



**ATTENDING
THE APOCALYPSE**



Jennifer Lee Wiebe & Janice Wright Cheney
ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE

Alpha-Omega: The End of Times

“ Interconnectivity is the fundamental paradox of this moment, our downfall and our salvation. ”ⁱⁱⁱ

- Jennifer Lee Wiebe & Janice Wright Cheney

ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE proposes a vision. It is not the prophecy of Revelations; there are no horsemen, no scythes, no thundering hooves. This is a contemporary version: quieter, more cerebral, secular and yet the warning is no less dire. *ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE* is a portent and Jennifer Lee Wiebe and Janice Wright Cheney are the messengers. They bear witness to the anxiety and despair that grip society here and now in the 21st century. As artists, they reflect back to us an image of the moment in which we live and a time in the future. In a world currently grappling with devastating floods and wildfires, mass shootings, climate change, plagues of locusts and now the outbreak of COVID-19, it is not hard to imagine how this will all end.

“ I see the mycelium as the Earth’s natural Internet, a consciousness with which we might be able to communicate. Through cross-species interfacing, we may one day exchange information with these sentient cellular networks. Because these externalized neurological nets sense any impression upon them, from footsteps to falling tree branches, they could relay enormous amounts of data regarding the movements of all organisms through the landscape. ”

- Paul Stamets

For Jennifer Lee Wiebe, US President Trump’s tweets are a proclamation of the end of times. They are signs of the final reckoning and we are only waiting. Janice Wright Cheney on the other hand, shows us the aftermath and the hope that springs eternal, a new world arising from the ashes of the old.

At first glance the work of these two artists seems very distinct, not only thematically but in media and content. Jennifer Lee Wiebe paints text and the hard edges of design while Janice Wright Cheney sculpts soft things with deft hands. Yet, despite these seeming differences, Jennifer Lee Wiebe and Janice Wright Cheney explore many of the same concerns.

They share an interest in understanding the nature of the world, continuously researching, reading, and discovering connections. They engage in the discussion of ideas and the exchange of images and reference materials. This intellectual approach has made them respected colleagues at the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design where they have taught Foundation Visual Arts for over 20 years. They continue to challenge and guide their students in the development of their own critical skills and visual vocabulary. They participate in the cultural development of their community as well by serving on the board of ConneXion ARC: Jennifer Lee Wiebe as President and Janice Wright Cheney as Programming Chair. As artists, they are interested in exploring the significance of women’s work and reinvesting value in traditional skills. They find inspiration in discarded objects and materials, salvaging and reusing them with critical purpose. They are both concerned about the state of society and employ their art as a means of understanding and communicating their discoveries. Though they have participated in Faculty shows and other group projects like *Depository Park*, 2018, Jennifer Lee Wiebe and Janice Wright Cheney have never exhibited together. Though *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse* and *Elysium* were initiated independently, the exhibition has allowed these two bodies of work to become more conceptually entwined. Together, they are two parts of an idea coalescing in *ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE*.

One of the thematic strands that binds their work together winds around networks—both digital and biological. In *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse*, Jennifer Lee Wiebe explores the hyperactive reality of social media, while Janice Wright Cheney searches underground to reveal the ceaseless activity of fungi. In so doing, they discover the similarities of these seemingly different expressions of the world.

Both social media and mycelia are part of massive systems of communication. Not fixed, these networks have the capacity to propagate and grow organically. They extend their reach, responsive and adaptive to their environment. Most importantly, they are both nourished by the rich ground of decaying systems. *ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE* shows us the inevitable cycle of decay and rebirth; that civilizations, like forests, eventually topple and die.

Fungi are pre-historic organisms dating back 1,300 million years and are one of the most widely dispersed species on the planet. Moulds, mildews, yeast and mushrooms occupy a singular place in taxonomy, neither plant nor animal; they are symbiotic, parasitic and extremely varied. They can be immense like the *Armillaria ostoyae* in the Blue Mountains of Oregon which is estimated to have an underground network 10 kilometres wide and thought to be 2400-8650 years old or they can be as small as the tiny cup mushroom *Hymenoscyphus Fructigenus* at just 4 mm. ¹

Fungi have many uses. They are edible, and contain antioxidants, selenium and folic acid. Not only used for making bread, cheese and beer, they are now being used to develop meat alternatives with a low carbon footprint. They have both medicinal and poisonous properties useful in a variety of applications. Penicillin was discovered when Alexander Flemming found it contaminating his petri dishes. Fungi have tough, fast growing fibres that are being developed for use in structural design and building materials. *Aspergillus tubingensis* is being explored for its ability to feed on polymer molecules which may be an important new development in the reduction of plastic waste. ²

Fungi are just one of the many systems that keep this planet functioning, responsible for breaking down organic matter and releasing important nutrients back into the ecosystem. The mushroom is the fruiting body of a vast underground network of mycelia. When conditions are right, it erupts from the ground, matures and releases its spores. Once a spore has landed, it begins to grow, generating long fibres or hyphae. As these elongate and branch off, they become mycelia. As the mycelia filaments grow, they secrete enzymes that digest organic compounds like cellulose and lignins found in dying trees and leaf litter. This expanding network of mycelia wrap around the roots of trees and other plants, connecting all local species. Current research suggests that



Janice Wright Cheney
Elysium, 2018-2020, detail



Jennifer Lee Wiebe painting CHILL GRETA CHILL @realDonaldTrump December 12, 2019.

technological revolution has changed how we receive information and how we respond. Computers and mobile phones connect us instantly to information and each other. At one time information was channeled through the editorial department of newspapers, TV and radio, responsible to its shareholders and subscribers. Now anyone can express a view. Platforms are interactive and as content is produced and shared by its users, it creates a path of invisible filaments that traverse the globe. Today there are 2.5 billion Facebook users and 126 million Twitter users worldwide. ⁴

Social media not only changes how we communicate but how we relate to current structures of power. It allows people to unite and it gives them a voice. Social movements like #ArabSpring, #MeToo, and #BlackLives-Matter have erupted from the fertile ground of discontent, putting power back into the hands of the people.

Social media networks create communities unbounded by traditional demographic, economic, or geographic divisions. While on one hand these networks have the power to take down established systems and force an unprecedented social change, they also have the potential to take root in the substrate of the alt-right and other conservative factions. As easily as truth and social justice can spread, so too can hatred and prejudice.

@realDonaldTrump demonstrates the genius of Donald Trump and his ability to capitalize on social media from the Oval Office. Playing the parts of real estate mogul, millionaire, Reality TV show host, and President, Trump knows the power of mass communication and how to dominate it. He is ranked with Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande in the top three most followed on Twitter. Since coming to office, Donald Trump has tweeted over 49,000 messages

mycelia not only deliver nitrogen and phosphates but chemical signals as well. It is believed that mycelia form an active underground communication system that alerts neighbouring plants to threats like insects, blights and other diseases. These mycelial conduits may also select which plants receive nutrients, thus determining the species that flourish and thrive. It appears that this unseen network not only controls activity below ground but above ground as well. ³

Social media, like mycelia, has a broad network and an organic reach. The

to 73 million followers; a great majority of these tweets attack people and organizations that threaten his position or policies, spreading misinformation, racism and misogyny. ⁵

Known for his aggressive hyper-macho style, President Trump is hardly a serious statesman. For him, Twitter is a game in which the rules of civility and diplomacy are disregarded. He exploits the informality of the medium and gets up-close and personal. Ignoring protocol and the advice of his aides and PR specialists, Trump shares his thoughts and reactions unfiltered. His inflammatory statements and unpredictability are strategies designed to keep his opponents off-balance and keep the world watching. Twitter provides the instant gratification needed for someone as narcissistic and antagonistic as Trump. It gives him reach and it gives him power. He describes sending a tweet as he would describe pressing the button to launch a nuclear attack:

“Boom. I press it,” ... “and, within two seconds, ‘We have breaking news.’” ⁶

For *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse*, Jennifer Lee Wiebe has selected one tweet per year from thousands in President Donald Trump’s twitter feed since 2015, the year he entered the presidential race. This series of 6 paintings shown together for the first time at the UNB Art Centre in 2020, marks a historic year in which both impeachment and potential re-election are a reality.

@realDonaldTrump	No. of tweets...that
5,889	attacked someone or something
4,876	praised someone or something
2,405	attacked Democrats
2,065	attacked investigations
2,026	praised President Trump
1,710	promoted conspiracy theories
1,308	attacked new organizations
851	attacked minority groups
758	praised or promoted Fox News and other conservative media
570	attacked immigrants
453	attacked previous president
417	conducted presidential business on Twitter
256	attacked Hillary Clinton
233	attacked ally nations
183	bragged about crowd size and applause
132	praised dictators
95	referred to a Trump business
40	promoted voter fraud conspiracy theories
36	called the news media the “enemy of the people”
16	referred to himself as everyone’s “favourite president”

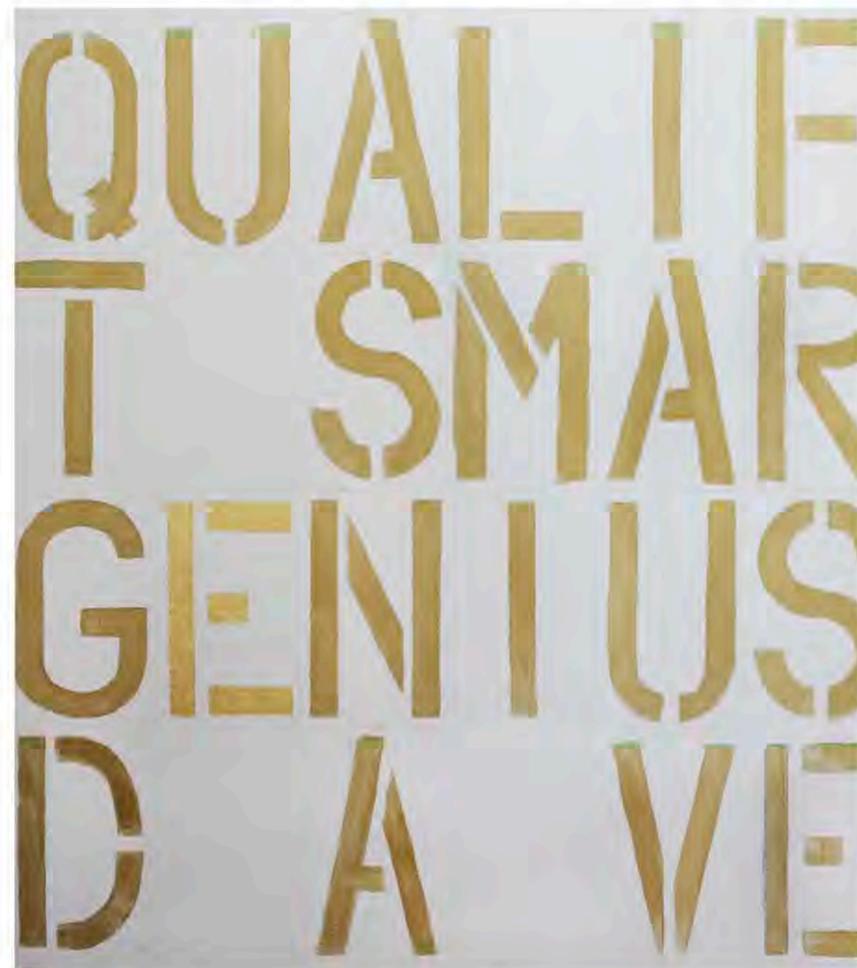
Tweets from Jan. 20, 2017 - Oct. 15, 2019 ⁷

“mushroom management: treat ‘em like a mushroom, feed ‘em a bunch of shit and keep them in the dark.” ^{vi}

- Urban Dictionary

“ The process of making these paintings has committed me to a more honest engagement with the political realities of the United States. The unfolding of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the US and in Canada challenges my assumptions about the role of government and partisanship in a time of crisis.^{vii} ”

-Jennifer Lee Wiebe



Jennifer Lee Wiebe, *VERY STABLE GENIUS*, @realDonaldTrump January 6, 2018, detail

The idea for this series began germinating in 2018 when Jennifer Lee Wiebe was thousands of miles from the epicentre of American politics in residence at Jivar Creació i Societat in Barcelona, Spain. While working on “Lingua Franca Spoken Here,” a project where she analyzed the role of English as the international language of trade and diplomacy, she became increasingly aware of the noise Trump was making. In considering the effects of colonization, commerce and culture in the spread of English, she found an intersection with the power and reach of the US President in his war of words on social media.

As an American living in Canada, Jennifer Lee Wiebe is highly engaged with the political process of the United States. She is at once implicated and dissociated from the politics of her country of birth; she is by times incredulous and deeply concerned. It was during her residency at The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in 2018 that she was moved to begin this series. The space provided was large enough to begin the 5 X 8 foot canvases on which Donald Trump’s tweets are stencilled, then hand-painted in gold. The letters remain discreet and organized, each staying within the bounds of its own box in a grid which holds 144 spaces — just enough to fit one tweet of 140 characters.⁷ The grid is drawn using the proportions of the Golden Section. This arrangement follows the principles of order and pattern derived from observations of the natural world. The Golden Section distributes space according to mathematical ratios and has been utilized since the Renaissance to find balance and harmony in a composition. This use of a classical ordering system is a joke when considered in the context of the chaos and capriciousness of Trump’s tweets. When read through a structure that provides order, the message is disrupted just enough to force the reader to slow down, dislocating the medium from the message.

Scratchcards for the Apocalypse takes an electronic signal that is broadcast in a fraction of a second and translates it using one of humankind’s oldest tools of communication: the stylus and paintbrush. For Jennifer Lee Wiebe, painting becomes a subversive act. It is a manual process, at once laborious and repetitive, meditative and intentional. In this series, each character of the tweet is drawn using a hand-cut stencil — a low tech means to reproduce letters quickly and accurately. Irregular edges and the uneven application of paint make each letter unique, imprinted by the hand that created it. As they are painted, the letters are emptied of meaning and merely become abstract shapes. It is almost like paint-by-number. The outline is provided, and the painter merely fills in the coded colour to gradually reveal the final form. There is no narrative, no meaning until it is all complete and legible. The carefully considered mathematical distribution of space and the laboriously hand-crafted letters become a small act of resistance in the face of President Donald Trump’s ill-conceived, profuse and never-ending tweets.

“ The Left views Trump as the Anti-Christ... I don’t. It’s the polarization that is problematic for me, and he represents the Right in this moment. My personal feelings about the US come from reading the founding documents of the Confederation of the original 13 colonies: The US Constitution and Amendments and the Declaration of Independence.^{viii} ”

- Jennifer Lee Wiebe

“ The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist. ^{ix} ”

- Hannah Arendt

revolution and a brave new world. Text again comes to the foreground in the mid-twentieth century with the Pop Art explosion and the appropriation of advertising and other mass media by artists like Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein. The conceptual art of Joseph Kosuth, Yoko Ono and On Kawara used text to explore the discrepancy between art and idea. In the 1960s and 70s, Greg Curnoe, Joyce Wieland and Garry Neill Kennedy used text to create a Canadian national identity and to critique public and political institutions. Contemporary American artists like Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer and Christopher Wool use text as a way to subvert the image and provide a critical commentary on consumerism, stereotypes and power structures. Syllabics are used by Indigenous artists Joi T. Arcand and Duane Linklater to reclaim their language and position it alongside that of the dominant white culture. The inclusion of text in a painting is no longer considered avant-garde but a staple in the arsenal of the post-modern artist.

In *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse*, Jennifer Lee Wiebe uses text as subject. The canvases are completely devoid of imagery, there are no other visual clues and no relief from the words themselves. Trump's tweets, though necessarily small and fleeting, nevertheless have large and lasting effects. In *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse*, they are rendered in a sans-serif font at 576 points, all caps. These tweets yell at us from across the room. While twitter generally uses a black typeface, here the tweets are translated in gold acrylic paint. Gold, the colour of wealth and power, is a colour associated with Trump and the values he endorses. In another subtly seditious act, Jennifer Lee Wiebe imbeds within the tweets the opening lines of the United States Constitution, drafted by the country's founding fathers in 1787. These are painted in actual 24K gold leaf. She challenges us to look for this charter of rights inside the frame of reference provided by the country's current political leader. She makes a game out of detecting which one is real and which one is fool's gold.

Painting has traditionally relied on the image as subject, whether representational or abstract, and on colours and textures to enhance its emotive power. The use of text in painting has its earliest manifestations in the tombs of the ancient Egyptians, in the illuminated manuscripts of the Medieval scriptoria, and the scrolls of the great Chinese poets and philosophers. Here, text may be secondary to the image, but not necessarily; sometimes the image is secondary to the text.

Text and image resurface in the Modernist era with the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque who incorporated scraps of newspaper and other materials into their collages and paintings to subvert the conventions of painting. Dadaists and Surrealists like Marcel Duchamp and Rene Magritte used text to challenge perceptions of reality. The posters and paintings of the Constructivists like Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky use text to call for

Jennifer Lee Wiebe is not alone in her fascination with translating Donald Trump's words into works of art. The *Tiny Pricks Project* is another subversive enterprise that has arisen in reaction to Trump's aggressive, un-presidential tweets. It began in 2018 when Victoria-based artist and activist Diana Weymar embroidered "I am a very stable genius" onto one of her grandmother's samplers. The idea began to gather momentum after she posted a picture on Instagram. An exhibit of these small needlework protests was held in New York City at the Lingua Franca Boutique in 2019 (an interesting coincidence when considered in relation to the context and origin of Jennifer Lee Wiebe's work). The project now has over 46.5 thousand followers and 2800 embroideries sent in by people all over North America and Europe. ⁸

While *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse* isn't a collective endeavor like the *Tiny Pricks Project*, it is nevertheless participatory. It relies upon the familiar, the instantly recognizable, our shared cultural property. Once tweeted, the thoughts and opinions of Donald Trump are in the public domain and take on a life of their own.

These tweets, so ubiquitous and pervasive, are just the kind of thing that fascinate Jennifer Lee Wiebe. She has had a sustained interest in kitsch—the kinds of cultural artifacts found in flea markets, auctions and thrift stores. She collects things that are mass produced and widely available, and recontextualizes them. She explores the unexpected connections that occur when disparate elements are brought together.

Frenchy's Sutra, 2008, her first solo exhibit at the UNB Art Centre, featured 17 quilts made from clothing scavenged from Frenchy's stores along the Eastern Seaboard. These garments, sewn in as-is, retain their distinctive shapes and at times impact the final shape of the quilt. In *Abstracts 1-12*, 2018, Jennifer Lee Wiebe paired 12 vintage paint-by-number paintings with her own abstract colour responses. Highly reproduced images of great works of art like Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* are as popular as the sentimental paint-by-number clowns and kittens in North American homes of the 1950s and 60s.

In the series *#needlepoint*, 2019, she collected needlepoint samplers worked by anonymous, most likely female hands. As with the paint-by-number kits, these are made from mass produced patterns of familiar scenes and famous paintings. To these, Jennifer Lee Wiebe embroidered memes found on social media.

“ One point about these paintings — it's our lens as the viewer that creates the resonance of the text. Part of my concept is the ambiguity of presenting these tweets... the texts on each panel are simply words-neutral. Each viewer brings their politics to the meaning. ^x ”

- Jennifer Lee Wiebe



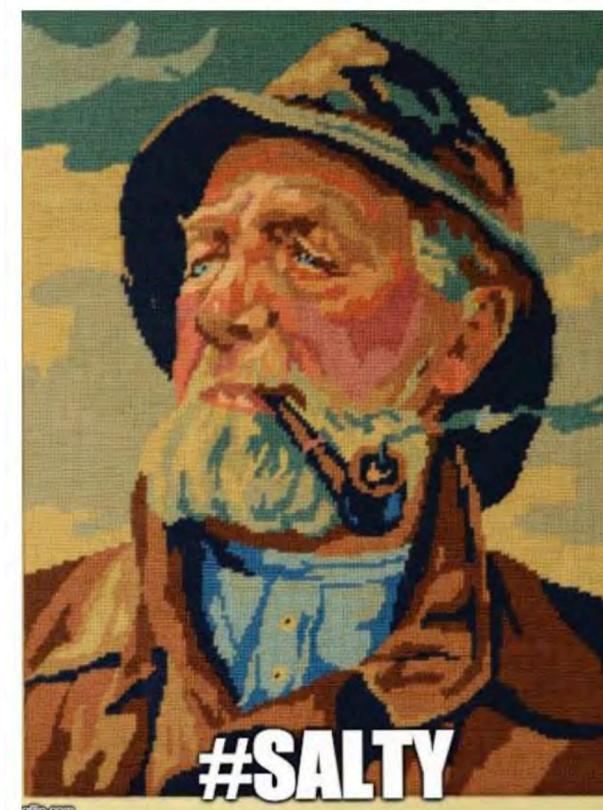
Jennifer Lee Wiebe, *Frenchy's Sutra*
 Top left: *Buctouche*, 2006
 Recycled clothing, 212.5 x 182.5 cm.
 Top right: *Greenwood (Blue Boy)*, 2005
 Recycled clothing, 120 x 147.5 cm



Jennifer Lee Wiebe, *Abstracts 1-12*
Abstract #6, Supper, 2015/16
 Colour grid: acrylic, 91.4 x 91.4 cm
 Paint by number: oil



Jennifer Lee Wiebe, *#METOO*, 2019
 Digital image



Jennifer Lee Wiebe, *#SALTY*, 2019
 Digital image

“ Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow.^{xi} ”

- Hannah Arendt

By overlaying contemporary phrases and references onto these innocuous decorative objects, she changes their meaning and reconstructs them in light of the digital age. In *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse*, Jennifer Lee Wiebe collects Donald Trump's tweets as though from the bargain basement of false claims and fake news. By making art from things cast off and sold cheap, she repurposes them, and re-invests them with a new value and puts them back into circulation.

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STOCK MARKET
STARTING TO
LOOK VERY GO
OD TO ME!

Jennifer Lee Wiebe
Left:
HALLMARK OF
DEMOCRACY
@realDonaldTrump
April 17, 2015

Right:
VERY MUCH
UNDER CONTROL,
@realDonaldTrump
February 24, 2020



While in *Scratchcards for the Apocalypse* Jennifer Lee Wiebe translates Donald Trump's tweets as a way of chronicling the path of dissolution, in *Elysium*, Janice Wright Cheney proposes that nature will provide the true path forward, restoring balance and order to a ruined civilization.

Janice Wright Cheney's work has centred around observations of nature since its early beginnings. Translated through textile-based media, early on, she was one of a number of female artists reclaiming traditional women's work. Embroidery became a trope with which to understand the place of women in society, her domestic situation and the value of her creative output. Janice Wright Cheney's early work in collage and quilt-making crystallized in a series of antique handkerchiefs beautifully embroidered, not with initials or roses, but with the eggs and larva of insects. Set in drawers and wooden frames, they were reminders of dusty collections, petticoats and bygone days.

Janice Wright Cheney brings a scientific scrutiny to the species she studies. Intensely researched and carefully observed, each body of work is meticulously crafted. Traditional techniques of needlework, felting, dying and crocheting are employed to create exacting replicas of jellyfish, mushrooms and silkworms. Her works are labour intensive— requiring many hours dedicated to experimentation and to the manufacture of felted roses, furry rats, and crocheted snowflakes and mycelia.



Janice Wright Cheney
Elysium, 2018, detail.

“ A curiosity about mushrooms — sparked by foraging and considerable reading — led me to a new understanding of the significance of fungi to, well, everything. ^{xii} ”

- Janice Wright Cheney

Small-scale works like those of *Disorderly Creatures*, 2001, *Labouratoire*, 2007, and *Encroach*, 2011 provide the platform for an increasingly complex vocabulary of skills and ideas developed over more than 20 years of artistic output. The progression to large three-dimensional sculptures like *Widow*, 2012 earned her a place in *Oh Canada*.⁹ From stand-alone sculptural pieces, Janice Wright Cheney moved to the development of experiential spaces with the site-specific installations *Cellar*, 2012 and *Sardinia*, 2016. The latter, a collaborative project, was her first multi-media enterprise using film and sound.¹⁰ More recently, she has developed a number of public interventions like *Rewild*, 2019 and *Fera Moira*, 2018. Her intense focus is trained on relational dynamics. From insect infestations, schools of fish, to a plague of rats, she explores the uneasy edge between humans and animals.

The idea of rewilding has become an increasingly important concept in this artist's most recent works. It derives from an approach to conservation which allows nature to take care of itself without the intervention of humans. Habitats are left to return to their wild state, increasing biodiversity and symbiosis, mitigating erosion, floods and climate change.

Already preoccupied with the idea of rewilding, Janice Wright Cheney was an artist-in-residence at the Tides Institute in Eastport, Maine in 2016. There to complete and install *Sardinia* in the North Church project space, she was captivated by the tale told of the building prior to its renovation in 2002. Originally built in 1819, the building had gradually fallen into ruin, and when it was taken over by the Tides Institute, the team discovered hundreds of mushrooms growing around the spiral staircase. For Janice Wright Cheney, already experimenting with felting mushrooms, this image kindled a whole series of works into being. *Fera Moira* was completed and exhibited in 2018.



Janice Wright Cheney
Top: *Encroach*, 2011
Felted wool, copper wire, onionskins, shellac and horsehair, found bucket

Middle: *Cellar*, 2012
Recycled fur, felted wool, wood and found materials

Bottom: *Cellar*, 2012, detail



Janice Wright Cheney
 Top: *Infestations: Devour*, 2003, detail
 Silk embroidery on silk organza,
 5 panels, wooden armature

Bottom left: *Tapestry Moths*, 1999
 Embroidery on cotton, beeswax,
 found materials
 35 x 40 cm

Bottom right: *Entomic Diary*, 1999
 Embroidery on cotton and linen,
 beeswax, found materials



Janice Wright Cheney
 Top left: *Labouratoire*, 2007
 Indigo tie-dye and cotton embroidery on
 cotton and linen, glass Petri dishes, table

Top right: *Labouratoire*, 2007, detail

Bottom left: *Sardinia*, 2016
 Recycled plastic, wood, found materials,
 video projection and sound, site specific
 installation at North Church, Eastport Maine
 original sound piece by David Cheney/
 Charles Harding, video editing Ryan O'Toole

“ As a contemp-
 orary artist I am creating a
 context, asking the viewer
 to consider how nature is
 made knowable. ^{xiii} ”

- Janice Wright Cheney



Janice Wright Cheney
Rewild, 2019
 Velvet, wool, found fur, taxidermy
 forms. Site-specific installation at the
 Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton NB

“ The positioning of “wild animals” into the curated space of the European collection invites dialogue about representation, conservation, nature and culture. Lurking among the tapestries, furniture and oil paintings these creatures test the expectations and complacency of visitors to the art gallery.^{xiv} ”

- Janice Wright Cheney



Janice Wright Cheney
Widow, Walking, 2012
 Wool, cochineal dye, velvet, taxidermy form, pins and wood
 collection of Telus Canada at Telus Garden, Vancouver, BC

Janice Wright Cheney often uses found objects to enhance the associative power of her works. The cabinets, drawers, buckets and bins in the earlier pieces lend the works authenticity. They aren't manufactured for an art piece but are actual objects with a past life. For *Fera Moira* she began to salvage columns, pillars and posts found in old houses to which she attached felted shelf fungus. Anyone who has walked in a forest and seen these polypores attached to trees knows that it signals the inevitable ruin of that tree, for once infected, there is no recovery.

These deceptively simple sculptures play with complex ideas and associations. Architectural elements like columns form part of the classical canon of architecture. According to Vitruvius, who lived in the first century B.C., a building must be designed according to the principles of symmetry, proportion, and harmony. Buildings like the Parthenon were studied for their exemplary design and have become synonymous with an ideal of civilization. The design is thought to come from early constructions using trees to support beams and roofs. Translated into marble, the posts and lintels become columns and architraves, majestic and enduring. This architectural design has been appropriated and used all over the world to construct churches, banks and government buildings. These temples of money and power are an homage to our origins and our progress— our permanence.

The appropriation of these classical elements for domestic architecture is a signifier of wealth and status, of safety and security, of home. Even when made of less permanent materials like wood, the association is inherent and compelling. The house is a structure that protects us from nature. It keeps us dry and warm, sheltered from the elements. It is a refuge that keeps us safe, shielded from intruders and the outside world. It gives us the illusion of order and control in a world that is chaotic and disorderly. By attaching fungi to the structural supports of houses, Janice Wright Cheney plays with our notions of comfort and safety. Organisms associated with decay and dilapidation remind us that permanence is an illusion; everything is subject to the laws of nature. Like the trees in the forest, every structure is impermanent. No matter the foundations that support it, the feats of engineering that built it, or the ideals that shape it; it will inevitably crumble and fall.



Janice Wright Cheney
 Left: *Fera Moira*, 2018
 Felted wool, silk and lace
 on found columns
 Right: *Elysium*, 2018
 Site specific installation
 at *Art in the Open*,
 Charlottetown, PEI



Conceived as part of the *Fera Moira* series, *Elysium* was previously installed in *Art in the Open* held in Victoria Park, Charlottetown, PEI, 2018. This intervention, on view for only 24 hours, was itself like a toadstool that has suddenly popped up on the forest floor. Public art interventions are surprising, sudden and out of place. They disrupt our perceptions and preconceptions. They allow the viewer to unexpectedly happen upon some wonderment and experience it three-dimensionally. Interventions are like a jolt that invite the viewer to recontextualize the space around it. This juxtaposition of art and environment can occur outdoors like *Elysium* at *Art in the Open* or indoors like the *Rewild* project at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in 2019.

Shown here at the UNB Art Centre's West Gallery, the work *Elysium* no longer functions as an intervention but becomes a sculptural statement and must be reconsidered in the context of *ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE*. By placing this work in a gallery, it is isolated, made precious, sterile. It has less to do with confronting the work as part of a natural environment and more about understanding the conceptual underpinnings of the piece itself. It now dominates the space and forces the viewer to confront its meaning intimately.



Janice Wright Cheney, *Elysium*, work in progress

“ Elysium- This word came into Latin from the Greek Elysion. In classical mythology, Elysium, or the Elysian Fields, was the home of the blessed after death, the final resting place of the souls of the heroic and the pure. ^{xv} ”

- Merriam Webster

Though sculptural, *Elysium* is like a still life. It can be seen as a *memento mori*, a reminder of the fragility of life. It shares commonalities with the *vanitas* paintings of the Dutch and Flemish painters of the 17th and 18th centuries. This genre portrays the fleeting beauty of this world and holds reminders that our time here is all too brief. Interestingly, mushrooms with their various colours and textures were often included in these paintings of the bountiful feast. The mushrooms are so keenly observed and so exactly rendered they can be accurately classified. They are laid out alongside fruits and nuts, and an assortment of plants and animals hunted, caught and gathered. The finely painted flies and snails, the fruit already turning, the blood on the fur congealing, are like little pricks in the veneer of the scene, signs of the inevitable process of decay. Mushrooms too are an apt garnish for the plate since not only are they part of this process, but they can also hasten it.



Janice Wright Cheney, *Elysium*, work in progress

“ Fungi grow from their tips, and gnaw into the future as they advance. A mycelial network is a map of a fungus’s recent history — a portrait of time — and a helpful reminder that all life forms are in fact processes not things. ^{xvi} ”

- Merlin Sheldrake

The crib itself in *Elysium* is a vivid reminder of mortality. It is at the centre of the house, the most vulnerable place. It evokes the double edge of joy and fear—it contains the seed of the future; it also contains the stone of grief. Old fashioned and no longer in use, this crib has been abandoned and left to rust, and is now colonized by mushrooms. These are *Clitocybe* mushrooms, conscientiously examined and recorded, intentionally selected by the artist for their generic and aesthetic qualities. Dyed with mushroom extracts, their fleshy bodies are made from felted wool, their caps covered in delicate silk, snakeskin and lace, their crocheted mycelia trailing and extending outward.

Elysium can be read as a post-apocalyptic statement that exists in the quietude of the aftermath. The mushrooms pushing up through the discarded bedframe are fed by the refuse of a dying civilization. With the passage of time, this relic of humanity will be consumed and returned to its original state. The mycelia spreading along the floor are relentless. They are perfect in their design. Adaptive and responsive, they are the way forward, providing new possibilities and new structures. The process of rewilding removes the artificial barriers separating humans from their environment. It is a transformation, a purification. The persistence of the mushroom and the regenerative power of this new life signals a return to nature— as it was in the beginning.

Marie E. Maltais
Director, UNB Art Centre



ESSAY NOTES

1. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/strange-but-true-largest-organism-is-fungus/>
<https://www.mushroomexpert.com/cups.html>
2. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-mycelium-revolution-is-upon-us/>
<https://thegreentemple.net/articles/mycelium-the-future-is-fungi>
3. <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141111-plants-have-a-hidden-internet>
4. <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>
5. <https://www.trackalytics.com/twitter/profile/realdonaldtrump/>
6. How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in Over 11,000 Tweets. New York Times, November 2, 2019. Michael D. Shear, Maggie Haberman, Nicholas Cofessore, Karen Yourist, Larry Buchanan and Keith Collins
7. The original limit for characters in a tweet was 140 characters in 2006. Today it is doubled at 280.
8. <https://www.tinypricksproject.com/the-project/>
9. Oh, Canada, curated by Denise Markonish, MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2012) Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, NB (2014) Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary, AB (2015)
10. Sardinia A multimedia exhibition installed at North Church In Eastport, Maine, Summer 2016. Film Editing by Ryan O'Toole and original sound composition by Charles Harding (Property//) and David Cheney.

QUOTE NOTES

- i. "The Math Behind Trump's Tweets", www.theconversation.com.
- ii. Tweets 2015-20, @realDonaldTrump.
- iii. Jennifer Lee Wiebe & Janice Wright Cheney, 2020.
- iv. Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*, 2005.
- v. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-presidency.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pg_type=Article.
- vi. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mushroom+management>.
- vii. Jennifer Lee Wiebe, 2020.
- viii. Ibid.
- ix. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, www.goodreads.com.
- x. Jennifer Lee Wiebe, 2020.
- xi. Hannah Arendt, www.goodreads.com.
- xii. Janice Wright Cheney, 2020.
- xiii. Ibid.
- xiv. Ibid.
- xv. merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Elysium.
- xvi. Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our Worlds, Change our Minds and Shape our Futures*, 2020.

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JENNIFER LEE WIEBE



Immigrating to Canada in 1993 reframed my identity as an American citizen. The lens of emigrant and ex-pat increasingly informs my practice as an artist/maker. The U.S. election of 2016 was especially galvanizing for me in this regard – and this current series *Scratch Cards for the Apocalypse* is a direct response to this experience.

Geography, growing up in the United States, looks quite a bit like this wooden puzzle...the contours of the country utterly unrelated to the rest of the continent to the north and to the south, without global context. For some, this mindset persists and is perpetuated, regardless of the international networking

platforms that connect us to one another globally. The nightly news and weather on the local television stations in Maine today will feature a contour of the state much like this. It's as if the United States is floating free form in the ocean.

This particular wooden puzzle is sold on an educational site for teachers, under the brand "Learning Journey". A thesis could be written on all the ways this is problematic – and how this insular and misleading version of the map of a North America relates directly to American policy and politics today.

Using the twitter feed of the U.S. president as the basis for a painting series is ironic on at least a couple of levels – this persistent myopia is one. The second is the contrast posed between a "tweet" fired off on a blackberry anytime of day and sent around the world on social media versus the same text on a stretched canvas: primed, stenciled, and hand painted.

When I had this idea in 2018, I was in Spain on an artist residency. Barcelona is fiercely Catalan, and also Spanish – and I was talking with citizens about their language use in a project called "Lingua Franca Spoken Here". I was fascinated by the current dominance of the English language as a world lingua franca and the presumptive privilege and power that goes with it. As it turned out Gràcia, Barcelona was the perfect place to have these conversations. Meanwhile the international news was broadcasting the tweets (in English) of the U.S. president, daily.



I have selected a text for the years 2015-2020, with the stated plan to either extend or end the series, depending on whether or not the president "is given a second term, or impeached". Now he is impeached, and also likely to be given a second term by democratic vote in the United States! You have to admit it's fascinating stuff.

Gold paint is used to form the stenciled letters on each canvas, and the text "WE THE PEOPLE" derived from the opening text of the United States Constitution can be found in 24 karat gold leaf running through the chronology of the tweets. With Dada inspired logic, the "value" of the work in a post-apocalyptic society is the gold leaf, which can be "scratched" from the surface of the work and hypothetically used to trade for reserve currency... though the international "gold standard" no longer exists.

CV, history and other works can be found at www.jenniferleewiebe.com

JANICE WRIGHT CHENEY



My work reflects an interest in commonly assumed distinctions between the cultural and the natural, and more specifically, between the safe/domestic and the wild/disorderly. I often depict various creatures transgressing into the human world, drawing attention to the instability of our presumed detachment from nature: *Coy Wolves*, 2010, *Cellar*, 2012, *Rewild*, 2019. Other projects explore wilderness as a lost environment, and consider the absence of the animal in our present global situation: *Spectre*, 2014, *Sardinia*, 2016, *The Lucivee*, 2020.

Fera Moira

In this series I imagine ecological life in a possible future. Representations of mushrooms sprout from beams and columns, imitating the growth of bracket fungi on tree trunks. Trees were harvested to create the posts—the subordination of nature to culture. But here the mushroom colonizes and thrives on the dead wood, refusing the boundaries that separate nature and culture.

In *Elysium* the felted mushrooms sprout from a rusty bed frame, evoking a persistent life force, the endless cycles of birth and death, creation and destruction. Beneath and beyond the crib spreads the mycelium, which I have created with crocheted yarn.

I want to make visible this silent and mysterious organism—the network of fungal strands that extends beneath the forest floor. Ecologists are just beginning to understand the significance of the mycelium and its role in biodiversity.

The title for this series of works, *Fera Moira*, loosely means “Wild Fate” in Greek and Latin. It is a reference to “rewilding,” a progressive approach to conservation, which essentially allows nature to take care of itself. Left alone, natural processes can repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes, creating wilder, more biodiverse habitats.

The rewilding of the architectural object suggests the passage of time, and the possibility of new life. Even in a time of ruin and despair, the presence of the mushrooms is ultimately hopeful.

CV, history and other works can be found at www.janicewrightcheney.com



List of Works

Jennifer Lee Wiebe

SCRATCHCARDS FOR THE APOCALYPSE
(2018-2020)

All works are acrylic paint on canvas,
with the addition of 24k gold leaf
243.84 x 152.4 cm

PURE ENJOYMENT,
@realDonaldTrump April 17, 2015

GREATLY STRENGTHEN,
@realDonaldTrump December 22, 2016

HALLMARK OF DEMOCRACY,
@realDonaldTrump January 22, 2017

VERY STABLE GENUIS,
@realDonaldTrump January 6, 2018

CHILL GRETA CHILL,
@realDonaldTrump December 12, 2019

VERY MUCH UNDER CONTROL,
@realDonaldTrump February 24, 2020



List of Works

Janice Wright Cheney

Elysium, 2018-2020
Found crib, wool, silk, lace,
snakeskin, mushroom dyes



Jennifer Lee Wiebe & Janice Wright Cheney **ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE**

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Jennifer Lee Wiebe & Janice Wright Cheney
ATTENDING THE APOCALYPSE
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