



When WE Return is a new online Art & Cultural platform which aims to become a bridge for ideas, to promote exchanges between diverse artistic communities from North and South America. This series is part of our “Artist in Isolation Experience”, WWR invites different artists to share their thoughts, open their studios and tell us what they are creating during lockdown and how they imagine the world will be like When WE Return.

Please meet Moira Ness!

**Moira Ness on her isolation experience and current project.**



Two months into the COVID-19 isolation I received news that my shared studio space, Northern Contemporary Studios, was being illegally evicted by our landlords.

*“The space I was looking forward to returning to after COVID-19 is now gone...”*

--- **Moira Ness**



*“How long can I manage to keep this strategy going?”*

---- **Moira Ness.**

The landlords informed us they had already changed the locks and were "allowing" us one week, within a restricted time each day, to retrieve our belongings.

The landlords blamed our studio managers for not paying April's rent. Our studio managers say they paid April's rent (without any discount or deferral help from our landlords, despite endless requests) and this eviction had arisen from an ongoing lease dispute. Just like that, 30 artists from the studio space had to scramble to move out during a pandemic.

No planning from the landlord to help us physically distance, no help with scheduling moving out, no communication when contacted with questions.

Construction had already begun, illegally (This was before the non-essential construction ban in Toronto was lifted), at the studio space and the rumour is that they are turning into a marijuana dispensary.

I had to dodge construction workers, contractors, and even my landlords, all of whom had no masks and made zero attempts at physical distancing. I couldn't believe how casually everyone was behaving, almost as if there was no pandemic occurring.

All for the pursuit of making a higher profit, with no regard to the individuals they were illegally displacing.



***“I couldn't believe how casually everyone  
was behaving,  
almost as if there was  
no pandemic occurring”  
---- Moira Ness***

The space I was looking forward to returning to after COVID-19 is now gone. With my art practice stalled, and my part-time employment dried up until travel resumes (I nanny and house/pet-sit) I am not sure when I will be able to afford a dedicated studio space again.

I've spent a lot of time during COVID-19 unsure of what the future looks like for emerging artists like myself.

With every in-person art exhibition/residency/fair cancelled at least until 2021 (and beyond?) can we, as artists, survive by just privately creating?

Artists thrive through public presentation of their work, and while well-intentioned, new online initiatives grow taxing to continually navigate and wade through. Conversations inspired by in-person viewing of art exhibitions form connections with new collectors and future opportunities.

People want to talk directly to the artist or the gallery behind the art, and this new COVID-19 and post-COVID -19 art world landscape severely limits these vital interactions. Instead, artists are turning inwards to their current collector base to help weather this COVID storm financially.

I've seen desperate pleas online for support offered discounts and two-for-one deals; all just so these artists can monetarily scrape by for another month.

I have an amazingly supportive group of collectors, but they can only provide so much, as the majority of them are understandably also being affected financially by COVID-19.

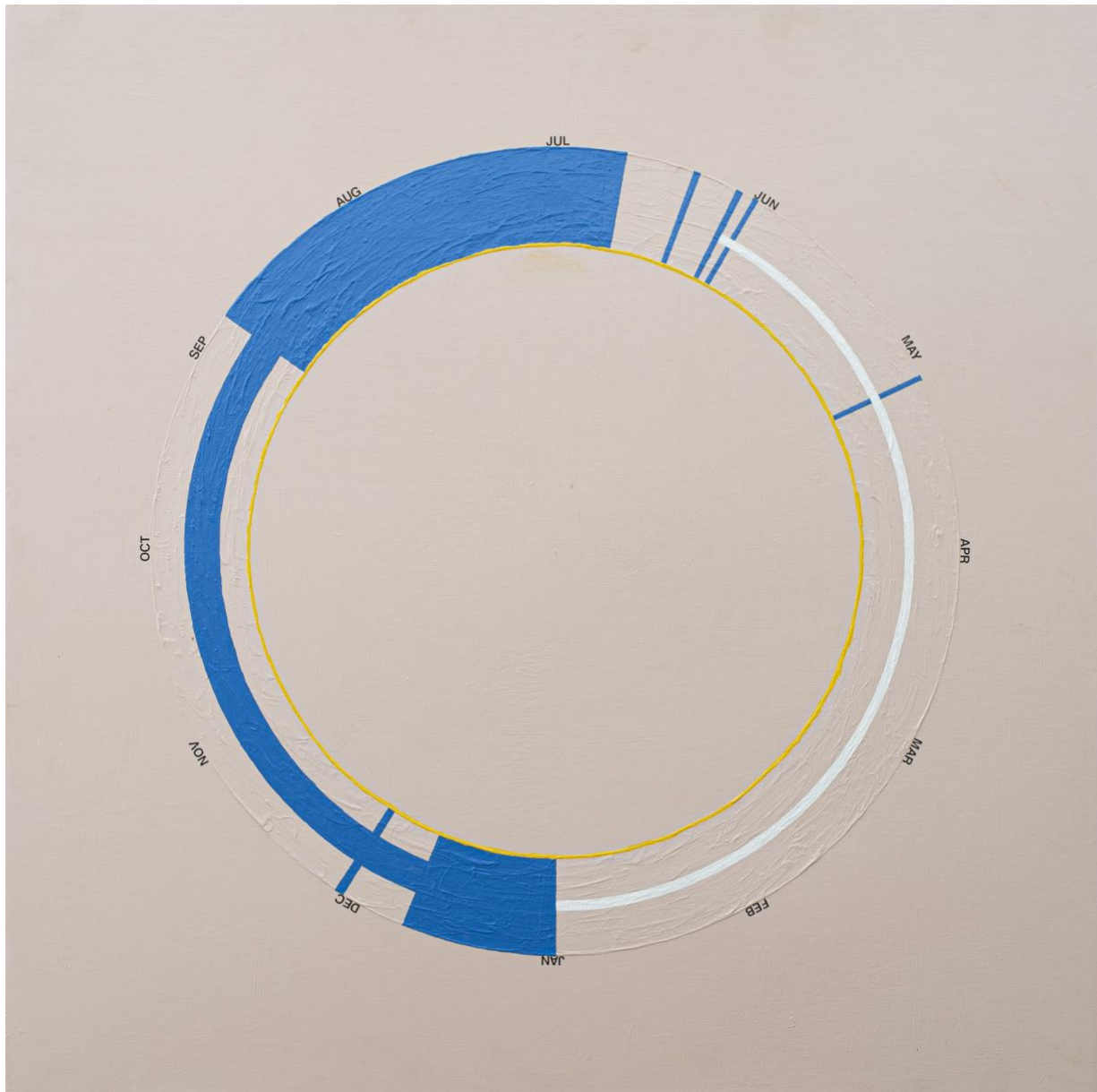
I have deferred payment for art sold recently to spread out my earnings in an attempt to guarantee funds each month for basic recurring bills and minimum debt interest payments. How long can I manage to keep this strategy going?

After moving out of my studio space, I set up a makeshift studio in my room. However, now that I am spending almost all my time inside during isolation, I am finding it difficult to separate my home life and my creative mind. I've gone for long walks, cleaned and decluttered my space, and even tried hanging more art on the walls to inspire me. Nothing seems to help organize my thoughts or fully ease them enough to be able to access my usual creative drive.

***“... tracing lines through  
my personal history.”***

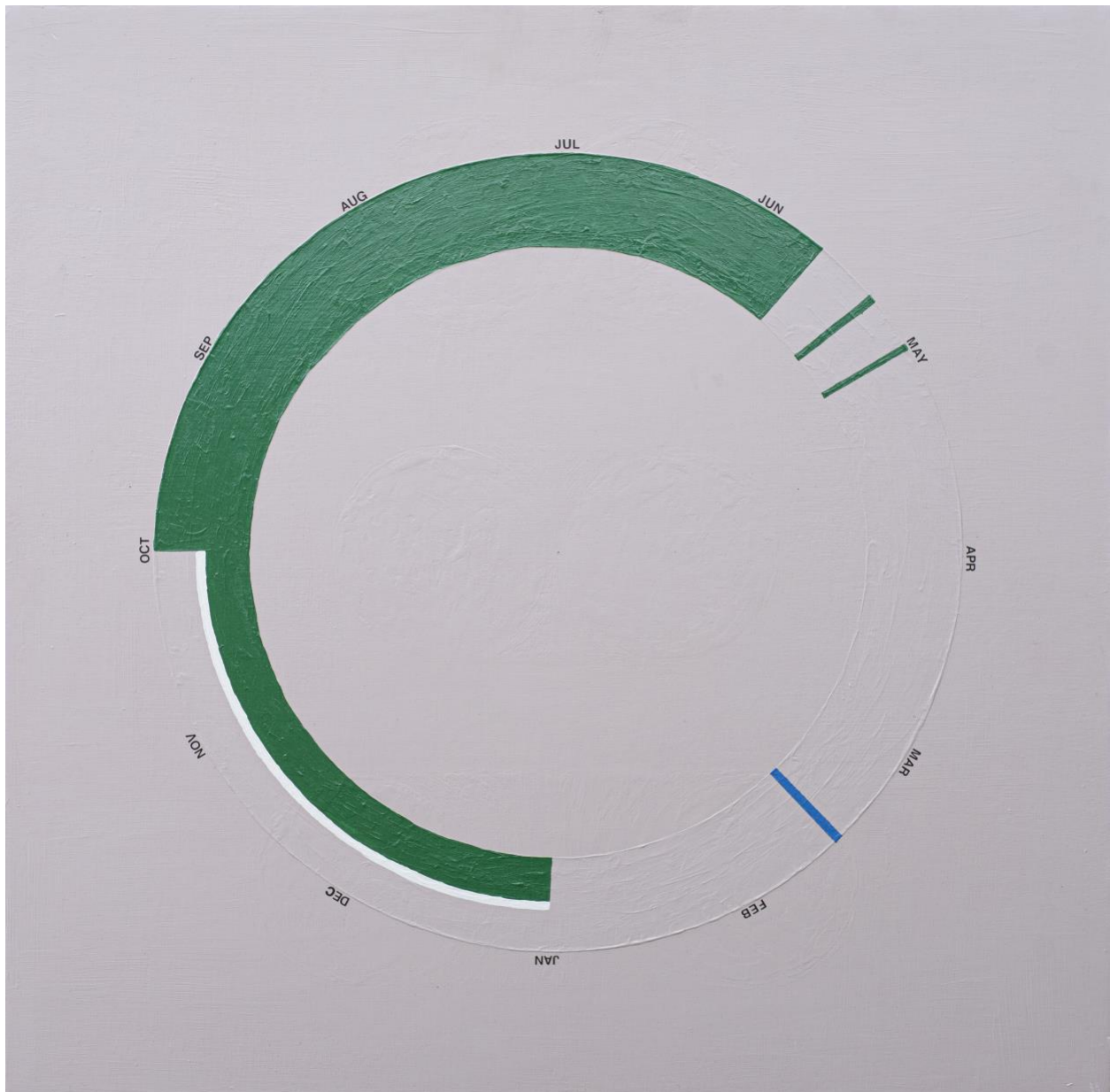
**-----Maira Ness**

Despite this period of lacking creativity, I am lucky enough to be working on an ongoing series that has already been planned out pre-COVID-19. This new series is concerned with archiving, pattern generation, and tracing lines through my personal history. I data-mine my collection of personal correspondences and connections to create confessional and romanticized visualized data on wood panels. I use a set of rules and graphic limitations.



*These coloured lines represent different relationships in my life*  
---- Moira Ness

The specific pieces I am working on now depict each year of my adult life on individual wood panels. On each panel there are single coloured lines painted upon a neutral outline of a circle. These coloured lines represent different relationships in my life and show when people enter and leave my timeline. Month by month, and then year by year, you can see different shifts in people's presence. I am currently working on the years 2006-2011, having already finished 2012-2019.



***“The drive to create will return”***  
**---- Moira Ness.**

The most interesting part of this series is how I have been actively planning the 2020 wood panel. As each month passes, I fill in another section of my sketchbook's mock-up for 2020. I can see how my relationships are changing during COVID-19, right before my eyes, based on my constant personal archiving. I keep in social media contact with many people, but my immediate in-person interactions have gone down to zero.

I take the rules/laws/restrictions of COVID-19 very seriously and firmly believe others should do the same. More recently I have started going on physical distancing walks with two friends, individually, but the rest of the people in my life will remain separate until this is "over". I've noted and recorded these happenings in my May and June (ongoing) entry to the 2020 mock-up.

Unfortunately, I have also noticed those of my friends who are not social and physically distancing. Their social media posts, and more specifically their Instagram stories, expose them for disregarding the rules and laws set in place by our Canadian government. Friday night dance and drinking parties and BBQs with multiple different households take place as if nothing in the world has been restricted in recent months.

I have witnessed my respect for them shift and I will not forget their selfishness and reckless behavior regarding the current pandemic.

These are all people I grew up with, went to Highschool with, dated, and loved. It is so disappointing each time I notice another friend post something problematic pandemic wise and I am unsure of how I will deal with these relationships moving forward.

This will be reflected in the coming months on the 2020 panel.

***“I am starting to view this COVID-19 time  
as a massive  
information gathering  
and  
archiving opportunity”.***  
**--- Moira Ness**

**..... In Isolation.... In My Home Studio..... About My Dreams:**

Something I also document in great detail is my dreams, even pre-COVID-19. I've found my dreamscapes have become increasingly vivid during this time, which has led to very curious entries into my dream journal.

These dream notes and musings have usually influenced larger ideas for future photography series, but I am finding a more immediate application by simply turning them into free verse poetry.

Planning and executing a whole photoshoot or working on a 60" x 60" panel isn't something I can currently manage, so this alternative works better with my current studio/creative predicament.

Maybe the poetry I am creating now will influence some future artwork for myself? I am starting to view this COVID-19 time as a massive information gathering and archiving opportunity.

When I get to a place where I can mentally process this newly collected archive of this current time, I will put it to use in my art.

The drive to create will return, I know myself well enough to believe that. I also know artists, in general, will find their own ways to adapt to the new art environment and push through the current standstill we are all facing.  
my dreamscapes have become increasingly vivid

***“....my dreamscapes have become increasingly vivid”***

**----- Moira Ness**

My current dream poetry:

**The strangest feeling that capital letters could have texture.**

**Confirming mutual feelings. Mutual wonder.**

**Engagement. Three text messages. Two years, too late.**

**Can't think of the English word. I keep accessing that day at Nicholas Metvier.**

**The image degrades further. I no longer dream about it.**

**Alternatively, I am mixing paints for Ms. Bell.**

**Call her Peggy.**

**Karen is helping me choose clothes.**

**Hair spray.**

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me. it's me. me.  
I've gone steady with  
writing non-fiction about  
how  
and when people turn bad  
how  
pretty your twin is  
how  
she created  
an exit wound

you left behind the rain  
walking around the strip mall in a thin mist  
sun showers are mythological  
and you believe them  
only when you can grasp the wet sun

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Men shooting at falcons by a frozen lake.  
I was calling 911, trying to scare the birds away.  
A wire retriever, overgrown, was retrieving.  
Bristly and growling. Attacking.  
Trying to sleep through this monomania, all nervous and disappointed.  
I knew this wasn't going anywhere.

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the colours of the French school  
the Lansdowne bus yelling for me to move  
parked in a bike lane (I hate myself)  
pleading for another moment  
just one more moment  
a pause, a parking spot  
a vacuum eating in my car  
a vacuum eating out my car  
metal on metal  
Foley  
I need another moment

and so, in Toronto  
holding 23 bottles so i couldn't touch you  
should i have?  
suddenly standing in Stephen Bulger  
Andrew holding me in a transference dyad.

**The ground floor apartments of the half-moon building by Humbertown.  
The building where I was born.  
Looking out from a sliding door, half-open.  
Just a mesh window between me and a pack of wolves.  
They walk by in such great numbers.  
Cam is nearby working on a painting in the dark.  
We are collaborating.**

**The wolves keep walking by, whole days pass.  
The wolves peer in the window and I pretend to be asleep.  
I stay still.  
I don't know what they want.  
Mesh screen between us.**

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**all-consuming, overtaking, without regard or fault. Natural but Sci-fi. Planet eater. Not aware of the action, natural action. An act of consumption.  
Engulfing. Taken over. Eating whole. Star eater. Like the Goya painting. World eater.  
Droning large spaceships or air crafts. Rumbling. Metal on metal, low rumbles. Large scale machine or entity.  
Goya. Saturn devouring son. But eating a void. A black area. A person. A mind. Letting someone do this.  
Having your mind taken over. Obsession and obsessive thought. A desperation in the algorithm.**

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**We all knew I was heading towards the island. This woman greeted us and sold us some oysters. Chatted about the island. She was very friendly. I asked her for her name. She told us. She said she had a twin. I laughed. Nervously. I looked back at my mom who rolled her eyes. I turned around and there you were, in front of me. Holding out my car keys which I had left down further on the beach. Thought you might want these. Made me feel stupid. Small. Perfect.**

### **Bio**

Moira Ness is an interdisciplinary visual artist from Toronto. She makes ascetic and conceptually driven work concerned with relentless archiving, pattern generation, and tracing comprehensive lines through her own personal history. Data mining her collection of personal correspondences and connections, Moira creates confessional and romanticized text by wielding word-organizing algorithms. These algorithms scramble groupings of source text and repurpose her archive into discrete series of new work. She has exhibited at Koerner Hall/The Royal Conservatory of Toronto, The Los Angeles Center For Digital Art, Akasha Art Projects, Lakeshore Arts, Northern Contemporary, Gallery 44, Roman Susan Gallery, Red Head Gallery, Latcham Gallery, The Art Gallery of Mississauga, Narwhal Contemporary, The Gladstone, OCADU, Main Street Arts, Kunstwerk Carlshütte, and The CICA Museum. Moira participated in the 2017 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition where she won the Emerging Artist Award and in the 2018 Toronto Outdoor Art Fair where she won the Catherine Bratty Award for Best of Art Fair, judged by Bruce Eves. In late 2019 Moira collaborated with Esprit Orchestra for a performance at Koerner Hall in Toronto. The new classical piece "I Hit My Head And Everything Changed" was written by Brian Harman and Moira provided the accompanying video projection of her algorithm created text work. Moira is on Arts Etobicoke's board of directors, as well as their gallery committee.