

**SHADOW**  
OF THE  
**GRADIENT**

**Dear Mother,**

I am in awe of your beauty and your strength and your ability to conquer the ideas of Man. I am confused and full of despair, the loneliness of mortality echos. I am going on a trip, I am leaving you for the unknown. I want to travel to the space where the future becomes the past, on the other side of the sphere of light. I am going to explore the liminal space between my skin and the atmosphere. I am going to get lost in the Shadow of the Gradient.

I am going to the place where illusion becomes reality.

With Love,

An astronaut drifts  
across the galaxy in a  
red convertible Tesla.

A backcountry hiker lingers  
on a trail watching the Brown  
Mountain lights flicker.

A group of scientists try to  
conquer and control nature  
while sealed inside Biosphere 2.

A Yogi climbs to the top  
of Cathedral Rock to get  
lost in an Energy Vortex.

UFO chasers await the sun  
to set and witness the  
Marfa lights in the distance.

A team of documentary filmmakers  
board a boat and set sail to the Plastic  
Island in the Pacific Ocean.

These are realities where humans chase  
the unknown, explore the depths of space,  
and face the monsters that haunt them.

***THIS***

***IS***

***THE***

***SHADOW***

***OF***

***THE***

***GRADIENT***





Help us to be always hopeful  
Gardeners of the spirit  
Who know that without darkness  
Nothing comes to birth  
As without light Nothing flowers

- Mary Sarton

5

**S**tanding on the beach looking at a jumble of seaweed washed ashore, the sky is reflected off of the wet surface of the algae, giving the illusion that it is the color blue. Against the grainy sand it offers a stringy portal to another world. But if picked up and taken home, it will soon dry to a dull brown, the blue of the sky vanished just as it does each evening when the sun sets. It is a reminder of the experiences in nature that change your perception of time, place and space instantly. These paradigm shifts make us question what is reality versus what is illusion until another event, phenomena or new information is presented.



People have been writing about climate change for centuries but the term Climate Fiction emerged in 2013 to describe the growing literary genre of fictional work written about the effects of global warming and climate change. "There are certain qualities of light that blur the years," Emily St. John Mandel wrote in the cli-fi *Station Eleven*, a darkly glittering novel set in dystopic days post collapse of civilization where we follow an itinerant group of actors traversing the landscape sacrificing everything for humanity and art. Similar to cli-fi literature, the artists included in *Shadow of the Gradient* are working in a language that seems to describe a near future that is both familiar and beyond imagining. Both a fantasy and a warning, calming and disorienting, the exhibition brings together works by

**"Perhaps the future belongs  
to magic, and it's we women  
who control magic."**

**- J. G. Ballard,  
Rushing to Paradise**

seven female artists investigating and manipulating nature inspired imagery in diverse ways. They explore our relationship to our experience of nature through technology and a futuristic otherworldliness where both nature and technology exist without us.

Kat Ryals's work *Paradise Wall*, composed of nine flip lenticular print panels gridded out, presents a baroque nature scape, an ornate enchanted garden. However, as you look closer and try to locate a flower, instead you find tufts of oddly colored hair, fake gold ferns and shiny gift bows scattered throughout. And because the hologram is always shifting as you move, there is a disorienting lack of being able to sense up or down, to locate yourself in the sky or on the ground. Ryal's work seduces us in and then constantly shifts, asking what is sacred, what is beautiful, what is valued and what is nature versus a perceived idea of nature. The idea of a holographic explanation of the universe was first suggested in the 1990s. It suggests that everything that we experience in three dimensions and our notion of time actually emanates from a flat two-dimensional field on the grandest of scales, the entire universe. Rachel Guardiola's *Mementos of an Investigator*, silver gelatin and chromogenic color prints, contain gloves, vials, tools and various instruments of scientific investigation. Using her lens based technology her work intersects art, science, and human curiosity at the same time theoretical physicists and astrophysicists are investigating irregularities in the 'afterglow' of the Big Bang, seeing if there's more evidence of the holographic universe. Her other works *Mementoes of VEGA's garden* and *Cryptoflora viewing box (How to pollinate a hybrid)*, which incorporates hand crafted essential oils, blend this scientific investigation with a poetic voice and both points of entry are imbued with wonder, often the fundamental source of inquiry for both a scientist and an artist.

8

Roxanne Jackson's work in the exhibition enters the territory of animal personification and the monstrous. Her creature palms and skulls are between beings and life forms, and with titles like "*Microdosing*," "*Black Magic*," and "*Delft Punk*," they are an invitation to the shadow. Her work calls to mind the personification often given to the DMT-containing plants ayahuasca or various mythological creatures of destruction/resurrection that are necessary, but slightly terrifying. This transformational underworld is certainly inhabited by Kat Ryals *Chandelier II*, another creature teacher sculpture crowned with hair, horns, magnificent bling and eerily asking us what are we all in the process of becoming? They call to mind other bizarre aspects of the natural world, like fruit of the sandbox tree that burst open from its trunk when ripe to disperse seeds, but the reaction is so violent that it can injure nearby people or livestock. Or *Sphaerobolus*, a genus of fungi known as the cannonball fungi, that are phototropic and propel sticky spore sacs towards the nearest source of direct or reflected light up to six meters horizontally. It's a whole world of adventure happening where meanwhile we humans thought we were at the center of everything. We're not. All of these works are saying, as Margaret Atwood wrote in *The Year of the Flood*, "Without the light, no chance; without the dark, no dance."





Several works in the show portray a flattening of landscape, transitioning it from space to line. Devra Freeland's work explores climate change, ancient planetary processes and geology using the language of digital software as her process. Madora Frey's *Big River Zen* is constructed of neon, glass and wood. The neon is the symbol of river, each side drawn in light. Both of these works remind us of our human experience that continues to remain at the center of our technological ones and bring in associations of the river of life, life giving water, the immensity of the landscape and the stories held within the outline of the antediluvian stones. The transference of the complexities of a river or mountain to a symbolic line give the work a presence of the interior of our minds, how what we take in through our eyes has another life in the brain, searing itself into a symbolic memory. "A fragment for my friend--If your soul left this earth I would follow and find you. Silent, my starship suspended in night." - Emily St. John Mandel wrote. Perhaps we will remember when we held the memory of the river or the mountain inside of us.



Naturalist John Muir wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." These works remind us, everything is indeed connected.

Taryn McMahon uses digital photographs and drawings from visits to ecological sites and blends digital and hand drawn print processes. Her piece *Glasshouse* is a pigment blue print on Inbe paper that is less and less saturated as

it ascends. It feels ceremonial, a threshold to walk through. Kasimir Malevich wrote "I have broken the blue boundary of color limits, come out into the white; beside me comrade-pilots, swim in this infinity." And blue being a primary color, is traditionally and universally elemental in our

cognitive and emotional language. Blue also appears when light passes the speed of light and appears as a luminal boom, a glow we see in nuclear reactors under certain conditions, known as the Cherenkov radiation. It is the tone of the entire exhibition, blue's magical mystical qualities and yet the very color that would appear at a nuclear detonation that could end the world.

Shelley Smith's digital prints and hand embroidery on polyester satin are equally a seamless blend of the digital and the handmade. The pieces feel like a soft rebirth, a place where it is constantly morning and in the presence of the sacred feminine. Her works discuss how identity is formed over a lifetime and the tree imagery calls to mind the slow growth of trees, through so many seasons, their rings carry the memory of the most intimidating storms they lasted through and continued, constantly, to keep reaching up.

10

In her book *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit states "People have always been good at imagining the end of the world, which is much easier to picture than the strange sidelong paths of change in a world without end." *Shadow of the Gradient* captures a process of unbecoming and a reaching for the unknown. The exhibition freshens and softens our charged landscapes and interweaves the climate change crisis with questions on how our experience of this time is mediated through the myriad of technologies we are viewing it. Finally, this exhibition is importantly highlighting a rising feminine voice, a voice that is both so connected to the natural world and so long oppressed through patriarchal power imbalance. How nature has been treated and how women have been treated are deeply connected.

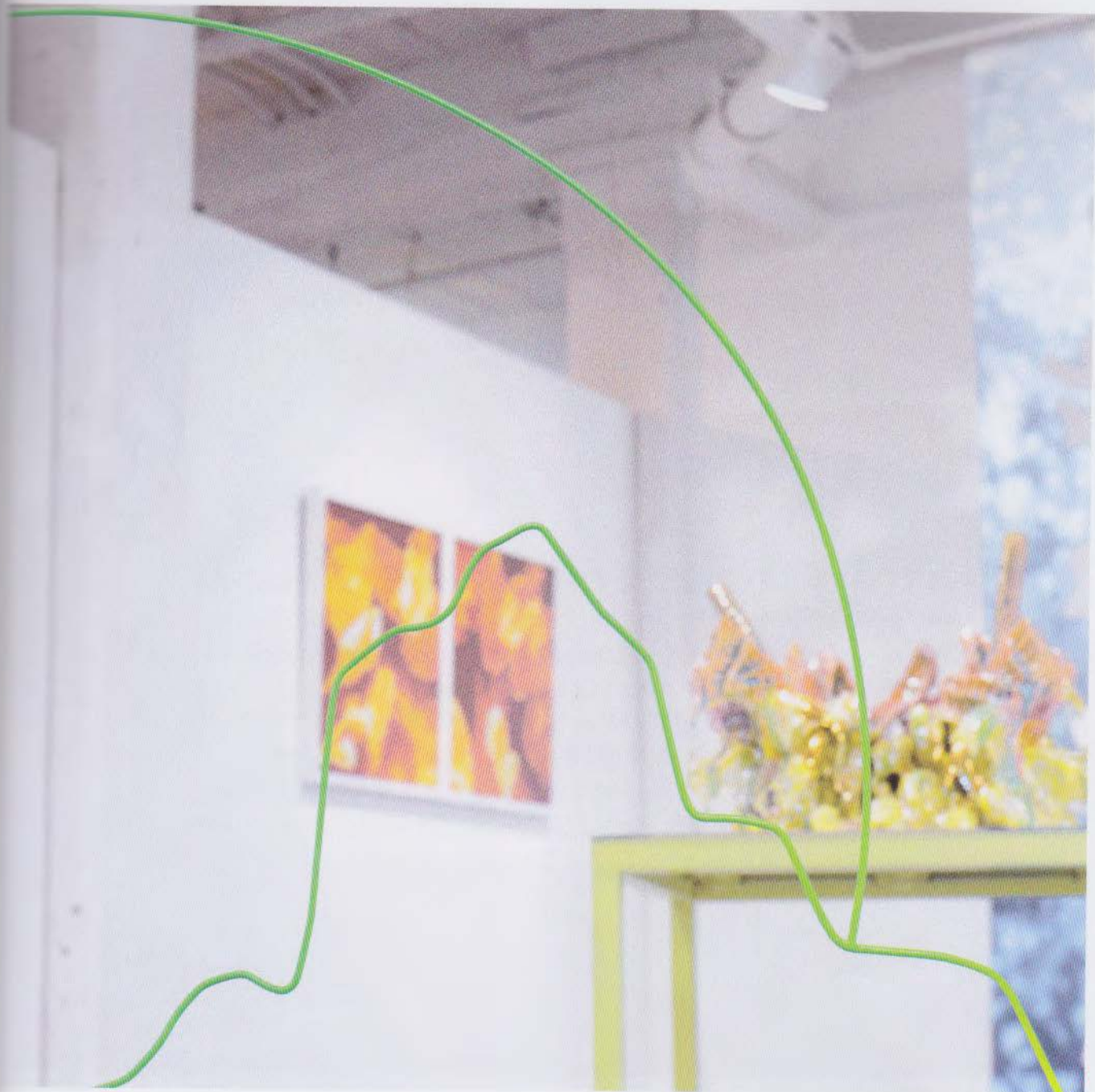
In ancient alchemy, as the alchemist approached material transformation for enlightenment there is a temporary phase of prevision of the end of the work that they can see at the very beginning. It is a polar

swing from out of the very first stage, the blackening. It is a stage right after the intense experience of being consumed in the crucible, when the alchemist can glimpse the appearance, however fragmentary, of a new possibility, a flickering light in the soul which promises change, gained inner perception and growth. A mere fleeting show of the prevision is a significant step towards the goal of transformation and the integration of the unseen and the material of our very beings.

Margaret Atwood (referenced here multiple times as one of the most important visionary futuristic females of our time herself) wrote "Human understanding is fallible, and we see through a glass, darkly. Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God." *The Shadow of the Gradient* is the shadow of what could be a rising or a decent. Stepping out of light, we are invited into the darkness to see the cracks in the jar, to make the fertilizer for new growth. Beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding, the primordial shadow moves us towards the possibility of another phase in the world. It is possibly one where the tools of our time are integrated for a stronger relationship with each other and nature. It is possibly one where we will not last past our technologies or the damage we have done to this planet. It is definitively one where the divine feminine is waiting, sometimes patiently and sometimes violently, for us to catch up.

Lights on illumination; lights off, magic.

- Sarah Walko





**TARYN M.**  
**MCMAHON**

25



Glasshouse, Pigment print on Inbe paper, 156" x 40", 2019

26

**“Like a DJ spinning sounds  
culled from disparate  
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remixed through the  
filters of print making,  
drawing, digital  
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**- Taryn M. McMahon**

When asked to imagine nature, a sublime landscape untouched by human hands comes to mind. Why do we consider ourselves outside of nature, and how can art, through its depictions of the natural world, disrupt culturally constructed views of nature to impact our understanding of the natural world and our place within it? These questions guide my creative practice, which uses digital photographs and drawings from visits to ecological sites to investigate our relationship to the natural world.

My artworks interrogate ways that these spaces project our own desires and fantasies of the natural world and our place within it. I blend digital and hand drawn print processes to further explore how our interactions with the natural world are mediated through technology, and are thus fragmented and selective. Through my work, I imagine a future ecology in which technology and reality are collapsed into each other and the natural and the manmade have become intertwined and indistinguishable in the face of unprecedented ecological change. Like a DJ spinning sounds culled from disparate sources, the forms are remixed through the filters of printmaking, drawing, digital photography, and collage.





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