




"A Day in the Life" with: Toronto Interdisciplinary Artist Lyla Rye

 March 26, 2025
  Shantelle Canzanese
  Arts

Themes of childhood, nature, and spatial perception resonate in the work of Lyla Rye. Often site-specific, there's a journey to be taken when entering the worlds she creates. Stepping onto a large gloss-black stage suspended by chains with my three children, I remember Swing Stage as both daunting and a platform for sheer joy. In the work Tether she reused the steel chain to secure maple trees as if to prevent them from floating away. In her 2022 video work Slowly Glides The Shadow, Too Quickly Flies The Hour a humble wood burial marker casts a shadow like a sundial. It was the last work of hers I saw in person at the now lost-to-fire sanctuary at St. Anne's Church.

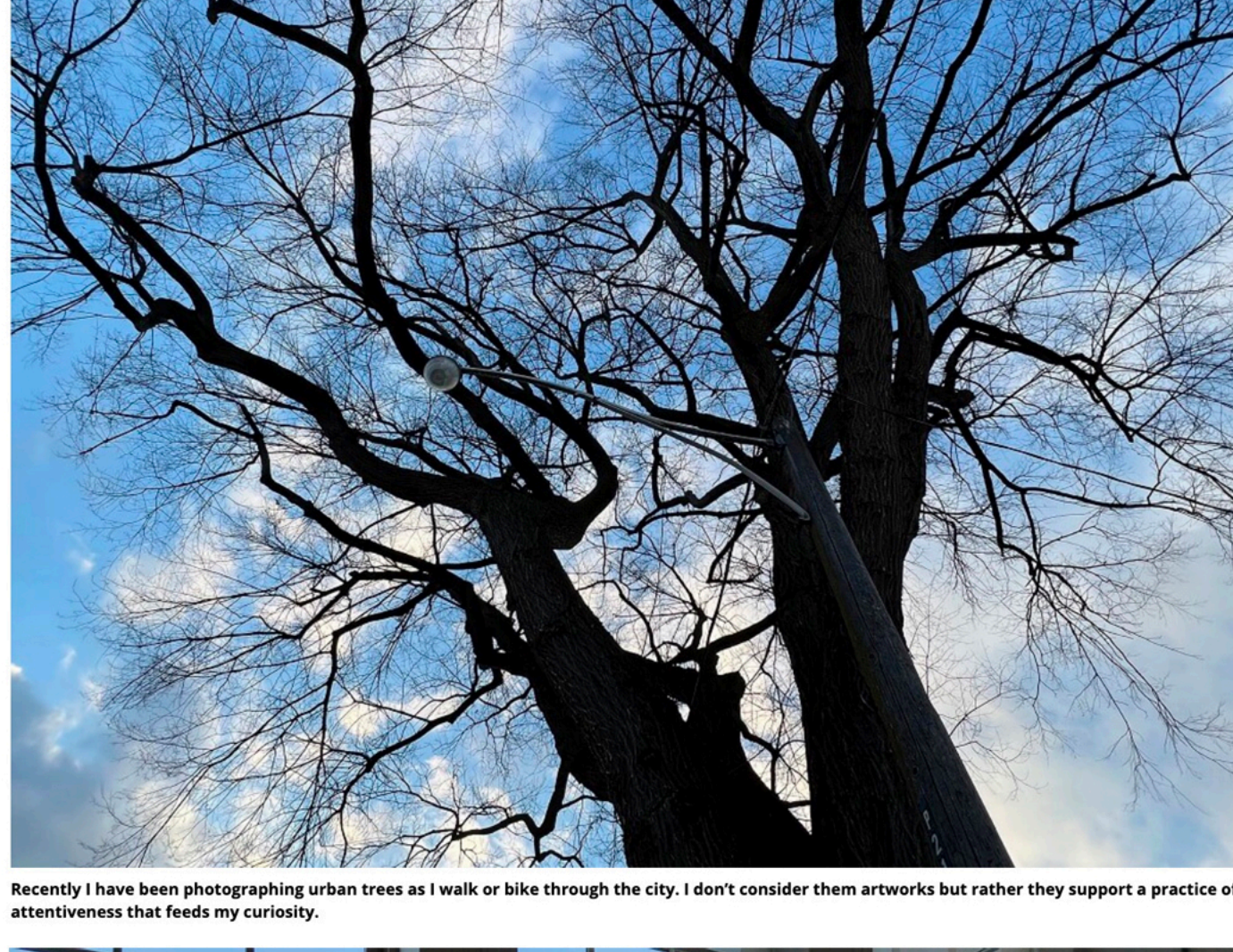
Artist and mentor Lyla began her studies in architecture, then drawing and painting, and after completing a Master's degree at the San Francisco Art Institute, her practice evolved into installation works, incorporating sculpture, video and soundscape.

When not creating art, Lyla mentors artists at all stages of their careers as a creative consultant and founder of the Mentor Lyla Rye. This includes: The Crit Club: a biweekly critique group for artists to seek communal feedback and insight.

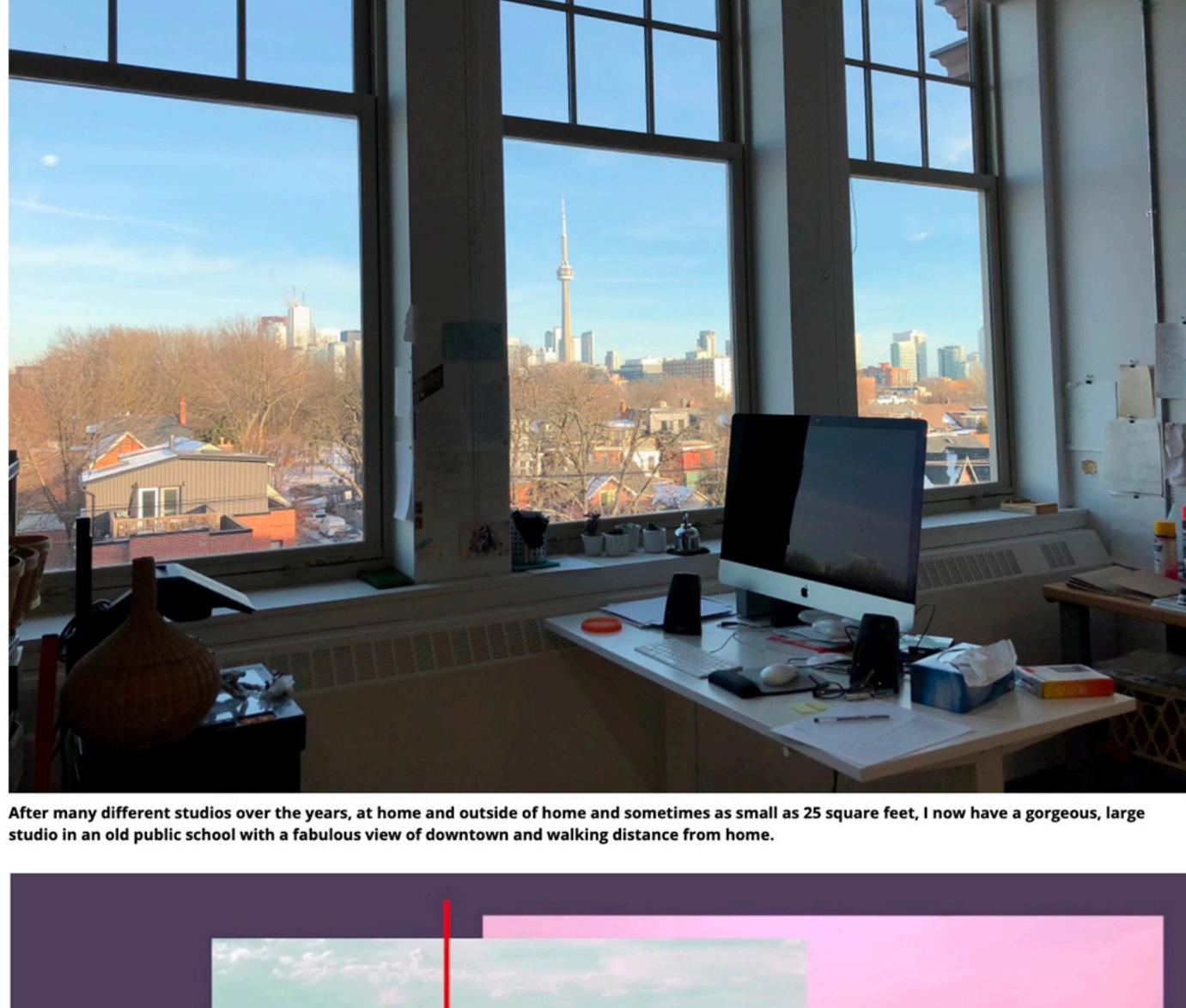
-Written by Ian Rye



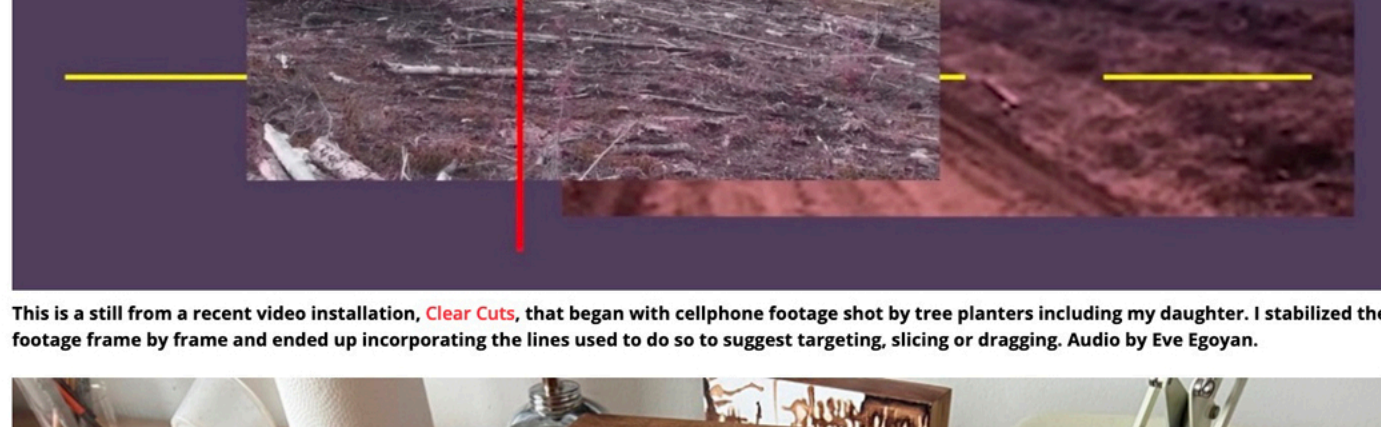
Swing Stage, from 2011, was a dream come true; to create a large, site-specific installation in the gorgeous post-industrial space of Olga Korper Gallery. People could step up on the suspended platform to watch a video that combined images from the roof of the site, Google Earth and a book published by the original factory: The Hanson & Van Winkle Company (est. 1863).



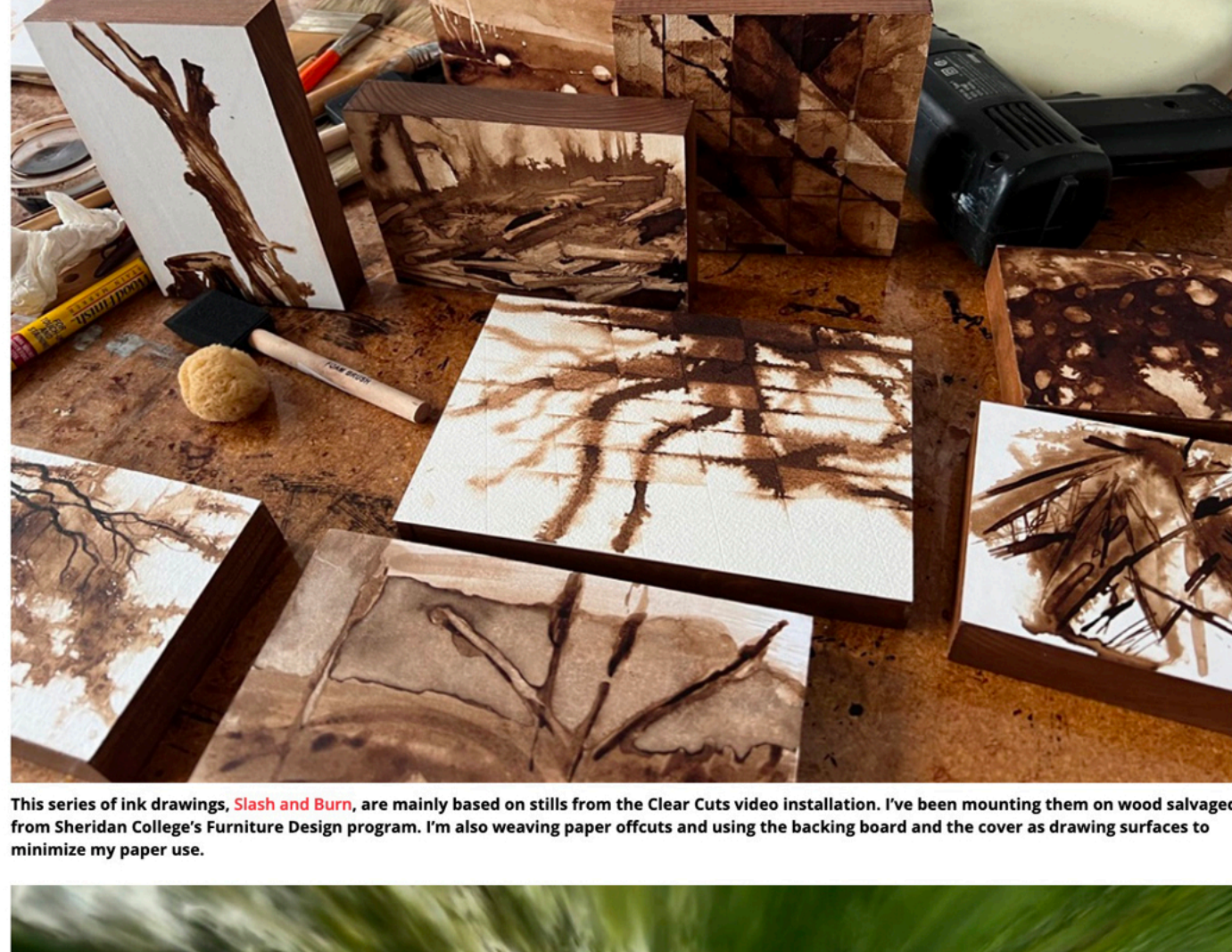
Recently I have been photographing urban trees as I walk or bike through the city. I don't consider them artworks but rather they support a practice of attentiveness that feeds my curiosity.



After many different studios over the years, at home and outside of home and sometimes as small as 25 square feet, I now have a gorgeous, large studio in an old public school with a fabulous view of downtown and walking distance from home.



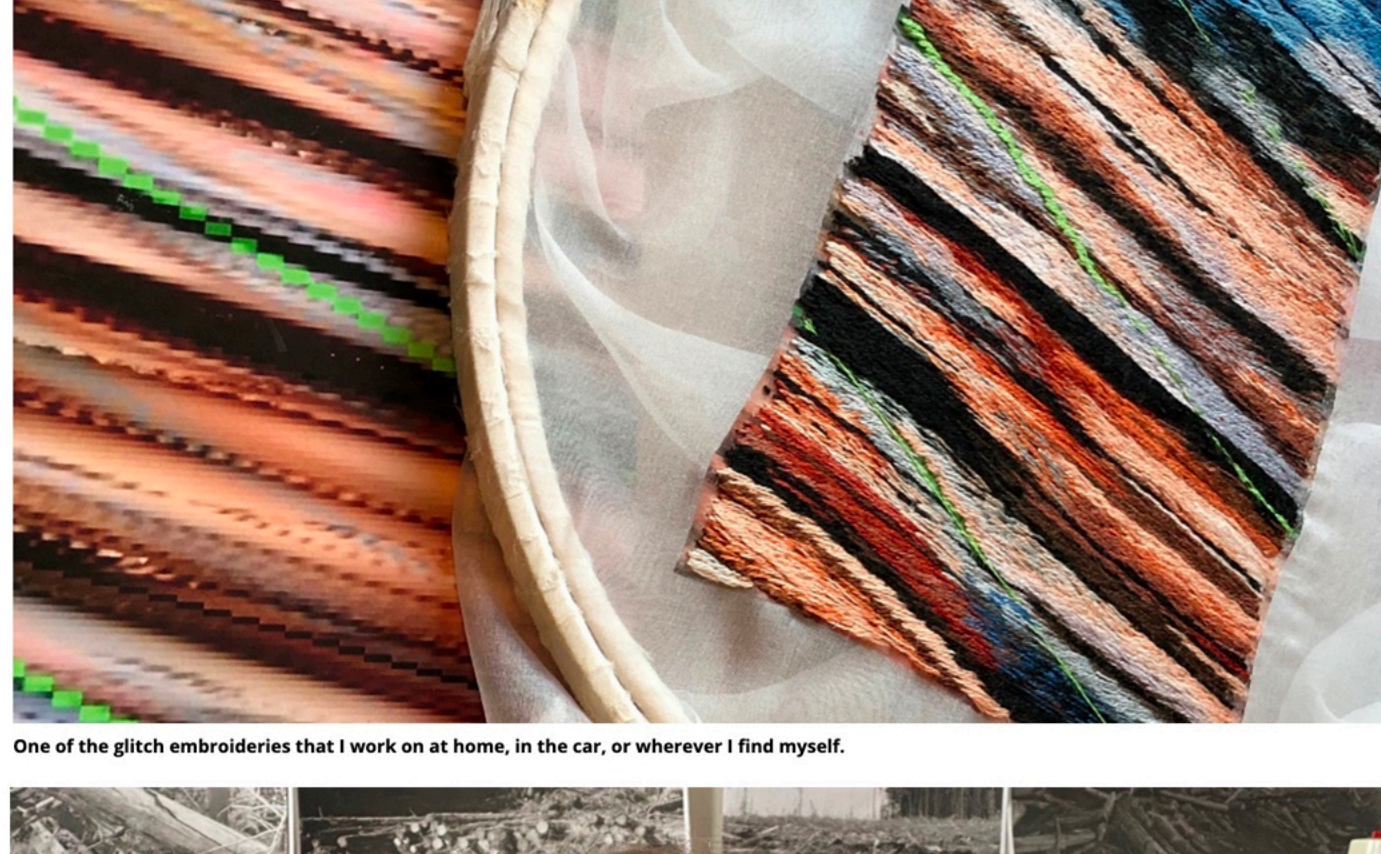
This is a still from a recent video installation, **Clear Cuts**, that began with cellphone footage shot by tree planters including my daughter. I stabilized the footage frame by frame and ended up incorporating the lines used to do so to suggest targeting, slicing or dragging. Audio by Eve Egoyan.



This series of ink drawings, **Slash and Burn**, are mainly based on stills from the Clear Cuts video installation. I've been mounting them on wood salvaged from Sheridan College's Furniture Design program. I'm also weaving paper scraps and using the drawings and the cover as wood salvaged to minimize my paper use.



This still is from a **recent series of videos** about one urban tree with audio for each video scored by a different musician/composer. This type of collaboration is an ongoing part of my practice that came out of a recognition that I've developed my vision far more than my hearing, probably, due to growing up with a father who was blind.



One of the glitch embroideries that I work on at home, in the car, or wherever I find myself.



Me, myself and I.

Which 'hood are you in?

I live in Seaton Village close to Christie Pits Park. I am lucky enough to be able to walk or ride my bike to my studio near Queen Street. I have an amazing view across Trinity Bellwoods Park towards downtown. Still, I sometimes need to remind myself to take a break and walk through the park or gaze out the window for more than just a glance and enjoy the view.

What do you do?

I work in a range of media but video installation is really the core of my practice. It allows me to consider the world through found footage. I can then incorporate these videos and create a spatial encounter that (hopefully) engages the mind and body of the viewer. After finishing a video installation, I often challenge myself to reconsider the ideas in a different medium. For example, after a recent project using cellphone footage shot by tree planters, I have been doing drawings of the images in walnut ink on watercolour paper. In all media, I work in a responsive, process-based way, letting the materials, found footage or site guide my curiosity. For the ink drawings I find them most successful when the image is transformed by the water-based media itself so a pile of wood looks like it is on fire despite clearly being made with water.

After many years at different universities and colleges, I now do mentoring for visual artists at www.mentorlylarye.com. In this role, I strive to help artists with creative and professional challenges. As visual artists, we don't just have to make the work but we also need to write about it, promote it, document it and archive it. We have the challenges of affording materials, tools, working space, shipping and often storage. It is a difficult gig that requires all of one's creativity in every arena. After 3 decades at it I now feel I have some insights to offer other artists.

What are you currently working on?

Currently, I am gearing up to begin learning Blender, a 3D computer graphics software, with the goal of integrating this into my next video installation. I have been doing research on trees and all the complex and interwoven ways they live, communicate, nurture and defend themselves. This next project is focused on modelling virtual trees to generate shadows that can be projected across landscapes from cellphone video footage. I am also working on mounting the Slash and Burn drawings for an upcoming exhibition at General Hardware Contemporary (date TBA). And, I always have a side, home project on the go as well. Currently, it is a series of images of digital glitches I am embroidering with hand. I like to mix it up to stay stimulated and amazingly, the ideas that drive the projects all overlap and interweave even if they initially sound so disparate.

Where can we find your work?

My [website](#) has a full archive of my practice and I am represented by [General Hardware Contemporary](#) in Toronto. My mentoring activities can be found [here](#).