Nightfall

Megan Arnold
Shannon Garden-Smith
Ness Lee
Brenda Mabel Reid
Shelley Niro
Chiedza Pasipanodya
Noelle Wharton-Ayer



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Curated by Hannah Keating

When I first encountered Shelley Niro's video *ONGNIAAHRA/Niagara* (2015), I was captivated by her use of language. In the work, lines of a poem descend one at a time over footage of Niagara Falls. Within the falls' torrent and roar, Niro occasionally wipes water from the camera lens. She zooms in on the falls' edge, all that water pouring over rock, and on the churning waves below. The narrative of the poem mirrors the propulsive ebb and flow of water, and I find myself plunged alternately between feelings of sadness and hope. The sadness comes from recollections within the poem of isolation and dislocation. Hope is present throughout, when gestures of recognition allow the characters to feel seen and known, in a dream, through a window, in jail, despite physical distance. The poem's final lines frame the text within the colonial apparatus that divides land and people in North America: "my birthplace / now a border / dividing." With this, the interactions recollected between Niro and the woman in her poem take on the weight of a much longer story of dispossession. This creates a shift in perspective where the immediate, personal memories that make up the poem are cast into the shadow of a wider, deeper time.

This perspective shift in Niro's work reminds me of the way I become more aware of occupying a particular space and time when night is falling, and simultaneously cognizant of how that present exists within a vast lineage of similar, but also profoundly different moments. The passage of time, the gravity of place, and the nuance of human relationships, which Niro evokes in her work, are central to the conceptual thrust of this exhibition. *Nightfall* brings together work by Megan Arnold, Shannon Garden-Smith, Ness Lee, Shelley Niro, Chiedza Pasipanodya, Brenda Mabel Reid, and Noelle Wharton-Ayer. Critically, their works help me think about living *with* and *in* the surface of the earth, not on it. They achieve this by leaning into perceptual changes —noticing such quiet and subtle events as the loss of light in the evening or leaves decaying on the forest floor—and by revealing a porous dialogue across various borders and surfaces. They also contextualize their attentiveness with stakes, offering, through their work, reflections on care, disruption, and responsibility. Formally, many of the works resemble covers and veils, which I hope draws attention to the idea of distance, the feeling of night itself, and the ground beneath your feet.

Over the past year and a half, I have spent a lot of time thinking about nightfall in my car. Through the summer, my commute home from work is

Mylar: Shelley Niro, still from *ONGNIAAHRA/Niagara*, video, 0:04.46, 2015. Image credit: Vtape.

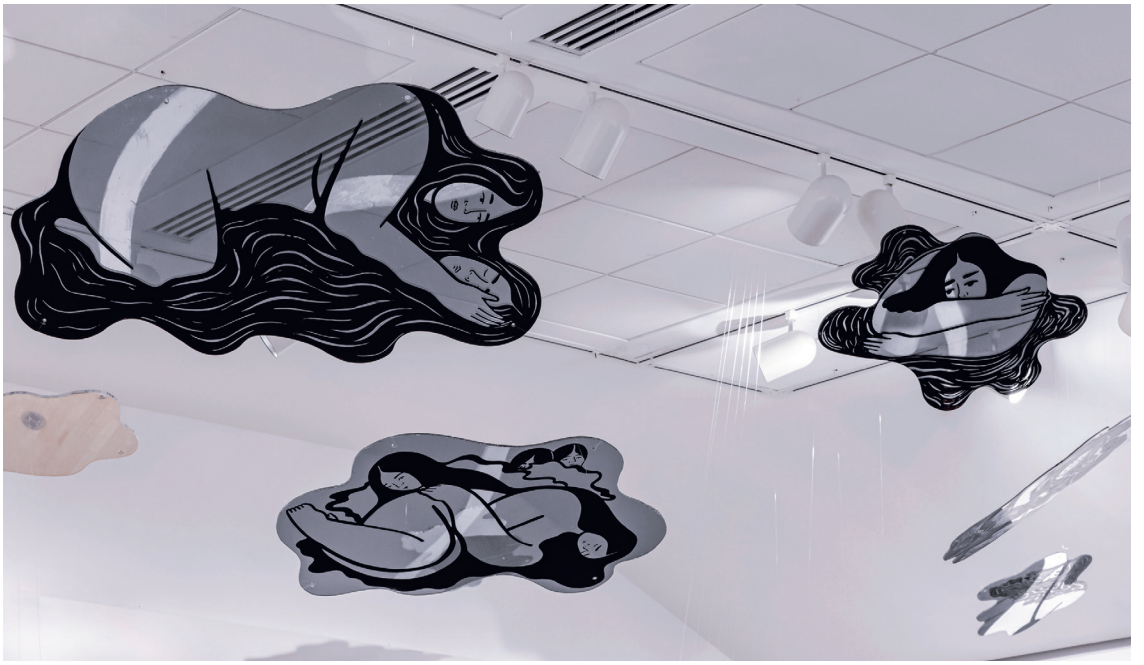




Shelley Niro, still from *ONGNIAAHRA/Niagara*, video, 0:04.46, 2015. Image credit: Vtape.

Megan Arnold, still from *Dog Time*, digital video, 0:16.53, 2023. Created in collaboration with Clayton Dyon and Farley during a residency at Eastern Edge. Music composed and recorded by Clayton Dyon and Megan Arnold at Graham Cox's house in St. John's.





Noelle Wharton-Ayer, *Sleep Study IV* from the *Bedfellows* series, digital collage printed on Habotai silk, aluminum, stainless steel, felted wool, 50 × 55 × 72", 2024. Image credit: Vincent Drouin.

Ness Lee, *Cloud 7*, *Cloud 3*, and *Cloud 4* from the *Windspells* series, acrylic plexiglass, enamel paint and vinyl film, 2021. Image credit: Toni Hafkenscheid.

sunny and nightfall is a far-off prospect. Come September, it's clear that changes are underway, and by December, I travel in darkness. With this exhibition on the horizon, I have frequently found myself trying to discern the precise composition of colours in the sky that tells me night is falling. When, exactly, does the landscape turn into silhouettes? *Now? No... now!* It has proven to be an elusive goal, and I think that's kind of the point.

In her video *Dog Time* (2023), Megan Arnold also journeys by car, but through the majestic terrain of Gros Morne National Park, the Northern Peninsula, and the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland. Travelling across these sites with her partner and dog, she combines footage of hillsides, roadways, and sweeping oceanside landscapes to create a portrait of companionship and place. The shots are captured through the window of a car and between the ears of her dog, having affixed a camera to his back. With a vantage point that is low to the ground, Farley (the dog) pauses at-will to catch a new scent on the breeze or to make sure the pack is all together. Recorded over a few days, the film is structured around a scene that finds Farley resting on a picnic table in the setting sun. He looks in the direction of the camera, at the artist, I imagine, while a spectacle in pink explodes behind him. In the film, Arnold establishes a rhythm of coming and going before and after this central moment, evoking the cyclical, and making the work feel like a calming lullaby. Farley offers us an opportunity to imagine other ways of experiencing the world, spatially and temporally, by interrupting the one most familiar to us.

Arnold frequently collaborates with Farley in her performances and videos, which helps her incorporate humour and improvisation into her work. This piece was made during an artist residency with Eastern Edge in St John's, Newfoundland, and Farley set the pace, allowing us to observe the craggy landscape with fresh eyes. Paying respect to the land and being with the ones we love are core themes I take from the film, defined at the outset through a recognition of traditional territory and a dedication of the work to a friend who recently passed. As a peaceful sojourn with Farley's family of three, *Dog Time* reminds me how softness is a balm in hard times and how valuable it is to tread lightly on the land that holds us.

In a complementary vein, Noelle Wharton-Ayer's meditative series, *Bedfellows*, captures the beauty and resilience of nature. Her multimedia sculpture *Sleep Study IV* (2024) is part of that series, and it features a photo-based collage printed on silk suspended over a metal frame. The collage combines photographs printed on clear plastic sheets, grease drawings also done on transparent sheets, and paper cutouts. All of the imagery refers to plants Wharton-Ayer photographed on walks she took in late fall and early winter in 2023, or which she researched online through plant-identification forums. The artist placed her collage materials on photographic paper in darkroom conditions and exposed them under an enlarger. The final image, developed like a regular silver-gelatin photograph, has a ghostly appearance with lively

organic shapes forming new landscapes and silhouettes. The monochromatic tones of this work lend the composition a dreamy quality and the form taken by the sculpture resembles a bed or makeshift shelter.

Wharton-Ayer was inspired to create this body of work through her walks and subsequent reflections on the living layer of organic matter that constitutes the forest floor. The attention she pays to leaf litter and ground-level plants is an invitation to visualize the layers of interdependence present in forest ecosystems, with fallen leaves serving as vital protection for various organisms and a source of nutrients for the soil. The autumnal process of loss is necessary and ultimately life-giving in this climatic region, serving as a familiar metaphor for embracing change in my own seasons of life. It also mirrors the artist's approach to making this work, in which divergent pieces are combined to make something new. Together with a pair of chemigrams, which were made in 2026 with plant-based solutions sourced from her neighbourhood, Wharton-Ayer celebrates beauty and dreaming as important stages in creative cycles, whether artistic or biological.

There are few daily rituals as simple and comforting as sinking into my bed and pulling the covers up to my chin. It's the growing warmth of my body cocooned under my blanket and the permission to let go with the support of my bed beneath me. Works by Ness Lee and Brenda Mabel Reid provide examples of intimacy, with self and other, that resonate with the action of turning in for the night. They illuminate the power of connection, and the acceptance that can be born in quiet moments of rest and retreat.

Drawings by Lee printed on acetate are hung in the exhibition from the ceiling. In their characteristic style, Lee renders soft bodies curled into protective, soothing postures. The figures cross their arms, fold into one another, and convey variously tender and mournful expressions. Enrobed in pools of long, flowing hair, each body is a cloud heavy with emotional weight. Nevertheless, in a gesture of love, Lee renders these figures with a gentle hand, lending them a corresponding air of lightness. For Lee, these works are expressions of acceptance, and relate to their personal experiences with grief, as they unspool the pressure of social expectations and surrender to stillness. Titled *Windspells*, these works from 2021 are both a form of catharsis and a set of wishes for profound self-love. Their reflective surfaces project that intention outwards, reminding me of moments when I have observed self-acceptance in someone else. When we care about ourselves and our needs, we give permission for others to do the same.

Expanding in that direction, Reid's large-scale quilt *Underlay* (2024), made of construction-grade materials, poses a question about how we share space and construct allyship across difference. Taking the form of a quilt, the work draws certain connotations into the fold. A quilt's geometric construction is durable so that even as its fabric pieces soften with age, a quilt can remain



Brenda Mabel Reid, installation of *Underlay* (2024) in The Backyard at the RMG on September 19, 2026. Photo credit: Aaron Li.

intact for a very long time. Sometimes they are passed from one person to another, carrying with them memories of times gone by. Painstakingly assembled, a quilt also bears the love and labour of its making and is therefore comforting to both body and soul.

In Reid's quilt, thread is replaced with sheathing tape, gromets, and reflective nylon rope to create a customizable quilt composed of hexagonal blocks. Combining the visual language of textiles with construction materials, *Underlay* blurs the line between two historically gendered forms of labour (quilt making and construction work), embracing qualities of femininity and masculinity in a creative gesture of community care. Thanks to the work's durable materials and flexible scale, it has been installed both indoors and outdoors, in different configurations, and under variable weather conditions. Over the years, participants have been invited to lie under the quilt, next to friends and strangers alike, in public installations of the work. Most recently, it was installed in the RMG's backyard for a nap event on September 19, 2026. Under the hospitable care of the Nap Team, the installation is a platform for public gathering that is highly visible, improvised, and playful. Beckoning a purposeful pause that has nothing to do with commerce or productivity, *Underlay* is nevertheless about exchange. It highlights the role of trust in maintaining shared infrastructure and how dependent we are on each other for rest and connection. While providing permission, it is also a provocation, especially when taking up space in public parks, inviting us to ask who is allowed to gather freely or sleep in public and who is not.

Just as rest need not be associated with nighttime alone, dusk doesn't necessarily signal the conclusion of labour or attention. There are shift workers, digital nomads, insomniacs, and night owls who are awake long after night falls. Chiedza Pasipanodya immerses viewers in other late-night happenings, drawing on Nguni folklore from southern Africa to consider how storytelling traditions have long served to entertain and caution, especially at night, in their work *Chimurenga 4 | An area (and satellite site) for inoculating epthialtes* (2026).

Chimurenga, from the artwork's title, is a word meaning uprising or revolutionary struggle. Drawing on the work of June Jordan, Pasipanodya's immersive installation concerns itself with themes of disruption. At its core are a series of sculptures inspired by the tokoloshe, a small nighttime spirit from Nguni folklore with shapeshifting abilities. The tokoloshe is a trickster who harms, seduces, or plays tricks on unsuspecting victims while they sleep, and therefore acts as a mechanism for warning against dangerous circumstances. In this work, the artist is more interested in the practice of conjuring the tokoloshe to exact vengeance. Dispersed on the ground, Pasipanodya's tokoloshe figures cast shadows on the walls and inspire a confrontation with wickedness. Drawing this folklore figure into the present, Pasipanodya considers it a device for approaching contemporary issues.

The work's engagement with themes of disruption and hazard asks us to discern what is a threat and where we are called to be a menace. The artist asks: how can the characters of our imaginations be summoned for powerful purposes in the lives we lead together?

Nearby, *Untitled (We might listen for the shimmering)* (2026), comes from a series of works by Pasipanodya using shattered glass. Gathered from broken car windows, the artist meticulously re-scatters the glass into haphazard, temporary compositions on wooden panels. Spraying the arrangement with paint, they fix the moment in place and consecrate the actions with salt to cleanse and seal the work. The image is one of cataclysm and beauty. It serves as a record of an unknowable event that appears at once like dappled light playing in the leaves of a tree, and then like a vast galaxy of stars. It reminds me of the quieter spectacle that unfolds in nightfall's wake, after the discernable outline of things vanishes into a sky that is dark and close, when pin pricks of starlight start to shimmer. It is this subtle reopening of the sky, deeper and vaster than can be seen in the day, that speaks to the experience I have viewing this work.

Lastly, Pasipandodya presents *Untitled (Inside Pomongwe)* (2026), which underlines their appreciation for the murky, profound nature of existence. As an embodied reckoning with the labour of making, this work was produced by submerging reams of cloth in a mixture of water and iron oxides. The artist scrubbed, rinsed, and wrung out the cloth, occasionally painting and dispersing pigment directly into its fibers. The work stands as a monument to human labour, holding both the material traces of the event and a sense of time. Like a curtain, a shroud, or the crawling shadow of night, this work is somewhat mundane and withholding, eliciting an insatiable curiosity and sense of mystery.

When the sun has slipped beyond the house across the street and the colours in my home fade to grey, I draw my curtains closed. In near darkness, I switch on my lamps, noticing my gaze and heart turn inward. Evening tends to be a subtle and intimate time. In her practice, Shannon Garden-Smith is highly attuned to intimacies in everyday life, particularly overlooked surfaces, like the ground and the page. In her work, *Dust Jacket* (2025), she installs hundreds of digital prints in a layered configuration that resembles a length of vertical blinds. Hung from a custom armature, each print lays over the one before it. Some are barely visible beneath the next, while others are spaced further apart. Because of this, the scalloped strata of a marbled-paper pattern comes in and out of focus as it is stretched and distorted across the sprawling width of the work.

The image itself, in jewel tones of red, blue, purple, yellow, and green, is borrowed from the decorative end papers of a nineteenth century book. Garden-Smith found the book at McGill University, scanned the page, and





Chiedza Pasipanodya, detail of *Chimurenga 1, 2 & 3 | An arena (and satellite site) for inoculating ephialtes*, site-specific installation, steel, 44 × 24", 2024. Image credit: Aubrey Theobald.

Shannon Garden-Smith, *Dust Jacket*, 1500 digital prints on bond paper, custom hanging armature, 6 × 80', 2025-26. Photo credit: Paul Litherland; installation view of *la clarté creuse les montagnes*, Musée d'art de Joliette, 2026.

extracted each pixel digitally line by line, so that each of her prints represents one vertical line (one-pixel wide) of the scanned image. With century's old roots in China, Japan, and the Middle East, paper marbling involves dispersing pigments on a liquid surface. Complex patterns are composed on that surface, then transferred to another, usually paper. The resulting image tends to resemble striations of stone or seashells. In *Dust Jacket*, Garden-Smith articulates a new surface—the vertical blind—that calls back to this fluid origin and to the popularity of marbling in decorative and domestic arts in Europe, where this book, and its marbled end papers, were produced. In this work, the artist is attentive to the covert presence of empire in everyday life in an effort to "re-examine, re-feel and undo the power relations that have been naturalized in the ground on which we walk."[1]

Like other of the artist's projects that make large-scale industry visible in the minutia of daily life, *Dust Jacket* articulates something useful about the way culture acts upon and within our lives. Layers of contact and movement between people and materials influence the way things are, not in a single moment or through singular means, but over time. Engagement with surfaces —in this case a book and the watery surface of the marbling process—draws forward a complex network of trade, technologies, and resources. The fact that *Dust Jacket* and the artist's *Opposite the spine (vitrine)* series (also exhibited), resemble stone, and therefore conjure the deep scope of geologic time, is essential to the insight they offer. It is easy to get lost in the timescale of one human life, but responsible stewardship depends upon a much wider generational and geologic lens.

In busy lives, nightfall is rarely something we get to notice as it's happening. Sunset, with its ever-changing colours and spectacle, tends to garner more attention. The passage into night is a quiet sort of settling. Awash in whatever feelings the day brought on, nightfall ushers in acceptance like an exhalation, the last breath of the day released. In darkness, what is imagined matters as much as what is. Critically, nightfall is not a true end; it is merely one moment in a persistent cycle. We don't have a say in the coming or going of the sun, only what we do with our own actions. Actions require rest. Rest requires surrender. Surrender requires trust. A falling into fear and dreaming.

[1] Shannon Garden-Smith, "The Heretical Baroque as Fissure in the Stratigraphic Wording of the World: A support paper accompanying the exhibition *Dust Jacket* in partial fulfillment of doctoral comprehensive examination requirements in Visual Art, Department of Visual Art & Art History, York University," October 24, 2025, p 37.

Megan Arnold is a multidisciplinary artist based in Guelph, ON. She obtained a BFA from the University of Western Ontario and an MFA from the University of Guelph. Recently, she has presented work at LIVE Biennale (Vancouver, BC), the Guelph Comedy Festival (Guelph, ON), PINCH Cabaret (Waterloo, ON), and Eastern Edge (St. John's, NF). Her favourite activity used to be karaoke, but now it might be lying down.

Shannon Garden-Smith is an artist based in Tkaronto/ Toronto, Canada of Scottish and Irish settler heritage. Garden-Smith is currently pursuing a PhD in Visual Art at York University, having previously earned an MFA at the University of Guelph and Honours BA at the University of Toronto. Primarily working across sculpture and installation, Garden-Smith engages with the mutability and poetics of the lithic environment. She seeks to unsettle naturalized relationships to its extraction, drawing on sand and stone's ability to hold complex possibilities for time, memory, and different futures. She has exhibited nationally and internationally. Her practice has been supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, and Ontario Graduate Scholarship. She was a 2025 finalist for the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Artist Prize.

Ness Lee (they/she) draws upon history and personal narratives to create tender and surreal illustrations, paintings, sculptures and installations. Exploring states of mind during intimate stages of vulnerability, Lee's work takes form as an effort in seeking comfort, forgiveness and desire for an end of a self-perpetuated state. Based in Toronto, their work has been featured at the AGO, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, the Gardiner Museum, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, as well as galleries in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Taiwan, Miami, Montreal and Toronto. Lee has also participated in mural festivals in Canada and Internationally in Hyderabad, India and Cozumel, Mexico. They have a BDes in Illustration from OCADU.

Brenda Mabel Reid is an emerging non-binary visual artist with a social practice. They grew up in rural Ontario and are currently based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. They have a background in architecture and their work explores friction between place, care and social expectation, often through means they find humorous. They often work through collage as a way of making and understanding, collecting snippets, reinterpreting pieces, and assembling spaces and places to exist in. Their practice includes textile, print-making, sculpture, installation and audio. Brenda's work has been exhibited at contemporary art festivals and in solo and group exhibitions in Canada. They've completed residencies in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador. They are the recipient of grants from the Canadian Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and Quadrangle NL.

Shelley Niro was born 1954, in Niagara Falls, NY. Currently she lives in Brantford, Ontario, where she is a member of the Six Nations Reserve, Bay of Quinte Mohawk, Turtle Clan. A multi-media artist whose work involves photography, painting, beadwork, and film, Niro is conscious of the impact post-colonial media have had on Indigenous people. Like many artists from different Native communities, she works relentlessly to present people in realistic and exploratory portrayals. An Honours graduate of the Ontario College of Art, Niro received her MFA from the University of Western Ontario. In 2012, she was the inaugural recipient of the Aboriginal Arts Award, presented through the Ontario Arts Council. In 2017, she received a Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts from the Canada Council; the Scotiabank Photography Award; and the Hnatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Award. Niro also received an Arts and Culture Award from the Dreamcatcher Charitable Foundation. Niro continues to produce work reflecting herself and her community.

Chiedza Pasipanodya (b.1987, Harare, Zimbabwe) is a sculptor and writer whose work explores material culture, diasporic memory, and transformation. Informed by post-minimalism, Afro-diasporic thought, and speculative frameworks, they create sculptural forms concerned with perceptual shifts and cultural transmission. Shaped by migration and alternative spiritual traditions, their material practice reflects a sustained interest in metaphysics, attentive to the ways time, matter, and meaning interrelate. Pasipanodya has exhibited locally and internationally and is a recipient of the Cranbrook Museum Purchase Award.

Noelle Wharton-Ayer is a multi-disciplinary artist currently living in Quebec City. She holds a Bachelor's degree in visual arts from York University and a Master's degree in visual arts from Laval University. Her work has been presented in group and solo exhibitions in Canada and Europe. Noelle worked as studio technician at the artist-run centre Engramme for several years and since 2019, she has worked as a freelance community arts practitioner in the Quebec City region. Her latest solo project, *Bedfellows*, funded by a Creation grant from CALQ, was presented at VU Photo in Québec City in spring of 2024 and in Winnipeg at Martha Street Studio in winter of 2025. Upcoming exhibitions include *A Night Garden* at the Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists in the fall of 2026, and a collaborative project at the Museum of Rimouski with artist Audrée Demers-Roberge in 2027.

Hannah Keating is the Associate Curator at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

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Curated by: Hannah Keating
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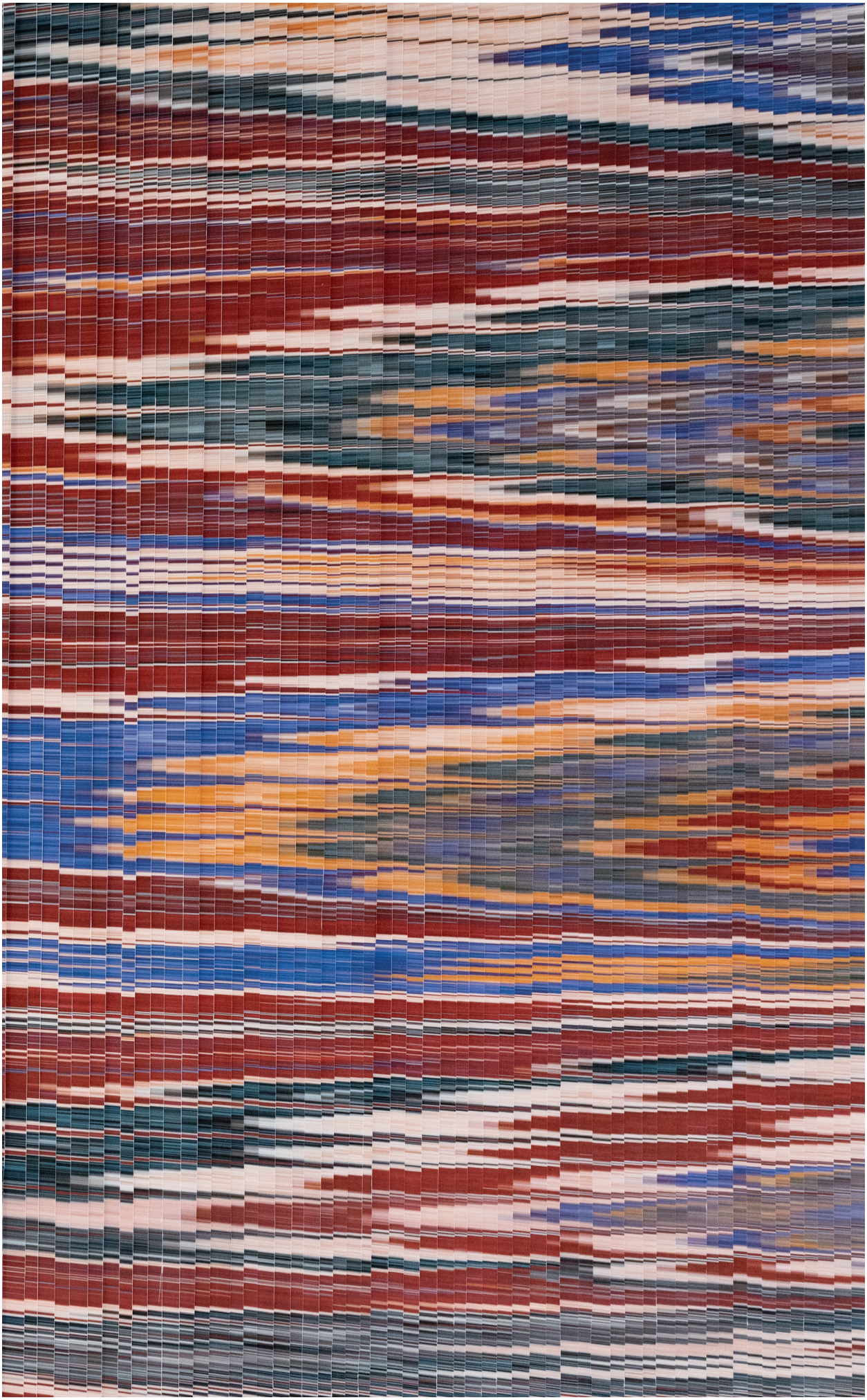
Mylar: Shannon Garden-Smith, detail, *Dust Jacket*, 1500 digital prints on bond paper, custom hanging armature, 6 × 80', 2025-26. Photo credit: Paul Litherland; installation view of *la clarté creuse les montagnes*, Musée d'art de Joliette, 2026.

Back: Noelle Wharton-Ayer, *Sleep Study IV*, digital collage (scanned silver-gelatin photograms), 2024. Image courtesy of the artist.





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