

## Postscript 80

The following conversation took place at Artspeak on Monday, November 29, in consideration of the exhibition.

WOOJAE KIM

"I Am Porous. And I Am Moved By You."  
November 5-December 11, 2021

Between those present – Sean Alward, Alexandra Bischoff, Bopha Chhay, Woojae Kim, Laiwan, Marina Roy, and an immortal fly named Fred – cups of Woojae's homemade makgeolli<sup>1</sup> were shared. The evening's transcripts have been edited for clarity and length.

## I. MAKGEOLLI & HOSPITALITY

Woojae Kim (WK)

So these are different batches of makgeolli. They're made at different times with slightly different materials. This one... [gesturing to different bottles] is from two weeks ago, and this one I bottled last Saturday; that one's from one week before and the last is from one week before that. This bottle is just the top, without any sediment.

When batches ferment, they separate into two layers. The sediment settles down to the bottom, and the clear liquid goes to the top. The clear liquid is what Japanese people call sake. The only difference is the Korean process uses wild organisms, but the Japanese process requires you to inoculate the grain with spores and the powder of koji. They're controlling specific organisms to make the nuruk.<sup>2</sup> The Korean method is to have nuruk and collect the wild microorganisms from that place of production.

So do we want to try? [all laugh agreeably]

This one [gestures to a bottle of makgeolli] was made on October 17. So it's been aging for a while. And it's a little bit strong because it is not watered down. So I'll just give you a little taste.

Marina Roy (MR)

So what do we say when we cheers in Korean?

WK

Oh, in Korean? Geonbae.

ALL

Geonbae!

Sean Alward (SA)

It's very smooth. I was expecting paint stripper or something [all laugh]. Something a little harsher! It's quite nice.

WK

It's got three ingredients. It's rice, water. And...

MR

...wheatberry.

WK

Yeah. It takes about four weeks to ferment.

And this batch has been aging for about two weeks now.

Laiwan (L)

That's not long at all, compared to a hundred-year-old whisky [all laugh].

WK

Because they still have microorganisms, the makgeolli's taste is always changing. The one that we just tasted wasn't as strong two weeks ago. But the microorganisms broke down the remaining sugar and kept building up the alcohol content. All these batches will continue to do the same thing.

Maybe if we taste the one that I just bottled.. this is a fresh batch. This is the second batch that I did start-to-finish at Artspeak, so it's meaningful in that way. This one is much sweeter, much more smooth. Fruity.

SA

Is makgeolli a drink traditionally made with the dregs?

WK

Dregs? Oh, yeah. The clear part is called cheongju – the Korean word for sake.

Cheongju was historically drunk by the higher caste.

The milky part was left out for the lower caste; they watered it down and drank it like beer. And that's called makgeolli. Traditionally, makgeolli is not this strong. They drank it between meals, or when working in the fields.

Alexandra Bischoff (AB)

I really love the texture and history of the sediment layer. There's something really mesmerizing about this milky liquid. It reminds me of how I recently learned from artist Rosamunde Bordo what Kvass meant to Russian peasants...

MR

What's it called?

AB

Kvass! It's made with fermented rye bread. Russian peasants would drink it in the fields and make summer soups out of it; I think every culture has its own sort of version of a working class, fermented, cloudy grain drink. This is to say, I'm excited for us to taste it [all laugh].

### Bopha Chhay (BC)

When we first spoke, Woojae, you mentioned that hospitality was a key element in your thinking around this. Did you want to speak a little bit about your upcoming events, too?

### WK

When I'm here, I always think about who I am making this drink for. I mean, people come in, so I greet them and I serve them drinks. But also, I think about the events that will be held to mark the end of my time here. There will be about 10 people as guests, and we will just be sharing drinks. The idea came from a desire last year when we were isolating at home. Sharing drinks and stories is such an integral part of Korean culture, and I was missing that. So I wanted to make this gesture of hospitality for people, but not just my hospitality...

There's a text that I'm writing, and it addresses the different aspects of labour that go into making makgeolli. The master makgeolli makers in Korea often talk about makgeolli as something that the microorganisms are creating. They're humbly acknowledging the fact that they don't have

much say in how good the makgeolli tastes – it's really the microorganisms that go into it. When we drink, the makgeolli becomes part of our body. And when I speak... when I've had, say, two or three cups [all laugh], it speaks through me [all laugh]. Well, the microorganisms eat sugar and exhale alcohol into this drink, and whatever they breathe out comes into me, and when I speak, their alcoholic breath is speaking through me. That's kind of what I wanted to say is... it's a simple gesture of sharing drinks. But there is more to that. Hopefully you leave this place with the ones that came from this land.

## L

When you speak about how the microorganisms come into you, it's like a multicellular intimacy, right? A conjugation. I don't think any alcoholic drink has that same kind of level of intimacy. There's something about the aliveness of that intimacy, and also when you [talked before] about your grandmother [making makgeolli]. I think about how our ancestors speak through us, and then you've got these microorganisms who aren't ancestors, but who have been collaborating with your peoples for a long time.

I'm really liking the aliveness of this. Because, you know, you leave it for an hour, it's changed; you leave it for a week, it's changed. If we see our own bodies that way, every hour, every encounter our bodies are changing too. It's a very different way of being in the world. You're letting whatever's in the air affect your work, and that's something that I love too. And the more I drink this, the more [all laugh]... the more I will love it [all laugh].

#### SA

I'm curious about the traditional collaboration – the makgeolli makers being aware that it's not them that's creating the taste [but the microorganisms]. Now we call them microorganisms. Before that, what was the scientific understanding? Who did they think they were collaborating with?

#### WK

I'm not sure. And that's something I would love to know, too. There are a lot of references in recipes, and makgeolli makers all talk about contamination. There's a lot of awareness about what grows a healthy batch and what makes a bad batch. But



certainly, they did know *life* – as in, the microorganisms – was doing this.

MR

I mean, you don't know what kind of bacteria entered into it... Is it bacteria, or what is it?

WK

It's mold, and it's yeast...

MR

It's mold and yeast?

WK

Yeah. From the air.

MR

And you don't know which is the 'good' and the 'bad'?

WK

Well, that's the thing... There's a lot of references about making good nuruk. And people take a lot of time and attention to make good nuruk, because good nuruk essentially makes good makgeolli. They had ways to invite only the 'good' organisms and create hostile places for the 'bad' organisms. One of them is recognizing the colors. So they recognize the colors of

the mold and they brush off the ones that they don't want and leave the good ones. And they also...

L

As in brushing off the color?

WK

Yeah. So they're brushing...

L

Ah, that's art. That's painting! [all laugh]

SA

So did you have to do that with these ones?

WK

Yeah, yeah. Sometimes I witness very deep bluish-green. I usually brush that off. The nuruk that I made at Artspeak had a lot of yellow on it. Yellow is really good for making nuruk!

SA

So... 'Bad'... what does 'bad' mean? 'Bad' as in bad tasting? Or dangerous?

WK

There is bad tasting for sure. But bad koji makes carcinogens. They didn't know that

then, but obviously there are bad organisms that you don't want.

MR

That reminds me of how early humans would eat plants and just try things out to figure out how to survive [laughs].

L

Trial and error.

MR

...and then someone obviously at some point croaked from drinking the makgeolli that had the bad microorganisms, maybe? I love this trial and error because our world is so controlled in terms of food inspection. You can't just go out and produce; it has to be quality controlled! So you can see how cut off we are from these really interesting processes. Knowing about it produces a sort of intimacy with the food and drink.

L

I think of Chinese medicine, and how sometimes it was accidental, how something was found... Maybe how a meridian is discovered, like, "Oh, this hurts, I'm gonna really poke it" [all laugh]. That

becomes an acupressure point, right? So that kind of deep listening to one's body or to other organisms.

I think of the pandemic, which brought this organism. And we're so abstracted from listening to these organisms that it was able to develop this far ahead. It's kind of like that really good makgeolli, it's gotten very sophisticated. But our relationship to these microorganisms or these biomedical critters... How can we develop the kind of relationship that you have learned? It's a relationship that your grandmother also learned [when she was making makgeolli].

## II. CLOSE LISTENING & FAMILIARITY

### WK

It's so hard for us to listen to things that we can't see. I think that's just our tendency, and that's something that I wanted to challenge when I made this exhibition, because you can see in the kind of quiet inanimacy that there are things breathing. You will see bubbles come up in the makgeolli.

It's a whole different level of listening once we go outside and try to listen. My questioning has been: how do we listen to things that are seemingly inaudible? Recently, I was thinking about Sean's past project at Wil Aballe Art Projects, *Liquid Mountains*.<sup>3</sup> There was a paragraph in the exhibition text that I was revisiting today, saying, if our lifespan was stretched to geological time, we would experience the movement of the Earth as a river and as something that's dynamic. But I think we have our own tempo. And this is something that I talk a lot with my friend Will, who created the music; we talk a lot about what we call "human tempo". How do we

listen? How do we slow down our tempo so that we start to recognize the tempo of the Earth?

SA

I think it's familiarity, like getting to know something. We're a people generally alienated from what's outside. We spend so much time on computers and other things compared to all of our ancestors. They just spent more time outside. In terms of how to listen better? I think familiarity is the first step. Generally, I think, in culture, right now, people are alienated from the world outside. They're bored. They don't know where they live. They don't know what the plants are, they don't understand the geology. They've vague awareness of the seasons and weather. But they're alienated.

MR

That reminds me of listening to all the news around natural disasters caused by climate change, which has been really devastating for so many communities. People are really upset. They want to blame something, because they can't comprehend that nature's actually around them and will react this way. The lake came back to Abbotsford!

BC

I was thinking about Sean, your work – [gesturing to all the artists] all of your work actually – and what you're saying about the attentiveness to time, and material relationships. As a studio practice, that takes so much time. Often, when I see things and I might feel a bit uncomfortable, I ask, "What is this discomfort?" And often I come back to the fact that some kind of shortcut has been taken that has severed acknowledgment of certain histories, or a relationship between the material and people.

WK

Going back to attentiveness. We have had several studio visits, Sean and I, over periods of many years. And every time I go, I'm always blown away by your stories of how much you're out walking along the Fraser River. Or you tell me, "Oh, I was just looking walking in Burnaby's mountains and valleys." I know that you've walked along almost the whole length of the Fraser River up to Fort Langley or something?

SA

Yeah, Maple Ridge.

WK

That's a lot of time to be walking along the river.

SA

In terms of close listening, with something – whatever the thing is – it's like a relationship. You can't get to know somebody, in half an hour, a day, or a week. It just takes time. So familiarity equals time.

WK

Also similar to your 2019 project here at Artspeak, Laiwan.<sup>4</sup> You were also looking into a very specific history of the maple tree, which also shows attentive listening to a species that we often think is inaudible.

L

It's only because Artspeak was here that I chose that tree, because the maple tree would be just there [gestures towards Water and Alexander Street]. And so that propelled me into listening to street trees and asking: What is it like to be separated so measuredly and with asphalt right around the trunk, and not having your community with you? How do you survive?



And then we discovered through Egan Davis, who was at the UBC Botanical Gardens at that time, that all of these trees are grafts of one singular tree that has proven to be resilient. They choose that one tree. And then they planted them everywhere. So there are specific species that they choose, and why they choose it. Say it has a very long trunk, so that there's no low branches that hit cars. A lot of it is chosen according to cars. You know, for the roads etcetera.

But because of climate change, the conditions are not positive for these street trees – an increasing number of trees are falling in the city. So those are the things that I'm also listening to. The maple tree that used to be here was the place where settlers would meet to organize the colony that they created – that tree was the witness to all. It was the eavesdropper of all the city council meetings that took place under it [all laugh].

MR

The tree was just down the street here?

L  
The tree would be where Gassy Jack is. That is why this is called Maple Tree Square.

SA  
Do you know when the tree was cut down, how long did it last?

L  
I can't remember. I think they cut it down because it had died. But the reality is left in Squamish now; this area was called Kumkumalay - "big leaf maple trees" or a "grove of maple trees" - and the maples used to be here.

### III. INTERSPECIES RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK, PLAY

#### L

When Sean was talking, I was thinking about geography. And when you spoke about taking a nuruk for a walk, it reminded me of a project of an artist named Karin Bolender. In her book, *The Unnaming of Aliass*, she writes: "in the company of one special donkey companion, a femammal of the species *Equus asinus* and, significantly, a registered 'American Spotted Ass.' Beast of burden that she is, this inscrutable companion helped carry a ridiculous load of human longings and quandaries into a maze of hot, harrowing miles, across the US South from Mississippi to Virginia, in the summer of 2002."<sup>5</sup> Aliass was pregnant and in the course of that walk, all the things that Aliass was eating would inform her milk, and from that milk, Karin would make ass-milk soap and do projects with folks with the ass-milk. She still lives and works with Aliass, and now they have Passenger who was born from that trip. So how can we have projects that are living while also have this geographical trajectory that maps a different kind of mapping?

WK

One thing Bopha and I talked about a lot when we were planning this show was the conditions to have live organisms in art. I was always trying to make art about my relationship with others, but then, in the end, the things in my art... they always died. So I wondered: how can I have a live relationship, or have organisms that are alive and work with them and end up not killing them? And I think the only possible answer that I've found so far is to actually have something that is incomplete, that is always in progress. This is about invisible relationships.

BC

It reminds me of when I was working at the Charles H. Scott Gallery. And I can't remember what I was doing, I think I was laying cables between the walls and the floor. And all of a sudden there was this huge patch of grass and dirt. I asked Kevin, "How come I've never seen this? What is this?" And he said, "Oh, this happens occasionally." Germaine Koh's...

MR

*Fallow!*<sup>6</sup>

BC

...it just keeps continuing to come back into that space in all these different ways.

MR

Amazing.

BC

I can't remember what year that project... Do you...?

MR

That would have been around 2008.

BC

Yeah, the whole gallery just became this kind of fallow piece of land.

MR

I think she transferred an easement or something, or like some kind of abandoned site...

BC

...into the gallery.

MR

Yeah, and then suddenly, spiders were all

over the place. And they allowed this to happen.

BC

But it reminds me of the impacts of the work on a space, physically. We have to think about a different level of scale. Because I also think all your work does this. I mean, it takes into consideration much deeper timescales that are actually beyond the course of a show, or even an idea, and those ideas still continue to germinate in between the walls, beyond when we see an end to things. And I love this idea... also Kevin realized when he was there: there were spiders and then all of a sudden there are these other critters and then mice suddenly appear [all laugh].

L

That's what they do [all laugh].

AB

When we were preparing the gallery for Woojae's exhibition here, I had to contend with a number of spiders that had woven some very intricate cobwebs in all the corners of the windows. Because we've been closed to the public for so long, they had been able to develop a very complex system.

So I asked Bopha, "What do I do?" And I ended up taking a piece of paper and gently scooping them... encouraging them...

L

"You can go higher on the wall!"

AB

"You can go behind the wall!"

BC

"Create a tunnel!" [all laugh]

AB

I hope they're still here.

L

They're here.

WK

Can I serve [another cup]? I was kind of waiting for the right time.

MR

Let's try the milky one!

WK

[pouring makgeolli] This one's got some fruity notes.

SA

It looks healthy.

AB

I love the glazed lip of the cups... It's like we're kissing the earth.

SA

There's a kind of red band near the lip of the cup. Is that just how it naturally fired?

L

Had you glazed the whole thing?

WK

I just glazed the inside, because I wanted the outside to have a raw texture.

ALL

Geonbea!

BC

Such a different thing.

MR

It does have that little bit of... not granular... but silky...



WK

That's from the rice flour.

SA

Is there a resurgence of making this back in Korea?

WK

Yeah, there is! There are a lot of people going back and revisiting old records of how to make makgeolli. There were a lot of nuruk makers too. Usually people who make nuruk *only* make nuruk, and people who make makgeolli *only* make makgeolli. They don't usually do both.

MR So there was a bit of an exchange, then.

WK

Yeah. Yeah. Because it's a wild process - you leave the grains out and then you let the spores land on, from the air. Once nuruk-makers find a taste they want, they almost never move. They just stay, because that's where they get the right profile of microorganisms. The wooden shelf that they dry microorganisms on becomes a treasure, so they pass it down to their predecessors to carry on.

MR

What do they pass down?

WK

The wooden shelves that they dry the nuruk on. Because some of the microorganisms live on the wood. And that becomes a treasure. So if they want to upgrade their facility and things like that – because I've seen one totally upgrade facility, so that there's a bit of a climate control – they are meticulous about maintaining the integrity of their nuruk shelves [laughs]. Everything's high tech except for the shelves.

MR

Never cleaned! Do they dust it, even?

WK

I'm not sure... but they are usually on the shelf. And then there is a thick block, and the nuruk always sits on top of them.

SA

Do they have to be careful though?

Breathing in... are living things getting into their bodies? Is that an issue?

WK

I'm not sure. I mean, I usually just  
[Woojae inhales deeply – all laugh]. That's  
how I know if it's good nuruk – I break it  
and I [inhales deeply]. "Aw yeah, it's  
good" [all laugh].

#### IV. SPEAKING THROUGH SMELL

BC

The day that you brought your class, Marina, Woojae had just smashed the nuruk up [laughs]. And the smell is such a... I don't know if you remember. But the smell in the gallery constantly changes depending on what part of the process Woojae's into.

WK

It was very strong that day. But now it's been going on a few days so it has a different smell.

BC

Like when you're steaming rice, that's a really particular smell.

AB

Yes, when you steam the rice and stir it in with the nuruk mixture, you get an almost yeasty smell...

BC

It almost smelled like fungus.

WK

But also 80% of what you taste is also

smell. Taste is basically a heightened experience of smelling.

MR

Have you done a lot of research on smell?

WK

Yeah [laughs].

AB

We were talking about your scent-based project, Woojae, that none of your peers were able to experience during the pandemic due to isolation. And I wondered if you could tell us a little bit more about that. What kind of smells were you cultivating?

WK

Oh, from last year. That one feels quite different from this work, because I was working with how the smell of humans is experienced by other organisms. I was working with scientific research on black flies. They cause a disease called "river blindness" through a parasite that they carry. So they've been working to control the population of black flies. In order to know how well they're treating this parasite, they're capturing flies to dissect them and see if the population of

the parasite is going down. And in order to capture black flies, they were using "human landing sites". Researchers were having humans sit and flies... flying to the humans, and hoping they captured the flies before they bit or sucked the blood of the humans. And you know... there are health issues, there are ethical issues - there are all sorts of issues with this method.

So they started to make this chemical trap, called the "Esperanza Window Trap," which attempts to replace the human body. They were trying to find out: what are the chemical signals that the black flies are responding to? There are eight chemicals that I used, I think, which was the original recipe of this lure that the researchers used.

L  
A recipe for lures [all laugh], that's good [laughs]!

WK  
So it's that smell, and it was... for me, I wondered: how do other organisms who communicate through smell experience the human body? And what does that smell like to me? What does it smell like to be

human?" [laughs]

AB

What did it smell like... to you?

WK

I can't tell. That's part of the article that I wrote. I made this thing that supposedly smells like what the other organisms are sensing of us, and I realized that I have no words to describe that smell.

SA

Could you smell it? Or was it...

WK

Yeah, yeah...

SA

...just something you couldn't articulate? What is that smell?

WK

I could smell it, but I was like, "What is this?" I can't...

AB

Did it smell bad?

WK

It was... I made it subtle. So it wasn't bad, but I realized: I can't write about this; I can't describe it; I can't compare it to anything... And I came to a point where I'd run out of ways to actually describe this experience. I called it *Territory of the Unsmelled*.<sup>7</sup> We have a word to name something that we don't see or touch or hear – we say, "unseen," "untouched," or "unheard." But we don't have "unsmelled" [all laugh].

That opened up my thinking to the kinds of communications that organisms have, which is chemical signaling. They're sending chemicals that run through the underground mycorrhizal network, and plants do in the air, but it's not part of human consciousness. And it's like, how can all the other organisms participate in this way of communication except for us? [all laugh]

MR

Well, they do it on the ferry... they have vents that push out the smell of french fries [all laugh] into where you're sitting, right? [all laugh] And then everyone's like, "Mmmm." So it's very commodity based.



BC

I also think it comes back to commodities, and the way we're alienated from certain processes, whether that's through our inability to be attentive and give things time, or also maybe we don't have the language to talk about certain things because we're being stunted in some way. Through capitalism, we already understand smell to be a commodity... When you were talking about pheromones and how animals signal, I think we have that too, but our understanding of it is very minimized. We don't have the knowledge.

MR

Well, we're quite repressed in that respect. I mean, I don't want to talk about Freud [all laugh], but we do repress our smells. There are really intimate experiences that we have with smells - of one another, of animals... I kind of love it when my cat spreads his nose mucus all over the place. It's here [gestures around face], and then we do this thing [gestures to suggest a routine choreography], and it's really nice. He's marking me, you know.

AB

It's more animal, somehow. Because we do

use smell in very primal ways that will help us know if something's bad, for example. Like, when you smell milk that is off, you know to stay away...

BC

Danger!

AB

Danger, danger! So smell has its own language.

L

The English language and Western culture doesn't have a vast vocabulary for smelly things. But in Chinese culture, there's a lot, a lot, a lot of smelly things. If you go to the herb stores, you boil up any one of those things – they really, really smell. I remember when I was growing up my dad – and this was in southern Africa, where you don't have Chinese goods – he always had supplies for making his special ointment. He'd boil up this ointment, and it'd smell up the whole house... [laughs] ...all the kids were so embarrassed. But it was actually really good that he still knew how to make all of these things.

I don't know enough Chinese to know what

kind of vocabulary there is for the sense of smell. And then I'm not sure about Korean, either...

WK

Yeah, I think it is more acceptable to, like you said, have stronger smells. Especially in food. And a lot of times, fermented food has a strong smell, like sodium paste has a smell. Soy sauce has a smell...

L

Fish sauce, kimchi...

WK

I remember boiling soy sauce at one point when I arrived in Vancouver, and my wife came in and said, "Oh my gosh, the whole neighborhood smells like soy sauce" [all laugh]. It would be nothing to be embarrassed about in Korea, but here, I was so anxious. Is someone going to come and knock on my door and say, "Dude, you're stinking up this whole neighborhood" [all laugh]. There is a highly cultural aspect to smell and the way we experience smell.

But also, to kind of go back to the repressed or base scent, I think some of it is that it's very relational. There is

context to be made of smell. There's no way to smell without breathing in this material. When I smell bad meat or bad milk, I gag, because I know some of it actually went into me.

SA

Out of context, I do not want to think about it [all laugh].

WK

And I think that is why it feels more like what they call a "primitive sense." The ancient Greeks favored vision over taste and smell, because they thought they were more savage, making them low senses, and that vision was a higher sense because it is more cognitive, rational. I think some of that actually carries to this day and the ways we experience a lot of cultural spaces. When I go into an art exhibition or experience, it usually privileges vision, which is the rational...

MR

There's a fly... There's a fly buzzing around!

BC & AB

Oh, that's Fred!

L

How long has Fred been around?

BC

Since the beginning of Artspeak [all  
laugh]!

MR

Fred's on my cup.

BC

[gasps]

SA

He wants a drink.

BC

Fred wants some makgeolli!

MR

He's making his way around the rim! Yeah,  
he's part of this now.

WK

Anybody want more?

Fred

[buzzes]

## V. HONORABLE HARVESTS & POROSITY

L

I've been thinking that something about your process avoids extraction. How do we have a relationship with the natural world without being exploitative of these other critters? You're making a name for yourself with these critters... How do you title them as co-collaborators? What's their name?

SA

What would the yeast and bacteria be doing if they weren't in the nuruk, what's their normal...?

WK

They are a grain loving species. That's why there's hay in there [gestures to nuruk incubator], because they would usually be living near the straw, breaking down the grains... anything that's starchy. These are the organisms that love starch.

L

We love starch too [all laugh].

### SA

There's also a bit of a danger in romanticizing this idea of collaboration. Do they want to collaborate? Maybe they'd rather be out in the field. In the end, we are consuming the critters. And maybe that sort of end, where the critters from the makgeolli are mixing with the critters in our stomach is [laughs] happy, or maybe we're romanticizing it. I like to think that it is a beautiful relationship where now we're a part of each other. However, it's kind of one-sided. It's still material for making art.

### L

That's why I was wondering: how do we work this way while not being extractive? Human willfulness in the world – making art, making shows, authoring the critters' collaboration with us into some kind of art making – might be more extractive than just being with hospitality or being with intimate relationing.

### WK

Two years ago, after the first year in my MFA program, the word "extraction" was everywhere in people's comments and feedback about my work. And that's

something I've thought about a lot. I was working with a lot of organic materials. And if we're working with organic materials to make something, there's always a step of extraction. Whether it is to extract chlorophyll - like for the prints in the show - or anything. But at some point in the last year, I realized the kind of change that I wanted to make in my practice was to rethink my position as a producer and creator.

Aside from being an artist, as a citizen, you're always contributing to the GDP. You're a producer: that's how you become a contributing citizen. And I thought, maybe that is the problem, that we are always producing. We're always making and we end up pushing everything aside, except for everything that we've made; there's just us and human made things. When we were installing the show, I didn't want to "make" artworks. So I decided to make these drinks. At the end, we'll share the drinks and that will be it. There'll be nothing left over except for... well...

MR

Except for what's inside of us.



SA

But you're taking photographs of this, you're writing about it, people are writing about it. It's being translated into something else through the standard art world mechanisms we're all used to.

MR

I agree with what you're saying, but I also like to think about how substances change us. I think a lot about the way a plant like marijuana will bring a certain intensity of experience. It can help you deal with pain, it can help you sleep. To tap into the possibilities of other organisms in terms of how they can alter consciousness and heighten it in a way that art can, that opens up something of our awareness. I think alcohol does that. It also domesticates us. Suddenly, we can become completely dependent on alcohol or marijuana or...

L

Or to the cat [all laugh]!

MR

...any addiction. I think that addiction is what makes life worthwhile. I don't smoke, but without the cigarette, life has

no more meaning, right? And so, I think about how this experience alters our consciousness through your stories, Woojae, but also through this drink, and the way that engagement is heightened or is altered through this drink and the microorganisms and the wheatberries – and whether it's extractive or whatever – the drink is producing something different. There are going to be photos, but then there's also another thing that happens.

L

I think that there's no such thing as purity.

SA

No, no...

L

And we're all being affected. There is a really important place in art right now and in what Marina says about consciousness and the consciousness changing-ness of organic things, plants, etcetera. But then I think of the words of Robin Kimmerer, in what she calls "the honorable harvest," and how we can live in a world and use things with great ethics. And maybe even with a sense of our interrelationship with everything.

This is given in the Taoist texts. This is in what might be called religion, but is actually in philosophy. Because we do have to make a living, but we can do it honorably. How do we do it honorably? What are we choosing as honorable?

But I also think that things like the smells – like the horrible smells of Chinese medicine, etcetera – are revolutionary. Because for people who hate those smells, it's going into their bodies, it's upsetting them [laughs]. You might have some reaction to it afterwards, that on another level is shifting their understanding if they're listening to themselves. Why did they respond that way? So I think the listening that we're advocating for is part of it.

### BC

I keep thinking about how the title of the show, *I Am Porous. And I Am Moved By You.*, is very intimate. And when you come into the space, the intimacy is the relationship you have with the people here. But the word that I keep coming back to is "porous," because I think that word almost refuses categorization, and compels the idea of different relationships too. Between us and

the microorganisms, but also between each other, our relationship to this really particular place and this neighbourhood and this land. And I've never thought about the word porous as much as I have in the past few weeks [all laugh], because it's got holes and it refuses and there's a lot of air and there's a lot of space to move, to be, or to move out, or to move into or within. I keep coming back to the word porous, because I love to create and make exhibitions or projects with people that force a bleeding of the exhibition space, even though that's totally gruesome [all laugh]... you know, just a continual seeping. For things to reside in and under the walls, for however long they need. I just keep coming back to that word, because it's like another word for thinking about relationships.

#### WK

I chose that word when I was writing the text because I was thinking about relationships. There is always "I" - who is the subject of relationship making - and then there are "others". But when I'm working on this project, I started to realize maybe those terms can be blurred and questioned.

Like, I'm drinking this and there is a kind of boundary breaking. Research is coming out about how our mental health is influenced by our gut biome, and our gut biome is also responsible for the immune system. And they say there's 10 times more microorganisms living in and on our body than the ones that carry our DNA. So you know, in terms of numbers, there are way more microorganisms than us, and, but we never think of "us" as multiple, just as one person. I'm not saying that I think of myself as multiple, but maybe that kind of language changes us and how we think about ourselves.

I was reading the book "Meeting the Universe Halfway," by Karen Barad.<sup>8</sup> And one of her terms is "intraaction," as opposed to interaction. Interaction means that there are two independent bodies interacting with each other. But intraaction points to the fact that we exist in relationships, and our agency arises from our relationships. And I think that's kind of how I want to see it, how I want to see my relationships with others and just realizing I am made of things that come into me and go out from me — including the kind of family knowledge that is passed down, but also my

relationship to the things that I gather, or things I cultivate. And I am moved by my engagement with other people, but also when you drink you are moved by the alcoholic beverage.

ALL

[appreciative chatter & thank-yous]

BC

Should we end it there?

WK

Feel free to have more!

## NOTES

- 1 Makgeolli is a Korean fermented rice wine that takes a minimum of 8 weeks to produce. Its taste and consistency are determined by the environmental conditions of its production.
- 2 Nuruk is a traditional Korean fermentation starter. It is used to create various Korean alcoholic beverages.
- 3 Sean Alward, *Liquid Mountains*. Wil Aballe Projects, April 27–May 27, 2017. Vancouver, BC.
- 4 Laiwan, *Maple Tree Spiral*. Artspeak, June 14–July 27, 2019. Vancouver, BC.
- 5 Karin Bolender, *The Unnaming of Aliass Santa Barbara*, (CA: Punctum Books, 2020), back cover.
- 6 Germain Koh, *Fallow*. Libby Leshgold Gallery (formerly the Charles H. Scott Gallery), February 4–March 8, 2009. Vancouver, BC.
- 7 Woojae Kim, "The Territory of the Unsmelled," *Canadian Art*, Winter 2021.
- 8 Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham:Duke University Press, 2007).

SEAN ALWARD is an artist based in Vancouver. His paintings explore the intersection of materials and historical consciousness. He received his MFA from the University of British Columbia and BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. He has exhibited across Canada and in the U.S., most recently at SFU Gallery Burnaby, CSA Space, the Art Gallery at Evergreen, WAAP Projects Vancouver/Vacation Gallery New York, AHVA Gallery at UBC, Surrey Art Gallery, and the Nanaimo Art Gallery. He has published writing in *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, and *Border Crossings*.

ALEXANDRA BISCHOFF is a durational performance artist and writer. An MFA graduate of Concordia University's Intermedia department (2021), she has exhibited and performed across Canada and internationally. Bischoff was born in Amiskwaciy Waskahikan (Edmonton) and currently lives on the traditional and unceded lands of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy'əm, Skw̄xwú7mesh Úxwumixw, and səl'ilw'ətaʔɪ First Nations. They are the current Communications and Operations Manager of Artspeak.



BOPHA CHHAY is a writer and curator who lives and works on the unceded territories of the xwməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səl'ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations, also known as Vancouver. Her curatorial practice is frequently guided by interdisciplinary research interests covering topics such as transnationalism, diaspora, social movements, art and labour, sound, filmic representation; and they have taken the form of collective practices, alternative formats and structures, independent and expanded publishing and study groups, and writing on art. She has held positions at Artspeak Gallery (Vancouver, CA), Enjoy Public Art Gallery (Wellington, NZ), Afterall (Contemporary arts research and publishing) Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design (London, UK) and 221A Artist run centre (Vancouver, CA). She graduated with an MA in Art History from the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

LAIWAN is an interdisciplinary artist, writer and educator with a wide-ranging practice based in poetics and philosophy. Born in Zimbabwe of Chinese parents, her family immigrated to Canada in 1977 to leave the war in Rhodesia. Laiwan has been

investigating colonialism, with aim toward a decoloniality, since the late 1980s. She also has been exploring embodiment since 2000, through performativity, audio, music, improvisation, and varieties of media, along with bodily and emotional ways of knowing, so as to unravel and engage presence. Laiwan taught in the MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts Program at Goddard College (2001-2022), based at the satellite site in Washington State, USA, and she currently works as a planner for the Decolonization, Arts & Culture Department at the Vancouver Park Board with the City of Vancouver. Her book of poetry, *TENDER*, is published by Talon Books.

MARINA ROY is art artist, writer, and associate professor in visual art at the University of British Columbia. Her artworks investigate a grotesque aesthetic at the intersection of language, history, materiality, and posthumanism. Works often explore a corporeal humour, addressing humans' underlying animality, mortality, and problematic behaviour vis-à-vis biodiversity on this planet. In 2001 she published *sign after the x* (Arsenal/Artspeak), using the letter x as a conceit to unravel its significance as symbol and

grapheme; her next book, *Queuejumping* (Information Office/Art Metropole), is organized around the letter Q and uses queuejumping as a figuration to address human hubris.