

Jenine Marsh:
HARBINGER



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18 October 2025 to 1 February 2026
Curated by Darryn Doull

The Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery is proud to present *HARBINGER*, a site-specific, immersive installation that centers on the alteration of the existing gallery floor. Colliding modes of excavation and construction, Marsh’s work examines histories of sacrifice and utopic hope which emerge from the familiar ritual of throwing coins into fountains and wells to make a wish. The installation confronts coin-wishing as a subtle yet illicit expression of post-capitalist desire, explored through a tactile and temporal alteration of public space.

Opening Reception & Artist Talk

18 October 2025
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Artist Talks are sponsored by:



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HARBINGER

Grey Matters

by Alex Turgeon, edited by Jayne Wilkinson

Grey, a colour without colour, is achromatic. Its presence serves as a unifying optics within the banal realm of the neutral. It contours our wisdom into state of equilibrium, suggesting an unbiased posture inside a nonpartisan field. But grey tends to be persuaded. Since grey lacks hue it covets its neighbour's; in doing so it encourages a shift towards values of indulgence or austerity, towards shades of richness or poverty. As for a name, grey is a collector of connotation. From its purse, a selection of associations emerge: *iron, smoke, silver, flint, lead, fossil, nickel* and *coin*. In naming, grey can be tied to processes of extraction as well as their byproducts—the oldest of capital including its long, drawn-out breath of industrial exhaust. The evolution of industry can be tracked through cities heralding modernity by rising from the ground in gradients of grey. The colours of cities have been replaced by their underlying substrates, as time eroded our taste for the gaudy and garnished it as grisaille relief. It's this kind of desaturation that shapes a docility of the eyes, binding the visual to vast economies of settled grey zones. “Grey surrounds us and we ignore it,” penned artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman in his treatises from *Chroma*.¹ Grey makes the case of being both seemingly invisible and

simultaneously everywhere, the horizon in which we fashion our domains, the scratchy wool blanket that is pulled over our vision.

Jenine Marsh speaks in the language of such grey worlds. Marsh's work reflects the material conditions of life as components of a greyed out infrastructural state, one entangled with the apparatuses of value. What circulates through these systems is a belief fastened to the nature and nurture of citizenship. Rather than defined through overt rights and discriminations tied to the legal management of nationality, this form of citizenship is rendered as a participatory marker. Here, resident beings, human or otherwise, equally contribute to, and are subjected to, an organizational substrate where forms of co-habitation are rendered as sites in which diverse populations determine the parameters for performing, operating and managing space. This is a kind of collective state that is simultaneously as aspirational as it is equally failed, represented through the ruined gaps or abandoned margins of metropolises. Utopian visions are interrogated and extrapolated through material processes of destruction and excavation, becoming an artistic medium of transformation. The artist's palette is a





byproduct of the material conditions in which she produces her work, echoing the greying expansions and wasted contractions of urban development. Marsh's installations investigate the jejune sites in which the civic operates, questioning how capitalism hollows out the urban and turns it into a form of colourless residue. It is a critique of grey as an ethos of civic neutrality, the anemic remains of a city drained of its vibrancy.

HARBINGER also speaks within this greyed out vernacular. Erected in the ubiquity of grey concrete, a central sculptural form anchors the exhibition. It reads as familiar architecture. One might describe it as a recessed drain or a public fountain, yet it stakes claims for neither. Instead, it exists as a structure that the artist defines as a *temporal uncertainty*: a vernacular object that eludes definitive function but suggests an ongoing, transitional reality. Rather than reproducing overt descriptions of preexisting structures, Marsh abstracts the ordinary, focusing on the seemingly benign points of everyday contact between populations. The artist reveals innate human interactions in these moments of the habitual, foregrounded by the language and material of currency, a ubiquitous point of exchange that resonates across society's epochs.

For Marsh, the act of touch becomes a unifying thread to suture form and metaphor together.

The communal nature of a civic fountain chronicles such exchange as a place of public congregation. Historically, fountains built in town squares and marketplaces offered up water as a resource for cleaning and cooking, becoming collective sites of engagement with the city and its points of commerce. In modern civic planning, such water features are implemented solely as an aesthetic gesture; emptied of their original functionality, they are often utilized to dull the sounds of the city. Rushing water creates an illusion of tranquility amid the cacophony of urban life, a white noise machine powered by grey waters, transporting the public elsewhere through a blurring barrier wall of sound. *But please don't drink the water.*

Wellsprings have long been central sites of spiritual communion. In belief systems rooted to the earth, such locations operated as thresholds to other worlds while simultaneously offering up the miracle of life as water. As an exchange, a sacrifice was a customary commemoration for such a divine gift. To give up something of intrinsic value for its reciprocal token is an act of good faith, a belief in a shared understanding of worth wrapped up in a form of prayer. Death is a return to nature and what were once sacrifices of life evolved into emblems of wealth, transforming the ritual into the practice we understand today as the act of tossing coins

into a fountain. Here, Marsh reimagines a wish named in the place of water.

The act of making a wish stands in stark contrast to the reality of its maker. To cast a coin into a fountain implies an illicit, utopic desire for a world beyond dominate structures that control class and caste systems. It offers a gesture towards freewill where none may ever exist. A wish is entangled with fiction, it's an action formed as a glitch to order, a ripple in the oppressive backdrop to which our world is oriented. Wishing with a coin is an act of destruction, a tear in society's grey fabric as its maker relinquishes what they are conditioned to hold dear: money. Once removed from circulation the coin is liberated rather than liquidated, rendered useless outside of capitalism's flow. As a benign object stripped of its privilege, the coin wanders aimlessly as detritus, unbound to purpose. To subtract value from this stream is an act of quiet antagonism, a small whittling at the ingot of rule and regulation.

Yet these wishful actions are often fleeting. City fountains are drained, their coins collected and returned to the stream of the economy, reused, discarded, and replayed in the recycled performance of a wish. Coins may be timeless, but they do reveal their age. Through oxidation, corrosion or submerged in run-offs, context of use mutes their shine.

Like a fossil, patina becomes a colour born of time. By being passed from hand to fountain to hand repeatedly, a coin is an accretion of touches. This production line results in an accumulation of belief made physical, a tangible grey amassed across the surface of a coin. Like a church's stone steps worn concave from centuries of footsteps, time takes the scope of an iconoclastic sculptor, slowly carving out the shape of a specie between the surfaces of finger and thumb.

Money represents a quintessential point of exchange between people. Even as an ancient technology, a single coin can travel the world without ever touching ground. They are passed from person to person, hand to hand, across countertops, slipped into turnstiles and vending machines, turning up in opportune moments between seat cushions or stuck to the soles of feet. Coins recur throughout Marsh's practice, arriving either squished or folded, pressed by locomotives or pierced by drills. These transformative acts strip the coin of its monetary worth, while simultaneously framing its beauty as an inherently sculptural object. Bound to the history of molding and casting, coins are, in essence, sculptures for the hand. Here, Marsh's sculptures are counterfeits. These coins are poor copies produced using the laborious and costly process of lost-wax bronze casting. The making of coins is a complex feat. These newly minted coins,

electroplated with copper, zinc and nickel, unsettle the ordinary with gestures that subvert expectation: Janus-like, some repeat their heads while discarding their tails, others look as though smeared like clay, bitten like chocolate, or fractured like glass. Through this reimagining, the coin takes on a new subjectivity, its value as currency collapses, yet returns when reappraised through an investment of the artistic labour necessary for its re-production. Tethered to the central basin of *HARBINGER*, these counterfeits invite touching and holding, but never possession. Their worth is tied to their performance of being bound to their context as a wholly communal sacrament. As a false promise or an ultimate ruin, these mementos stage a form of future-past where currencies persist only as shared memory, a lost residue of geologic time.

As grey tokens of the urban landscape, the metallic plumage of pigeons is easily persuaded by the colour of their most trusted environments. As apt companions to our constructed world, pigeons are a city's co-dependent as much as they are its reliable nuisance. These creatures are synonymous with the urban expanse, roosting over and under every possibility at the scale of a plague, but somehow never settled. A pigeon's nest reflects this precious existence: erected not of an interwoven weft, encouraging the softness required for incubation, but of a collection of

brittle sticks, loose wires and cigarette butts sketching out the idea of a circle on a cold concrete ledge. Perhaps pigeons could be the great undiscovered sculptors of our time. Their complete deconstruction of the image of habitat is a humble form of monument, reflecting the conditions of the artist within cities hostile to such vagrant, artful inhabitants. While as birds, pigeons coalesce around sources of food and water, gathering and collecting in the last public spaces, the plazas, parkettes and slick corporate squares that span office towers, finding their fellowship around the basins of fountains. Much like the grey of a city, they surround us almost entirely and we do all that we can to entirely ignore them.

Once considered of high noble regard and delicacy, pigeons have become vermin that cluster around picnic tables, like urchins begging for bread. But pigeons were once the carriers of important news from the front lines in war and in commerce: a trusted bird would always return to its roost and to its mate, a stand-up citizen by any definition, and a vestigial technology of communication. At the advent of radio transmission, these flocks were rendered jobless, dismissed by capitalism's hunger for progress and mechanical efficiency. Yet there still exists an understated symbiosis between humanity and the diverse family of Columbidae. Pigeons remove the detritus of



the city through their incessant preening, ridding the streets of its commuter crumbs. It's a meager job, though someone's got to do it. As potent indicators of our future, they perform in the grey suits of high streets, carrying a message of our place within existing hegemony: easily discarded, yet constantly enduring.

Having been previously loved and nurtured, the pigeons of *HARBINGER* return to perform everyday life as a habitual form of ritual. Their taxidermy reads as both as an act of reverence and macabre, as though they carry on about their business of arranging and pruning, pecking and puttering in quiet due diligence. Set against the greyed backdrop of the exhibition, they too congregate around the sculptural basin, returning to roost around this trusted receptacle for wishes. They bear witness to the geographies of transition, having crossed continents as messages themselves, wrapped up in the cardboard parcels that crisscross our skies. In their beaks they distribute collections of poetic messages, words cut up and extracted from newspapers resounding in muted protest. These pigeons are as much tokens of the past as they are harbingers of our future. In flocks of grey camouflage, they blur distinctions between subject and object, between life and death, extraction and constriction, construction and demolition. They suspend disbelief because

their time has stopped. By existing outside of time, they point directly to our own and deliver communiqués that lie beyond the front lines of capitalist supremacy, as scouts of a potential future on an alternative horizon. As ghosts of the past, they mirror our own citizenship. They reach out to us from beyond with a wish: *please don't shoot the messenger.*

1. Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Color* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).





Jenine Marsh Biography

Jenine Marsh (b. 1984 Calgary CA; lives in Toronto CA) has exhibited her sculpture and installation work widely in galleries and institutions such as the Buffalo Institute for Contemporary Art (2025); the Goldfarb Art Gallery, Toronto (2024); Ensemble, New York (2024); Prairie, Chicago (2024); Ashley, Berlin (2024); the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2024); Gianni Manhattan, Vienna (2023); Union Pacific, London (2023); Cooper Cole, Toronto (2023); Joe Project, Montreal (2023); Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2022); Essex Flowers, New York (2020); Franz Kaka, Toronto (2019); Centre Clark, Montreal (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019), Entrée Gallery, Bergen (2018), and Lulu, Mexico City (2015). She has served as artist in residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts (2009, 2010 and 2022), at AiR Bergen at USF Verftet, Bergen (2018); Rupert, Vilnius (2017); and the Vermont Studio Center, Johnson VT (2011). Marsh's work has received funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, Partners in Art, the Chalmers Arts Fellowship, the Toronto Arts Council, and the Ontario Arts Council. Jenine received her BFA from the Alberta University of the Arts in 2007, and her MFA from the University of Guelph in 2013. She is currently a doctoral candidate at York University.

Alex Turgeon Biography

Alex Turgeon (b. Kijipuktuk/Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada) is an artist whose practice investigates the structural relationships between poetry and architecture, interpreting how together these fields can work to inform the queer subject as built environment. His work has been presented in part at the Tate (Liverpool); Akademie der Künste, KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin); Kunsthalle Zürich; Contemporary Art Centre (Vilnius); Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge) and as part of "Poetry as Practice," an online exhibition hosted by Rhizome and the New Museum (New York). He was a 2022–23 Junge Akademie Fellow at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin and has participated as an artist-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts (2011), Rupert (2015), Fondazione Antonio Ratti (2017), Autodesk Technology Center (2019) and Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2024–25). Alex has contributed critical and creative writing to publications including C Magazine, Canadian Art, Frieze, Mousse, F.R. David, amongst many others. He holds a BFA from Emily Carr University (2010) and an MFA from Rutgers University (2020) and is the current Structurist Creative Research Fellow at the University of Saskatchewan (2025-2026).

