

February 24 – April 7, 2007
The Latcham Gallery

FLUID

Laura Hair
Holly McClellan
Ruth Read
Margaret Rodgers
Janice Taylor-Prebble
Sally Thurlow
Wendy Wallace

reserved for CIP

by Wendy Wallace,
exhibition organizer

FLUID

Foreword

Our thoughts like water flow down different tributaries converging into a large pool, the collective consciousness, reinforcing the semblance of our sense of being and place.

In November 2004, IRIS members discussed the existence of common artistic currents. In December, I presented the idea of fluidity in the work of the collective to Curator Maura Broadhurst and the *Fluid* project began.

Fluid

Within a fluid space what can transpire?

The physical nature of 'fluid' becomes a metaphor for the diverse yet related works of seven female artists from Durham Region. Their process reflects a sensitive dialogue encompassing ideal form in physics and morphology, environmental awareness, anthropological insights and the ethereal transformation of matter into energy. Concerns in this exhibition mirror the history of their relationship to The IRIS Group, a women's collective initiated by Margaret Rodgers.

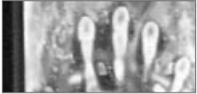
Fluid – a substance such as liquid or gas, that can flow, has no fixed shape, and offers little resistance to external stress... capable of flowing and easily changing shape.ⁱ

In the creative process, there is always a layering of pure action, material choices and the imagination. These artists have allowed their individual aesthetics to enter a critical and translucent dialogue incumbent upon a philosophical and inspired impulse for change. Sheer vision and poetic labour is not enough to create a transformation of the spaces and territories we inhabit. By hearkening back to an almost pre-Socratic elemental state (fluid) these artists have set the stage, as a primary substance re-conditions aspects of the nature of being. I would argue that their investment is connected to the fundamental reframing of a world-view espoused by the artist, writer and teacher Suzy Gablik in her book entitled *Re-enchantment of Art*.

The philosophies of the Cartesian era carried us away from a sense of wholeness by focusing only on individual experience.... Under modernism this often meant freedom from community, freedom from obligation to the world and freedom from relatedness. The emerging new paradigm reflects a will to participate socially: a central aspect of new paradigm thinking involves a significant shift from objects to relationships.... Whereas the aesthetic perspective oriented us to the making of objects, the ecological perspective connects art to its integrative role in the larger whole and the web of relationships in which art exists.ⁱⁱ

There is room here to relate the individual aesthetic processes of each of the artists while reflecting their willingness to transform their visions through a collective re-reading. *Fluid* choreographs a voyage through a landscape in transition.

Untitled by **Janice Taylor-Prebble** is a light box construction that illuminates the hand and foot prints of women from the IRIS Group and the surrounding regions. This performative action took place on International Woman's Day. A primary action manages to reclaim space and time. Gesso imprints shine forth like markings on a cave wall as ritual connotes a fluid dance, a gestural collaboration leaving one's mark as a sign of communal action. Taylor-Prebble has managed to bear witness to the haptic nature of the origins of making and knowing. Here there is no trace of an individual but rather the shared primacy of the body in relationship to gravity, motion and marking.



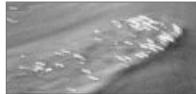
Laura Hair's triptych *Of Becoming*, graphite drawings on Mylar, deal with the concept of metamorphosis. The body and the psyche initiate transformations, mimetic in nature to the pattern and movement of butterfly wings – fluid choreographies in air. Nature's forms are not alien to, but interwoven with, our human narratives. Biblical archetypes and mythological tales trace the oral and written transformations of our human awareness. Hair's imagery evokes the enactment of consciousness moving towards a refined knowledge of itself becoming. Her underlying interest in morphogenesis becomes a woven thread laced through these triptychs. Evolution and the genetic script that underlies our external reality becomes the source and inspiration for these sublime graphic tales.



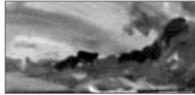
Rodgers' *Untitled* acrylic on canvas and multimedia piece *Fluidity* draw the viewer into an atmosphere inspired initially by a series of works exhibited in the Adirondack Mountains. This was a place of healing, where air and light became the architects of hospitality. Rodgers' abstract landscape painting mirrors the elemental substances that transform the earth's atmosphere. Colours transport our vision as an airy magenta and yellow mist rises above a turquoise line, giving shape to the horizon. A narrow shaft of white light separates the apparition of water and mountain from sky. The viewer is set adrift in a fluid space where all form is modified by the play of light. Matter in this place is in a constant state of flux just as the healing body becomes a site for elemental transformation. In *Fluidity* a chamber of water illuminates crayoned stones, echoed by a video loop of crayons tumbling into the same vessel.



Holly McClellan's photographs construct fluid spaces fraught with ambiguity and unfamiliarity. Water becomes the site for something that is invisible. McClellan manages to surprise us through colour shifts or distortions of viewpoint. *Different Freedoms* alludes to a wading pool that guides our vision through a grid of human activity beside and within a fountain. A contained body of water is set close to an ocean only separated by a road and beach. This pool is to be entered and becomes a political space. McClellan's two-colour images *Surface vs. Subtext* and *Industrial Waterscape* allow colour to set us afloat in imaginary bodies of water. Here the uncertainty of hue gives presence to the phenomenon of waves and depth so unrecognizable that we question both our safety and perception in an exotic fluid landscape.



Strata of aluminum, copper, and vinyl are stitched together by **Wendy Wallace**. Her recycled materials reveal an industrial wasteland that pierces each layer of our natural habitat.



There is no place to conceal the meeting of such parallel worlds. One feels the upheaval and disparate dislocations within such landscapes. *Manipulation, Oak Ridge Moraine* becomes a visceral mixed media work that allows Wallace to convey the dramatic process of making and deconstructing the landscape. This work invokes a kind of Iron or Bronze Age forging of materials for geographical warfare. Water and its surrounding terrain are overcome by urban/industrial sprawl. We are faced with an alchemical mix of substances that distort fluid sources. Marshlands and rivers must circumnavigate terrains constructed at the expense of forgotten ecologies.

The energy contained within a standing wave carries an unknown force. **Ruth Read's** *Rolling and Tumbling* paper sculpture freezes a fluid gesture. Layers of brown paper curl over, under and outwards, gathering the momentum of deep rhythms. This formal interlude is threaded with a bamboo skewer,

holding the surrounding space in stasis. Contained here is the memory of a fluid landscape, part of the ebb and flow of running water. One imagines hydraulic energy drawing a vessel forward. The physics of nature becomes the language of motion distilled for navigation, irrigation and the potential growth of a garden. Read captures this wave, giving us the form of invisible geometries. The shape delineates hidden sounds or the primal gathering of patterns that merge below the surface. This is a powerful sculpture waiting to unfold like layers of skin or pages in a book.



Where do we travel with such awareness, as the world unfolds before us, a bound history? Ours is a landscape fraught with constructed barriers, sites in upheaval. **Sally Thurlow's** ethe-



real fiberglass vessel *Essence* forges a journey, a transcendent passage. The form becomes a boat floating like a feather, as imaginary voyages are embarked upon. Between dreams and myth, the earth becomes fluid once again as fragments of a geographical map float into new configurations. Inside this boat, the lightness of being enters a ritual space, concave and womb-like. Thurlow's journey envisions the almost trance-like state of the shaman; for the spirit must loosen in order to visualize a healing process. She has constructed a form that floats. Here navigation wills itself into the fluid currents as mind and spirit imagine new landscapes.

There is much to consider in this exhibition of thoughtful works. A cosmology reshapes itself in *Fluid*, allowing us to enter a refined discourse concerning our place and participation in an evolving environment.

Maralynn Cherry is a member of the IRIS Group and an artist, writer, educator and curator.

Endnotes

- i "Fluid," Collins English Dictionary, 1979 ed.
- ii Suzi Gablik, *Re-enchantment of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 7–8.



Laura Hair, *Of Becoming 2*, 2006, Graphite on Mylar on linen boards, 35" x 32"





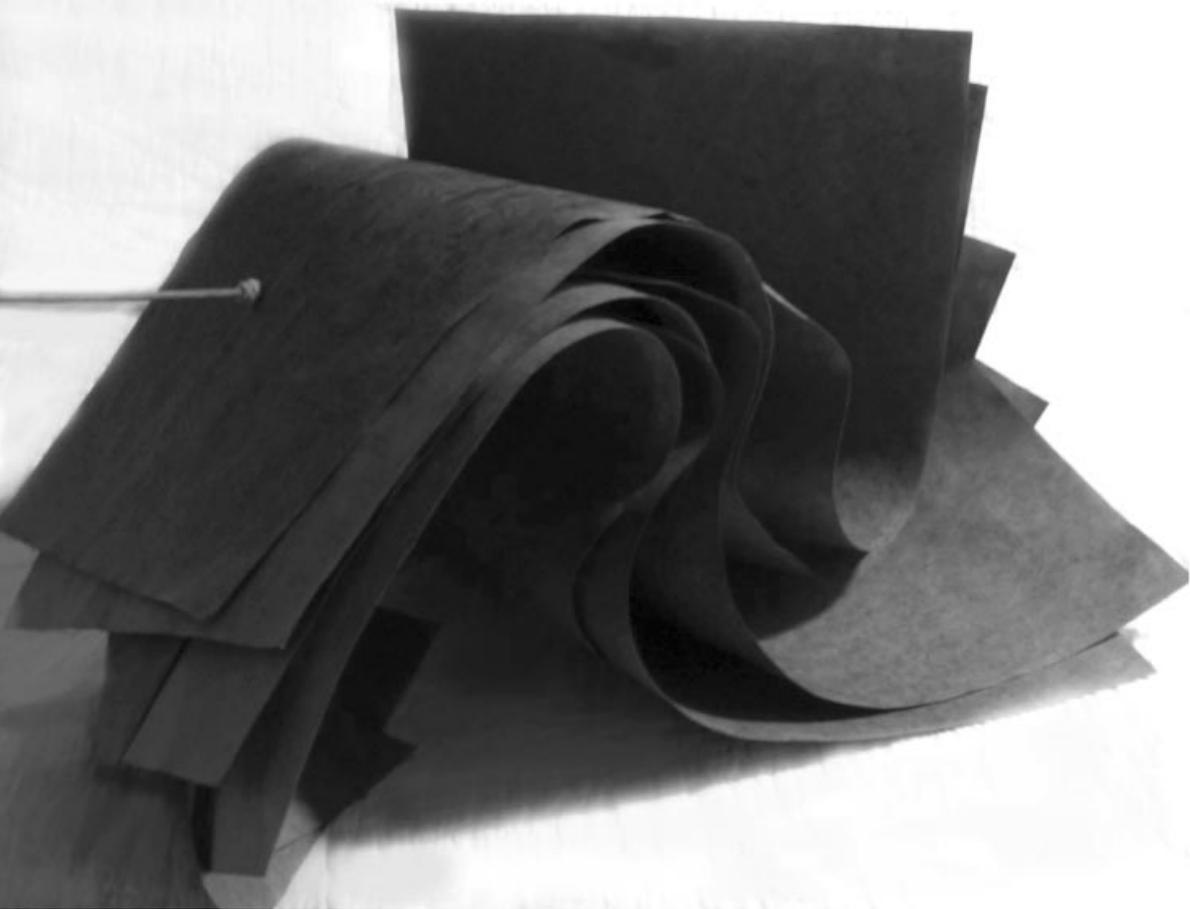
Holly McClellan, *Surface vs. Subtext*, 2006, Photograph on Arches Infinity watercolour paper, 24" x 36"





Wendy Wallace, *Manipulation, Oak Ridge Moraine*, 2006, Acrylic on vinyl with copper and aluminium, 74" x 96"





Ruth Read, *Rolling and Tumbling*, 2006, Brown Kraft paper dyed in Indian ink, bamboo with two elastics, 36" x 24"

(un)Natural Selections

In *Fluid*, seven members of the IRIS Group, a Durham-based collective of women artists, articulate their observations on human nature, through photography, sculpture, painting, and mixed media artworks. Beauty, grace, dignity and healing are the predominant themes playing out within their works.

A dichotomy, the exhibition comments on our interconnectedness from a global perspective and reflects our individual psyches on a deeper level of consciousness. The artists

“...you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper.”ⁱ

express their relationships across space and time, with one another and with the natural world. Working independently, seven separate bodies of work interconnect, the artistic process revealing anthropological observations about environmental and cultural issues in a contemporary context. The title *Fluid* hints at an array of thematic undercurrents visible throughout the artworks, offering abstract and literal interpretations of the term, and revealing the artistic visions indicative of the theme.

In *Surface vs. Subtext*, **Holly McClellan** undertakes a literal approach. A foamy red wave approaches the darkened shore of Lake Ontario in a glistening ripple.

The photographed image is divided into two parts, one consisting of a highly textured wave and the other of the flatness present in what could be interpreted as a sandbank. The playful sparkling of the bubbles on the water's surface counterpoints the constantly changing and unrepeatable patterns of crashing waves. The reflections of light on the inconsistent ripple are starkly contrasted with the muted flatness of the sand. While recognizing the surface as a familiar formation found in nature, its associated blue/green/brown tones are substituted with a saturated red, suggestive of an alien location, and prompting questions about the state of this vital natural resource and our dependence on it. A serene waterscape is disturbed by McClellan's deliberate, ironic pollution of our enjoyment of the scene.



In *Untitled* **Margaret Rodgers** also uses red against the conventional blueness of the sky and the earthy tones of the ground, merely hinting at the portrayed location with her spontaneously executed brushstrokes. The primary colours spill into one another, revealing the boundaries of the lake, hills and sky.

Parts of the canvas are untouched by the swiftness of the brush, the white surface, empty in its form, echoing the yellow light penetrating from a turbulent crimson firmament. Inspired by ideas surrounding the healing power of mountain air and sunlight, Rodgers moves beyond site. Her work becomes analytical and intuitive, prepared for our "decoding" pleasure through memory and association of place. The patches of colour are a guideline waiting to be filled by our minds with recollections of similar places seen and visited. The fluidity of artistic process offers a multiplicity of interpretation. While the mountains standing in quiet solitude suggest strength and power, and the light bears numerous connotations of healing and spirituality, it is the massive red sky that evokes a sense of unease.



Titled *Rolling and Tumbling*, **Ruth Read's** paper sculptures are reminiscent of water's waves. Deceiving in appearance, they appear to be heavy, made out of rusted sheet metal.



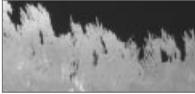
Only upon close observation is their fragility revealed. The torn edged and unevenly ink-dyed sheets of paper are rolled by hand and held together by thin wooden skewers that pierce the pages. In reference to the ever-changing qualities found in her own backyard, Read describes "a streambed of dry, curling paper paralleling the garden path, alternating the water's turbulence with a stillness frozen in memory."ⁱⁱ Staining and spattering animates the surfaces, which are then buckled into a rounded wave and punctured with bamboo. The ritual-like process of completing each sculpture leaves a residual reminder of the artist's hand.

Reinforcing the idea of our human interconnectedness, hand and foot imprints of women are the basis for **Janice Taylor-Prebble's** *Untitled* pine light-box. Created during the IRIS Group's 2005 International Women's Day events, they are associated with stories of pain and struggle voiced by many women who participated in the project. To a viewer such a print is simply the residue of a stranger's identity, proof of



someone's individualism and testimony to human conduct. Additionally, *Untitled* maintains the ability to withhold its contents: with the lack of light, the box becomes empty. The sight of the prints disappears and all that remains is a wooden construction with opaque plaster filling the surfaces between the darkened frames. The privilege to visually connect to the hands and feet of others fades away.

Like a passing milky cloud, the ghostly silhouette floating in the air is **Sally Thurlow's** *Essence*. Inspired by the artist's previous body of sculptural work titled *Canoe Dreamings*, this translucent white fiberglass piece is achieved through a mold and its outer smoothness is a grinding down of the abrasive material.



All that remains is a weightless and apparently fragile white form. The canoe-shaped object represents "a flow that happens when the creative energy moving it is able to unlock the floodgates and ride the river in whatever form it takes, all senses awakened to the spirit of the journey."ⁱⁱⁱⁱ The molded matte fiberglass creates an illusion of lacy delicacy and the uniqueness and impermanence of a snowflake, but the delightfully deceptive form is feathered with sharp, spiny protrusions. The rough fiberglass interior of the vessel hides a network of vein-like patterning. *Essence* is a trap comprised of two opposing sides competing with one another at all times: the revealed, approachable skin and the undisclosed coarseness of the inner surface. Thurlow successfully evokes a sense of entrapment and deceit. Through these contrasting surfaces and a suggestive shape, Thurlow invites the viewer on a reflective journey to discover our potential as critically aware examiners of our surroundings.

In a very complex work of art, **Wendy Wallace** dissects an everyday sight, using an array of juxtapositions between the natural and artificial materials employed in her artistic practice. *Manipulation, Oak Ridge Moraine* depicts a natural landscape of trees and grasses painted in acrylic on vinyl, a man-made material

often used in tablecloths for outdoor picnic tables. Wallace offers a current depiction of Southern Ontario, where industrial developments and building constructions often occupy the remaining natural landscape. Wallace manipulates the layering of opaque, translucent and transparent surfaces, and interchanges raw and synthetic materials, blurring the boundaries between sustaining and jeopardizing the environment. In her work, the authentic topography of the land is sacrificed for the corporate "clean-up" of the inhabitable terrain. *Manipulation, Oak Ridge Moraine* is a spectacle of an egocentric betterment of territory in the name of restoration or conservation of earth. Wallace frames the artwork in an untreated poplar wood frame enveloping the two elements of the man-made and the natural into a single ecosystem, foreshadowing the never-ending co-existence of the two.



Three triptychs titled *Of Becoming* depict **Laura Hair's** investigations in the origins of winged beings. Occupied by numerous evolutionary theories, Hair arrives at her own artistic interpretations regarding the composition of human anatomy.



The artworks are a metamorphosis from the unintelligible gesture drawings on canvas, paper and wood with detailed realistic and obscure planes of colour. The colour fields contain enigmatic figures, which collide into a recognizable humanlike appearance. Hair's body of work is a study of the evolution of design and the volatility of movement of living beings. Her work demands invested amounts of observation in order to ascribe the forms as humans, animals, birds, or plants. Hair ultimately unites all living creatures into a single entity comprised of a collection of anthropomorphic and entomological attributes. The outcome is a compilation of her anthropological research and quests into ancient belief systems, comparative anatomy, and the development of individual organisms and subjects in transitions, such as insect/human. Is the 'changeling' in the artwork our true reflection? *Of Becoming* expresses a fluidity of compositions capable of questioning our current scientific knowledge and reanalyzing the truth about the origins of human genetic material. Hair emphasizes that it is "our commitments and choices that determine whether we take flight, to soar with the joy of growth or to plunge, breathless into the looming unknown."^{iv}

The seven bodies of work evidence their intentionally thematic and aesthetic interrelatedness. The exhibition is an observation of the impressions we lay everyday upon the natural world. The literal meaning of the title encompasses many phases of matter, such as liquids, gases, plasmas, and some solids. The artists, fluid in their interpretations, remain

loyal to the theme, providing significant insight into the consequences of human behaviour.

Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life.^v

Endnotes

- i Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press 1990) [OLA TO PROVIDE PAGE#](#).
- ii Ruth Read, Artist statement, 2006.
- iii Sally Thurlow, Artist statement, 2006.
- iv Laura Hair, Artist statement, 2006.
- v Charles Darwin, 1859, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray [Facsimile of 1st ed.]: Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1964) [OLA TO PROVIDE PAGE#](#).

Acknowledgments

The artists wish to thank Latcham Gallery staff Roz Pritchard, Ola Wlusek, IRIS organizer Wendy Wallace, Maralynn Cherry, and designer Karen Henricks for patience and hard work.

The Latcham Gallery is a public art gallery located in Stouffville, Ontario. It exhibits up to ten different exhibitions of contemporary Ontario art each year. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, memberships, and fundraising events, as well as grants from the Municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the provincial government through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The IRIS Group was formed in 1996 as a collective whose aim is to raise levels of access for women in the arts, to share ideas and offer mutual support. Members are located in Durham Region, and meet to develop projects that further the overall intentions of the group. IRIS is a member of CARFAC Ontario and The Red Head Gallery.

exhibition organizer **Wendy Wallace**
curator **Ola Wlusek**
essays **Maralynn Cherry** and **Ola Wlusek**
catalogue design **Karen Henricks**
editor **Margaret Rodgers**
printed by **Master Print**

Publication to accompany the exhibition of artworks by seven artists from The IRIS Group entitled *Fluid* and held at the Latcham Gallery, February 24 – April 7 2007.





The Latcham Gallery

P.O. Box 3
6240 Main Street
Stouffville, ON L4A 7Z4
T 905.640.8954
F 905.640.6246
info@latchamgallery.ca