

EBB AND FLOW

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For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
In the Department of Art and Art History
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Saskatoon

By

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EBB AND FLOW

Action, poetics, language, translation, illusion, reflection, intimacy, feeling, ordering. Material trace, intuitive gesture, embodied metaphor, sensorial experience. Searching, seeing, questioning, recording, revealing. A series of spatial relations, an act of expressiveness, an exploration into the unknown, a process of coming to know. A way of entering into, portraying, and bringing permanence to the illusive and ephemeral.

My perception of drawing began with an understanding of it as something of a necessary stepping stone to all other visual art media – a base level of knowledge one must acquire to move on to a more specialized area: *a sketch, a study, a mapping out, an intention, a plan...something eventually going somewhere else*. This understanding shifted and expanded through the perceptiveness and criticality with which the medium was discussed by select instructors, always with dedicated drawing practices of their own. Each line, mark, and tonal shift mattered; nothing went overlooked. In these cases, I remember being taught how to see (*to look, to observe, to perceive, to imagine*), encouraged to feel through process, materials, and formal visual elements (*to persist, to intuit, to judge, to trust*), and pushed to understand, question, and speak to my decisions.

While I can only speak to my own experience, I would argue that many people come into their art education with the same preconceived notion about this role of drawing as an “introductory” or preparatory medium. In its simplest form, drawing may be considered quite basic – even rudimentary. Drawing does not necessarily require a great deal of specialized materials or specific equipment. In its accessibility and range of possibilities, drawing is democratic, and perhaps this is one of the reasons it is oftentimes referred to as a “basic skill.” What it *does* take, however, is the sense of “here and now” that is achieved when time meets physicality meets action. In the words of one of these instructors, “Drawing = Time; Time = Duration; Duration = Intimacy; Intimacy = Drawing.”¹

These types of thoughtful theoretical frameworks, elaborating drawing’s possibilities, histories, and philosophical underpinnings, have deeply resonated with me, and informed the conceptual basis of my current drawing practice. These teachings have allowed me to come to my

1. Joe Di Leo, from an e-mail sent to Éric Simon. *Time Lines: Drawings from Concordia 1948-2017*. Edited by Gilles Daigneault, François Morelli, and Éric Simon (Montréal: Guido Molinari Foundation, 2017). Exhibition catalogue, 7.

own philosophical grounding and relationship to the medium, which is rooted in my understanding of drawing as a process-based art form with strong ties to intuition, as well as ways of knowing, feeling, and being. Here, “knowing” encompasses, though is not limited to, energetic concentrations of thinking and feeling that are experienced on emotive, cognitive, and physical levels. I consider drawing as a channel through which I can access these ways of knowing by engaging in dialogue with the immersive power of mark making. *A quick dash, a slow drag, an accumulation of cautious, meandering, searching lines. Considered softness, impulsive activity.* During this engagement, I aim to collaborate with process rather than being directed by a particular result. This process is reflective, material, embodied, and attempts to engage in the “here and now.” In this endeavour, I see drawing as an act of ontological presence. *Energies evidenced. Subconscious decisions brought to light. Attempts to understand, reclaim, and reconfigure.*

When reflecting upon my own drawing methodologies, I consider the role of bodily engagement to be among the medium’s most distinctive characteristics: the body has consistently played an important role within my work. Early on, this was expressed through the representation of the human figure. One of the most significant visual and conceptual shifts within my practice occurred when I stopped seeing the body as a subject to be interpreted or represented, and began to understand it as a tool with which to create the work. With this shift in perspective, I began to see both the body and the hand as instruments for articulation, analytical topographical vehicles, and interpreters and documenters of life experience. This was a crucial recognition which has brought me to a deeper understanding of the motivating factors within my work. Rather than depict, portray, or describe a body, I’ve come to realize that what I strive to do is reflect, engage, and articulate the experience of my own self; the things that I encounter, and the world which I navigate. Through drawing, I am trying to reach beyond representation or even interpretation, towards something more vast, immersive, and personal; something existing simultaneously inside and outside of myself. Something not finite, but in constant flux.



Figure 1: Breanne Bandur, *A Severe Bloom*, 2021. Oil pastel, oil bar, and graphite on paper, 8.5x12'. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

The complex and nuanced experience of one's own being arguably exists outside of the realm of representation, visual or verbal. As such, in my work, it seemed a natural progression to engage in these notions as they exist: abstract, ephemeral, illusive, experiential, perpetually in process. Gradually, the figural elements within my work began to fragment, obscure, and eventually become non-representational altogether. I've found that to approach the body through abstraction resonates more closely with my motivations, and allows me to employ methodologies and processes which seem to be more rooted in experience, feeling, emotion, and sensation. Through this formal and conceptual shift, I've come to realize that it's not necessary to represent something tangible; elements such as a dash, a dot, a spot of colour, a mark, a shadow, a highlight, begin to take on meaning and exist with equal potential to be representative of other things – perhaps the nuanced details that sit in one's experiential peripherals.

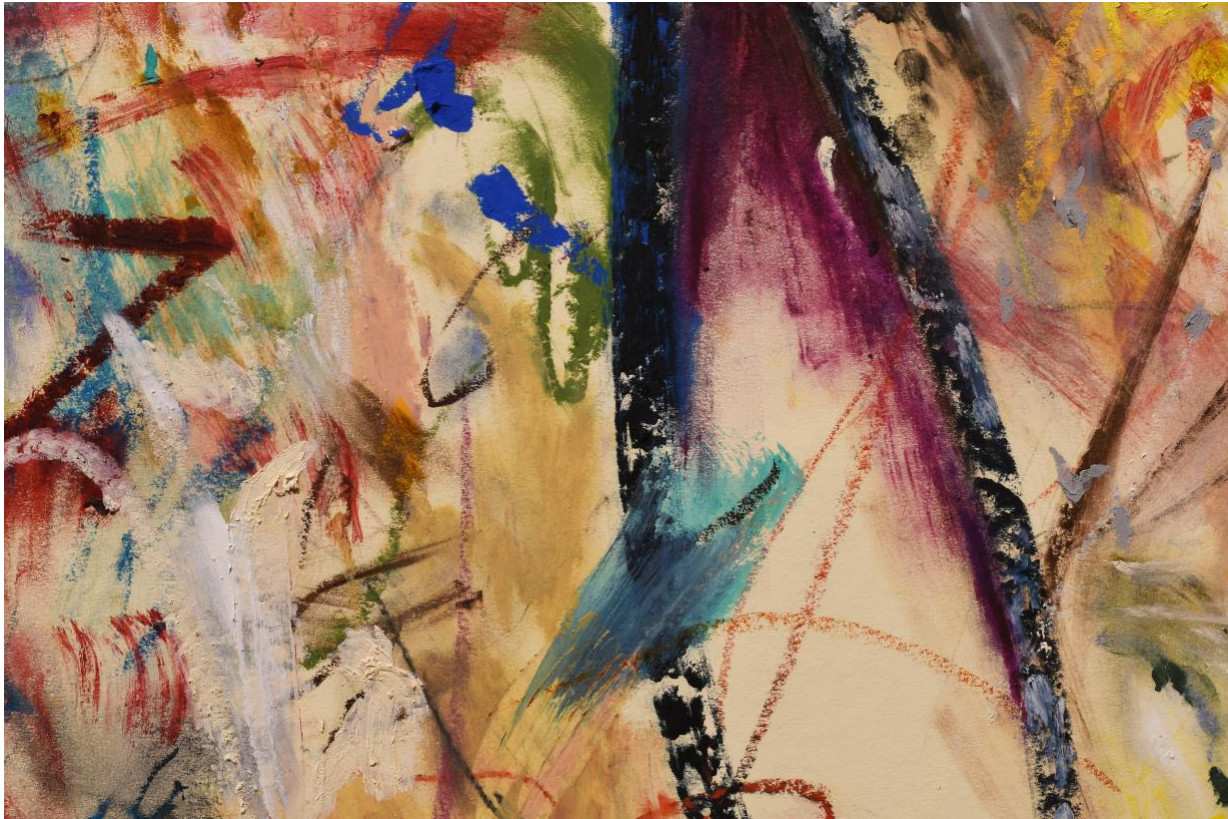


Figure 2: Breanne Bandur, *A Severe Bloom*, 2021. Oil pastel, oil bar, and graphite on paper. Detail.

In the active process of drawing, I understand my body to be in dialogue with presence, physicality, action, intuition, memory, the subconscious, and as close to my own subjective “inner world” of thought and feeling that I know how to be. This dialogue is the most direct access I have to these large and open-ended aspects of being, which I attempt to extend and bring clarity to. *Tactility embraced, visceral closeness, intimate vulnerability.* In shifting the focus from *what* I am representing to *how* I am representing it – through graphic signifiers – it seems there is something much more philosophical, and perhaps poetic, about the use of my body that extends beyond mere portrayal. *Action, movement, gesture, weight, pressure, speed:* drawing records the body’s relationship to physical expressions of gesture with immediacy and directness. *A trace of a moment. Evidence of a body in space and time. Abstract records of being.* It is within this ambiguous, yet once-real time, through both material and embodied means, that I consider drawing as an active transmission of knowledge, experience, and ontological presence. Drawings are material traces of gestures belonging to specific moments in time.



Figure 3: Breanne Bandur, *Accumulations*, 2021. Oil pastel, oil bar, and graphite on paper. Detail.

With this close alignment to abstraction come associations with Abstract Expressionism. While both visually and theoretically inspired by and working in alignment with Abstract Expressionism, I don't perceive my practice as fitting categorically within this movement. At the same time, my work does not aspire to revolutionize that which has come before. Rather than imitating or reiterating a particular style, or redoing that which has already been etched in history, I consciously navigate and dialogue with this terrain. The more I make, the clearer the common threads become; situating myself within, while at a critical distance from these existing histories and contexts, offers clarity in moving forward, and propels new possibilities and future investigations.

I continue to elaborate my understanding of and relationship to drawing by looking to artists and theorists, both predecessors and contemporaries, whose practices and thinking I feel affiliation with. One such artist is American sculptor Richard Serra, who has significantly developed critical frameworks surrounding drawing's artistic, conceptual, and philosophical

relevance. In reflecting on drawing's inherent relationship to thinking, Serra says:

It's not formal operational thought. Thought and language are interdependent, but drawing comes from another source (experience and intuition). Thinking is not the mode; the experience in drawing is not obtained through language. Language does not equal experience – it points to it. Drawing creates its own ordering. To draw a line is to have an idea. More than one line is usually construction. Ideas become compounded as soon as you make the second line. Drawing is a way for me to carry on an interior monologue with the making as I'm making it.²

Serra's comment points to the innate nature, as well as potential complexity, of drawn thought. Importantly, Serra clarifies that language – which, within the context of this quotation, can be understood as verbal language – is not the same thing as lived experience. Verbal language may reflect upon or provide interpretations of lived experience, but these suggestions will always be just that – suggestions – as well as confined to their own verbal realm. Adding to these thoughts about the drawing's potential to take us beyond verbal articulations, artist and academic Philip Rawson writes:

Our verbal language reflects our everyday life pretty comprehensively. But there is a huge number of other genuine, valid 'forms' of experience, produced by the analogizing faculty and therefore perfectly 'true' in any possible sense of that word, for which we have no conventionally associated words. They probably constitute a submerged 90 per cent of our actual, perceived experience. But they lie atrophied and inert in our minds, unless we can find ways of bringing them forward into our consciousness. By vivifying them and vitalizing them we can make ourselves aware of that lost part of ourselves, our suppressed perceptions and memories. This is what the arts do. And that is why spokesmen for the arts always claim, quite rightly, to be operating beyond the reach of ordinary, utilitarian communication.³

Here, what both Serra and Rawson speak to is the reality of there being a multitude of experiences outside of our human capacity for verbal description, a territory they equate with a parallel realm, the communicative capacity of drawing. They do not suggest that drawing is a more accurate means of articulating these perceived and lived experiences, but potentially an alternative and equally viable avenue to take by which we might begin to explore the dim corners and unlit recesses of notions of being, which verbal language alone cannot reach. It is my opinion

2. Richard Serra. "About Drawing: An Interview (1977)," interview by Lizzie Borden. *Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective*, edited by Michelle White, Bernice Rose, and Gary Garrels. (Houston, Texas: Menil Foundation, Inc., 2011), 59.

3. Philip Rawson. *Drawing*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 26.

that this logic brings with it the suggestion that if there are various ways of accessing certain experiences, then there may also be different ways of actually experiencing, and therefore being, in the world. For me, drawing is one of these ways of being.



Figure 4: Breanne Bandur, *Residual Matter*, 2021. Oil pastel, oil bar, and graphite on paper, 8.5x12'. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

Personal, philosophical, metaphorical, contemplative, self-reflective, visceral, tangible, delicate, intimate, felt, sensual, ephemeral. Aggressive, reactionary, fast, abrasive, loud, insistent, demanding, precarious, scarring. Drawing practice offers me an arena in which I can engage in these ways of being, and then be left with visual evidence of the accumulation of these experiences; drawing practice does not discriminate between experiences within the wide range of states of being. *Traces of time building upon one another. Indiscriminate moments given visual form and taking on new meaning. A concentration of ranges of lived experience.*

Within my practice, these visual recordings - or the drawings themselves - have evolved parallel to the shifts within both my making process and reflections, which mutually inform one another. The results of my most recent drawing investigations have taken the form of large-scale, abstract, gestural, multi-media drawings. These drawings are in some ways related to the work of

artists both past and present, such as Julie Mehretu,⁴ Joan Mitchell,⁵ and Cy Twombly; hints of their influence are echoed in this recent work. In their visceral quality and emphasis on mark making, my drawings arguably have the closest affinity with the work of Cy Twombly, an artist who was “drawing paintings and painting drawings.”⁶ When once asked how to make a painting, Twombly answered: “You take everything that’s in your head, and everything that’s in your stomach, and everything that’s in your body, and you take it, and everything you know about the world, and you put it there.”⁷ *Raw, unmediated, non-discriminatory, seemingly intuitive, reflective, connected to the mind, and connected to the body.*

4. Christine Y. Kim. “On the Mark, 1996-2000,” *Julie Mehretu*, edited by Christine Y. Kim and Rujeko Hockley. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2020). Exhibition catalogue, 57. Mehretu describes drawing as “an informed, intuitive process, a process that is representative of individual agency and culture, a very personal process.” This is evidenced through her abstract, large-scale paintings and drawings, in which gestural mark making is consistently employed, and combinations of referential and non-referential iconography are brought together.

5. Alexxa Gotthardt. “Joan Mitchell on How to Be an Artist.” *Artsy*, 11 Oct. 2018. Accessed 19 March 2021. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-joan-mitchell-artist>. Accessed 19 March 2021. Mitchell talks about her work as something driven almost exclusively by feeling and emotion. Though working from emotion rather than thought, I suggest that Mitchell is in dialogue with a kind of metaphysical embodied knowledge, which results in work that reads as visceral and intuitive.

6. Kirk Varnedoe and Richard Serra. “Cy Twombly: An Artist’s Artist,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 28, (Autumn 1995): 163.

7. Varnedoe and Serra, 178.



Figure 5: Cy Twombly, *The First Part of the Return from Parnassus*, 1961. Oil paint, lead pencil, wax crayon, coloured pencil on canvas, 94^{3/4}x118^{3/8}". © Cy Twombly Foundation. Image used with the permission of The Cy Twombly Foundation and The Art Institute of Chicago.

About his own work, Twombly has written: "Each line now is the actual experience with its own innate history. It does not illustrate, it is the sensation of its own realization. The imagery is of a private or separate indulgence, rather than of an abstract totality of visual perception."⁸ Serra has interpreted this comment as Twombly indicating that each line counts as an entity within itself, and they don't merely exist to construct other things.⁹ This idea of each line existing for no other purpose outside of its own being seems to indicate a favouring of the role of process in Twombly's work, as well as place emphasis on the philosophical underpinnings of mark making. The essentially continuous nature of the direct relationship from mind (thought and

8. Varnedoe and Serra, 165.

9. Varnedoe and Serra, 165.

feeling), to hand (body), to mark (externalized drawn thought), is central to drawing practice. Mark making can happen as quickly as thinking, sometimes simultaneously to what we see with our eye, and offers access to engagement with alternate “ways of seeing.”¹⁰ The hand is a tool for following this seeing and thinking; even if illegible to anyone else in its abstraction, mark making is evidence of a cohesive relationship to one’s thought process through the scoring of a surface. This idea of the philosophical capacity of mark making is in dialogue with my previously stated definition of drawing as a transmission of knowledge, experience, and an ontological presence. Of Twombly’s process, theorist, philosopher, and writer Roland Barthes has written:

he seeks to produce an effect and at the same time seeks no such thing; the effects he produces he has not obligatorily sought out; they are reversed, inadvertent effects which turn back upon him and thereupon provoke certain modifications, deviations, mitigations of the line, of the stroke. Thus in gesture is abolished the distinction between cause and effect, motivation and goal, expression and persuasion. The artist’s gesture - or the artist as gesture...¹¹

Barthes’ observations point to the centrality of process in Twombly’s work; the role of call-and-response between Twombly, his materials, and his marks; and the idea of the artist’s gesture – or artist as gesture. In these ways, I see my own process and practice as related to Twombly’s.

As of recently, my work has taken on a considerably large scale, up to 9’x20’, which I’ve come to see as an important factor within my making. In working on drawings of this size, I’ve found that a larger surface area allows for larger gestures, a more unrestrained incorporating of my body, and affects my perception. This increased scale allows me to shift from moments of engaged, physical activity to periods of reflection by breaking down the work into a series of immersive moments, in which I can get comfortably and fruitfully lost. Working on a substrate existing beyond the dimensions of my body, or even the scope of my vision, requires me to step back in order to gain perspective and properly see and embrace the work as a whole. Working with panoramic scale and at times on a white surface allows the forms of the drawing to “float” into the space, somewhat uncontained by the paper’s rectangular edges, and exist in

10. Seminal work and term coined by artist, art critic, and writer John Berger, which explores how we view art, and the relationship between what we see and what we know.

11. Roland Barthes, “Cy Twombly: Works on Paper,” *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 160.

communication with the peripheral environment. *An ongoing negotiation of growing elements. Shifting relationships between parts and a whole. Encouraging both maker and viewer to interact, shifting one's position organically in order to capture an immersive experience.* In these ways, scale makes distinct the moments of reflection within the act of making, allowing me to thoughtfully and fully engage in both parts of this process. *Action followed by contemplation. Becoming lost and then coming to recognize. Process reflected in outcome.*



Figure 6: Breanne Bandur, *Accumulations*, 2021. Oil pastel, oil bar, and graphite on paper, 8x12'. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

Drawing is a self-revealing process: it reveals aspects of the maker, as well as the material process by which the drawing comes to be. That is, the maker is reflected back to themselves through the activity of making, as well as through the visual end result of the work. Inner patterns, impulses, prejudices, and preferences become evident when communicated through physical, material, and visual means. An artist's inner world, thoughts, and reflections are revealed through shorthand, hieroglyphs, organic typography; this allows for movement – in the form of an artist's embodied intervention – to become poetry.



Figure 7: Breanne Bandur, *Coming and Going*, 2021. Chalk pastel, graphite, acrylic, oil pastel, and oil bar on Stonehenge paper, 9.5x12". (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

I see my own drawing process as a seeking of a kind of self-knowledge, pushing beyond that which I already know, and pursuing my interest in the abyss of what is not yet known or discovered. While drawing, I actively investigate, observe, discern, analyze, reflect, and come to know. Drawing is an endless string of decision-making. These decisions take material form, and are layered and nuanced. This self-revealing process lends itself to a collaboration between myself, my materials, my technical abilities, and the evolving work; the drawings themselves come to have their own agency and voices, and as much as possible, I try to step out of the way to make room for this reciprocal engagement. Sometimes it is a negotiation, and often I find myself compromising with the work. Each of these moments within the making carry the potential to provide metaphor, and in turn, a point of entry into contemplation.



Figure 8: Breanne Bandur, *Becoming*, 2021. Graphite on Stonehenge paper, 9x20". (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

By the *process* revealing parts of itself, I suggest that the process of drawing cannot hide or deny the truth of its making. Erase as you may, there is still a trace of a line, the imprint of an impression that once made contact with a surface, a history of residual junctures. Though you can attempt to cover parts up, the new material builds upon the “hidden” layers underneath, adding weight and depth, insisting upon the validity of each line, mark, and step that came before. The process is thus rooted in a series of formal, technical, material, and conceptual decisions which relentlessly insist on the evidence of their being. When we experience a drawing, whether maker or viewer, we bear witness to the artist’s motions revealing command, exuberance, passion, tentativeness, energy, pause, and reflection. We are privy to what is allowed to exist, to that which is barely legible, that which may have existed temporarily, and become a part of its evolutionary state and final existence. Drawing takes place both within and outside of myself, and then becomes something of its own.



Figure 9: Breanne Bandur, *Slow Build*, 2021. Chalk pastel, acrylic, charcoal and graphite on Stonehenge paper, 9.5x16". (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

A sketch, a study, a mapping out, an intention, a plan...something eventually going somewhere else. What I have come to understand about drawing within the context of my own artistic practice is that it is not necessarily going somewhere *else*: if nurtured, drawing rewardingly goes back into itself. Fueling its own progression, I've found drawing to be a continuum – tantamount to life experience – each work informing the next. *Organically shifting and existing in response to...open-ended and ongoing.*

Action and reaction. Rhythmic vibrations. Embodied affirmations. Ebb and flow. To draw is to be in dialogue with one's body, senses, and self. In drawing, embodied knowledge and intuition are given meaning and allowed room to manifest. A call to attention: drawing has the capacity to give form to that which often escapes verbalization. Drawing confronts its maker with themselves and offers entry points into inner worlds. Drawing is a form of searching; to draw is to engage with the unknown. Through drawing, one may come to know, and come to be known.



Figure 10: Breanne Bandur, *Ebb and Flow* at AKA artist-run, August 2021. Exhibition view. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

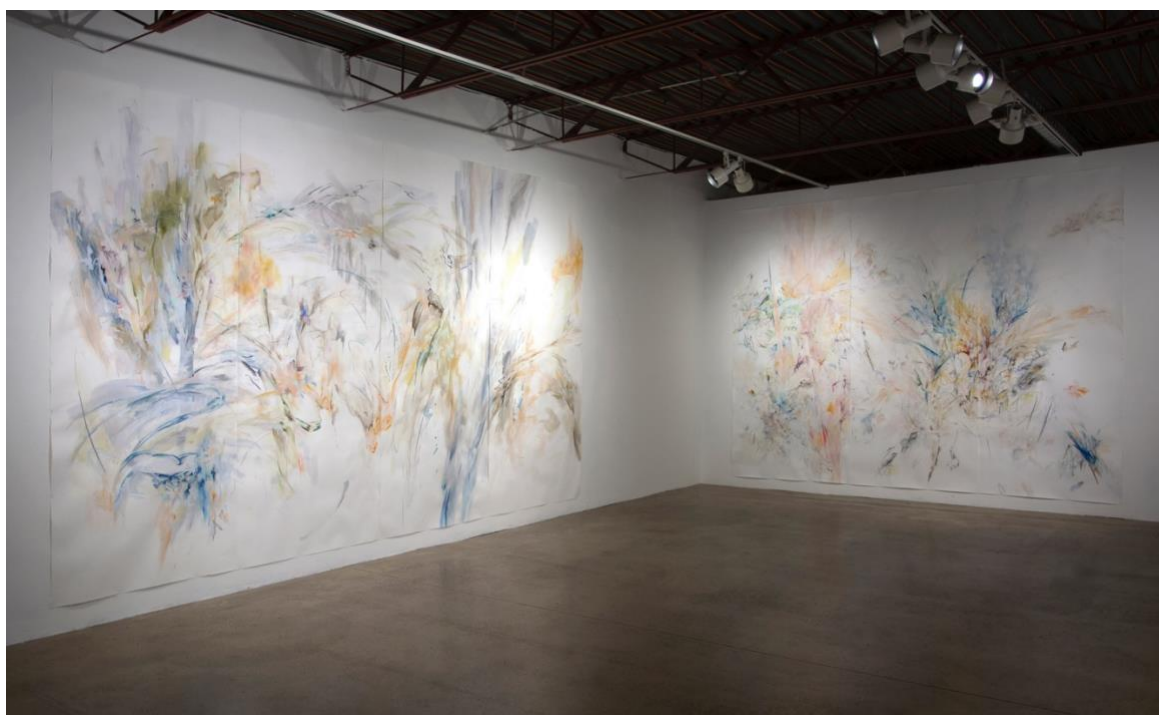


Figure 11: Breanne Bandur, *Ebb and Flow* at AKA artist-run, August 2021. Exhibition view. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).



Figure 12: Breanne Bandur, *Ebb and Flow* at AKA artist-run, August 2021. Exhibition view. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).



Figure 13: Breanne Bandur, *Ebb and Flow* at AKA artist-run, August 2021. Exhibition view. (Photo: Gabriela García-Luna).

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