

The Okanagan

An exhibition of sculptures, drawings, and installation

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The Okanagan is a sculpture, drawing and installation-based thesis exhibition that uses the Early Sunrise peach as both a motif and material to explore the emotional impact of separation, distance, and the longing for connection. Through tactile and fragile forms, including felted peaches, porcelain peach pits, and charcoal stains, the works examine the complexities of intimacy, absence, and the passage of time. The unruly nature of the peach—its softness, messiness, and inevitable decay—mirrors the impermanent nature of emotional closeness. This exhibition presents a landscape that evokes the disintegration of intimacy and the rawness of yearning, inviting viewers to reflect on their experiences of presence, absence, and connection. Through the scale and materiality of the work, *The Okanagan* engages with the embodied nature of longing and the profound impact of separation.

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To those who are no longer physically with us, I carry your presence with me every day. The impact you had on my life continues to guide and inspire me, and your memory is woven into everything I do. I am where I am today because of you. Thank you for your love, your lessons, and the lasting influence you've had on my journey. Until we meet again.

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Land Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and extend my deepest gratitude to the traditional, ancestral, and unceded tm̓xʷúlaʔxʷ (land) of the Syilx / Okanagan people, where most of my upbringing, adult life, and early art career have taken place. This land is where my roots first took hold, and where my understanding of place, grief, and memory was nurtured. The connection I share with this land has been both profound and transformative, shaping the very essence of my thesis exhibition. Its presence permeates the work, from the themes explored to the emotional depth woven throughout. By naming this exhibition after the land, I aim to express my respect and gratitude for its enduring significance, as it continues to resonate within the themes I explore in my practice.

Likewise, I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishnaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples, where my thesis work has been created. The land upon which the University of Waterloo sits is part of the Haldimand Tract, where in 1784, the Haldimand Treaty was signed, promising the Haudenosaunee peoples six miles on either side of the Grand River. Unfortunately, this promise has not been honoured, and today, the Six Nations of the Grand River comprise less than 5% of the land guaranteed by the Crown.

This acknowledgment extends beyond the land itself to the histories and ongoing presence of the peoples who have cared for these territories since time immemorial. While acknowledging the original stewards of this land is a vital step in reconciliation, I recognize that actions speak louder than words. As I create and reflect, I am mindful of the lasting impact of this history, and I offer my deep gratitude to these lands that have shaped the context of my work. In honoring the past, I also commit to nurturing the land I am on, amplifying Indigenous voices, and supporting Indigenous sovereignty.

Dedication

To my grandmother, Margaret-Rose Rice.

This work grew from the ache of missing someone I love.

I didn't know I would be missing you too.

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Preface: Embodied Grief



Fig. 1. Vacant Palpitations. By Jordan MacDonald, University of Waterloo Artery, 2023.

From childhood on, art has been a lifeline that helps me process, understand, and communicate complex emotions that can be too overwhelming to express with words, such as grief, loss, and separation from loved ones through death or geography. In my work, the act of creation has become a means of navigating grief, not just as an expression of sorrow but as a way of actively engaging with loss and transforming it into something tangible. Through the process of making, I give form to what cannot be easily articulated, creating a space where absence can be acknowledged, examined, and redefined. As American philosopher and educator, John Dewey, observed, "Making is vitalizing, because it feels vitally important and can only be understood by carrying it out. The aliveness experienced by makers in the process derives from what they truly care about. Thus, the creative act is quite literally a life force" (13).

An example of this process began with an earlier work that I made after the death of my stepfather and is not part of this thesis exhibition. *Vacant Palpitations* (see Fig. 1) is a needle-felted sculpture that is both visually and size-accurate to the average adult human heart. It is made from sheep wool that has been dyed a rich red using natural pigment, with fine details such as the vessels and the intricate network of arteries and veins. The sculpture's outermost layer consists of thin white wool, depicting the pericardium, the protective sac that surrounds the heart. The delicate, tactile nature of the felted material contrasts with the emotional weight it carries, embodying both the fragility and the enduring connection I felt when my stepfather passed away. Embedded within the felted structure is a mechanism that vibrates subtly, mimicking the human heartbeat. This vibration creates a visceral experience, turning the absence of my stepdad into a present, physical sensation.

Suspended from the gallery ceiling, the sculpture hangs at a height corresponding to where my heart is located within my body. This placement invites the public to engage with the artwork, encouraging a shared experience of grief and healing as viewers physically interact with the piece, allowing them to feel its heartbeat and connect to their own emotions of loss and healing. I wanted the sculpture to go beyond my own personal journey, allowing others to connect and reflect on their own experiences of loss. The act of touching or feeling the heartbeat in this sculpture creates a moment of physical connection to the work, reinforcing the idea that art, in its most intimate form, becomes a space for collective emotional exchange and healing.

These lived experiences have directly informed my thesis exhibition, *The Okanagan* (see Fig. 2), particularly in exploring how art—especially in mediums like soft sculpture—serves not only as a method of expression but also as a means of navigating emotional and physical states. The work I create now reflects my ongoing investigation into how we can reshape pain, loss, and disconnection into something that can be understood and visualized.

Introduction: Navigating Absence



Fig. 2. The Okanagan. Installation view. By Jordan MacDonald, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

It is the poetics of the landscape: the sharp scent of orchards in bloom, the weight of the setting sun on the golden hills, and the coolness of the lake at dawn, which sometimes feels like the world is holding its breath. In the summer, the Okanagan Vally comes alive—not with frantic energy, but with a gentle, unhurried tempo like how the peach trees quietly hum and sway in the breeze. It is the kind of pace that makes the world feel softer.

In 2023, when I left for Waterloo to pursue my Master of Fine Arts degree, the Okanagan did not just become a distant place; it became the backdrop to a deeper absence, the absence of the life I had, the life I shared with my partner. I was not just leaving the place I called home; I was leaving the

person whose voice I heard each morning, whose warmth I felt in the evening. The transition from the lush landscape of British Columbia to the more restrained, landlocked geography of Ontario echoes the emotional distance that grows between us—a quiet expanse that mirrored the land, vast and unresolved.

In her seminal book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart unpacks the emotional and psychological dynamics of longing, examining how absence creates a profound sense of separation. She writes: “What lies between here and there is oblivion, a void marking a radical separation between past and present,” (Stewart, 139). The ache of missing my partner became the starting place of *The Okanagan* (see Fig. 2), a series of works that explore the emotional landscape of longing, reflecting Stewart’s concept of the void between past and present.



Fig. 3. "Exploring the Okanagan from Calgary." Super, Natural BC, Government of British Columbia, <https://www.hellobc.com/road-trips/exploring-the-okanagan-from-calgary/>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2025.

I engage with both the geography and emotional impact of the land itself—hills, lakes and the quiet expansiveness of its orchards—which have become integral to my exploration of absence. By

bringing these physical elements into my work, I seek to render the Okanagan not simply as a nostalgic backdrop, but as a key player in the emotional narrative I am exploring. Through materials, spatial arrangements, and forms, I aim to make the Okanagan's physicality tangible, allowing its landscape to resonate not only as a place but as an emotional force in the story of longing and separation.

This exploration finds kinship with the work of Tamara Kottanovsky, particularly her installation *Origins* (2004), which examines themes of geography, distance, and belonging (Harmon, 120). In Kottanovsky's work, geography serves as both an anchor to personal identity and a reminder of the displacement that accompanies migration and cultural change. Similarly, I use the Okanagan Valley not just as a symbol of nostalgia, but as a physical and emotional space that shapes my identity and the experience of longing. Through this, I aim to push beyond an abstract understanding of place and instead treat the land as an active participant in my emotional journey.



Fig. 4. "Peach Varieties." Davison Orchards, <https://www.davisonorchards.ca/produce-in-season>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2025.

Through my use of soft sculptures, ceramics, and charcoal drawings, I engage in a material dialogue with the Okanagan Valley's landscape. The Early Sunrise peach (see Fig. 4), a central motif in my work, represents the dual nature of home—its sweetness and its absence. The peach is not only a symbol of the life I left behind but also a tangible manifestation of the emotional weight of that distance. The contrasting textures—soft versus hard, burnt versus pristine—speak to the complexities of memory, presence, and loss. The Early Sunrise peach also represents a kind of lovesickness signified by the giant pit—a nod to the idiom and felt experience of having a “pit in my stomach.” Through these materials (hard vs soft, big vs small, burnt or stained vs clean), I speak to the oscillating qualities of absence and connection.

In the following sections, I will delve deeper into how the materials and spatial arrangements in *The Okanagan* contribute to an ongoing exploration of the emotional landscapes in which I situate

my work. This paper serves as a reflection of the exhibition's aim to unpack the intricate relationship between longing and place through framing *The Okanagan* as both a personal reflection on loss as well as a commentary on how landscapes shape our emotional and physical identities. I seek to expand on an understanding of how these spaces, even in their absence, continue to influence us.

The Tactility of Longing



Fig. 5. *Tender Distance* (1 of 3), by Jordan MacDonald. Installation as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

The materials used in *The Okanagan* are familiar to the everyday domestic vernacular. For example, *Tender Distance*, (Fig. 5) is a series of large-scale, soft sculptures that take the form of Early Sunrise peaches, a variety of peaches that are often the first to ripen in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. These peaches are significant not only because they mark the beginning of the peach harvest but also because they are a variety that, due to their delicate nature, could not survive the harsh winters of Ontario. This fragility and temporal quality are reflected in the sculptures' soft, tactile materials—wool, yarn, quilt batting, bed sheets, mattress foam, and steel—materials that evoke the intimate and often vulnerable aspects of daily life.

Each sculpted peach measures approximately twenty-four inches in diameter—a size comparable to exercise balls—that is small enough for a person to carry one but too large for someone to carry two. The scale of the sculptures is crucial to how they are experienced; their size creates a physical relationship between the work and the viewer. Standing before them, the viewer must navigate their own sense of space, body, and proximity, feeling the presence of the objects in relation to their own body. This sensation of scale emphasizes the *felt* nature of the work—the softness, the weight, the texture—each element is designed to be physically perceived and *felt*, even without direct contact. The viewer, in a sense, *becomes* part of the sculpture’s emotional landscape, drawn into its intimate and vulnerable presence.



Fig. 6. Tender Distance (1 of 3), by Jordan MacDonald. Detail shot as part of The Okanagan, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

The sculptures' materials are prosaic, stemming from daily life, things I use, live with, and touch regularly—wool, yarn, quilt batting, bed sheets, mattress foam, and steel. Reddish-brown stains, evoking bodily leakage, emerge beneath the sculptures as though the form itself has been compressed to the point of releasing this mark (see *Fig. 5*). These stains are created using avocado pits, a fruit commonly associated with comfort, much like the peach, which houses its pit within a soft, vulnerable flesh—easily bruised and consumed. The color drawn from the pits is deep and earthy, rich in tone, resembling the hue of a bruise—a visual marker of injury and tenderness, reflecting the delicate balance between care and fragility.

These materials situate my collection of sculptural peaches within the domestic sphere, where activities associated with the bedroom, sleep, rest, watching Netflix, sex, recovering from the flu, or even depression are literally the materials that these peaches are made from. The Early Sunrise peaches, fragile and precious, echo the vulnerability of the materials and the lived experiences they represent—fleeting moments of comfort and care, sometimes at the mercy of external forces.

This use of everyday materials and the scale of the soft sculptures resonate with the legacy of Post-Minimalism, where the focus shifts from the Minimalist tradition of refined aesthetic objects to the incorporation of raw, personal, and often discarded materials, imbuing the work with emotional depth and an intimate connection to everyday life. As Stewart notes, “Works arising from this movement [, (post-minimalism),] have been characterized by the particular use of highly textured natural materials on a comparatively large scale in unstructured space; they usually display a strong relation to immediate context or environment” (76). The sculptures are not pristine or idealized—they are soft, imperfect, and heavy with the tactile presence of materials that feel lived in. They are physical manifestations of the vulnerability I experience, shaped by the gentle insistence of time and emotional distance.

The outermost layer of each sculpture is densely felted wool, in a creamy hue that merges the warmth of peach with a subtle likeness of my skin tone. This layer imitates the soft velvet fuzz of peach skin, smooth and compact, alongside the raw, fibrous textures beneath, resembling the porous, cellulite-like bumps of human skin. The smoothness of the peach-like surface and the imperfection of skin aims to invite the viewer not just to admire the sculpture, but to feel the haptic qualities of its texture—not through physical touch, but in a way that resonates deeper within their body, offering a more visceral experience of intimacy and vulnerability.

Beneath the wool, tightly wound lines of yarn crisscross the interior of each soft sculpture, establishing a visual rhythm that mirrors the structure of the circulatory system—the heart that pumps blood throughout the body (see Fig. 6). This delicate web of yarn holds further familial significance, evoking memories of time spent with my mother learning to knit and crochet—acts that were as much about care and connection as they were about the quiet rituals of love and nurturing.

The final visible layer made of quilt batting adds a soft, cloud-like quality to the sculptures, contrasting with the dense, textured wool and yarn. The quilt batting evokes a sense of warmth, comfort, and fragility. Beneath these layers, two sets of queen-sized bedding—flat sheets, fitted sheets, and pillowcases—are tightly wrapped around the core. One set comes from the bedding my partner continued to use while I was away, and the other from the new bedding I acquired for my own space in Waterloo. This combination of bedding merges our two separate spaces—one shared, the other solitary—into a single sculptural form, symbolizing the transition from a life shared with someone to one lived alone.

The decision to incorporate my bedding into the sculptures stems from a desire to infuse the work with the intimacy of home, and the often-overlooked labor involved in creating a space of comfort and refuge. The use of these materials reflects my experience of maintaining a sense of

personal and emotional continuity between two places that feel increasingly distant. These materials blend to form a physical reminder of both connection and separation.

At the core of these layers lies mattress foam, with coiled steel wrapped within the interior, referencing the springs of a mattress. The foam offers comfort and support, while the coiled steel introduces a subtle tension, alluding to the underlying structure of a bed—a symbol of rest, intimacy, and vulnerability. Together, these materials preserve the round, peach-like shape at the heart of each piece, grounding the sculptures in the familiar, domestic symbol of the mattress, while subtly embodying the emotional weight of distance, change, and the merging of two personal spaces into one.

The imagery of the Early Sunrise peach parallels my personal experience. This specific variety of peaches, which thrives in the Okanagan, cannot grow in Waterloo and thus becomes a metaphor for my own emotional journey. The peach, with its suggestive form, is a visual metaphor for the intimacy I once shared with my partner, now overshadowed by the disconnection that has followed our physical separation. Just as the peach is unable to flourish away from its home, the work speaks to my own struggles to find emotional flourishing.

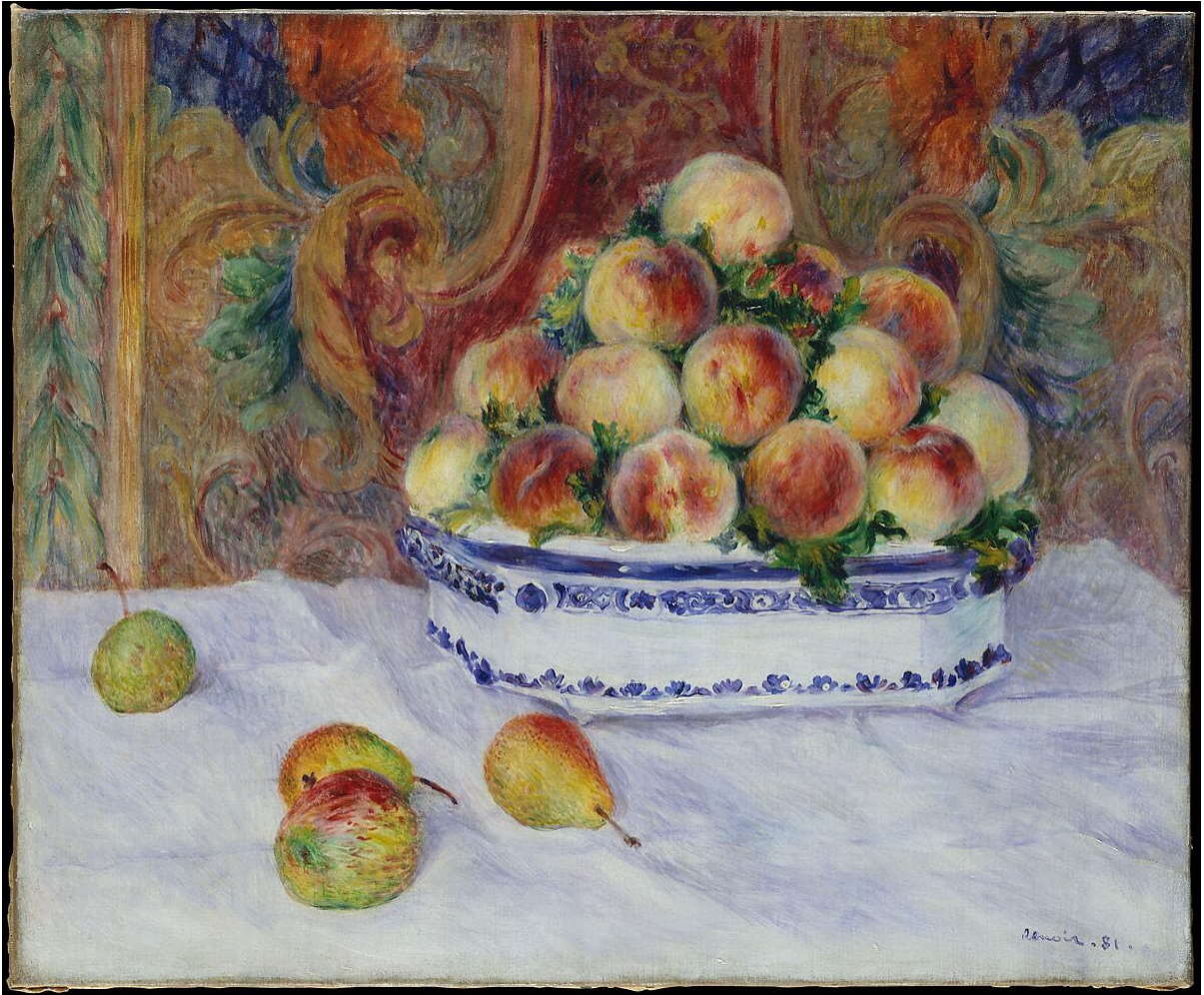


Fig. 7. *Still Life with Peaches*, by Auguste Renoir (French, Limoges 1841–1919 Cagnes-sur-Mer). Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437429>. Accessed 30 Mar. 2025.

The peach, a fruit historically imbued with sexual connotations, evokes a connection to my home in the Okanagan, where the fruit is a tangible, familiar part of life. In my work, it reflects both the warmth of that connection and the more complex, intimate bond I feel towards my partner. Throughout art history, the peach has been symbolically linked to sensuality, fertility, and desire (ArtDependence). In Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "*Still Life with Peaches*" (1881), (fig. 7), for example, the soft, velvety texture of the peaches evokes a sense of intimacy and the pleasures of the body,

consistent with the fruit's associations with romance and sensuality in Western culture. Peaches have long been symbolic of fertility and sensual desire, their texture and appearance drawing parallels to the softness and vulnerability of the human body. Similarly, in Chinese culture, peaches are seen as symbols of immortality and love, further linking the fruit to themes of connection and intimacy, as well as tenderness and loss (ArtDependence).

However, the peach in my work also serves as a subtle acknowledgment of the lack of libido I have experienced since depression set in, exacerbated by the emotional distance between us. This tension between desire and detachment is reminiscent of the 2017 film *Call Me by Your Name* by Luca Guadagnino, a tender and evocative exploration of young love and sexual awakening. In it, the peach becomes a symbol laden with yearning, desire, and the quiet discovery of intimacy between the characters Elio and Oliver. One of the most poignant scenes revolves around the peach¹, which acts as a metaphorical vessel for their emotions—the unspoken, raw feelings they do not fully understand or know how to express. As André Aciman, the author of the 2007 novel, the movie is based on explains,

What is absolutely superlative, and one of the most moving moments in the film, is that as the two men/boys are struggling with each other [(during the now-iconic peach scene)], one wants to eat the peach, and the other is trying to grab it away from him to prevent him from doing so. At some point, Elio will say, 'You are hurting me' and [Oliver] says, 'Let go then'... at which point Elio just breaks down and cries, saying, 'I don't want you to go' (TIFF Originals).

¹ *Call Me by Your Name*, directed by Luca Guadagnino, *Sony Pictures Classics*, 2017. 1:34:30–1:40:25. In this scene, the peach becomes a metaphor for intimacy, longing, and emotional vulnerability between Elio and Oliver.

This moment transitions from physical desire to emotional vulnerability, showing the complex interplay of longing and emotional depth. It was not until after I began creating *Tender Distance* that I saw the film and realized how closely it reflected my work. In a way, it felt like the sculptures and the film were speaking the same language—both carrying the weight of longing, of things that are both known and unknown.

As Aciman explains, "I think the peach scene is very essential partly because it's so shocking, but also because at the same time, it is the most intimate moment between the two men" (TIFF Originals). For me, the peach in my work does something similar. The peach has long been an enticing symbol throughout art history, representing desire, sensuality, and intimacy. But beyond its historical associations, it is that intimacy the peach speaks to—the longing, the desire, and the complex relationship with libido that I experienced—that resonates so deeply. The peach represents not just the closeness and warmth I once shared with my partner, but also the intimate bond that time and distance have gradually eroded. Like the characters in the film, my sense of intimacy has been challenged by time—the antagonist in my narrative—as it stretches and pulls us further apart. *Tender Distance*, in its soft, unfinished state, mirrors the vulnerability and longing that come with trying to stay connected while navigating the physical and sensual void I am learning to inhabit.



Fig. 8. *The Okanagan*. Installation view. By Jordan MacDonald, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

The positioning of these sculptures plays a crucial role in how they are experienced. Slightly elevated from the ground, they rest on low risers, creating a subtle gap between the sculptures and the gallery floor. This placement evokes the presence of a bed frame, where the mattress—held slightly above the ground—creates a void beneath it (Fig. 8). Shadows from this gap spill onto the floor, mirroring the stains that mark the risers themselves. This physical separation between the work and the ground evokes a sense of absence and vulnerability, just as a bedframe lifts a mattress, leaving a space between what is and what is no longer present.

The risers themselves, with their geometric simplicity, contrast sharply with the organic, flowing stains that adorn their surfaces. The stains—deep, unsaturated reds, almost blood-like browns—form irregular shapes that seem to seep across the risers, creating a wash of color in some

places and opaque, heavy marks in others. These stains evoke the feeling of something fading, of intimacy and moments slowly slipping away, while the deeper, more opaque marks suggest a permanence—a lingering residue that refuses to be erased (see *Fig. 5*). This is akin to the traces left on bedding over time—marks from morning coffee, wine, sweat, semen, and menstrual blood. Just as these substances leave faint stains on fabric, their presence endures, lingering even after many washes. Similarly, the stains on the risers are not simply fleeting or forgettable; they remain—quiet reminders of the intimacy, vulnerability, and connection that once existed. The stains suggest that, even as things fade, there is always a trace, an echo of what was once shared, leaving a lasting imprint on the space and the body.

The stains represent the marks left by time, suggesting the residue of relationships, and the remnants of intimate moments. Just as the sculptures carry the vulnerability of their soft, unfinished nature, the stains act as a record of that vulnerability—the traces of something once felt, now left behind. These organic forms echo the imperfection and unpredictability of human emotions, contrasting with the rigidity of the geometric risers beneath them. The contrast between the stains and the risers underscores the tension between the controlled, structured nature of external appearances and the fluid, unpredictable nature of internal experiences.

The stains speak to the deep, often invisible marks that we carry with us—both the gradual accumulation of time and the sudden, intense impressions that leave lasting traces on our lives. These marks, much like the messiness of the body, are imperfect, unpredictable, and sometimes uncontrollable. The body, like the stains, doesn't always adhere to an idealized order; it holds within it the residue of emotions, experiences, and moments that are complex and often difficult to contain. The stains on the risers act as a visual metaphor for the ways in which emotional and physical experiences—whether joyful, painful, intimate, or traumatic—leave their traces, whether we are

aware of them or not. Just as our bodies carry scars, sweat, tears, and the inevitable messiness of life, these stains reflect the ongoing process of being, living, and feeling.



Fig. 9. In His Mouth, by Jordan MacDonald and Dylan Baiko. Installation as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

Similarly, *In His Mouth* (Fig. 9), continues to explore this notion of residual marks and traces, this time through the medium of charcoal. The charcoal, created from the pits of Early Sunrise peaches, embodies a different kind of residue—one that speaks directly to the act of transformation. My partner and I worked together to create this charcoal, and though I was distant from him geographically, our emotional connection remained intact through this shared process. He collected the pits from the peaches, cleaned them, and then fired them into charcoal. Once the charcoal was made, he mailed it to me in Waterloo. This act of exchange—sending the physical remnants of the

peach trees from the Okanagan to me—became more than just a creative process; it represented the intimacy of our relationship despite the miles between us.

In many ways, the charcoal mirrors the process of memory. As the pits transformed into charcoal, they held within them not only the physical remnants of the peaches but also the emotional weight of the distance and connection between us. Each piece of charcoal carries the essence of the land—the Okanagan Valley where we both grew up—and the bond we share, forever intertwined in the material. The act of turning these peach pits into something tangible, something that could be used in my work, was a gesture of transformation. It was a way of bridging the gap between us, both physically and emotionally.

When I discovered that peach pits had historically been used in World War I to create charcoal filters for gas masks—chosen for their ability to absorb toxins—I did not feel a connection to this aspect of the material’s inherent qualities (Rosenberg). However, just as these filters absorbed toxins from the air, I was compelled to see if the peach pit charcoal, in the context of my work, could absorb something from me as well. Could this material somehow draw out the emotional toxins I’ve accumulated, as a physical metaphor for the purification of my own emotional landscape? The charcoal’s dark, velvety blackness and its ability to absorb impurities made me wonder if the process of incorporating it into my artwork might help purge or transform the emotional residue I carry—the distance, the longing, and the absence.

The resulting charcoal, now marked by the remnants of the fruit and the trees, acts as a direct link between the physical landscape and the emotional landscape of my experience. Just as the stains on the risers represent the lingering traces of intimate moments, *In His Mouth* serves as a physical manifestation of the transformation of memory and emotion into something that can be touched, felt, and seen. It speaks to the ways in which the past continues to shape and resonate within us, leaving

marks that persist long after the original experience has passed. These pieces of charcoal, with their velvety blackness, serve as a reminder that even the most ephemeral moments—those of touch, distance, and longing—can leave behind something solid, something enduring.



Fig. 10. *Where Pressure Lingers* (2 of 4), by Jordan MacDonald. Installation as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

This new material inspired the creation of *Where Pressure Lingers*. These large-scale works, standing 96 inches tall, 39.5 inches wide, and stretching over 120 inches across the gallery floor, are drawn on Kozuke paper, a traditional Japanese material known for its tactile, organic feel. The off-white paper, with its visible fibers woven throughout, holds a gentle warmth, echoing the soft, inviting touch of peach skin and the subtle warmth of my own body, much like the wool in my sculptures. The paper's slightly uneven texture and gentle hue aim to invite its viewer in, forming an intimate space where the traces of the past are not only seen but felt.



Fig. 11. A close-up shot of the stamp-making process for *Where Pressure Lingers*, 2025. Photograph by Paige Smith.

The compositions in *Where Pressure Lingers* began with the creation of peach prints. To make these prints, I pressed peaches —each coated with varying amounts of ink—onto paper, experimenting with the fruit’s texture until it began to fall apart and no longer produced a recognizable imprint (Fig. 11). The resulting prints were scanned and became the basis for the drawings. These inked impressions served as a starting point, a way to explore the relationship between material and process. I embraced the fluidity of the prints, allowing them to push beyond the edges of the paper, extending into the surrounding space and sometimes bleeding into one another. These marks represent the landscape of my emotional experience—like the land I come from, the

marks are not confined but rather spill beyond themselves, creating an ever-expanding space of exploration.



*Fig. 12. Where Pressure Lingers (1 of 4), by Jordan MacDonald. Detail shot as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025, Photo by Jordan MacDonald.*

As I began translating these print forms into charcoal drawings, I followed the paths already laid out by the inked impressions, layering charcoal onto the Kozuke paper. The drawings take on a topographical quality, much like maps of land surrounded by water. Each mark follows the contours of the prints, but the charcoal brings an added depth—embodying a sense of both presence and absence, with the space around the marks being just as crucial to the composition as the marks themselves (*Fig. 12*). The charcoal moves across the surface in a way that feels like the slow unraveling of memory, echoing the fluidity and constant shift between land and water that I associate with living in the Okanagan Vally.



Fig. 13. *Black Lemons*, by Donald Sultan, 1981. Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1981. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/60056>. Accessed 30 Mar. 2025.

These drawings are also in conversation with Donald Sultan's large-scale works, *Black Lemons* (Fig. 13), where texture and the tension of containment play a key role. Sultan's smudged surfaces, filled with a sense of struggle to control the material, were a key inspiration for the approach I took with charcoal. The once-yellow lemons, now depicted through Sultan's velvety, soft charcoal, are rendered with soft edges and overlapping images. In his work, the fruit's recognizable shape dissolves into the surrounding space, and only the title of the work and the suggestion of form hint at what is being depicted. This uncontained, elusive representation echoes the same tensions I explore in my drawings.

The velvety, black charcoal marks in my work mimic the uncontained nature of Donald Sultan's *Black Lemons*, as both my marks and Sultan's demonstrate the tension between material and

form, control and release. In both works, familiar objects like fruits are transformed through material and technique into abstract forms that convey deeper, more complex emotional and physical resonances. Sultan's lemons, with their soft, blurred edges and overlapping images, dissolve into the surrounding space, much like my charcoal marks, which similarly float across the paper, both contained and uncontained. This shared exploration of impermanence and transformation speaks to the ongoing shift between what is held and what is released, and how the materials themselves carry both emotional weight and physical presence.

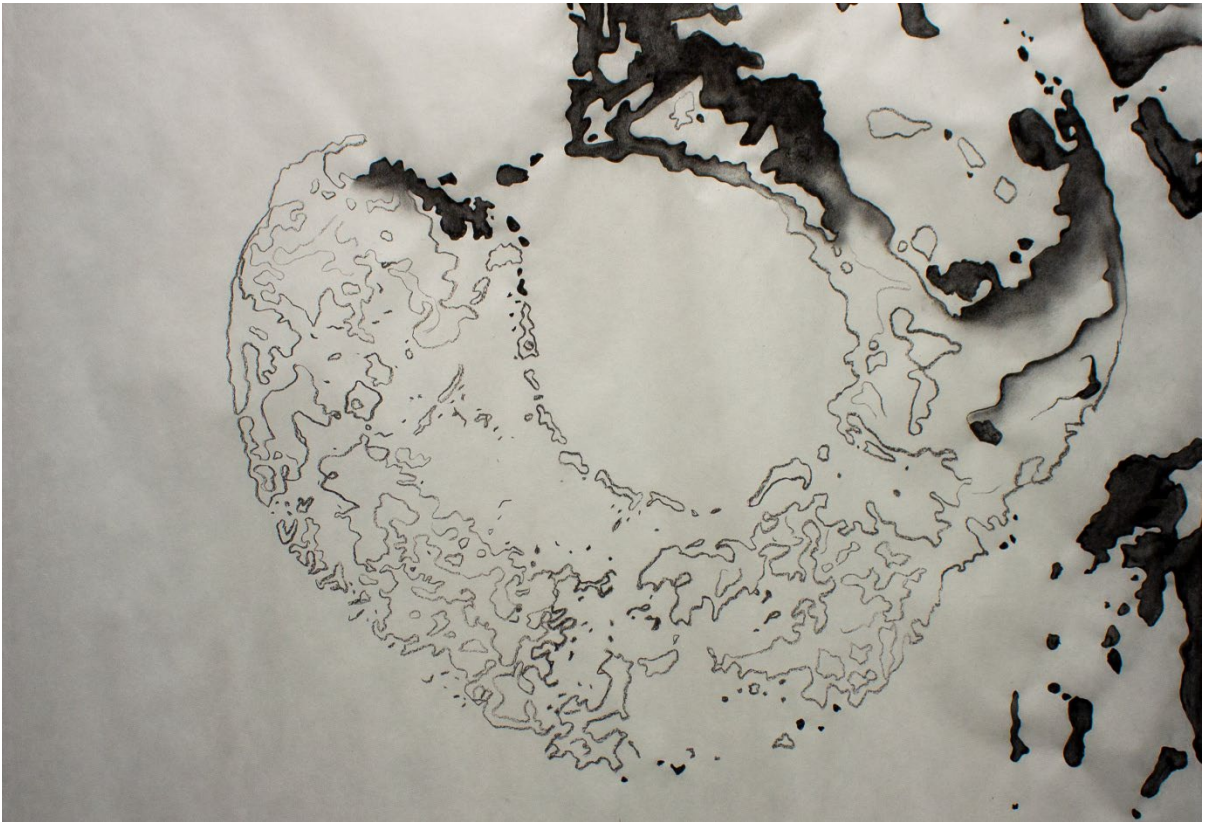


Fig. 14: *Where Pressure Lingers* (1 of 4), by Jordan MacDonald. Detail shot as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025, Photo by Jordan MacDonald.

Each drawing in *The Okanagan* depicts varying stages of rendering, from initial, sketch-like lines to more developed, dense imprints (Fig. 14). This incomplete nature of the drawings reflects the

emotional gaps and unspoken spaces that exist between connections. It speaks to the slow, subtle unraveling of intimacy, and to how memory and emotion are often fragmented, incomplete. The floating, shifting quality of the marks evokes a sense of impermanence—present, yet slipping away. The marks are both immediate gestures, capturing the bodily experience of drawing on such a large scale, and also reflections of something more abstract: the ongoing transformation of memory, the passage of time, and the tension between what is held and what is released.

The charcoal imprints, approximately 29 inches in diameter, echo the lingering traces of the peach's inner fruit, where juice once pooled and dried, leaving behind stained imprints. Each stroke of charcoal captures a moment of absence and presence, as if the essence of the fruit has been absorbed into the paper, leaving a trace of its fleeting life. The marks are scattered across the page, allowing negative space to breathe, providing room for the viewer to interpret the relationship between form and emptiness. The open, unrefined quality of the marks further reflects the raw nature of the process, unpolished and yet intentional. The marks do not fully fill the space, creating a sense of fluidity and continuous motion. In this, the drawings are in constant flux, evoking the sense that these imprints are not fixed—much like the memories and intimacy they represent—present, yet slipping away, forever shifting and incomplete.



Fig. 15. *Fractured Traces* (1 of 6), by Jordan MacDonald. Installation as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025, Photo by Jordan MacDonald.

Similarly, the porcelain peach pits, *Fractured Traces* (Fig. 15), are displayed fully formed yet unfinished, their surfaces left unpolished and unglazed. The absence of color—a matte, off-white tone—heightens their untamed nature, as if they exist in a state of both life and death. The porcelain, in its natural state, catches the gallery’s light in the crevices, casting soft shadows that reveal their smooth, tactile texture. The play of light and shadow creates a visual tension, amplifying the sense that these pits are neither fully alive nor entirely dead, but suspended in a state of becoming. They feel incomplete, lingering between states, like something caught in transition, yet not fully resolved.



Fig. 16. *Fractured Traces* (1 of 6), by Jordan MacDonald. Detail shot as part of *The Okanagan*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025, Photo by Jordan MacDonald.

Measuring approximately 12 inches across and 7 inches deep, these pits are massive in comparison to their real counterparts. Their smooth, round forms are interrupted by deep, jagged cracks that traverse the outer shell, suggesting fragility and imminent destruction. The fissures resemble the folds of skin, like the natural cracks found in the earth, deep and exposed (*Fig. 16*). Every curve, every crack, every subtle indentation carries the imprint of my own body—the way my hands shaped and pressed the clay, leaving a tactile record of my interaction with the material. These pits are not just representations of the fruit; they are delicate, tactile records of time—reminders of the process of creation, the passage of time, and the tension between life and decay.

The porcelain's unglazed, matte finish, much like the kitchen dishes left unwashed or the chipped mugs left to accumulate in a domestic space, speaks to the unrefined nature of everyday life.

They are familiar yet strange—objects caught in an unfinished state, not yet fully polished, much like memories or moments left hanging in the air. The porcelain also reflects its own endurance, as it can "take the heat"—both literally, in its kiln-fired state, and figuratively, as it holds the power to withstand the fire of creation and transformation. This quality of porcelain, its capacity to endure, also speaks to its permanence—these pits, though unrefined and unfinished, will last far beyond their immediate context, representing an enduring, unyielding mark in the landscape of my work.

Fractured Traces is not merely a collection of objects to be observed, but symbols of waiting—like land left fallow, they are dormant for now, holding the potential for growth but currently in a suspended state, echoing the agricultural practice of resting the land to restore its fertility. As such, they hold a quiet potential, waiting for the right moment to be reborn. The permanence of the porcelain serves as a reminder that even in states of dormancy or imperfection, something lasting is present—a record of time and transformation that will remain.

The Geography of Play



Fig. 17. A close-up shot of the drawing process for *Where Pressure Lingers*, 2025.

“The open mind is the generative place from which potentially springs. But this is not an easy feat – it only comes with practice—because opening the mind to see more clearly, to see something new or anew, is to engage the question with our whole being” (69, Jacob)

At the heart of my studio methodology is the concept of play, not as aimless exploration but as a generative, intentional practice. Play allows me to enter a space where I can both experiment and surrender control. This sense of freedom enables me to engage with materials in a fluid and intuitive manner. Each artwork is a dialogue with the material: I respond to its texture, its behavior, its resistance, and its unpredictability. This interaction becomes an embodied experience, where my physical movements (whether the rhythmic motions of needle felting or sweeping gestures in

drawing) become an extension of my emotional state, a direct channel for expressing what words cannot capture (*Fig. 17*).

This engagement with play, or “deep play” as Diane Ackerman refers to it, is fundamental to my creative process. As Ackerman notes, “Deep play is a fascinating hallmark of being human; it reveals our need to seek a special brand of transcendence, with a passion that makes thrill-seeking explicable, creativity possible, and religion inevitable” (17). Deep play, in this context, is not simply a tool for passing time or achieving an end result. Its purpose is to embrace spontaneity, allowing the material to shape itself organically in response to my movements.

The process is one of discovery, where I do not seek to control the outcome, but instead allow it to emerge through continuous interaction with the materials and the act of creation itself. Much like the dynamic between two lovers, where rules are unique to the relationship², the creative process unfolds within its own set of expectations, distinct to each piece. There is no prescribed path, no pressure to control the final piece—only to commit to the moment, to fully embrace whatever arises from my interaction with the material. As Mary Jane Jacob describes in *Dewey for Artists*, “During this process, the artist is intensely focused on bringing something into being, often so immersed in the task that all other concerns seem to vanish. The artist becomes deeply connected to the work, so completely involved that time and effort feel irrelevant in the pursuit” (13).

The studio, a space where I am free from the pressures of daily life and external expectations, becomes a sanctuary liberated by the unpredictable nature of the creative process. However, much

²Ackerman, Diane. *Deep Play*. Vintage Books, 1999, p. 20.

In this passage, Ackerman describes how lovers, when they choose to be together, create a private, sacred space in which they are free from the outside world: “When lovers isolate themselves from others, desperate to be alone together, indeed when they decide to become 'a couple,' they escape to the sacred kingdom of their love affair, a private world with its own customs, dialect, values, and rules. Love is a voluntary mysticism. They become a cult of two.”

like the world of two lovers, this space is not permanent. Ackerman's analogy reflects the transient nature of this creative world: "If one lover breaks up with the other, their secret world is shattered" (20, Ackerman). The magic of the studio exists only as long as I remain fully immersed in the moment, embracing the ebb and flow of the creative act.

It is in this shifting, ephemeral space that the deepest parts of my emotions are allowed to surface and transform, making the act of creation itself both a refuge and a release. In the studio, the emotional and physical dimensions of my practice intersect. Creating becomes an intimate process, one in which my body is as involved as my mind. Whether sculpting, drawing, or manipulating materials, each movement is a physical manifestation of the emotions I am processing. This emotional engagement, rooted in the act of making, forms the heart of my methodology.

As Jacob states, "When process is a practice, it requires our full presence." The act of creation demands my attention, my vulnerability, and my presence. It is not just about making something tangible—it is about being attuned to the nuances of my emotional and physical responses, allowing them to guide the work, however unpredictable it may be.



Fig. 18. A close-up shot of the felting process for *Tender Distances*, 2025. Photograph by Jordan MacDonald.

While the work may at times feel chaotic, raw, or even uncomfortable, these moments are integral to the process. They are not interruptions but opportunities for emotional release and exploration. In embracing the vulnerability and messiness that arise during creation, I open myself to deeper layers of meaning and transformation. As the material responds to my gestures and movements, it becomes an extension of my emotional state, not passive objects but active participants in the creative process. Whether I am needle felting wool, manipulating clay, or applying charcoal to paper, the material informs the trajectory of the work. The physicality of wool—its softness, pliability, and unpredictability—becomes a metaphor for my emotional process. For example, when creating *Tender Distance*, (Fig. 18), the softness of the wool presents an interesting challenge in how I control its pliability. As I shape and form the wool, I allow my hands to follow its texture,

responding to subtle changes that lead the work in new, unforeseen directions. The unpredictable nature of the wool, where each strand can take the piece in a new direction, is a metaphor for my own process of emotional unfolding, where each gesture allows a new emotional layer to emerge.

In this dynamic exchange, repetition plays a crucial role. The rhythmic motion of needle felting, layering clay, or drawing not only grounds me but allows me to enter a meditative state where I can focus on the present moment. Repetition is a method of processing emotional material, building upon each layer added to a sculpture or each gesture made in drawing. This creates a rhythm and flow that mirrors the emotional cycles I experience. Repetition becomes both a release and a confrontation—allowing me to process emotions without seeking immediate resolution. It is a continuous, evolving process that allows me to explore emotions from different angles, perspectives, and depths.



Fig. 19. *The Okanagan*. Installation view. By Jordan MacDonald, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

This act of repetition extends beyond my studio into the gallery, as seen in Figure 19, which depicts the installation view of *The Okanagan*. As the viewer enters the gallery, they are invited to navigate the space in a similar way to how I engage with compositions in *Where Pressure Lingers* (see Fig. 10). The landscape of the paper, marked by circular forms, can be viewed as a topographical map—land surrounded by water, a dynamic geography shaped by layers of pressure and repetition. Similarly, the gallery space mirrors this topography, with the rectangular layout broken up by round, circular risers that hold the sculptures. Just as I moved through the paper, interacting with its circular forms, the viewer must navigate the gallery’s terrain, maneuvering around the risers and becoming part of the unfolding experience.

Circles, with their endless loops and interconnections, create a space for exploration. Their inherent fluidity evokes a sense of play, one that transcends the physical boundaries of the gallery and spills into the emotional space of the viewer. As Ingrid Fetell Lee notes in *Joyful*, “...circles and spheres are the most approachable shapes, with no sharp edges to risk injury. Our emotional brain understands this intuitively and unconsciously prefers round forms over angular ones” (141). The circular forms in the gallery invite comfort and openness, creating an atmosphere where the viewer is encouraged to engage deeply with the work.

In this setup, the gallery becomes more than just a space for displaying finished works—it becomes a space for shared experience. The viewer’s own emotional journey mirrors the process of making, where repetition, transformation, and immersion in the work become a collective, ongoing dialogue. Just as I immerse myself in the rhythm of repetition in the studio, the gallery allows the viewer to experience that same sense of continuity, where each interaction with the work deepens their emotional and intellectual connection. This shared experience reinforces the cyclical nature of both the creative process and the viewer’s engagement, creating a fluid, evolving relationship between the space, the work, and the audience.

The physical traces left behind in the gallery—whether the stains on the plinths, the charcoal dust that marks the paper, or the unfinished qualities of the sculptures—become vital elements of the work. These imperfections are not byproducts to hide; they are evidence of the raw, vulnerable engagement that lies at the heart of creation. The stains on the plinths, for example, embody the physicality and emotional energy that went into making the pieces. They reveal the ongoing process of transformation, where emotion is not just contained within the work but spills out into the environment, leaving traces behind. This vulnerability, though messy, creates space for true emotional release and growth.

The messiness of play—whether it’s stray wool fibers, splatters of clay, or the traces of my hands on the surfaces—reveals the true essence of the creative act. This messiness is not something to be hidden or cleaned away; it is a vital aspect of the process. Just as in life, where emotions spill out uncontrollably, the messiness of play is an honest, human expression of the process of becoming. It shows the raw and unfiltered journey of creation, where the physical marks left behind—whether on the plinths or the floor—are as much a part of the artwork as the final piece itself. It is in this chaos, this untidy and unrefined space, that the most profound and vulnerable parts of my work emerge, revealing the complexity of both the creative process and the emotions that fuel it.

The studio space, free from external judgments, is a sanctuary where this raw, intuitive process unfolds. It is a space for risk and discovery, where I can navigate the complexities of my emotions through materiality. The work is always evolving, never static, and in this flux, I find a profound sense of freedom. The transformation of the material parallels the transformation I experience emotionally and creatively. Each piece is an embodiment of that journey, inviting both myself and the viewer into a shared space of discovery, vulnerability, and growth.

I do not view my works as static, resolved objects. Instead, they are part of an ongoing exploration that evolves over time. Just as emotions are not linear, but fluctuate, transform, and shift, the work in my studio reflects this fluidity. Each piece retains layers of possibility—marks, textures, and gestures that suggest a larger, unspoken narrative. Even when a work is presented in the gallery, it carries the unfinished quality of its creation, inviting the viewer into the process and encouraging them to experience it as a living, evolving entity. The space between the material and the viewer, the process and the final piece, becomes a space of exchange—an opportunity for both to witness the continuous unfolding of the work. It is in this unfinished, ever-evolving state that the work reveals its

fullest potential, urging the viewer to engage not just with the final product, but with the ongoing conversation between creation, transformation, and the emotional resonance that lies at its core.

Conclusion: The Turning Season



Fig. 20. *The Okanagan*. Installation view. By Jordan MacDonald, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2025. Photograph by Scott Lee.

The Okanagan exists within a cycle of creation, transformation, and reinterpretation, an ongoing process beyond its initial conception. What began as an exploration of healing has evolved—shaped by the materials I work with, the places I’ve inhabited, and the time in which the work has unfolded—now standing as a testament to the complex relationship between my personal history, the work itself, and the environments that shape it. Like the agricultural landscapes of the Okanagan Valley, where decay nourishes new growth, *The Okanagan* remains unfixed, unfinished, and open to new interpretations.

With this ongoing evolution comes a constant reimagining, raising new questions like: How does distance alter our connection to place? Can objects and materials carry the weight of absence? What role does the viewer play in shaping the work's meaning? These are not questions I am meant to answer or impose on the work, but ones that will be answered with time, naturally.

As my work moves from one space to another, its context will inevitably shift, as its meaning will no longer be tethered to a singular perspective. The relationship between distance and presence, absence and connection, remains central, but the work now invites an ongoing dialogue that extends beyond my intentions. It becomes something shared between the viewer, the space, and the moment in which it occupies.

As I return to the Okanagan Valley, the installation will undergo a shift, marking a new phase where absence gives way to presence. The circular forms throughout the installation—peaches, pits, drawings, and risers—echo this return, suggesting not an ending, but a cyclical re-encounter, a revisiting from a changed perspective. As I seek opportunities to exhibit the work again, beginning within the Okanagan, I'm considering how its meaning will evolve, when experienced in proximity to the landscapes that originally inspired it. The geographical and emotional context of a new exhibition location prompts new considerations: How might the viewer's understanding shift when the context aligns more closely with the work's source? What happens when the metaphor of distance is no longer abstract, but embodied by the land itself? Rather than settling into certainty, these questions keep the work open to shifting interpretations, evolving contexts, and the dialogues that

emerge around it. In this way, the Okanagan Valley becomes more than just a backdrop—it evolves into an active participant in the work’s transformation.

In this ever-evolving journey, *The Okanagan* stands not as a final statement, but as a moment in time, continuously shaped by new encounters, reflections, and spaces. As the work moves forward, it remains a testament to the cyclical nature of creation and the possibilities that lie within distance, presence, and absence. *The Okanagan* is not a conclusion, but an ongoing process—one that will continue to unfold, just as the landscapes that inspired it.

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