

Restoration at Silo City 2020

Avey Alexandres, Jozef Bajus, and Gareth Lichty



Avey Alexandres, *Balance of Air*, 2020, found objects including floating dock, wood and aluminum filter screens, concrete and soil fill

Restoration at Silo City is part of *Activism in the Arts*, a series of exhibitions, workshops, and community forums at Buffalo Arts Studio and Silo City. In partnership with groups focused on grassroots activism and community empowerment, the series promoted the creation of new work, educated emerging and student artists, and fostered critical dialogue about social, ecological, economic, and representational justice activism. Buffalo Arts Studio is committed to providing inclusive community cultural connections through exhibitions, educational programs, mentorships, and public art.

Restoration at Silo City is a partnership between Buffalo Arts Studio and Silo City. Both institutions have a long history of supporting the creation of innovative, site specific visual, performing, and literary artwork. Buffalo Arts Studio developed this project with a focus on restorative art practices, including three site-specific works that explore new installation possibilities while repurposing abandoned industrial materials and promoting ecological stewardship. The three artists selected for *Restoration at Silo City* are committed to artistic practices that embrace reclaimed materials and respect natural environments.

Site History

Silo City is part of a series of abandoned grain elevators located along the banks of the Buffalo River near its intersection with Lake Erie. "Elevator Alley," as this area is known, is the densest collection of concrete grain elevators in the world. During the first half of the 20th Century, these structures stored tens of millions of bushels of wheat and grain, but when the grain industry declined in the 1960s, many of the historic elevators were abandoned. For the next 50 years, time and extreme Buffalo weather took their toll on the concrete and steel structures.

In 2006, Rick Smith, president of Rigidized Metals Corporation on nearby Ohio Street, purchased four of the structures in hopes of starting an ethanol production business. Unfortunately, much of the remaining infrastructure on the site was unusable for industrial purposes, so Smith reimagined the site as a special place for art, design, theater, music, creativity, and innovation. Although the site could not be rehabilitated for ethanol production, Smith recognized the need to repair the ecological damage done by a century of industry and decades of neglect. He hired Josh Smith as Director of Ecology to guide the work of moving the site beyond its industrial past and towards a more sustainable future.

Since 2012, Silo City has been a unique cultural and ecological site that inspires creativity and community within the historical legacy of Buffalo's grain silos. Silo City sits on the south shore of the Buffalo River just 600 yards from Lake Erie, and is the grandest collection of concrete grain elevators in the world. Today the massive structures that provided grain and flour for much of the world now stand as a legacy, connecting the water and the land to the sky.



This bend of the Buffalo River — where Silo City is seated — was part of the historic Buffalo Creek Reservation, and home to regional indigenous populations for centuries prior to its use for grain storage and milling. Buffalo Arts Studio and Silo City acknowledge the deep history of this land, give thanks for the current stewardship, and welcome all to the site.

Avey Alexandres, *Balance of Air*

2020, found objects including floating dock, wood and aluminum filter screens, concrete and soil fill

Avey Alexandres (Buffalo, NY) is a multimedia artist who focuses on site-specific work. For *Balance of Air*, Alexandres chose to work with a series of wooden framed screens that had been used to sift flour in the Perot Malt House. She placed the screens atop an abandoned dock which was raised up on a mound of earth along the river's edge. *Balance of Air* is installed along the east-west axis to filter the light of the sun rising over the Buffalo River. Throughout the morning, light streams through the mesh screens with varying degrees of opacity based on the angle of the sun and the volatile Buffalo weather. During much of the day, the installation is a quiet counterpoint to the noise of the nearly constant river traffic. As the sun sets in the evening, the western rays make the wooden frames appear gold, and they seem to leap forward against the blue background of water and sky. The arrangement of the wooden frames creates a sense of forced perspective, forming a visual bridge connecting the two shores. Eventually, the wind and rain will undo Alexandres's work, eroding the pile of earth and toppling the dock. The bridge will fall and like the Silos themselves, *Balance of Air* will become another relic on the site, marking time and its passing.



Avey Alexandres was born in Athens, Greece, and moved to the US at the age of six. Her work investigates the psychological ramifications of structures and space. Evolving from a background in photography and theatre, her work encompasses immersive sculpture, locative media, and experimental digital narratives. In 2015 she graduated with an MFA in Art and Emerging Practices from the University at Buffalo and was the 2016 recipient of the Oseroff Memorial Purchase Award from Roswell Park Cancer Institute and CEPA Gallery. She has exhibited nationally and at venues such as the Burchfield Penney Art Center, The Soap Factory, and the Weisman Art Museum.

Jozef Bajus, *Floating Echoes*

2020, steel, silk screen ink, non-woven polyester fabric filters



Since 2005, Jozef Bajus has focused on eco-activist art, meticulously reimagining the detritus of contemporary culture. For this project, Bajus created *Floating Echoes* using nine foot long fabric filter cones left unused inside the grain elevators. The filters, made from non-woven, heavy duty material, would have been attached to metal cages to capture the fine particulates produced when tons of grain poured into the silos.

Like the other Restoration artists, Bajus embraced the dramatic weather conditions of Silo City, creating an installation that is activated by the nearly constant wind. He chose to install *Floating Echoes* against Marine A, a 100 year old grain elevator that is 120 feet tall. The interior is a long corridor with repeating silos and the exterior is nearly uninterrupted except for a few glassless windows at the north and south ends.

Bajus first transformed the material by screen printing solid areas of bright blue, red, yellow, orange, or green onto each filter. He also nearly doubled the length to 16 feet by cutting out a center panel and allowing the fabric flap to fall over the base. The modification activated the material, creating sections of negative space through which the wind could pass. The colorful flags were then suspended from 30 foot long steel tracks that allowed the artist to reposition and retract the flags through a window seventy feet above the ground. Although each flag weighs about 15 pounds, when suspended, they dramatically dance in the wind. Like banners flown from medieval castles, the flags can be seen from a great distance by those visiting on foot or traveling along the Buffalo River. *Floating Echoes* draws the viewers' attention up from the debris along the river's shore, calling attention to the historic majesty of these industrial relics.

Originally from Slovakia, Jozef Bajus received his MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Bratislava. Bajus is an Associate Professor at SUNY Buffalo State College, and serves as the Coordinator of the Fibers/Design Program.

Gareth Lichty, *Celastrus Scandens*

2020, steel, soil, American Bittersweet vine

Gareth Lichty's sculptural practice consists of manipulating manufactured and natural materials such as garden hose, construction fence, field marking tape, grass sod, and non-invasive plants. His past projects have included wrapping a section of the Gardiner Expressway's supporting structure in yellow hazard tape and building a 12 foot tall topiary from hand woven galvanized steel wire to support Virginia creeper. For *Restoration at Silo City*, Lichty selected a 20 foot square pit located outside of the southern end of Marine A as the site for his installation. When the silos were still in use, trains would dump their load down into the shaft, and conveyor belts would then carry the grain up into the silos. Today, the pit is often filled with river water and serves as a micro habitat for fish, insects, and several turtles.

Lichty worked with nine foot rusted steel filter cages, which he manipulated by bending, twisting, and welding into an elliptical substructure to support American Bittersweet vine. The vine is planted inside large steel planters placed at each of the four corners. The cages form a spiral, dipping into and rising above the pit. As the vines grow, they are supported by the steel structure, and form a dome of green leaves and orange berries. As the planters rust, they will develop the same orange patina of the cages and complement the bright orange berries that remain on the branches even as the leaves fall in autumn. The plants will also support a new micro ecosystem, as the berries are a favorite of more than a dozen bird species. But like the ecosystem inside the pit, the micro-ecosystem of *Celastrus Scandens* will take time to develop. Lichty envisioned his installation as a 100 year project, considering how both his installation and the site might look in the future. *Celastrus Scandens* serves as a lynchpin between the past and the future; honoring the 100 year history of Marine A while also imagining a more sustainable future.



Gareth Lichty (born London, Ontario, 1980) is a sculptor who focuses on making large-scale, site-specific installations. He received his MFA from SUNY Buffalo (2016) and his Honours BFA at York University (2004) in Toronto as well as a degree in Sculpture at Leeds University (2002) in England. He has exhibited internationally with exhibitions in Europe, New Zealand, China, USA, and Canada. Lichty currently lives and works in Buffalo, New York.



Bajus, detail of *Floating Echoes*



Alexandres, detail of *Balance of Air*



Lichty, detail of *Celastrus Scandens*

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