

Third Movement

Counter Gravity and Geophysics of Race

Claudia Huenchuleo Paquien 2022

San Francisco State University/ Fine Arts Gallery

What allows whiteness to levitate as a metaphysical
and geophysical force? –Kathryn Yusoff

I created the third movement inspired by the critical work of geographer Kathryn Yusoff, who states that “white” geology is the science that grounded race in the material world. As the science that studies the physical processes and phenomena of earth and the environment, geology and particularly geophysics created infrastructures of materiality, forms of mining and psychic conditions of extraction that reordered social spaces. Under colonial standards, geology renders human subjectivities as inhuman matter.

This means that the idea of Blackness and the displacement and eradication of indigenous people get caught and defined in the ontological wake of geology. The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction, which is to say that the categorization of matter is a spatial execution of place, land, and person cut from relation through geographic displacement (and relocation through forced settlement and transatlantic slavery). That is, racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert. Extractable matter must be both passive (awaiting extraction and possessing of properties) and able to be activated through the mastery of white men.¹

¹ Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocene or None*, 2.

The dynamics of geologic life have been assimilated into distinct geographical zones, locating whiteness in elevated higher grounds in association with the plateau, and blackness and indigeneity located in associations with the underground. Whiteness with its elevation to the superior or higher register imposes a kind of antigravity. In the collective imaginary, reinforced by the media, racialized bodies are pulled down by the force of gravity, laying on or under the ground, dead and murdered, as reasonable acts sanctioned by the State. Gravity, as a set of forces that imposes hierarchies in the metaphysical earth and reflected in the current politics of earth, defines the social conditions of falling and counter-gravity in resistance.

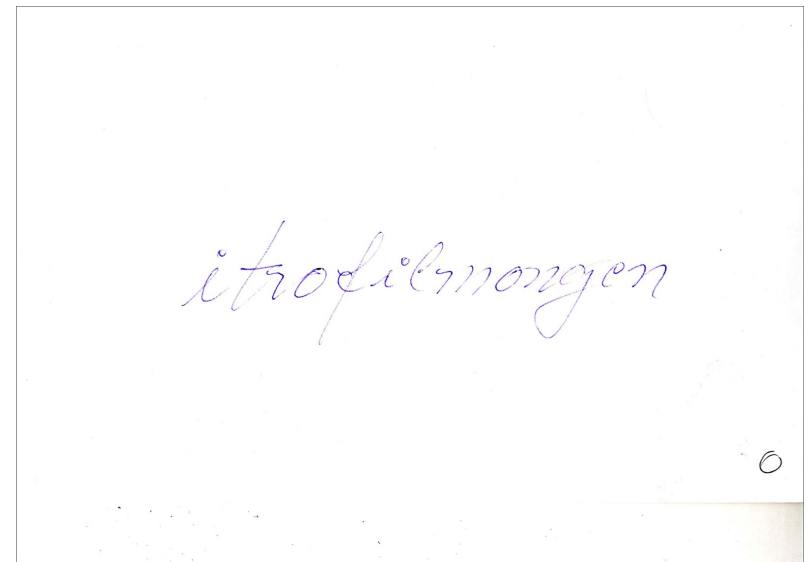
These ideas echo my criticism of current politics in relation to visual representations that romanticize indigenous bodies in a special intimacy with the earth without recognition of their condition as political subjects and sovereignty.

Reflecting on Yusoff's questioning of what conditions allows whiteness to levitate as a metaphysical and geophysical force, I made *Indissoluble Geographies*, and *In Defiance of Gravity, They Rise* to consider new narratives for indigenous subjectivities and geocoded bodies.



INDISSOLUBLE GEOGRAPHIES

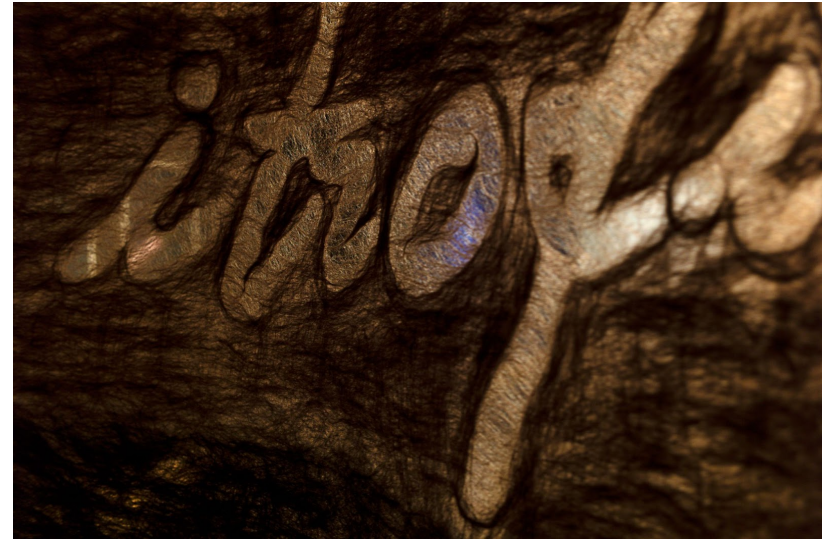
Made of alpaca hair, the work is sustained and pulled from the ceiling by strings of horse hair. It looks like it floats in the air. The felt like-paper structure has a light body. Its brown tones layers talk about the strata. Embedded in the body of the cloth, there is a Mapuche word: *itrofilmongen*, with my father's handwriting. A hand that carries a history of violence and dispossession, and a hand that opens the doors for me to look into the history from which I was removed.



Original piece of paper with my father's handwriting.

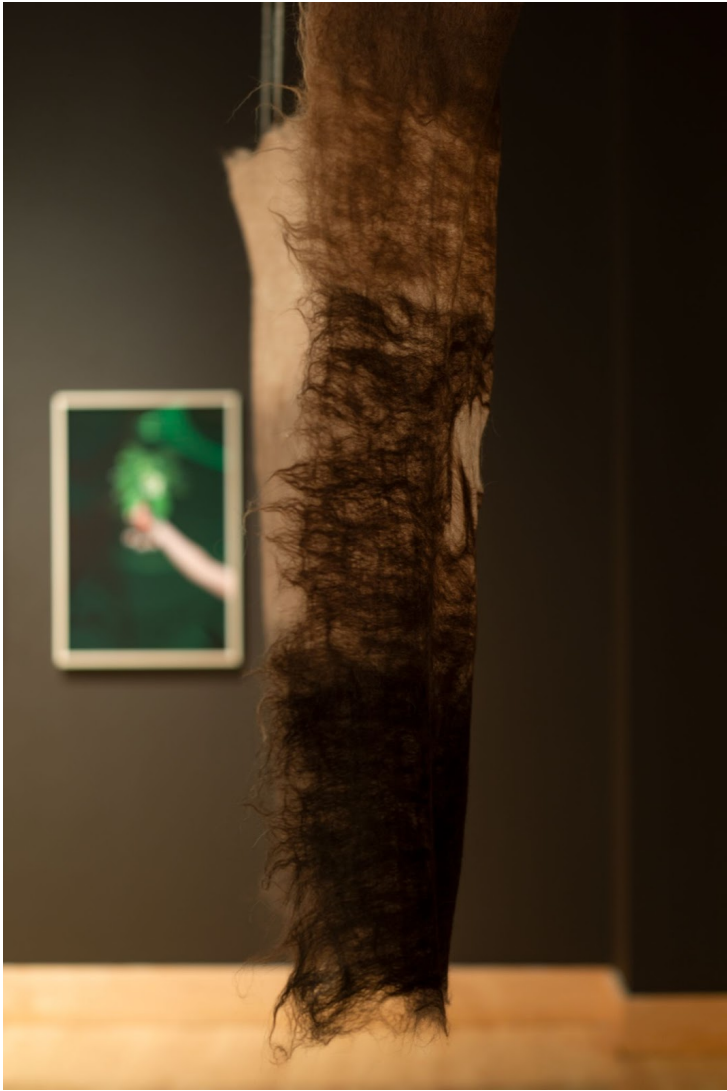


The principle of *itrofilmongen* communicates about life in all kinds of geomorphological forms. It is an integrative, totalizing, and relational discourse of the elements that make up the world of Mapuche life. A principle that is incompatible with settler and neoliberal policies of land productivity and grammars of extraction.



Indissoluble Geographies does not rest on the floor as layers of rocks and minerals in the ground, rather it elevates to the horizontal viewer's plane in an exercise of counter-gravity.

Made through a strenuous process of layering the wool, mixing, and bonding fibers through hours of rubbing using soap and water, the piece speaks to these indissoluble, indigenous and settler worldviews coexisting in different places, planes and geographies.



IN DEFIANCE OF GRAVITY, THEY RISE



Indissoluble Geographies, alpaca wool, horse hair, my father's handwriting, 103" x 90" (Dimensions variable), Fine Arts Gallery, San Francisco State University, 2022



A QR code for geocoded bodies.

(To be experienced in Adobe Aero app.)

If decolonization is a process of taking apart colonial structures, I find it compelling to enact insurgent acts, movements or gestures to counter gravity as a force that pulls bodies down. Inspired by Tina M. Camp's ways of visualizing Black struggles and transcendence as the "capacity to defy the deadly gravitational pull of white supremacy," I created *In defiance of Gravity, They Rise* to commemorate the many indigenous leaders and activists murdered by the State.²

In defiance of Gravity, They Rise, derived from my previous work: *Sin Cuenta Hojas de Canelo (Uncounted Foye Tree leaves)*, made in 2019, two years after the murder of Macarena Valdes, a woman who opposed the construction of an Austrian power plant in Mapuche territory. *Sin Cuenta Hojas de Canelo* displays foye leaves made in ceramic painted in red as a gesture to honor the memory of dead activists who resisted ancestral land usurpation.



Sin Cuenta Hojas de Canelo, rope, metallic embroidery thread, sheep wool dyed with plant pigment and clay, dimensions variable, 2019

I recreated *Sin Cuenta Hojas de Canelo* in another work, *Invisible Forces*, an installation where I also worked with the leaf metaphor using paper.



Invisible Forces, burned and gold leaf encrusted tangled ropes, paper and wire leaves, kultrun (Mapuche drum), dimensions variable, 2019

In defiance of Gravity, They Rise is an augmented reality project that I made in 2022 using 3D scanned leaves from the foye tree (*Drimys Winteri*) collected at the San Francisco Botanical Garden. I did the collection and material digital registration, and created the interactive experience. I worked in collaboration with artist Jeffrey Yip, co-founder of the social justice collective Macrowaves, who built the augmented experience in the Adobe Aero application.

² Camp, *A Black Gaze*, 47.

The choreography does not replicate the natural flow of leaves falling from a tree. Instead, the virtual leaves move in circular motion around and above the viewer. The leaves are blue, a color that is a signifier of Mapuche cultural identity. I choose to present the leaves in augmented reality because of the potential for accessibility and to bring the foye leaves into a contemporary cycle of techno futurism art.



In defiance of Gravity, They Rise, 2022, augmented reality (stills made with Adobe Aero),
Experience built by Jeffrey Yip

*Blue leaves of power and memory,
incorporeal presences.*

*They crossed the threshold between life and death.
Their corporeal bodies once gathered around a communal tree.*

They breathed for the whole and lived to nurture their home.

*Violently removed from the flux of life, unburied, they float among us in
a circular choreography, a ritual of exorcism.*
