



LAND IS NOT A MAT  
TO BE ROLLED UP  
AND TAKEN AWAY

RICHARD IBGHY AND  
MARILOU LEMMENS

# INTRODUCTION

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The exhibition *Land is not a mat to be rolled up and taken away* is an invitation to contemplate the ways in which we, members of human and nonhuman collectives, relate to the land and to each other. Presenting new and recent sculptures and videos by Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, two artists based in Quebec who have been working collaboratively for twenty years, the exhibition immerses visitors—body, mind, and soul—in a rich, multicoloured realm where objects, images, texts, sounds, and ideas reveal the magnitude of our kinship with all of earth’s inhabitants, challenging us to critically reassess our shared history and to imagine our fate with care.

Punctuating the first-floor space, videos from the series *The Violence of Care* (2019–ongoing) and *Herber, désherber* [Planting/Unplanting] (2020) make visible the entanglement of soil, avian, and human ecologies. These moving images mingle with the *Futures* series of sculptures, offering a counterpoint to its proliferation of small colourful wooden constructions presented on tables. Short, deadpan handwritten captions—blending titular succinctness and descriptive assertion—accompany these toy-like objects, producing a playful interpretive jostle that destabilizes both language and object. On the one hand, these short texts lead us to consider the economic, financial, and ecological processes in North American food and biofuel production. On the other, they hint at the sculptures’ elaborative logic, its *pas de trois* materialization of graphical representations—literally, giving a material form to a naked abstraction bent on asserting it represents matter. Putting ekphrasis

in question, *Futures* humourously equips us to confront the urgencies of our time.

In a nearby room of its own, the animation *What Birds Talk About When They Talk* (2019) also enlists ekphrasis to humourously critique humankind’s fascination with bird voices and invites us to consider the stakes of interpretation. Does it foster connections across differences? Or limit our understanding of what nonhuman animals can think and do?

These questions resound on the second floor as the exhibition bids us to acknowledge the converging historical forces that have brought us here and to tune into a spectrum of lifeforms with unfettered attention. On one side of this gallery, four recent sculptures enlist the human idea of the “shed” to imagine the rich experiential and cognitive universe of soil and animals. Made of humble, recycled materials, some of these structures hold implements that are used by animals or that could be useful to them; others evoke sophisticated practices of interspecies accommodation and collaboration. Ultimately, they invite us to rid ourselves of the hubris of human superiority as we embrace a much richer collective experience: living as one amongst many species on a shared, wonderful, and endangered planet.

Two monumental works take us back to the land as a storied confluence of matter and mind—a battleground of experience and abstraction. *La grande appropriation* [The Great Appropriation] (2020–ongoing), an installation of over 200 small colourful sculptures presented at waist height on a long table, brings us face to face with the violent property-logic we’ve

inherited from colonial appropriation and settler capitalism. Each sculpture represents a Quebec seigneurie or township—the three-dimensional reduction of territory to simple geometry for the taking. Seductive yet damning, the work’s proliferation reflects the scale of the systematic displacement, dispossession, and extraction enacted for colonial expansion. Casting myriad coloured shadows, the sculptural cut-ups also link this violence to the current ecological crisis and inequalities in land access and governance.

Produced following the artists’ research residency in Charlottetown last summer, the new installation *Ain’t never been there, they tell me it’s nice* (2023) draws on Samuel Holland’s 1765 map of Prince Edward Island, critically turning the map into a mobile. Suspended in front of the Gallery’s tallest wall and visible from both floors, sixty-seven fluid forms—paper outlines of the Island’s lots—dangle from threads. Just above our heads, these slumping forms and their fickle shadows hauntingly remind us that the ontological, technical, and legal foundations of our decolonizing communities are specters—fragile, yet lasting projections.

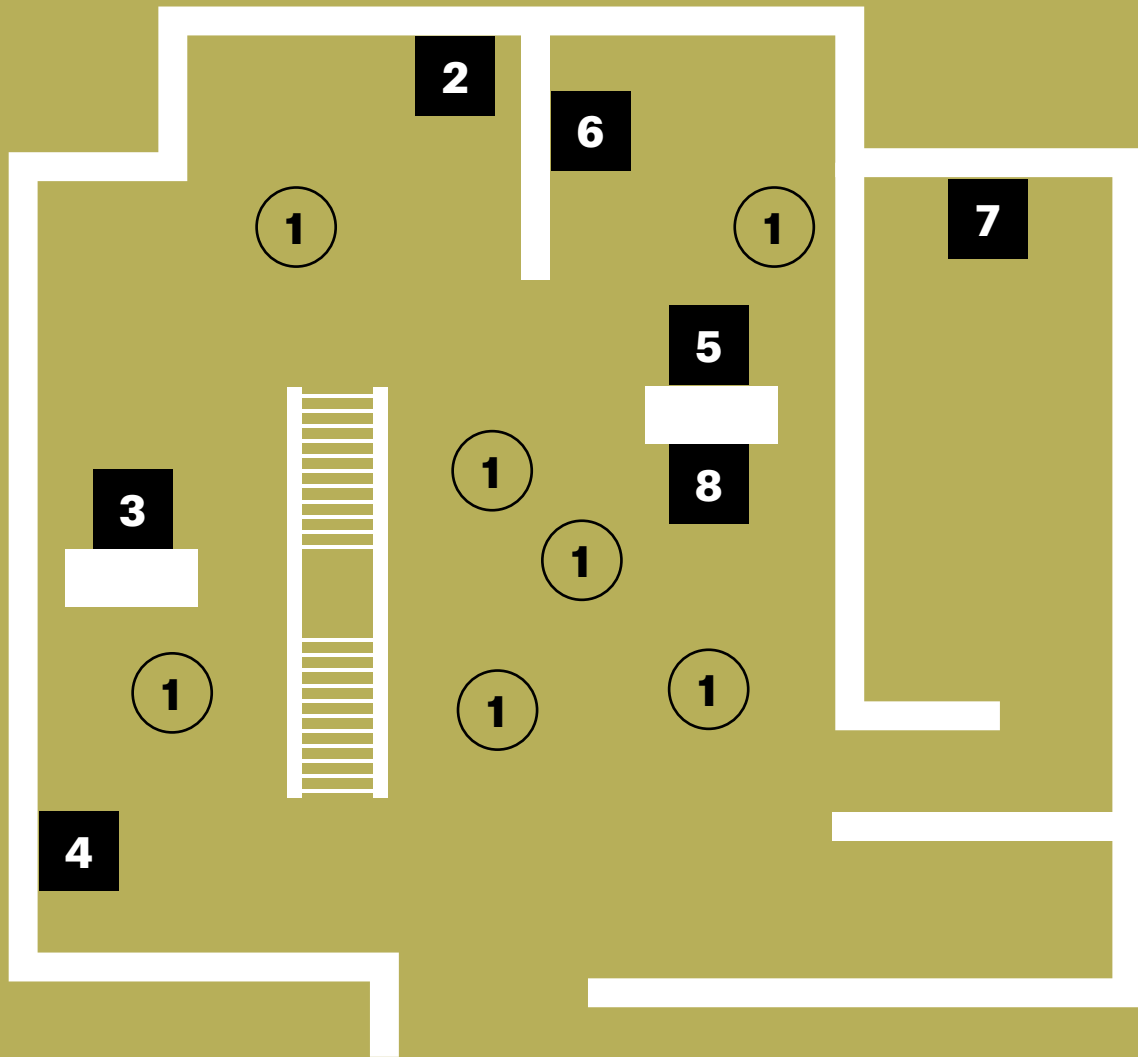
Sylvie Fortin, Curator



Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, *Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing*, 2021. Installation view, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS. Photo: H&S.

# MAIN LEVEL

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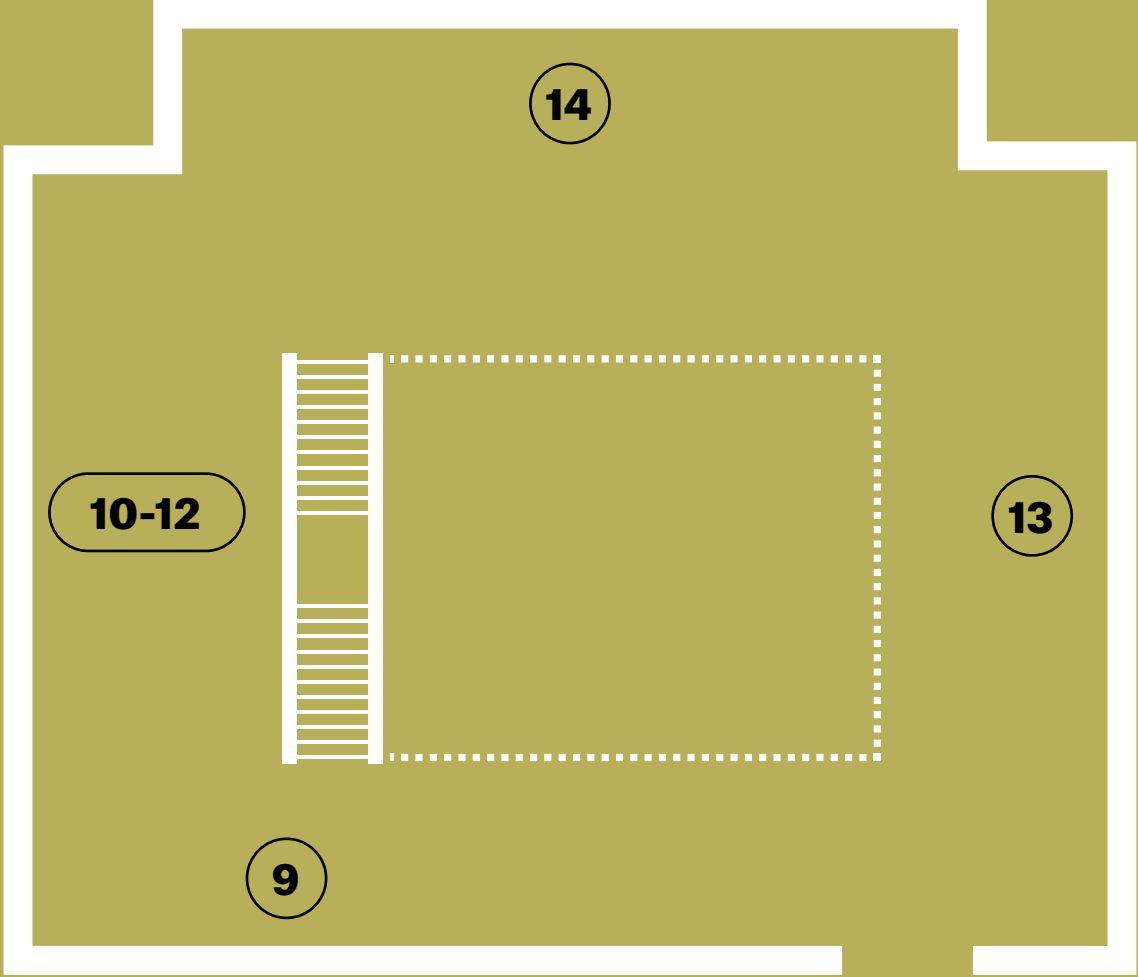
Video



Sculpture/Installation

UPPER LEVEL

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1

**Futures**

2019–ongoing, series of sculptures:  
wood, ink, and other materials  
Dimensions variable

This series of small wooden sculptures enlists colourful geometric constructions to explore the economic, financial, and ecological processes at play in North American food and biofuel production by materializing graphical representations.



*Sales Volume of the 10 Top Meat Processing Companies, 2019, wood and ink, 44 × 36 × 25 cm.*

2-6

**The Violence of Care**

This series of videos (2019–ongoing) focuses on human practices that aim to create the conditions for avian lives to thrive, or, at times, be sustained. Connecting the zoo, the field station, the conservation centre, and the backyard, this series makes visible the entanglement of avian and human ecologies and temporalities.



2

**Banding and Releasing Young Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes in the Carden Alvar**

2019, video with sound, 25:24 min.

Loggerhead Shrikes were once common in pastures and grasslands across Eastern Canada. Their numbers have dropped steadily since the 1960s and they are now critically endangered, with roughly a dozen wild breeding pairs remaining in Ontario. The plains of Carden is one of the areas where wild Shrikes may still be found. Every summer, cohorts of young Shrikes bred in captive facilities in Canada and the USA are transferred to the Carden Alvar before being released into the “wild” to strengthen the remaining population.

In this video, a team of biologists catch, examine, collect basic data, and band a cohort of fledglings prior to their release. The banding and data enable the future identification of individual birds, increasing the understanding of their winter migration as well as factors affecting the number of returning individuals and their breeding success.



*Hedging vs. Speculation on the Chicago Wheat Market (1996 and 2011), 2019, wood, handmade organic dyes, ink, and paper, 49 × 42 × 22 cm.*



Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens, *Look, it's daybreak, dear, time to sing*, 2021. Installation view, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS. Photo: H&S.

Afterwards, a biologist opens the enclosure early in the morning, allowing the birds to leave at will. This type of “soft release” enables the birds to habituate themselves to their surroundings and choose the moment of their exit.

Credits: The video features Hazel Wheeler, Lead Biologist and Coordinator of the Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program, coordinated by Wildlife Preservation Canada with the support of multiple partners; Jane Hudecki, Shrike Conservation Breeding Coordinator; contract biologists Sam Shappas and Mandy Shepherd, and a volunteer. Filmed at the Carden Field Station, Ontario, Canada.



3

### ***Cleaning the Atlantic Puffins, Tufted Puffins, and Common Murres' Exhibit***

2019, video with sound, 8:31 min.

A keeper cleans the Atlantic puffins, tufted puffins, and common murres' exhibit at the zoo. As the birds dive, swim, and move in and out of their nests at the back of the exhibit, the worker meticulously scrubs the constructed landscape—a daily task. From the other side of the glass, the camera captures both the birds living their lives on display and the human care and dedication required to make their lives visible.



Credits: Paul Rollman, Aquarium/Birds Lead Keeper, was filmed at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium.

4

### ***Counting Birds for Five-minutes***

2019, video with sound, 6:09 min.

Two biologists perform a five-minute bird count: one focuses on identifying bird species and tracking their relative position as the other scientist registers the information on a field data sheet. The five-minute bird count is widely used to monitor bird populations or progress in ecological restoration projects. As opposed to counting the actual number of birds, this method enables researchers to infer their population from multiple samples

Credits: The two biologists in the video are John McCarty and LaReesa Wolfenbarger, Ph.D., founders of the Laboratory of Avian Ecology at the University of Nebraska Omaha. The video was filmed at Glacier Creek Prairie Reserve, Omaha, NE.





## 5

**Feeding Birds in the Aviary**

2019, video with sound, 15:42 min.

A keeper brings food to birds living in an expansive outdoor aviary, revealing a carefully created landscape as well as the logistical and physical labour invested in caring for captive birds. In the video, an uncommon gathering of species, from straw-necked ibis, ruddy shelduck, and roseate spoonbill to golden pheasant, snowy egret, and greater scaup approach the feeding ground at their own pace after the keeper has left. While multiple bird species cohabitate in the aviary by design, uninvited guests, mainly European starlings, have managed to enter the enclosure and chosen to make it their home.



Credits: Bob Lastovica, Bird Department Supervisor, was filmed at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium.

## 6

**Feeding Cottonball**

2019, video with sound, 5:35 min.

Due to her advanced age, Cottonball has stopped laying eggs. She is no longer able to walk to the feeder to eat with her fellow hens. In response, Sara, her human companion, has started bringing Cottonball outside of the chicken house to hand-feed her seeds, fresh corn, and minced meat.



Credits: This video was filmed at the home of Cottonball and Sara McClure, near Omaha, NE.

## 7

***What Birds Talk About When They Talk***

2019, video projection with sound  
26:28 min.

This video animation humourously ventures into the stakes of interpretation. *What Birds Talk About When They Talk* explores humankind's eternal fascination with bird songs and calls and invites us to consider the effects of our interpretative acts: Do they foster connections across difference? Or limit our understanding of what non-human animals can think and do?



## 8

***Herber, désherber [Planting, Unplanting]***

2020, video with sound, 17 min.

A woman repeatedly digs holes in the ground with her bare hands, places seedlings, and presses down the soil, smoothing its surface. Later, her hands move skillfully over the same terrain, ruthlessly ripping plants. Her labour-intensive agricultural practice is committed to the long-term sustenance of soil and its biological activity and diversity. And yet, her crops remain human-centric and her work involves both care and violence: her weeding discards plants that do not benefit humans. Her intimate gestures connect the living and nonliving, the human and nonhuman, calling on us to think in circles instead of along the lines of so-called progress and production.

Credit: This work was realized with the support of the Grantham Foundation for the Arts and the Environment.



*Movement of Spot and Futures Market Prices for  
Agricultural Commodities (2005–2012) from the  
series Futures (2019–ongoing), wood and ink,  
72 × 24 × 23 cm.*





9

### **Community Toolshed for the Birds**

2021, wood, plywood, stones, thread, plastic, metal, dried organic materials, paper, and ink  
185 × 71 × 60 cm

Designed to function as a community “library,” the small wooden structure entitled *Community Toolshed for the Birds* contains tools that birds have been observed to use and fabricate for various purposes, from foraging, hooking, and cracking things open to scratching themselves and playing. These tools include both organic and human-made components. *Community Toolshed for the Birds* humourously offers a whimsical yet practical example of ways to improve interspecies cohabitation.



10-12

### **Architectural Services and Roadway Designs for Animals**

Furthering the exploration of hospitality, care, and communication between species, *Architectural Services and Roadway Design for Animals* comprises three shed-like structures made of found, recycled materials. These works focus on the relationship of animals to their habitat: how some animals live in complex, symbiotic communities, build their homes, and modify their environment. Akin to *Community Toolshed for the Birds* (2021), each structure houses a variety of constructions, materials, and accessories that are or could be used by animals—such as plastic threads, twigs, and sewing needles—and playfully blurs the opposition between nature and culture, human and nonhuman.

10

### **Structures for Performances and Parades for Birds**

2022, wood, plastic, metal, organic materials, paper, and ink  
236 × 50.7 × 59 cm





**11** *Architecture of Hunting Lodges and Ambushes for Spiders*

2022, wood, stones, thread, plastic, metal, organic materials, paper, and ink  
138.5 × 94 × 33.5 cm

**12** *Subterranean Sector*

2022, wood, stones, organic materials, paper, and ink  
35 × 118.5 × 57.5 cm



13

### ***La grande appropriation*** **[The Great Appropriation]**

2020–ongoing, installation: wood, bamboo, acetate, thread, mesh, paper, and ink  
Dimensions variable

This installation brings us face to face with the violent property-logic we've inherited from colonial appropriation and settler capitalism. Each of the 200+ small sculptures represents a Quebec seigneurie or township—the three-dimensional reduction of territory to simple geometric abstractions for the taking. The work's proliferation reflects the scale of the systematic displacement, dispossession, and extraction enacted for colonial expansion. Casting myriad coloured shadows, the sculptural cut-ups also link this violence to the current ecological crisis and inequalities in land access and governance.

Credit: The work was realized with the support from the Grantham Foundation for the Arts and the Environment.



14

### ***Ain't never been there, they tell me it's nice***

2023, installation: paper, thread, and wax  
Dimensions variable

This new installation draws on Samuel Holland's 1765 map of Prince Edward Island, critically turning the map into a mobile. Buoyed by the room's gentle airflows, sixty-seven fluid forms—paper outlines of the Island's lots, whose ownership was perfunctorily granted by remote lottery in London in 1767—dangle from waxed threads, stopping just above our heads. These slumping forms cast fickle, engulfing shadows that remind us of our suspect colonial inheritance and of the work needed to undermine its ontological, technical, and legal foundations.





# BIOGRAPHIES

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The artists **Richard Ibhgy and Marilou Lemmens** live and work in Durham-Sud, Canada. Their work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Jane Lombard Gallery, New York (2022 and 2017), Fondation Guido Molinari, Montreal (2022), Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, KS, USA (2021), Grantham Foundation for the Arts and the Environment, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, Canada (2020–2021), Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE, USA (2019–2020), Visningsrommet USF Gallery, Bergen, Norway (2019), Audain Gallery, SFU Galleries, Vancouver (2018), Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Canada (2017), Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, Canada (2017), International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York (2016), Esker Foundation Contemporary Art Gallery, Calgary (2016), Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Montreal (2016), VOX, Montreal (2014), and Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles (2012).

They have participated in group exhibitions including the 1st Fiskars Biennale, Finland (2019), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2018), Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH (2018), 2nd OFF-Biennale, Budapest (2017), Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2017), Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2017), XIII Bienal de Cuenca, Cuenca, Ecuador (2016), Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, Canada (2016), 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015), La Biennale de Montréal (2014), Manif d'art 7: Quebec City Biennial (2014), La Filature, Scene Nationale and La Kunsthalle, Mulhouse, France (2013), Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway (2013), Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2012) and 10th Sharjah Biennial (2011).

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**Sylvie Fortin** is an interdependent curator, researcher, critic, and editor based between Montréal and New York. She was Curator-in-Residence 2019–2021 at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, NE, Executive/Artistic Director of La Biennale de Montréal (2013–2017), Executive Director/Editor of ART PAPERS in Atlanta (2004–2012), Curator of Contemporary Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (2013), Curator of Manif d'art 5: Quebec City Biennial (2010), and Curator of Contemporary Art at the Ottawa Art Gallery (1996–2001).

Fortin lectures internationally and her critical essays and reviews have been published in numerous catalogues, anthologies, and periodicals, including *Art/Agenda*, *Artforum International*, *ART PAPERS*, *Art Press*, *C Magazine*, *Flash Art*, and *Frieze*.

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*Herber, désherber* [Planting,  
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Thursday: 10 AM–8 PM

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