

Fracture/ Suture







***Fracture/
Suture***

Undine Foulds

***A How-to
Guide
for Navigating
Wilderness
in Five
Conversations***

with

Amber Santos
Kit Holden-Ada
Dan Merino
Lux Gow-Habrich
Olivia Mansveld
&
Undine Foulds



Introduction

Undine Foulds

Six years ago, I traded my ankle-supporting hiking boots for studio shoes covered in clay and plaster spills, but my motivation to keep a group of people moving forward through unknown terrain remains. As a backpacker and Wilderness First Responder for many years, I learned flowcharts and treatment plans to meet all kinds of emergencies. Even though I currently spend much more time in studios than on trails, the translation of these trainings continues to be salient as it's clear that engaging with art is yet another type of dangerous territory. Throughout the spring of 2022, I interviewed Lux Gow-Habrigh, Kit Holden-Ada, Dan Merino, Olivia Mansveld, and Amber Santos about their relationships with wild places and how those environments inform their creative practices. They have shown an attentiveness to connective tissue and a care for the whole that I recognize accompanies an aptitude for traversing complicated ground. Alone and with others, they each navigate treacherous territory, encounter isolation or remoteness, and problem solve in crisis; they undergo rupture and cultivate repair. What follows is a first aid guidebook for artists and arts workers, to help navigate the wilderness we encounter in our field. Excerpts from our discussions, directions and recipes, and images of works that resonated with (or were made in response to) the content of the interviews, were chosen by the artists.

Each of the contributors to this publication have packing lists, maps, and advice for reaching into the wilds, and they have approached the content of *Fracture/Suture* through their experiences of constructing lives that support creative work. Collectively, their expertise spans

and overlaps in many directions: craft-based mediums, writing, collaborating with large groups, out-tripping (hiking, canoeing, skiing, guiding), wilderness first aid training, disability, neurodivergence, genderfucking, parenting, large-scale installation, teaching, evading arrest, multilingualism, working through the night, and stock-piling studio snacks. Individually, they are navigating the complex constellations of artistic work, and these are some of the shared stories of this process.

The discussions shared here began with the idea that we can borrow from emergency medicine frameworks to understand how to better avoid and address injury within artistic environments. At its best, art asks of us trust and vulnerability on uneven ground. At our best, we can engage with art while being responsible to and for each other, building our capacity to go further into the work and the wild alike. In our conversations, Lux, Kit, Dan, Olivia, and Amber explored the cross-overs of topographic travel with that of creative navigation, and we discovered that whether the wilderness you're in is internal or external, many of the important questions are the same: Who is here with you? How do you read this map? Where is your water?

There are infinite routes—we don't have the definitive flowchart for the next crisis. However, consistencies did emerge through all our conversations. When considering the idea of a fracture, a break, or an injury, common words used to describe the experience were: precarious, fear, dangerous, burnt out, tangled, invisible, insecurity, force, and anxious. To describe the way out, or through, a difficult place, each spoke to the action of mapping: finding and following through-lines, noticing patterns, and reading landscapes to wayfind were all metaphorical and literal stories shared. As we considered the idea of a suture, or a stitch in something living, the words repeated were: mend,

attend, fix, repair, visible, together, join, thread, careful, new, slow, signal, scar, stretch, and learn.

With gratitude to field guides of all sorts, this collection of conversations hopes to contribute tips and tricks not just to survive, but for how we might come together more mended, to leave each other less torn.

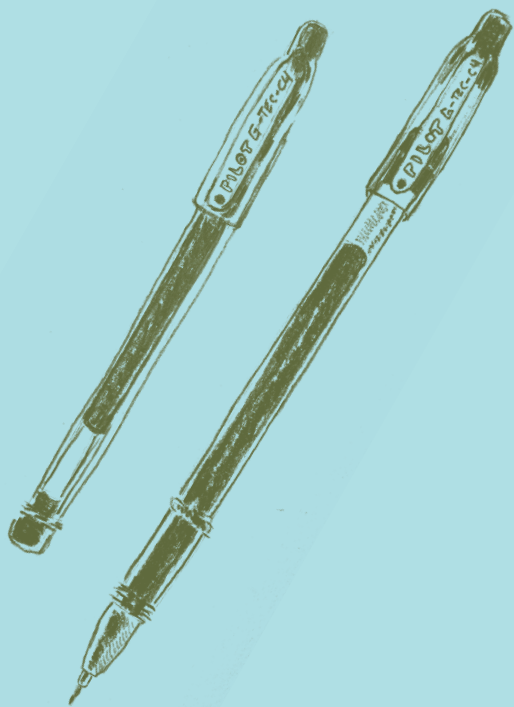
Director's Note

Laura Ritchie, Director, MSVU Art Gallery

If you have ever been turned around in the outdoors, you know the feeling of relief brought on by a landmark confirming the rightness of the path underfoot. On a hike, there is security in knowing precisely where you are going and how you are going to get there. In the studio or at the drawing board, however, such surety is rare. Often, guiding landmarks show up in less concrete forms, such as values, happy accidents, or curious conversationalists. So, artists and arts workers need extra resources when braving unknown terrain. In *Fracture/Suture*, Undine Foulds and the artists she has engaged offer such a hand as they take up care in the framework of wilderness first aid. They let us know we are not alone in the woods.

It was a delight to have Undine join the teams at MSVU Art Gallery, Dalhousie Art Gallery, and St. Mary's University Art Gallery in 2021-22 as the 2nd Halifax Young Curator, a collaborative curatorial position dedicated for emerging BIPOC curators. *Fracture/Suture* is the product of Undine's thoughtfulness and care during that time, as well as her commitment to seeing this valuable conversation through to its book form. I am thankful for Undine's efforts, and for her generous discussions with me throughout and after her term. Thanks also to Claire Dykhuis, Education and Outreach Coordinator, for keen copyediting, and to Traci Steylen, Administrative Assistant, for organizing payments and practicalities related to the project.

***What's
your
favourite
tool?***



Amber Santos is an interdisciplinary artist and arts educator working with themes of belonging, family, and geography. She orients herself from and towards her German, Métis, and Anishinaabe heritage. Amber knows home in many places, and her family is currently sharing time between sn̓íckstx̣ tmx̣^wúlaʔx̣^w (Sinixt), Ktunaxa, and Okanagan territories of the Interior Salish region, and her husband's hometown of Recife, Brazil.



AMBER

Stitching is a love language bringing beauty, healing, and connection. This word, suture, is a kind of stitch for human bodies; where there is a stitch there is a trauma, something that needs a stitch has been torn.

I work with maps of many kinds. Especially since our kids arrived, all the individual maps of us as family members have collided and are molding around each other. How many kinds of family exist? Genetic, birth, adoptive, chosen, and so on, as many kinds as you have threads to tie them together, as many kinds as you have room on the paper to draw. Binary systems don't work in my family, but maps do. There's room for all of it on a map.



↑ *Untitled, stitches and paint on canvas, 2022.*

A big part of my mapping has been drawing in the edges, filling in the gaps, of my own family's migration and history. Through slow and patient conversations with family members, I have learned some of the routes: from Anishnaabe territory and post-war Germany, travelling west, they tell me the places of rest, places they stayed a while, and where they moved through. These conversations require an immediate tool kit, a kind of first aid: tread softly, be cautious, listen.

How do we build trust in a home, in a family? Tell stories, make food, care for each other. Listen. Some ways are hard, some are easier: I can fix the tear in your shirt, I can fix the hole in your jeans.

These pieces shown here, from the series *Maps of Belonging*, offer examples of how to travel through:

Rhythm

Viscera

Puncture

Pull

Texture

Preciousness of time

And of the hand.



Kit Holden-Ada is an interdisciplinary artist currently based in Kijipuktuk. With many years focusing on jewellery and wearable art objects, they are expanding their practice to include larger-scale projects (in scope and space) and collaborations. A constant character in their work is the body and how it carries, contains, and presents internal and external environments.



Kit

A place I go to find grounding is the forest; I feel held and content amongst trees and rocks and moss. As a kid I spent a lot of time in the woods, sometimes with my sibling or friends, but often alone. I grew up on the prairies, Treaty 2 Territory (Manitoba), in a rather unique place on an escarpment where upland boreal forest and eastern deciduous forests converge with grasslands and prairie farmland. There is an abundance of trembling Aspen there and I like to think about how these trees grow from the same source: a stand of Aspen is actually one huge





organism, connected underground by an extensive root system often covering huge swaths of land. They sing a beautiful duet with the wind and turn a stunning yellow in the fall. I often reflect on the mentorship of these trees and how they so simply and generously model interconnectedness and an orientation to collectivity.

While I'm working on production and custom projects, I mostly work solo in the jewellery studio, but it is a shared space so there is always a bustling of some sort and other artists I'm working informally with and around. As I've been growing my art practice outside of that space I'm

tending to more collaborative projects. I had the privilege of participating in a project a few years ago that helped to ignite my movement towards collaborative work. SHIFT 2019/20 was a residency/exchange project facilitated by NSCAD's Dr. Sandra Alföldy Craft Institute, the Craft Alliance Atlantic Association, and Applied Arts Scotland which brought together makers from Scotland and Mi'kma'ki to work collaboratively. After a handful of years not having much capacity beyond puzzling my solo creative practices in and around parenting smaller kids, this project challenged me to crack open my process a bit and to engage in new ways. It took place across distance and an (unexpectedly) extended time frame during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic so it felt like a feat.

While I was excited about working with others and how that necessitates a different level of accountability, timeline obligations, and more rigorous planning, I also worried that my parenting commitments and other community work, especially during a pandemic, would erode my capacity. I'm gathering that this is quite a common tension for many working artists/parents in general. Fortunately, the group was open, generous, and adaptable; navigating the shifting waters of the unfolding pandemic together. I have come to value collaborators that are willing to be honest and dig into conversations around both the work and the broader dynamics that are shaping us and our practices, capacity, mental/emotional health, and how we are willing to adjust and adapt when needed.

My creative self is a bit of a tornado, usually engaged with a number of different projects and practices at any given time, nourished by both research and the experiential, and fit in (sometimes barely) amidst parenting and other work. My art practices and embodiment practices

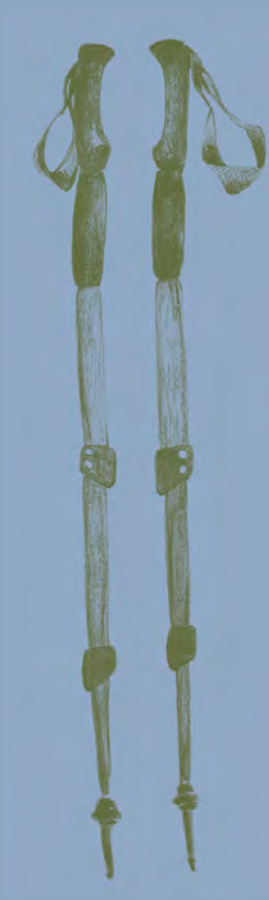
are interwoven. Sometimes things can feel very slow. I am learning to trust my own timelines and that what gets pulled through the chaos feels like it was worth making or at least a process that challenged me in juicy ways. As for working with deadlines, I wouldn't say I enjoy taking risks with time and deadlines but often find myself deep in, and motivated by, the last minute crunch. I value deadlines and the pinch. Both/and. I'm toying with accepting that this may be a part of how I work (with time) as a neurodivergent person, while also working to shift things a bit so as to facilitate more gentleness for my nervous system. I think a lot about the vulnerability inherent in making and sharing art, how it shows up differently for everyone, how we each move with it and how it can influence the shape of our processes. No answers, only questions and noticings as I try to be present with my own experiences of vulnerability as it emerges and shifts over time.

I don't believe there is ever only one way to show up in support of a process or situation (be it artistic or first aid/crisis/support) as each scenario might call for different tools and approaches. I try to lean into my experience, material awareness, skills, communication, consent, and intuition. Sometimes support or participation isn't something I can offer and I'm learning to better discern when this is the case. I'd say I rarely bail on things once I've committed, especially if there are others relying on me or if it would mean letting others down. I value this commitment in myself and am also trying to unlearn some rigidity around it. Getting real about managing some chronic pain and mental health challenges has helped me understand my own fluctuating capacities on a day-to-day/week-to-week basis and I am accessing more gentleness and self-compassion around this. Work in progress. I have deep appreciation for the disability

justice movement and community for this and some of the shifts we are witnessing around how we orient to working with others, recognizing and creating space for a greater diversity of needs and approaches.

Shown here is *TORSO PIECE*, from the above mentioned SHIFT 19/20 project. The process of excavating ancestral lineage, as a white settler of Scottish/Orcadian and Irish descent, is both connective/healing and painful as it necessitates a reckoning with legacies of harm. This piece facilitates a somatic practice of sitting with the tension inherent in such a reckoning, and in the 'both/and' reality of colonizer/colonized. The rocks, akin to bendlin stanes traditionally used to secure thatched roofs in Orkney, Scotland, create a physical tension in the body; an opportunity to practice an embodied presence under said tension and discomfort, encouraging a felt sense of connection to the land and holding space in which to inhabit other expressions of hybridity. The rock suspended on the back body is from Orkney, representing history and the landscape of my Orcadian ancestors while the rock suspended on the front body is from Mi'kma'ki, representing the present, my current home and the legacy of this land. The leather, handmade rope dyed with lichen (a hybrid organism) and the ropework suspending the rocks draw in queer and kink lineages. This work questions how a regenerative connection to ones heritage and an embodied practice of sitting with complexity might ground and expand our resilience to better serve the sustainability of our work and collective movements for racial and environmental justice.

←↖← *Torso Piece*, leather, sandcast sterling silver hardware cast with sand from Orkney & Mi'kma'ki handmade rope made from lichen (*Umbilicaria Mamulata*) dyed wool, rocks from Orkney & Mi'kma'ki, 2019/21. Photos by Mo Phùng.



Dan Merino is a photographer and writer currently based in the Pacific Northwest on the unceded and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, and Lil'wat Nations. Dan spends a lot of their time walking, alone and with others, far away from roads.



↑ Moody views during some solo time on a group hiking trip, photograph, 2018;
↓ Spread out on multi-day backcountry skiing trip, photograph, 2020.

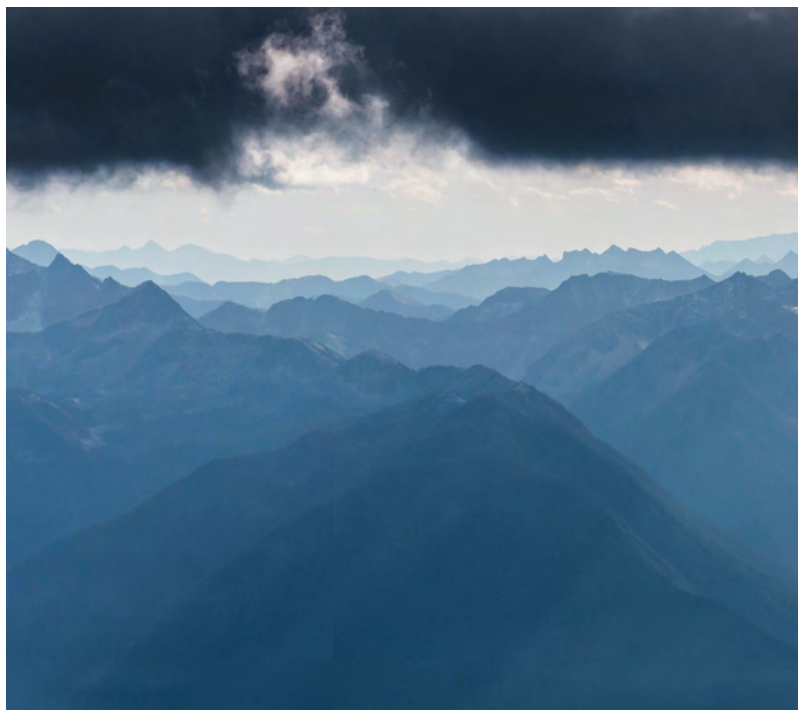
Dan

The term “immersion” seems to fit for all kinds of trips: big projects, long travels inwards, long hikes outwards. It’s a kind of prolonged hyperfocus, chosen or accidental, that leads us to trade a usual routine for singular goals. Immersions can be all kinds of pleasant, but they can be trouble, too—going so deep into it that you begin to resent things like making dinner or going to the bank. Or showering. On a trip or in a project, this can be tricky when our goals are so direct and obvious (a deadline, or a peak in sight), and we can forget to feel our tired legs. We can lose track of our own needs outside of reaching the finish line, and end up overdone. Risky decisions look ingenious when we’re exhausted, annoyed at bugs, and ‘almost there.’

In the best case, returning from an immersion is an excellent chance to reassess what I’d left and what I want to return to. I get to take off layers of my ‘normal life’, like caring about a bug in my water, or checking my phone, or worrying about material possessions. When I get back, and if I’m paying attention, I get to choose to re-engage with the habits that have fallen off or to leave them alone. Of course, a lot of habits come back too easily, but stretching the space before they resume is good practice for me.

Sometimes you go together. Sometimes you go alone, come back, and have to apologize to a bunch of people.

Choosing to go with people—this is the big question, and is maybe all the big questions. How do you decide to go with someone into the wild? Built trust helps, sure, and previous experiences, comparable or complementary skill... Bringing someone too far out of their ability level can quickly be more harmful than leaving them out. Going in a group is generally considered safer (detering bears, or sharing weight, or keeping spirits high, for



example), but it's not without its own risks. How many unknowns are you engaging with: the weather? the timeline? the slide alders? Paired with each extra person's stamina, strength, mood, and fears (of heights, cold, bears, pain?). Everyone brings seen and unseen ingredients.

As I develop my own collaborative tendencies, these questions have grown in importance:

Can this person help plan?

Can they stay present the whole time, or are they checked out halfway back to the car?

Will they be around after to follow up, clean out the car, dry out the gear we shared?



I value consistency, reliability, and some shared perspective in my collaborators. And, I know that defining the parameters of the trip helps everyone sink in, and allows them to bring more of themselves forward. If there are too many rapid changes, no one can settle, and the depth of experience is shallowed.

I hope we can bring out the best in each other. Doing scary things alone is rewarding in its own right, but being in good company to face a challenge makes it so much more likely that we'll want to go out and do it again.

↑ *Far from home with mixed weather*, photograph, 2015.

***What does
lost
feel like?***



Lux Gow-Hubrich is a multi-disciplinary visual artist, arts facilitator, and support worker of mixed, second-generation Chinese and German heritage. She is drawn to tactile and repetitive processes, often creating compositions of repair and creation at the same time. Her interest in ritual objects and commemorative practices centers on diasporic experiences of loss and belonging, embodied hybridization in blood and spirit, and honouring the untold stories and unspoken legacies that live inside each of us. Lux lives and practices in Kijipuktuk, Mi'kma'ki, the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq/L'nu.



Lux

My practice is very fluid: my work, my interests, my focus all go in many directions each day. To others it can seem disjointed—when I was in school, my teachers would tell me I was ‘really unfocused’—but that’s not at all how it feels for me. I need tactile changes to keep me interested, so I go between things to keep myself engaged. And a lot of my work requires very repetitive manual practice, which can get very tedious unless you switch it up. I’m not unfocused in my practice and I don’t feel lost in it—making art has been my longest, most consistent relationship.

Because of how personal it is for me, I’m always wrestling with this idea of how much to share publicly. For a long time I just didn’t really do it. I didn’t recognize myself in the places where I was seeing art being shown. So, I had to find a way to see myself as a part of the cycle of that world, to create different pathways for myself in. In 2019 I was preparing for a solo show at Tangled Art Gallery. The work was really personal, and I had doubts about it actually coming to fruition, and fear about how my body would respond to what I was asking it to do. Creating installations is hard, physical work! When I got into the actual space, I was taken aback by their willingness and ability to support me, and at my own resourcefulness. This felt like a space that my disabled body could exist in.

← *memories of a homeland unknown*, ceramic sculpture, 2018.

For example, they have no hard deadlines, they often say “there is no such thing as an art emergency.” They really trusted me to make this work, and that kind of deep respect isn’t something I had encountered before.

The act of sharing work often seems counter to the process of creation, where it has been a way of stopping time, of quieting...a coping thing, a generative thing. Turning it outwards to put on display can feel like such an inversion. Now I recognize how viewing other artists’ work is part of the same activity: witnessing is also profound, and is also an emotional process. It can build connection, create space, and build presence. Art-making is risky. Sharing is risky. When I am deciding to show my work, I ask myself, “What kind of damage am I going to take from this? Can I accept that chance, right now?” Now that I have more experience negotiating with galleries, collaborators, and my own self, I have more confidence to name my needs. It’s hard and there’s definitely fear, but every time I do, I’m fighting the feeling that I might vanish if I don’t speak up.



↑ Queen Mothers of Eastern and Western Skies, digital collage, 2022.



Olivia (Liv) Mansveld is a textile artist based in Montreal. She has extensive training in weaving, textile technologies, pattern drafting, and production sewing. She is also the founder of Olive Rose*, a fashion construction and design company that uses responsibly-sourced material in the form of recycled, off-cut, and deadstock fabrics. Olivia's work comes from, talks to, and represents her relationship to the heart. Attempting to construct its likeness in fabric, every piece is intended to create a kind and positive impact on the wearer, with room to contain the stretching, running, zippered, resting, hooded, cuffed, and elastic experiences of being human.



Liv

I'm currently managing an internal struggle with the constant thought that I "have to get a real job," versus crediting my own practice. As always, feeling pressed to meet external definitions, requirements, and systems. Since the winter, and losing a lot of work to a dishonest business, I've taken up working for someone else 3 to 4 days a week. It's simple: I show up and someone else tells me what to do. It doesn't ask me to be vulnerable in the same way as creating my own work does.



I'm always searching for the opposite of 'forced.' There are always ups and downs of making art, but so often it also feels contrived, especially when you bring money into it. So I'm trying to find the inverse and get to the superfluid.

It's common for me to use the word 'stitch' as a noun, but here we've been talking about it as a verb. Phrasing it as active, embodied, allows me to perceive it as the act of creation rather than the physical result. Making art is an embodied experience. Sometimes it takes months



← *sleeping next to my studio, ballpoint pen, and coloured pencils, 2022.*
↑ *Superscrap Sweater; Bunny Sweaters; Opal T-Shirts, reclaimed and recycled
angora, cashmere, wool, and silk.*

or years, sometimes it's contained in one short project, sometimes it's a material outcome that will be shared or displayed...other times, the stitch is the pulling together of a day—getting the right groceries to feed oneself, and soil for plants on the balcony.

Maybe talking about the struggles of my everyday life isn't the *right* thing to do...but they are what always bubble up, because lately life feels like big swoops of ups and downs. But that's what it really is: all these stretched out moments that feel really challenging, the hills and valleys, highs and lows, losses and triumphs. They're not always visible in the art being made, but they're inseparable.

Lots of these things feel like they're coming from a state of burn out. Which for me makes it harder to see with clarity how things come together and come apart. It's hard to carve out studio time and hard to see what is designated studio time anyways, as the areas continue to mix and flow together—working for others, making an income, mixing art into both of those. Health, energy levels, physical capacity mixing with forcing and pushing to a finish or deadline, noise, errands, the clock, alone time, collaboration, supporting or supportive systems, distractions... It can feel like living multiple lives.

My main meditation time is listening to sleep stories before bed, which can help to make everything gel. I imagine a day when I would not feel internally busy, but I don't think the hum will truly simmer down until I am maybe a grandma.

**In 2022, Olivia entered into a partnership with a stockist that resulted in the loss of many of her pieces after the owner absconded from their business, severed all contact, and declared bankruptcy. She has found community with other artists who shared this experience, and is moving through the aftermath that a breach of trust creates with protective adjustments to where and how she shares her work.*

***What
is your
recipe
for
coming
back?***

Fracture/Suture was curated, edited, and illustrated by Undine Foulds during her time as Halifax's Young Curator 2021–22, a position shared with Dalhousie Art Gallery, MSVU Art Gallery and Saint Mary's University Art Gallery.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Fracture/suture : a helpful first aid guide book for artists
& arts workers.

Foulds, Undine, writer of foreword, organizer, artist.

Mount Saint Vincent University. Art Gallery, publisher.

Art and texts by Undine Foulds, Amber Santos, Dan Merino,

Olivia Mansveld, Lux Habrich, Kit Holden-Ada, Laura Ritchie.

ISBN 9781894518819 (softcover)

Canadiana 20230186963 | LCSH: Art, Canadian—21st century.

CLCC N6545.6 .F73 2023 | DDC 709.71—dc23

Illustrations by Undine Foulds

Copyediting by Claire Dykhuis

Design & production by Copy Shop Studio

Printed in Canada

msvu art gallery

Mount Saint Vincent University

166 Bedford Highway

Halifax, NS



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Acknowledgements

This publication was collected, designed, and produced in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional, current, and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. I extend my deepest appreciation for their examples of navigating both collective care networks and autonomy at the same time—as witnessed through their defiance to prevailing colonial doctrines of scarcity and individualism.

To each of the contributors, for their willingness to explore the unknown, thank-you for going out there with me. I find heart in your example of being many things at once, of shifting form in step with your creation.

Fracture/Suture is in praise and in offering to anyone who has trusted a grubby stuff-sack first aid kit to touch something bleeding, burning, or stung; to those who are chasing daylight, who are climbing above the treeline to see far! May we continue to come back, covered in dirt or paint or sunscreen, together.

—Undine, February 2023

Undine Foulds is an interdisciplinary artist, facilitator, and curator of Métis and Irish descent. She knows home along the Kootenay River, the swah'netk'qhu/Columbia River, the Salish Sea, and is currently living with the North Atlantic Ocean, in Kjiipuktuk/Halifax, where she received an Interdisciplinary BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 2021. Motivated by doing things with and for others (including interactive art projects, back-country hiking, tanning deer hides, and sharing dinner), Undine endeavors to connect more than keep separate. She often makes things out of clay, and is more interested in what a vessel can contain than its name.





**A First Aid Guide Book *for*
Artists & Arts Workers**

msvu art gallery