
KARINA IRVINE is a 2nd generation settler of Swedish and Scottish ancestry based in Vancouver, BC, the unceded territories of the x̣m̄əθkw̄əȳə̄m, Skwxwú7mesh and Səl̓ílwətaʔ Nations. She is a writer, researcher and sometimes curator. She holds an MA in Art History and diploma in Curatorial Studies from York University and BFA from Emily Carr University. Her writing has been published in Canadian Art, C Magazine, Frieze, BlackFlash, among other outlets. Her current research has been exploring the impacts of resource extraction on language, labour and materiality.

TEGAN MOORE works with sculpture and installation using methods of saving, salvage, and deconstruction, in a material research practice investigating the hidden systems that mediate interior climates. Her recent exhibitions include *Immersion Grade*, at Vivo Media Arts (2019) and *Variations* at Zalucky Contemporary (2018). She has participated in residencies at Tokyo Arts and Space, Mustarinda (Finland), and Flaggfabrikken (now Aldea, Norway). She co-organizes the project space Support, in London, Ontario, and is part of The Synthetic Collective, a collaborative group researching plastics pollution and organizing the upcoming exhibition, *Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Though* at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

The artist would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council for supporting the realization of this project. Special thanks to Karina Irvine, Avery Moore Kloss, HaeAhn Kwon, and Paul Kajander for their work on the exhibition's accompanying material.

POCKETS FOR AIR

BY KARINA IRVINE

...there is some action of cutting through surfaces to a site that has no business being underneath.

What is the future doing underneath the past?

—Anne Carson, *Cassandra Float Can*

The main characteristic of foam is that it is equivocal, it can be and do many things. It begins from material, liquid or solid, and is swelled by air to form pockets. It can be impermeable or porous, flexible or soft. It's natural—a sea sponge, with pores that filter food and oxygen; a mushroom, that releases spores through tiny tunnels in the spongy underside of its cap; a volcanic rock, that once molten became hardened when cooled, inviting a network of crevices as it solidifies; or, borne from a creek infused with bacteria and organic matter, whipped up in a pooling eddy. The description of something as *foamy* emerged from the industrial production, marketing and consumption of foam. What's natural and what's synthetic became fused in both language and form, in description and environment.

/detritus/

In *Foam Fatigue*, bits of synthetic foam and plastic are reclaimed by Tegan Moore from her immediate surroundings where she locates her materials in a landscape that has already altered their appearances: from buoyancy foam found alongside river banks, discarded filters from an air conditioner, pieces of insulation, packing material, to cigarette butts. Foam is made invisible, both in use and impact.

As foam ages, the film membranes that separate air pockets degrade—collapsing from the erosive effects of time but never completely disappearing. Instead, their spatial range increases through dispersal, infiltrating and disrupting ecosystems as they go.

Once the foam Moore has collected enters her studio it undergoes a different form of entropy, beginning another phase. In the first phase, the object performs its intended function: filtering air, insulating, absorbing impact,

blocking sound. In the second phase, weather conditions or environmental impacts transform it, weakening its internal structure. In the third phase the objects are cut and assembled by Moore's hand. Her approach is additive and subtractive. The phases, iterations of the same materials, demonstrate the fact that though the materials are designed to disappear in infrastructure, their integrity is designed to last.

What are the forces that move and shape them? What's their conclusion?

/metaphor/

As foam ages, its surface texture transforms. It's cleaved by fractures that branch outwards like a tributary. The language used to describe the aging of plastics is shared with biologic and geologic processes.

It can bloom, like algae or flowers. When under pressure it shears, like tectonic plates.

Craze describes a network of cracks // stretch marks // that striate across a surface of plastic or a frozen lake.

Materials under stress begin to creep, over time—this happens in glaciers and gum, too.

Natural forms also adopt characteristics of manufactured ones. The formation of graupel or “snow pellets,” for instance, is a type of precipitation where snow develops a thin coating of ice. Its lightweight and round shape mimic the pervasive spreading of foam particles. Moore's observations show their mass movements guided by the wind in an unpredictable choreography, demonstrating the ease at which they spread.

Comparably, the thin tangled threads of eel grass, seen on the gallery floor, can be easily mistaken for plastic pollution—carrying a resemblance to that which threatens it. Here, it's entwined with its likeness, a shredded tarp.

Both form and language mix until I can no longer tell what's foam, what's rock; what's plastic, what's ice; what's air conditioning, what's breath?

/breath/

HVAC systems regulate interior atmospheres by controlling temperature, humidity and circulation. They operate on the fringes of perception, humming with a prolonged steady breath as if to simulate the focused exhalations performed to counter anxiety. A comfort is also placed in a belief in efficiency of energy use and effective filtration of particulate matter.

A steady rush of air is triggered as I turn up the heat—the sounds of an atmosphere pulling together. Condensation builds on the window panes as the contrast between temperatures outside and inside increase. The tropical plants seem happy.

How is air replaced, air that has become stuffy, infected, dirty, moist or dry? In a video an announcement spells out the Air Changes Per Hour (ACPH) of an air conditioner as a cursor hovers over its manual. The voice-over offers a description of the rate and relative efficiency with which the circulation of air in ventilation systems is refreshed by the air outside. Between each word the voice pauses, breathes in, then out—performing a shortened measure of interior airflow.

Foam is primarily made up of air, sometimes by 95–98%. The smaller the pockets, the denser, the more resilient and long-lasting. Filters contain millions of pockets for air, as air filters air.

The most illusory filter is designed for cigarettes. With each inhalation it yellows, darkening over the course of a smoke, to lend an illusion of purification. The filters contain plastic cellulose acetate fiber and are the leading form of litter across the globe, having actively been discarded since the 50s and resisting decomposition. The chemicals embedded within filters leach into ecosystems and are often mistaken for food.

/sound/

She cuts through the foam, puncturing hundreds of tiny air pockets that release an arching scream. When whole, these pockets collectively form a sound barrier blocking

noise by absorbing it. Frequency is lost as sound vibrations move through foam, trapped in its cellular structure. When cut it does the opposite, amplifying the sound of a slice.

The neighbours are talking, but not loudly. I wonder to myself, there must not be enough pockets of air in the insulation.

History repeats itself. Is that what Anne Carson meant by asking, “what is the future doing underneath the past?” The present is forever and continually marked by past events, actions and materials. What are their conclusions? The future holds this accumulation and more. If the past is yet to come what technologies can replace foam?

Sea sponges are “highly effective” at carbon-trapping. Egg shells can absorb and store carbon dioxide in their membranes. Fungi can be used to patch holes as they grow outwards or as packing material. Fungi not only can replace synthetic foam, they can consume it too. There is a paradox that arises between the fragility of synthetic foam's internal infrastructure and the fragile ecosystems that they penetrate. By revealing the persistence of natural processes among so much manufactured detritus, Moore brings attention to the interconnectedness of synthetic and natural forms, in atmospheres, ecosystems and bodies. What atmospheres are manufactured? What does it mean to be in air?