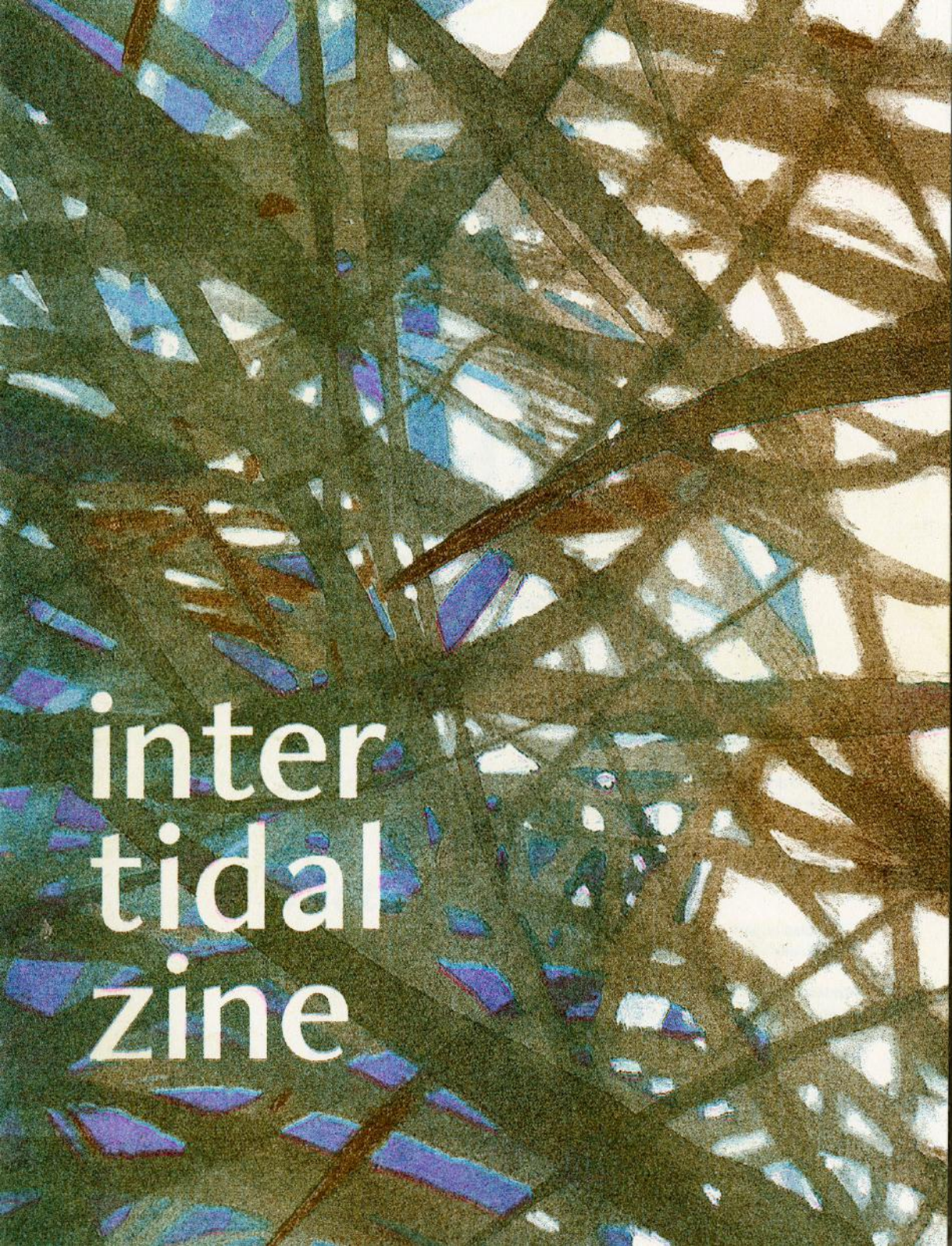

inter
tidal
zine

This project was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.

Design: Sichen Grace Chen
Cover Illustration: Sichen Grace Chen
Risograph printed in the COMD Lab at Emily Carr University using 3 inks:
Fluorescent Pink, Light Teal, and Flat Gold

"False Creek":
COMMUNITY CONNECTED BY WATER

Assembled as part of the 3-year project,
"False Creek": Community Connected by Water

intertidal zine issue 0: What's in the Water was made on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations, land and water that have been stewarded by them since time immemorial. With gratitude and respect, we recognize our accountability and the mutual responsibility we hold towards one another—human, non-human, and more-than-human—and are committed to the life-long journey of being accomplices in climate action.

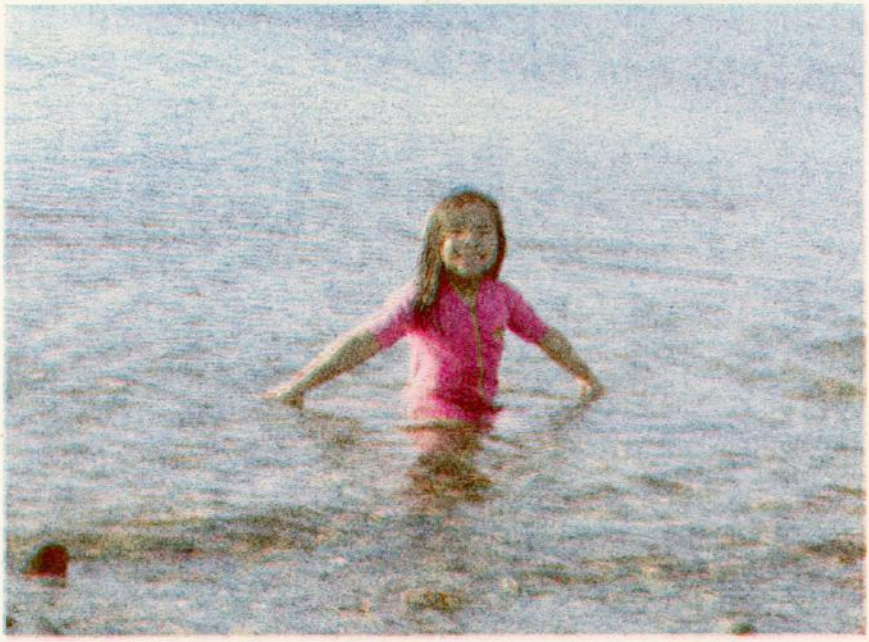
inter tidal zine

Issue 0:

What's in the Water

Edited by Sichen Grace Chen and Jasmine Lee

Atelier Aloera / Aloera Climate Creative Society



Rare photo, mermaid emerging from the sea. Photo from Lee family.

Editor's Note

Hello, friend —

As your fingers contact the pages of this zine, allow yourself to be immersed in the mystery and clarity of human, non-human, and more-than-human narratives connected by *What's in the Water*. Ancestral histories? Fractal patterns? Future remnants? When we coax the boundaries of our semi-permeable vessels into dissolving, what is left? By choosing to enter this materially-situated shared space, you are joined with every other hand on this zine — reader or contributor — across geographic and temporal dimensions.

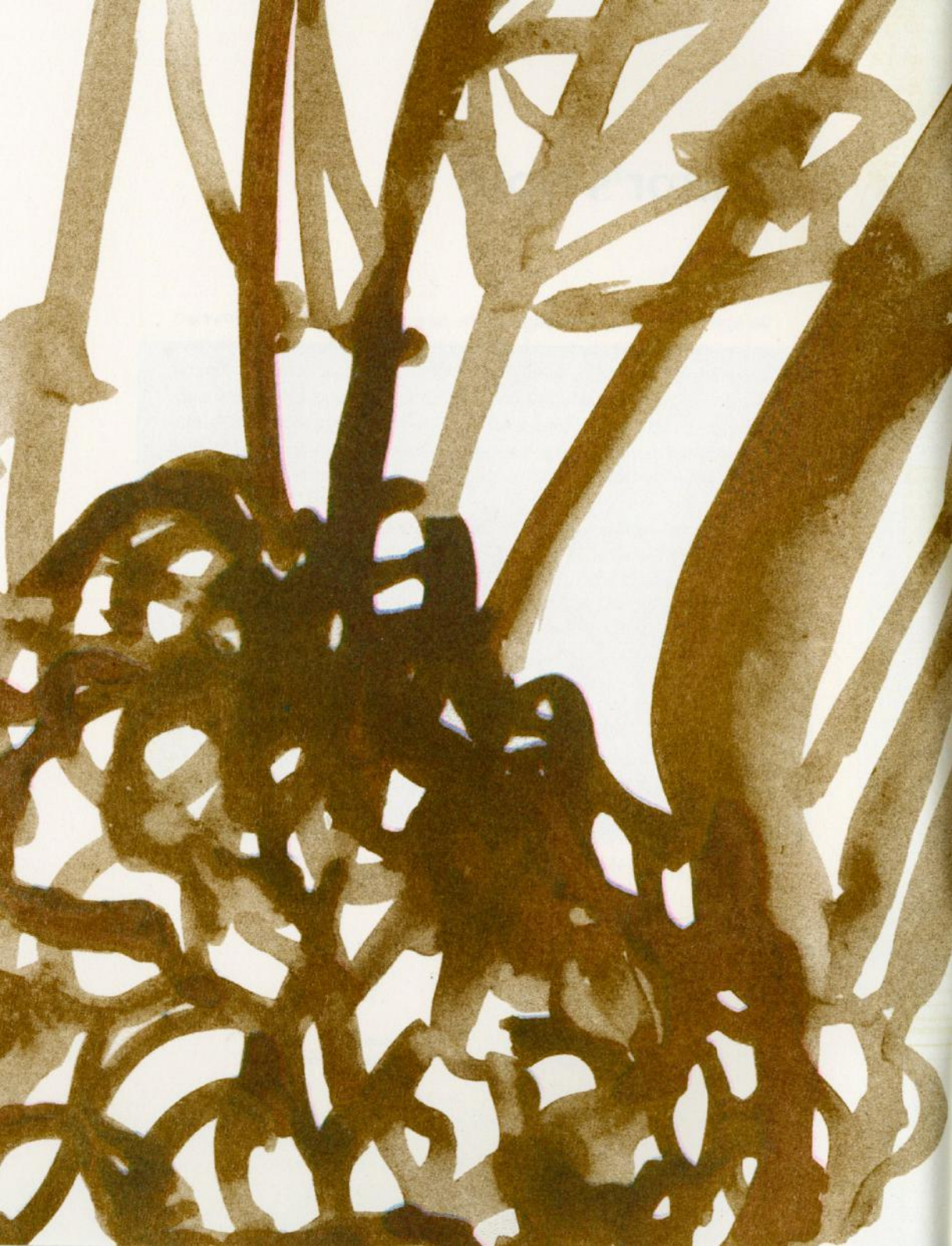
This pilot publication explores the multifaceted reflections within and beyond water: the water is constant, yet no part of the water ever stays the same. In a time of artificial ecologies flooding our senses, in this zine, let's take them apart one at a time. We encourage you to follow the bends of each piece relating to another, like the flow of a river into an ocean, carrying sediments of memory and speculation. Along the way, what new interconnections emerge? Where does this water meet your body: physically, emotionally, spiritually?

Thank you for reinforcing the current of our three-year journey with "False Creek": Community Connected by Water. We are carried by the momentum of your tide.

We invite you to take a deep breath, and step into the *intertidal zine*.

Sichen Grace Chen
Creative Director

Jasmine Lee
Climate Director



The story takes place in a time beyond our understanding of time, in an era that precedes human habitation of this world, when life on this planet was in its infancy and light itself was still forming. Many supernatural creatures with powers beyond our understanding were hard at work shaping the world as we know it today. A shapeshifter now known as Raven, who could change size, shape, and matter, was gifted with the task from X'als (The Creator) to bring light to a darkened world, and so Raven did. The first sunrise was brought to the earth and sunlight beamed across the land, giving way to much needed illumination for all living things.

Raven and the First Sunrise, as told by Kwantlen First Nation Artist Brandon Gabriel in collaboration with the city of Surrey (Raven and the First Sunrise | City of Surrey).

Rising, Immutable

Jasmine Lee

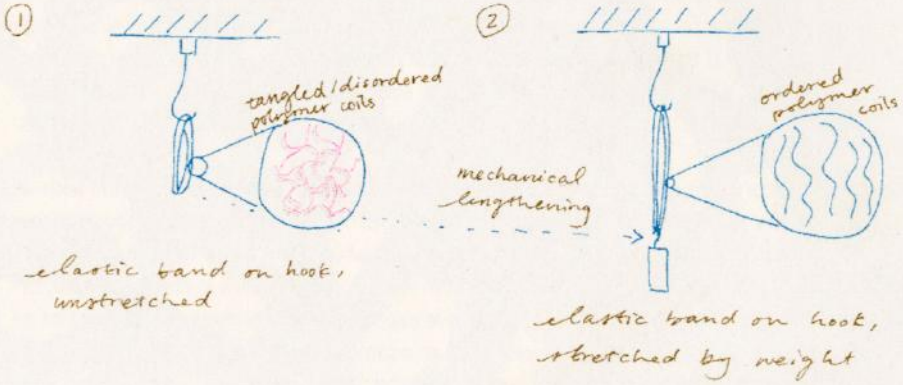
Why does the sun rise? For as long as humanity has inhabited this planet, we have been characterized by an immutable curiosity; a drive to understand *why things are*. Around the globe, scientists and storytellers alike have leveraged branching streams, Ways of Knowing, to respond to such questions: interpretations supported by seasonal observation, empirical measurement, and community conversation.

The story of the Raven and the First Sunrise was one of my first encounters with an answer to the above. Growing up in the Fraser Valley, the Kwantlen First Nation's telling of the First Sunrise is the version with which I am most familiar, although I continue to discover the ubiquity of this story across Nations in the Pacific Northwest. Each telling of the story that I have explored since involves an intersection of this natural phenomenon paired with an examination of organismic morality and shared community values (in addition to the Sunrise, Raven is credited with the bringing of human constitutions such as health, happiness, generosity, and family). To me, this story provides a holistic and intertwined model for physical and metaphysical forces, a shared postulation against the unKnowable.

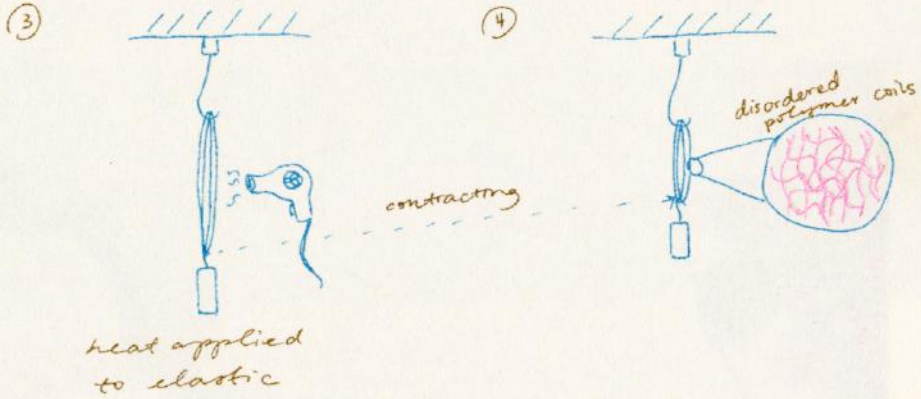
Illustration by Sichen Grace Chen

As I continued on my learning journey, other Ways of Knowing entered my perspective with their unique explanations for our Sun's rising. For instance, I found Copernicus's suggestion that it was the Earth circumnavigating the Sun (rather than the inverse) particularly striking. By proposing his heliocentric model, Copernicus subverted the need for convolutions in charting astronomical movement present in the Ptolemaic system, which relied on complex epicycles that related nearby space bodies to the Earth as their centre. The elegance of such a simplification inspired me, fuelling my curiosity towards the scientific method and its ability to streamline and isolate correlations and causations. I eventually completed an undergraduate degree in Engineering in pursuit of understanding and developing such empirical models.

Here is an experiment I conducted during my studies. An elastic band, made of tangled and coiled polymer chains akin to strands of spaghetti, is hung on a hook with a weight attached at its bottom end at room temperature. Under such conditions, the band is stretched taut – the aforementioned polymer chains are artificially arranged in such a way that the tangles and coils begin to resemble strands laid next to each other: they become more 'ordered' than in their original form.



The peculiarity in this experiment emerges when heat is added to the setup. Commonly, it is believed that 'heat expands'; as energy is added in the form of heat to a system, molecules are excited into more intense vibrations against each other, causing a higher demand for intermolecular space. This is reflected in the expansion of the system in question; I certainly am a sufferer of swollen fingers come summer, and nothing loosens the stubborn dregs of a honeypot like a double boiler. However, when a candle is lit under our elastic band, subjecting its spaghetti strand chains to heat, we watch the bottom weight *slowly creep upward*. The addition of the unKnowable – entropy – Nature's inclination towards disorder and randomness, has overcome the expansive force of the candle, causing the polymer chains to return to their tangled and coiled form.

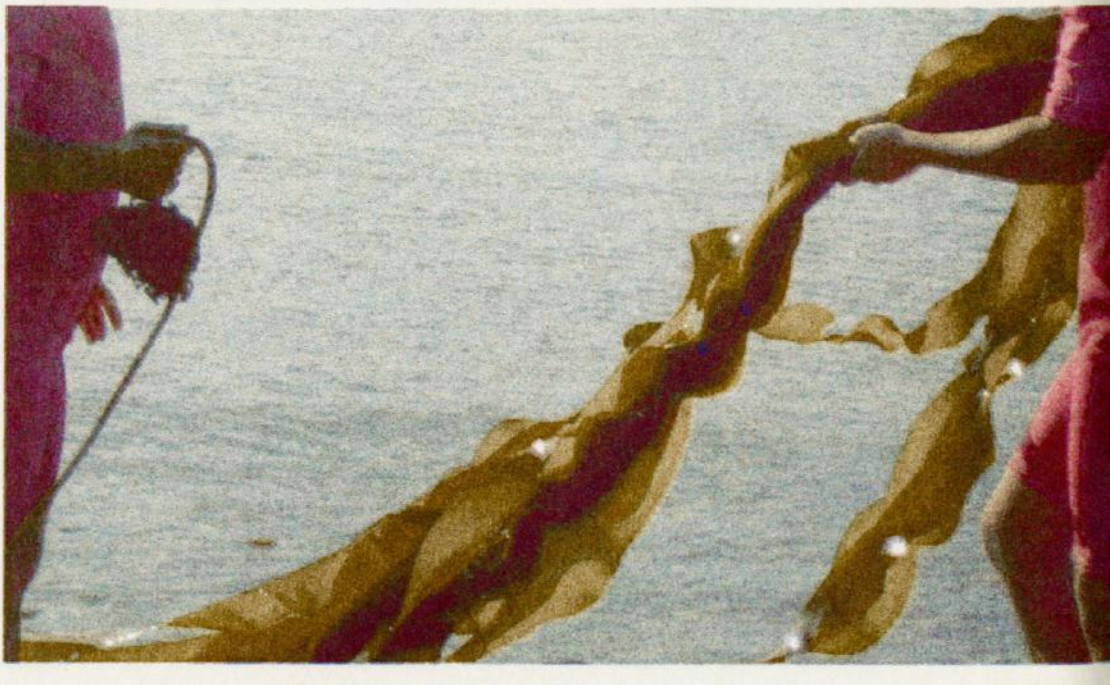


This experiment revealed to me the way empirical general principles often bind us within their limits – predictive models overcome in reality by the randomness of Nature. Each simplification, although its basis provides a useful assumptive principle to guide us, can easily erase some nuance, some detail, some other Way of Knowing. There is no blossoming in the comfort of status quo, there is no life in a vacuum: to coexist wholly and fully with our Earth is a lifelong negotiation with the unKnowable.

I return to the Raven and the First Sunrise with renewed insight towards the wisdom that lies in mythical models of universal phenomena – by acknowledging the potential presence of unexpected and metaphysical forces in its explanation, the story illustrates a representation of our Sun's rising that retains a reverence for the Nature with which we live alongside. In my experiment, Nature was introduced by entropy; in other examples, perhaps something else I cannot even begin to name.

However limited, quantifiable projections provide the basis of humanity's attempt to control Nature for material gain (if we can isolate for enough correlations and causations in a vacuum, we could minimize the unKnowable to a mere contingency). Since the Industrial Revolution, this has largely been the strategy taken by developers and entrepreneurs: to suppress our relationship with Nature so deeply that we reshape reality within the illusion of our control.

The climate crisis is her response.



A core memory: hands joined together by bull kelp fronds, glistening in the golden dusk. Little did I know that I had just met a lifelong (frond) friend. Photo from Lee family.

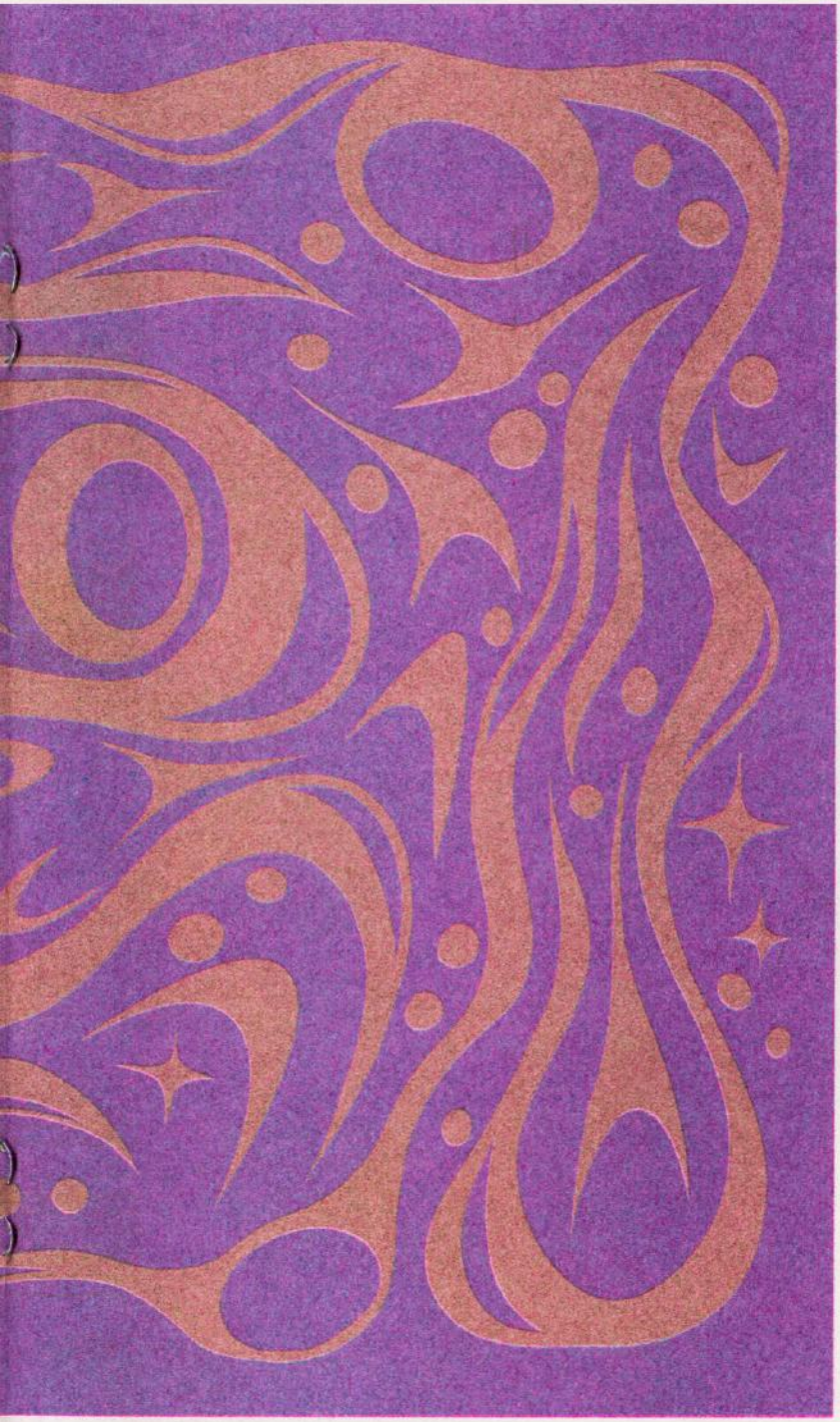
Dear intertidal minerals, algae, other beings - how many worlds do you hold?
How would you tell your story, if given the chance?
Do you think I could even understand?

In the next few years, Atelier Aloera attempts to examine a balance between the precision of what we can Know, and the nuance of what we may not. Through "False Creek": Community Connected by Water, we will be reflecting on environmental DNA results produced by Langara College (in collaboration with the Hakai Institute and the False Creek Friends Society) in an attempt to answer the question: can joint-led science and artistic participation build connection between False Creek and its surrounding people? Supported by seasonal observation, empirical measurement, and community conversation, we look to synergize our Ways of Knowing in pursuit of holistic, boundless understanding.

Sichen Grace Chen. *Where My Wishes Go*. oil and acrylic on canvas, 45" x 33". 2025.

There is no blossoming in the comfort of status quo, there is no life in a vacuum; to coexist wholly and fully with our Earth is a life-long negotiation with the unKnowable.

Jasmine Lee
Rising, Immutable



Sacred Micro-Beings

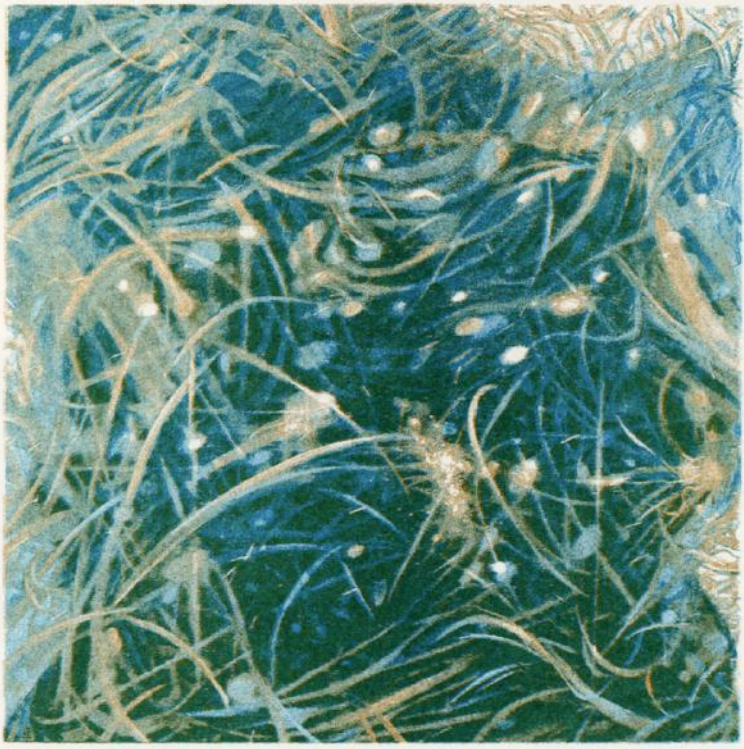
Grace Edwards

Digital Illustration, 2026.

What *is* in the water? Many beings thrive in water, mostly marine mammals and crustaceans, and sometimes myself. As I pondered the question further, I began questioning what else lives in the water. I then began imagining the microorganisms and how they might be seen through an Indigenous lens. Mixed with forms that flow freely and undulate around circular beings that propel through the space, I contemplate how art forms, such as formlines, can push the narrative that even the smallest beings are sacred and deserve protection.

By simply showing up, we add to a movement of collectivism: people that refuse to be passive.

Tyler Meng
One At A Time



Sichen Grace Chen. *U.S.B. (Unidentified Swimming Being)*, oil, wax pastel, acrylic, and watercolour on canvas, 48" x 48", 2025.

The Fish That Won't Give Up, and Neither Will We

Sam Peng

A herring swimming in between mussels. Photo by Fernando Lessa.

Imagine the glimmering waters of False Creek, sun rays shining down, and marine life thriving in the inlet. Before the waterway became an important transportation hub to Vancouver's coast, Pacific herring spawned so abundantly that the Squamish Nation named after the sound of the fish spawning on the beach.

In the late 1890s and in the 1900s, settlers in False Creek brought with them heavy industrialization. Construction, oil slicks, fuel spills, raw sewage contamination, and sound pollution followed. Past commercial fisheries took more fish from the tidal pocket than the herring could return in offspring. Lessons have been learned since, but by that time, the number of herring had plummeted. No longer can you hear the herring sparking new life every year under the March sun peeking through clouds.

While citizens of Vancouver bike the seawall and purchase tonight's seafood at the wharf, a rich ecosystem of underwater fauna goes about their daily lives, too. Despite the many reasons for the herring not to return, the fish refuse to give up their ancestral home. Their numbers dwindle, but their programming brings them back to False Creek.

And as the herring journey through the ocean to familiar waters, humans dream to see the waters run silver with spawning herring again. Partnering with the Squamish Streamkeeper, a volunteer biologist has spent over 15 years experimenting with ways to help the returning herring.

Doug Swanston is thought of by some as the 'herring whisperer,' though he admits he has no idea why they behave the way they do.

Since 2015, he's been wrapping dock pilings in nylon mesh panels that the fish preferred for spawning eggs. At its peak, the project drew 75 volunteers to monitor and clean spawning panels every three days, with real signs of success. In 2020, up to 150 panels were deployed, with 60-70% of them covered in eggs.

Until the herring stopped coming slowly as the years went by. On a brisk, cloudy day in March 2026, Doug and his team of UBC Earth and Ocean Sciences students pulled out their nets one last time to find no eggs anywhere.

"Where have they gone? I don't know what the answer is," Doug said, puzzled. Nobody knows exactly why the herring aren't returning in their historical numbers. Yet, he doesn't give up, believing in the resiliency of the aquatic world.

"I go underwater, I see things that blow my mind every day." Doug won't rest till he solves the mystery of the fickle fish. And the herring continue to travel homebound.

There's still a sparkle of hope in his eyes as he remarks on the creek's cleaner water, returning crabs, shrimps, and shellfish, and new construction by the city to create a habitable shoreline for marine life.

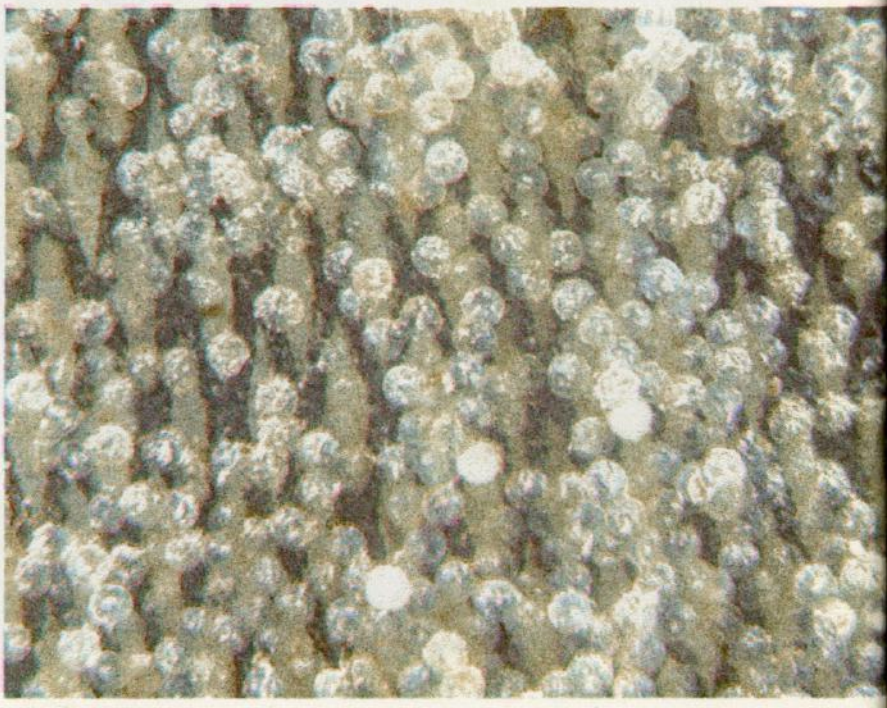
While Vancouver is bustling around the waters, underneath us, where our naked eyes cannot reach, the herring endure their annual pilgrimage as they have for hundreds of years. And in parallel, every year, Doug puts the panels back in the water because somewhere out in the tide's furthest grasp, there may be fish that hatched from this dock, old enough now to spawn, trying to find their way home.

A school of young herring. Photo by Fernando Lessa.

(Top) A young herring approaches a rock adorned with barnacles.

(Bottom) Herring roe on deployed nylon mesh panels.

Photos by Fernando Lessa.



One At A Time

Tyler Meng

The state of the world is too overwhelming. What can I even do about it?

My answer to this question had always been "nothing". My individual contribution felt moot, so clearly there was no need to examine society beyond myself. Besides, global issues require a bravery to take on the whole world at once. My strengths lie in mechanical intelligence and a capability of diagnosing a problem, which led me to choose engineering instead. Somehow, I still found my way to the community through Aloera.

"Kelp in Hand", a previous Aloera project, is a short and sweet card game about ocean reforestation and healthy kelp habitats, thematically built around real ecosystem phenomena. Invited for my diagnostic capabilities, I contributed to its development as a playtester — despite prioritizing its real world allegory, it was critical that the cards functioned as a game. While applying my mechanical mind to a simplified model of a climate problem, I discovered where my strengths could be applied to efforts in systemic change.

"Gamifying" structures requires defining boundaries; when those boundaries are clear, the shortcomings in our systems become highlighted. I couldn't help but apply this strategy to my work: I started gaining an awareness of how my industry, Manufacturing, contributes to pollution by operating within narrow boundaries that prioritize growth and profit, integral to every level of production. I could no longer watch myself participate within this system. I needed to change. My diagnostic mind now accompanies me in my next ambition of medicine — helping people, one at a time.

Kelp in Hand asks people inclined towards game theory and mechanics to apply critical thought to systemic forces in order to inspire awareness. Captured by the game, and with my newfound worldview, I now have an answer to what I can do. I am choosing to participate in more community initiatives, which often ask for nothing but an openness to learn.

By simply showing up, we add to a movement of collectivism:
people that refuse to be passive.

Photo by Samson Cheung

Wishing you well

Florence-Ariel Tremblay-F

Cardboard, metal mesh; tire, PVC pipe, metal rod, metal wire, traffic cone rubber base, plastic pull-tabs, packaging and tarp, receipts; wood glue and methyl cellulose adhesive, 36 x 35 in. 2025-2026.

Water fountains and wells recall a time before domestic aqueducts, when water was carried by bodies and gathered from local sources. The labor involved made it precious; collection sites became an everyday ritual and meeting places. Wells and fountains remain sites of hope and superstition; where coins and fragments are offered in exchange for better days.

Untitled (Four Amphorae)

Florence-Ariel Tremblay-F

Cardboard, metal mesh, staples; plastic spouts, rubber elastics; masking tape, glue stick, wood glue and methyl cellulose adhesive. Two 2-ft vessels; one 3-ft vessel. 2025-2026.

To Be a Climate Creative
(an agreement as defined by Aloera)

Please re-experience this zine and any other content as many times as you need to. Sign when you're ready, however you may define readiness.

Ancestral land(s) of your current location

Current weather

Current emotion/mood

Before completing this contract, please take a sip of water. Notice the temperature of the water as it touches your lips. Hold that water in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing. Visualize how it saturates your body, into every crease and through every vein.

I, _____, hereby promise to keep learning how to be a strong and mindful advocate in climate action.

I vow to unlearn harmful doctrines in exchange for ways of knowing that care for land, water, and air that are home to many past, current, and emerging bodies-human, non-human, and more-than-human. I look towards the future, reflect on the past, and hold the present weight of gratitude, reciprocal care, mutual responsibility, and accountability in my heart, spirit, and the everyday.

I commit to the life-long journey of being a good environmental relative, acknowledging that this experience will be imperfect, non-linear, working with and for the community, and full of serendipitous encounters, big and small.

Preferred name (print)

Today's Date

Signature

Contributors

In order of appearance

Jasmine Lee 1, 4-8, 10

Sichen Grace Chen 3, 9, 14

Grace Edwards 11-12

Tyler Meng 13, 18

Sam Peng 15-16

Fernando Lessa 15-18

Florence-Ariel Tremblay-F 19-20

Special Thanks to our Partners

Langara.

ʔəx̌ʷməθkʷəy̓əm | at Musqueam

FALSE CREEK FRIENDS

Hakai

Science on the Coastal Margin

Scan to view this issue in a digital format

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