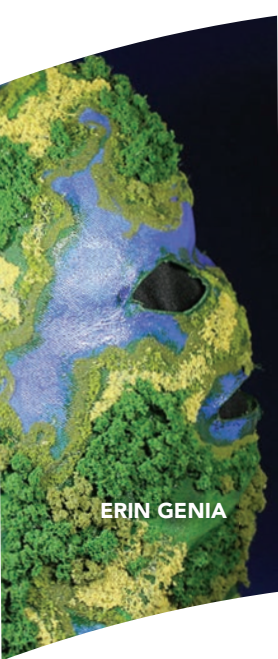
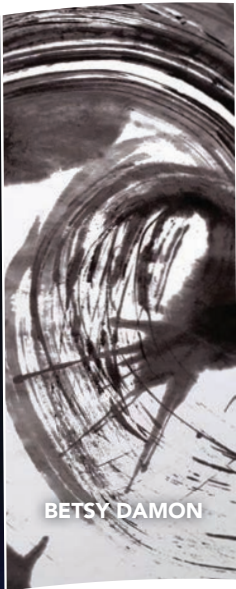


PAUL W. ZUCCAIRE GALLERY | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



ERIN GENIA



BETSY DAMON



MARY MATTINGLY



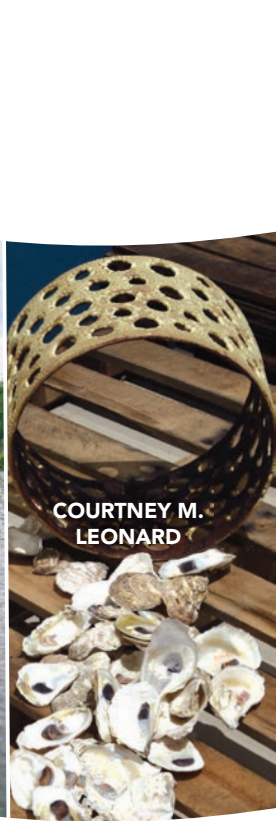
JAANIKA PEERNA



LILLIAN BALL



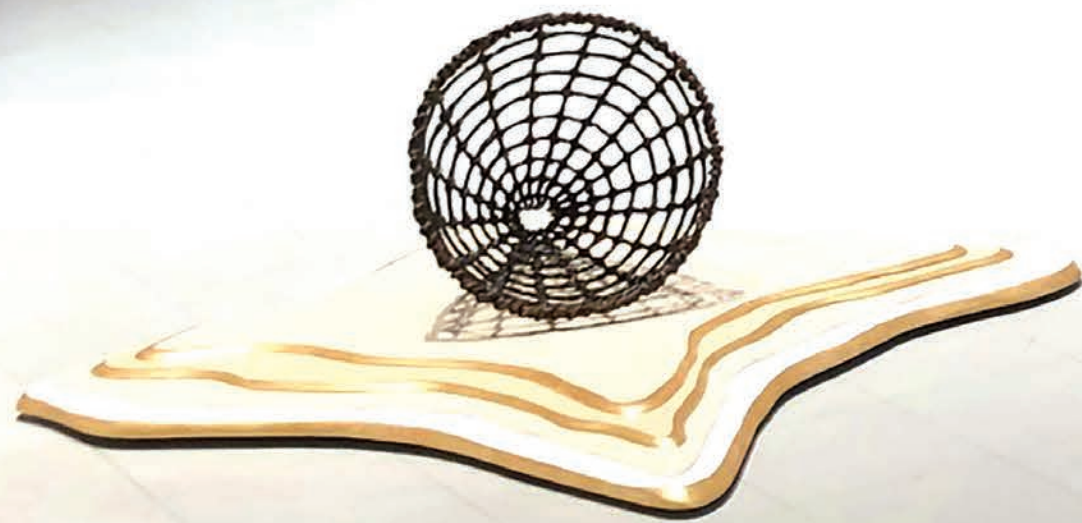
ALICIA GRULLÓN



COURTNEY M.  
LEONARD

*Connecting  
the Drops The Power  
of Water*

Connecting  
the Drops The Power  
of Water



Lillian Ball • Betsy Damon • Erin Genia • Alicia Grullón  
Courtney M. Leonard • Mary Mattingly • Jaanika Peerna

July 21 - October 29, 2022

PAUL W. ZUCCAIRE GALLERY | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



**Water is powerful.**

One drop contains thousands of microorganisms—a miniature world of its own. It nourishes and sustains life and carries stories and people around the world.

**Yet water also has the power to destroy.**

Torrents of water brought together by the forces of nature can ravage the natural and built environments, made more frequent and stronger by climate change, just as lack of water and polluted water can devastate lives and communities.

*Connecting the Drops: The Power of Water* brings together seven artists whose work focuses on environmental justice and the vital importance of water. In sculpture, drawing, performance, video and a computer game, the artists explore topics including the Shinnecocks' historical ties to water and oyster farming, access to clean water, rising ocean levels and melting glaciers, carbon absorption by the oceans, and personal narratives around water. Here, their work is in dialogue with science, history and communities, connecting their creative practice to real-world activism.

My gratitude to the exhibition's artists whose work inspires contemplation and action to make our world a better place for people, animals and plants and the water that sustains us all. Our conversations over the past months have energized the development of this project. My deep appreciation to Erica Cirino for her beautiful Introduction to this catalog.

I also want to express my gratitude to the staff of the Staller Center for the Arts, especially Director Alan Inkles,

for his enthusiastic support of this project, and Public Programs Manager Georgia LaMair Tomczak, who has been vital to every aspect of this exhibition, catalog and programming. Thanks as well to the faculty, staff, scientists, researchers and students across campus who have contributed to the collaborative nature of this exhibition.

The exhibition and programs are supported in part by a Stony Brook University Presidential Mini-Grant for Departmental Diversity Initiatives. My gratitude to President Maurie McInnis for this meaningful recognition. The 2022-2023 Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery exhibition schedule is made possible by a generous grant from the Paul W. Zuccaire Foundation. Additional funding has been provided by the Friends of Staller Center. We are extremely grateful for their support.

Karen Levitov  
Director and Curator, Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery  
Professor of Practice, Department of Art

# Connecting the Drops The Power of Water

## Water.

**It flows, it floods, it crashes, it cascades, it soaks, it seeps, and it keeps each of us alive.**

Each molecule is nothing more than three atoms bound in an essential combination: Hydrogen-Oxygen-Hydrogen. No life on this planet would be if it weren't for this simple union between two of Earth's most abundant elements, in this specific sequence. Water molecules cling tightly to one another, possessing strength in numbers; their scarcity or abundance marking the difference between a drizzle and a monsoon, a puddle and an ocean.

Like us people, who constantly mill and meander as we go about our days, water is always on the move, adapting—far more gracefully than we—as part of a chaotic system that by nature seeks equilibrium.

Water evaporates, condenses, precipitates, collects, freezes, melts, shape shifts in its looping journeys above our heads, and beneath our feet; in plants and trees; in oceans, rivers, lakes, streams.

Long Island would not be if it were not for the epochs-long relationship between ancient bedrock, a disappearing river, a massive sheet of ice, and the rocky soils upon which we are now standing. Water had the strength to carve this place into existence, and yet its power also has the potential to erode it away.

Far away from this island, in much colder latitudes, water once freezing into vast glaciers is now rapidly melting as humans warm Earth's climate. Glacial meltwater pours into a warming ocean, adding to rising tides pushed higher by expanding, warming seawater.

The waters are rising and Long Island is vulnerable. Every year, seawater permanently

gains between 0.10 to 0.16 inches on Long Island's shorelines. That's a rate fifty percent faster than the global average of 6.5 inches over the last 100 years.

And Long Island's people are vulnerable. Beneath our feet saltwater spills upward, intruding as once-abundant groundwater is sucked out from below, mostly to be poured wastefully on lawns or industrial farms treated with toxins, which seep down. Landfills, incinerators, leaking subterranean petrochemical tanks, oil spills, and a history of industry further contaminates our sole source of drinking water—which exists wholly underground.

Who suffers most from pollution and a lack of clean water but repeatedly Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low-income communities. This is injustice, clearly. Yet, the systems fueling destruction carry on with their lethal business-as-usual.

The waters are closing in on us from all angles. Acute flooding is becoming chronic, and deadly. Water causing loss of property and life has become commonplace; is almost no longer shocking. Storms are more frequent and less predictable. Water has the power to create, but through our neglect and disrespect, we force water to destroy.

Some people say they strive to “be like water,” ignorant or perhaps ignoring the fact that they are water. Mostly.

While humans could learn from water, being like water is not enough: We must offer water our love, protection, respect, and reflection.

## **We must learn to connect the drops.**

Erica Cirino, Writer, Artist, and Author of *Thicker Than Water: The Quest for Solutions to the Plastic Crisis*

# LILLIAN BALL

**GO H.O.M.E. Bimini, 2018–20**

Interactive video game

*GO H.O.M.E. Bimini* is an interactive video game about threatened mangrove wetlands in Bimini, Bahamas. The mangrove restoration project began in 2019 and continued in 2020 after Hurricane Dorian's devastation. The restoration was initiated by WATERWASH Projects in collaboration with Waterkeepers Bahamas and Mr. Pinder's art class at Louise McDonald High School, Bimini. The project's title H.O.M.E. (Help Our Mangrove Ecosystem) was chosen from student suggestions.

Originally commissioned by the 2008 international Seville Biennial, the GO series can vary to illustrate different environmental situations. It is based on the ancient Asian game of GO, which uses strategies to capture territory. The game is only over once both sides have won through cooperation.

[lillianball.com](http://lillianball.com)





## BETSY DAMON

*The Primary Motion of Water is the Vortex*  
from ***Principles of Water*** series, 2018  
Sumi ink

As an artist, activist and teacher, my creative curiosity has focused on water for forty years. I have explored water from the interior of the drop to the systems that function as the veins of the earth. I seek to invite people to know their waters, to be in relationship with each other, and to work within and across communities worldwide to repair the living system. My journey with water has opened my body, mind and heart to a vast interconnectedness of living in a watery world.

[betsydamon.com](http://betsydamon.com)

# ERIN GENIA

SISSETON-WAHPETON OYATE

## *Earthling*, 2019

Acrylic on canvas, architectural model turf

*Earthling* is a playful and unnerving being who was born from dissonance: collective understandings of life have come far away from the reality that humans are not separate from the earth. Actually, we are the earth—we are part of the earth's body. *Earthling* is a reminder that underneath people's closely held ideas, underneath the systems that capitalize upon us and colonize us, our adopted ideologies, we are earth-based and water-based beings. By appearing in normal places, doing day-to-day activities, my performative character, or alter ego, *Earthling*, asks: How would our responsibilities to ourselves, each other, and our world change if this reality was the basis of our collective thought and action?

[eringenia.studio](http://eringenia.studio)



## *Mni Omni*, 2022

Acrylic on canvas

What are the geometries of interconnectedness? Within the powerful iconography of the Morningstar symbol as a representation of Dakota cosmology, an image of *mni omni*, which means "whirlpool" in the Dakota language, shows water as a unifying force across elements.



# ALICIA GRULLÓN

## ***7 Stories About Water, 2022***

Multichannel video installation  
(video still; installation view on back cover)

*7 Stories About Water* is a multichannel video installation, reflecting on the consciousness of water and how it interconnects people's lives. Meant to be fragmentary, I utilize storytelling techniques to retell water stories shared with me or found through my research from activists, artists, and educators in different parts of the world. I use text and narration to highlight the perspectives in each story. The work serves as an extension of my process which explores collective and individual memories through embodied research, looking at the critiques on the politics of presence that argue for the inclusion of disinvested communities in political and social spheres.

[aliciagrullon.com](http://aliciagrullon.com)



# COURTNEY M. LEONARD

## SHINNECOCK

### **BREACH: LOGBOOK 22 | CULL**

Ceramics, oyster shells, pallets, paint

Shinnecock in our language translates to “people of the level land” or “people of the shore.” The Shinnecock Bay, the ecological estuary to which our nation’s traditional territories border, and of which bears our name, is key to who we are as water people. This waterscape exists as a part of our cultural landscape, its movement, its abundance, its life, shapes our relationship and understanding of and with one another.

As a Shinnecock artist, my work explores marine biology, Indigenous food sovereignty, migration, and human environmental impact through a visual logbook that investigates the multiple definitions of the term “breach” as documentation of the impact of our anthropogenic time. BREACH, as a whole, is an annual logbook and visual account. It tracks from year to year what lies above and below the sightline of water and land horizons—its record, a marker of the previous year’s account explored through relationships of environmental fragility, shifting adaptations, and/or the ability to simply become anew.

*BREACH: Logbook 22 | CULL* is an exploration of the intercultural relationships, reliances, impacts and impositions that Shinnecock Bay has endured as a part of our Anthropogenic time. The viewpoint of the installation is mapped from the abstracted memory of docks, the import and export of extraction, and the culling of oysters as a means of consumption and ecological aid.

[courtneymleonard.com](http://courtneymleonard.com)





## MARY MATTINGLY

### *Clepsydra for Carbon, 2022*

Collected vessels and plastic tubing, reclaimed metal conduit and plastic restaurant trays, water pump powered by electricity from natural gas and fossil fuels, water, and plants suitable for a warmer, wetter climate (detail; installation view on back cover)

Between transportation, electricity, agriculture, industry, commercial and residential activity, almost 5 million tons of carbon are currently produced each hour around the world. In response to the power of the ocean and its uphill battle to sequester carbon, this clepsydra absurdly counts carbon absorption by the ocean's living systems in response to how much of a "western world" has separated and compartmentalized and imposed an order on water. When the water hits the water line, it records the time it takes for the oceans around the world to absorb roughly 1 million tons of carbon, although over time and with the acidification of oceans around the world, their ability to sequester carbon slows down.

[marymattingly.com](http://marymattingly.com)

# JAANIKA PEERNA

*Ice Memory*, 2021-ongoing

Pigment pencil and ice on Mylar, plastic tube

*Ice Memory* offers an opportunity to witness an evolution of the work, not unlike the changes we witness in our natural landscapes, encouraging us to meditate on the way human actions alter the environment that surrounds us. The title refers to an ongoing climate research project where core samples of the world's vanishing glaciers are being archived in long preserved frozen cylinders to retain a tangible record of past climate changes.

Each week, ice is inserted into the perforated tube at top and allowed to melt onto the drawing. Through the release of water, the drawing itself will slowly be transformed over the course of the exhibition.

[jaanikapeerna.net](http://jaanikapeerna.net)



## CONVERSATIONS: CONNECTIONS

**Karen Levitov:** In curating this exhibition, my intention was to bring together artists whose work is inspired by water and who actively seek positive change in water systems and the communities affected by them. Can you describe how your work does this?

**Betsy Damon:** Water is needed for every detail of our lives. It is hard to notice water until there is a problem. All actions and activities arise from relationships both with community members and with water. I invite people and communities to notice water and organize around restoring and protecting their waters. When possible, I started real, on-the-ground projects that model resin water collection, or restore the living system through flow plants and movement.

**Lillian Ball:** Water issues have been a constant element of my environmental work from the very beginning. My ongoing WATERWASH series was designed as a collaborative green infrastructure solution to stormwater runoff which would also restore native habitat, create public space and educate visitors on relevant environmental concerns. My more recent work in Bimini, Bahamas, deals with the restoration of mangroves in areas faced with the overwhelming construction of large hotels and other tourist attractions. Mangroves play an integral role in Bimini as well as in many coastal areas worldwide, providing an essential nursing habitat for numerous species of marine animals and other wildlife, while also serving as a coastal defense, preventing erosion and protecting against damage caused by extreme weather conditions like hurricanes.

Both of these projects were grounded in relationship building within a specific community that helped guide the process. For example, it was the collaboration between local scientists, educators, and students that helped shape the mangrove restoration project in Bimini. Community involvement is an integral element of my environmental work, with a strong emphasis on the educational outreach component. And it's truly been a great pleasure to see many of the students and community members, being inspired by their participation and showing interest in furthering their interests in related fields, including marine ecology.

**Erin Genia:** I am an artist and cultural worker creating art and community at the intersection of social justice and Indigenous arts, sciences and cultures. My goals as an artist go beyond the personal practice of creating art in my studio and go out into my communities. I use the power of the creative process to address challenges from my unique lens: I am a Dakota person and tribal member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. I am concerned with stopping pollution of our waterways and the poisoning of our people and non-human relatives, and the disproportionate effect of environmental racism in Native communities. In the community where I come from—the Lake Traverse reservation in Sisseton, South Dakota—there is a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) that has been contaminating the groundwater sources of tribal members for years with impunity. Our community believes there is a correlation between high rates of cancer and the CAFO. Our reservation also experienced a huge oil spill on our traditional lands by the Keystone pipeline in 2017.

Unfortunately, this situation is a familiar one to Native peoples, as it is happening in Indigenous territories all across the land and sea.

In Dakota culture, water is life—the words *mni wiconi*, meaning water is life, have become associated with the mass movement opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline in the traditional homelands of my tribe. These words illustrate a way of life that is inclusive of the Dakota philosophy of *mitakuye oyasin*, which means we are all related. In Dakota culture, water is not viewed as a resource, dead or inert, or as a place to dump waste as it is in the dominant culture. In our culture, the water that sustains life is also respected as life itself. In our culture, it has its own agency, and is treated with the respect it deserves. My work advocates for a shift in the public perception of water towards respect and reverence for the lifegiving entity it is.

**Alicia Grullón:** The nature of my work has consisted of understanding the camera as an imperial tool and using embodied research through self-portraiture, performance and organizing to dismantle the gaze. And this has been in itself, a complicated endeavor as a person of color raised in the first-world within the lexicon of US exceptionalism. Undoing how I see myself has been an intellectual endeavor as well as an emotional and psychological one. For me, the image and the documentation of my performances are anchors for understanding the power the colonial patriarchal gaze has had and how to unwind it.



ERIN GENIA  
*Mnitaža*, 2022  
Porcupine quills, seed beads, shell, canvas, silk cord

Depicting the *mni taža*—“ripples” in Dakota language—that form when drops fall and hit the surface of water, this medicine pouch holds seed prayers for people to act respectfully towards water, and that those good actions will expand to more and more people across the globe.

In creating *7 Stories about Water*, I consider, “how do people encounter water?” The contexts under which these encounters occur in the 21st century are capitalism, settler-colonialism and colonialism. Racial capitalism’s effects have been reaching their peak directly evinced through climate chaos—a direct result of resource extraction, attempted genocide of indigenous peoples and erasure of earth-based spiritual practices. As so-called developed countries wrestle with their cultures of consumption, families fleeing political and climatic turmoil are detained at borders or risk death on the seas and roads trying to find relief. First Nation peoples on Turtle Island have been and continue to fight to protect their unceded lands and waters as the US and Canada continually disregard treaties and agreements in clear violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. When I address these questions to myself, I cannot remove my positionality which includes my histories and lived experiences. I am neither settler nor native. In the early 1960’s, fleeing a US-backed dictator and subsequent US military invasion, my parents came from the unceded land of the Taino in the Caribbean, known as Ayiti or Kiskeya—“land of the most bountiful.” It is also known by its colonial name Hispaniola; currently divided into two predominately Black nations, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Both countries are still experiencing cataclysmic environmental damage to land and water due to European and North American mining companies, like Barrack Gold, still digging for gold.

In this new video installation, I create scripts out of interviews with people about their experiences around water. I re-tell them creating moving collages using contemporary news clips, footage from my time at the Shell River in Minnesota, and people’s hands wrapping, cooking, and drawing. In the work, I study the storytelling process between collective and individual memories. At times the components are inconclusive. Sometimes there is a disjunction between the

narration and text or there is silence. It is meant to highlight the fragmentary quality of reality, perspectives and what is being experienced. I re-tell their personal stories and yet, there is also the indexical truth that binds their stories together under the context in which we live. My story is implied through the specific blue background reminiscent of how my parents would describe the color of the ocean where they are from.

**Courtney M. Leonard:** BREACH, as a whole, is an annual logbook and visual account. It tracks from year to year what lies above and below the sightline of water and land horizons—its record, a marker of the previous year’s account explored through relationships of environmental fragility, shifting adaptations, and/or the ability to simply become anew.

With each BREACH logbook, the question that persists is, “Can a culture sustain itself when it no longer has access to the environment that fashions that culture?” How I navigate this research as an Indigenous person might conflict with other individual beliefs in any group. However, my hope is to pose questions and explorations from this perspective that are inclusive of a global understanding. Often, many water communities are not meaningfully acknowledged as actors in the larger climate crisis conversation, despite being on the frontlines of climate change and directly affected by global climate decisions.

**Mary Mattingly:** Growing up in a rural agricultural town outside of New York City, without access to clean drinking water due to insecticides, herbicides and nitrates in the water table, I continually worried about water. I was made aware of industrial farming practices as a young person, and of the connection of environmental issues to human and nonhuman health.

There are many forms of water crisis—including the crisis of water pollution, of rising costs with privatization, and lack of access to water—most recently in the US with Detroit’s water shut-offs during the height of the coronavirus and with extreme droughts. What has driven me to focus on water in much of the work I do, and to follow the business of water privatization, was when Bechtel (with the World Bank) privatized water in and around Cochabamba Bolivia in the year 2000. The water became unaffordable for most people, and in Cochabamba tens of thousands of people protested until unrest led the government to revoke the water contracts.

Since learning about Cochabamba’s water crisis, water privatization has been something I’ve followed closely. While many rural areas in the US can’t afford privatization costs, many cities have found that employing public/private water partnerships have helped ailing budgets, but almost always in the short term only. This type of partnership came to a head during the beginning of the Flint, MI water crisis. Flint’s public private partnership was in the hands of Veolia and the city government—cutting corners with water is a health issue and a life-or-death issue.

**Karen Levitov: Collaboration is an integral part of many of your projects. Can you describe some of these collaborations and how they have worked?**

**Betsy:** Over 30 years, I’ve invited artists to collaborate with each other, with scientists, and with their own communities. Beginning with a workshop in which everyone learns the larger scientific issues, the community finds the best ways to start their collaborations. These collaborations have led to the cleanup of the San Antonio River, a stormwater collection project in a school, and the first inner city water garden in China, to name a few.

**Lillian Ball:** An essential part of WATERWASH Bronx River was the collaboration with local non-profit Rocking the Boat, that teaches neighborhood youth to build wooden boats and do environmental work. The students helped plant over 800 native wetland and grassland plants and continued doing maintenance on the site years after the park’s construction, learning in the process the difference between native and invasive plant species. This sense of collaboration has also been evident in the project’s prototype, WATERWASH Mattituck Inlet, which was designed in 2007 and even to this day relies on the participation of local community members in the removal of invasive species growing in and around the wetland.

**Courtney M. Leonard:** Collaboration exists as both an understanding of and responsibility to each community and cultural landscape that has been a part of BREACH. If we consider water itself to be a sentient being, a community of drops to which we are in connection with, then at what point do we seek consent, ask permission, give acknowledgement and express gratitude to the water (the community) for all that it has given within this collaboration? How do we communicate collaboration as a practice of responsibility to and with one another? Shinnecock Bay borders our traditional territories as a part of the Shinnecock Nation and has been a key estuary for our people lending to generations of built knowledge. Indigenous epistemologies exist as scientific records of the place based knowledge and responsibility we hold and practice. These include protection of the waters, shores, and marine ecologies our community has always and continues to connect with; the bay which bears the name of who we are, “Shinnecock” Bay. We honor and give thanks to the water as a means of who we are and where we come from.

**Mary Mattingly:** Because everyone is continually acting and interacting in relation, sometimes silently and sometimes intentionally, collaboration is a daily act, and it can be more thoughtful. Collaboration is what drives my work—I thrive when co-learning and working together because it turns up other ways of building and creating—we can be in a support role holding someone’s ideas or we can lead, but collaboration is always a form of compromise and that’s part of its strength. I really appreciate this way of learning and being together and it is key in most of the artwork I do or get involved in, in a support role. I’ve found that no matter the work, the best collaborations tend to be the ones where compromise and context are foregrounded, and collaborators share their skills in a way that allows each person to lead and hold a part of the whole.

**Jaanika Peerna:** I tend to prefer being a solitary artist type in my studio. It’s essential for me to distill down everything that I take in during my wakeful hours. At the same time I find myself doing more and more performance art that invites participatory involvement from audience members and is so much about collaborative action. There are no words exchanged yet it takes a lot of sensing and listening to others that makes these performances tick.

As the current project’s prep got prolonged due to covid it’s been such a treasure to have Karen and Betsy encouraging conversations between us the participating artists and also with Stony Brook professors. There is so much I have learned from Betsy’s approach for example—she is much more grounded and action oriented, and her knowledge about water is vast.

**Karen Levitov:** As a university art gallery, our mission is to foster learning and critical thinking. What do you hope visitors take away from this exhibition?

**Betsy Damon:** My greatest hope is that visitors take away ideas—not only what they can do on their own property but within the larger water systems in which they live.

**Lillian Ball:** I consider my job as an artist and environmental pro-activist to be getting people to care about these essential environmental concerns. And I believe Stony Brook is an excellent community to get people involved and invested. I hope that visitors will be able to place themselves within the greater framework of crucial ecosystem issues and see how truly impactful their actions, and perhaps in some cases how detrimental their inaction, can actually be.

**Jaanika Peerna:** I believe that if there is even only one participant in my performance who leaves being changed from inside or with an experience that has gotten under her/his skin, it is better than a thousand politely clapping hands.

To evoke awe towards water, give space to be with our grief for vanishing glacial landscapes, and, as a result, feel transformed and able to take on some action is probably the most I can hope to achieve. Art has its own ways to offer us solace, inspire and inform— art does it the way no other discipline does. It’s at times magical and can’t be explained.

**Erin Genia:** I would like viewers to consider how Indigenous methodologies, creative practice, Western science and community-based organizing are methods that, when used in conjunction in a manner that centers respect and reciprocity, can be a potent problem-solving combination to address and solve many of the water issues that we face.

**Alicia Grullón:** Awareness—in its most amplified and all-embracing way possible.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

**Lillian Ball**  
*GO H.O.M.E. Bimini*, 2018–20  
Three-channel interactive video game

**Betsy Damon**  
*Drop*, 2013  
Charcoal on paper

**Betsy Damon**  
*Principles of Water series*, 2018  
Sumi ink

Water Creates  
Water Creates Complexity  
Water Creates Coherence  
All Waters are Connected  
Water Never Moves in a Straight Line  
Water is Self-Regenerating  
Life Adapts to Water, Water Does Not  
Adapt to Life  
The Primary Motion of Water is the  
Vortex

**Betsy Damon**  
*Rain*, 2012  
Video

**Erin Genia**  
*Earthling*, 2019  
Acrylic on canvas, architectural model  
turf

**Erin Genia**  
*Mnitaža*, 2022  
Porcupine quills, seed beads, shell,  
canvas, silk cord

**Erin Genia**  
*Mni Omni*, 2022  
Acrylic on canvas

**Alicia Grullón**  
*7 Stories About Water*, 2022  
Multichannel video installation


**Courtney M. Leonard**  
*BREACH: LOGBOOK 22 | CULL*  
Ceramics, oyster shells, pallets, paint

**Mary Mattingly**  
*Clepsydra for Carbon*, 2022  
Collected vessels and plastic tubing,  
reclaimed metal conduit and plastic  
restaurant trays, water pump  
powered by electricity from natural  
gas and fossil fuels, water, and plants  
suitable for a warmer, wetter climate

**Jaanika Peerna**  
*Ice Memory*, 2021-ongoing  
Pigment pencil and ice on Mylar,  
plastic tube

**Jaanika Peerna**  
*Thawing*, 2020  
Pigment pencil, ice, handcut Mylar

**Jaanika Peerna**  
*Screech of Ice* (series numbers 60, 64  
and 74), 2019  
Graphite and color pencil on Mylar

 **Paul W. Zuccaire**  
**GALLERY**

631.632.7240  
ZuccaireGallery@stonybrook.edu  
<http://ZuccaireGallery.stonybrook.edu>



Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery  
1220 Staller Center for the Arts  
Stony Brook University  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5425

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