

Urban Moorings Two

Nathan Eugene Carson, Alex Jacobs-Blum,
Tor Lukasik-Foss, Christopher McLeod & Nora Hutchinson
Curated by Nora Hutchinson & Alexis Moline



This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition, *Urban Moorings Two*, on view from August 2 to November 1, 2022 on the waters of Cootes Paradise.

Nathan Eugene Carson received a BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 2005. His drawings and paintings have since been shown at Verso Gallery, Lennox Contemporary, Gallery One, and the Drake Hotel in Toronto. His most recent solo exhibition, *Cut From The Same Cloth* (2021) at the Power Plant comprised paintings of brightly-rendered whimsical portraits and characters emerging from obscure matte grounds. He was artist-in-resident at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2022.

Alex Jacobs-Blum (Lower Cayuga of Six Nations/German) is a photo-based artist and curator living in Oñròn:wakon (Hamilton, ON). Alex's practice centres Indigeneity, reclamation, and intergenerational love and healing while challenging colonial structures.

Tor Lukasik-Foss is a Hamilton artist whose creative practice has integrated music, performance, story-telling and visual art. His artistic focus has largely been directed on social anxiety, its manifestation in story and myth, and how this can complicate human relations in both public and private space. He has exhibited and performed throughout Canada both individually and as part of several artist collectives including TH&B, Hamilton 7, Wing and String Collective, and Tuesday Choir. He is currently Director of Programs and Education at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Christopher McLeod is a multidisciplinary social practice artist, artistic director, and educator. He has a BA in Studio Art from McMaster University and an MFA from Emily Carr University in Vancouver, BC. He is the Artistic Director at Waterlution, and was the Director of the Building Cultural Legacies project at the Hamilton Arts Council. His practice explores social engagement and interaction, focusing on cultural and ecological themes.

Nora Hutchinson is an internationally exhibited artist and curator. She has taught at Ontario College of Art and Design, Guelph University and York University. She is the recipient of The Lesley Nelson Reward, The Portland Oregon Award, The Hamilton Arts Award and The Video Roma Award, Rome, Italy. In 2020-2021, a retrospective of her work *Rebel Opera* appeared at The Art Gallery of Hamilton, including work from 1976 to 2021. She developed and curated the first *Urban Moorings* in 2008.

Alexis Moline is an independent curator, arts professional, and community services coordinator who has worked in Vancouver, Toronto, and Hamilton. She received her Master of Museum Studies in collaboration with Sexual Diversity Studies from the University of Toronto. Most recently, she curated *The Bigger Picture: Art in Hamilton 1950-2000* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton featuring over 200 artists.



Urban Moorings Two: A Public Art Project

Alexis Moline

We build relationships with where we live by learning about and playing within our natural landscape. For many who live in and around Hamilton, the water and land of Cootes Paradise evokes this on a personal level. However, opportunities to reflect upon the ecological sustainability of our communities are often unavailable as collective, public experiences. This lack of greater understanding can lead to disastrous results, as recently seen in the four-year, 24-billion litre sewage and stormwater spill into Chedoke Creek. *Urban Moorings Two* explores this natural desire and urgency to cultivate care for our environment.

Installed in the lower Chedoke Creek watershed, original artworks by Nathan Eugene Carson, Nora Hutchinson, Alex Jacobs-Blum, Tor Lukasik-Foss, and Christopher McLeod invite the public to engage with their surroundings and to consider the environmental and cultural challenges within Hamilton's urban watersheds. In conjunction with the Royal Botanical Gardens' launch of water quality remediation floats and with the dredging of the water, these artworks create educational and emotional opportunities for us to consciously connect with our natural surroundings through art.

Carson's *The New Bird Restaurant* explores the need for play and respite in urbanized, potentially hazardous environments. His sculpture takes the form of a playground for local birds to feast, rest, or create a new home for the season. This sanctuary of detritus ponders how we can utilize and find joy in the wreckage in which we find ourselves.

Hutchinson's *The Last, Lost Iceberg* is a prefabricated structure powered by solar. Precariously floating and often on the verge of collapse, this delicate work speaks to the crumbling of our environments and stands as a symbol of a time gone by. Vulnerable to wind and water damage, the precarity of the symbolic iceberg sways on the cusp of demise alongside our real life natural landscapes. Lighting up at night, the artwork glows like a ghost haunting us with what we have lost.

Jacobs-Blum's *Guided by Reflections* takes the form of the Hodinöhsö:ni' skydome to join Mother Earth and the Sky World, and explore the interconnectedness of our natural worlds. When viewed up close, intricate traditional designs are wood burned into the structure. From the shore, visitors can use augmented reality to view the Celestial Tree growing from the dome and reaching from earth and water to sky. Fresh soil and sunflower seeds are added to the base of the structure to encourage growth and invite reflection on our life cycles.

Lukasik-Foss' work *AquaVecchio / Window (Ad)dressing / Vanity* takes the form of a series of pop-up performances on the walking bridge that passes over Chedoke Creek, overlooking Cootes Paradise and the four floating artworks. During the run of the exhibition, Lukasik-Foss constructed a temporary three-walled sculpture with interactive elements to encourage thoughtful exchange with our water and surroundings. Inspired by the Ponte Vecchio, a segmental arch bridge crossing the Arno River in Florence, Italy, this work centers on a fantasy of replicating this bridge's potential, specifically how to encourage complex actions, exchanges, and social commerce on any bridge, even tiny ones.



Nathan Eugene Carson, *The New Bird Restaurant Project*, 2022. 10ft x 14ft. Metal scrap, wood, various discarded materials.

Constructed using 95% reclaimed materials, and hosting Indigenous aquatic plants that work to filter Chedoke Creek during the installation, McLeod's *Leadership Assemblage in Chedoke Creek (LACC)* is a living, partially kinetic assemblage exploring how consequence and "intention" collide with a long-standing hope that our leaders are looking out for us. This piece asks how we as a community, and the leaders within that community, deal with effluent (waste), and why we tend to treat bodies of water like naturally occurring toilets. The aquatic plants, upon deinstallation, will be planted along the shoreline at Princess Point, with the remainder of the assemblage pieces disassembled for future re-use.

In 2008, Nora Hutchinson spearheaded the first *Urban Moorings* project as a site-specific call to awareness around the historical, cultural and environmental concerns in Cootes Paradise. This sequel project draws upon the issues raised over a decade ago to reflect on the ongoing failures and possibilities in envisioning and enabling a better ecological future.

Through the creative works of five local artists, *Urban Moorings Two* urges us towards a broader culture of care and ecological sustainability in our waters and communities. The artists' collective oeuvres showcase deep commitment and passion for Hamilton, its people and natural landscape. By inserting artworks and calls to action into our direct sightlines, this exhibition asks how we can offer our environment the same restorative power that it offers us.

Urban Moorings Two: Project Diary

Nora Hutchinson

February-June 2022:

Due to the strange way time works in this new, post-Covid universe, everything was late. The money for the project, the insurance, the city permit—the hold-ups were everywhere. Time was traversed it seemed by facing a computer with no emails coming in or looking at a phone for calls that were promised.

The waiting game in the ethers.

Felt like I was in a play such as Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or *Sainte Carmen* on the Main by Michel Tremblay.

August 2 2022:

Beautiful. A day of light and breeze

A day populated by an RBG crew led by Tys Theysmeyer (Head of Natural Areas) and four others. Wonderful workers, patiently helping each artist with creative and technical concerns.

The artists had great alchemy as did our film crew, photographer, video technicians, and the Royal Botanical Gardens staff. Finally, a physical, geographical coming together of like minded people after all that texting and waiting, emails and waiting, phone calls.... waiting.

There was a sense of belonging in the natural landscapes of the RBG and the waves of the bay (they appeared almost blue on the install day) became a chorus that sang all day long. Bicyclists, rollerbladers and walkers stopped to see the process of assembling the work and the slow process of moving them by motor boat to be anchored off shore..or pushed out by crews wearing chest waders.

This show occurs in conjunction with the sewage cleanup. The dredging, by proximity and theme, will become a performative part of our Urban Moorings Two project. An adjunct....along with the pine tree berm and the seagulls, fish and turtles. And the beautiful weeping willows. The triangular planted wetland gardens—the first of several planned by the RBG to filter the water. All in concert with one another.

How wildlife survived the years of sewage strewn waters is beyond the beyond.

A barge will be positioned next to the foot bridge and will dispose of 22,000 tonnes of sludge; it will literally be vacuum sucked through a system of pipes into sock like tubes to control the odour. Kinetic vacuum art.

On this day of the opening I had a number of those unexpected moments where time and space are suspended. This combination of the particular to the universal... This symphony of waves, sculptures, berm, willows, birds and the weird tugboat-looking barge that will scoop up our detritus.

August 16 2022:

The iceberg has melted/deflated and will be fixed again. However, it is a good example of our fragile environment

August 18 2022:

...another delay. This time the dredging is on hold. This is due to members of the Haudenosaunee Development Institute (HDI). They are asking for a “meaningful consultation” with the city as the Chedoke Creek is part of their treaty.

August 22 2022:

.... the city has put the dredging machine into the waters and now it is cordoned off due to the ongoing delay. The sculptures sit as sentinels as if observing the entire situation. The blue heron and the cormorants are visitors to the deflated, melted, dysfunctional iceberg. Their new hang out is also (ironically) situated by the toilets on Christopher McLeod's sculpture.

Sept. 2 2022:

....Now the repair work begins on the iceberg in conjunction with Tor's initial presentation.

There are moments of quiet beauty regardless of the situation. When the light hits the sculptures at that time of day when their reflections become a double image of themselves is reminiscent of Andy Goldworthy's land art.

The ephemeral shape-shifting changes everything...calm reflections, chopped up reflections from waves, or the sudden swoop of a bird across your sightline.

Tor's installation is up just after 4pm. A vanity with a porthole. Vintage artifacts,.. curtains blowing in the wind framing the other artists' sculptures in the bay. A stool, antique rug, a megaphone for projecting poetry or song. An interactive chalk board for notes or doodles or drawings made by passersby. A possible trading post.



Nora Hutchinson, *The Last, Lost Iceberg*, 2022. 10ft x 14ft. Nylon, solar panels.

notes or doodles or drawings made by passersby. A possible trading post.

I will bring carrots tops for his shelves. ... this exchange between public and private....a conversation between water, culture and ecology. It is all this, then nothing. Its pop-up arrival and removal, folds within itself, shifting from a “parlor”/ trading station to a landscape without a frame. Cicadas all day long.

The iceberg performative event was intended to reanimate it. Volunteers wearing hazmat suits canoeing out materials for the raft to be placed inside. A dead cormorant on the raft.

Two plastic balls escaped the canoe and floated away. Chris Adeney and Tys Tteysmeyer rescued them. The dredging machine in the river still cordoned off.

September 13 2022:

The entire landscape has changed to mud. Devolving the purpose of the floating installations, now they sit on mud...forlornly shipwrecked. Bleak and poignant, they are full of lost longings, memories...

Time and its sharp corners. Dredging has still not begun. The metaphors of our environmental show just keep piling up.

Do not tell me nothing ends.

We do not know the immortality of the things that we do when we are doing them, do we?



Alex Jacobs-Blum, *Guided by Reflections*, 2022. 7ft x 5.5ft. Wood, wood burning, augmented reality.



Christopher McLeod, *Leadership Assemblage in Chedoke Creek*, 2022. 5.5ft x 11.5ft x 12ft. Reclaimed wood, copper, aluminum, steel, and toilets with indigenous aquatic and xeriscape plants.

Copy Editing:
Photo documentation: Cody King
ISBN



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Urban Moorings Two is a temporary project made possible by the City of Hamilton's Placemaking Grant Pilot Program with support from the Patrick J. McNally Charitable Foundation.

This project is generously supported by the Royal Botanical Gardens and the Hamilton Artists Inc.



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Cover and back: Installation views of *Urban Moorings Two*.

