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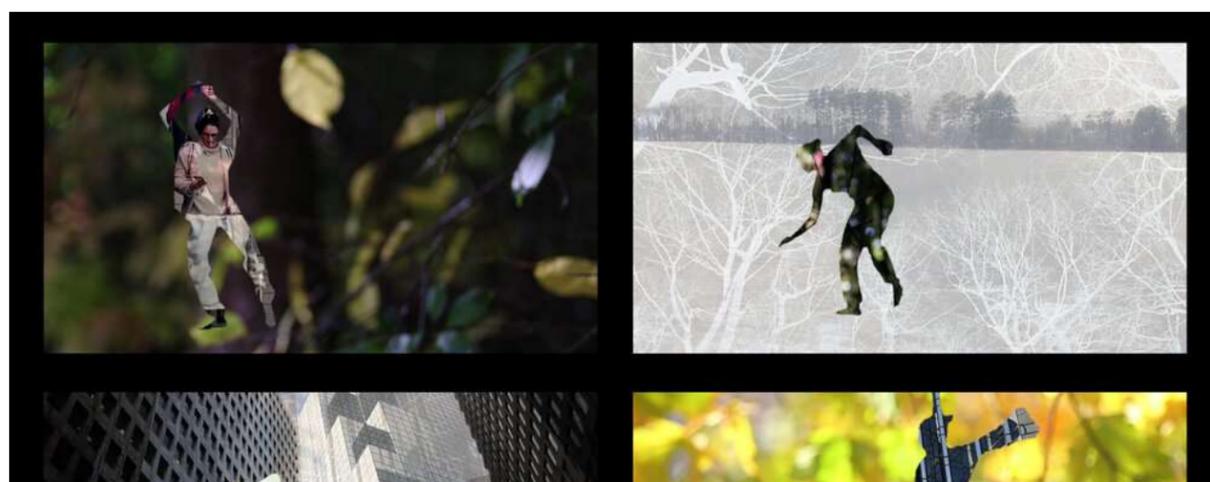
Cheryl Pagurek

We continue our #CouncilSpotlight look back at the Ottawa Arts Council Award recipients with Cheryl Pagurek. She received the 2020 Corel Endowment Fund for the Arts Award for an interdisciplinary project titled *States of Being*.

Since receiving an M.F.A. from the University of Victoria, Cheryl Pagurek's work in video, photography and digital media has been exhibited widely in Canada and internationally, including presentations at MSVU Gallery (Halifax), Patrick Mikhail Gallery (Montréal), Vu (Québec), Gallery 44 (Toronto), Carleton University Art Gallery (Ottawa); numerous video screenings in Canada, USA, Brazil, France, Columbia, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia; *Currents*, a commissioned video work at Marketplace transit station in Ottawa; and many public art presentations (Kamloops Art Gallery's Luminocity, Toulouse's Rencontres Traverse Vidéo, Daimon's City Clips, Kingston's Next Door). Her solo exhibit *Connect/Connexion* at the Ottawa Art Gallery in 2019 featured an interactive video and audio installation. She is the recipient of the 2020 Corel Endowment for the Arts Award celebrating the integration of technology and the arts, and a 2020 Canada Council for the Arts Digital Originals grant for a web-based project.

How has the pandemic forced you to reimagine your project? Is there an unforeseen silver lining in this process?

After exhibiting the *Connect* installation, and before the pandemic, I had been shooting video footage for a new interactive video and audio installation. The new project, *States of Being*, was conceived to further expand the expressive potential of interactivity by inviting dancers to engage and interact with it. *States of Being* shifts *Connect's* focus on the embodied experience of each participant, to the more performative aspects of interactive installation. Each dancer will bring their own movement vocabulary when navigating and synthesizing the video and audio feeds. Last spring I put that project on hold temporarily; it did not seem feasible to move forward at that time because of its collaborative nature. Instead I spent a few months working on a Canada Council for the Arts Digital Originals grant that allowed me to develop a four-part online project. It involved learning some coding for generative and interactive web-based works, and launched in September at <https://www.statesofbeing.ca>. Just as I was finishing that work, I was offered a 2021 Expanded Practice residency at DARC to develop *States of Being*. By that point it was looking like it could be possible to plan for a residency several months into the future, hopefully Spring 2021, during which time I will work safely with one dancer at a time in the installation. So I began to delve back into the development of the new installation.



"States of Being" mockups

Set of 4 mockup screen captures of "States of Being" work-in-progress, showing different videos within a dancer's silhouette and in the background, during the course of their choreography or improvisation.



What struck me when reviewing the footage I had shot before the pandemic, was how the many months of lockdown and restrictions now affected my reactions to the video footage—new layers of meaning were evoked. Everything had shifted—scenes of crowds were no longer just busy, but potentially threatening; a lone individual now called up a sense of isolation; the divide between public and domestic space was heightened; and the solace of the natural world beckoned even more urgently as a refuge. I began to envision the installation as creating a poetics of our present times, when meanings shift continuously around concepts of distance vs togetherness, safety vs threat, inside vs outside, individual vs collectivity. Video imagery evokes fleeting sensibilities: dense urbanity, vast natural space, solitude, chaotic crowds, lyrical abstraction, domesticity, organic forms, built environment, rushing speed, slow contemplation, immediacy, distance, claustrophobia, freedom. Newly created footage reflects the pervasive mediation we currently experience in our inter-personal communications, through the frames of our ever-present digital screens. The experience of the pandemic has guided the direction of the work. I also am currently thinking about alternate ways that the installation could be shared and experienced by viewers during the time that live performances/exhibitions are still restricted.



A screen capture of *Present Continuous* generative, interactive web-based artwork.

What is your favourite colour? Or why not have a favourite colour?

I actually don't have one favourite colour—I adore colours, in combination, playing off each other. When I was experimenting with colours for the shapes and backgrounds for the two online generative artworks in *Untitled Moments: Contemplate, Animate, Generate, Participate*, I was always considering how the colours and their levels of transparency would affect how they behaved together when side by side, and how they would create new colours and forms when seen through one another when overlapping.

You've crossed the country and beyond with your career, what opportunities do you find unique to Ottawa?

Ottawa has been a stimulating environment to work in. I have been fortunate to receive support from the City of Ottawa and community arts organizations in various ways and at different stages of my career, all of which have been important for continued growth. We are also lucky in Ottawa to have the benefit of being surrounded by arts institutions at the municipal and national levels, and also in post-secondary educational contexts. These resources are essential for continual inspiration and learning.



Screen capture of *Momentary* generative web-based artwork.

What about technology drives your creative process?

I am very excited by the new possibilities that working with technology brings to artworks and artistic expression of all kinds. As I am writing this, I have one of my generative artworks playing on the monitor beside me. Even though I established the aesthetic parameters—the shapes, and the range of colours, transparencies, patterns of movement—I am constantly delighted by the unexpected, new compositions that the project generates due to the 'controlled randomness' coded into the project. It creates combinations of the elements that I likely would never have come up with on my own, and I enjoy these ephemeral surprises. With interactive installation, technology introduces the actions of the viewer into the mix. While I determine the video and audio content that will be layered, and the structure of the interaction, it is the participants' movements that reveal and shape how these elements come together. These additional contributions that are enabled by technology bring richness to the work, and are compelling to me as an artist.



Another capture of *Momentary* generative web-based artwork.

Info on Digital Originals web-based project:

[https:](https://www.ottawaarts.ca/digital-originals)

Untitled Moments: Contemplate, Animate, Generate, Participate

Animated videos and web-based generative, interactive artworks expand on the *Untitled Moments* prints, incorporating their visual vocabulary of exuberant compositions and brightly coloured shapes. I turned to my personal archive of cellphone photos to create abstractions from the untitled moments that make up our days.



A second capture of *Present Continuous* generative, interactive web-based artwork.

More info:

Untitled Moments: Contemplate, Animate, Generate, Participate is a four part project. The 'Contemplate' section of the website features 8 still images from the *Untitled Moments* print series, a contemporary take on the aesthetic of Matisse's Cut-Outs. Abstracted from my trove of cellphone images into shapes of flat colour, recognizable elements reveal themselves from public and private imagery – landscapes, people, places, objects, plucked from the diverse realms of travel, work, leisure, domestic life, celebratory and everyday occasions. The 'Animate' section features playful short videos that animate the experimental, creative process that went into the making of the *Untitled Moments* prints. The 'Generate' section features *Momentary*, a coded, generative artwork that continually renews itself in the web browser, layering changing shapes of semi-transparent flat colour that combine to create new forms and colours when seen through one another. The 'Participate' section features *Present Continuous*, a coded, generative artwork that is also interactive. Viewers participate by moving their cursor or finger to dynamically interact with and affect the generated colourful compositions of shapes. Across the different media and formats, a similar visual vocabulary links all four parts of the project. The flat shapes of colour reveal silhouettes from the world around us in juxtapositions of natural, urban, public, domestic, mundane, unexpected, and sometimes funny imagery.

The Corel Endowment Fund for the Arts Award

This award champions projects that celebrate the integration of technology and the arts. The award supports projects with the potential to significantly advance the artist's art practice or have an impact on the community.

Deadline: February 12, 2021

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