

Building Positive Relations:

Manifesto for the Arts, New Materialism, Posthumanism & Human Rights

November 23
2022

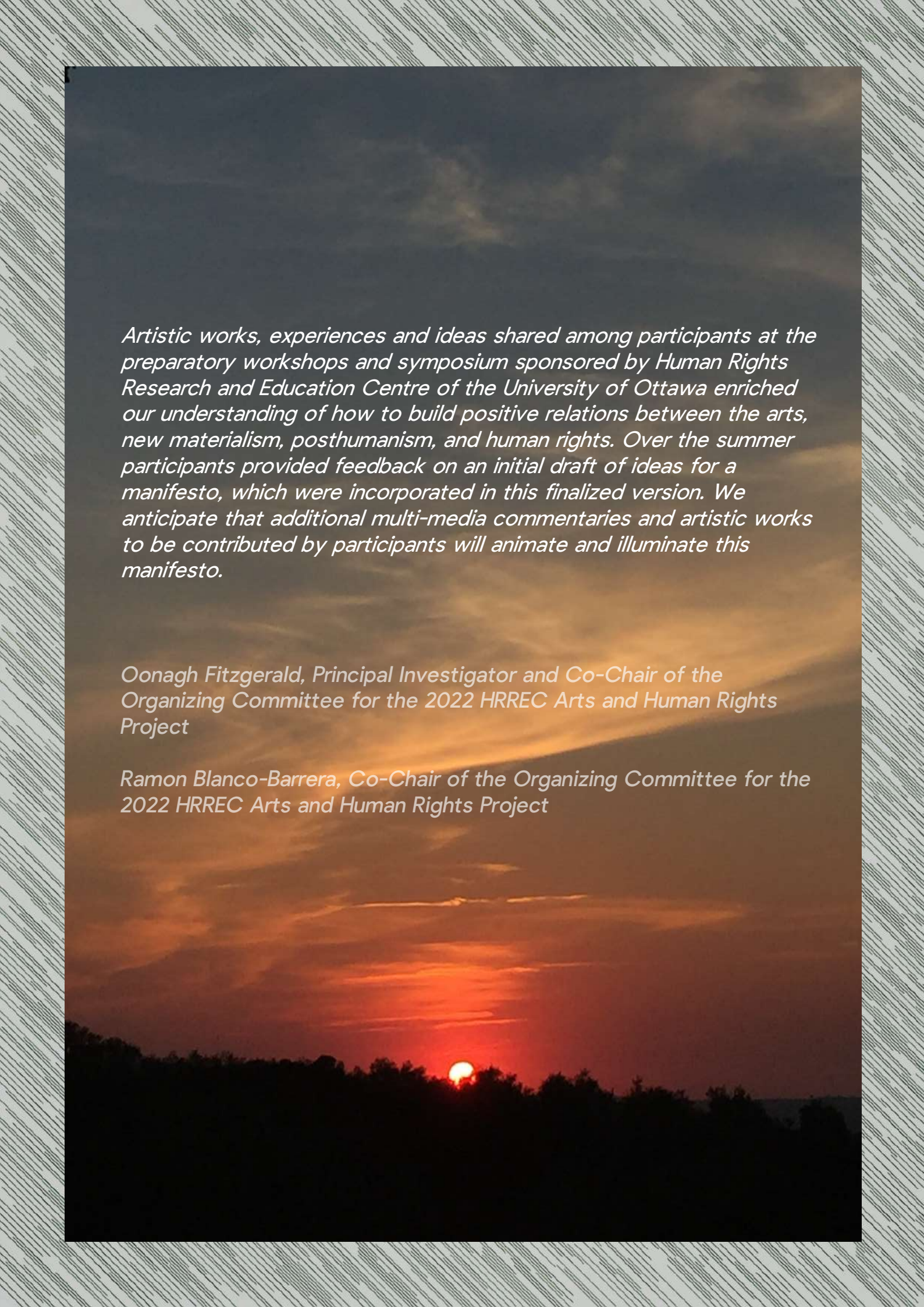
Centre
de recherche
et d'enseignement
sur les

DROITS DE LA PERSONNE



HUMAN RIGHTS
Research
and
Education
Centre

40



Artistic works, experiences and ideas shared among participants at the preparatory workshops and symposium sponsored by Human Rights Research and Education Centre of the University of Ottawa enriched our understanding of how to build positive relations between the arts, new materialism, posthumanism, and human rights. Over the summer participants provided feedback on an initial draft of ideas for a manifesto, which were incorporated in this finalized version. We anticipate that additional multi-media commentaries and artistic works to be contributed by participants will animate and illuminate this manifesto.

Oonagh Fitzgerald, Principal Investigator and Co-Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 2022 HRREC Arts and Human Rights Project

Ramon Blanco-Barrera, Co-Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 2022 HRREC Arts and Human Rights Project

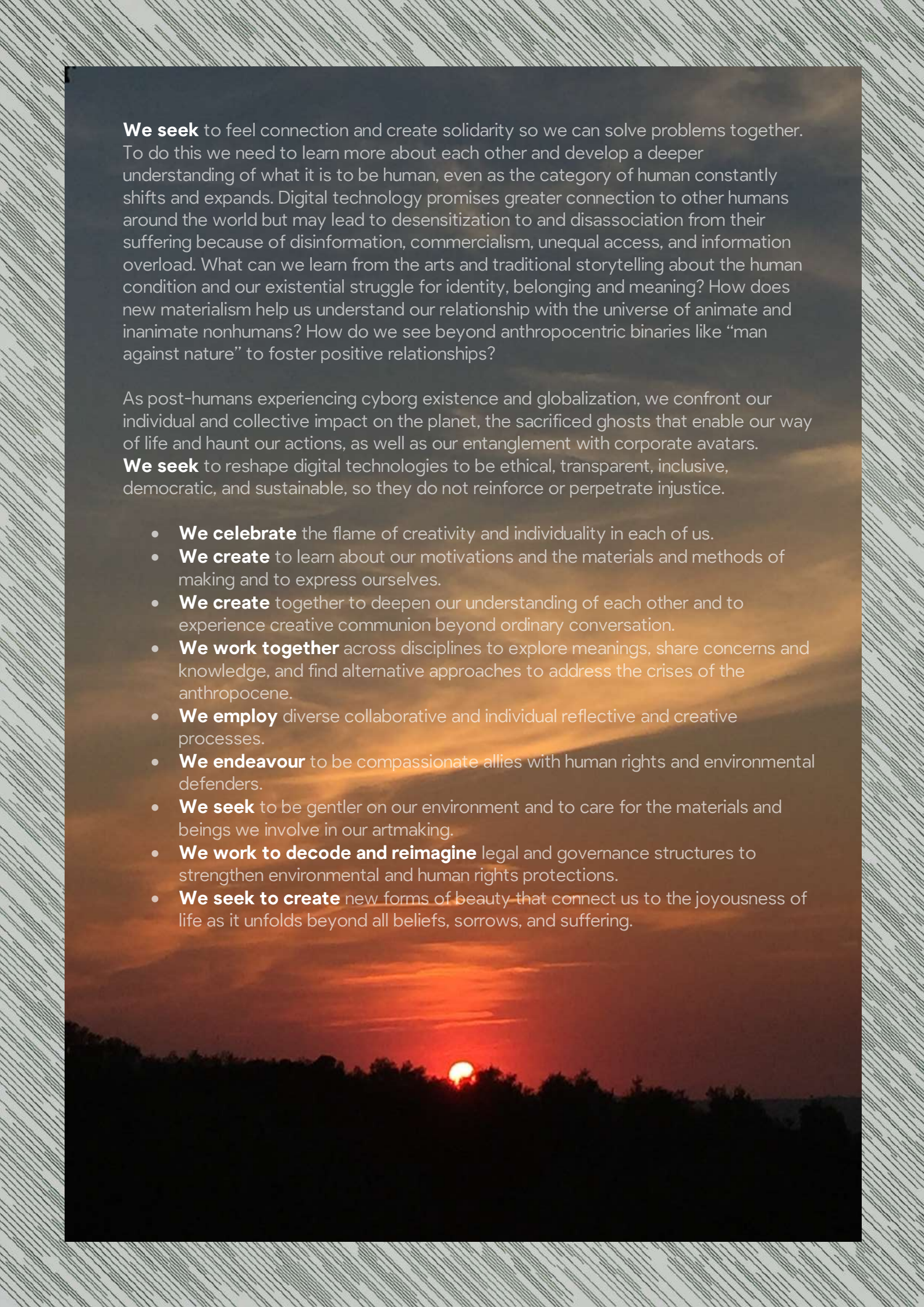
Building Positive Relations: Manifesto for the Arts, New Materialism, Posthumanism & Human Rights

Inspired by the experience of sharing artistic works and diverse perspectives, this manifesto seeks to connect individual and collective reflections and generate new thinking about how to build positive relations between the arts, posthumanism, new materialism and human rights. **We embrace** inclusive and interdisciplinary research and practices that recognize our interdependence with each other and the material world. Our individual and collaborative work of advocacy, teaching, decoding, encoding, artmaking, and performance seeks to foster solidarity and inclusion.

The idea of a manifesto is approached with trepidation. **We acknowledge** the inadequacy of attempting to communicate complex ideas through words alone. For human rights to evolve to meet new challenges, legal language must be informed by experience, imagination, and artistic expression beyond words. **We focus** on the creative, expressive flame in each of us unconstrained by conventions, canons, and categorizations of artistic worth.

As we explore ideas about the arts and human rights, new materialism and posthumanism, we are wary of how social conditioning may unconsciously influence us and how our access to knowledge about the world is often mediated by anthropocentric distortions. **We acknowledge** that those of us with privileges, power, and resources continue to benefit from historical policies and practices that today would be considered illegal aggression, genocide, occupation, and crimes against humanity. **We strive** to use our artistic expression and human rights advocacy to decode and dismantle the legal, economic, cultural, and social architecture that entrenches injustice. **We strive** to identify and embrace the best in human knowledge and understanding while challenging ideas that are entangled in the ongoing influence of colonial, capitalist, extractivist, racialized and gendered power.

In a discussion of building positive relations between the arts, new materialism, posthumanism and human rights, many concepts clash, and answers are elusive. Consider for example, how the reductive idea of “survival of the fittest” can be used to advance both scientific understanding of evolution and an anthropocentric, racialized, and gendered political agenda. **We seek** generative ideas that encompass wonder, caring, nurturing, identity, solidarity, kinship, community, kindness. Human rights protections are essentially about careful caretaking of the many ‘non-fit’, the disadvantaged and oppressed. Do “human rights” raise humans above nature, making environmental protection mainly about saving the planet for humans? Can we reimagine “human rights” to include other forms of life? Can we see connections between the inherent dignity of each person and the inherent dignity of each tree, bird, river, or rock? **We endeavour** to learn from Indigenous ways of knowing and being in relationship, aware of the risk of appropriating and misrepresenting what may be beyond our understanding.

A photograph of a sunset over a forest silhouette. The sun is a bright orange circle on the horizon, partially obscured by dark trees. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds, transitioning to a darker blue at the top. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

We seek to feel connection and create solidarity so we can solve problems together. To do this we need to learn more about each other and develop a deeper understanding of what it is to be human, even as the category of human constantly shifts and expands. Digital technology promises greater connection to other humans around the world but may lead to desensitization to and disassociation from their suffering because of disinformation, commercialism, unequal access, and information overload. What can we learn from the arts and traditional storytelling about the human condition and our existential struggle for identity, belonging and meaning? How does new materialism help us understand our relationship with the universe of animate and inanimate nonhumans? How do we see beyond anthropocentric binaries like “man against nature” to foster positive relationships?

As post-humans experiencing cyborg existence and globalization, we confront our individual and collective impact on the planet, the sacrificed ghosts that enable our way of life and haunt our actions, as well as our entanglement with corporate avatars.

We seek to reshape digital technologies to be ethical, transparent, inclusive, democratic, and sustainable, so they do not reinforce or perpetrate injustice.

- **We celebrate** the flame of creativity and individuality in each of us.
- **We create** to learn about our motivations and the materials and methods of making and to express ourselves.
- **We create** together to deepen our understanding of each other and to experience creative communion beyond ordinary conversation.
- **We work together** across disciplines to explore meanings, share concerns and knowledge, and find alternative approaches to address the crises of the anthropocene.
- **We employ** diverse collaborative and individual reflective and creative processes.
- **We endeavour** to be compassionate allies with human rights and environmental defenders.
- **We seek** to be gentler on our environment and to care for the materials and beings we involve in our artmaking.
- **We work to decode and reimagine** legal and governance structures to strengthen environmental and human rights protections.
- **We seek to create** new forms of beauty that connect us to the joyousness of life as it unfolds beyond all beliefs, sorrows, and suffering.



CREDP | 40
HRREC