

**STATES OF MATTER
RUTH BEER**

TWO RIVERS GALLERY
Prince George
April 29–July 10, 2016

THE REACH GALLERY MUSEUM
Abbotsford
September 29, 2016–January 8, 2017

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**Two Rivers
Gallery**

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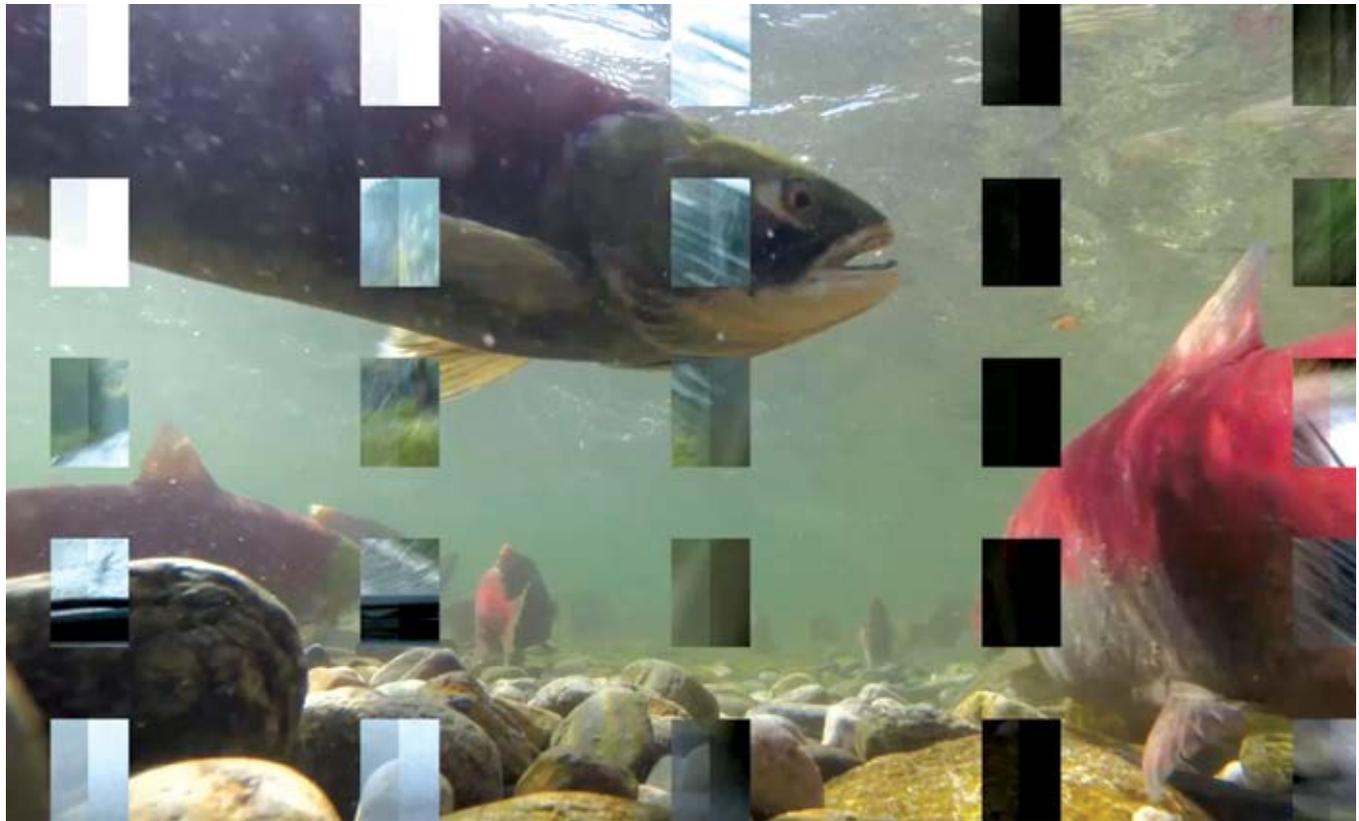
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FOREWORD

Both Prince George and Abbotsford, like many Canadian communities, have direct ties to natural resource extraction. Some industrial activity, like logging, pit mining, or oil extraction, is more in evidence than others. The movement of oil, on the other hand, can be concealed in buried pipelines at best leaving only trenched gaps in the landscape and signs declaring the presence of a high pressure pipeline. Only a shift of consequence, like a proposed expansion or an environmental disaster, brings them to the forefront of our consciousness.

For several years artist Ruth Beer has concerned herself with the social, culture, economic, and ecological impacts of petro-culture on British Columbia communities, while also taking into consideration the materiality of both raw and processed substances generated by this immense and pervasive industry. The artworks that have resulted from this sustained line of inquiry comprise the exhibition *States of Matter*.

The exhibition was developed collaboratively by Two Rivers Gallery, Prince George and The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford and presented at both galleries in 2016. While the core selection of artworks presented in both iterations of the exhibition remained the same, slight variances occurred in each respective presentation. These are noted in the list of works included in this publication.

This publication includes writing by the artist, Ruth Beer, whose essay introduces us to the origins of this body of work, the multi-year research-creation project *Trading Routes*. In addition, we have included curatorial perspectives that provide some insight into the selection of Beer's work and its connection to real-world concerns. Beer's is an impressive body of work. Her concerns are timely and will no doubt resonate with many communities and with many readers. We would like to express our thanks to the artist whose intellectual curiosity and

artistic acuity has resulted in a body of work that is both aesthetically compelling and extraordinarily responsive to the complexities of its subject matter. Two Rivers Gallery would like to thank the Province of BC, and the BC Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Regional District of Fraser Fort George. The Reach Gallery Museum is grateful for the significant and ongoing financial support it receives from the City of Abbotsford.

George Harris
Curator and Artistic Director
Two Rivers Gallery
Prince George

Laura Schneider
Executive Director & Curator
The Reach Gallery Museum
Abbotsford



Ruth Beer, *Crossroads: Gas Station*, 2014, inkjet digital print, 81 x 112 cm (32 x 44 in)

Using metaphors of grease and oil, at the heart of the project is an attentiveness to the entanglement between water and extraction industries, social and environmental geographies, and cultural ways of knowing. The project was initially sparked by industry proposals to further expand the network of crude oil pipelines across the country, it was a direct response to the unrelenting pursuit of resources and profit on unceded Indigenous territories, and it followed in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

FROM TRADING ROUTES TO STATES OF
MATTER: ARTIST'S INTRODUCTION
RUTH BEER

Amidst a rapidly transforming landscape, the cultural and political conditions of Canada have been an enormous source of inspiration and provocation for my creative practice over the last several years. The work developed for the exhibition *States of Matter* is embedded in the recent debates about resource extraction that are shaping Canadian environments from coast to coast to coast. Finding ways to generate new forms of knowledge and understanding through artistic production and artistic encounters has guided my practice as an artist and researcher. The artworks presented in this exhibition elicit the questions: what matters, and perhaps more pointedly, what *is* the matter with contemporary extraction industries? My intention in the creation and presentation of these artworks is to critically engage with these challenging ideas and provoke similar questions within the viewer. Rather than being a straightforward representation of the issues that connect extractive energy industries, landscape, and community, these

artworks bring together the knowledge systems related to social, political, and cultural ideas, and the art-based language related to aesthetic, formal, material, and space concerns, to draw the viewer into other ways of reflecting on these matters.

My interests have included crossovers between the material investigations of physical substances and the rhetoric that surrounds energy, resource extraction, and culture. Looking at objects and ideas side-by-side, I seek out expressive strategies of representation that can frame our relationship to the environment in new and different ways. In their material form, the artworks present an intentionally ambiguous and complicated relationship for the viewer, one that may be similar to our own uncomfortable relationship to the production and consumption of energy in which we are complicit. The works act as metaphors or multivalent symbols and are characterized by contradictory implications.

The exhibition presents a survey of the last four years of my creative work. It is linked to a research-creation project called *Trading Routes: Grease Trails, Oil Pipelines* (2013–2018) where I am the lead artist-researcher working with a team of artists, educators, researchers, activists, and museum professionals. Through artworks, publications, artistic research, conversations, and events, the project aims to more fully understand the relationship between land and people within Canada. As a forum for dialogue, advocacy, and exchange among Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and citizens, the development of this work was also a process of highlighting current environmental challenges while envisioning strategies for future change. The project was initially sparked by industry proposals to further expand the network of crude oil pipelines across the country. It is a direct response to the unrelenting pursuit of resources and profit on unceded Indigenous territories and follows in the wake of the Truth and





Reconciliation Commission. In recent years there have been significant changes to industry proposals for the British Columbia-bound pipelines, and to plans for the future of energy in this province and the country as a whole. What hasn't changed is the pace at which the energy futures of provinces and territories are rapidly transforming, and the need for interventions from individuals and collectives towards energy and social transition, and renewable futures.

Bringing new and diverse perspectives to the discussion of extractive industries, energy and “petroculture” is key to the overall *Trading Routes* project, and to the resulting body of work. Using metaphors of grease and oil, at the heart of the project is an attentiveness to the entanglement between water and extraction industries, social and environmental geographies, and cultural ways of knowing. My search for a deeper understanding of these issues has benefitted tremendously from

fieldwork and collaborative-based approaches.

My fieldwork has involved travelling to industry-affected areas in northern rural British Columbia, collecting interviews from residents about art-making, place histories, and the future of energy and extraction in Canada. Visiting these landscapes, engaging with communities, and travelling along the coastal and interior corridors of the province has been a necessary step in understanding, firsthand, the ramifications of these mega-industry resource projects. Throughout this process, I have developed connections with residents living in communities in the Pacific Northwest, specifically in the regions that are closest to the proposed sites of development and most directly vulnerable to their impact. Coming to understand the lived experiences of people who are at the crux of future energy landscapes has been an essential part of my creative process. Listening to the stories that emerge from these places has been



formative to both the development of the artworks and to a growing body of research which includes oral histories and audio-mapping. I have spoken with environmentalists, emergency responders, artists, writers, curators, teachers, elders, youth, cultural leaders, activists, and other inspired thinkers, who have contributed significantly to my research through their unique positions on issues of industrial development. In these intimate discussions, one speaker's position often overlaps, converges, and departs from the next speaker's, demonstrating a number of diverse and informed perspectives. There is an interesting parallel between the physicality of the weavings presented in this exhibition and the stories and narratives that, tangled together, influence my art/making. Weaving becomes a metaphor for the intersection of stories and narratives and the places from which they emerge. Woven structures convey the complexity and interconnectedness of the conversations I have gathered in my fieldwork.

This is perhaps most apparent in the video work that accompanies *Intersections* in the exhibitions. It is clear in the conversations that are part of this piece that there is no singular resonating message, but a deeply nuanced and multifaceted web of issues.

I am particularly interested in how dialogue, filtered through contemporary art practices, serves as a catalyst for new socio-economic and cultural adaptations. As a sculptor, I am inspired by the ability of materials and objects to be affective and to communicate ideas and raise questions about the world. I have long been interested in the way minerals and other resources such as oil are barely knowable in everyday experience except in transformed states: gas for the car, copper in electronic and digital devices. In this body of work I explore how materials can be considered active agents rather than inert or inanimate substances. I often incorporate quotidian items, like cassette tapes or rubber sealants, and “non-fine art”



industrial materials into these works because of their relationship to petro-products, extracted resources, popular culture and land/water-based stories.

While observation, conversation, and experiments with material shape the research trajectories of my creative practice, collaboration is integral to the production of the artworks. In addressing the technical challenges of working with these materials, I have sought out the assistance of highly skilled craftspersons. These talented accomplices have adapted their knowledge of a medium to new ways of working, the results of which comprise *States of Matter*. I am grateful for the opportunity to share perspectives and collaboration with student assistants and also professionals. In particular, my gratitude is aimed towards Soledad Muñoz, an accomplished weaver; Pascale Theoret-Groulx, a sophisticated video editor; Tomas Borsa and Jean-Philippe Marquis, committed documentary filmmakers; Caitlin Chaisson, a skilled

writer and researcher; and many other collaborators.

The output of cultural and artistic work is often sensorial, experiential, ambiguous, or abstracted. This means that contemporary art is not likely the most efficient mode for a shift in resolutions of debates or challenges. But rather than minimizing the complexity of our relationship to energy and extraction, contemporary art can be used as a tool to broaden the ways in which we interpret meaning and significance in the world. The works shared in this exhibition have been, for me, a way to navigate my own politics, concerns, and imaginings about the relationship I have with land, water, resources, and environmental justice. As a pedagogical and social space, the gallery is a site of informal learning that has a crucial role in harnessing our questions and concerns, and can help us acknowledge the way our perspectives are often mediated. Through artistic encounters, I believe we are able to look at what is

happening around us in new ways, which in turn may begin opening up creative possibilities for a more environmentally just future. The environmental, cultural, and geographic challenges that we will face in the years to come are formidable, but art can provide an opportunity to consider complexity, uncertainty, and creative potential in forming future imaginaries.

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the British Columbia Arts Council for their support.

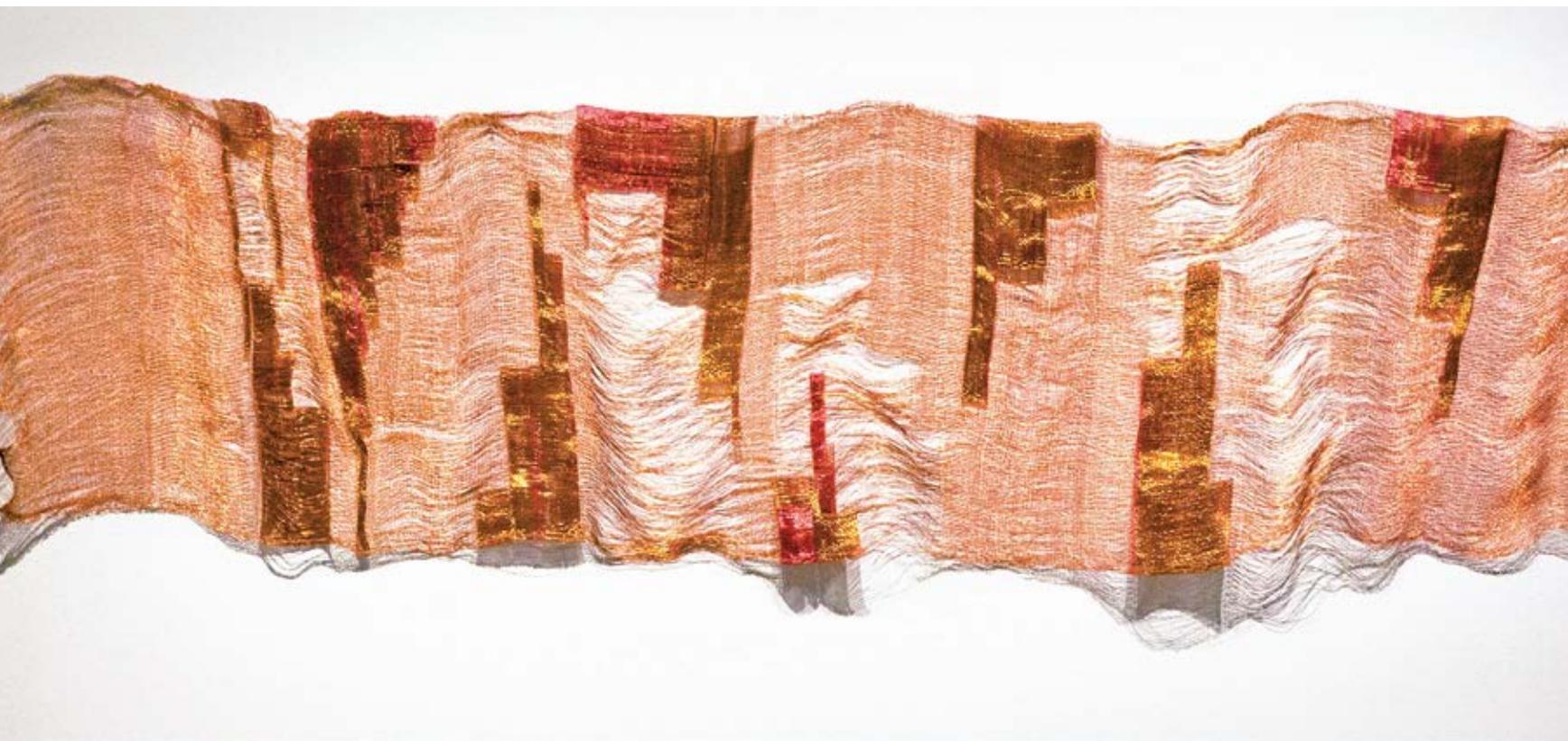
Ruth Beer, Vancouver
June 2017

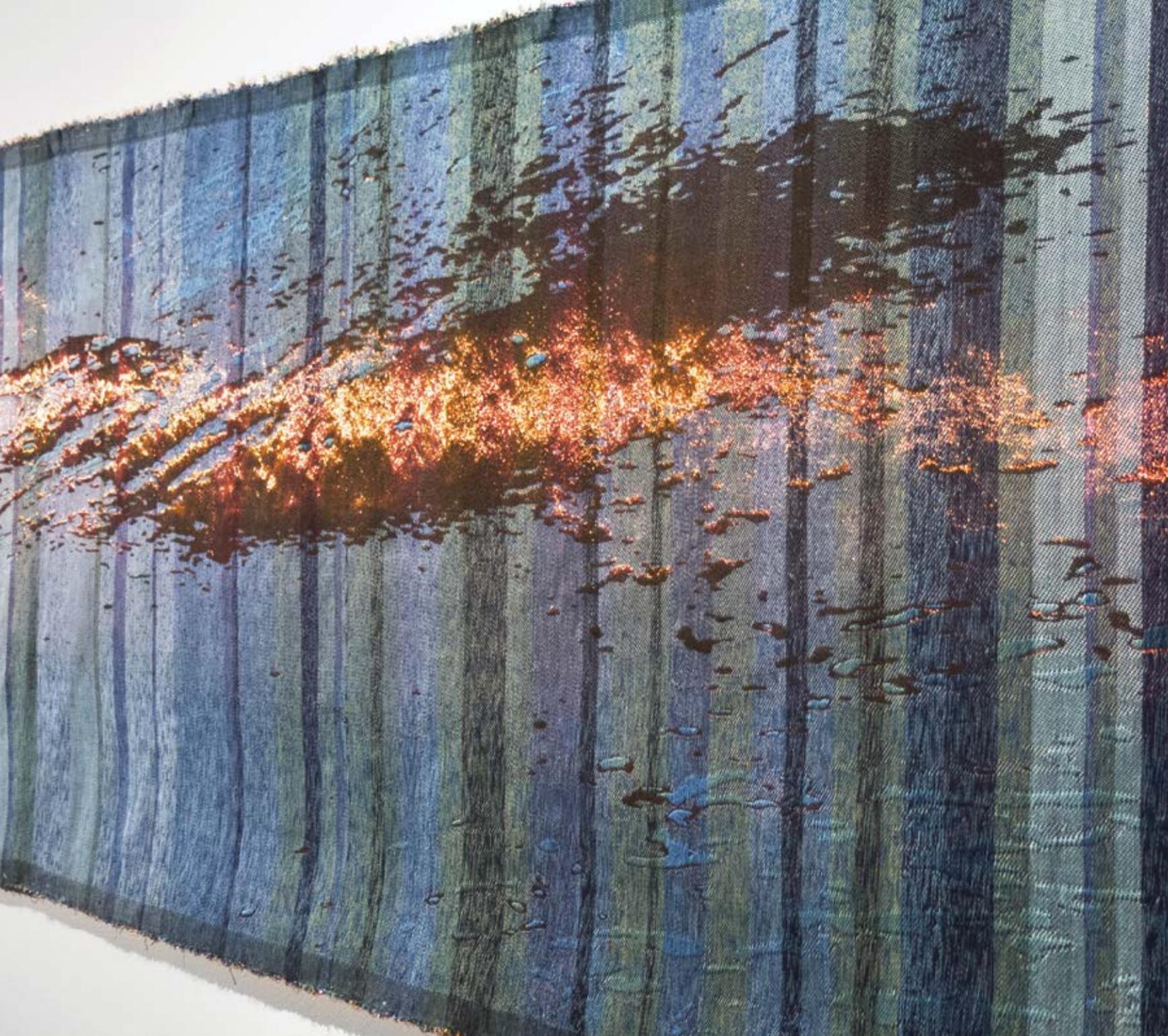


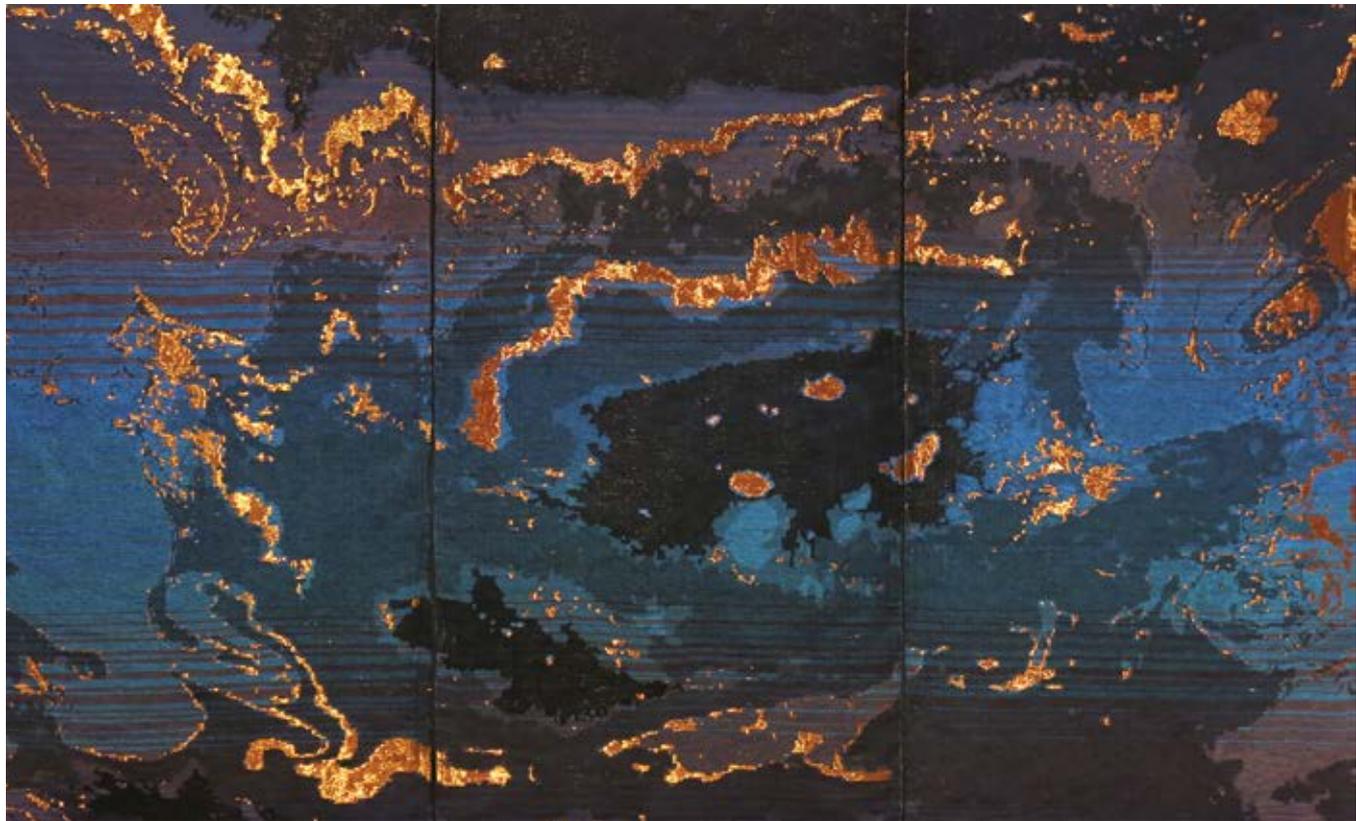
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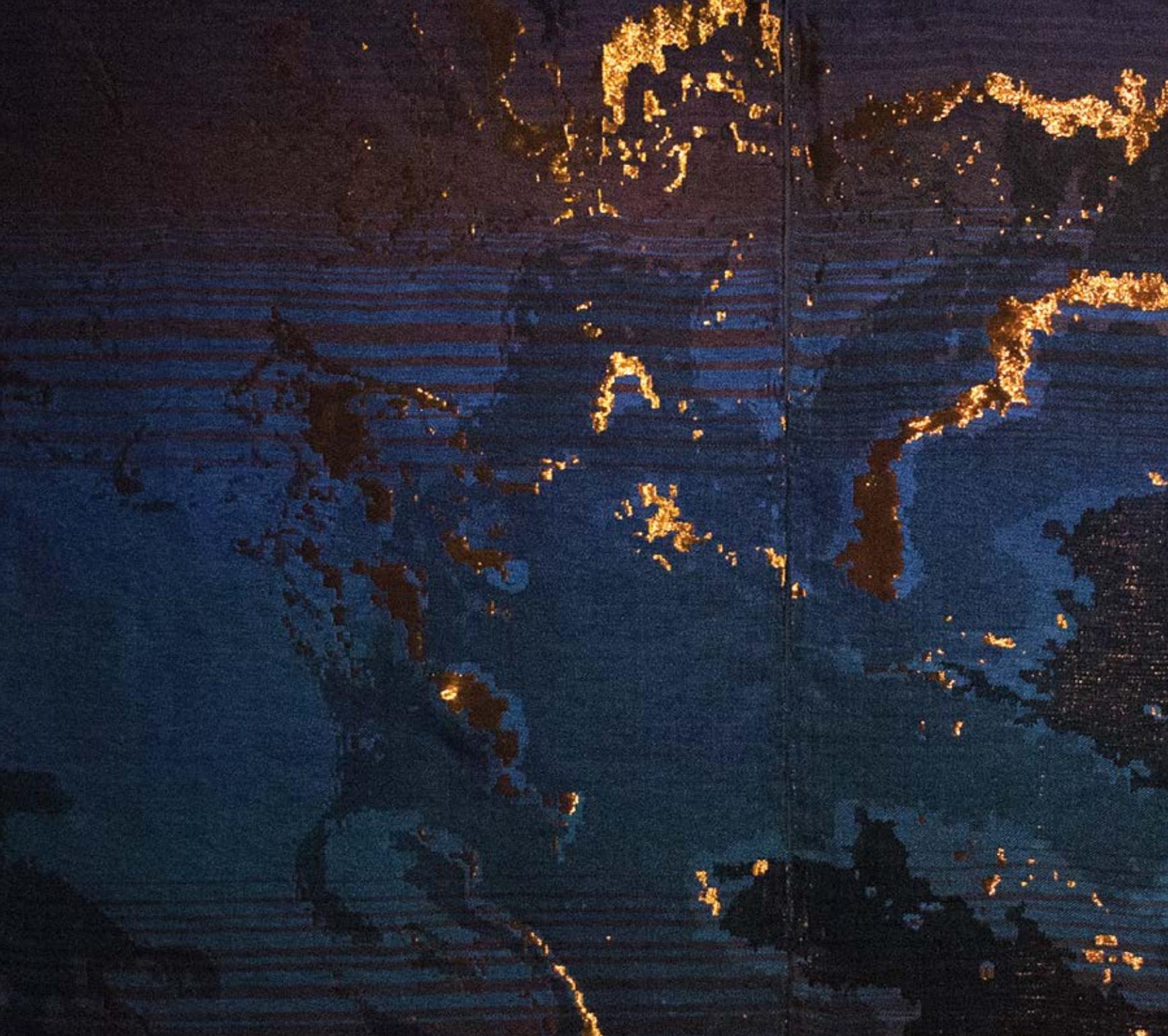




TWO RIVERS GALLERY
PRINCE GEORGE

April 29–July 10, 2016

Curated by George Harris







The Nathan E Stewart ran aground on October 13, 2016, leaking over 100,000 litres of diesel fuel into coastal waters of BC. Photograph courtesy of April Bencze / Heiltsuk Nation.

When the tugboat Nathan E Stewart sank off Bella Bella earlier this year copper, green, and cobalt-coloured sheens tracked the extent of the resulting diesel leak and tipped the balance. Partially contained by special equipment designed to mitigate the environmental impact of the spill, the fuel nevertheless landed on the beaches and spread upon the ocean currents prompting a notice of fisheries closure. The economic and subsistence related impacts on the Heiltsuk, upon whose territory the spill occurred, has yet to be determined, but stands to be significant.

RUTH BEER: STATES OF MATTER
GEORGE HARRIS

States of Matter, an exhibition of recent work by Ruth Beer, examines links between industry and the environment. Using metal thread, audiotape, and other fibres, she seeks to sensitize viewers to the complex set of considerations that, both in terms of media and subject matter, are woven together to form a series of tapestries and sculptures.

In her video work *Intersections*, Beer splices together video from the Haisla, Heiltsuk, and Gitksan First Nations communities. Individuals grapple with fishing equipment on their boats in one scene. In another, people paddle traditional canoes at a gathering of coastal First Nations. Salmon are also represented in shallow water, filmed just below the surface, and footage of a coastal industrial facility is also depicted. The soundtrack is comprised of voices sometimes overlaid as an indecipherable cacophony. At other times, threads of conversation emerge clearly and describe histories connected to

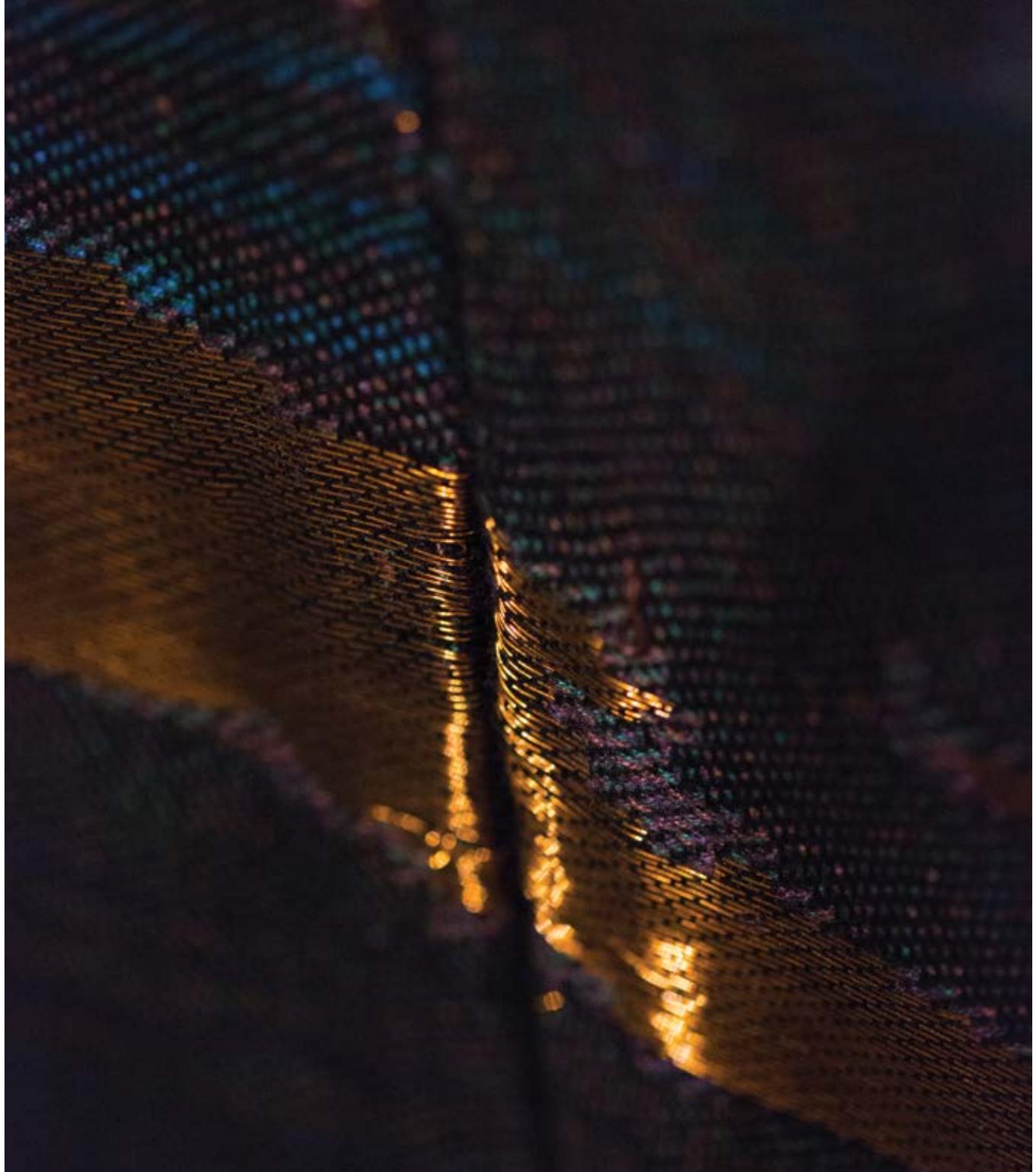
the location depicted, express the importance of the coastal rainforest, and voice concerns around environmental health. In one section of the video, hands are shown weaving fibre as if to invoke the strong traditions of Indigenous weaving.

Throughout *Intersections* Beer has chosen to layer elements of one scene upon another, creating composite images. Elements of one scene are imposed as patterns and lines upon another scene, assuming geometric shapes reminiscent of woven designs not unlike those found on Ravens Tail Blankets, for instance. This kind of digital weaving not only evokes the artist's tapestries, but also entwines history, resources, industry, and the environment in a complex series of concerns in precarious balance.

When the tugboat Nathan E Stewart sank off Bella Bella in October 2016, copper, green, and cobalt-coloured sheens tracked the extent of the resulting

diesel leak and tipped the balance. Partially contained by special equipment designed to mitigate the environmental impact of the spill, the fuel nevertheless landed on beaches and spread upon the ocean currents prompting a notice of fisheries closure.¹ At the time of writing, the economic and subsistence related impacts on the Heiltsuk, upon whose territory the spill occurred, was yet to be determined, but stands to be significant. *Oil Topography* presents a view of landscape altered by oil. Drawn from a digital photo of a small oil sheen in a puddle, the nearly ten by seven-foot tapestry reorients the slick, repositioning it directly in our line of sight. No longer diminutive, no longer something to be stepped over, it is set in front of us, forcing a confrontation. Most of us have encountered a minor parking-lot spill. Few of us have ever had to tackle a spill on an industrial scale like that of Bella Bella and Beer seems determined to reposition it in our consciousness.

¹ "Fisheries Notice," October 16, 2016, Government of Canada, accessed on December 4, 2016, <http://notices.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fns-sap/index-eng.cfm?pg=view_notice&DOC_ID=188883&ID=all>.





Beer's tapestry *Seep* is similarly calculated to draw attention to another concern. Comprised of three sections, curvilinear copper bands of various densities meander across the dark horizontal configuration of panels, resembling both a creeping tideline and the lines on a topographical map. The artist raises the idea of the land measured and defined, rendering it in simple terms. Elevation is suggested and it is presented in the earthy colours of the minerals drawn from the land rather than with the history, or the character of the life that lives upon it. The ambiguity of elevation represented here suggests depressions as much as hills or mountains in which case it is easy to see a series of ponds in this work, which seems appropriate to its title. "Seep" is a term that can be used to describe the process of contaminated materials escaping from an area of confinement. It has been used in connection with garbage dumps and tailing ponds, for instance, and the pollution of nearby waterways. Beer's work sensitizes us to this risk. Intellectually, it is inviting

to minimize this threat. However, as with Bella Bella and the fuel spill, and with residents of the Central Interior of BC in 2014 when a tailings pond burst at the Mount Polley mine, it is important to remember that real people bear the consequences.

Seep is made of fibre, magnetic audiotape, and copper. Copper is mined at places such as Mount Polley and Beer's incorporation of it in her work serves as both a warning and an acknowledgement of complicity. Our world is dependent upon extracted resources like oil and metals and it may be impossible to extricate these materials from our lives. Beer's use of copper is calculated to add a layer of complexity to her critique. Not only does she use it as a significant medium in her work, the hand-woven jacquard technique she uses is also dependent upon numerous technological processes that require it too. Mined materials, for example, are key to electronic computer-based systems the artist utilized in sourcing images and



to the processing of loom-patterning software. Beer draws herself into her work not as a sage and exemplary abstainer from these materials but, like most of us, as a conflicted colluder.

Beer utilizes magnetic audiotape, a largely obsolete material of which many households have divested themselves, in a number of artworks including *Seep*. In *Loop* the material is perhaps most obvious. Diverted from the waste stream, the tape in these works still contains those sounds originally recorded on them. The voices, stories, and music encoded to the tape, drawn from commercial and home recordings, are representative of a broad range of tastes and interests. As a sampling of material collected in this province they remind us of the connection many of us had to this medium. The artist selected the material because of its tendency to shimmer and shine in a fashion that reminds her of the sheen on water or fish

scales,² however the use of the once ubiquitous material cannot help but raise the problem of post-consumer waste. More than passive witnesses to its repurposing as art, we are reflected in and implicated in the material used. Conceptually, Beer quite literally weaves us into her work as bed-fellows to issues of waste and pollution.

Beer demonstrates her concerns in global terms in *Neptune* where graphs based on oceanographic research that chart oxygen levels in the oceans are woven into a copper warp and weft. As a means of characterizing the health of our oceans similar types of data have been drawn upon to articulate a looming crisis. Pollution, global warming, and other factors have resulted in oceanic dead-zones where oxygen levels are depleted in places like the Gulf of Mexico and the Baltic Sea to the point they can no longer sustain life. In 2008 more than four hundred dead zones around the world had been







identified and scientists have warned of the potential of significant growth ultimately imperiling planetary health.³ The copper electrical wire Beer uses in this and other works, like the technological applications in which it is utilized, is desirable. Shiny and attractive, it is as vital to her work as is the electricity it conducts to power lights, industry, and devices integral to life in the twenty-first century. Copper and other resources extracted from the earth are as much a fabric of our society as they are to these weavings and if they were to be removed, both would collapse.

Three black amorphous sculptures in the exhibition titled *Black Formation Energy 1–3 (Recycling Rodin)* evoke similarities to coal, the ore from which minerals and metals might be extracted, and the tarry blobs of oil that result from oil spills. At Two Rivers Gallery they were placed across from *Climate* a nearly sixteen-foot-long tapestry woven from copper wire and indigo-dyed cotton fibre. The woven

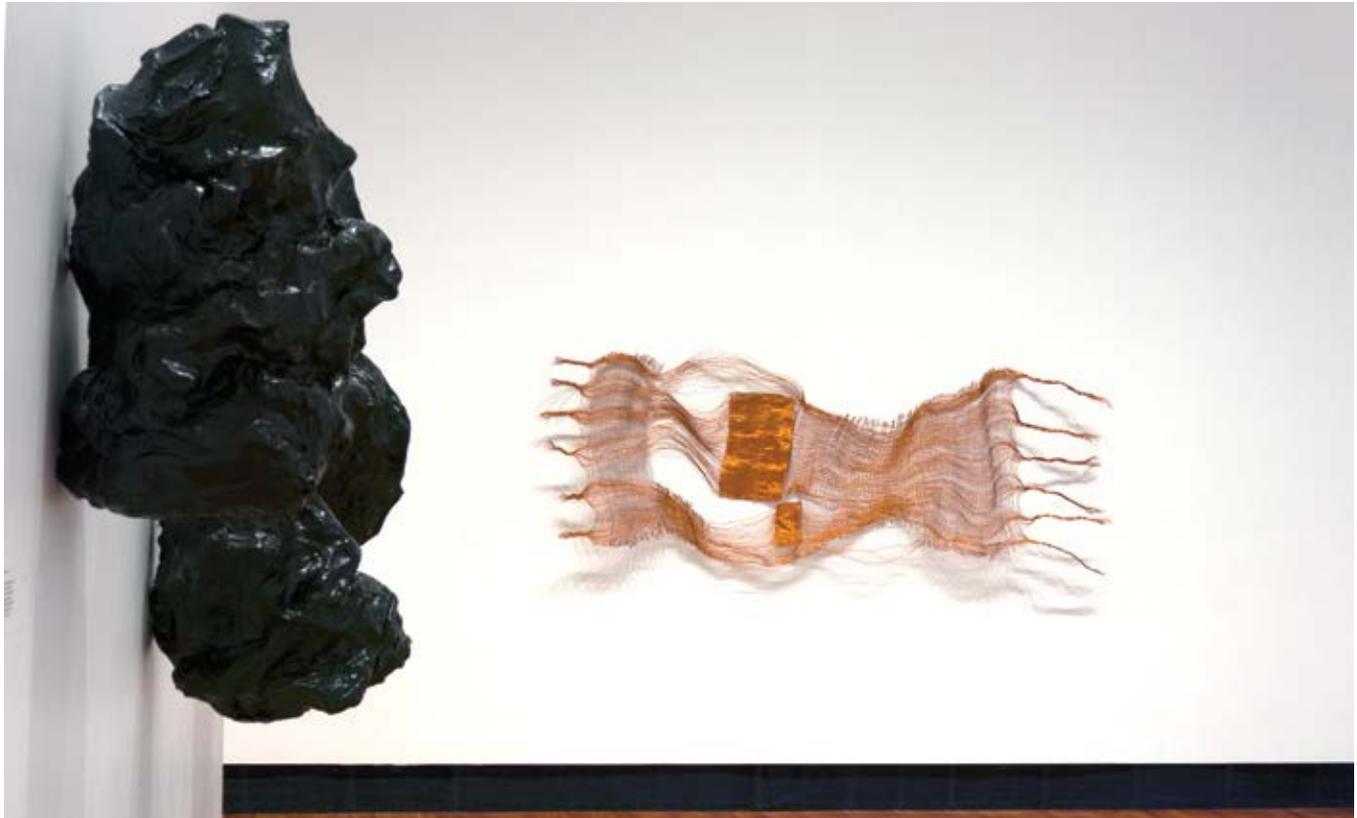
image in this work is derived from a digital image of a dramatic sunset, replete with extraordinary hues resulting from pollutants in the air, stemming, in part, from the processes used by the matter evoked by the amorphous black forms facing it. It is oddly reminiscent of *Oil Topography* discussed earlier. The tapestry, with the copper wire reflecting light, replicates the drama of the sunset it pictures. It is expansive, extraordinary, and breathtaking. Beer has acknowledged her fascination with the beauty that can stem from pollution and her conflicted perspective is present here. Enveloping in scale, it asks us to consider the sphere that contains us, from which we draw our breath and to which we are inextricably connected.

Beer's work presents her as complicit in the concerns she sets out to critique. Not only does she weave herself into this discourse, but the rest of us as well. Her work embodies a dynamic relationship to industry, resource extraction, and the state of

² Personal communication with the artist, December 7, 2016.

³ Carl Zimmer, "A Looming Oxygen Crisis and Its Impacts on the World's Oceans," *Yale Environment 360*. (August 5, 2010), accessed on December 5, 2016, http://e360.yale.edu/feature/a_looming_oxygen_crisis_and_its_impact_on_worlds_oceans/2301/.

being in the twenty-first century that is conflicted and complex. Rather than rejecting outright those elements in question, hers is a more measured approach. Beer's process of weaving materials is an allusion to the integral fabric of the world in which we live. Reflecting it back to us, she shows us how vital it is to be mindful inhabitants of this planet. She presents to us the risk associated with environmentally irresponsible methods of resource extraction, and asks us to consider what is at stake.





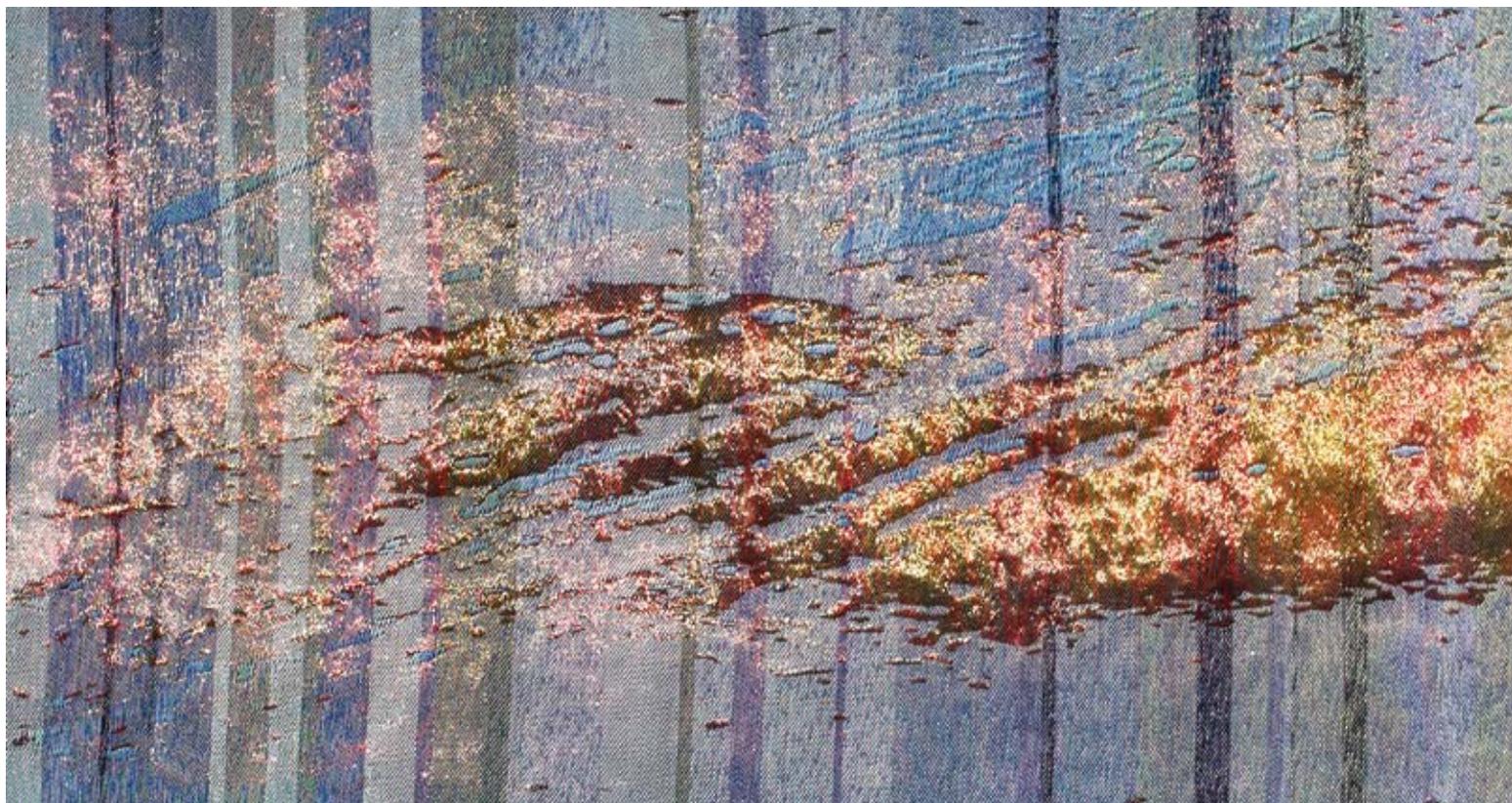


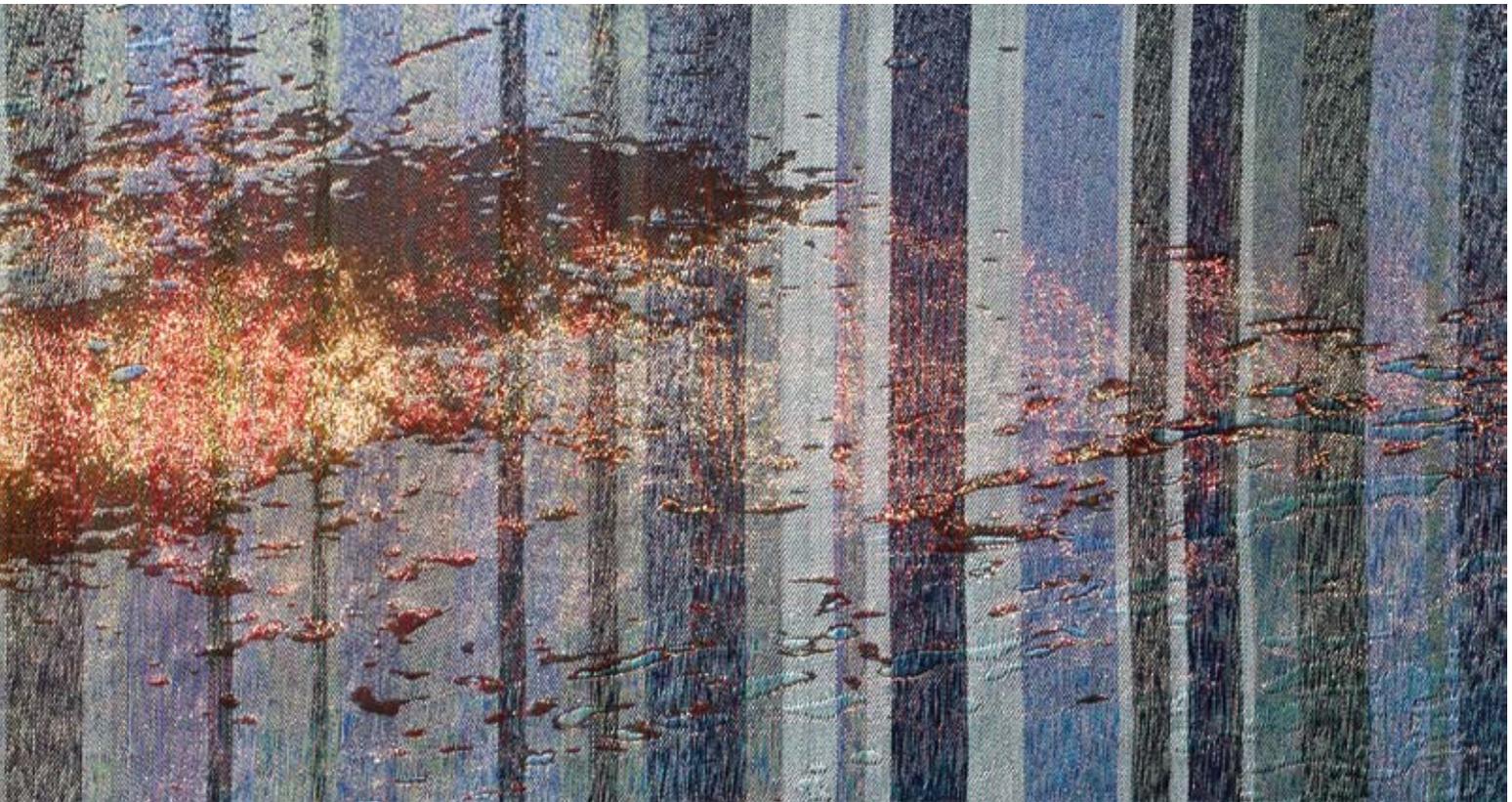


THE REACH
GALLERY MUSEUM
ABBOTSFORD

September 29, 2016–January 8, 2017

Curated by Laura Schneider







Participants walk a portion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline that passes through Abbotsford in an event hosted by The Reach on October 29, 2016. Photograph courtesy of Kate Bradford.

The suburban uniformity is broken by a wide swath of mown turf that cuts a tidy path between two homes, stretching out in either direction. The treed corridor is adorned with a smattering of vibrant autumn colours and looks to be the perfect spot for an invigorating seasonal walk (were the weather more favourable). Bright yellow signposts which read “Warning High Pressure Petroleum Pipeline Crossing” pop up at regular intervals along the grassy thoroughfare, the sole indicator of its actual purpose.

SPILLS IN THE GALLERY
(AND OTHER SUBURBAN REFLECTIONS)
LAURA SCHNEIDER

We are standing in a cul-de-sac, between two newly built homes in the east end of Abbotsford, BC. Although most of us are dressed in practical apparel, accustomed as we are to the soggy weather of a British Columbia autumn, it is raining just hard enough to begin soaking through any unprotected surface. The large homes that surround us are tightly packed, dizzyingly monotonous in their vinyl and faux-stone facades, multi-pitched rooflines, and protruding garages. We could be in any middle-class development in any burgeoning Canadian city. The suburban uniformity is broken by a wide swath of mown turf that cuts a tidy path between two homes, stretching out in either direction. The treed corridor is adorned with a smattering of vibrant fall colours and looks to be the perfect spot for an invigorating seasonal walk (were the weather more favourable). Bright yellow signposts that read “Warning High Pressure Petroleum Pipeline Crossing” pop up at regular intervals along the grassy thoroughfare, the

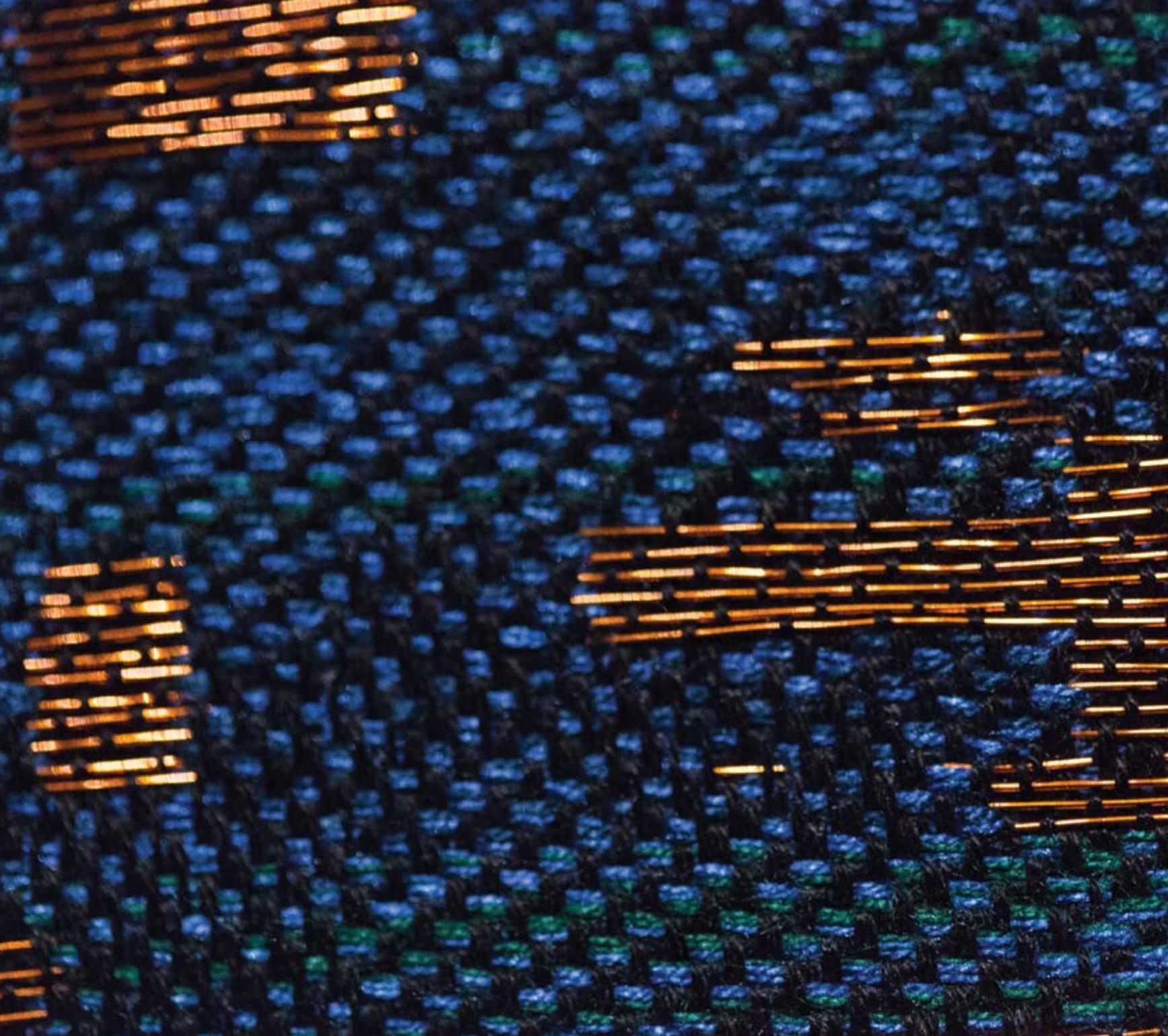
sole indicator of its actual purpose. Beneath our feet, the Trans-Mountain pipeline surges, transporting three hundred thousand barrels of petroleum product to nearby refineries and terminals each day.

The relative invisibility of the pipeline—its quiet presence so close to the comfortable domesticity of this Abbotsford suburb—is one of the reasons we are standing in the rain on a Saturday afternoon. Motivated by the work of Vancouver-based artist Ruth Beer, and organized in response to the exhibition *States of Matter*, the pipeline walk is an embodied consideration of the inconspicuous infrastructure and processes of natural resource extraction that surround us. Standing in this unremarkable cul-de-sac, the fact that fifteen million gallons of oil product moves past these homes every day seems somehow inconceivable, despite the fact that we are surrounded by evidence of its ubiquity in the materials that comprise and adorn this community: the vinyl-clad

homes, natural-gas fireplaces, and two- and three-car garages concealing multiple family vehicles.

The walk is a means to situate Ruth Beer's *States of Matter* in the context of our community. Which is not to say, of course, that the exhibition is specific to this place. Quite the opposite is true, and therein lies the power of Beer's recent body of work: as Canadians we have a complicated relationship with natural resource extraction, and one that we're not always eager to examine too carefully. Our reliance on this industry for our creature comforts, modern conveniences, and economic stability is at odds with our image of ourselves as an environmentally conscientious nation. We all participate in this conundrum; even the most eco-conscious household is part of the collective paradox. The asymmetry of our attitudes toward fossil fuels is an ongoing challenge to the possibility that we might permanently and significantly shift our behaviour to consider more sustainable energy sources.





Oil and its byproducts are pervasive in our daily lives, powering economies, shaping societies, and fueling debates, yet in its raw form, it is virtually invisible to us. In the artist's words, the pipeline "comes from an invisible place and snakes off into an invisible landscape with what may seem like invisible consequences."¹ In *States of Matter* Beer endeavours to make visible the complexities of petroculture and all of its complicated relationships, realities, and reverberations. Works of art in the exhibition are made from materials that are born of, and recall, the processes of natural resource extraction. The transformation of resources from their origin to their quotidian use, and the cultural, environmental, and economic implications of this activity, provide a conceptual and material foundation for this body of work. Using weaving, video and sculpture, she addresses our difficult relationship to nonrenewable resources, testing the aesthetic possibilities of these materials when they are brought starkly into view.

Many of Beer's latest works take the form of woven sculptures and wall hangings that incorporate a variety of disparate materials, each of which is infused with its own particular cultural significance. In addition to more traditional materials like indigo-dyed cotton, the artist uses copper wire and discarded magnetic audiotape in these weavings, interlacing materials that embody layers of temporal and cultural meaning. Copper holds traditional significance for many First Nations and is also an essential material in contemporary industry. In the recent past, magnetic audiotape was one of the more common materials used to record the stories, sounds, and sights of the modern world. Despite its once pervasive role, today it is charmingly outmoded, perhaps even unfamiliar to a younger generation of gallery-goers. Hand-dyed materials are simultaneously anachronistic, and today are more likely associated with contemporary luxury items than with everyday utility. The materials that Beer has chosen to work with represent the

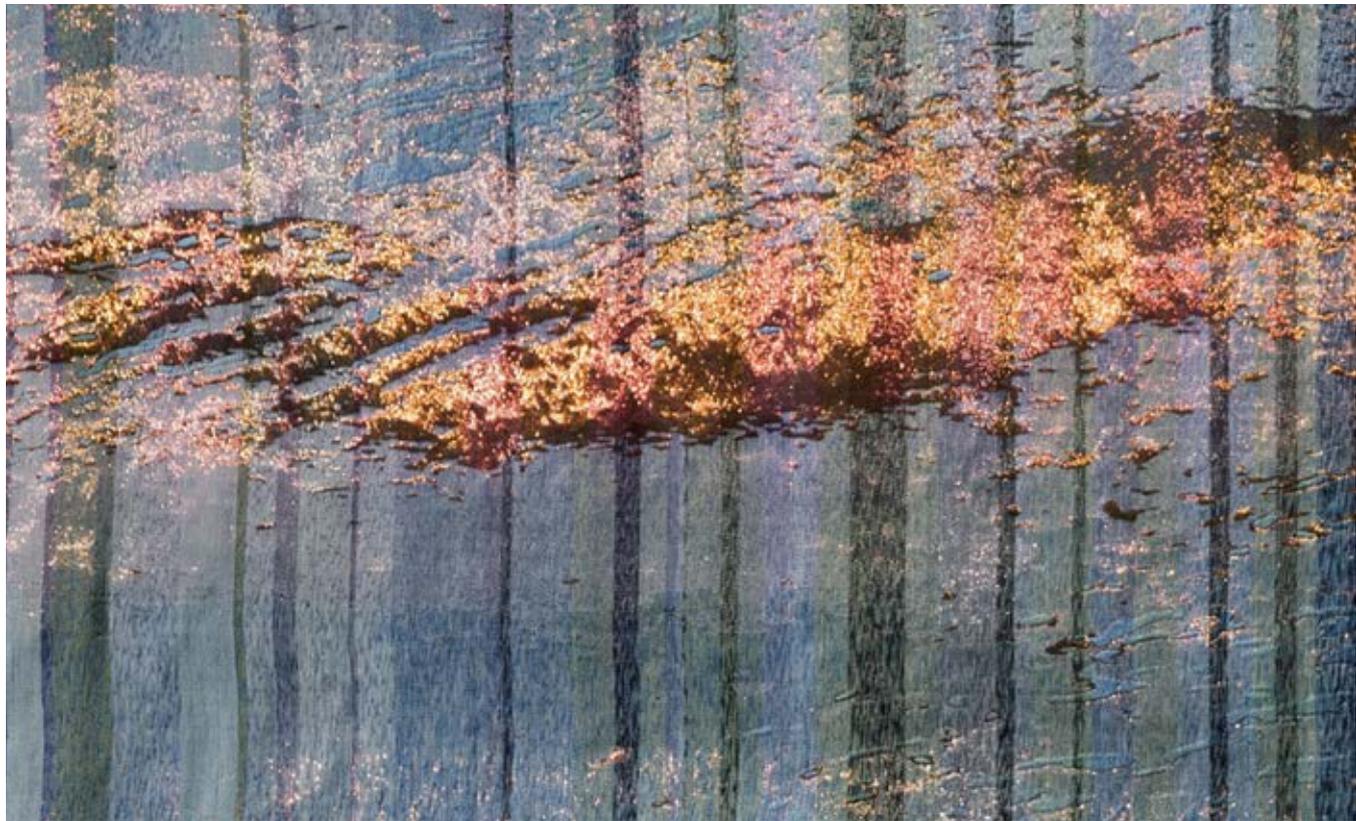
¹ Ruth Beer and Ingrid Olason, "Trading Routes: The Intersection of Art Practices and Place," *Relate North: Art Heritage and Identity*, 2014.

lifecycle of use-value associated with innovation in manufacturing, as cutting-edge technologies are invented and replaced with increasing rapidity. Intertwined as they are in Beer's works, they seem to suggest that the physical residues of past, present, and future are indivisible.

As a process, weaving is a natural choice for Beer whose work interlaces complex ideas with carefully selected materials. Many of the expansive jacquard weavings in the exhibition were created with the assistance of talented artists and craftspeople working with highly digitized weaving technologies in Vancouver and Montreal. Though Beer's jacquard process employs the latest version of this technology, the history of jacquard weaving has significant bearing on how we might understand these works. One of the key inventions of the industrial revolution and a precursor to modern-day computing, traditional jacquard

weaving processes employed a series of punch cards to increase the efficiency of creating complex patterns in the fabric. The increased mechanization of this process allowed for decorative fabrics to be widely and affordably available to the public, thus playing an important role in shaping industrialized mass production, and the insatiable consumer behaviour that impacts global markets today. Beer's glittering, jacquard-woven tapestries have the allure of luxurious pieces of home décor while insinuating the environmental impacts of the last two centuries of human activity.

In *Climate*, the artist uses hand-dyed cotton thread woven through a warp of copper wire to produce a massive and beguiling sunset image, resplendent its variable orangey pink hues. The vivid colours of the setting sun are part natural phenomena and part human-generated spectacle resulting from the high levels of particulate borne



in the atmosphere (like soot produced by industry and motor engines) that alter the spectral palette. Beer similarly probes the tension between aesthetic beauty and ecological devastation in *Oil Topography*. The central image of this jacquard triptych is a pool of oil, its gleaming surface woven entirely from copper wire. Moving around this work, the light catches its metallic surface with disconcerting appeal, appearing from one angle as a foreboding black hole and from another as a brilliantly radiant orb. In the more modestly sized *Oolichan Fish*, black and umber threads combine with copper wire, nearly camouflaging the image of a single oolichan specimen in the weaving. These small, oily ocean fish have long been an important economic resource for Pacific Coastal Indigenous communities, and Beer's decision to depict this humble species points not only to the recent and dramatic reduction in their population, but to the significantly divergent cultural attitudes that exist towards natural resources in Canada today.

In *Water*, Beer moves away from jacquard weaving, instead relying on the density of woven copper wire to achieve aesthetic effect. Part wall-hanging, part sculpture, *Water*, is comprised of a woven veil of copper wire that tumbles from the wall, cascading around a sculptural dark mass on the floor that resembles a boulder of coal. Densely interlaced sections of wire undulate with areas of looser weave, culminating at the base of the work, where the fluidity of form seems to crash upon the floor of the gallery. Beer's ability to conjure this kind of material allusion, bringing dynamism to her industrial and natural references, is paramount in this body of work.

Punctuating the exhibition are sculptures with exceptional tactile appeal, made from commonplace materials. Resembling dull black pools of oil, masses of coal, and geological specimens coated in a petroleum sheen, these works recall the basic elements of their own production. Sculptures in Beer's series







Black Formation Energy 1–3 (Recycling Rodin) are suspended from the wall. Evoking large, crudely chiseled lumps of coal, these inky forms simultaneously embody the heft and grace of Rodin's bronze creations, and the haphazard flimsiness of discarded garbage bags. *Spill* and *Slip* are low-relief sculptures resembling molten black pools of oil. The former was installed directly on the gallery floor at The Reach, while the latter was designed to hang from a stretched linen backing, as though it has slid from its rightful place, leaving behind a discoloured residue. In *Other Worlds*, four metallic-glazed ceramic sculptures are displayed on a low plinth. These large, egg-shaped sculptures glisten with oily patina like interplanetary geological specimens. Taken together, these ambiguous sculptural forms are at once vulgar and undeniably enthralling. Displayed using standard techniques befitting the white cube of the gallery, these three-dimensional works are presented as rarefied aesthetic objects. The crudeness of the resources that these forms imitate becomes the

object of artistic consideration and commodification, as though Beer is offering us the opportunity to justify our more shameful, covetous behaviour under the guise of neutral aesthetic discernment. However, this kind of dispassionate gaze is not sustainable, nor does the artist truly spare the hallowed ground of the gallery from critical discussions of social, moral, and ecological impacts of natural resource extraction. Their aesthetic ambition, if anything, underscores the unsettling tension found throughout this entire body of work, and we are continually reminded that beauty and devastation are never far apart.

The serene experience of a neighbourhood walk was, by design, continually interrupted by jarring and urgent discussions of the impacts of natural resource extraction. Moving beyond a passive awareness of the mighty petroleum artery that traverses our community, the small group in attendance became bluntly attuned to its actuality, perhaps beginning

to see the industry and its related products through fresh, though no less troubled, eyes. Spanning textiles, sculpture, and digital media, *States of Matter* urges the same kind of encounter. Beer's poetic allusions to the impact of natural resource extraction on soil, water, and sky ask us to confront the impressions that we, as humans, leave on the world. While they do not attempt to provide solutions to our complicated entanglement with petroculture, these works do ask that we not only look at, but actually see, what might otherwise remain hidden in plain sight.





RUTH BEER: STATES OF MATTER LIST OF WORKS

Dimensions listed as: width x height x depth.

All works are collection of the artist.

Black Formation Energy 1–3 (Recycling Rodin), 2015
Polyurethane rubber
61 x 51 x 40.5 cm (24 x 20 x 16 in)
pp. 23, 38, 41, 58

Neptune, 2013
Copper magnet wire
350.5 x 101.5 x 25.5 cm (138 x 40 x 10 in)
pp. 21, 24, 37 (detail), 42 (detail), 58, 59

Seep, 2014
Jacquard woven tapestry
Copper magnet wire, magnetic audio tape, fibre
171.5 x 66 cm (67.5 x 26 in)
pp. 19, 32, 34 (detail), 59

Oolichan Fish, 2014
Jacquard woven tapestry
Copper magnet wire, aluminum, fibre
175.25 x 57 cm (69 x 22.5 in)
pp. 57, 58

Loop, 2014
Magnetic audio tape, fibre
228.5 x 101.5 x 35.5 cm (90 x 40 x 14 in)
pp. 36 (detail), 37, 44

Water, 2015
Copper magnet wire, polyurethane rubber, anodized aluminum
134.5 x 305 x 51 cm (120 x 53 x 20 in)
pp. 16 (detail), 44, 59

Climate, 2015
Jacquard woven tapestry
Copper magnet wire, indigo-dyed fibre
477.5 x 117 cm (188 x 46 in)
pp. 22 (detail), 44, 46–47 (detail), 52 (detail), 55 (detail)

Oil Topography, 2014
Jacquard woven tapestry
Copper magnet wire, fibre
304 x 208.25 cm (120 x 82 in)
pp. 23, 24, 26–27 (detail), 31 (detail), 44, 52 (detail)

Intersections, 2015
Digital video with sound
4 min 33 sec loop
pp. 4, 5, 11, 24

Stretch, 2015†
Copper magnet wire
228.5 x 91.5 x 23.25 cm (90 x 36 x 8 in)
pp. 12 (detail), 24, 41, 58, 59

Slip, 2015‡
Acrylic, polyurethane, steel on linen
66 x 124.5 x 5 cm (49 x 26 x 2 in)
pp. 58, 59, 62 (detail)

Other Worlds, 2013‡
Four metallic glazed ceramic sculptures
Approximately 61 x 51 x 45.75 cm each
(24 x 20 x 18 in)
pp. 14, 19, 20, 43 (detail), 58, 59, 63

Spill, 2013‡
Polyurethane
96.5 x 2.5 x 81 cm (38 x 1 x 32 in)
p. 51 (detail)

†Shown at Two Rivers Gallery only

‡Shown at The Reach Gallery Museum only