



Over the course of completing this work, Smithers-Crump pondered how humans express their physical and spiritual relationship and need for water through sacred rituals, religion, and the arts. Life on land emerged from the water, signifying birth and rebirth, death and transformation in endless cycles.

The evolution of these amazingly interconnected ecosystems took time to develop. It is estimated that the development, beginning with the first unicellular organism to the mind-bending complexity of today's ecology, took 3+ billion years to evolve. Chance mutations and natural selection were the main driving forces to shape our natural world and, in the process, gave rise to consciousness and to a species with awesome power over nature.

The looming ecological cataclysm has changed the traditional definition of art's purpose. In this new role, the environmentally concerned artist will be asked to embrace a measure of activism to provoke and educate. Environmental art, in its diversity, can promote the message of nature's protection and sustainability and, hopefully, change some minds. Smithers-Crump's majestic, swirling discs and intricately connected plantar structures evoke a feeling of wonderment about Nature, its beauty, and its mysteries. It also asks the question - would we risk losing it?

As the artist asks the question, we all have to provide an answer.

Margaret Smithers-Crump was born in Canada and has lived most of her adult life in Houston, Texas. Her work addresses the interconnectedness of the Earth's diverse life forms and ecosystems and seeks to encourage discourse that generates new ideas and a deeper understanding about our role and collective responsibilities in an increasingly intertwined biosphere. She creates her artworks with hundreds of units of hand-cut, recycled translucent Plexiglas which she paints, shapes and chemically joins into sculptural forms and installations. The glass-like quality of the semi-transparent Plexiglas emphasizes the fragility of life.

Smithers-Crump's recent solo exhibitions include the Grace Museum, Abilene, Texas; Pearl Fincher MFA, Houston, Texas; Galveston Art Center, Galveston, Texas; Imperial Center for the Arts, Rocky Mount, North Carolina; Penn College of Technology - Penn State and Manifest Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Her recent gallery exhibitions include Camiba Art Gallery, Austin, Texas, and Rudolph Blume Fine Art, Houston, Texas. She participated and received a Houston Chronicle review for her large installation at the Silos at Sawyer Yards for the 2019 Sculpture Month Houston. Smithers-Crump holds a BFA in Painting from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and has lived and traveled extensively. She grew up on her family's island in Canada, lived in the South Pacific in her early twenties and eventually moved to the Gulf Coast. She has traveled to many countries including Japan, France, Italy, Spain, Peru, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Costa Rica and Switzerland. These experiences expanded her cultural education and nurtured her respect and awe for nature. She maintains that the planet is her best educator.

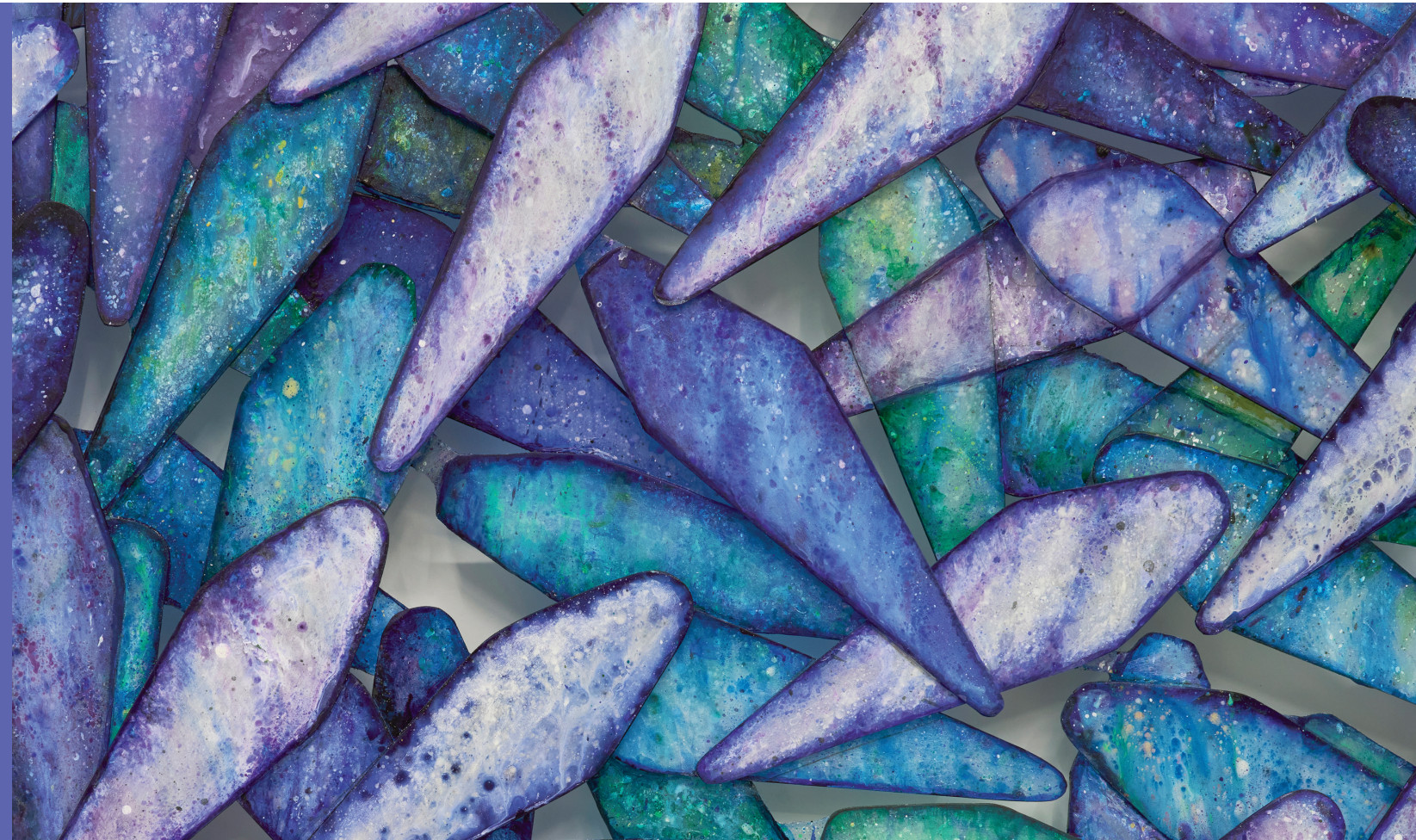
* Cover image: *Oasis*, 2022, acrylic on hand cut, recycled translucent Plexiglas, image courtesy of the artist, photo credit: Jake Eschelman.

This exhibition is generously funded, in part, by the Edaren Foundation, Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wesley W. Washburn, M.D. and Lulu L. Smith, M.D. Endowment Fund, the C. Homer and Edith Fuller Chambers Charitable Foundation, the City of Beaumont, and the members of the Art Museum of Southeast Texas. Additional funding provided by: Sheila and Jerry Reese, Kim and Roy Steinhagen, and Heather Petkovsek.

To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov.



Art Museum of Southeast Texas
500 Main St. Beaumont, TX 77701
(409) 832-3432 | www.amset.org
Museum Hours
Mon-Fri 9-5 Sat 10-5 Sunday 12-5
Closed major holidays



MARGARET SMITHERS-CRUMP: *KINSHIP*

Art Museum of Southeast Texas
April 1 - June 18, 2023

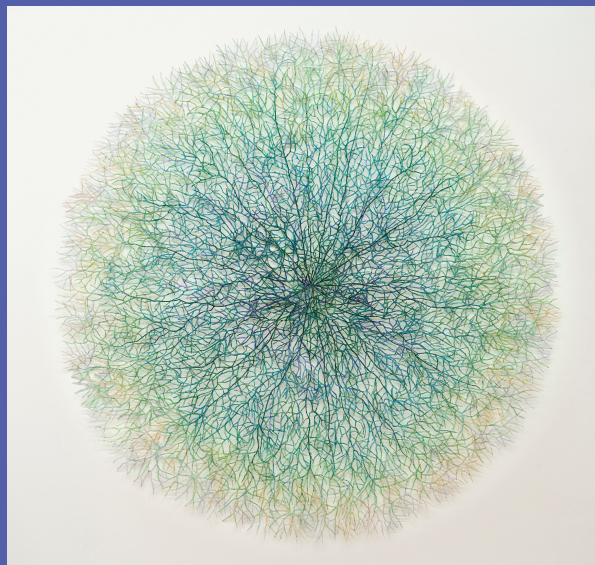




Kinship - A Kaleidoscope of Life

Volker Eisele
Curator, Sculpture Month Houston

For most of western art history, nature played a subordinate role as a backdrop to various human narratives until artists from the Romantic era freed it as an independent subject worthy of exploration and contemplation. Powerful works from Thomas Cole in America, Turner in England, and Friedrich in Germany ignited the viewer's imagination to the awe-inspiring grandeur of nature as a transformational experience. During Impressionism, Monet and Cézanne continued this trajectory by employing a brilliant investigation of natural light and color. Subsequent modern art movements expanded on this foundation until a radical shift occurred in the 1960s—Land Art—where artists left their studios behind and engaged the land and nature in a new creative discourse. As environmental threats, ecology, and climate change entered the contemporary dialogue, a new generation of artists evolved. These “eco-artists,” as they are sometimes called, responded from a conceptual, emotional, and spiritual perspective—producing an amazing variety of work in diverse materials. Their work and that of Margaret Smithers-Crump engage the viewer and invite them into this lively discourse.



Symbiosis, 2018, acrylic on hand cut, recycled translucent Plexiglas, image courtesy of the artist, photo credit: Jake Eschelman

The last ice age created some breathtaking islands and lakes across Canada, and Smithers-Crump had the good fortune to grow up on such an island. However, by adulthood, she witnessed the gradual change in water quality due to pollution and found this impact greatly disturbing. As she traveled, she found many opportunities to experience and learn about some amazing ecologies—particularly the coral reefs of the South Pacific. This exposure to the sublimely beautiful and now dying marine life caused by climate change and human neglect created a seismic shift in the direction of her work toward both activism and a passionate concern for all co-existing life. The notion of nature as an interconnected whole, with humans as a part of this interspecies collaboration, forms the conceptual foundation of this exhibition featuring both paintings and sculpture appropriately entitled, *Kinship*.

Mindful of the environment, Smithers-Crump works with mostly recycled Plexiglas and polycarbonate. Amazingly versatile, this lightweight translucent material can be cut with power tools, chemically bonded together, heated to change shape, painted with most media, and sanded so that its glass-like appearance suggests the fragility of the organisms it portrays. Connecting countless forms, the

artist creates large, elaborate works referencing many kinds of kinships and ecologies.

Resembling a branching meandering tapestry, *Arctic Lichenography* (2022) demonstrates this juncture of forms and concerns. As water is the product of hydrogen and oxygen, fungi and algae microscopically join with other organisms to become lichen, thus epitomizing the notion of “kinship.”

The union of these species enables lichen to endure incredibly harsh environments like the arctic regions. Similarly, several other key works in this exhibition, like *Mapping Mycelium* (2022), *Symbiosis* (2018), and *Surge* (2014), feature the complex fungi and root, “mycorrhizal” collaboration that occurs in ninety percent of all plant species. Fungi—metabolic masterminds—digest organic and inorganic materials and broker elaborate nutrient and energy exchanges between plants and other fungi. This unique interspecies partnership, in particular, inspired the creation of most, if not all, of the “kinship” related works in this exhibition.

In these works, the artist uses color, texture, and collaged materials such as colored glass, gold leaf, copper, and fibers to code the symbolic relationships and exchanges between the various organisms. Visually rich and multilayered, the result invites the viewer to explore the surfaces and contemplate its concepts.

Climate change and “hothouse” emissions have become a part of our everyday discussions. The carbon in the atmosphere becomes a kind of balancing act subject to the Earth's ecology and human intervention—and if imbalanced—it has dire consequences. Stabilizing that balance, plants extract enormous amounts of carbon from the atmosphere to metabolize the carbon for food and then share it with fungi in exchange for nutrients and water. When these organisms die, that carbon goes back into the soil—not the atmosphere. Responding to these issues, the artist has created a dynamic floor sculpture, *Question of Balance* (2018), which ponders the “carbon cycle” on many levels. Arranged on a glass-like, dark, circular floor form, Plexiglas dodecahedrons resembling carbon molecules and anthracite coal are precariously stacked like a house of cards but also appear to tumble and randomly spill.

These environmental changes, along with pollution, sadly affect our oceans. From coral reefs to microscopic plankton, one sees the results of chemical imbalance and pollution—particularly plastic. Known as the Pacific trash vortex, plastic debris islands can reach the size of Texas. As plastic decomposes, it contaminates almost every organism on Earth. It has entered the food chain of marine organisms and has found its way into our food supply. Responding to this dilemma, Smithers-Crump created *Code Blue* (2016), a huge, vortex-like wall installation focusing on the engine of our food chain—plankton. *Code Blue* derives its name from the hospital announcement indicating a life-threatening medical emergency and also references our “blue” water planet. Entirely created out of recycled plastic, the wave-like arms of this artwork whip countless planktonic-like creatures into a red-hot center. An enormous white plastic fishing net backs the entire installation capturing all the inhabitants with no hope of escape.

More than any other artwork in this exhibition, *Oasis* (2022) reflects Smithers-Crump's particular affinity to our planet's life-giving water. In lustrous hues of blue, green, and violet, this large circular wall sculpture references both our oceans and the immensity of life in a single drop of water. Composed like an inward spiraling kaleidoscope, hundreds of hand-cut and painted forms emerge from an almost black perimeter. The outer form's dark colors intensify in light and vibrance as they jockey and move toward the dark center.



Mapping Mycelium, 2022, acrylic on hand cut, recycled translucent Plexiglas, image courtesy of the artist, photo credit: Jake Eschelman

