

**Incredible Phenomena Will Occur: boundary layers and boundary objects in
*Atmospheric Shifts and *(s)twerH***

McIntosh Gallery, Western University

January 16 – May 16, 2026



David Spriggs, *Aeturnum*, 2025, acrylic, acrylic paint on layered acrylic sheets, LED light box.

Incredible phenomena will occur. Such is the final descriptor in the list of catastrophic effects of an EF5 Tornado, the most severe category on the Enhanced Fujita Scale used to measure these weather events. It might also describe the profound and unexpected results of bringing artists and scientists together over shared concerns for the current climate crisis. Although these disciplines consider similar issues, they do so from different perspectives and ask different questions that mutually complicate their respective areas of investigation. Scientists and engineers are often credited with engaging in research tasked with solving the problems that humanity has created, but artists cast a critical eye on their progress. Collectively, pragmatic, social, and kinship-based viewpoints lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of global environmental issues and initiate conversations about how we might move towards the betterment of the planet.

Philosopher Timothy Morton describes climate change as a *hyperobject*—an entity that is so massively dispersed across time and space that we are incapable of truly comprehending it. While we can imagine ourselves in relation to the recent past, the here and now, and the near future, it is more challenging to understand the role we play in a trajectory that spans from the ancient past to thousands of years in the future. Our individual actions may not have any statistical impact on the environment but, over time, the collective behaviour of the seven billion humans who inhabit the Earth has brought us to the reality that defines the present moment. Our complicity in this particular planetary change—this atmospheric shift—which has been unfolding over millennia is seemingly ungraspable, yet we are increasingly forced to reckon with it.

Humans have been aware of enormous entities—some real, some imagined—for as long as they have existed. But...there is something quite special about the recently discovered entities such as climate. These entities cause us to reflect on our very place on Earth and in the cosmos. Perhaps this is the most fundamental issue—hyperobjects seem to force something on us, something that affects some core idea of what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is. ¹

While the impulse to understand global climate drives several branches of scientific research, artists are equally concerned with the environmental and social effects of the current climate crisis. Recognizing that these concerns cross disciplines, the exhibitions *Atmospheric Shifts* and **(s)twerH* aim to highlight these shared areas of investigation. The project began with an invitation to four artists, Wally Dion, Lisa Hirmer, Andrew Maize and David Spriggs, to meet with the research team at the Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory² in the Faculty of Engineering at Western University in London, Ontario. The engineers shared their findings with enthusiasm and generosity with the understanding that the artists would create new works in response to what they heard or, in Maize's case, build on an existing project over the course of a four-week residency in the gallery.

To further underscore the mutual concern for the environment between artists and engineers, material culture generated by the Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory's research is exhibited in conversation not only with the new artworks created by Dion, Hirmer, and Spriggs, but also with works drawn from McIntosh Gallery's permanent collection and works borrowed from Museum London and the Royal Bank of Canada. Sustained observation of weather conditions and their effect on the landscape is captured in a salon hang that relies on visual analogies across several media. Drone photographs of

¹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 15.

² The Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory currently comprises three smaller research groups: The Northern Tornado Project, The Northern Hail Project, and the Northern Mesonet Project.

tornado damage to Canadian landscapes, derived from the Northern Tornado Project's field research, is echoed in landscape paintings and other weather-related images. Paterson Ewen's *Tornado #2* (1989) is echoed in a photograph of a tornado recorded in Lodgepole, Alberta. *Eco-Pulse* (1995), Roly Fenwick's study of a dense scrub of weather-beaten and denuded evergreens is reflected in an image of tornado-flattened trees in Oliver Lake, Ontario. In Fenwick's *Sliding Edges* (1989), the roofs of agricultural buildings are overshadowed by looming clouds signalling impending strong weather. Similarly, an image of barn roofs is captured moments before their destruction by a dark, violent, and especially fierce rapidly approaching tornado. Recorded in Didsbury, Alberta in 2023, it remains one of Canada's few recorded occurrences of an EF5 tornado³.



Hailstones, 3D printed with PETG (Polyethylene Terephthalate Glycol) filament at the Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory, Western University

A cluster of 3D printed hailstones, reproduced from scans of specimens collected by the Northern Hail Project researchers, are simultaneously beautiful and menacing. Printed using a translucent filament, these shimmering objects with their various lumps and

³ Tornadoes are measured on a scale of 0 to 5 on the Enhanced Fujita (EF) Scale. EF5 tornadoes are characterized as having estimated wind speeds of 315 km/h or more, and incurring damage including houses leveled and swept from their foundations, automobile-sized missiles flying through the air in excess of 100 m, and high-rise buildings having significant structural damage. Incredible phenomena will occur.

protuberances, are sculptural and beautiful, but their arresting size reminds us of their potential to cause damage to life and property.

The recontextualization of the drone photographs and printed hailstones from the research lab to the art gallery initiates a shift in meaning. The primary original function of these objects is to record environmental data – the photographs document a tornado’s impact on land and constructed property, and the hailstones provide measurements of the severity of hailstorms, respectively. Yet, when moved into the gallery they serve a dual purpose, becoming both scientific and aesthetic objects. The drone photographs also portray iconic Canadian landscapes with farmland subdivided into fields of agricultural crops, grain elevators, and evergreen forests. The printed hailstones are enchanting small-scale sculptures. These objects are engaging because they have the capacity of to move from one discipline to another and carry multiple meanings. They are what Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer refer to as boundary objects – objects that inhabit “several intersecting social worlds”⁴ and are “adaptable to different viewpoints and robust enough to maintain identify across them.”⁵ Placing such objects within the space of the gallery creates new potential readings into their meanings and forges connections with new audiences. Objects in museums and art galleries are uniquely situated to provide a path for public engagement with challenging issues such as climate change. As boundary objects, “They sit in the space between multiple domains, providing bridges, connections, and translations that allow both perspectives to understand the other more fully.”⁶ By moving material culture generated by the research of the Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory into a public gallery space, it is presented to the public in a new light, encouraging personal connections and initiating conversations that might not otherwise occur due to disciplinary divisions.

Images of tornado damage and 3D printed hailstones are further shifted towards new interpretations by their juxtaposition with the new works of art created for *Atmospheric Shifts*. The shimmering, diaphanous quilts at the heart of Wally Dion’s mixed media installation *Wind Dancers* (2026) are both set piece and costume for a performance that took place at Western’s WindEEE Dome Research Institute. The WindEEE Dome is an internationally renowned research facility in Western University’s Faculty of Engineering where the effects of severe wind conditions can be tested on scale landscapes and man-made structures through simulated tornadoes and downbursts. In this instance, the

⁴ Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkely’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39.” *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (August 1989), 393.

⁵ Star and Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology,” 387

⁶ See Sarah Sutton, *The Arts and Humanities on Environmental Climate Change: Broadening Approaches to Research and Public Engagement* (London: Routledge 2022), 66.

WindEEE Dome itself becomes a boundary object: an engineering research facility is transformed into a theatrical set, a black rotunda, where Indigenous dancers manipulate shimmering textile quilts in an invisible vortex. Dion frequently documents his quilts outdoors, carried by the wind, yet here the work is not only situated indoors, but within an engineering facility that uses technology to understand natural phenomena.



Wally Dion, *Wind Dancers*, 2026, filmed at WindEEE Dome, Western University.

Situating *Wind Dancers* within such a technologically-driven facility highlights the tension between storytelling, mythology, and scientific research. A member of Yellow Quill First Nation, Dion grew up in Saskatchewan, where the occurrence of tornadoes influenced his life and infiltrated his dreams.

When I was younger, I used to dream of the tornado; a living creature. For me, the tornado was full of dread; sentient, but not necessarily maleficent. In my dreams, the tornado would always appear in urban areas, catching me totally by surprise; ripping entire neighborhoods apart but, at the same time, seeming to move in total silence as if its' gravity were pulling in all sound around it like a localized black hole

in the sky. With lightning bolts whipping out of its black mass I would run & hide from it as though the entire experience were a horrible test of courage.⁷

During the performance, each of the four dancers approaches the centre of the “stage”, allowing the currents to carry the quilts into a perfect vortex, a quadruple helix to borrow Dion’s term, giving form to the invisible tornado. Dion reimagines the four witches of Oz, spinning a tornado into existence. Like the witches of Oz (the wicked witches of the East and West, and the good witches of the North and South) Dion aligns his witches with the four cardinal directions, representing not only the destructive power of the tornado but also the potential for renewal and growth.



Atmospheric Shifts, 2026, installation, McIntosh Gallery.

David Spriggs *Aeternum* (2025) is swirl of white pigment, sprayed onto layers of transparent acrylic. Spriggs’ technique creates an image that embodies the tension between form and formlessness. Like weather systems, it conveys power and momentum, despite its lack of solidity. White clouds spiral around a transparent central point, the proverbial eye of the storm or “stadium effect”, holding violent movement in equilibrium with stillness and calm. As Spriggs describes the work,

⁷ Correspondence with the artist, September 3, 2025

An atmospheric vortex appears within a transparent space, its form revealed through the alignment of eleven painted layers. Guided by the golden ratio, its geometry echoes the forces that shape weather systems, tides, and celestial motion. At its center lies a circular void, charged with the momentum of all that turns around it. *Aeternum* reflects the endless continuity of natural systems, where energy and form transform without cease. Like the eye of a storm, it holds a fragile equilibrium of a balance between form and chaos. Here, the circle exists through motion, sustained in an eternal state.⁸

The image immediately suggests a now-familiar aerial view of a storm system captured through satellite imaging, a contemporary way of experiencing weather. Throughout history, we have turned to the tools at hand to understand nature, from microscopic to macroscopic levels. The invention of the microscope, for example, allowed us to see things that were previously unobservable to the human eye and now satellites allow us to view the planet at any magnification.

Our environment is so frequently mediated, measured, and described by available technologies that they have the potential to shape how we understand and experience the natural world, separating humanity from an embodied relationship with its surroundings. Donna Haraway argues that environmental issues cannot be positioned as technical problems to be solved through scientific study because it perpetuates the notion of human dominance and the drive to assert control over the non-human world. Rather she argues for a more collaborative approach to nature. Environmental problems are not to be treated as something to be fixed, but rather to be approached in the spirit of kinship and interconnectedness.⁹ It is also worth noting, however, that Haraway does not oppose scientists and scientific research, rather asserts that “it remains important to embrace situated technical projects and their people.”¹⁰

Lisa Hirmer embraces the importance of kinship in how we live in the world. An extension of her earlier work *We Are Atmosphere* (2020-2022), Hirmer’s *Atmospheric Beings* (2025) challenges the primacy of our relationship with the surface of the earth and asserts that we are not merely “Earthbound”, to use Haraway’s term. Although human history is often described in terms of our terrestrial existence on the surface of the earth, we are, in fact, atmospheric beings. The atmosphere has evolved over millennia, and humans have

⁸ Correspondence with the artist, August 8, 2025

⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2026), 3-4.

¹⁰ Haraway, 3.

evolved along within it—everything we do and have done has impacted on the atmosphere. As Hirmer says, “We move across the planet’s surface but live *in* the atmosphere.”¹¹



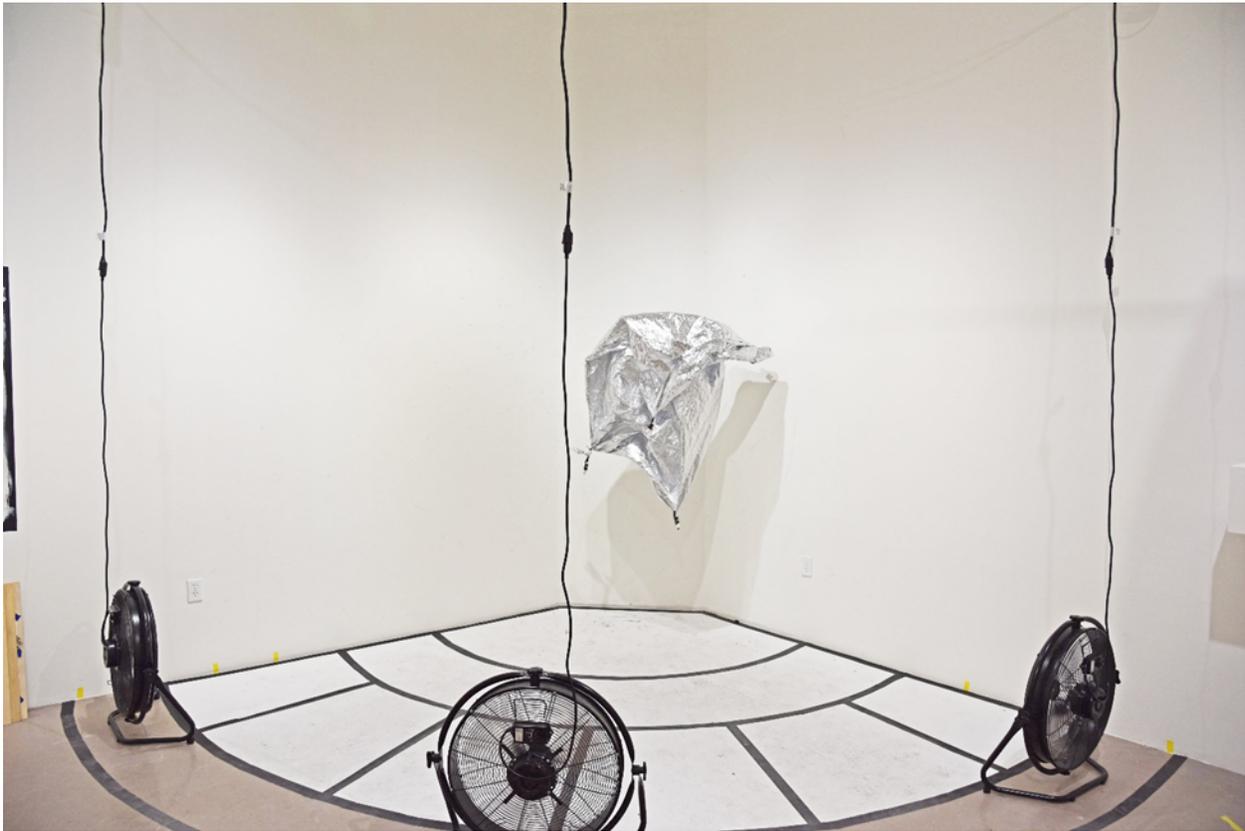
Lisa Hirmer, *Atmospheric Beings*, 2025, photographs on aluminum.

Hirmer is intrigued by the poetic potential of the atmospheric or planetary boundary layer—the lowest level of the atmosphere which is influenced by its contact with the Earth’s surface. Characterized by turbulent mixing, it is here that heat, moisture, and pollutants are dispersed. It is the place where human activity has the greatest potential for enduring negative impact. Hirmer’s coloured clouds intermix and disperse, reminding us that our actions—and inactions—have consequences that transcend geopolitical borders. The atmosphere is not subject to such socially constructed delineations, and the collective industrial activity of the earth’s human inhabitants will affect the entire planet. “As a place of unbounded, unending exchange, the atmosphere puts us into relationship with everything.”¹²

¹¹ Lisa Hirmer, “Everything We Have Done is Weather Now”, *Public 70: The Weather*, ed. Joel Ong, (Toronto: Goldfarb Centre for the Arts, York University), 54.

¹² Ibid.

Andrew Maize's installation **(s)twerH*¹³ continues his ongoing research project with its genesis in his MFA thesis exhibition at the University of Guelph. Inspired by the work of climate scientists on the complexity of turbulence and the increased prevalence of severe storms, Maize explores potential common ground between scientific and artistic research. He considers how research methodologies from different disciplines might complement one another and lead to a more nuanced understanding of our relationship with the Earth's forces. With an art practice rooted in playful experimentation, Maize wonders what we might learn if, instead of relying on what can be predicted, we accept the chaotic and the unpredictable.



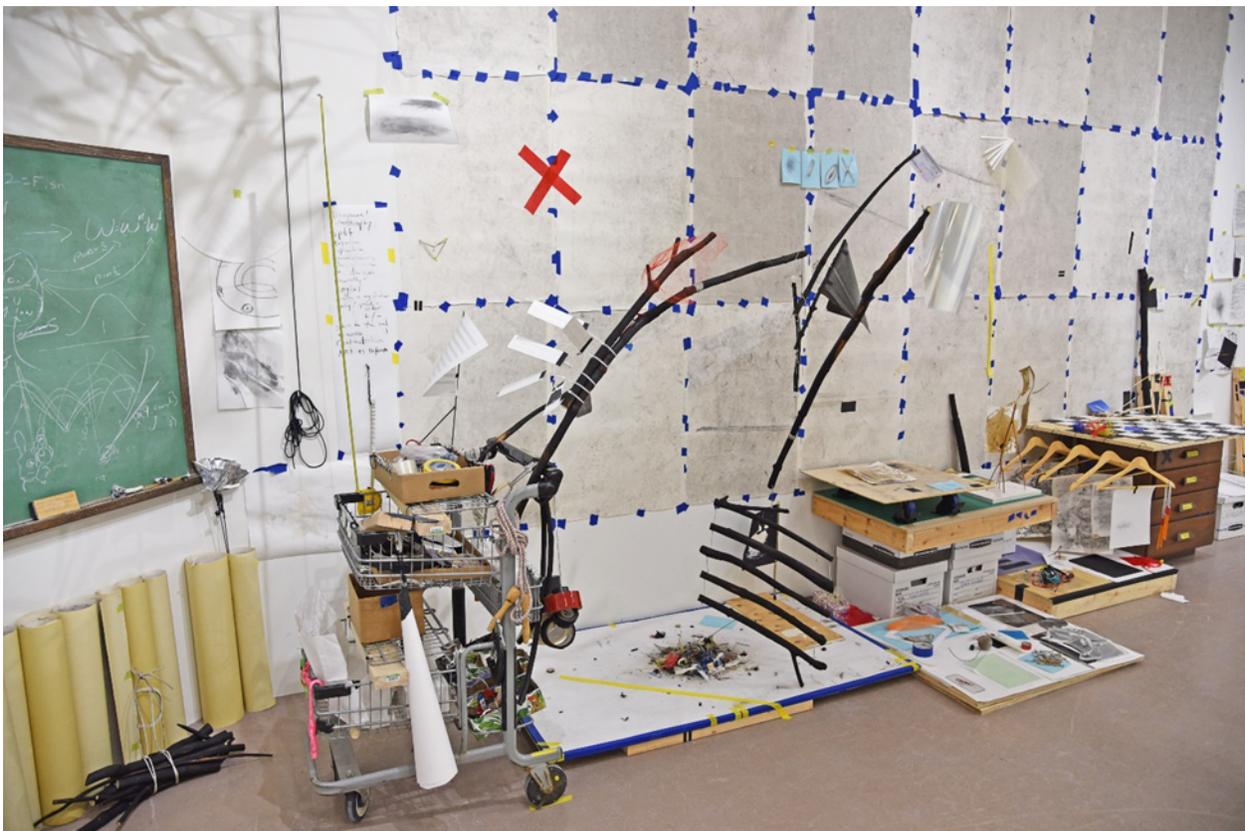
Andrew Maize, **(s)twerH*, 2026, installation, McIntosh Gallery.

For this iteration of **(s)twerH*, Maize worked in residence at McIntosh Gallery for a period of five weeks. The gallery was transformed into an interactive hybrid space that was equal parts studio, laboratory, and exhibition venue. Maize worked through the uneasy relationship created by maintaining his art practice while on public view, always attempting

¹³ The term **(s)twerH* is derived from a hypothetical proto-Indo-European word meaning “rotate, swirl, twirl, move around.” It is the speculative root of many words, including disturb, turbulence, tumult, turmoil, turbine, and storm.

to work productively but at the same time obliged to interact with visitors, infusing his practice with a performative quality.

The installation is built around a “wind dome” created by positioning three industrial fans in the corner of the room. When activated, the air currents create a closed system capable of holding aloft a series of mylar emergency blankets, each altered through the attachment of variously weighted objects to the corners. The effect is mesmerizing. The blankets, with their four appendages possess an anthropomorphic quality as they twist and dance with varying levels of success. One cannot help but feel a certain amount of empathy for some of the blankets as they struggle and sag, flailing pathetically, while others soar and dance effortlessly.



Andrew Maize, *(s)twrH*, 2026, installation, McIntosh Gallery.

Over the course of five weeks, the space became an increasingly chaotic testament to Maize’s practice, as elements were constructed, de-constructed, and reconfigured daily. At the end of the residency, Maize created a final reconfiguration as a document of the work that had occurred. One element of the installation that took on a life of its own after Maize’s departure was a chalkboard located in one corner of the gallery. Rescued from another building on campus, the chalkboard was already marked with the arcs, waves, and vectors of someone else’s research. With Maize absent from the space, visitors began to

insert small interventions including, notably, a drawing of the white rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, pointing to its pocket watch—an unexpectedly prescient reminder that time is running out to change the environmental trajectory that humankind has set in motion.