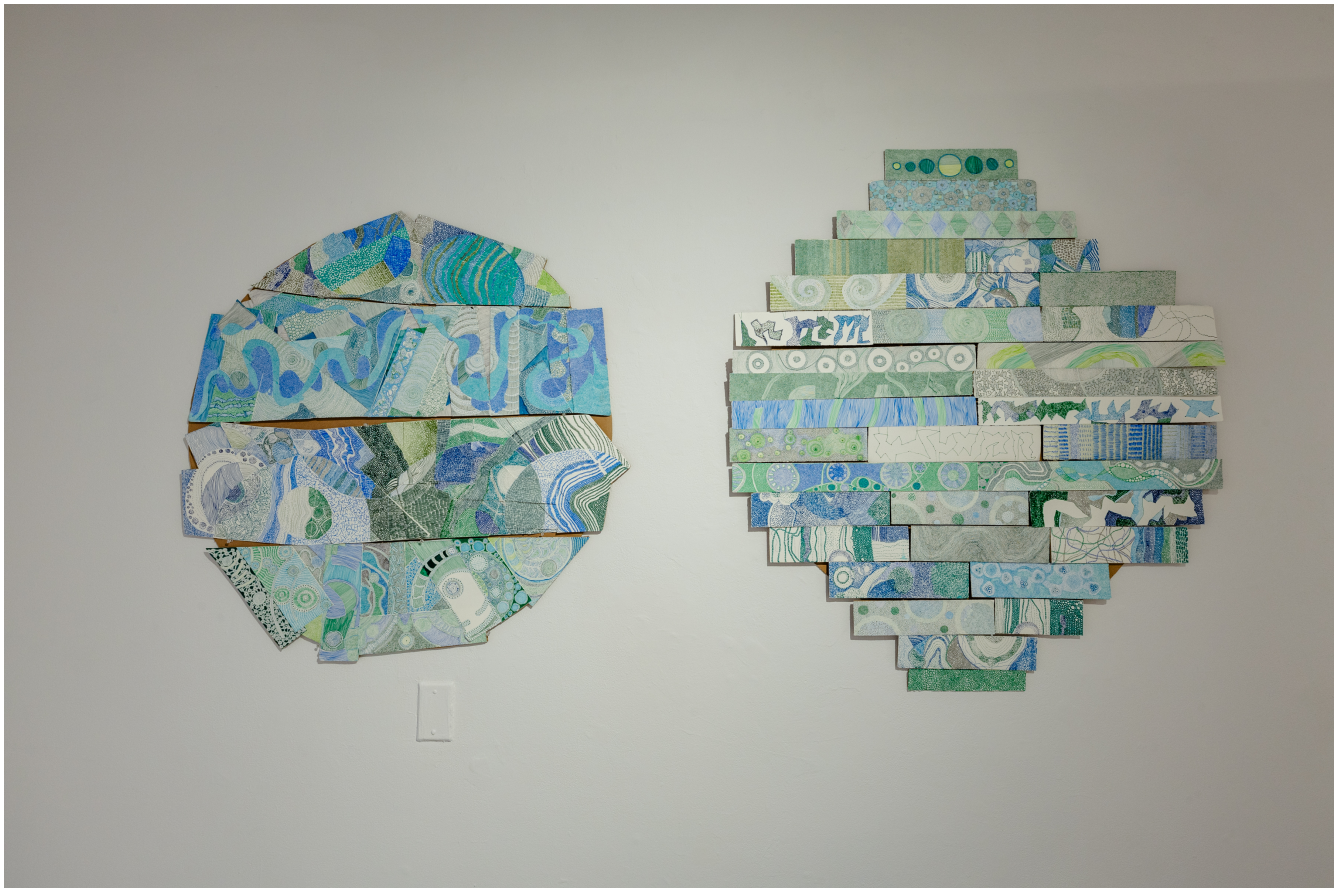


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Materials / Methodology / Caption

Compulsive drawing of circles, repurposed borders of old prints, paper from the recycling bins in the Print department, markers from kids' school supplies, exchanges of drawing processes on Instagram between Pramila and Sabina, more markers from the CUCCR, in-person working sessions filled with conversations, tape rolls that have been used for a while now, one new tape roll bought at deSerres, large cardboard sheets preciously saved because they are hard to come by, many other pieces of cardboard that became the backing for the drawings, solitary drawing sessions influenced by Pramila's contagious creative energy while allowing Sabina some quiet times in an otherwise chaotic world,

human connections that give meaning to our mark-making impulses, scores of conversations, movable pieces, choice of colours, recycling of shapes and matter.



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Collaboration 6: CRUMBS / Chapter 10: *Between the Planets*



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

From a distance, our solar system looks empty [...] But it is not empty, the space between the planets contains all manner of chunky rocks, pebbles, ice balls, dust, streams of charged particles, and far-flung probes. (p. 165)

Interplanetary space is so not-empty that Earth, during its 30 kilometres-per-second orbital journey, plows through hundreds of tons of meteors per day – most of them no larger than a grain of sand. Nearly all of them burn in Earth's upper atmosphere, slamming into the air with so much energy that the debris vaporises on contact. Our frail species evolved under this protective blanket. (pp. 165-166)

Collaboration Type

/ræk+ŋ4/, a collaborative project between Sabina Rak (ræk) and Hei Lam Ng (ŋ4). Titled, *Odds & Ends*, it takes the format of curated packages of paper & word pieces. Each package is a one-of-a-kind zine, edition of 100. The work presented here is an expansion of *Chapter 2: poetic of crumbs*.



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Materials / Methodology / Caption

Conversation on the *Poetics of Space*, definitions of crumbs, many printed books I do not have any other use for, maps given by friends, ideas of orbits and trajectories and bodies, glue, cardboard boxes I've been keeping supplies in, an old edition of a lithograph I made during my BFA, indexes, cut outs and cut-offs, manual labour purposely not automatised, 100 zines and a number (always in progress) of deflated boxes, matter on its way to being trash, affective relationship, time spent, book and craft fairs, games of words.



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Collaboration 7: A COSMIC ART PRACTICE / Chapter 12: *Reflections on the Cosmic Perspective*



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Citation from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*

When I pause and reflect on our expanding universe, with its galaxies hurtling away from one another, embedded within the ever-stretching, four-dimensional fabric of space and time, sometimes I forget that uncounted people walk this Earth without food or shelter, and that children are disproportionately represented among them. (p. 195)

When I track the orbits of asteroids, comets, and planets, each one a pirouetting dancer in a cosmic ballet, choreographed by the forces of gravity, sometimes I forget that too many people act in wanton disregard for the delicate interplay of Earth's atmosphere, oceans, and land, with consequences that our children and our children's children will witness and pay for with their health and well-being. (pp. 195-196)

Collaboration Type

I am one of billions.
Billions of billions
Languages
Tongues
Mother of words
that envelop the
tongues of one
the language of
billions of words.
I speak one of billions
billions of billions
of languages
of tongues.
I am the mother one.

Materials / Methodology / Caption

Political

According to the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, more than 110 armed conflicts are currently taking place in the world. Their website lists all these conflicts and gives information on their histories. (<https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>)

The conflicts that have been most notable for myself as a Quebec resident and which have been a part of everyday life and politics, be it at the university, provincial or federal level, are: the ethnic genocide in Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo's fifty-year wars, the gang wars in Haiti, and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Without claiming expertise in international affairs, I subscribe to the view that colonialism and imperialism is at the root of these wars.

I would like to borrow The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM)'s Statement of Solidarity Against Imperialism & Colonialism for this thesis to help me express my own view:

In the face of the overwhelming challenges that echo across the world, The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) extends our unwavering solidarity with those in the crossfires of imperialism, militarism and settler colonialism.

Our hearts are heavy with the recognition that human suffering extends far beyond the borders of the latest headlines. While the world's gaze remains fixed on the devastating genocide in Gaza, it is also our duty to remain vigilant and acknowledge the pain and struggles of those in regions less geopolitically relevant to some, but no less significant to us.

Navigating the waves of news that share tales of suffering from around the world can often leave us feeling powerless. The term "polycrisis" instills a sense of panic and malaise, a feeling that can overwhelm our senses. Western media and those in positions of power monopolize

disaster-centric language, leaving people with a sense of helplessness – particularly those of us in the Global South. While these instances of violence are, indeed, disasters, labeling them as crises almost freezes the devastations in time, as if they are sporadic occurrences and do not have long-term consequences across generations. In reality, they are the calculated results of well thought-out imperialist strategies that continue to disenfranchise the many, while benefiting the few.

Our compassion and empathy for these situations should mirror the nature in which we come to witness these atrocities: in a slow and sustainable way that centers our humanity and recognizes the inextricable links among us all. It is essential to resist the urge to be overwhelmed and instead approach these issues with deliberate and sustained focus, understanding that addressing the root causes of inequality requires a commitment to dismantling global systems of oppression and promoting justice for all.

[The rest of the text can be found at <https://cofemsocialchange.org/cofem-statement-of-solidarity-against-imperialism-colonialism/>]

Artistic

I would like to acknowledge my very intentional acts of citation styles of my inspirations.

I would like to acknowledge my very intentional writing choices while engaging with art history while finding my voice as an artist.

I would like to acknowledge my very intentional association with DIY movements, university research, labour enthusiasts, humour, absurdity, non-directional value systems, critical thinking, slow processing, group knowledge, rethinking education, and all the generous scholars I met along the way during my three and a half years of MFA studies.

A few of my influences: Karen Trask, Caroline Monet, Sophie Jodoin, Bridget Moser, Deanna Bowen, Maria Ezcurra

Environmental

My work for this project has followed a few environmental principles:

- must not be monumental, but rather all must be easily disassembled and movable;
- must not be more than 10% new material;
- must be easily mended/repaired, or modified according to the resources available;
- must be worth nothing in terms of materials.

Thesis Conclusion / The Language of Art Collaborations



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

Materials / Methodology / Caption

The other day I went to rummage through the premises and shelves of CUCCR (the Concordia University Centre for Creative Reuse). The center's mission is to recover materials used in all university departments that would otherwise be destined for the trash, and offer them free of charge to the community at large for creative reuse and re-purpose. I go there regularly to find materials with which to make art (papers, fabrics, containers, etc.), but also ideas to work with.

There's a whole section of books, dictionaries, literature, school textbooks. As I took out a dictionary to leaf through it, a book fell out. *Le monolinguisme de l'autre: ou la prothèse d'origine* by Jacques Derrida. But in its English translation: *Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthesis of Origin*.

This book is the written version of a presentation Jacques Derrida gave at a bilingual conference held at Louisiana State University in April 1992, entitled "Echoes from Nowhere/Renvois d'ailleurs". The conference was organized around the question of the influence of the French language outside France, with an emphasis on bilingualism.



Photo : Gabriel Fournier

I took this book, read it, and formulated a working model of art collaborations, a guide to understand my research on how I made this MFA thesis body of work through collaborating with others.

This concluding guide will be structured in three reflections, which are each based on statements made by Jacques in the book mentioned above:

Reflection 1:

"[...] I have only one language, but it is not mine." (page 1)

Reflection 2:

"1. We only speak one language.

2. We never speak more than one language." (page 7)

Reflection 3:

"[...] anyone should be able to declare under oath: 'I have only one language and it is not mine; my "own" language is, for me, an unassimilable language. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and accept to speak, is the language of the other.'" (page 25)

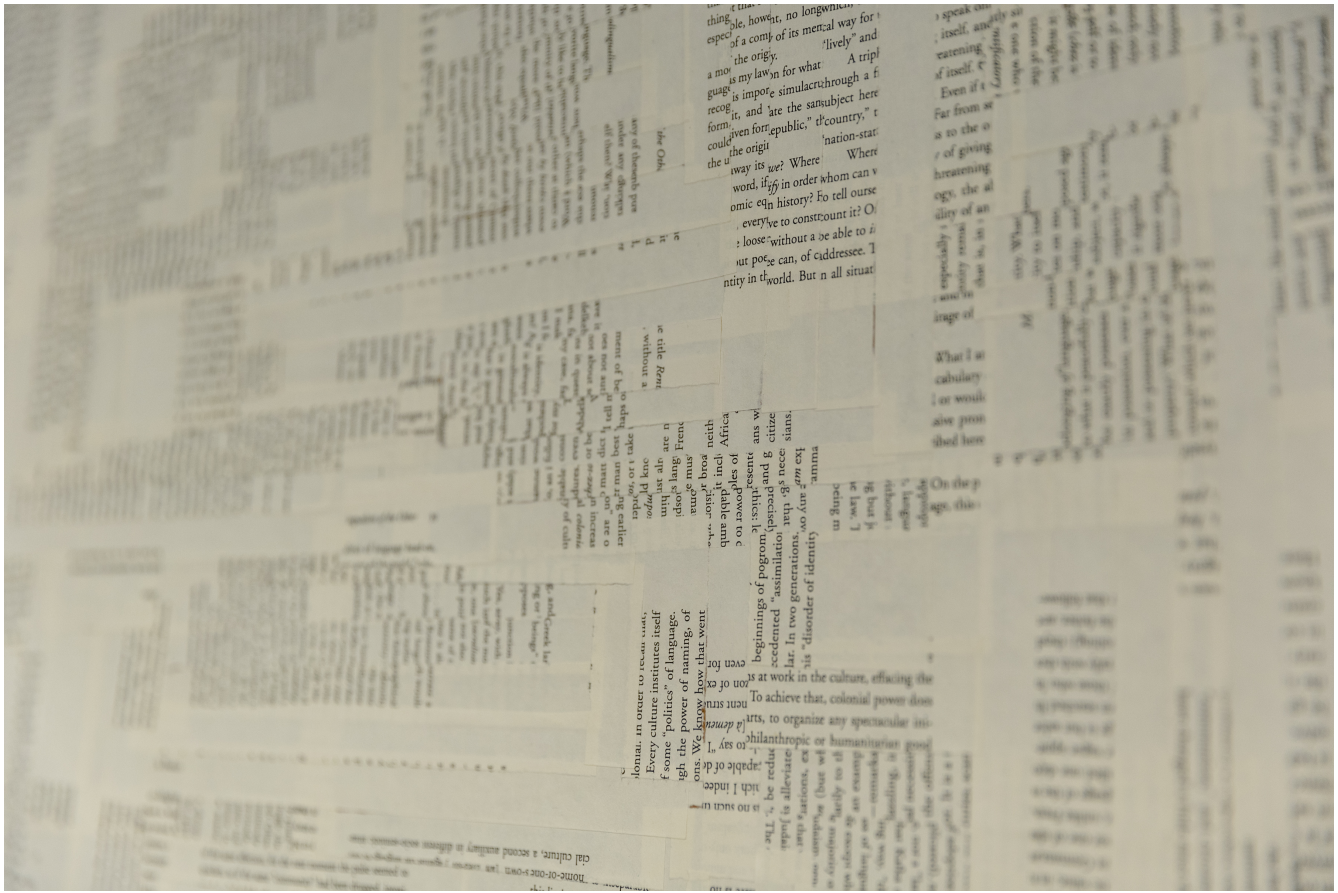


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

The Language of Art Collaborations

Reflection 1

I only have one language, but it's not mine.

What does my language of expression look like when my cultural practice consists of rummaging through the recycling bin of materials and ideas?

It's a language recycled, recomposed, mutilated, tested, and above all created one work at a time from pieces that aren't mine.

That's how I do my theoretical, practical and political research. I do research by searching my environment, relying on the principle of chance, personal encounters, the decentralization of academic knowledge and DIY at all levels.

Decentralization or decolonization of teaching and research is a current inquiry.

For me, this means constantly asking the question: what thread do I give to my curiosity? Without any constraints, without any professional or academic obligations, how do I direct my research to satisfy a deep personal desire to understand and to do?

The Human Circle: A Growing Model of Collaboration project I'm doing with Pramila Choudhary, is a drawing collaboration around the idea of the circle. A universal symbol of nothing and everything, the individual and the universal, the circle here represents one of the simplest forms common to all cultures, and which, through addition and collaboration, can mimic the growth of an idea, an organization, shared interests into a larger, more coherent whole.

What I want to emphasize is that Pramila and I met in the context of another use of our time, one of those that makes money. Without knowing anything about her, such as the fact that she's a PhD student in geography as well as an Indian-born textile art researcher and artist, we connected through a simple gesture common to both: compulsively drawing circles. A gesture that apparently is a language of expression that requires neither practice nor knowledge, just time and people, anyone and anytime.

[..] We only use one language, but it's not our own.

Reflection 2

- "1. We only speak one language.
2. We never speak more than one language."

Actually, it's funny, I have more than one language. I'm one of those citizens who doesn't have a real language. The one I spoke at birth I now barely use, just with my aging parents once a week and in very specific contexts. It's comfortable just within certain nostalgic parameters. As soon as I leave these contexts, I struggle to make a coherent sentence without mixing it with other languages.

The one I speak at home is straightforward, learned from TV in my teens, it's practical, funny, vulgar, sometimes theatrical, always without an ulterior motive. It just comes out when I yell at my kids.

The language I speak at school is thought through, written and rehearsed to optimize meaning, analyzed and used as a public face.

For me, researching and practicing through language is a game. I play with bits of knowledge, fragments of meaning, methodologies of deconstruction.

Odds & Ends (translated by deepl as bric-à-brac) is a collaborative project with artist Hei Lam Ng. It takes the form of assemblages - bundles of paper and words - that revolve around the (de)construction of definitions. Each packet is a unique collaboration.

Hei Lam Ng is a fellow MFA student in print, and friend, the two of us share an obsession with typography, words, and the peculiarities of languages (she speaks about 4 or 5 languages, myself just 3). Chapter 1 of this collaboration, entitled *Confettis*, is an edition of 100 packs containing only recycled material and meaning. It is a collection of personal glossaries and an interest in how we define words in many languages. Two vocabularies meet to ask, in a deconstructed zine format, what we mean and how we say it.

We never speak in more than one language.

Reflection 3

"[...] anyone should be able to declare under oath: "I have only one language and it is not mine; my 'own' language is, for me, an unassimilable language. My language, the only one that I hear myself speak and that I agree to speak, is the language of the other."

For this final chapter, I would like to reflect on a third collaboration with audio and video artist Sabina Gámez, also a Master's student in the Intermedia program at Concordia. We work under the name Las Sabinas and for the project, we invented its title: Sabinar. Let me explain...

Our collaboration grew out of a chance encounter and a shared obsession with the theme of the Abduction of the Sabines throughout art history. Exploring this theme led us in various directions, from feminist art to ecological considerations, to questions of what it means to have and create community, all linked to our explorations of materials ranging from the virtual realm to the raw material of the earth.

Conquest, kidnapping and colonization... are violent terms linked to the history of Sabina(s). By immersing ourselves in Jacques-Louis David's painting *El rapto de las Sabinas*, we try to read between the perpetuated images. Our piece has different shades and layers of humor, many attempts to understand its place. We intervene in the myth, decontextualizing and recontextualizing it to fit our own bodies. The resulting pieces mix and paste meanings and overlap questions in a physical and historical space.

We used the painting as a theatrical backdrop. Our collaboration thus became a game: play precedes meaning, as the *modus operandi* of the conversation between two bodies, as the parameters of exchanges.

Play also strengthens social bonds. Working with Las Sabinas made us feel stronger together. In our collaboration, we each planted ideas to play with, but we cultivated and nurtured them together. There have been laughs, moments of doubt, confidence, challenges, juggling with words (between us we speak 4 different languages), looking for translations and synonyms in dictionaries, analyzing similarities and differences, and the pleasure of thinking together while building a common vocabulary.

Perhaps this is what Sabinar is all about: finding his people across borders. Together, we speak a single language, the language of other Sabinas.

Final Reflection

Learning from my collaborations has been very different from learning in a course. From these experiences I have made some rules of collaboration for myself, that have worked for me until this point.

"[...] I have only one language, but it is not mine." (page 1)

Never assume that your language is yours, nor that it is unique, nor that it is special. The fallacy of art school that helps you to find your own language must be dispelled. Your language has no inherent value.

"1. We only speak one language.

2. We never speak more than one language." (page 7)

Your language is never clear unless it is spoken by someone else. Once you are in a visual, auditory, and overall sensual relation with it, then it starts taking concrete shapes, the shapes of a negotiated collaboration.

"[...] anyone should be able to declare under oath: 'I have only one language and it is not mine; my "own" language is, for me, an unassimilable language. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and accept to speak, is the language of the other.'" (page 25)

The moment you find a shared language between yourself and another artist, that language is a treasure, a breakthrough, a beautiful moment that lingers as long as you both keep learning and speaking it.

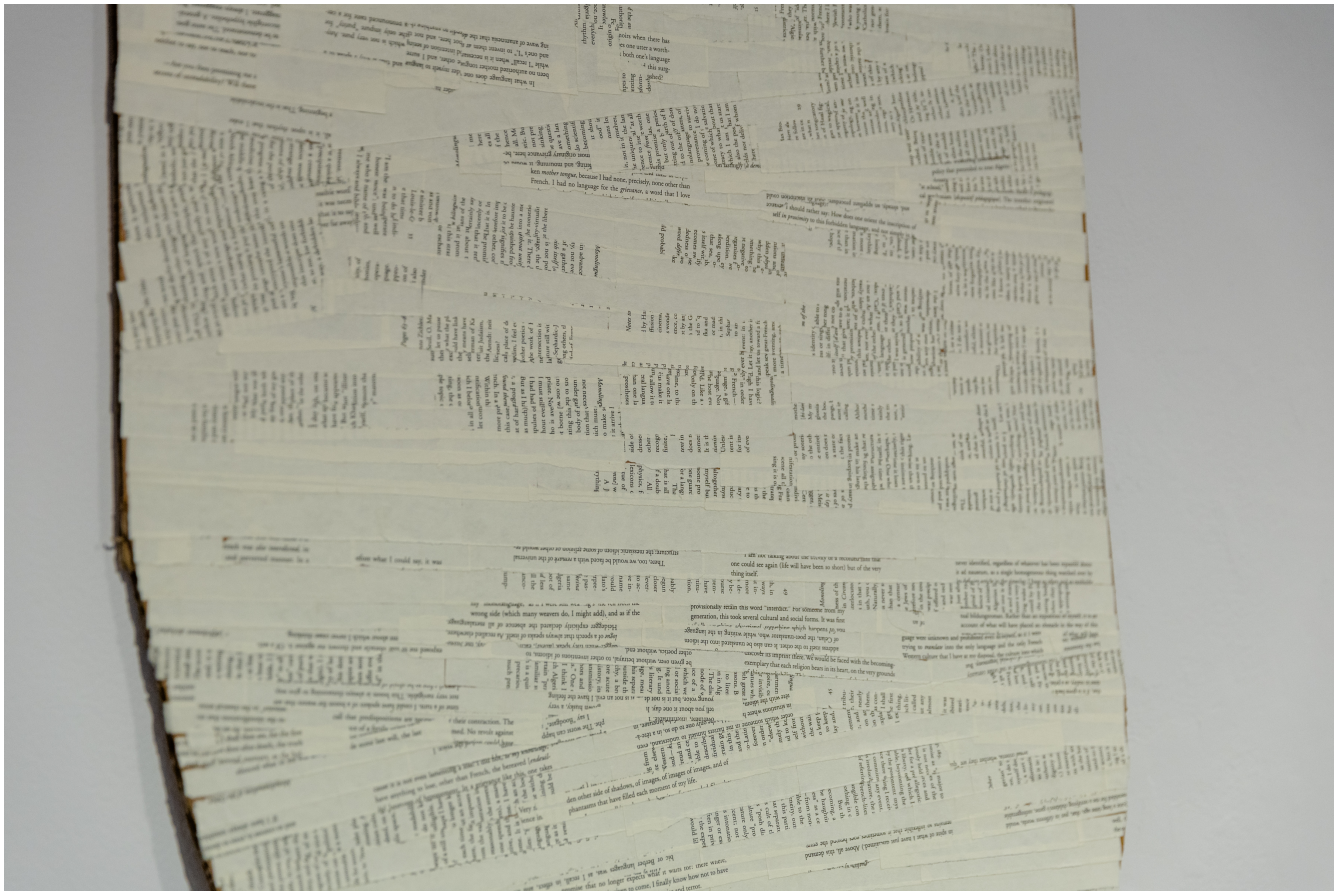


Photo : Gabriel Fournier

gathering of atoms, the void between forces, gestures, relations, nothing and everything, meaning-less and meaning-full, inferred intention, performance(s), work as word, labour as rhythm, pattern as language, absurd-less and absurd-full, neutral space, non-purposeful, accumulation of zeros, value-less and value-more, non-directional thought, trace, matter and material