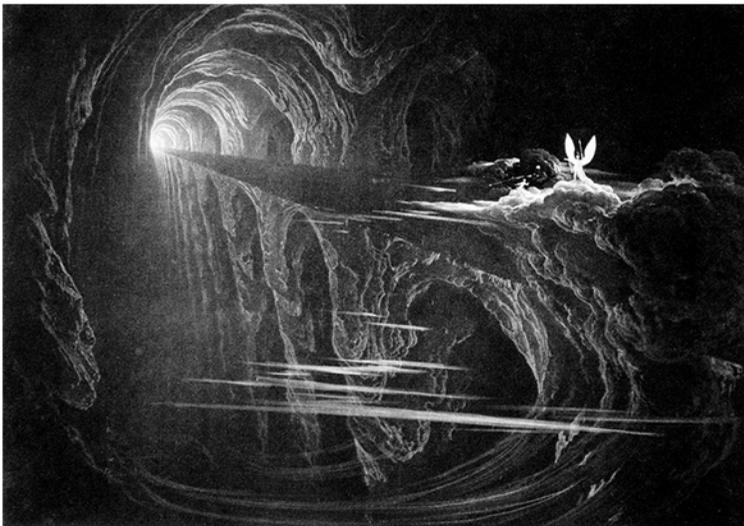


Of Several Depths



April 14th - May 10th

Curated by Miles Rufelds



"The Preparations and Instruments are these. We have large and deep caves of several depths: the deepest are sunk six hundred fathom: and some of them are digged and made under great hills and mountains: so that if you reckon together the depth of the hill and the depth of the cave, they are (some of them) above three miles deep. For we find, that the depth of a hill, and the depth of a cave from the flat, is the same thing; both remote alike, from the sun and heaven's beams, and from the open air. These caves we call the Lower Region; and we use them for all coagulations, indurations, refrigerations, and conservations of bodies. We use them likewise for the imitation of natural mines; and the producing also of new artificial metals, by compositions and materials which we use, and lay there for many years. We use them also sometimes, (which may seem strange,) for curing of some diseases, and for prolongation of life in some hermits that choose to live there, well accommodated of all things necessary, and indeed live very long; by whom also we learn many things.

- The New Atlantis,
Francis Bacon, 1626

RECOILING FROM THE SUN

We have high towers; the highest about half a mile in height; and some of them likewise set upon high mountains; so that the vantage of the hill with the tower is in the highest of them three miles at least. And these places we call the Upper Region; accounting the air between the high places and the low, as a Middle Region. We use these towers, according to their several heights, and situations, for insolation, refrigeration, conservation; and for the view of divers meteors; as winds, rain, snow, hail; and some of the fiery meteors also. And upon them, in some places, are dwellings of hermits, whom we visit sometimes, and instruct what to observe."

The numbers appear to even out if you adjust for mountains and hills, but we know very well that there's still no flat equation between 3 miles up and 3 miles down. Below 0-level, on the bottom end of the threshold, in space marked "subterranean", something changes that escapes calculation. A logical positivist framework might try to smooth it over, conceive of it according to equal distances from the surface, but it's actually about distances from the Sun.

I was surprised to find Francis Bacon—one of the Enlightenment's intellectual power brokers responsible for synthesizing older alchemical traditions into an "enlightened" empirico-rationalism—observe the unique singularity of subterranean space quite clearly in his 17th-century utopian treatise, *The New Atlantis*.

In the story's concluding section, the shipwrecked visitors to New Atlantis finally get to meet representatives from the "House of Solomon," the hegemonic sect of proto-industrial scientists who rule over the central island. Speaking through these technocratic elites, expounding the marvels of their (his) scientific utopia, Bacon breaks off on a curious tangent, describing the island's many caves and towers, and distinguishing between the "hermits" who live in each of them.

When residing above ground, in towers, close to the sun, we learn, hermits serve essentially as functionaries for the elite, gathering weather data, reporting on astronomical phenomena, presumably watching the seas, scouting for advancing armies. Those hermits that live in the “Lower Regions,” on the other hand, are sources of coveted wisdom, indexes of the almost supernatural: they oversee the synthesis of “artificial metals” and live for unusually long periods, both subjects that captivated alchemists in Bacon’s time.

Caves, mines, and subterranean spaces have long been at the centre of experimental thought, across ages and across continents. And though always a site of challenge and refinement for scientists and industrialists of every stripe, the underground has also paradoxically doubled as a bulwark against any totalizing rationalism. Philosopher Esther Leslie writes of “the double-sidedness of the mine, as a site of industry and a spur to fantasy”; unmapped or unmappable, the subterranean passage exists as “a place where industry mingles with desire,” defined more by projection and speculation than by reasoned industriousness. Darkened, winding, closed-off, these spaces serve as repositories of vague and occulted feelings—intrigue, secrecy, fear, desire, fantasy—as well as occulted beings, from rare and horrific monsters to actual spirits and demons. Cut off from the Sun both literally and allegorically, separated from the light which Plato equated with knowledge and wisdom, the subterranean stands both as the laboratory’s repressed inversion and its direct extension. The underground reverberates with an undying echo of magical thinking, haunting secular materialism while serving as its most promising frontier. Passages into the earth beckon equally as sources of shelter and black site prisons; mushroom sanctuaries and feedstocks of exploitable minerals; lively ecosystems and fossilized sediment; centres of necessary infrastructure and the sites of destructive conspiracy; burial chambers and torture chambers; troves of undiscovered nature and interfaces with the supernatural. Spreading out across this divided spectrum, the works and projects in *Of Several Depths* palpate these subterranean phenomena: things below ground that don’t stay there, and the spiraling fantasies that are projected back down.

Ensnared in the sunny light of reason, surveying an uninterrupted horizon, lit without shadow, in Bacon’s story the House of Solomon still looks to the caves. Contravening Plato’s allegory yet again, these technocrats understand very well that deep below the sunny Enlightened surface, just as much is produced in the dark. Significantly, the pit dwellers are presented as teachers. And it’s in this sense that these passages actually reveal something more subtle and fraught and endemic. To a political order that draws power from technological and scientific knowledge, there can be no learning that doesn’t serve a political end; in a technocratic system all information is mobilized, squeezed as a metric of efficiency, put to work to deepen control – perfectly in keeping with Bacon’s early “scientific method,” which famously compared the collection of data to obtaining nature’s tortured confessions. Foil to an overly rational surface, the underground’s murky, generative depths become irresistible, are plumbed ever-more—who knows what they might yield next?—and skulk as an inverted Lodestar to the technocrat’s extractive ontology.

Breaking from The New Atlantis as a narrative analogy, we know that as it practically concerns the mobilization of power, there's considerably more to extract from below ground than occulted knowledge. Owing no small debt to Bacon's thought and work, the exhumation of underground space accelerated violently during the Industrial Revolution, overseen by an ever-expanding House of real-life technocrats, wielding power in excess of any 17th-century utopian dream. The imbricated projects of industrialism, imperialism, and capitalism have always paired a world bestriding program of exploitation with a spiraling dialectic of extraction – mines and pits descended across the world, plumbing coal, iron, copper, silver, zinc, gold, and every available rock and mineral; built from and powered by these same extracted goods, networks of canals and railways snaked across the planet, blasting through mountains and boring below the earth in turn. These industrial and imperial projects regularly comprised the most violent and deadly kinds of work available, powered by a surfeit of cheap, desperate labour, and devalued life. These projects' brutality peaked when the labour and life in question was under colonial rule, such as the digging of 28 trail tunnels through India's Bhor Ghat mountains, during which British formen effectively killed as many as 25,000 workers. The examples multiply no matter the nation or continent, and even in imperial centres, into the 1970s, the cost of tunnels included a calculation of deaths per mile.

Spawned by brutal systems of abstract capital, drilled or dug or tunneled as direct conduits to the surface, imperialism's underground "sacrifice zones" are often still marked by that incalculable subterranean affect. Occult connections proliferate across industrial ruins, the elemental strangeness of underground space amplified by capital's horrors, made malignant. 19th century steamboat tunnels across England regularly saw crews and passengers suffocated by fumes, burnt, or drowned, and local legends of haunted tunnels proliferated quickly, still circulating with names like "Kit Crewbucker" or the "Harecastle Horror." Mines in the Donbass region of Ukraine and Russia are said to be haunted by an ambivalent spirit called Shubin, clad in a long fur coat, who alternately guides lost miners or triggers collapses; German folkloric figures like Kobolds, who reside in mines and obsess over jewels and gems, prefigure a recurring trope of haunted mines in Romantic poetry and literature. In Bolivia, a long-operating silver mine is famously inhabited by a powerful spirit known as "El Tío," or "The Uncle." For decades, workers have built statues of El Tío throughout the mine, with which they regularly consort, offering tributes and sacrifices in exchange for a promise of safety. Occasionally, this stubborn occult presence doesn't appear as a "being" at all. Plagued with accidents while building a 6-mile tunnel through the Rocky Mountains in 1925, contractors reported how "every device of mechanical ingenuity, every time-saving expedient, was promptly overmatched by an intelligent and malignant force within... the mountain." Political theorists even coined the term "resource curse" to describe the tendency for nations "rich" in a particularly sought-after material (specifically Indigenous territories and countries throughout the Global South) to be invaded by wealthy imperial powers—the dynamics of imperial extractivism so ungraspable as to become a "curse," cast in the language of occult horror.



EXHUMATIONS

Parallel to legend and folklore, artists have been thinking through this novel affect—the violence of an extraction-obsessed industrial order refracted through an ancient, elemental subterranean mysticism—for centuries. As coal mines, iron plants, factories, and railroads began chewing up British landscapes in the early 19th century, the violence was immediately processed in now-famous works of painting and literature. John Martin grew up around the Newcastle coal fields, witnessed the mine’s everyday disasters, remained fascinated by them, designed mechanisms for their function and safety. The grandiose scenes that made Martin one of England’s most adored painters channeled the country’s industrial violence through shadowy Biblical settings. As art historian Francis Klingender notes of Martin’s works from the 1820s, he editorialized descriptions from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, making the “Bridge Over Chaos” resemble a train tunnel, made the architecture of hell mirror that of industrializing Britain. Produced in 1948, as United States’ abundance of oil was showing itself as the key to their role as global superpower, the radio play *The Thing on the Fourble Board* told the story of an eldritch monster that found its way out of the earth through an oil rig’s borehole. Widely considered the greatest work of radio horror ever made, the narrative illustrates how readily these older fears of the subterranean abyss absorb contemporary anxieties, and furthermore serve as lively ballast for political critique.

All of the artists in *Of Several Depths* channel an uneasy mixture of anxiety, curiosity, appeal, and critique, set in discourse with the subterranean in one of its facets; one of the strongest currents running throughout fixates on the occult axes of imperialist resource extraction. For years, across both their collective and independent practices, Anna Eyler and Nicolas Lapointe have produced large bodies of work teasing the alternately divine, demonic, or banal mystical undercurrents from contemporary advanced technologies. The artists’ 3 kinetic sculptures in *Of Several Depths*—miniaturized oil derricks fabricated from acrylic sheets—bob hypnotically like their industrial counterparts, perched across the gallery’s floor, walls, and ceiling, gleaming in a reflective turquoise inscribed with ornate and inscrutable patterns. Straddling the exhibition’s central thematic, refracting a familiar, industrial pragmatism through a prism of aesthetic mystification, Eyler and Lapointe reconfigure an iconic mechanical symbol, turn its mechanism inwards, autopoietic, working to uncertain ends. Miniaturized, animated, these machines mimic extractive labour, but we’re left to ask what it is they seek behind the walls, above the ceiling—if not oil then what? Are there others? How many is enough? Despite their enchanting demeanour, these derricks cannot help but carry a low-rumble of threat, their esoteric gestures laterally linking up with Reza Negarestani’s speculative work on the literally demonic nature of oil, its internal agency as a substance, and immanent push to merge the earth with the sun. There’s no hint of the *Fourble Board*’s invisible monster, but the ambiguity these derricks introduce necessarily holds a sinister undercurrent of spills and wars, poisoned water or choked atmosphere.

Equally an expanded artwork and a parallel curatorial project, Kate Whiteway's *In the Rough* arrays a precise selection of books, images, zines, and videos across two of the gallery's rooms. Set against brilliant cobalt walls, connected by a shared historiography of the contemporary healing crystal industry, the two constellations trace labyrinthine paths through the complex and imbricated histories of diamond mining, medical technology, theosophical symbolism, mineralogy, imperialism, and labour organizing. Physically functioning as portals to the two main rooms in *Of Several Depths*, Whiteway's installations serve as brilliant studies into the stubborn occultism that follows these materials, even as they're wrenched from the underground and circulated as commodities. Whiteway has written a text that narrates her project more eloquently than I possibly could here, and I encourage you to read it in concert with this.

Far exceeding her works in this exhibition, a central thread of Dana Prieto's artistic production concerns the global spiderweb of chemical, ecological, and pseudo-governmental brutality wrought by multinational mining operations (over 60% of which are headquartered in Canada, giving us by far the largest global implication in one of the most consequentially destructive industries ever to exist). Prieto's works in this exhibition build on her years of critical research around multinational resource extraction, focusing in this case on *Bajo la Alumbreira*, a gold and copper mining operation in Argentina, run by the Canadian companies Yamana Gold and Newmont-Goldcorp, and the Swiss Glencore. Prieto's ceramic vessels are loosely molded from 3D models of *La Alumbreira*'s open-pit mine, on a scale of 1:10,000 and fabricated with soil from territories contaminated by the mine. The vessels sit atop and within a set of lacquered boxes, lithe and menacing, equally evocative of luxury packaging or makeshift caskets. Interior lids inscribed with baleful intonations of death and haunting, there's an unfinished narrative surrounding the work, a gesture to be completed, sending a curse or burying an effigy. Two more indexes from the mine's site mobilize the narrative further—two hardened, clay samples from a nearby town, and a damning medical report observing the destructive effects of the mine's chemical on nearby communities, signed by a host of local physicians. A slumping video screen shows footage Prieto took around the perimeter of the mine's site, as well as drone footage shot by *Colectivo Policarpo*. The gray wall encompasses these baleful items uneasily as a kind of set decoration, recalling the clay and earth masticated by Yamana's operation in one sense, the shadowy, funereal tonality cast on the whole operation in another; perversely the two readings hover over one another, never quite settling, Toronto's bedrock of violent extractive capital bleached out in fluorescent light pollution.

Approaching the occulted histories of subterranean space from an unusually intimate perspective, Alana Bartol has produced extensive work exploring the imperial brutality of fossil fuel extraction across the Canadian Prairies, and the combined ecological and spiritual legacies that these practices demolish. Bartol notes that she hails from a line of "water witches," practitioners of dousing / sensing the presence of water or other substances below the earth, from the surface. Hag's Taper, Bartol's video work in *Of Several Depths*, takes its name from one of the many monikers attached to "mullein," an invasive plant spread across Canada by

colonists hundreds of years ago. Multivariate in use, the plant served, among other things, as an ingredient in medications and as a reliable source of light for subterranean exploration; now considered a weed, it flocks to sites of industrial ruin, such as the Prairies' many abandoned coal mines, intoning a reminder that colonial capitalism's notions of interchangeable "abstract space" leave negative cavities that linger long after the extractive eye has lost interest. In Hag's Taper, a green hand with bright red nails, reminiscent of the Wicked Witch from the Wizard of Oz, holds a stalk of burning mullein against a stark black background; the mullein burns quickly in a conflagration, then hangs as an ember, before reversing in time, and reforming itself in a blaze. Bartol writes of this hand, holding the stalk, as a sort of compound figure, representing many people and ideas—among them is 17th-century French mineralogist, Martine de Bertereau, who employed dowsing techniques in her early mineralogical research, and despite helping along the budding extractivism of 17th century Europe, was eventually condemned for witchcraft and killed. Broadcasting from the plumb's subterranean recesses, Bartol's video rhymes with the exhibition's core thesis, quietly dramatizing the churning ecological, esoteric, scientific, and industrial impulses that so often meet and merge below ground.

Sidling up in the shadows of the resource empire, hiding in its blind spots, looking in in waiting and in horror, is the underground ecology. Lit up by a burning torch or headlamp, the deep rocky earth has the appearance of a dead zone, fossilized and empty. We instinctively know that fertile layers of topsoil and clay are latticed with bugs, rodents, bacteria, and, as revealed by newly relevant research, vast networks of mycelia and fungus that enable the growth of essentially every plant and tree on earth. Among the oldest life-forms in existence, fungi have even been posited as the originary producers of the earth's soil, their enzymes breaking down terrestrial rock for nutrition over a billion years ago. But even a rocky flat is porous in meaningful ways, and the seemingly impenetrable, tomb-like, fossil-laden sublayers are swarming with microbial life. Since the 1990s, when, miles below ground, in caves far deeper than was believed to be the habitable threshold of living cells, biologists have been finding overwhelming evidence that the deepest, darkest, hottest, most punishing quadrants of the earth contain thriving biological life—creatures that have very literally recoiled from the sun, living instead on the deep earth's chemical energy, eating rock instead of vegetation. A host of heterodox biological theories have arisen since, positing a Deep Hot Biosphere, a subterranean origin of earthly life, a kind of inscrutable intelligence to the mineral underground; as Reza Negarestani notes, channeling Thomas Gold, even the ultimate origins of petroleum are being repropounded as first-hand emanations from the deep earth rather than the product of fossilized phytoplankton.

Maria Simmons' installation *Wavelength of a Spore/Attachment* serves as a kind of microcosm for gaming out the contesting visions of life noted above, and throws this question of the possibility and appearance of underground life into a complex and fiendishly ambivalent relief. The centrepiece of Simmons' installation is a series of seven translucent cylinders freestanding on the plumb's tile. Resembling enlarged "core samples" an archaeologist might have pulled from the earth to study past eras of sediment, the cylinders are filled with layers of

detritus Simmons has collected and curated: between sparse layers of soil, the cylinders have sedimented regions of plastic debris, single-serving foods, or braded packaging. A small plant grows atop each cylinder, nurtured by two powerful lightboxes arranged nearby. The lightboxes are inset with grow lights, and display delirious, spectral images of mushrooms that Simmons has grown in her studio. The work's conceptual object is canny and elusive: ostensibly a performance of plant-life resilience, set against a straightforward environmentalist critique, the simple opposition between living plants and dead waste quickly breaks down. The lightbox's fungal imagery reminds us that however deep underground, amidst even the most noxious waste, there is a surfeit of life. As the lightboxes keep the surface plants alive, Simmons readily notes that things are always growing below as well. Though absolutely still anchored in late-capitalist environmental criticism, Simmons' work denies any kind of simple resolution, even repudiating the "frontier thinking" that would look to the deep earth as a final untouched space. So much of what's below ground doesn't stay there, and so much is projected back down in turn: her work clearly presents the subterranean as contaminated by the surface, as the surface is contaminated by the depths.

UNDER THE FLOORS, BEHIND THE WALLS

Architectural marvels, ornate, baleful remnants from a ruined antiquity, labyrinths were a staple feature of Gothic horror fiction throughout much of the 18th century, as both a common setting for the stories' narrative climaxes, and a physical parallel for the narratives' frequently byzantine plot structures. The threat of deviation from established gender, sexual, or moral orders reappeared as dominant themes of Gothic fiction, the literal "gothic" remnants and ruins in which the stories took place hovering as a constant reminder that such deviations caused great European societies to fall, that a repressed legacy of barbarism threatened to return at any time. For a while, Gothic stories, novels, and reviews saw the labyrinth favourably, illustrating complex and variegated systems that nonetheless remained unified by an overarching logic. Following the French Revolution, however, this image of the labyrinth as a symbol of complexity and coherence began to turn sinister. Paralyzed by the fear that a similarly Revolutionary upheaval could happen elsewhere in Europe, the labyrinth's confusion of order terrified bourgeois and conservative commentators whose power this directly challenged. The labyrinth came to represent everything they feared: it was a place of powerlessness, where people got lost and could never again find their way; it was a place of heresy, where people made pacts with the devil or engaged occult forces; it was a place of sexual liberation, where structural gender and racial hierarchies crumbled.

Significantly, carried by fears regarding the secret societies, spies, and political saboteurs rumoured to have orchestrated the Revolution, labyrinths also became symbols of political subterfuge, where people went to hide, plot, and organize surreptitiously.

Just as the subterranean has long been caught in the instrumentalist gaze of technocratic power, then, so too has it been representative of those regimes' greatest fears. Most ancient underground architecture throughout the world was dedicated to water passages, temples, and tombs, but for the thousand years before tunnels and canals became public works in the 17th-century, underground architecture consisted predominantly of secret passages. Escape routes from castles, tunnels dug to infiltrate besieged fortresses, trade lines for smuggling operations—the history of subterranean architecture has a dominant streak of organized secrecy. Mine shafts can open into secret tunnels, crypts, and passages with ease. Even as the ruling class craters into the earth for rocks, minerals, and energy resources of every sort—feed on these resources as the centre of their power, even—the underground is still defined by an ineluctable opacity, mystery, and secrecy. Tracking these qualities as the object of ruling class anxieties, the subterranean as a whole comes into focus as a kind of dissident space.

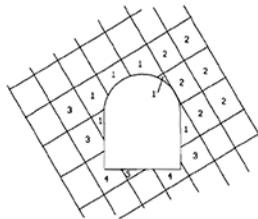
There's a quiet narrativity in Angela Snieder's Diorama series that's at once serene and violent. Each print depicts a different scene, set within anonymous, empty architectural spaces – stretching hallways, closed corridors, open rooms. Whether labyrinth, service tunnel, or office building, each location seems to be in a state of decay or disrepair. Dirt and dust fill the air in clouds, or fill the space in piles, falling in through the spaces' cracked walls and ceilings. Snieder's deft photographic handling freezes time in such a way that we're left with no clue as to whether this destruction was rendered in an explosive flash or developed over millennia. In material fact, these scenes are all constructed maquettes—dioramas, as indicated by the title—which Snieder built and manipulated, staging these frozen moments of demolition or decay. These long hallways with stark, featureless architecture most forcefully recall corporate or bureaucratic architecture, and necessarily take on a vague military association when placed underground. Since the 1940s, the US and Canadian militaries poked North America with sprawling underground complexes, enacting the uncomfortable flip side to the underground's "dissident" nature. These bases were rigorously prototyped to hide military operations, and specifically to withstand incoming nuclear attacks. Whether the agitated dust clouds in Snieder's prints hail from a collapsing sand table, ruptured by a ballistic missile, or from the underground's slow reclamation of an architectural space, these images very subtly distill moments that threaten the powerful – whoever occupied this bunker is either under attack or has disappeared completely, projected as a Gothic ruin, or a cautionary tale. What these "dioramas" depict is intentionally unclear, but in their quiet there's a defiant confidence that resonates with older spirits of subterranean dissidence.

Like their backdrop of old gothic structures and ruins, the undead, uncanny, and monstrous figures that populated Gothic novels variously represented the ways in which Modernity was haunted by repressed shadows of a barbaric instinct, supposedly relegated to the past by civilizational development. As emblems of the antisocial and unacceptable, they also demarcated

the outlines of social normalcy. Literary theorist Fred Botting observes that in the mediatised, late-capitalist age, these figures of ghosts and monsters have absolutely lost their shock, relocated from the margins to the swirling centre of commodified cultural signifiers. Contemporary “gothic” symbols, which genuinely mark the edges of acceptable discourse and behaviour, have taken their place; they might not come to mind as readily, but reliably, they seem to feature subterranean phenomena as magnetic centres of their fear and anxiety. Depending on who you ask, one recent narrative that contends for a position of contemporary Gothic might be something like the network of reactionary Q theories that have spread across the internet over the past 4 years, speeding up during the COVID pandemic violently. Further back in Q’s predecessor theory, “Pizzagate,” we find a basement at the centre of the narrative: the literally non-existent basement of DC Pizza restaurant Comet Ping Pong, where the online theory claimed high-ranking Democratic officials conducted satanic and perverted rituals. Going back decades, subterranean bases have held a special place in the minds of the paranoid: Deep Underground Military Bases, alien hideouts, secret weapons laboratories, invisible prisons. The opacity of the earth’s surface makes any location as likely as any other, and for many, every closed hatch or bolted staircase signals a hidden den of evil. A Q theory from 2020 posited that a legion of imprisoned “Mole Children” lived in a network of tunnels beneath New York’s Central Park. To the contemporary paranoid reactionary impulse, the subterranean represents a free-floating fear of change, of others, of Others, of the unknown; in its turn, this violent reaction—fear and insecurity turned to racism and scorn—stands in for the former skeletons or ghosts or vampires, ascending as the horrific fringe of workable sociality.

Sara Stern’s video-sculpture, *Rehearsal for Crawl Space Expiration* reads like a 21st-century Gothic on numerous fronts. Produced while Stern was living in Richmond, Virginia, teaching at the Virginia Commonwealth University, the work’s central object is a building in Richmond, known as the Whitehouse of the Confederacy: a southern inversion of the more familiar US Whitehouse, which famously served as the house of Jefferson Davis, president of the slave-state Confederacy during the US Civil War. The building faced the threat of demolition numerous times since the 19th century, yet was repeatedly maintained by a willful society of architectural preservationists. Kept alive beyond its years, the building looms like the broken-down castles or churches in a Gothic novel, ruins haunting the contemporary age, explicitly representing a zombie spirit of racism and exploitation, still clinging to life and law over a hundred years later. In Stern’s work, a 19th-century iron vent is set on the gallery’s floor, apparently fastened to the tile with cracked insulation foam, which appears to have been hastily repaired. Visually inconspicuous from a distance, we hear a raspy croaking coming from the vent; looking through the grate, an embedded video screen depicts an image of the Confederate Whitehouse flopping and undulating like a bedsheet “ghost” costume, performing its own death, yet always reappearing again. Below the ground, drifting through the vents like an eavesdropped secret, Stern shows the resilient spirit of this architectural emblem and political project. Surprisingly pathetic and humorous, the levity is cut by an uncomfortable relevance. Indeed, we see Confederacy, white supremacy, imperial exploitation fake their deaths over and over, hiding in more inert terms like conservatism or free trade; momentarily relegated below the floor, they’re not dead, just waiting to be excavated again by an eager preservationist.

Recalling the long history of subterranean hauntings and enchantments, it makes sense that Stern would place of the ghost below-ground, even as a metaphor. The metaphor is resilient. Passing across the threshold between surface and subsurface, we encounter an unavoidable binary association, a flip-side, an “other” side, and among the many metaphors covered in this essay, one of the most enduring is “above/below” representing some form of life/death. The solvent transfers in Erika DeFreitas’ series, a stammer inclined still, reflect 24 archival photos from “table turning” rituals, mediumistic ceremonies where spirits were said to manifest themselves by lifting tables into the air. Though 19th-century Spiritualism has a contested history of opportunism and fraudulence (embodied most popularly by the Fox sisters) its legacy extends far beyond the most common, spectacular associations. A powerful, if conflicted, upsetting of 19th-century gender balances (most mediums were women) and a genuine outlet for mourning and loss in a brutal age, Spiritualism mobilized the symbolic insurgency of the metaphorical “subterranean.” It offered a defiant alternative to the rationalist or orthodox Christian ideologies that held power, even as it was infiltrated by con artists and exploiters. DeFreitas has worked in and around these forms of mediumship in many projects, sympathetically exploring the phenomena from many angles. DeFreitas has suggested that the porthole apertures outlining the solvent transfers appeared to her as a kind of unexplained compulsion, that the image reappeared to her from some unseen source, insisting to be used in the work. Across the 24 images, we see varieties of subjects through this porthole—hands, faces, legs, clothes, sometimes entire people—but they are always anchored by the ceremonies’ centrepiece, the table. Floating through the air, flipped upside-down, illuminated diaphanously, these tables gradually come to resemble another kind of metaphor, a shifting threshold in their own right, motile force from some “other side” breaching through, forcefully destabilizing the marker of above/below, or sub/surface.



DARK MATTER SUBLIME

Grand and encompassing as the labyrinth is, the rage it generated from conservative commentators makes clear that its scope is not Sublime. As imagined by conservative paragon Edmund Burke, the Sublime teases the powerful with feelings of terror and awe, yet poses no real danger; the viewer joyfully returns to their powerful position flattered for having survived, with renewed conviction that this power is under threat and must be protected. As it manifests an opposite affect from the Sublime, terrifying the powerful, the subterranean also follows an opposite aesthetic code. The Sublime thrives in the excessively sensible, large storms and mountain ranges; the subterranean opposes this with thin passages, incomprehensible twists and turns, an inherent absence of light and sound. Though comparably powerful in affect, the subterranean is something like an inversion of the Sublime, a negative Sublime, but one that works through an absence of sense rather than a surplus.

The works in *Of Several Depths* all seem to manifest this strange vacuum through a comparable strategy that's come into focus only as the exhibition has come together. Miniaturizations, simulations, models, maquettes – despite the widely differing affects and angles these works use to interrogate facets of the subterranean, in their aesthetic strategies they all betray a kind of inability to represent their object on its own terms. Not because of any failure of the artists, but because their objects are fundamentally occluded, an inverted Sublime that fundamentally defies representation. The subterranean is perceptible only in fragments, one chamber at a time; to glimpse it as a whole is to denature it, to render its effects and affects rather than the thing itself, like astrophysicists plotting gravitational distortions around dark matter or black holes. Palpating the subterranean from the surface, no clear picture emerges, but that cannot be the point. To quote Negarestani, “machines are digging,” but by definition sunlight will never reach the real depths.

Alana Bartol comes from a long line of water witches. Her site-responsive works explore divination as a way to question consumption-driven relationships to land, water, and natural resources. Her recent works examine the past, present, and future of coal mining in what is now known as Alberta. In 2019, she was longlisted for the Sobey Art Award representing Prairies and North. Of English, Irish, French, Scottish, German, and Danish ancestry, Bartol is a white settler Canadian currently living in Treaty 7 territory in Mohkínstsis (Calgary), where she teaches at Alberta University of the Arts.

Erika DeFreitas is a Scarborough-based artist whose practice includes the use of performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, works on paper, and writing. Placing an emphasis on process, gesture, the body, documentation, and paranormal phenomena, she works through attempts to understand concepts of loss, post-memory, inheritance, and objecthood. DeFreitas' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. She was the recipient of the TFVA 2016 Finalist Artist Prize, the 2016 John Hartman Award, and longlisted for the 2017 Sobey Art Award. DeFreitas holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

Anna Eyler + Nicolas Lapointe

Working in sculpture and new media, Anna Eyler and Nicolas Lapointe maintain independent and collaborative artistic practices. The duo have participated in residencies with Espace Projet (Montréal, 2015), Verticale (Laval, 2018), and the Bòlit: Centre d'Art Contemporani (Catalonia, 2019). Recent two-person exhibitions include beyond différence, and now at Ace Art Inc. (Winnipeg, 2016) and void loop () at the City Hall Art Gallery (Ottawa, 2018). Recent group exhibitions include Le Large at Galérie AVE (Montréal, 2019), the Place Publique festival at the Fonderie Darling (Montréal, 2020) and the Athens Digital Art Festival (Athens, 2020).

Dana Prieto is an Argentine artist and educator based in Toronto. Dana's site-responsive art practice manifests in sculpture, installation, performance, writing and collaborations. Her work examines our intimate and collective entanglements with colonial institutions and power structures, calling for a careful attention to our ways of relating, thinking, making and consuming in the Anthropocene. Dana holds a Master of Visual Studies from University of Toronto, a BFA from OCAD University, and is a York University Research Associate for the Finding Flowers Project. Her work has been presented in national and international galleries, public spaces and informal cultural venues.

Maria Simmons is an artist from Hamilton, ON. She doesn't know what to tell her grandfather when he asks what kind of art she makes. She collects garbage, grows mushrooms, ferments plants, nurtures fruit flies. She makes art that eats itself. She holds a BFA from McMaster University and is an MFA candidate at the University of Waterloo.

Angela Snieder is an artist working in print media and installation. She completed her BFA at York University (2013) and her MFA in Printmaking at the University of Alberta (2017). Angela taught for several years at the University of Alberta in Printmaking, Foundations, Drawing and Intermedia, and at the Society of Northern Alberta Print Artists (SNAP). She has exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently at the Strzeminski Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Poland; at the 7th International Guanlan Print Biennial in Shenzhen, China; and at the Kraków International Print Triennial in Kraków, Poland. She was recently awarded a Research and Creation Grant from the Canada Council for the Arts for an ongoing project with collaborator Morgan Wedderspoon. Angela currently resides in Hamilton, Ontario.

Sara Stern is an interdisciplinary artist from New York City. Her recent projects prod histories of urban development with animacy and speculative fiction. Stern received her BA from Harvard University and her MFA from Columbia University. She has exhibited and screened her work in the US and internationally, at venues including SculptureCenter, NY; Anthology Film Archives, NY; the Museum of the Moving Image, NY; The Jewish Museum, NY; MuseumsQuartier, Vienna; and the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. Her awards include the 2018 Rema Hort Mann Emerging Artist Grant, the 2017-18 Fountainhead Fellowship at VCU Sculpture + Extended Media, and the 2018-2019 Visual Artist Fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA.

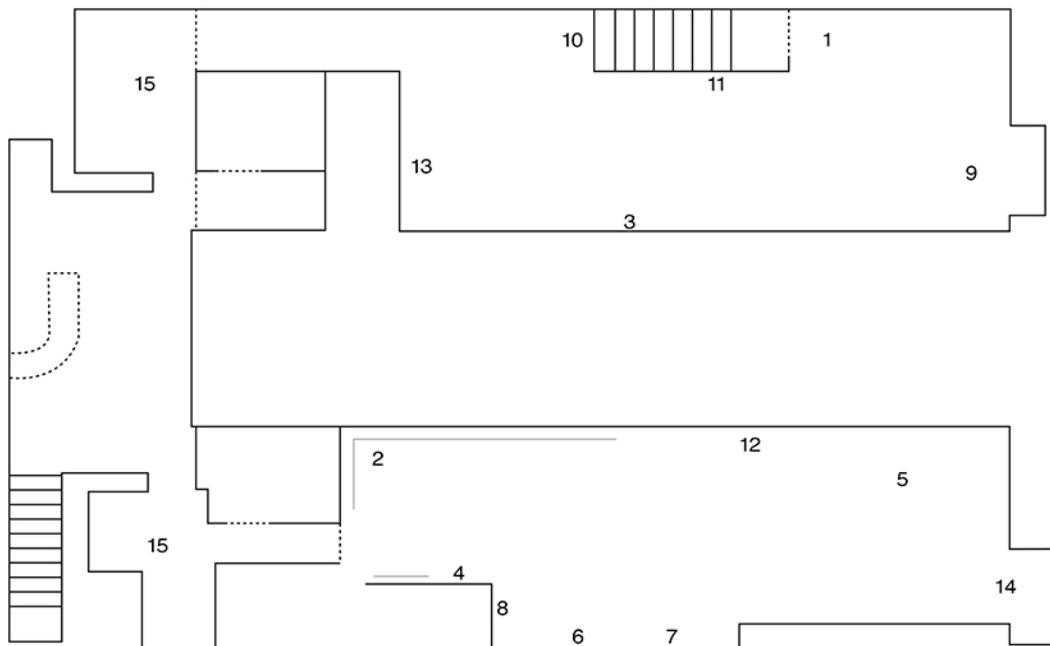
Kate Whiteway is an independent curator in Toronto. Exhibitions include In & Out of Saskatchewan (Art Museum at the University of Toronto, 2019), Whispers That Got Away (SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Atelier Céladon, 2018), and A Glass House Should Hold No Terrors (Atelier Céladon, 2016). Kate holds a Master of Curatorial Studies from the University of Toronto. She is the recipient of the 2018 Reesa Greenberg Curatorial Studies Award, the 2020 C Magazine New Critics Award, and participated in the 2020 Momus Emerging Critics Residency. She is a current member of L'Union des Refusés and a volunteer with the Toronto Workers' History Project. Her current work aims to contribute to the fight for class equity within the contemporary art sector.

LIST OF WORKS

1. Alana Bartol, Hag's Taper, 2020, HDV, 03:00 (loop)
2. Erika DeFreitas, a stammer inclined still, 2019, Solvent transfer on paper, 12" x 12," (series of 24)
3. Anna Eyler + Nicolas Lapointe, derrick_I, 2021, plexiglas, electronics, 12" x 12" x 4"
4. Anna Eyler + Nicolas Lapointe, derrick_II, 2021, plexiglas, electronics, 12" x 12" x 4"
5. Anna Eyler + Nicolas Lapointe, derrick_III, 2021, plexiglas, electronics, 12" x 12" x 4"
6. Dana Prieto, 1:10,000, 2018, Glazed black stoneware, hand made with clay from territories surrounding Bajo de la Alumbrera mine, Catamarca, Argentina. Wooden box, gold leaf engraving.
7. Dana Prieto, Footnotes for an Adage, 2020, Digital print on vellum, copy of a medical report documenting the effects of Bajo de la Alumbrera mine on people's health in Andalgalá, a community downstream from the pit; Natural clay rock from Hualfín, Catamarca.
8. Dana Prieto, Drifting, 2020, Digital video and sound on LED monitor, 01:09 loop. Drone footage of territories surrounding Bajo la Alumbrera mine filmed by Colectivo Policarpo. Video documentation of road towards Bajo la Alumbrera by Dana Prieto.
9. Maria Simmons, Wavelength of a Spore/Attachment, 2021, Polypropelene prints, grow lights, birch plywood, Mother of Thousands, silicone, plastic bags, grogged clay, potting soil, dirt, microbial culture, brick, latex gloves, cement, golf ball, hardened plastic tubing, plumbob, 5 euro note, pheasant feathers, photographic slides, moss, usnea lichen, ear plugs, shrink wrap, nylon rope, steel wool, honeycomb, beaver wood shavings, fermented garbage* (velvet ribbon, iPhone charger, Skittles®, fidget spinner, newspaper bag, succulent leaves, apple juice, wristband), Heinz® ketchup packets, Encapso™ k, GooGone®, Maynard's Sour Patch Kids™ mango wrapper, Trident gum insert, Reese's Pieces®, Energizer Max® box, sticky note with "oyster" written on it, salt, water *Fermented 3 years
10. Angela Snieder, Dioarama 1, 2017, Photopolymer print on Japanese paper, chine-collé on rag paper, 22" x 32" (image), 30" x 40" (paper)
11. Angela Snieder, Dioarama 3, 2017, Photopolymer print on Japanese paper, chine-collé on rag paper, 22" x 32" (image), 30" x 40" (paper)
12. Angela Snieder, Dioarama 4, 2017, Photopolymer print on Japanese paper, chine-collé on rag paper, 22" x 32" (image), 30" x 40" (paper)
13. Angela Snieder, Dioarama 5, 2017, Photopolymer print on Japanese paper, chine-collé on rag paper, 22" x 32" (image), 30" x 40" (paper)

14. Sara Stern, Rehearsal for Crawl Space Expiration, 2018, 19th century foundation vent, insulation foam, installation detritus, single-channel video with sound. 15 minutes, looped.

15. Kate Whiteway, In the Rough, 2021, Exhibition of books, video, prints, and painting exploring the diamond mining and healing crystal industries -- See separate takeaway



the plumb