

Sutures





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Eve Tagny + Emii Alrai
July 3 - September 4, 2022

Curated by
Matthew Kyba and Megan Kammerer



Foreword

The past two years were defined by an explosive unpredictability. The behaviours, routines, relationships, and habits that we had accustomed ourselves with for so long were suddenly unsettled—ruptured in their totality. *Sutures* was born amid these new lacerations, a navigation of contemporary separation.

Eve Tagny and Emii Alrai met on Instagram in 2020—one based in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal and the other in Leeds. They wove common research practices together online from across the Atlantic after initiating a shared collaboration with my co-curator, Matthew Kyba. Digital partnerships later developed into physical meetings in England, Italy, and Canada—ultimately landing on the common structures that tie these landscapes together. Tagny and Alrai travelled to Clarington for a month-long residency in June 2022. They stitched together duelling notions of a wound in our studios—activating ceramics, photography, and found objects to uncover the history of these materials as they transform into new barriers and skins.

Tagny focuses on how communities at the margins commit to living, rather than merely surviving through lens-based installations. She centres physical gestures and populated landscapes to mend traumatic disruptions in accordance with

nature. Her work manifests into sanctuaries that simultaneously encompass all stages of living—from luscious growth to decay, man-made construction to rot. Manufactured plastics are positioned against natural linens. Photographs that appear familiar are discarded and torn. Looping gestures of physical labour unsettle bucolic scenes of serenity. Tagny captures a quiet resilience, engaging processes of renewal, reconnection, and transformation. Informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity, and post-colonial museum practices of collecting and displaying objects, Alrai weaves together historical narratives by forging new artefacts and visualizing residues of cultural collision. Her work contains elements which are broken and hover between the formal polish of an imperial museum, archaeological dig, or the residue of performance. Hand-sculpted vessels populate the landscape as reimagined tomb ware. The pots' patinated shells reflect the oxidized surface of altars rising off the gallery's floor—elevated homes for healing, offering, and mourning. She questions the value and origin of artefacts here, while navigating familiar diasporic experiences.

Tagny + Alrai's practices come together as an accumulation of sculptural gestures in this exhibition. Referencing the two-year international research process that came before, these gestures are placed in the gallery as a visual essay, layering relationships between land, extraction, and the body.

After injury, a suture weaves broken pieces back into a whole. Its bands pull together, forcing two lacerations to meet as the body recovers from incision. The works in this exhibition take the form of stitches—physical and photographic assemblages which together create a scarred landscape. Traditional techniques of cob mortar, hand-dyed textile, and clay are blended with new experimentation in bioplastics and construction materials to create a terrain that desires time to heal itself from the extractive binds which the non-white body undergoes in a landscape.

It was a pleasure to support Eve and Emii in bringing their works to life. It is now our joy to share it all with you.

Megan Kammerer
Curator of Exhibitions

Sutures



I am at a party in Oshawa and Kristen, who works as a nurse, tells me about retaining sutures— big blue elastic ties which hem together the sawn, spilling, and swollen body after an operation.

As the body begins to heal from its incision, the bands pull together, forcing two lacerations of flesh to meet again. Its process is slow. It is painful. Kristen tells me that sometimes these bloated binds no longer contain themselves, and often rupture completely, exposing bursted entrails out of a stitch.

Flag poles jammed into the earth wave a textile emblem. Flax and linen are harvested into fibre, into yarn, and spun. They are woven threads stitched and sutured together. The blood of the cross and the leaf are gashes against the sky.

I am in an archival vault reading about maps. A collections assistant tells me that these navigational diagrams were an invention of control—of space that facilitated the geographical expansion of social systems. They are an ungirding of state power. Maps foster the notion of a socially empty space. Their lines are drawn straight, which bears discomfort when I consider that the human body contains not one straight line. A landscape which has been organically twisted over centuries before us, and commanded by the so-called ruler.

Skin



Land is taken in a grid formation—forming a mesh or network over its already teeming undercurrents. Cement lines are laid straight with no regard to the body underneath or to the rest of the environment around it. These lands are razed. They are eaten by the process of concrete. It is almost impossible to imagine the land that was here before.

Gash



Swing back to season whatever of *Lost* and Sayid Jarrah, the Iraqi Specialist Republican Guard is played by Naveen Andrews. He is not Iraqi. I watched this with my mama. At the time, we loved that we had one hot ‘Iraqi’ on the island. We laughed at his ‘Iraqi’ accent. Sayid Jarrah is wounded in the scene that I think of. Without flinching, despite the gouge in his arm bleeding profusely, Jarrah packs the trauma with gunpowder. He lights it. I ask my mama why, and she says it is a method of sterilising a wound called cauterisation—a self infliction of violence against the body in order to heal.

Kassia St. Clair talks about the history of fabric in her book *The Golden Thread*, often questioning how textiles have shaped our environment. In the text, she cites the ‘discovery’ of Tutankhamun’s tomb. Archaeologists found that the site had been partially looted sometime in antiquity. Artefacts and goods were disturbed and reorganized, hastily stuffed back into chests and caskets.

The body of the young Egyptian ruler was later found in a perilous state when the sarcophagus was reopened in 1968. The mummy was not in one piece. Its head and neck were separated from the corpse, limbs detached from the torso¹. In Ancient Egypt, the act of wrapping a body was sacred. It had the power to transform the mundane into something protected, pure, and godlike. Ever more violent methods of extraction disturb these sacred rituals—all for the sake of getting at the valued amulets and jewels that can be found among inviolable bandages.

These objects exist in constellations of sutures, histories stitched together with the rough hand of empire and whiteness. How do we heal from these gashes and wounds? How can we reconcile an extracted world hastily pulled together by unsteady sutures and stitches?

— Emii Alrai

¹ Kassia St. Clair, *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed History* (London: John Murray, 2018), 54.

Two practices stitch together which both deal with the notion of a wound, one in the elemental life force of grief into landscape—how the body might act as a support instead of an extract. One in the wound of lost time and oral history, the entrapment and the value of empire. In its strangulation, it took the skin of our necks under its fingernail as it smashed the air out of our throats.



The flag
The tool
The brace
The stitch
The gash
The land
The weed
The harvester
The separation
The wound
The suture















*Avant que le rendement de la terre soit pressée
de poison et de monocultures au point d'appauvrissement permanent.*

With the development of sedentary agricultural communities, sheep and cows were the first animals to be domesticated for agrarian purposes. To these days they roam pastures as if they had been shaped not from this very soil. *Comme si à l'origine elles avaient été moulées au creux de ces terres arables même.*

The skilled sheep shearer knows how to avoid hurting the animal. They explain that centuries of shearing for wool has modified the animal's genetics—the sheep no longer naturally shed their own wool. Protection becomes entrapment.

Some strayed sheep living in the wild collapses under the weight of their own wool. *Un amoncellement de mousses et de lichens, d'insectes et de tiques, de ses propres déchets.*

Here, I react with tears and self-pitying sobs to what I perceive as the destruction of land and forest, to choke it with concrete boxes.

Not knowing how or not wanting to engage with the consequences of these values and decisions. Seeing our present and future ruins



Escape of safety - what happens when you have a certain body which holds specific context - at the same time the body holds another context - metamorphosis.

Looking at Deana Lawson's photographs again. This time in London on a reduced scale. First time was in New York City.

When Black

In the United States of America

It seems to me that

Skins are roughed up, bruised, tattooed, marked, hyperpigmented, sunkissed to the point of wrinkling, laboured, soft, malleable, strong, supple, smooth.

What is it to be a body?

What is it to have a skin?

Layers that can simultaneously
protect and render us vulnerable?

What is it to be vulnerable when

I see myself as powerful?

Growing up, I studied the large
bulbous scar on my father's back
with amazement and slight terror,
perhaps connecting it to visual
representations of the slave's back,
covered in lacerations as physical
testament of barbarity. I used
to (maybe still do) resent these
persistent scars.

Since learning of it, fascination
hasn't ceased, que les quantités
élevées de mélanine présentent
dans les corps, freinent le
processus de cicatrisation.

So I dream of new skins.

Biographies

Eve Tagny is a Tiohtià:ke/Montreal-based artist. Her practice considers gardens and disrupted landscapes as mutable sites of personal and collective memory – inscribed in dynamics of power, colonial histories, and their legacies. Weaving lens-based mediums, installation, text and performance, she explores spiritual and embodied expressions of grief and resiliency, in correlation with nature’s rhythms, cycles, and materiality.

Tagny has a BFA in Film Production from Concordia University and a Certificate in Journalism from University of Montreal. Recent exhibitions include Musée de Joliette, Momenta Biennale, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal and Centre Clark, Montreal; Cooper Cole, Gallery 44, and Franz Kaka, Toronto. She is the recipient of the Mfon grant (2018), the Plein Sud Bursary (2020) and has been shortlisted for the CAP Prize (2018), the Burtynsky Photobook Grant (2018) and the OAAG Award (2020).

Emii Alrai’s practice is informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity and post-colonial museum practices of collecting and displaying objects. Focusing on ancient mythologies alongside oral histories, Alrai weaves together narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision. Often working at large scale, she creates sculptural installations that recall museological displays and dioramas, natural landscapes and processes of decay and ruin that question the verity of the historical record.

Alrai is an artist based in Leeds and Wakefield, UK. She was selected for Year 2 of iniva’s Future Collect with The Hepworth Wakefield. Recent exhibitions include: A Core of Scar, The Hepworth Wakefield (2022), The Courtship of Giants, Eastside Projects (2022) Deposition Layer, Threshold Projects, Leeds (2021), Stories We Tell Ourselves, Foreman Gallery, Quebec (2021); Jerwood Solo Presentations, Jerwood Arts, London (2021); The High Dam, The Tetley, Leeds (2020); Tutelaries, VITRINE, London (2019); An Ancient Quiver, GLOAM, Sheffield (2018). In 2021, Emii was selected for Triangle Astérides residency programme in Marseille, In-Ruins residency in Calabria and partook in a Creative Fellowship at the University of Leicester.



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