

About the artist

Vladimir Kanic is a multidisciplinary artist and environmental activist whose practice explores the creation of living art. His practice began during the pandemic, when he had no access to art studios or materials, but had three boxes of algae salad in his fridge. After years of academic research and development, the experimentation with the algae salad lead to the invention of new sculpting materials made from organic biopolymers and the creation of sculptures that incorporate living algae and have a potential to curb the effects of global climate change.

Kanic was awarded InterAccess Media Prize, Mitacs Research Award, and OCAD University Faculty Award in 2022. His work has been curated by the City of Toronto for the Nuit Blanche exhibition in addition to being selected as one of the RBC Emerging Artists by the Powerplant Gallery.

About the author

Nicole Clouston is a practice-based researcher based in Burlington, Ontario who completed her Ph.D. in Visual Art at York University. Nicole works at the intersection of art and science to explore the enmeshed nature of life. She has exhibited across Canada and internationally, most recently in Berlin, Germany. She was the artist in residence at the Bio Art Lab at the University at Buffalo and at Idea Projects: Ontario Science Centre's Studio Residencies at MOCA.

GARDEN OF WAVES - VLADIMIR KANIC

An essay by Nicole Clouston

Inter/Access

950 Dupont St., Unit 1
Toronto, Ontario M6H 1Z2
+1 416 532 0597

interaccess.org

Gallery Hours
Tuesday—Saturday
11 AM—6 PM
Admission is always free

Founded in 1983, InterAccess is a non-profit gallery, educational facility, production studio, festival, and registered charity dedicated to emerging practices in art and technology. Our programs support art forms that integrate technology, fostering and supporting the full cycle of art and artistic practice through education, production, and exhibition. InterAccess is regarded as a preeminent Canadian arts and technology centre.

January 18—February 18, 2023



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Breath is a connecting force between human and more than human worlds capable of creating positive change. This is a sentiment that rings throughout Vladimir Kanic's solo exhibition *Garden of Waves* at InterAccess. Entering the space, you can sense the fresh air created by the algae at the heart of the sculptures. There are rectangular pieces on the wall ranging from one-by-one foot to almost three feet composed from undulating waves of coloured biomaterial radiating light. Walking closely, you can hear the movement of water as live algae is pumped through each wall work. In the space there are also numerous free-standing sculptures. Some are human scale, emitting light through purple and blue hued layers of biofilm. In these works, you can see the living algae as you peer between folds. Another sculpture, Kanic's largest to date at eight feet tall, features a green glowing pool of algae around its base. The sculpture has streaks of blue and fuchsia throughout its large wrinkled flakes of biomaterial. As viewers breathe, the algae in the sculptures absorb the carbon dioxide in their breath and turns it into oxygen. This exchange of breath makes the exhibited artworks a carbon sink capable of producing as much oxygen per day as a small forest. In the face of the climate crisis, the *Garden of Waves* presents us with a possibility to curb the damage already done.

This body of work began with a serendipitous experiment. Having moved to Canada from Croatia in 2019, Kanic found himself locked down during the pandemic. Unable to access many materials, he used what was on hand – boxes of prepared algae salad – and created a rudimentary biomaterial out of cellulose. Kanic then spent months researching, fabricating specialized equipment, and refining his technique to create a moldable bio sculpture material.

Although Kanic has some control over the appearance of the sculptures, he describes the process as something he sets in motion and then reacts to. How the algae grow and the forms they take when dried into biofilms dictates the organic shapes and forms that become the basis of the artworks. Kanic then takes these films, colours them, and molds them into the organic, flowing, bodies of his sculptures. Although creating something beautiful was not the specific aim of the artist, the pieces have an organic aesthetic quality and gracefully echo the folds of waves, or the petals of flowers.

Alongside the desiccated form of the algae, the sculptures also contain living algae communities. Speaking with Kanic, it is clear that he respects these living beings. Algae are microorganisms that gain energy through photo-

synthesis, a process that requires carbon dioxide and light which naturally produces oxygen as a byproduct. Although many of us consider rainforests to be the greatest photo synthesizers and carbon sinks, it is actually algae populations in our oceans that create the majority of oxygen for the world. According to Kanic, algae do not get the credit they deserve.

The living algae needs to be cared for and attended to throughout exhibition and beyond. To do so Kanic set up an algae farm in his apartment and has learned how to take good care of his microbial companions. Within the sculptures this care requires oxygenating the water and maintaining a good light source for the algae. The need to provide ongoing care is a unique facet of living work and parallels the attentiveness that is required to forge a more responsible relationship with our ecosystem more broadly.

The connection between the artwork, breath, and water – as emphasized by the exhibition title – is also important to Kanic. Growing up on the island of Pag in the Adriatic Sea, the artist has a close relationship to the ocean and has spent time deep sea diving. In this space, Kanic felt connected to the environment and his own breath in a way that is difficult to find in daily life. The sculptures contain forms reminiscent of waves and

contain flowing water that is necessary for the living algae to survive. The media of water as a life-giving force enables a moment of contemplation between the viewer and sculptures.

The relationship between viewers and the sculptures lingers beyond the experience of the exhibition as the algae retains carbon from each person's breath. Kanic describes algae colonies on a larger scale as extracts of planetary memory. These colonies have consumed sunlight and gasses from fossil fuels, archiving them in their bodies over geologic time. Inside the sculptures, the algae maintain memory of everywhere they have been and every person they have exchanged breath with.

The sculptures offer a moment to experience this connection to the living world through breath as well as to each other through meaningful conversation. In his practice, Kanic operates as the artist-as-researcher – through the act of knowledgably creating, but also through the urgent need to be an informed individual capable of disseminating the climate research of others. His artworks spark conversations from the embodied experiences they provide, not only because they are visually captivating, but also because they are a site of hope. As we are suffering from climate anxiety and overwhelmed by

negative news, Kanic's exhibition demonstrates that our own breath in collaboration with other living beings can create change. Kanic believes that an experience of hope is a more powerful agent of change than the climate anxiety created from encountering the often-overwhelming facts of the damage already done. As Kanic states, he is not going to be able to solve the climate crisis, but his sculptures and the algae within them can be a beacon of hope shining light on a possible future where humans and more than humans have a more reciprocal and sustainable relationship.