

# Beyond Here Lies Nothing



Brad Necyk

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An online exhibition during the COVID-19 pandemic  
of video work by Brad Necyk

Exhibition Site:  
<https://www.bradnecyk.com/beyond-here-lies-nothing>



The Photograph (2012)







## Beyond Here Lies Nothing

*Beyond Here Lies Nothing* is a healing journey. It wasn't planned but, reflecting back on this collection of videos, that journey is there. Over the past eight years, most of my time has been spent in other media, but, while collecting this work, I can see the early investigation of trauma to now, a celebration of wellbeing.

In 2012, I started reading stories. I told stories about my childhood—the illnesses, the surgeries, the pain. I was telling these stories as an adult living with bipolar affective disorder. I was looking for the root of this. Yes, genetics was at play, but I also recognized early trauma as setting the stage for where I was then, a 28 year old in 2012, trying to make sense of my present pain by looking into the past.

I believe art creates worlds. But first, we need to make sense of worlds broadly. We are world-generating beings. Our senses take in the world-out-there, and our brain constructs a world, a world for us to inhabit. Each being has its own world, all the way down to the tick described by Uexküll. You have a world and I have a world.

This is, however, only a limited perceptual world. A recent area of study in neuroscience is the Default-Mode Network. It is the network in the brain that, on an fMRI scan, lights up when you aren't doing anything. It is that voice in your head. It is you, your sense of self. It is a time machine. It ruminates on the past and projects into the future. It is your autobiographical network. It tells you stories. It tells you the story of yourself. It tells stories of other people. It tells you stories of interactions and all the things that need to be made sense of, to make meaning. It takes your perceptions, your perception-world, and adds the very human ability of self-reflection, of storytelling. It is part of your world. Donna Haraway says, "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories." (p. 12)



Of Mom (2019)

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger believes that art is the origin of truth, and it can overturn the metaphysics of our time, the way we be-in-the-world. Thomas King said, "want a different ethic? Tell a different story." (p. 19) In my mind I read it as: want a different *world*? Tell a different story. But what is an ethic, if not a story? And what is a story, if not a world? This idea of art helping to come to know how to be-in-the-world, *art as giving*, has its roots in anthropology and the study of the evolution of behaviour, where Ellen Dissanayake describes the *behaviour of art* as the act of *making-special*, where humans elevate the ordinary into the extra-ordinary, the everyday into the sacred, maybe to influence some future event or provide clarity to a field of uncertainty—to understand something outside the realm of the rational. Art was, and should be anti-individual, participated in by everyone, and not be about sectioning off the artist from the nonartist and not be about mastery. Art was about attuning our worlds to change our behaviour, to adapt our behaviours in the moment and collectively. Art was a way to knowing—a way to Being.

Heidegger says that art creates a world and sets forth an earth, the form of the world, and it is between the world and the earth that a strife forms, and this is where truth can be won. Truth is the unconcealment of Being. It allows us to be a being before and within Being. And in this unconcealed Being that we can learn how to be-in-the-world. We learn how to live. Deeper, we learn how to die, which then teaches us more about how to live. It allows us to step out of our world, our stories, our Default-Mode Network, ourself and simply be-in-the-world.

My experience is, and this hopefully is clear in this selection of work across eight years of living and creating, that art creates worlds for us to experience other worlds otherwise. We can set forth new worlds, change the earth, and experience the sensations of that strife to help us imagine other worlds, other ways of being-in-the-world. We can set forth our trauma in those worlds and let them play out, we can sense them otherwise, we can experience them otherwise, we can story them otherwise, and we can integrate them into our psychology. This is healing.

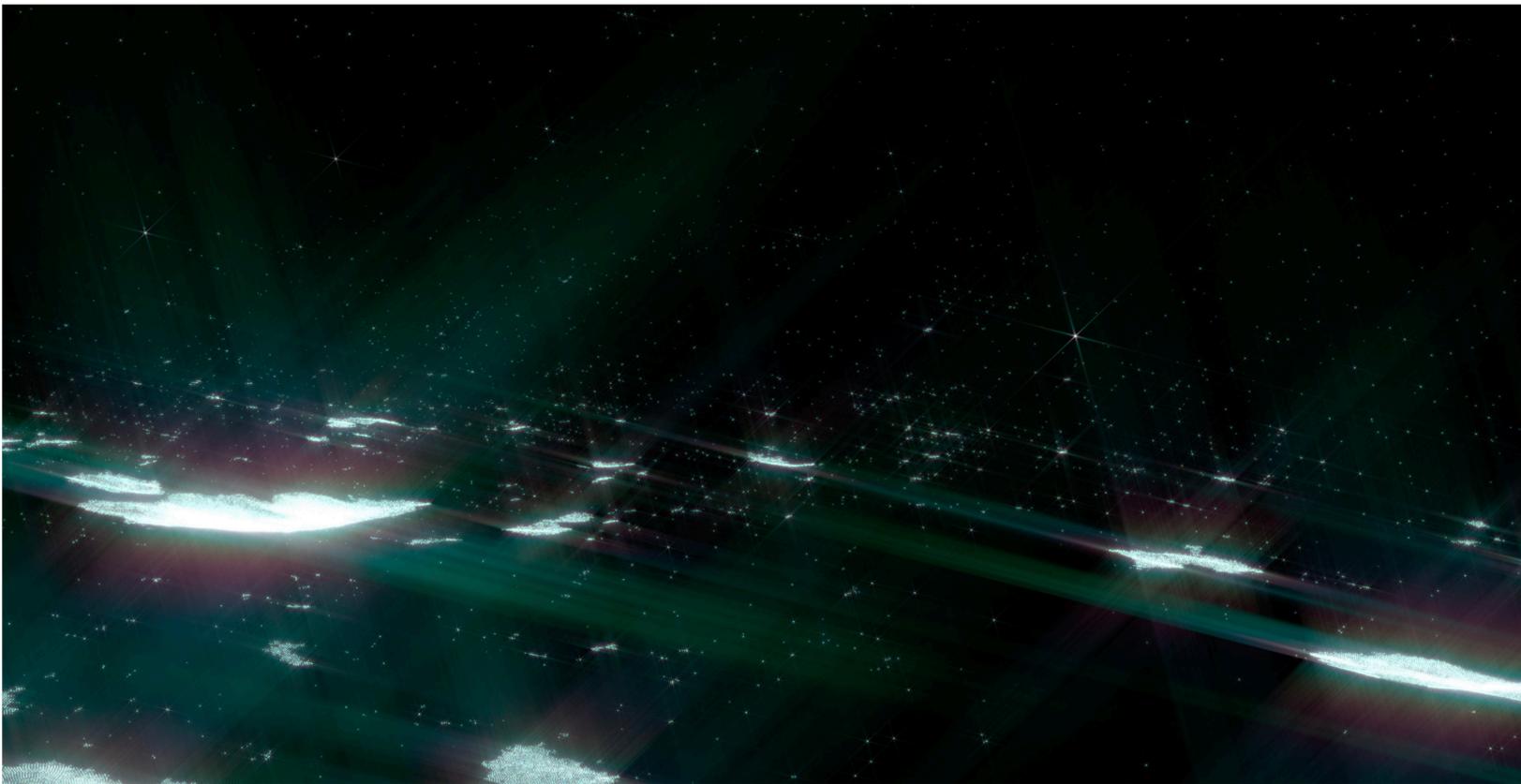


Atomic Priesthood (2019)

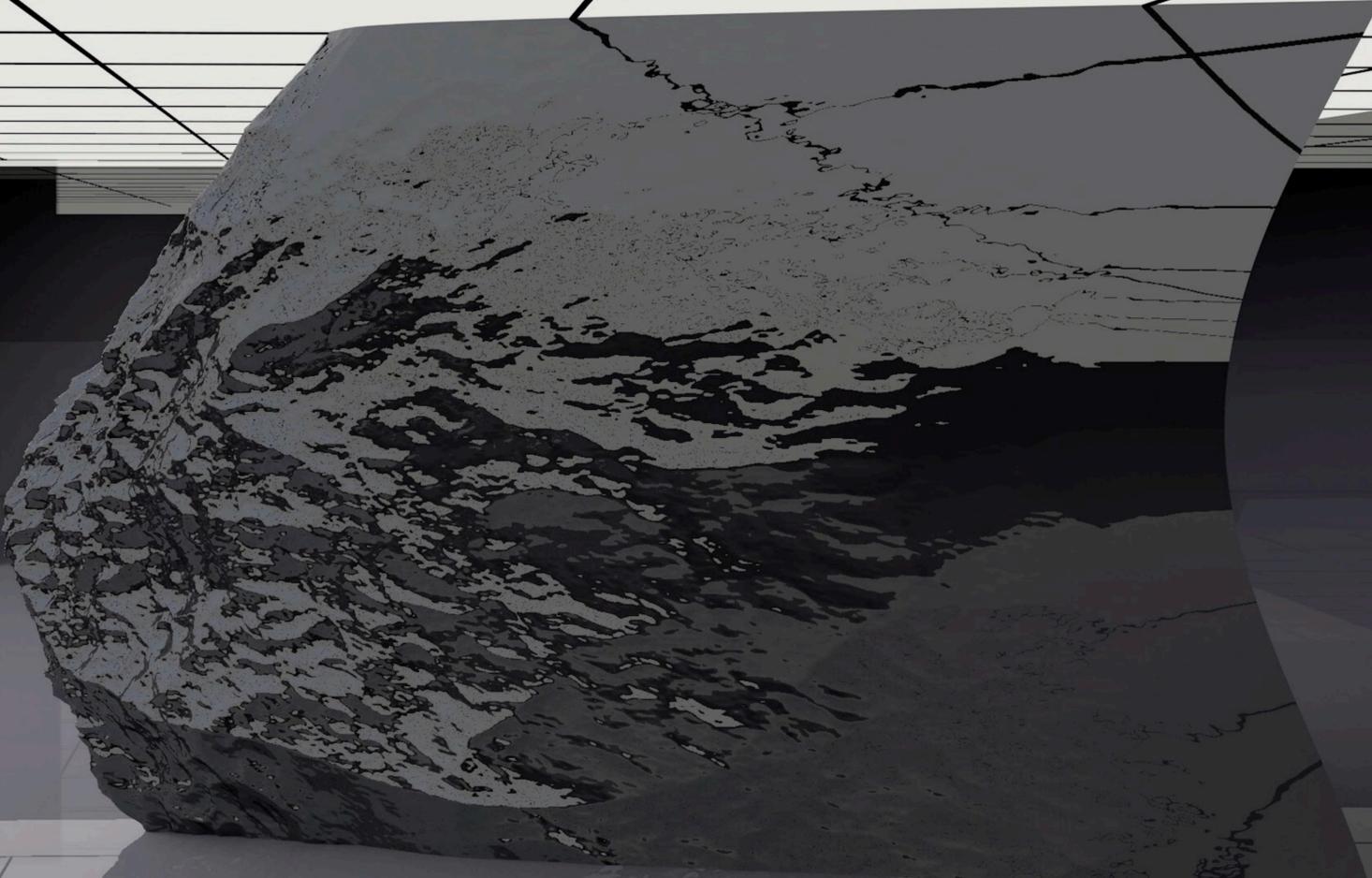
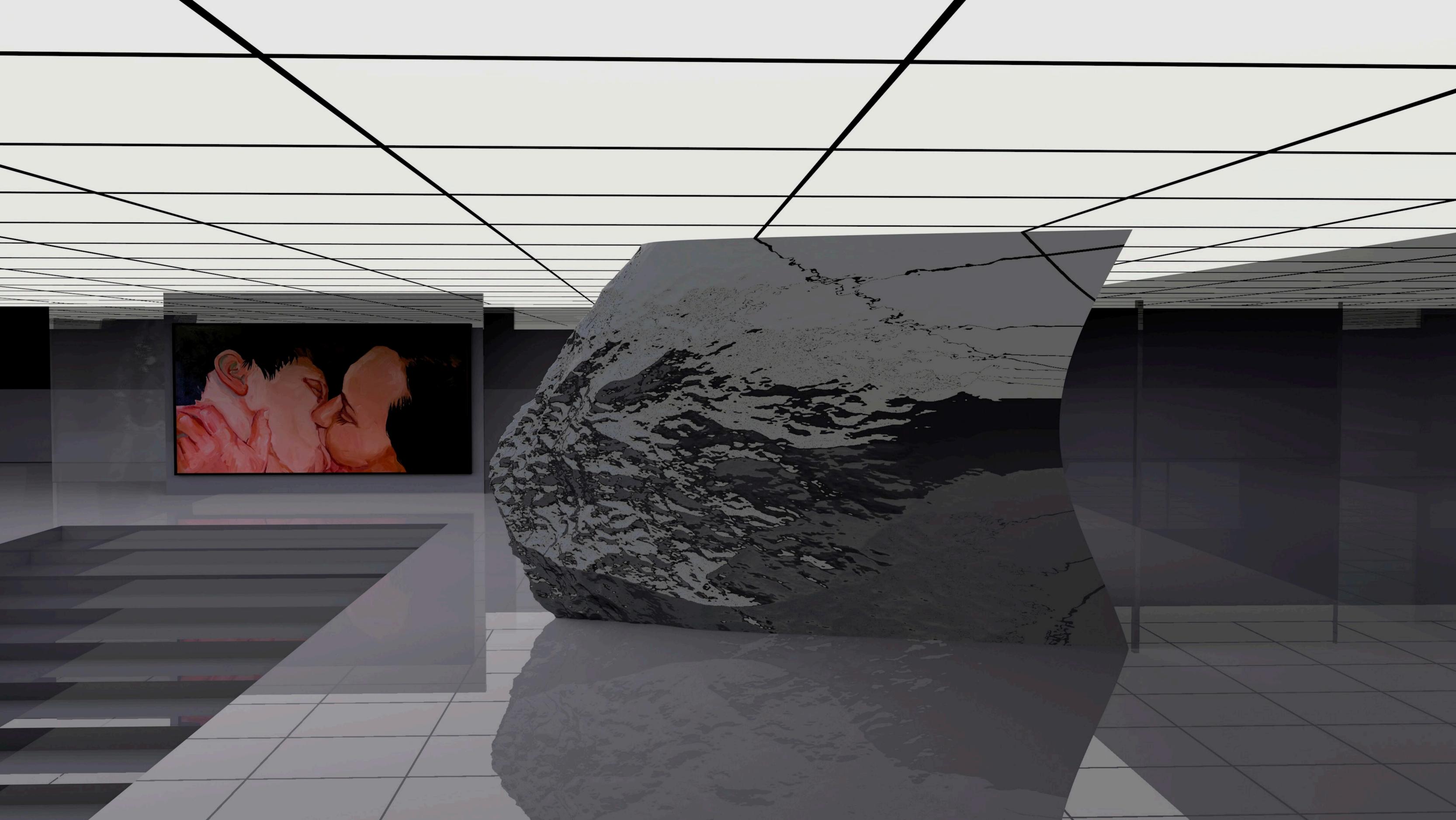
Heidegger describes this space as *the open*. He believes that animals are poor in world and humans are world-forming (an older idea that does not resonate in my *more-than-human* world I inhabit). He says the animal is captivated in its perceptual world and never fully experiences a world. Humans do have a world, a world they generate, but that world is a mirror, reflecting back on the human, like a trap, and, unlike the animal, the human never stands out in *the open*. A being before Being. Unconcealed. Truth. The open is how to be-in-the-world in the truest sense. Pure experience. Pure Being. This is where we learn how to be-in-the-world—this is how we all individually and collectively heal. It is to heal the human-animal divide, the mind-body divide.

Art is healing. It gives our trauma, and we all have trauma, a world to inhabit, allowing us to step into *the open*. But I think it takes a specific way to art, a specific drive, a specific spirit, that some cannot *not* avoid. Carl Jung describes this way of art as *visionary art*, where we leave the daytime of waking consciousness and descend into the night-world, an ancient world within the psyche of all humans. It's a primordial space that all art, religions, and mythologies have pulled from across human history, whose symbols permeate our ancient and contemporary world. It is our ancestral inheritance. Heidegger describes the origin of art as the origin of truth, but what is the knowledge domain of that truth?

For me, it is our unconscious. It's an irrational, noncoherent, unstructured, and nonlinguistic space that takes storying and imagining otherwise to unpack its contents. I have seen the unconscious interact with consciousness in two ways. First, it is the content-less scaffolding of the mind that holds our conscious, explicit understandings in place, giving a hidden structure to our world. I believe this is one way stories can shape our world. They form this implicit, unconscious structure that our conscious experiences populate. This is partly how stories are our world. Cultivating these implicit, unconscious structures allows for personal and collective transformation.



Beyond the Land (2019)



But below that content-less structure lays the foundation of our unconscious world ripping with content passed down from early humans to you— affective knowing. Emotions are namable sensations (happiness, anger, fear) that, as Alexis Shotwell notes, are “a crucial means by which human beings come to know and understand themselves and their contexts, their interests and commitments, their needs and their options in securing those needs” (p. 22) Affect is the unnamable confrontation with the unconscious, driven by bodily energy in response to inner and outer exploration. This is the abyss, the void, the *Otherworld*, the *Kingdom of Illumination*, where the veil of the world has been lifted, the doors of perception have been cleansed, and you can sense all the horror and beauty, heaven and hell, from the hinterlands of the mind. Both Jung and Heidegger described this psychic world in contrast to the physical world, both equally part of reality. They exist in balance, just as light needs darkness to contrast, to give light its presence, to give dark its presence, to be whole. This realm requires storying otherwise to unpack its contents, the origin of art. And Heidegger notes that the origin of art is the origin of the artist.

This is why the role of the artist, especially the visionary artist, has been so crucial throughout human history. This is why we can look back in the ages, to Dante or Ovid, and still feel their world, even when ours is so removed from what they experienced. They tapped into that collective space, the *Otherworld*, and saw the *Kingdom of Illumination*. They gazed into the abyss, and soon the abyss gazed back into them. And from that relationship, they brought form from no form, new ways of being-in-the-world. Truth.

This is where my resistance to mastery comes in. An artist is not a master of technique. Heidegger argues the Greeks make the distinction of *technê* away from craft or art to a mode of knowing. “*Technê*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of being in that it *brings forth* what is present as such *out of* concealment and specifically *into* the unconcealment of its appearance; *technê* never signifies the action of making.” (p. 184) The artist is not an extension of form but is a conduit where the artist becomes a column of air that is one with its breath—one that brings form from no form, the void, the abyss, our ancestral inheritance of ways of Being.



Storm Fear (2019)

To gaze into the abyss is not a light task, but one of the greatest journeys a human can go on. It's a journey for every human being. This journey has been described across time as an authentic spiritual journey, a healing journey. We all suffer, suffering is universal, but the Buddha says that suffering is the cause to bring about its end. The path to enlightenment. Nietzsche talked about the journey to become the Overman. Maslow spoke of self-actualization, peak experience. Jung described the process of Individuation, integrating your unconscious and conscious worlds, to become whole, to heal in the fullest sense.

This isn't what I was thinking about when making any of this work. I was making gestures to the void. Following intuition. Following feeling. Leaving behind the rational and embracing the irrational, the noncoherent, and flux of the mind. This body of work has been an integral part of my personal healing journey. To enter into the open.

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*Beyond Here Lies Nothing* is the vision-seekers journey into exile, to the land beyond the land. Ovid went there 2,000 years ago and described it as a place of "chillness, hostility, frozen waves of an ice-hard sea." He was pressed to the edge of the world, the blackest of seas, and found the desolate landscape of his mind torn from home.

To reach the hinterlands is not to a place-out-there but is the greatest journey of the mind. It is only for the vision-seeker, the one that cannot do anything but grow deep into the unmapped territories of the mind. The one that descends, that falls, because falling is easier than resisting. When you cross the river Styx, when you slip past the event horizon, all directions lead down, and this is where the vision-seeker always must go. Not everyone wants the journey, this weight, but those that pursue it cannot *not* fall. And so, that is what we will do.

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Brad Necyk is a multimedia artist and writer in Canada whose practice engages with issues of medicine, mental health, and precarious populations and subjects. He recently completed an arts-based, research-creation Ph.D. in Psychiatry at the University of Alberta and his doctoral research was awarded the Governor General's Gold Medal. His works include drawings and paintings, still and motion film, sculpture, 3D imaging and printing, virtual reality, performance, and narrative writing. He finished a residency with AHS Transplant Services in 2015-16, worked as an artist-researcher in a project on Head and Neck Cancer, and was a visiting artist-researcher at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto 2017-19. His current work focuses on patient experience, auto-ethnography, psychiatry, and, recently, the Anthropocene. His artistic work was included in the 2015 Alberta Biennial, and has been shown internationally, most recently in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Chicago, IL; he has presented academic work at conferences in Canada and internationally, most recently at the 2018 FLUX Symposium at the International Museum for Surgical Sciences in Chicago, IL and SLSA 2019 UC Irvine in California. Brad sits on the boards of several professional bodies and is a Scholar at the Integrative Health Institute at the University of Alberta. He currently teaches courses in Drawing and Intermedia at the University of Alberta and MacEwan University.

