



Kim Morgan: Dust Disruptors

CURATED BY SUSAN GIBSON GARVEY | DALHOUSIE ART GALLERY

KIM MORGAN: DUST DISRUPTORS

Susan Gibson Garvey | curator/conceptual collaborator

Dust Disruptors is an ongoing, open-ended performative project by interdisciplinary artist Kim Morgan. It involves a series of mobile inflatable objects constructed out of very light fabric printed with enlarged scanning electron microscope (SEM) images. The images are derived from dust and ash samples taken from human bodies and their immediate environment. In *Dust Disruptors*, Morgan continues her preoccupation with the body's materiality, from its tiniest structures to its farthest-reaching entanglements in the stuff of the universe.

“Dust” is a broad term evoking many resonances, from the imaginative and astronomical (stardust, dark matter, interstellar dust) through the droll (dust bunnies, belly button lint) to the abject (dirt, disease). It offers metaphors for the passage of time (accumulation), for confusion (dust storms, fog), and obstruction (blocking the smooth operation of machinery, or the passage of breath in human lungs); and for the cycle of life: “ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

At between 1,000 and 12,000 times magnification, SEM images of body dust reveal a fascinating world of matter, both fibrous and granular, including hair, dirt, skin flakes, fabric fibers, and parts of insects. From these scans, Morgan selects images to be enlarged and printed onto non-breathable fabric “skins” from which the three-dimensional forms of the *Dust Disruptors* are constructed. The forms are then inflated and activated by air (fans, wind), helium, and human interaction.

Starting in September 2021 and continuing intermittently to Summer 2022, the *Dust Disruptors* are being workshopped and recorded in various interventions around the campus of Dalhousie University. One might encounter them rolling around like a giant beach ball, as in the *Dust Ball (belly button)* intervention, or rising in front of you and collapsing (like the “tube guys” on used car lots, which inspired the *Stray Hair* inflatable); they may temporarily disrupt a path, block an entrance, or simply float gracefully aloft. Inevitably,



Dust Ball (belly button) intervention on Dalhousie University campus, 2021
Participants: Noah Kay, Kiara Glover, Vishnu Priyan. Photo: Susan Gibson Garvey

given their source in bodily matter, these objects can both attract and repel, eliciting both playfulness and disgust. Equally, they offer an occasion for wonder, and ways to explore conflicting feelings about our personal and collective vulnerabilities.

Dust Ball (belly button)

ink on Silpoly fabric, 2021

mobile inflated sphere, approximately 6' 6" (198 cms) diameter

SEM image: lint from human navel magnified 1,000 times

The oversize *Dust Ball (belly button)* was workshopped in September and October 2021, first inside the public spaces of the Dalhousie Arts Centre where its large scale barely squeezes through stairwells and passage-ways as it engages with the modernist architecture; then outdoors on the quadrangle in front of the University's Administration building, where it is light and playful, yet barely controlled by the three participants who roll it around and throw it high into the air. The occasionally burlesque quality of the *Dust Ball's* interactions is balanced by a more disquieting impression that it might escape and cause real mayhem.



top and opposite: *Dust Ball (belly button)* intervention, Dalhousie Arts Centre, 2021
video still (top): Jessica Winton; photo (opposite): Camille-Zoe Valcourt-Synott



Stray Hair

ink on Silpoly fabric, electric fan, 2021

mobile inflatable, about 12 feet high x 10 inches diameter (366 x 25 cms)

SEM image: hair fragment found in body dust magnified 2,000 times

Stray Hair made its public debut on the grassy median of University Avenue during Halifax's Nocturne festival (October 2021) where passers-by answered its invitation to play and dance with it (despite the uneasy notion of a "stray" hair being associated with something out of place - found in one's soup, perhaps, or irritating one's eye). However, when spotlighted and workshopped in the enclosed white space of the Art Gallery, *Stray Hair* takes on a stranger aspect, its frayed ends resembling a duster attached to a vacuum hose, bashing against its own shadow on the wall. It becomes a tautology: a dust-derived image frantically dusting itself.



top: interacting with *Stray Hair* during Nocturne festival, 2021. Photo: Bruce Anderson
opposite: detail of SEM image of hair fragment





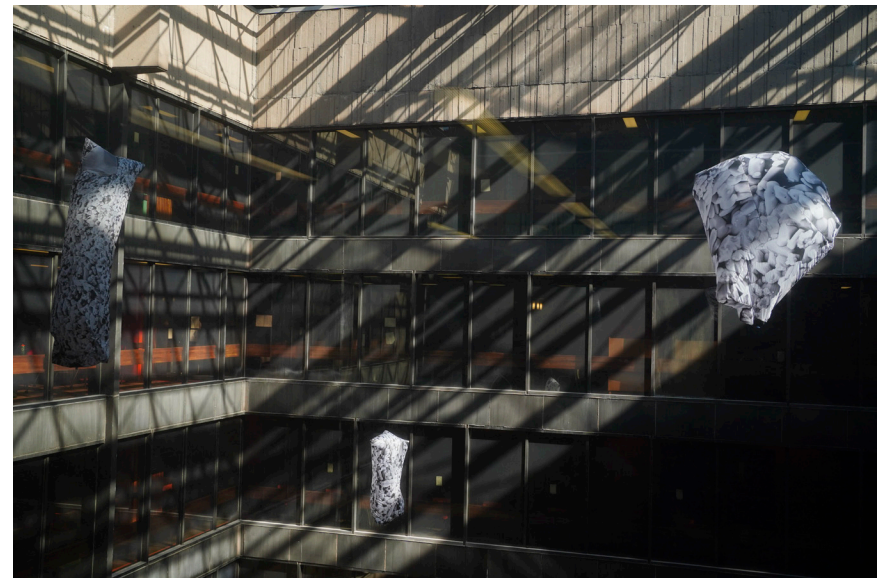
My Mother's Ashes

ink on Silpoly membrane, helium, 2021

three irregular mobile inflatables, longest dimension: 5' 4" (163 cms)

SEM image: human ashes magnified between 8,000 and 12,000 times

These inflatables are derived from SEM scans of a pinch of the artist's mother's ashes. Constructed to resemble three irregular ash granules found in the scans, they are printed overall with images of the ashes at different magnitudes. When inflated, the sharp edges of the "granules" are softened and rounded, like pillows or plush toys. Although different in shape, each form's longest dimension is 5'4" — an homage to the artist's mother, Grace, who was 5'4" in height. Grace was a scientist and scholar, who spent much of her time in university libraries. *My Mother's Ashes* was presented as a pop-up intervention in the Killam Library Atrium in late February and early March 2022.



top: *My Mother's Ashes* intervention, Dalhousie's Killam Library, 2022. Photos: Bruce Anderson
opposite: detail of SEM image of human ashes

Flake

ink on Silpoly fabric, 2021-22

inflatable floor piece, interior programmed fans

about 11' x 3' (335 x 91 cms) x varying thickness

SEM image: human skin flake magnified 6,000 times

“...each of us is constantly enveloped in a haze of our own skin flakes.”*

The image for this complex work is created by digitally stitching together numerous scans of a microscopic skin flake. The printed fabric is then constructed into one large floor piece, to be animated by internal fans. The work is in process, and will make its public debut in a major solo exhibition of Morgan's work, titled *Blood and Breath, Skin and Dust*, to be presented by Dalhousie Art Gallery in September 2022.



top: *Flake* test, Dalhousie Art Gallery, 2021. Photo: Susan Gibson Garvey
below: SEM skin flake image construction by Felix Bernier



VIDEOS OF DUST DISRUPTORS IN ACTION

[Stray Hair in the Gallery](#)

[Dust Ball \(belly button\) Dalhousie Arts Centre](#)

[Dust Ball \(belly button\) Dalhousie Campus](#)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

[Kim Morgan](#) works in sculpture, multimedia installation, and public art. Her current work explores materiality and the body through interdisciplinary and sometimes collaborative methods of artmaking.

Morgan has participated in solo and group exhibitions internationally at Mass MoCA, North Adams, USA, John Michael Kohler Arts Centre, Sheboygan, USA, Cynthia Broan Gallery, NYC, USA, and St. Paul's Gallery, Auckland, NZ; in Canada at the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, and MSVU Art Gallery and Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax. Public Spaces commissions include: Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Photopolis festival of photography, Halifax, the Vancouver Olympics, and Regina Transit System. Artist Residencies include: Artpace San Antonio, Texas, Dalhousie Medical School, Halifax, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Florida, Optic Nerve Residency, Banff Centre for the Arts, and TR Labs, University of Regina. Morgan has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Arts Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan Arts, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. She received the Arts Nova Scotia Established Artist Recognition Award in 2017 and the Nova Scotia Masterworks Award in 2012.

Kim Morgan, B.Lit. (McGill), BFA (School of Visual Arts, NYC), MFA (University of Regina) is also a Professor at NSCAD University, Halifax, teaching sculpture, installation, and public art.

cover image: detail of SEM image of navel lint

REFERENCES

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Joseph A. Amato: *The Book of Dust, A History of the Small and the Invisible*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000

SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES

Pulverulence, The power of powder, by Steven Connor (literary and magical connections)
<https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/35/connor.php>

On our unique microbial cloud
<https://www.sciencealert.com/humans-can-be-identified-by-the-unique-microbial-cloud-that-surrounds-them>

How disgust explains everything, Molly Young, NYTimes Magazine, Dec 27 2021
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/27/magazine/disgust-science.html?smid=em-share>

In her song Woodstock, Joni Mitchell sang "We are stardust." Are we?
<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=are+we+stardust>

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