

BREATHING IN BREATHING OUT



Karina Bergmans | Vladimir Kanic

October 30 to December 12, 2026



Above: Vladimir Kanic, *Everything Broken Can Be Fixed (With a Needle and Thread) IV*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist.

Front Cover: (Top) Vladimir Kanic, *Book of Waves Pt. 200,* 2023. Courtesy of the artist. (Bottom) Karina Bergmans, *Pollen* (detail), 2016-2021. Courtesy of the artist.

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With every breath, our lungs draw in more than 10 sextillion molecules (that is, 10, 000,000,000,000,000,000,000) from the air around us. At least one of those molecules was exhaled by Albert Einstein, Leonardo Da Vinci, or Marie Curie. Though oxygen is what the body craves, with every breath a little bit of the world enters our lungs, connecting us, inextricably, to every other living and non-living thing and to the history of the entire planet. As ethnobotanist Wade Davis points out, the air we breathe is part of an interconnected planetary exchange.

This interconnectedness is explored in *Breathing In, Breathing Out* through the work of two artists: Ottawa-based interdisciplinary artist, Karina Bergmans and Croatian Canadian transdisciplinary artist, Vladimir Kanic. Kanic's experimental practice straddles art and science and involves collaborating with living algae to generate the organic biopolymers he uses as a sustainable sculptural material. Bergmans' inflatable cells and soft sculptures consider the human relationship with airborne allergens, moulds, and viruses through the lens of psychology. Through her use of soft, approachable materials and light, Bergmans' sculptures transform airborne sources of illness and anxiety into objects of wonder and delight.

Enacting the concept of *Sympoiesis*, which describes how no single thing exists in a vacuum, every viewer's presence becomes an active ingredient in the exhibition with every breath they take. As Bergmans' giant sculptural cells inflate and deflate, they circulate the air in the gallery. In this way the viewers and Bergmans' sculptures become collaborators, helping to grow and shape the formations of the biomass secreted by the algae in Kanic's *Living Sculptures*, which will then take on a new life as the material for his future sculptures. Through the process, the algae removes toxins from the air and produces oxygen, providing cleaner air for viewers to inhale in a collaborative life-sustaining and art-producing cycle.

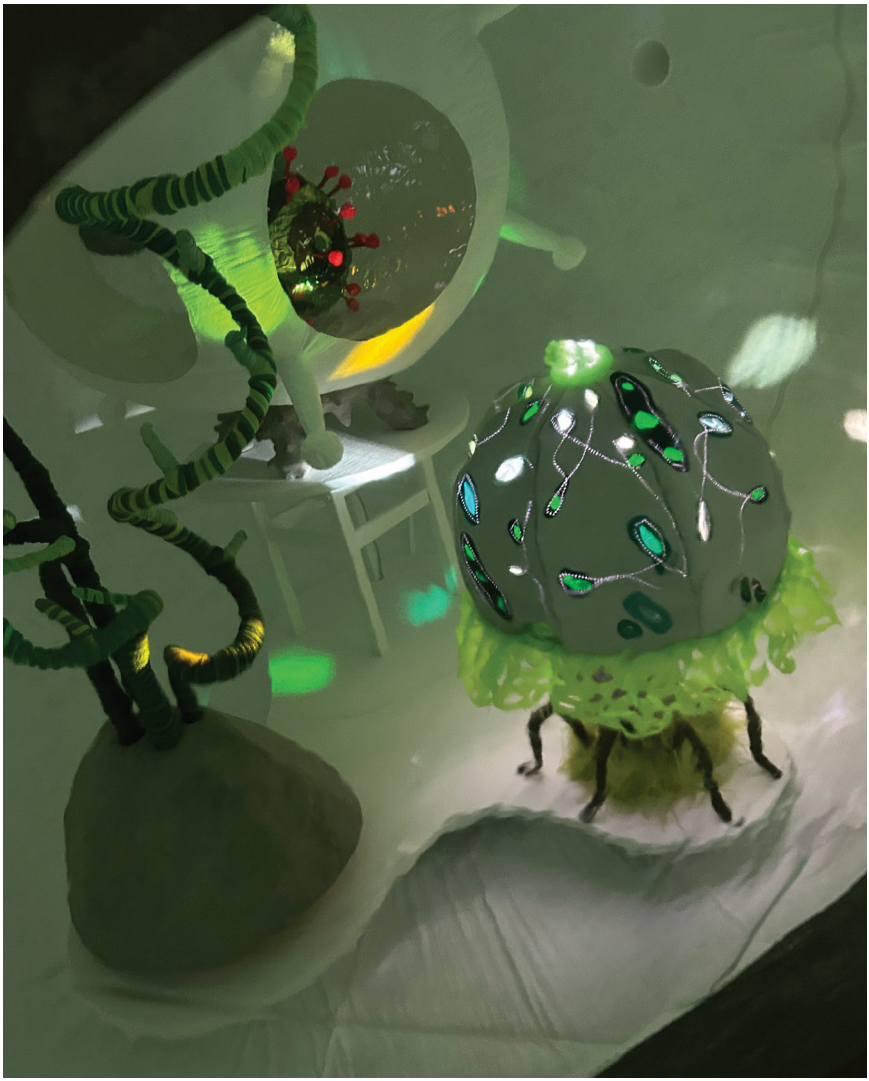
Kanic began exploring the possibilities of creating a sculptural material out of algae during the Covid 19 pandemic. Without access to his usual studio materials, he started experimenting with leftover seaweed salad from his fridge to see what would happen if he let it grow. Months later his bathroom had become a laboratory filled with a substance that looked like a combination of paper and glass (the dried secretions of algae). Algae, similar to those growing in his lab, have inhabited the oceans for billions of years and are one of the largest carbon sinks on the planet. Because the material being produced in his lab also absorbs greenhouse gases, Kanic understood that his experiments could produce a carbon-neutral art making material. He realized that this material could answer the question of how to be an artist without contributing to the climate crisis.

From these early experiments, Kanic began learning how to use the natural drying process of the materials to guide the creation of sculptural forms. He considers the process collaborative, as he responds to the shapes that are created by the material. He began experimenting with incorporating light into the pieces in response to the material's translucent properties. Light is also an essential ingredient to photosynthesis—the process of transforming carbon dioxide and water into food, in the form of glucose, and oxygen. Kanic harvests the material derived from this process and incorporates it into his *Living Sculptures* and *Photosynthetic Murals*.

Kanic's experimental video installation, *SOL*, includes footage taken during his time free diving in Croatia's Adriatic Sea. This work recalls the seaside culture that informed Kanic's interest in aquatic ecosystems while also acting as a tribute to his Croatian heritage. The apple imagery throughout the video is derived from a Croatian custom of offering apples to water at the end of each year to bring good health and fortune. In Kanic's adaptation of this custom, the apples become an offering for safe passage into the non-human world portrayed in the piece. To free dive, one must learn the art of holding one's breath underwater for extended periods. This practice attunes free divers to their environment and to the importance of breath control while they explore the underwater world.

The cellular structures that shape Kanic's sculptures are echoed in Karina Bergmans' spherical, biomorphic forms, and like Kanic's work, Bermans' sculptures are also derived from an interest in the intersections of the human and non-human. The microscopic organisms depicted in her work are created with entirely different processes and materials. They combine Bergmans' fascination with materials and tactile experience with her interest in how the body encounters and responds to the outside world. Since 2008 Bergmans has been creating blown up versions of microscopic organisms using textiles. Her early renderings of fear-inducing viruses, allergens, and moulds were created using soft materials that are commonly associated with comfort and coziness. Instead of spreading fear, Bergmans is interested in interrogating and defusing

the heightened emotional, and sometimes irrational, responses that disease can provoke.



Karina Bergmans, *Virus* (detail), 2016-2021. Courtesy of the artist.





Installation view of *Breathing In, Breathing Out* | Karina Bergmans and Vladimir Kanic.



Karina Bergmans, *Pollen* (detail), 2016-2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Bergmans' sculptures of allergens, moulds, and viruses reflect the magnification of internalized anxieties around airborne illnesses that can happen during disease outbreaks. But through her use of soft textiles, she attempts to make these threats approachable. The playful combination of found objects and familiar materials in Bergmans' work invites curiosity, joy, and wonder.

Bergman's three inflatable cells in *Breathing In, Breathing Out* are made from Tyvek with sewn-in, clear vinyl windows. The cells inflate and deflate like breathing lungs, adding to their uncanniness. Through the vinyl windows, viewers can peer into Bergmans' interior worlds populated by fantastical microorganisms, contained as if in hazmat bubbles. The combination of materials, alien-looking forms, and coloured light creates a surreal, dreamlike space, like something out of science fiction. The relationship between the interior and exterior is activated by Bergmans' inventive compositions, inviting viewers to consider what is happening within their own bodies. Medical practitioners use scopes, scans, ultrasounds, and X-rays to visualize diseases that lurk beneath the skin. The windows in Bergmans' sculptures function in a similar way, echoing the scientific standards of objective observation and control, and inviting curiosity while maintaining boundaries.

Like Kanic, Bergmans is also actively engaged in maintaining a more sustainable art practice. Her sculptures integrate an

assortment of found and repurposed materials, including umbrellas, barbeque rotisseries, feathers, and a range of used fabrics, giving new life to materials that might otherwise end up in landfills. The inflatable aspect of her work also makes her sculptures lighter and much easier to transport than traditionally fabricated artworks—significantly reducing the carbon footprint of her practice.

In 2003, physicist Karen Barad developed their theory of *intra-action*, which proposes that, because of the intricate ways that every being is entirely dependent on the organisms and environments in and around it (and vice versa), the existence of an "independent being" becomes less of a certainty and more of an open question. For example, within our bodies are microbiomes, full of tiny organisms on which we depend to remain healthy and alive. On that microscopic level, the closer we look at our porous biology and that of the world around us the more difficult it becomes to distinguish where a person's body ends and where the world around them begins.

Art and science are two disciplines that thrive on asking new questions about what it means to be human and to better understand how the universe operates. Vladimir Kanic's and Karina Bergmans' art practices engage in innovative ways to think about science and life. Together, their unique approaches to artmaking illuminate the complex biological, ecological, and psychological relationships that are activated with every breath.



Vladimir Kanic, *Book of Waves Pt. 100*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Photo by Selina McCallum

Vladimir Kanic is a transmedia artist whose living algae installations transform spectators' breath into oxygen, creating participatory ecosystems that embody the possibilities of interspecies collaboration.

Informed by his maritime heritage and ocean freediving experience, Kanic's practice uses breath as both material and method for creating art, accessing cultural, ancestral and geological memories embedded within algae — Earth's principal carbon sinks, responsible for producing approximately half of planetary oxygen.

Kanic's work envisions a symbiotic future where living artworks serve as both ecological interventions and world-building frameworks for community resilience and repair.

Recipient of two Governor General's Academic Medals, Kanic holds a Master of Fine Arts from York University and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from OCAD University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in (Bio)Digital Media at York University. He is also an award-winning filmmaker and an alum of the Locarno Film Academy and Berlinale Talents.



Photo by James Fowler

Karina Bergmans is inspired by the intersection between art and science. By converging the themes of communication and the body, she creates cross disciplinary installations merging art and science. Themes in her work are based on our collective experiences of language, communication, text and play. Bergmans works in sculpture, installation, performance, public art and public interventions. Exhibitions include *YAYHAY!* at CAFKA.21 (Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area), 2021, *Ligaments and Ligatures* at Estevan Art Gallery and Museum, Estevan SK, 2020, Ottawa's City Hall Art Gallery (2013) and Edmonton's Harcourt House (2013), *Airborne Allergens/Allergènes Aéroportés* at Art-Image in Gatineau (2016).

Bergmans' work has been exhibited at the Ontario Science Centre, Toronto (2014), Art Al Vent XI, Spain (2014), Fieldwork (Fall 2011-Spring 2012), the Mississippi Mills Textile Museum (2010), Stride Gallery +15 Window Space (2010), Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles (2009), the Dumbo Arts Festival (2009) and the Toronto Alternative Fashion Show (2006, 2007). Karina has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre (2011) and Moon Rain Textile Bienniel, Val-des-Monts, QC, (2013). She has received grants from the Canada Council for the arts, Ontario Arts Council and the City of Ottawa. Bergmans' work has been featured in Galleries West Magazine, the Estevan Mercury, the Canadian Medical Association Journal, and Ottawa Magazine Art of Fashion issue. Karina resides in Ottawa, Ontario.

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