

# Jack Larimore BONDING



ROWAN UNIVERSITY  
ART GALLERY & MUSEUM



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March 25 - June 15, 2024

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Jack Larimore embodies the spirit of a maker, which provokes contemplation on the significance of that designation. I find it most aptly characterizes him as a visionary thinker, shaping his creative pursuits. Materials serve as the catalyst for his intuitive and philosophical creative explorations, guiding his hands and infusing his work with themes and concepts inspired by their inherent qualities. Jack's creative muse draws from the nuanced interplay of nature, where he perceives patterns and processes that speak to resilience, adaptability, and interconnectedness. As I reflect on the works in *Bonding* I am struck by their visual allure and refined craftsmanship, prompting profound reflections on the narratives they convey.

The decision to extend an invitation to Jack for an exhibition at the Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum was motivated by his artistic methodology. Of particular interest is his thoughtful sourcing of materials, predominantly from his South Jersey farmstead and adjacent undeveloped environs, often juxtaposing organic elements with fabricated ones. It becomes evident that Jack's choice of materials and meticulous crafting techniques evoke the histories, mythologies, and narratives intrinsic to these rural surroundings.

In essence, *Bonding* isn't just a collection of artworks; it's a journey into the soul of a maker and his profound relationship with his process and the materials that fuel it.

I am deeply grateful for Jack's interest in participating in an exhibition, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to him and his team for their invaluable support in bringing this show to fruition.

**Mary Salvante**

Director and Chief Curator  
Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum

Am I one thing?

Not always.

There are those incongruities...

Interior incongruities.

Proud...Humble

Distant...Present

Satisfied...Longing

Powerful...Fragile

Doubtful...Certain

Thinking...Doing

Balancing am I... always



**Jack Larimore** grew up in the cherry orchard region of northeastern Michigan. He attended Michigan State University, earning a degree in Landscape Architecture in 1973. Since 1983, Larimore has been self employed as a sculptor and furniture maker. His work has been exhibited internationally and is included in major private and public collections. Additionally, he has served as a Professor in the Crafts Department at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, as an Advisory Board Member of The Furniture Society, as a Trustee for the Center for Art in Wood, and a Board member at Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center.

## BONDING

Isn't making, in its broadest sense, a balance between impulse, intuition, and instinct? For me, the act of making opens awareness much like meditation or a good hike, putting my mind in accord with my body and the environment. Making can attune us to a natural world.

When experiencing nature and her complex relationships, I am drawn to the positive bonds that coexist with the challenges of competition. To my eye, these bonds rely on synergy and shared advantage. We humans are prone to divisiveness. By breaking natural bonds and contriving differences some of us are recast as them. But we are naturally hardwired to bond so when divisive traumas like war, enslavement, partisanship, religion, etc. divide us, new bonds are then created and new communities evolve to nurture commonalities. Humanity is restored.

Much of our bonding is through making and maintaining—making babies, making dinner, making a home, a family, a school, a settlement. Making music and stories creates beautiful bonds. The works in this exhibition explore some of those stories—stories of bonds that defy the weight of divisiveness.

My practice is one of exploration. I am drawn to exploring the mediation between intuition and reason. Dualisms like this are a persistent part of our lives but what interests me in this construct is the mediation experience. Through the window of my studio work, I look for an understanding of the effect this mediation has on me.

As a naturalist, I observe a fluid and less binary world that encourages my intuitive side and presents a deeply satisfying feeling of completeness. Complete yet full of mysteries and complexities. Crispin Sartwell proposes that the shared sense of the beautiful is evidence of a longing for this sense of completeness, for the sublime. My studio work is a conduit for insights into this beauty and sublimity and I find the best results come through an organic process, an unscripted exchange between accretion and deletion.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity to exhibit at the Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum. The installation invites the pieces to be recontextualized. My experience of the work in the studio is so different from the experience of it together, in chorus within the gallery. The exploration continues.

- Jack Larimore, 2024

## Tree of Life

In the early 19th century, as industry began to turn grassy swaths of countryside into the grey density of soon-to-be cities, a vital issue arose: how to bury the dead. People had always laid their kin to rest underground, but in these new crowded spaces, urban graveyards were piled high. Land was limited and disease was rampant, so a new answer emerged. Carved out just beyond the city limits, acres of land became burial grounds, imagined with sweeps of trees that looked to the green of pastoral landscapes and the artistry of English gardens.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, the first garden cemetery was realized in 1831, the hilly retreat of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston. Laurel Hill in Philadelphia, Green-Wood in Brooklyn, and others sprouted in quick succession

For many, the grandeur of iron gates marked the threshold between the everyday world and the realm of repose. Gravestones were wrapped into an arboretum: sheltered by the burly trunks of Weeping Beech in winter and flooded with golden carpets of Ginkgo leaves in autumn. As visitors flocked to these sacred green spaces to picnic and promenade, the rural cemetery movement was born. In both literal and metaphorical terms, the people nourished the trees and the trees nourished people, a bond of science and spirit between them.

Jack Larimore's work is not about death, but rather the notion that life cannot be possible without lifecycles. Before he became an artist, Larimore was trained in landscape architecture—a field forged in that long shadow of the rural cemetery movement and its successor, the public park, with Frederick Law Olmsted as a founding figure. But for Larimore it was the environmental thinking of Ian McHarg's 1969 book *Design With Nature* that sparked his passion. McHarg believed design should be in harmony with the larger cycles of the biosphere, the earth, and, indeed, the universe. Ecology, McHarg argued, was the bridge between science, the arts, and humanity.<sup>3</sup> This powerful idea took hold for Larimore, and while landscape architecture fell away in favor of an artistic practice, the tree was left standing.

The massive trunk that became a part of *Sycamore Story* (pages 16-17) was already partially hollowed out when Larimore began to work with it. As he stood

inside carving, the rings that told the story of the tree's two hundred years as a living, breathing, growing thing became clear. Over the last three centuries, we have lost nearly one third of the earth's forests. In fact, in the last one hundred years, the rate of woodland destruction is nearly equal to the collective loss of the previous nine thousand years—a dizzying statistic.<sup>4</sup> At *Sycamore Story's* threshold, curved stacks of cypress darkened with pine tar form a simple, elliptical boat shape. Inside, it suggests three passengers, their spindly branches of belongings peeking over the top. This wooden vessel has no clear front, nor back. Is the hulking Sycamore enclosure a hopeful port of refuge or a dead zone to leave behind?

Pioneering ecologist Suzanne Simard discovered that in the Canadian forests of Douglas Firs, the trees are not only singular, separate beings but, in fact, an interconnected community.<sup>5</sup> Young and old—even different tree species—can signal one another using neurotransmitters similar to our own. These forest networks can warn each other of danger, they can ask for nourishment or help. In other words, they communicate with one another. The oldest and the largest in the forest are what Simard has called *Mother Trees*, the locus of connection in these systems of kinship. Mother Trees are the care workers of the forest, the anchors who keep watch above ground and below it, listening, receiving, and responding.

*Seven...each a witness* (pages 18-19) speaks to the same kind of shared intelligence Simard discovered. Standing guard, the interior of these seven beings are made from Linden branches turned upside down and resembling both plant roots and the human nervous system. In lore, it is said that you cannot tell a lie under a Linden tree, turning these seven watchers—witnesses—into truth seekers. With their heart-shaped leaves, the Linden tree also symbolizes love. Like the Mother Tree who is able to send extra sustenance to her seedlings in the forest, these beings stand at attention, ready to serve.

As Larimore knows, seven is a powerful number in the natural world: seven continents, seven colors of the rainbow, the seven days for each phase of the moon. Thus, these seven witnesses surround *FEMININA* (pages 20-23), alight in her ethereal glow. Yet, rather than anchored like a tree, *FEMININA* rises like vapor. A

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey  
locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and  
daily.

- Mary Oliver, *When I am Among The Trees*<sup>1</sup>

scaffold made from cedar creates a boundary around her. Is it protection or confinement? She pays no mind to this question. Like the moon, she simply and slowly turns towards the light, moving beyond the bounds of her physical self—a reminder that she cannot be contained.

The ongoing cycles of the human world are of concern to Larimore as well. The bonds of daily life are bound up in the spheres that ground *Humility* (pages 10-11). Instead of roots, these ladder forms are grounded with soft masses made from the very real stuff of life: bedsheets. Sought out from second hand shops, Larimore has fused them into felt-like orbs merging their domestic histories into a collective. Like the affective labor that changed and washed and folded and made these beds again and again, these objects wear their years of service. Ongoing cycles of rest, toil, and care are embedded within them. At ten feet tall, each of *Humility's* salvaged wood frameworks move beyond human-scale. As a result, they reach up towards those Mother Trees while keeping humanity in mind just below.

In addition to the pieces in *Bonding*, Larimore is also at work beyond the gallery walls at Rowan University. Perhaps a return to his roots in landscape architecture and the search for nature's balance that first sparked his passion, Larimore is working alongside ceramic artist Syd Carpenter on *Batsto Homestead*, a land-based installation that honors the overlooked history of iron and ceramics production, and the great Pine Barrens that made them possible. Put another way, the piece examines a cycle of exchange where the forest fuels the people. Carpenter and Larimore will reclaim this story, filling their work with living plants, shelter, and artifacts of their making, a living interpretation of a forgotten history, a reminder Larimore says, "of the necessity to tread lightly on this persistent but delicate landscape."<sup>6</sup> The Mother Trees and visitors to those first garden cemeteries might have said the same.

What poet and writer Hermann Hesse describes, Larimore already knows: "Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life."<sup>7</sup>

- Elizabeth Essner, 2024



**Elizabeth Essner** is the inaugural Windgate Foundation Associate Curator of Craft at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where she oversees the Museum's modern and contemporary craft collection. Prior to joining the MFAH in 2022, Elizabeth was a New York-based independent curator, organizing exhibitions on craft for national institutions. Elizabeth is a frequent lecturer and contributor to journals and exhibition catalogues. She holds an M.A. in Design History from the Bard Graduate Center in New York.

<sup>1</sup> Mary Oliver, "When I Am Among the Trees," *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see Jeffrey Smith, *The Rural Cemetery Movement: Places of Paradox in Nineteenth Century America* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See Ian McHarg, *Design With Nature* (Philadelphia: The Falcon Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Jill Lepore, "What We Owe Our Trees," *The New Yorker*, May 29, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> See Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* (New York: Knopf, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Jack Larimore, unpublished description of *Batsto Homestead*, October 17, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Wandering: Notes and Sketches* translated by James White, (London: Picador Books, 1975), 54.





### *Humility*

My routines provide me with an emotional foundation and a connection to others. In a way, their cadence can be comforting. These rhythmic practices are not unique, they look a lot like everyone else's. The most commonly practiced routines involve caretaking, domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, laundry, upkeep, etc. They are filled with moments where the body and mind can be in unison, undistracted.

Faced with the relentless demands of external life, caretaking can moor us to our humanity and can lead us to embrace humility. This shared practice of care can bring contentment and enrich life.

David Brooks has much to say about humility and how essential it is to personal fulfillment and balanced community.

"Humility is not thinking lowly of yourself; it's an accurate perception of yourself. It is the ability to cast aside illusions and vanities and see life as it really is."

—David Brooks 11/2/23

The strongest bonds I experience rely on care.

2024

35' X 3' X 10' h

salvaged wood parts, cotton







*Hand*

A hand pulled the boll  
made the music  
assembled the parts  
lifted the fallen  
made the mark  
prepared the food  
expressed joy  
endured pain  
restored life  
gave comfort

Whose hand.....ours

2024

48" X 36" X 48" h

redwood, bronze, cotton





*TRIAL*

Imposing judgement requires authority.  
We, not as individuals but as community,  
ask to be judged—we delegate judgement  
and require absolutes—right/wrong—  
yes/no—good/bad.

It is abstract.

When I think back on the trials in my life,  
the most valuable of them were self-  
imposed challenges. These experiences  
affected growth without judgement.

Binary systems are limiting.

2021  
48" x 28" x 78" h  
cedar, steel





### *Sycamore Story*

"So many questions remain unanswered. Perhaps we are poorer for having lost a possible explanation or richer for having gained a mystery. But aren't both possibilities equally intriguing?"

—Peter Wohlleben,  
*The Hidden Life of Trees*

This Sycamore may have been planted in the 19th century. From its rooted home, across the road from our home, it has witnessed a lot. I do not get to know it's long story—but I am fortunate to be a small part of it.

This magnificent perennial lives on...  
de vita cycle platanus occidentalis

2021

68" x 67" x 40" h

sycamore, cypress, pine tar, bronze





*Seven...each a witness*

I am aware of beauty and ugliness every day.  
Much of what I witness is beyond my reach,  
and yet I am drawn to the experience—  
I am affected by it—guided by it.

As individuals we bear witness individually.  
Does our shared experience as witnesses  
inform our ethos?

Our truth?

Our humanity?

I stand with these Seven and seek  
enlightenment.

2021

38" x 38" x 108" h ea.

steel, bronze, linden branch





### *FEMINA*

mother

maiden

queen

huntress

sage

mystic

lover

### SHE TRANSENDS

When I started thinking about this piece, I wasn't at all certain what it was about. It seemed at the time like it was going to be about abasement. The experience of making has expanded me—I now think of this piece as a shrine that I am honored to share.

2021

120" x 120" x 108" h

cedar, steel, cotton voile, stones, lighting





METABOLIZE  
INTENTIONS VS GOAL  
GENERATIVE PRACTICE  
DEFINITE HUMANISM  
WARM PASSION

MASSIVE  
PRESSURE  
IN ROUTINE

FROM THE CAVE



Precious  
Simon  
Ekeoyomon  
LEIGHT

WHY IS MORE PEOPLE WANT

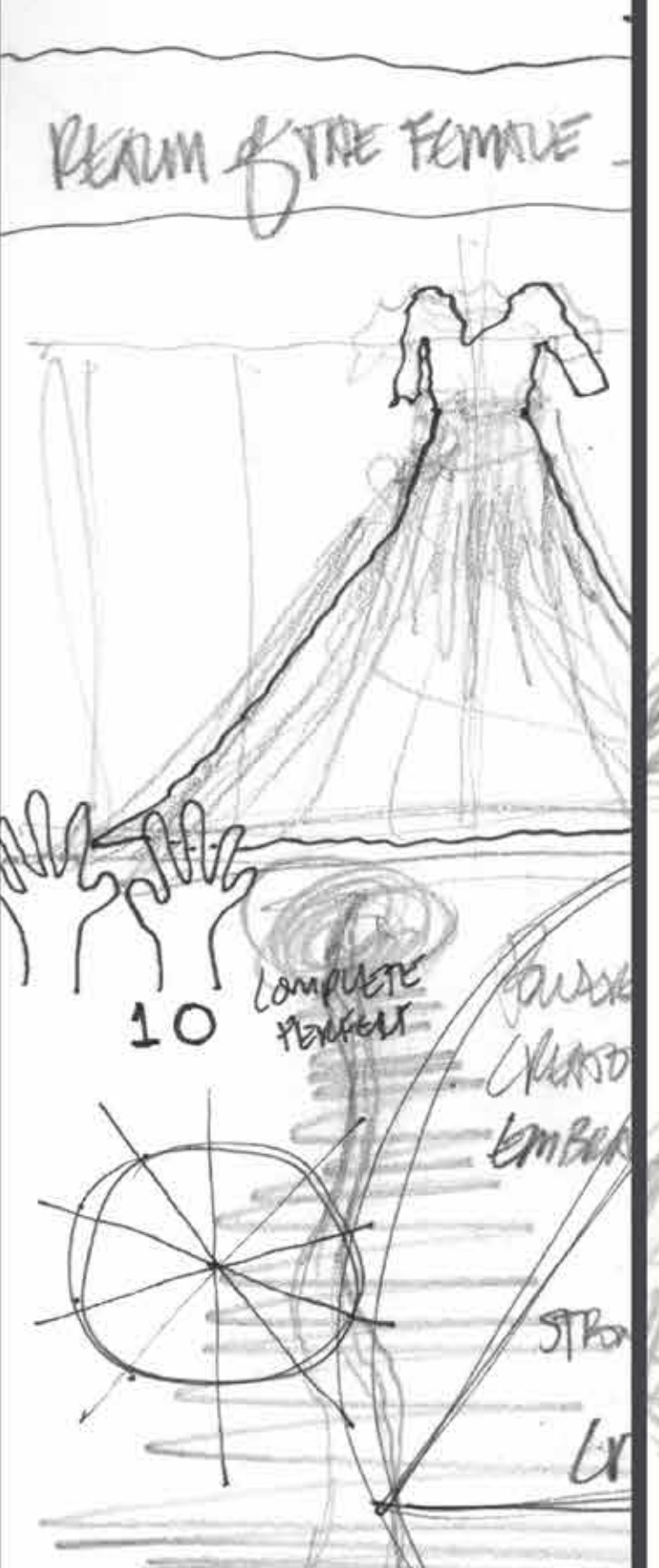


ARE SEVEN  
changes - Michael  
Raphael  
Gabriel  
Uriel  
Saraqael  
Raguel  
Remiel

Monday  
Tuesday  
Wednesday  
Thursday  
Friday  
Saturday  
Sunday

Andles Menorah  
aliyahs - Torah

happens



PEAK OF THE FEMALE

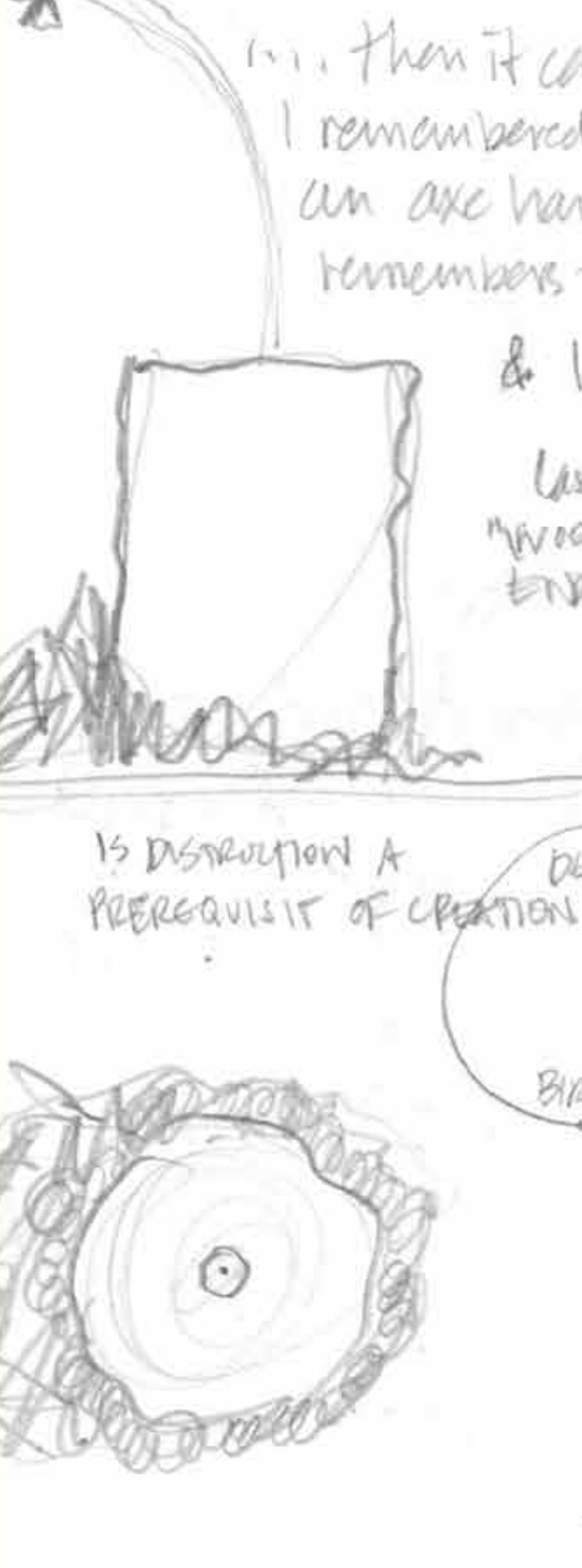
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COMPLETE  
PERFECT

WOOD  
EMBER

STB

UP



IS DESTRUCTION A  
PREREQUISITE OF CREATION

... then if  
I remembered  
an axe had  
remembered

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BIR

## Acknowledgements

Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum is honored to present this exhibition and we greatly appreciate the assistance of Jack Larimore on the selection of the work and exhibition layout design. Special thanks to Elizabeth Essner for the thoughtful and inspiring catalog essay.

Additional thanks go to our Gallery Coordinator Kristin Qualls, our art installer Tyler Kline, and our student assistants Isabella Cristinziani, Andrea Gonzalez Gomez, Rachel Hanan, Leila Hewitt, Reid Higgins, and Jaylah Ross for their support. Also, thanks to Tara Porch, our graduate intern for her help with exhibition program development and to Keith Ragone for his catalog design consultation.

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### *Photography courtesy of:*

Jack Ramsdale, art works and gallery views except

Kristin Qualls, pages 10 and 12

Myles Pettengill, front and back covers

Jack Larimore head shot and working in studio courtesy Jack Larimore

Elizabeth Essner head shot courtesy of Elizabeth Essner

### *Catalog Design:*

Kristin Qualls, adapted from a Keith Ragone Studio design

## ROWAN UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

A Museum Destination for Contemporary Art

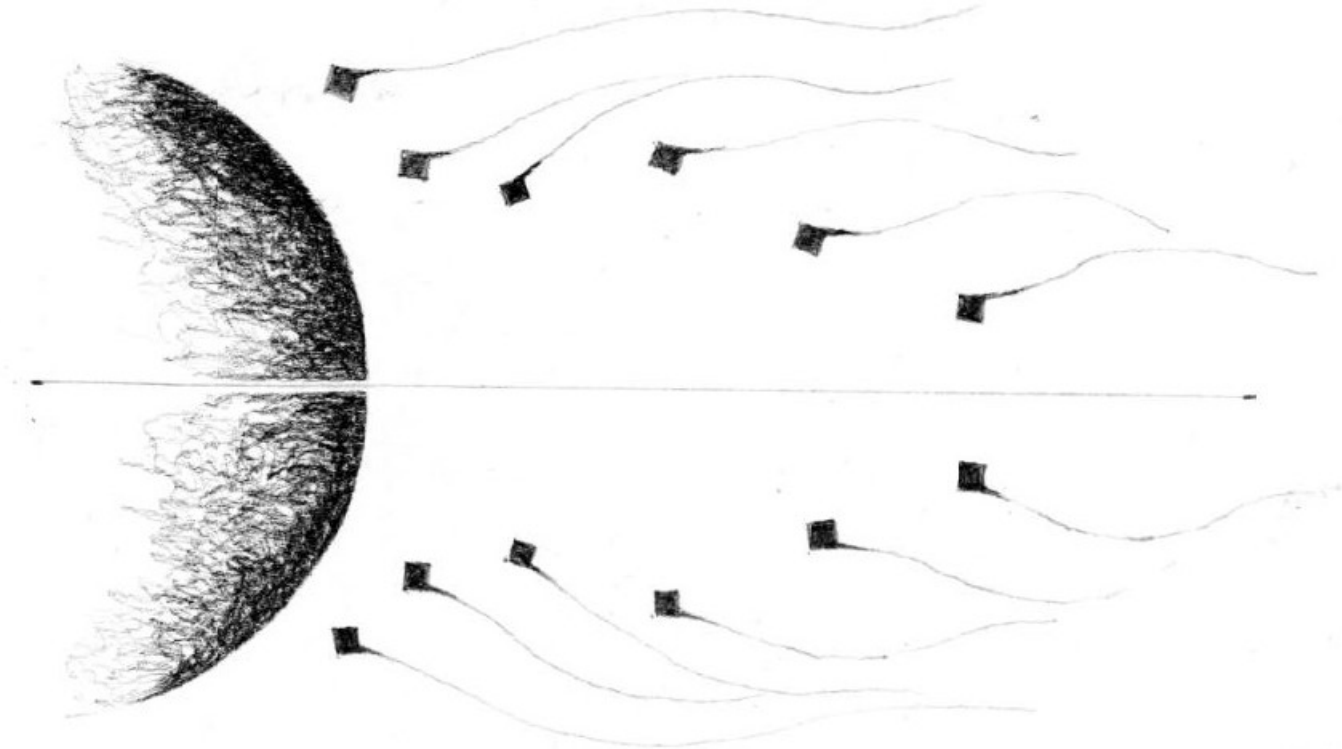
Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum serves as a vibrant cultural destination for South Jersey, the Rowan community, and surrounding region. We are committed to cultivating an accessible and just environment that encourages dialogue and collaboration between exhibiting artists, students, faculty, and the general public through the presentation of interdisciplinary art exhibitions, artist talks and other public programming. Our mission is to present diverse forms of contemporary art by professional artists with content that is thought provoking, relevant, and timely. With our exhibitions and programming, we seek to engender curiosity and a passion for contemporary art, enrich the quality of life for area residents, and create a welcoming and inclusive cultural destination at Rowan University.



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ROWAN UNIVERSITY  
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Jan 24





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