



Filamentous

Elaine Whittaker and Kelley Aitken
October 19, 2022 – November 5, 2022

Reception: October 22nd, 2 to 4pm, Performance by Julia Aplin, with music by John Gzowski.

Artists' Talk and Poetry Reading: November 5th, 2 to 4 pm with The Inconvenients and guests.

Paying attention is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving the gifts with open eyes and open heart. - Robin Wall Kimmerer

How do we measure these passing pandemic years? Is it the daily tea bags consumed while isolated at home? Is it the number of masks hanging on a peg by the door? Is it the daily walks in the neighbourhood, or the incessant scrolling on the internet? Or, perhaps, it is the hope that draws our breath while watching a pair of robins build their spring nest, and the promise of a clear blue summer sky as the air starts to warm—the freedom to move about outside and connect with nature.

The artworks in Filamentous, a collaborative exhibition by Elaine Whittaker and Kelley Aitken, contemplate these questions, drawing on the daily rituals that became part of their lives and art practices during the pandemic. They bring attention to those quiet details and the importance of connecting with nature while coping with isolation. During this time, they found lessons of endurance in their gardens, the strength garnered in caring for family and friends, and hope through writing and creating art.

Filamentous threads these ideas through mixed media installations of drawings, sculptures, ceramics, text, and photographic processes. Hand-crafted wire and paper interventions enmesh and entwine displaced nests and plant roots. Inks, watercolours, and cyanotype blues wash across translucent tea bag papers and silk textiles. Detailed observations of moss, lichen, fungi, and microbes reflect on nature's resilience, while fragile ceramic forms and delicate paper constructions evoke vulnerability.



Combined with urban found objects, the artworks in Filamentous are a homage to connection, with home, family, friends, and community.

During these last two years we nestled in our homes, rooted in the knowledge that Covid and the pandemic would continue around us but that we were connected to each other through the filaments of friendship and the binding threads of nature. Ultimately, Filamentous honours these filaments of our lives.

Kelley Aitken is a Canadian author and artist. Her visual art practice is informed by narrative, and she brings an artist's observational acuity to her prose and poetry. Aitken has exhibited in Canada and Ecuador and her artwork can be found in many private collections, and in the Canada Council Art Bank collection. Her images have been published in journals, periodicals and as book covers. She has taught art for over 30 years for community-based agencies serving newcomers to Canada, and for women experiencing long-term poverty. She has led painting and writing workshops at the Aga Khan Museum and continues to teach drawing and watercolour at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Prior to Covid, Aitken co-lead plein air courses in Europe and Canada and hopes to re-establish those trips in 2023. Her artwork can be viewed at www.kelleyaitken.com

Aitken's poetry and short stories have been published in numerous literary periodicals. A book of short stories informed by wilderness, *Canadian Shield* (2017), won the IPPY Awards Regional Bronze Medal, and her book *Love in a Warm Climate* (1998) was nominated for the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book. She has also co-edited an anthology of essays, *First Writes* (2003). As an active member of the poetry collective, *The Inconvenients*, based in Toronto, she reads with the group at many local and provincial literary and art events.

Elaine Whittaker is a Canadian visual artist working at the intersection of art, science, medicine, and ecology. Biology is the basis for her installations, sculptures, paintings, drawings, and digital images. She examines the beauty and fear of non-human life as our environment becomes even more fragile from Climate Change, in this unsettling time of contagions.



Whittaker has exhibited in art and science galleries and museums in Canada, France, Italy, UK, Ireland, Latvia, China, South Korea, Australia, Mexico, and the U.S. Artwork she has created through collaboration with scientists at the Pelling Laboratory for Augmented Biology (University of Ottawa), was exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2019. She was one of the first Artists-in-Residence with the Ontario Science Centre (in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto), creating an installation for their 50th anniversary in 2018. Her artwork has been featured in literary, medical, and art magazines and journals, and in books on BioArt and New Media. She has been a recipient of grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council. She has been an active member in the Red Head Gallery artist collective in Toronto since 2004. Her artwork can be viewed at <https://www.redheadgallery.org/elaine-whittaker> and <https://www.elainewhittaker.ca/>