

A PLACE FOR FIRE AND THE MATTER OF DEEP TIME

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## ABSTRACT

Fire is the subject, matter is the object. This paper is written to accompany my MFA thesis exhibition, *Stone like Fruit, Fruit like Fire*. Emerging out of fire, objects made of metal, stone, wood, and paper, in addition to a series of paintings, the central body of work, will be on display April 25-30, 2022 in The Gales Gallery at York University. The idea for this series arrived from an encounter with a wood stove in Ireland. The wood stove and the fire within became an allegory for a climate in crisis and my own life and grief cycles as I struggled with my health, matters of the heart and the making and articulation of this work. I reference the work of philosopher Gaston Bachelard to investigate the “doing” of fire and political theorist Jane Bennett to explain the “thingness” of matter, and how these two entities (fire and matter) shift with our own social, political, spiritual, and ecological ideologies. As a reflection of my practice and like the building of a fire, this essay is written with a stacking and positioning of the biographical and theoretical, where stories and concepts create fictional frictions illuminating paths within the work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before all else, I humbly acknowledge that I work and live on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who live here on Turtle Island in Tkaronto. As a queer cis-gendered female settler of Northern and Southern European ancestry and as a first generation Canadian, I acknowledge that I reside on stolen land.

This work has been largely inspired by the site and people of Artscape Gibraltar Point on Toronto Island, at which I am forever grateful for. Toronto Island is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. It has been the site of human activity for 15,000 years and previously occupied by the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations of the Seneca.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you Barbara Balfour and Dawn Burns, who ushered me through the MFA visual arts doors back in 2020 and on the cusp of the global pandemic no less and thank you especially for getting us access to our much-needed studios during the first lockdown. And thank you to Nina Levitt, who carried on and carried us through the legacy of pivoting with such steady kindness. I thank brilliant painter and committee member Janet Jones, who upon meeting for the first time during an admissions interview suggested two important theoretical resources that have mainly shaped this essay, Gaston Bachelard's *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*. And of course, a painter's painter, Michel Daigneault, my thesis supervisor. Thank you, Michel, for supporting me through the difficult task of writing about my paintings. It was the last thing I wanted to do, but in the end, the most essential; especially in the context of

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<sup>1</sup> This land acknowledgment was created in partnership with the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation and the Toronto Island - MCFN Friendship Group

my “How to Write a Painting” predicament. Friction as Fiction always. Thank you to Dai and Kim of Fastwurms for being my dream external committee due to zoom multi-dimensional teleportation. And especially for not flinching when I explained my work was about practical magic under the guise of New Materialism.

I am forever thankful for the initial sparks offered by my stay at Shankill Castle Artist in 2016, that has fueled the next 6 years of painting. Thank you to mentor and artist Lyla Rae for shaping me back into an artist after many years of working as an arts administrator. I thank you now, especially as I near the end of my MFA.

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My body your shelter, your body my shelter. To my wife, Leah Finkel. For the burning and the building. For letting me get lost in my own world for two years. Thank you to our two dogs, Lantern for being our pandemic puppy and it all being justified by Donna Haraway theories on interspecies care, and Parsley for protecting me from ghosts on the island so I could get my work done.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“TO LISTEN TO AND TELL A RUSH OF STORIES IS A method.”*

*– Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing<sup>2</sup>*

For the last 17 years, I have carried with me the predicament of “How to Write a Painting”. The request came to me while lucidly napping in my studio. Its arrival was in the form of what I can only describe as an audio hallucination, accompanied by the vision of a radiating and rippling vulvic shape. Through the crystallizing centre, a deep voice emerged, stating clearly and firmly, “I want to hear the colour of your voice”. Cheesy I know, but that’s what it said! Over the years, through many similar encounters, the phrase evolved into “How to Write a Painting”. The enigma of this question was enough to keep me interested, so I wrote poetry and made paintings, but it still did not quite satisfy me. When I met Barbara Balfour for an admissions interview into the York MFA program, I told her about this dilemma and wondered whether my Master’s would be the place to grapple with this predicament. Now well into my Masters, it occurred to me; why not look through my old notebooks for the answer? Surely my much cleverer 25-year-old self would have left me a clue. And she did. The answer, I realized, was not *inside* the notebooks but *is* the notebook itself.

The concept of the notebook was invented in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when people started using the margins of a popular dictionary to make notes while traveling.<sup>3</sup> This essay is an account of the margins surrounding my paintings; my life stories, my sketches, my material findings and how

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<sup>2</sup> Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, “The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins”, New Jersey, 2015, Page 37.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘notebook’ was coined by 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian religious scholar and author of the dictionary, Ambrodio Calepino. Calepin is notebook in French “The Origins of the Notebook”, My PaperBook, Sept 8, 2016. [http://www.mypaperbook.com/the-origins-of-the-notebook/#:~:text=The%20notebook%20term%2C%20comes%20from,\(Hebrew%2C%20Italian%20%E2%80%A6%20\).](http://www.mypaperbook.com/the-origins-of-the-notebook/#:~:text=The%20notebook%20term%2C%20comes%20from,(Hebrew%2C%20Italian%20%E2%80%A6%20).)

they became contained within my studio, a wood frame, a notebook, and the fireplace. “How to Write a Painting”, is like building a fire; it starts with the collection of materials, those materials result in “fictional frictions” which then create illuminating paths within my paintings for the viewer to explore. <sup>4</sup>

While recovering from surgery, I painted a forest on fire every day from my bed. Up until then, I had been hesitant to get into the real crux of my fire research. As a Taurus Sun, Taurus Moon and Scorpio Rising, this comes as no surprise: my zodiac is earth-elemental heavy. There is no sign of fire in the rest of my astrological chart, either. The first half of my Masters was focused on the concept of New Materialism and the lustrous objects I take into consideration when painting.<sup>5</sup> Now midway through my MFA, I have been procrastinating facing my research into fire. To frame it more positively, procrastination can be defined as an action deferred until tomorrow to allow new information to arrive.<sup>6</sup> What better place to await the arrival of this new information than from the comfort of my own healing bed? And so my research, painting, healing, and, as I will argue, life itself, finally emerged out of fire.

**The Origin Story:** *A Place for Fire and the Matter of Deep Time* is the first of 5 chapters in this essay. It starts with the origin of these bodies of work, which arise from an encounter with a woodstove in Ireland. It describes how I came to see the first shapes of the next 6 years of painting. The second chapter is titled **The Build:** *An Affinity for ‘Things’, Positioned*. This chapter describes the building phase of my process, the gathering of materials to create

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<sup>4</sup> “Friction as Fiction” was a phrase used by Michel Daigneault during MFA committee zoom meeting Feb 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> New Materialisms is a theory that defines matter as not passive but active. Contrasting previous notions of humans occupying a unique vantage point over matter and nature's true essence. Gamble, Christopher N., Hanan, Joshua S. & Nail, Thomas, “What is New Materialism”, Angelaki, 2019, Page 113.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Webster dictionary the etymology of procrastination is *procrastinare*, *pro-* (forward), with *-crastinus*, (till next day) from *cras*, (tomorrow). Definition of Procrastinate found on <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/procrastinate>

assemblages for paintings. The third chapter is titled **Friction:** *The Rubbing of Two Sticks and Words of Magic*, this chapter describes what happens when you have friction in combination with fuel and how friction causes a point of ignition, resulting in a kind of trauma or mending. Friction is created with repetition in a practice that transforms a material reality to create paintings, and friction also gives way to fire. Hence, friction leads us into the fourth chapter, titled **Fire:** *The Spirit of Matter*. If friction is like trauma, then fire is inflammation. You can find this metaphorical fire hiding within the assemblages of my work. After fire, and in conclusion, the final chapter of this essay is titled **The Remains:** *The Matter Remains Transformed*. This refers to the ashes of fire and the aftermath of my paintings.

These chapters reveal the structure of my research into matter and the fire held within. I use the theme of fire and its process as a metaphor, an illustration of the environmental impact as a response to materialism. Fire is the subject, and matter the object. This essay and my final thesis exhibition are an account of material encounters and their involvement in my own personal narrative as a painter. Emerging out of fire, objects made of metal, stone, wood, and paper, in addition to the central body of work, a series of paintings, becomes an index of materials connected to the deeper ecological landscape. The exhibition titled, “*Stone like Fruit, Fruit like Fire*” is where the public and the objects finally meet and engage in a social environment, a microcosm of how the entanglement of the inanimate and animate world can impact and interdependently shift along with our social, political, and ecological ideologies.

## CHAPTER 1

### **The Origin Story: A Place for Fire and the Matter of Deep Time**

This chapter explores the origin story of my practice and the creation of this body of work, which starts with an encounter with a woodstove.

#### *Early Objects of Affection*

I owe my identity as an artist and my care for the material world to the rejection I faced by the human world. As a child, I believed my toys had consciousness and our exchange of care was a mutually beneficial one. My rationale was that if “God” had made us in his own image, and we made toys in ours, then they, too, must be alive. Through this research-creation project my childish existential thoughts have now matured into New Materialism investigations.

#### *Compassionate Trash Talk*

While scrolling through Instagram I came across a meme created by Audie Murray, Indigenous artist, “dreamer”, and “skin stitcher”. The caption reads “Introducing my art practice like:”<sup>7</sup> and the imagery shows Abbi Jacobson from the comedy show *Broad City* standing on a garbage truck ladder. The text below her, a quote from the episode, reads: “There was a moment in time where trash was very comforting to me”.<sup>8</sup> I had just recently introduced my art practice with the exact same sentiment, and felt like my affinity for objects, coupled with the humor of the meme, perfectly embodied the attitude of the work. Many artists identify with an affection for the inanimate and work within the realms of assemblage. Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner

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<sup>7</sup> Murray, Audie. @audie.m, Instagram meme, “Introducing my art practice like:”, November 21, 2021.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CH3aLzwl7dM/?igshid=1gyyo5u5olu2>

<sup>8</sup> Jacobson, Abbi. *Broad City*, “Along Came Molly”, Season 5, Episode 9, Comedy Central, New York, March 21, 2019.

created functional manhole covers in New York City streets that read: “in direct line with another and the next” on the circular metal plate. Weiner states that he is essentially a materialist, and that the relationship between human beings and materials is how we relate to the real world, through bricks and mortar and stone and that without that, we are lost.<sup>9</sup> Theaster Gates, an American social practice and installation artist, describes his empathy for materials thusly: “there is a way in which I imagine that materials and spaces have life in them and rather than a constant state of becoming, which is also true, that they have something extremely sacred inside them that might be sleeping or may have been put into a coma, but is living and we have to find ways to activate the living.”<sup>10</sup> The exchange between the object and audience is often elusive, considered metaphysical or even in the realm of spiritual belief. Humans for centuries have been looking to the vibrant force of the object, in a sort of animism, to provide a change of luck, to honour a god, or even as an accompaniment in the passage to death. My question is, how can these affiliations with the material and non-human world help us make ethical choices and be a social-political act that supports all non-human and human occupants? And is it through the empathy of artists that we can learn to deepen our understanding of the vibrant force of a more-than-human world?<sup>11</sup>

### *Obsession with Possessions*

Later in life, my care for the material world hit a tipping point. I developed a habit of excessive accumulation, a theme that presented itself in my work, my art practice, my health, and my relationships. This cyclical theme is what I call the build up, the burn and the burn out. This problem is not unique to me; I am willing to attribute this behavior to our entire species, a

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<sup>9</sup> Weiner, Lawrence, “NYC Manhole Covers” Public Art Fund, Referenced from website and podcast, episode 4, In Direct Line, Nov 21, 2000

<sup>10</sup> Gates, Theaster. Interview by Claire Doherty, Public Art (Now): Film Interviews, YouTube, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> First heard “More-than-human world” used by Robin Wall Kimmerer in the foreword of “Old Growth: The best writing trees from *Orion Magazine*” *Orion Magazine*, 2021 Page xvi.

species with the capacity to harness excessive amounts of materials from a fragile earth. Our obsession with possessions has caused a warming planet, leading to intense weather systems and catastrophic events. The planet, like many of us, is experiencing the build up, the burn, and the burn out.

It's 2016. I am 36 years old and I am no longer making art and on the brink of divorce. I had spent 10 years running a residency program and event space on Toronto Island, and had recently started managing several arts spaces across the city. Following a separation from my wife, and the piling up of an unmanageable workload, I decided to take a trip to Ireland. My mother left Belfast, Northern Ireland when she was 21 due to "The Troubles," an ongoing conflict between Protestants and Catholics.<sup>12</sup> I had been there before, as a child in the 1980's, but my memories of Ireland were not of rolling green hills and cliffs at the edge of an emerald sea. They were instead of an occupied space, where we played in bombed-out playgrounds surrounded by armed British soldiers.

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<sup>12</sup> "The Troubles", refers to a conflict between the Protestants and Catholics that lasted around 30 years. It is not to do with religion, but a political conflict. The Protestants wanted Northern Ireland to remain with UK, where the Catholics wanted to unite Northern Ireland with the rest of Ireland.



Figure 1, Black dog in front, from left to right me, Lisa Cristinzo, sister Julie Cristinzo and neighbourhood kids, behind is Grandfather Leo Presley and Auntie Anne Presley at their house in Belfast Northern Ireland, 1985

### *The Story of the Woodstove at Shankill Castle*

Now for the first time, I travelled outside of Northern Ireland, to the South. I decided to travel to the South after the purchase of a photograph by artist Nick Pye that he took while at an artist residency at Shankill Castle, just outside of Dublin. In this picture he is sitting in front of a large window at a desk, from a room in the castle, looking straight out onto a pond surrounded by lush green grasses and grazing cattle.

Shankill Castle is home to the Cope Family. Geoffrey is a historian and Elizabeth is a painter. I stayed in one of the outbuildings on the property, where every evening at exactly 6pm a murder of crows circled above before settling in the same ancient tree they had been roosting in for generations. This is the story of the wood stove at Shankill Castle and the beginning of me starting to paint again. It is the origin of my recent bodies of work, the story I start all my essays, presentations, and grant applications with.

*The Story* Each morning I collected kindling to warm up the stone cabin by lighting a fire in the wood stove. I soon came to see the pieces of wood, newspaper, burnable objects, and ash as triangular compositions in anticipation of fire. The wood stove, made of cast iron, cradled this anticipation, holding a horizon line, indicating gravity within a strange world. The metal of the fireplace kept danger in and radiated only the good parts of warmth, while the stone wall stood fortified behind the wood stove just in case. I began to postpone the fire each morning to paint the material arrangement of metal, stone, wood, paper, and ash prior to burning. Even when painted more abstractly, the objects held the potential for fire and transformation from tree to kindling, from paper to ash.



Figure 2, Lisa Cristinzo at Shankill Castle, bucket of ash in a mound of decomposing apples in front of the castle wall, 2016

The scene of the woodstove is an allegory for our geological landscape, creating an index of material considerations made of metal, stone, wood, and paper. What does this assemblage of materials within the story of the Woodstove at Shankill Castle reveal about the agency and interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds? I will attempt to explain this interrelationship through my paintings and the objects I have the tendency to take into my care. We will start by looking at the metal of the woodstove and other future metallic visitations in the studio.

## *Metal & Stone*



Figure 3, metal hub cap found on a walk, a gift from highway 7, 2021

It's 2021. While staying at a hotel close to my studio at York University, I went for a walk along Highway 7. There were 90-kilometre/hr winds that day, and a metal hubcap from a car flew to my feet at the side of the road. I took it to the studio and hung it above one of my paintings. On another walk, I found a very large metal object in the shape of a sun left at a demolition site. I tucked it away in a nearby bush, then returned later that week with a rented truck. After this, there was a procession of metal objects that begin to enter my studio and adorn my paintings. In her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, political theorist Jane Bennett says "playing on the notion of metal as conductor of electricity, they say that metal "conducts" (ushers) itself through a series of self transformations, which is not a sequential movement from

one fixed point to another, but a tumbling of continuous variations with fuzzy borders and was created by cosmic events in deep space.”<sup>13</sup> Metal’s “fuzzy borders” are positioned nicely alongside my transmutable paintings, its perceived permanence always in flux and only momentarily stationed. The metal of the woodstove is a container to fire, and I pay honour to my metal finds and their metaphysical properties by placing them alongside my paintings.

And what of the matter of the fortifying stone wall positioned around the wood stove? In 2021 while hiking in Northern Ontario, I encountered some of the oldest surface rocks on the planet. These rocks had already existed for over a billion years, just when life was crawling out of the sea.<sup>14</sup> Nick Calder, in his book *Restless Earth*, personifies the planet as a device to explain that the geological matter of deep time is a more-than-human story. If the earth is said to be 4.6 billion years old, he says, and we took each mega-century as one year, we could imagine the earth as a 46-year-old person. It took until they were 45 years old for the earth to show its flowers, and it was only 4 hours ago that humans showed up.<sup>15</sup> Considering our very short time on the planet thus far, and the climate crisis we’ve even more recently created, you could say we’ve managed to mess things up in a matter of seconds. Perhaps our short time on the planet is contributing to this massive disconnection. The answer may be to spend more time communing in empathetic ways with the geological world, in order to understand more deeply our vital connection. Described above by Wiener and Gates, you can say communing with this world is

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<sup>13</sup> Bennett, Jane, “Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things”, Duke University Press Durham and London, 2010, Page 59.

<sup>14</sup> Eyles, Nick, “Ontario Rocks three billion years of environmental change”, University of Toronto, 2002, Page 5.

<sup>15</sup> Calder, Nick, “ Restless Earth”, Penguin Publishing Group, 1978, Page 7.

being “in direct line with another and the next” and to “imagine that materials and spaces have life in them”.<sup>16</sup>

Like metal, rocks are an archive of vibrant matter dating back billions of years and yet there are countless metaphors on the lifeless weight of rocks. Jane Bennett describes how so often there is a separation between “dull matter” (it, things) and “vibrant life” (us, being).<sup>17</sup> “Dull matter” may appear absent of life but harbours a teeming record of ancestral beings and stories. The marble from Carrara, Italy, was at one point a lively mud in a shallow sea. Only after millennia of pressure and heat does it become marble as we recognize it, the very medium used for Michelangelo’s “David”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Earlier reference from “Lawrence Weiner: NYC Manhole Covers” Nov 21, 2000, Public Art Fund, Referenced from website and podcast, episode 4, In Direct Line and Gates, Theaster. Interview by Claire Doherty, Public Art (Now): Film Interviews, YouTube, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, Jane, “Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things”, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010, in Preface i.

<sup>18</sup> Burtynsky, Edward, Baichwall, Jennifer, de Pencier, Nicholas. “Anthropocene: The Human Epoch,” Mongrel Media, 2018.

## *Wood & Paper*



Figure 4, Assemblage of paper, wood, fire in the woodstove that I would later start sketching at Shankill Castle, 2016

Now I would like to address the wood and paper in the woodstove. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?<sup>19</sup> The wood of a tree, like the precious mining of metals, like the stone of a mountain range, has been extracted, commercialized, and commodified. We are now entering a 6<sup>th</sup> major extinction, completely at our own hands.<sup>20</sup> Does the deforestation of 85% of the world's forests make a sound? The theory of uncertainty indicates the very act of observing, causes a wave function to collapse and create the shape of matter.<sup>21</sup> The question is, who is doing the observing? The falling tree does make a sound because the human ear is just one part of an observing ecosystem. Author Anna Lowenshaupt

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<sup>19</sup> George Berkley, common quote, various sources.

<sup>20</sup> Burtynsky, Edward, Baichwall, Jennifer, de Pencier, Nicholas. "Anthropocene: The Human Epoch", Mongrel Media, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Inspiring philosophy, "Quantum Physics Debunks Materialism", YouTube, May 4, 2014.

Tsing states in her text, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, “To learn anything we must revitalize the art of noticing and include ethnography and natural history”.<sup>22</sup>

And from the death of a tree comes paper and the birch wood panels I paint on. It is not lost on me that you may be reading this essay on the subject of making matter matter on pieces of paper resulting in the death of a tree.<sup>23</sup> Like Tsing, plant ecologist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer asks us to listen more deeply: “As we give our attention to the old growth forest and the beloved backyard shade tree, we recognize that paying attention is only the beginning. Attention generates wonder, which generates more attention and more joy. Paying attention to the more-than-human world doesn’t lead only to amazement; it leads also to acknowledgement of pain.”<sup>24</sup> My paintings are about this deep acknowledgement of “joy” and “pain” within an emotionally built environment, which is lived in and made by a vibrant material world.

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<sup>22</sup> Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. “The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins”, New Jersey, 2015, Page 37

<sup>23</sup> Kimmerer, Robin Wall, foreword. Fox, Christopher, ed. “Old Growth: The best writing about trees from *Orion Magazine*” *Orion Magazine* 2021, Page xvi

<sup>24</sup> Ibid Page xvi

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Build:** *An Affinity for ‘Things’, Positioned*

This chapter describes my compulsion to gather and place objects within a container, whether that be frame, fireplace, notebook, or studio and compares building a fire to making a painting.

#### *Thing Power in Times of Grief*

When I was 9, my kitten was run over by a van, right in front of me. The man driving the van insisted on buying me a new kitten, but my parents said that wouldn’t be necessary. The next day he left a tiny figurine of a white fluffy kitten on a ball of yarn on our doorstep. It was the first of the many cat figurines I would begin to collect. Jane Bennett investigates the “intense bond” between the hoarder and their possessions, as a means of accessing “thing power”. She says that hoarders are differently abled and are especially attuned to the “things” that draw us near.<sup>25</sup>

These material connections often come from times of grief. It wasn’t until my parents’ divorce that my father started to hoard “thing power” and it was not until that cat figurine was left on my porch after the accident that I started to collect “cat power”. Myself and my three sisters were often enlisted to clean and organize the piles of things in my father’s home. He trusted me the most to recognize their value, as I also find it extremely difficult to throw anything out. I dedicate The Build chapter to my father, Pasquale Cristinzo, a Capricorn, construction worker and prolific hoarder.

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<sup>25</sup> Bennett, Jane, “Powers of the Hoard, Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter”, presented by New School, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #1



Figure 5, Lisa Cristinzo, *The Last Metal Object*, Acrylic and Oil on Linen, 60" x 76", 2021

My father found an old, damaged reproduction of *The Last Supper* in one of his storage units and asked me to restore it. I acquired this painting with no intention other than to fix it for him, but I have yet to return it, and it sits in my studio, informing an entire term of theory and painting. When I brought it home I had already been preparing a large painting with a dark, smokey background. My vision was to have this large “anomaly” painting in contrast with my smaller colourful fire assemblage paintings. Then it occurred to me, what if I took the Last Supper reproduction and converted the 12 apostles into mounds of garbage and made fire assemblages?

*Piles, Preservation, Vigils, Adorn-rangements*

My methodology is situated in the collection of materials, as well as choice colours, textures, and shapes. During my undergrad at OCAD U, I produced a body of work called, *Jarred Abstraction*. In this work, I collected objects from my father's piles and preserved them in glass jars to create still life models for paintings. I then loosely referenced these models, smearing and blocking in shapes of colour with my hands on a 5ft by 7ft canvas. The process of gathering materials, arranging compositions, and making paintings has been a constant, whether they are framed in a jar or in a fireplace.

*Driftwood, Rocks, Abandoned Fire Pits and Colourful Eroded Plastics*

After graduation, I started working at Artscape Gibraltar Point on Toronto Island. The building was an old school, converted into an artist residency and event space. In the late 90s it was abandoned by the school board due to the building's proximity to an eroding shoreline and encroaching lake. Officials declared it no longer suitable for children, as they feared a rogue wave would eventually wash the building away. The building seemed viable enough to be occupied by artists, and after some debate, it opened as an art centre in 1999. In 2017, the prophecy of the rogue wave came true; the building was submerged by water due to massive flooding. I spent over a decade making work about Toronto Island. During my long walks there, I found the shoreline offered endless materials suitable as subjects for painting. I would often take photos of items such as driftwood, rocks, abandoned fire pits, colourful eroded plastics, and unusual (often dead) wildlife, and haul them back to the studio for further study. This process is similar to the mining of materials from my father's hoarding piles, but was now situated in the

outdoors, where I encountered the remnants and erosion of a landscape impacted by human activity.

After my time with the wood stove at Shankill castle in 2016, I returned home and started placing the materials found on my walks in imaginary fireplaces. I would use the corner of a room, a shelf, or the inside of a cardboard box painted black to allude to objects contained in a wood stove. This methodology of collecting materials becomes a substitute for the kindling of fire. My work at this point was more concerned with the metaphors associated with building a fire than fire itself.



Figure 6, Model on a shelf for the painting *Heap and Sweep*, 2020

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #2



Figure 7, WIP Lisa Cristinzo, *Heap and Sweep*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2020

I destroy parts I like within my paintings, as a practice in grief. This “invented death”, is where I mourn the covering up of the colours and shapes that initially gave me such pleasure.<sup>26</sup> Grief and absence trigger my hoarding tendency within paint. I feel the need to render and stack shiny objects on top of a matte background finish. In this painting, the center brick block was eroded by the lake; it sits on the edge of the background and foreground. The background alludes to a sky more than a wall, as a result the yellow paper is now holding the weight of the brick so it doesn’t fall. There is pressure from the crumbled paper in front and the log to the side to push it over the edge. The candle to the right and the fruit behind it reaches, observes, maybe even instructs. This candle appears in almost every painting. Maybe it's the painter, painting within the painting.

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<sup>26</sup> Phrase “invented death” from Pinkola Estes, Clarissa, “The Creative Fire: Myths and Stories on the Cycles of Creativity”, Audible, 2005, Audiobook

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #3



Figure 8 , Lisa Cristinzo, *Heap and Sweep*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2020

Do all things have eyeless eyes? There are no eyes on the broom, the smoke, the log, but you sense sightlines that allude to a movement within a frame. Although the direction of this movement is not clear. Is the sun setting or rising? The smoke seems to dismiss the direction of the wind, where the falling leaves seem to follow. The smoke would rather look in the direction of the broom, almost in anticipation of the material mound being created by its sweeping motion. Smoke is a product of fire, like ash, an excrement. The broom anticipates being able to collect more ash, debris, a cigarette butt, to build the next mound, which will eventually return as smoke.

## *Assembling a Material Social Life*

After a gathering of the “things” I have an affinity for, there is a positioning of “things” within space. This is assemblage within paint. An assemblage is a gathering of people, places, and things. Poet and essayist Anne Carson states that “Nouns name the world. Verbs activate the name.”<sup>27</sup> If this is true, then the matter of assemblage must be the noun, and fire must be its activation as a verb. An assemblage can be a material combination of a mountain range lined with trees with pockets of shallow water filled with marine life and shells beside a small town with a gas station and corner store, creating community. Artists and authors, Jamie Kruse and Elizabeth Ellesworth state that “the geologic ‘now’ is a teeming assemblage of exchange and interaction among the bio, geo, cosmo, socio, political, legal, economic, strategic and imaginary. The geological ‘now’ in which we live, and for which we design urban spaces and infrastructures, is an ongoing procession of substance that were formed in the deep past and are arriving into the present.”<sup>28</sup> Theorist and York University professor Dan Adler speaks of disposable goods, making them “ideal material for assembling a discontinuous construction, a staging of fragments from past and present. The objects are seized from disparate contexts - removed from the historicist’s comfy historical continuum - and staged in order to conjure a revelatory “lightning flash” of insight about the present and future”.<sup>29</sup> The crossroads created by material combinations like that found in the metal, stone, wood, paper, of the woodstove, create a rubbing between time and space, like that of fuel, oxygen and heat resulting in fire. This rubbing illuminates as a “lighting flash” - a collision of past, present and future. This is the activation of a narrative. The story of a monster made of unlikely parts.

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<sup>27</sup> Carson, Anne, “Autobiography of Red”, Vintage Contemporaries, New York, 1999 Page 4

<sup>28</sup> Ellsworth, Elizabeth, Kruse, Jamie, “Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life”, Punctum Books, Brooklyn, New York, 2013, Page 23

<sup>29</sup> Adler, Dan, “Contemporary Sculpture and the Critique of Display Cultures”, Routledge, New York, 2019, Page 20

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #4



Figure 9 , Lisa Cristinzo, *Venus Thirst Trap*, Acrylic on Linen, 60" x 76", 2022

I have a giant 650-page book in my studio titled *Great Paintings*. I search it for compositional inspirations. The "Masters" knew all about the secrets of the golden triangle composition. This is the very same shape needed to build a fire. And like a fire, it brings the viewer to a central warmth: the subject. I land on *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli. This is one of my father's favorite paintings and a reproduction sits above his fireplace at home. The description under the painting in the book reads, "Here, Venus, conceived from the union of the sea and the severed genitals of Uranus, rises from a scallop shell and is born of the two winds towards the shore...."<sup>30</sup> You can probably tell I am influenced by the Group of Seven, particularly in the way they paint trees at the rocky waters' edge. The water's edge of Toronto Island is often full of litter, concrete, and eroded plastics. I guess this is what painting during a climate crisis looks like?

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<sup>30</sup> Gallup, Allison, Gruitrooy, Gerhard, Weisberg, Elizabeth, "Great Paintings of the Western World", Barnes & Noble Books, 1998 Page 209

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #5



Figure 10, WIP, Initial Stage, Lisa Cristinzo, *Venus Thirst Trap*, Acrylic on Linen, 60" x 76", 2022

The two winds blowing towards the shore are essential to starting a fire. The back and forth action of my brush when painting the sky feels like it's full of air. All my paintings seem to start with a colour field painting. Hansa Yellow, Phthalo Blue and Quinacridone Red are my primary colours, my golden triangle. I paint the sky here with blue and a tiny mix of yellow and red. I think of the painting "Sky Above Clouds" by Georgia O'Keefe. My paintings start with a portrait of deep time, a prehistoric time where things just start to take shape. There is a rock, or a heavy bottom of some sort, for other elements to start crawling up and over out of primordial waters. Fire did not appear as flame until 400 million years ago, when oxygen was stabilized at 21%.<sup>31</sup> This level of oxygen was also required for earth to show its flowers and for our lungs to breathe. The meaning of the word 'spirit' is to breathe.

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen J. Pyne, "Fire: A Brief History", University of Washington Press, 2016 Page 8

## CHAPTER 3

### **Friction** *The Rubbing of Two Sticks and Words of Magic*

This chapter considers the friction between “things” and as a result of this friction, their material transformation. Friction is compared to repetition within my art practice, where the metaphor of building and now starting a fire is used to explain my methodology within paint.



Figure 11, Notebook sketches of a forest on fire, 2021

### *Fire is Time, Matter is Deep*

While recovering from a hysterectomy, I painted a forest on fire everyday in my notebook. A forest fire can be brought on by the rubbing of two sticks within the branches of a tree on a dry summer’s day. This happens because the friction between two surfaces results in heat, triggering a chemical change in the surface and resulting in fire.<sup>32</sup> The “fuel” in this case can be compared to the accumulation of materials in the building phase of my paintings. The daily practice and

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<sup>32</sup> Tuve, L Richard, “Principles of Fire Protection Chemistry”, National Fire Protection Association, 1976, Page 1

repetition of notetaking, researching, painting, collecting is the friction required to make this body of work. And friction, as practice, creates paradigm shifts. An over-accumulation of fuel, for example, hits a metaphorical brim and spills over. The repetitive process of painting a forest on fire everyday eventually migrated from the paper of my notebook onto the wood panel of a painting. Art critic Boris Groys refers to the project as a device for “drafting a particular vision for a suitable future”.<sup>33</sup> What does friction through practice with a vision in mind conjure? Writers and researchers Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine ask in their book *The Promise of Practice*, “What are we (diverse humans and non-humans around the planet) practicing for?”<sup>34</sup> Personally, I have an art practice, an earth-based spiritual practice, a meditation practice, a walking practice, a coffee practice, to name a few. My aim with these practices is to be present, commune and transform, in co-authorship with my environment, and to use repetition and imagination to transform my reality. As a metaphor here I reference the rubbing of two sticks as a practice in repetition that creates a transformation in the form of fire.

### *We All Want Heat*

Of friction and fire, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard says that it “must be recognized that rubbing is a highly sexualized experience.”<sup>35</sup> He also states that “The impulse towards fire that is brought about by friction is the need for shared warmth.”<sup>36</sup> We all want heat. We need heat, the sun, to survive. Practice is the intimate action of being present with a material, a body, a movement in space. Friction can remove, like the act of cleaning a counter, or friction can create offspring through a “sexualized experience”. It can instigate a removal or reproduction. It is the

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<sup>33</sup> Groys, Boris. “Loneliness of the Project”, MuHKA New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory, New York, 2002, Page 1

<sup>34</sup> Boon, Marcus. Levine Gabriel. Editors. “Practice: Documents of Contemporary Art”, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2018, Page 12

<sup>35</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, “The Psychoanalysis of Fire”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, original text 1938, Page 23

<sup>36</sup> Ibid Page 40

action of friction that brings the past (material) into the present (practice) and creates a new formed future (art). I was diagnosed with early-stage uterine cancer in April of 2020. In the fall of 2021, after many invasive treatments and biopsies, I decided to have a hysterectomy. Friction may be a desire for “shared warmth”, but the intimate relations of friction can also be a state of trauma. Friction can create a wound. The pathology report on my removed womb found that yes, I had cancer, but also fibroids, polyps, cysts, a non-cancerous tumor and adenomyosis, in which the uterus lining grows into the muscle. My uterus contained a build up of dysregulated hormones, perhaps a result of excessive accumulation themes in my life. The house was now being burnt down. But through friction and repetition, the wound can also be mended, rebuilt.

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Journal Entry #6



Figure 12, Lisa Cristinzo, *Untitled*, Acrylic on Wood Panel 36" x 48", 2022

I have this irrational fear that my ability to paint was in my golden triangle of a womb. Now removed, the purpose of all my paintings is to prove this irrational fear wrong. Alas, I had the same thought about my head injury and being able to finish a Masters degree. It seems that my creative spirit does not lie within my disabled body, but elsewhere. My grandfather could always sing, even when he had the debilitating effects of his dementia. Matter is body, fire is spirit. The two are separate. An injured body does not always kill spirit.

*Two Dogs Bark on Either Side of the Fence, but Meet Peaceably in the Street*

My paintings hold various states of friction. Friction creates fictional narratives, a friction in hate, friction in love, friction in death, friction in life, friction in faith, friction in grief, unlucky and lucky friction, all resulting in a collapse or a build of a material condition. Theorist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in her book “*Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*”, explains how friction causes movement and effect. A stick alone is just a stick - friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form and agency.<sup>37</sup> The reactions between intersections within the more-than-human world is described by Jane Bennett: “Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface.”<sup>38</sup> Friction is the cause of electricity, and it is the cause of fire.<sup>39</sup> Energy from friction exists in the act of gathering and within the assemblages of my paintings. The highly trafficked areas become the body of the work. Belfast, Northern Ireland and the friction between Protestants and Catholics gives way to bombs, and walls are built in the attempt to mute friction. A stick is just a stick, although one stick on either side of a wall results in the wall becoming another surface of friction.

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<sup>37</sup> Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. “*Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*”, Princeton University Press, 2004 Page 5 and 6

<sup>38</sup> Bennett, Jane, “*Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*”, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010 Page 24

<sup>39</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, “*The Psychoanalysis of Fire*”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, original text 1938, Page 26

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #7



Figure 13 , Lisa Cristinzo, *Call Me, It's a Climate Emergency*, Acrylic on Wood Panel 36" x 48", 2020

The paint brush against the linen causes friction. The brush type almost feels better when it is slightly wrong. The paint spreads like wildfire through the friction of the brush. Friction is a sensation, an encounter with and within a material landscape. There is a push and a pull. The push of smoke and pull of rope. The back and forth suggests movement. I paint moments of friction as fiction, like the friction of the rope against the log. The threatened safety of the candle, protected by the panels of wood. The smoke pressing forward, the wave rushing to extinguish and the sandbags trying to hold it all together.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Fire: The Spirit of Matter*

I dedicate this chapter, in which I investigate the various social realities of fire, to my mother, Margaret Presley, a Sagittarius who worked as a cook and a housekeeper all her life, a prolific cleaner and transformer of “things”.

#### *Build a Fire, Write a Painting*

Fire is an energy, moving within a material landscape in search of doorways of friction to release its newly transformed energy as flame. Fire is the animator of matter. It is an energy hidden within the nouns that name the world. If the first nine months of my Masters consisted of the “build phase” supported by theories of Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, and my Father’s hoarding, then the last nine months has been the burn stage of Gaston Bachelard’s *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, where I encounter my mother’s clearing energy. I encase these paradoxical tensions between matter and fire, Bennet and Bachelard, the noun and the verb, and my mother and father in the words “to build a fire”. The question is, how is it that you “build” a fire when fire is not material but reaction? Building a fire is like writing a painting: You must gather words and ideas and objects and position them, in order to create compositional intersections with the right amount of space, so that it will give way to the “lighting bolt” of activation. The wood panel of my paintings, like the woodstove in the origin story, are the containers for those reactions. We can only speculate about the kind of burn a painting or a situation will ignite. A fire through war, a fire over a broken heart, a devastating forest fire due to a climate in crisis, the flame of a candle at the altar of a god; all these themes and possibilities are collected and collapsed into one visual field in my paintings.

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #8



Figure 14 , Lisa Cristinzo, *Birch Bark is like Snakeskin*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2020

Shading cylinder shapes, pipes, logs, bottles, reminds me of the rudimentary shading practices of my youth. I am attracted to this rendered shape, often topped with a rim of colour, most often red. The brush steady in circular motion, like lipstick on a mouth, I place it around the opening of the bottle, pipe, log, with an angled brush, and just enough twist and pressure. Now this painting is hot, it's what painting looks like when we are experiencing an ice age version of a warming planet. This is fire without seeing flame. All the lush items left in the world gather on top of this stump and drink from its center, although we know the gathering will eventually cause friction, and it too will endure the perils of fire.

*The Strawberry Moon in this Painting*

It was the summer of 2021. I call it 'the summer of fire'. I return to Toronto Island to participate in a two-week residency at Artscape Gibraltar Point. I have been on a leave from managing the residency program, and several other buildings at Artscape, due to a brain injury sustained in late 2019. I am joined by Yuula Benivolski, Amy Lam and Aliya Pabani, who are spending time discussing the details of an ongoing BDS campaign in Toronto. Filmmaker Shelia Pye is also there. She is working on a coming-of-age film called "The Young Arsonists". Shelia is telling me this as I build a fire on Gibraltar Point Beach. The damage done by the rogue wave of the 2017 flood is less visible, and the large beach has returned due to the city's erosion mitigation strategy, which involves placing huge concrete slabs along the shoreline. We are hoping to catch a glimpse of the strawberry full moon. We see a bright neon pink beam of light on the horizon. First, we think it's a party boat, but in fact it's the pink moon we have been waiting for, rising over the lake. Surprisingly, the colour looks identical to the unusual pink moon in the painting I'm working on in the studio, hovering within a monochromatic blue palette.

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #9



Figure 15 , Lisa Cristinzo, *The Strawberry Moon, Just like the one in this Painting*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2021

Phthalo blue is an especially dangerous blue. It has been my primary blue for 17 years. It is like fire, so be careful, it's a flammable blue. Like grief, the blue in this painting is so deep it's almost black. My therapist said the feeling of grief is experiencing the purest form of love. This is how I feel about phthalo blue, so potent you can only handle a tiny bit. Like the birch bark painting, the one of a scorched planet, this one is what painting looks like when you have rapidly melting glaciers. There is not a lot of visible heat in this painting, but all this water is from a warming. You catch the anchored raft, in the moment before the candle burns through the rope and the raft drifts out of frame.

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #10



Figure 16 ,WIP Lisa Cristinzo, *The Strawberry Moon, Just like the one in this Painting*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2021

The raft drifts out of frame. I found two golden triangles (see on the left, the red and blue triangle). I gather objects for paintings, but also steal compositions and styles of painting, from Turner to Leger, Romanticism to Modernism. This is assemblage within paint.<sup>40</sup> This painting is based on the structure/theme of *The Raft of the Medusa*, by Theodore Gericault. I have placed some wooden boards on the right side of the painting as a reference for the raft. You will see one of my metal objects above this WIP also adding moral support.

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<sup>40</sup> I'm referencing comments made by committee members Fastwurms on whether my style of painting is Turner or Leger; and Janet Jones on my assemblages made from different styles of painting.

*It Shines in Paradise, It Burns in Hell*

Fires have occurred throughout natural history and controlled burns have been utilized for agricultural and ecosystem restoration. Colonial approaches to fire created a fire defense system that suppressed natural wildfires, throwing off the natural balance of the fire seasons.<sup>41</sup> The dominant narrative of fire is fire fighting. I challenge this narrative by creating an index for the incarnations of fire, which I will divide into eight categories. 1. Climate Crisis and Wildfires, 2. Firefighting, 3. Hearth & Home, 4. Burnt Letters and Photos in Times of Grief, 5. Warfare, Gunfire and Ceasefire, 6. Mythic History of Fire, 7. Fire in Protest and 8. Geological Fire. Gaston Bachelard speaks of the paradoxical state of fire, “Among all the phenomena, it [fire] is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in paradise. It burns in Hell....It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanations”.<sup>42</sup> The “two faces of fire” are explained in the text *Blazing the Trail: Celebrating Indigenous Fire Stewardship*. Indigenous burning practices have been used to control vegetation within a landscape and are culturally informed practices by Elders, Fire Keepers and Fire Knowledge Holders. These fires are referred to as “good fires”, whereas “bad fires” are uncontrolled wildfires that threaten livelihood, lives, and ecosystems.<sup>43</sup> The reciprocity in the spirit of fire is explained by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, “Fire will have to be equated as equal as any other element that we depend on because of this interdependence/interconnection with our natural world. If you have that understanding that this is life’s energy, and if you rely and depend on it for the benefit of all, then I believe that the fire will also respond in that way.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen J. Pyne, “Fire: A Brief History”, University of Washington Press, 2016 Page 7

<sup>42</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, “The Psychoanalysis of Fire”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, original text 1938, Page 7

<sup>43</sup> Walker Madeline, ed. Nklawa, Storyteller, “Blazing the Trail: Celebrating Indigenous Fire Stewardship”, Fire Smart Canada 2020 Page 8

<sup>44</sup> Ibid Page 13

How to Write a Painting  
Journal Entry #11



Figure 17, Lisa Cristinzo, *Fire is the Spirit of Matter*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2021

The representation of a painted wood log vibrates and pulses like a Disney animation. The animated wood stump looks more like a cartoon than a stump well-rendered. The limit of my talent is my wobbly painting aesthetic. I see my style of rendering as a much-needed activation and expression of the animism of an object. My paintings do not often contain the image of fire, I usually use a well blended peach; red orange and yellow to allude to fire. This is my first painting of fire, with a big vertical neon stroke. When I started painting fire my wood panel orientation changed from horizontal to vertical to accommodate its upward motion.

## *Fire in Theory*

The physical world can be divided into the categories of “matter” and “energy”. Matter occupies space and has volume, whereas energy, like fire, is not a substance but a force that does the work of bringing chemical and physical changes to matter.<sup>45</sup> These two entities, the “thing” and the “doing” (matter and fire) interdependently shift with our own social, political, spiritual, and ecological ideologies. Jane Bennett does not equate her research into vibrant matter to a consciousness or spirit within the material world, however, she demonstrates qualities of matter that are parallel to our own social structures and behaviours. Philosopher Karen Barad describes matter in its “doing”, while Thomas Nail describes it in “how it moves”.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the concept of fire in my research is presented as energy that “does” and “moves” in relation to matter. Fire inserts itself as living in all comparison. As American artist Theaster Gates explains, artists seem to be able to imagine that materials and spaces have something extremely sacred inside. I consider fire and energy as the sacred spirit within matter. Bachelard uses psychoanalysis to explain fire and its complexities, “fire is more a social reality than a natural reality”.<sup>47</sup> Emile Du Chatelet, a century before Bachelard, has similar sentiments about fire, describing it as too complex for science, an allusive energy that animates all substances.<sup>48</sup> “Every moment it defies the ability of our mind to grasp it, even though it is part of ourselves and of all bodies that surround us.”<sup>49</sup> “Without the perpetual action and reaction of fire on bodies, and bodies on fire, all fluidity, all elasticity, all softness would be banished; and if matter were for a

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<sup>45</sup> Tuve, L Richard, “Principles of Fire Protection Chemistry”, National Fire Protection Association, 1976, Page 1

<sup>46</sup> Gamble, Christopher N., Hanan, Joshua S. & Nail, Thomas, “What is New Materialism”, *Angelaki*, 24:6, Pages 111-134, 2019. Page 112, makes reference to Barad, “Meeting the Universe” 151 & Nail, *Being and Motion*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, “The Psychoanalysis of Fire”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, original text 1938  
Page 10

<sup>48</sup> Zinsser, Judith P, Ed. Intro, “Emilie Du Chatelet: Selected Philosophical and Scientific Writings”, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, Page 54

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Page 63

moment deprived of this spirit of life which animates it...all would be compact in the universe, and it would soon be destroyed.”<sup>50</sup> I return to my description of fire as a flameless, indestructible energy, moving within a material landscape in search of doorways of friction to release its energy as flame. As demonstrated by Bachelard, Bennett and DuChalelet, the analysis of fire and matter requires the devices of metaphor and prose. I use these same devices as I attempt to write the complexities of why and how I paint. The three elements needed to start a fire is; fuel, heat, and oxygen. For this reason and as explained above, a narrative of matter and fire, in a state of danger, or comfort, is contingent on the materiality of the object, its relationship to space, the friction of an encounter and finally the fire it will eventually endure. One must build a house for fire, then something must go incredibly wrong, or fortuitously right, before the flame of fire can move in. It can be the hearth of a home, or it can burn your house down. Making a painting is like building a house for fire.

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<sup>50</sup> Zinsser, Judith P, ed. Intro, “Emilie Du Chatelet: Selected Philosophical and Scientific Writings”, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, Page 80

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Journal Entry #12

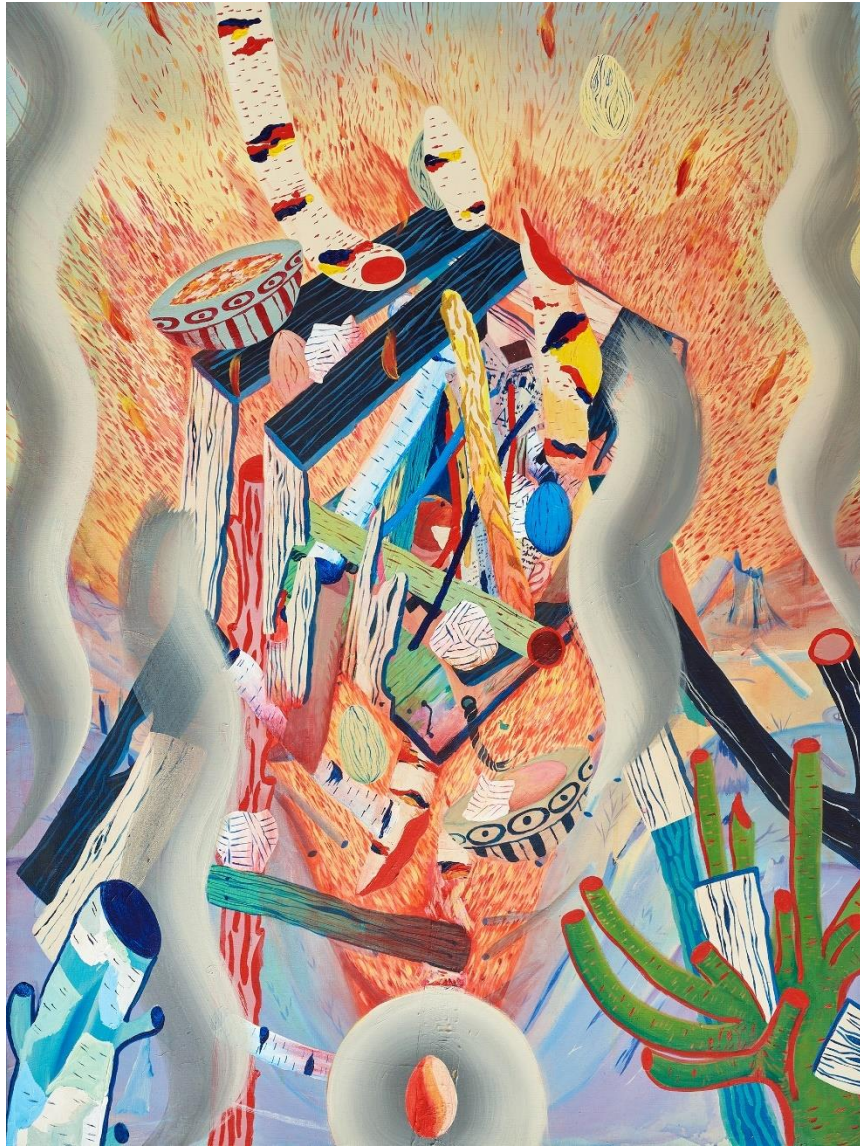


Figure 18 , Lisa Cristinzo, *My Body Your Shelter, Your Body My Shelter*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 36" x 48", 2021

I manage to do a painting of a furious fire while recovering from my hysterectomy. At the same time, I receive a confessional letter from a loved one. I burn the letter. I've been confined to my room for weeks, living with various stages of this painting. It started with a watercolour painting of a forest on fire. I did one everyday in my sketchbook. Confined to bed, I could not build a model, carry things to the studio, go for my walks for source materials. I feel like I've lost my connection to matter. I am anchorless and frustrated with the results, in a state I can only describe as an uncontrollable blaze. If the accumulation of matter as fuel can cause wildfires, the absence of material for fire can be like a nuclear bomb.

## CHAPTER 5

### **The Remains:** *Matter Remains Transformed*

*The Ashes from your wood fire  
Are carried by the wind  
And returned to the forest  
Finally*

If last summer was the summer for fire, then this fall was the season for ashes. Coming to terms with the loss of my biological fertility and dealing with the contents of the confessional letter resulted in an emotional state I can only describe as a bad fire. I was trying to convince myself that my mothering energy and a symbolic immortality would come through the material world through paintings, not children. How appropriate that my affinity for things would now result in non-human ‘thing’ babies in the form of objects and paintings. In the fall of 2021, I honour the aftermath of my fires in the creation of an archive for ashes. I build fires through life and grief cycles, as I struggle with my own health, matters of the heart and the making and articulation of this work. This archive of ashes is contained within clear glass peaches, holding the transformation of matter through fire, in a gradation of greys, whites, and blacks. If indeed one of the coping mechanisms for dealing with grief is the activation of “thing power” resulting in hoarding, then in the state of cooled ashes, comes the desire for the return of “shared warmth”.<sup>51</sup> Ashes used in “the fields being fertilized” become an intimate dream, the dream of fertility.<sup>52</sup> So we build a fire, within the spot of the cooled ashes. I gather again objects made of metal, stone, wood and paper, colourful plastics, the ashes of fires, and impregnate the container, that of a woodstove, a glass jar, a notebook, the wood panel and the walls of my studio. Ashes hold the

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<sup>51</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, “The Psychoanalysis of Fire”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, original text 1938

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid Page 33

cyclical nature of birth and death, and all the practices of life in between. Life is matter, fire is afterlife and ashes are matter resurrected. With the build up, the burn, the burn out, we restore.



Figure 19, archive of ashes from fires throughout thesis

## Kinship

“Very slowly burning, the big forest tree  
stands in the slight hollow of the snow  
melted around it by the mild, long  
heat of its being and its will to be  
root, trunk, branch, leaf, and know  
earth dark, sun light, wind touch, bird song.

Rootless and restless and warmblooded, we  
blaze in the flare that blinds us to that slow,  
tall, fraternal fire of life as strong  
now as in the seedling two centuries ago”.

-Ursula K. Le Guin<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Le Guin, Ursula K. Fox, Christopher, ed. “Old Growth: The best writing about trees from *Orion Magazine*” *Orion Magazine*, Massachusetts, 2021, Page 15

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**APPENDIX A**  
MFA Thesis Exhibition Documentation: Stone like Fruit, Fruit like Fire  
Photography by Lisa East





