

Art Museum
University of Toronto
—
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
University of Toronto Art Centre

7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Art Museum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Art Museum at the University of Toronto presents *Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through*

Toronto, September 7, 2021—The Art Museum at the University of Toronto is pleased to present *Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through*, an exhibition that examines plastic as art material, cultural object, pollution, geologic process, petrochemical product, and most crucially, as a synthetic material that is fully entangled with the human body. By acknowledging plastics as both lubricants of artistic, gallery, and museum practices and as ‘wicked problems’ intimately linked to the fossil fuel industry, *Plastic Heart* includes an auto-critique as an essential component of its making. The exhibition is organized by the Synthetic Collective and will be on view at the Art Museum from September 8 to November 20, 2021.

Plastic Heart draws on the existing work of the Synthetic Collective, an art and science collaboration, who recently completed a study of microplastics pollution on the shores of the Great Lakes. The exhibition features data visualizations, artworks created by the Synthetic Collective in response to the research, as well as new commissions by contemporary artists from the Great Lakes Region.

The exhibition juxtaposes contemporary artworks with historical installations, paraphernalia, and objects that used early plastics that are now degrading, surfacing questions of conservation and preservation in museum culture.

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Plastic Heart also features works by artists who embraced and resisted the peculiarities found in the flexibility of the new medium. Works by Françoise Sullivan, Les Levine, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, and Eva Hesse exhibit the excitement posed by the new medium when it first entered the art world in the 1960s, while contemporary artists like Leticia Bernaus, Amy Brener, and Catherine Telford-Keogh explore the complicated relationship to plastic, calling attention to its ubiquity, and how it permeates our everyday lives.

Mobilizing practices of institutional critique, *Plastic Heart* proposes alternative methods of exhibition development and presentation that address ecology and sustainability in both content and form. From limiting the travel of artworks, to re-using existing museum furniture, to sourcing Manitoulin natural inks as an alternative to traditional wall vinyl, the exhibition provides a useful provocation for more sustainable and ethical relations to materials.

"The exhibition poses an urgent 21st century challenge for museums and galleries," says Barbara Fischer, Art Museum's Executive Director and Chief Curator. "Plastic, here as everywhere else, is an inextricable part of how we extend 'care' to things, especially objects of art; it enables us to shield them from environmental elements (water, air, and dust) and even from each other (the ubiquitous bubble wrap). But, how do we protect the elements themselves from plastic? Our 'care' is, so ironically, bound to non-care for the air, earth, rivers, lakes, oceans, animals, and our bodies. The Synthetic Collective's

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work shows how the promise of *plastic care*—its seductive expediency and fluid adaptability—is undone by its long-term effects, and how this might need to change the very nature not only of the museum's notions and practices of how, exactly, we care.”

Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through

September 8–November 20, 2021

University of Toronto Art Centre

Organized by the Synthetic Collective

artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/plastic-heart/

Works by Christina Battle, IAIN BAXTER&, Sara Belontz, Leticia Bernaus, J Blackwell, Amy Brener, Hannah Claus, Sully Corth, Heather Davis and Kirsty Robertson, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, Fred Eversley, Naum Gabo, General Idea, Kelly Jazvac, Woomin Kim, Kiki Kogelnik, Les Levine, Mary Mattingly, Christopher Mendoza, Tegan Moore, Skye Morét, Meagan Musseau, Claes Oldenburg, Meghan Price, Françoise Sullivan, Catherine Telford-Keogh, Lan Tuazon, Marianne Vierø, Joyce Wieland, Nico Williams, Kelly Wood

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Dialogue # 1: Plastic Pollution, Toxicity, and Policy Change

Wednesday, September 15, 6pm–7:30pm EDT

With Vanessa Gray, Christopher Hilkene, Michelle Murphy,
Chelsea Rochman

Moderated by Heather Davis

**Dialogue # 2: Plastic Pollution in the Laurentian Great Lakes:
Industry and Invisibility**

Wednesday, October 6, 6pm–7:30pm EDT

With Ian Arturo, Sara Belontz, Mary Mattingly, Tegan Moore,
Alice (Xia) Zhu

Moderated by Kelly Jazvac

**Dialogue # 3: The Plastic Conservation Conundrum:
Preserving Plastics in Museum Collections and Plastics'
Durability in the Environment**

Wednesday, October 13, 6pm–7:30pm EDT

With Courtney Asztalos, Roger Griffith, Sherry Phillips, Lorena
Rios Mendoza

Moderated by Kelly Jazvac

Dialogue # 4: Sustainable Museums

Wednesday, October 27, 2pm–3:30pm EDT

With Suzanne Carte, Maya Ishizawa, Sarah Sutton

Moderated by Kirsty Robertson

**All programs will be held online. For more information and to
register, visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs/**

VIRTUAL SPOTLIGHTS

Commissioned essays, artist interviews, and video content
offering a deep dive into the themes explored in the exhibition.

New content launches monthly on [artmuseum.utoronto.ca/
virtual-spotlights/](https://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/virtual-spotlights/)

About the Synthetic Collective

The Synthetic Collective is an interdisciplinary collaboration between visual artists, scientists, and cultural workers. They work to sample, map, understand, and visualize the complexities of plastics and micro-plastics pollution in the Great Lakes Region. Synthetic Collective is Kelly Jazvac, Kirsty Robertson, Kelly Wood, Patricia Corcoran, Heather Davis, Tegan Moore, Sara Belontz, Lorena Rios Mendoza, Kathleen Hill, and Ian Arturo. (syntheticcollective.org)

About the Art Museum

The Art Museum is one of the largest gallery spaces for visual art exhibitions and programming in Toronto. The Art Museum originates and organizes an intensive year-round program of exhibitions and events that foster—at a local, regional, and international level—innovative research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and knowledge of art and its histories befitting Canada’s leading university and the country’s largest city.

Our Supporters

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