

### Acknowledgements

Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. Brantford is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

**Opening reception with artist in attendance  
(free admission, everyone welcome)**

Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 - 8:30pm

GLENHYRST ART GALLERY  
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GALLERY HOURS  
Tuesday – Friday: 10am – 5pm  
Weekends: 11am – 4pm  
*Admission is free*

*Drupel, 2019, encaustic  
wax, damar resin, pigment*



TO  
THE  
END

TRACEY-MAE CHAMBERS

MAY 25 - JULY 14, 2019

People were always getting ready for  
tomorrow. I didn't believe in that.  
Tomorrow wasn't getting ready for them.  
It didn't even know they were there.

-Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

## Notes

1. Ed Yong, "Gut Reaction: The Surprising Power of Microbes," *The Guardian* (25 August, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/aug/25/gut-reaction-surprising-power-of-microbes> (accessed 10 April, 2019).
2. Tracey-Mae Chambers, Artist Statement (1 April, 2019).
3. Michael Wines, "A Sharp Spike in Honeybee Deaths Deepens a Worrisome Trend," *New York Times* (13 May, 2015), <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/us/honeybees-mysterious-die-off-appears-to-worsen.html> (accessed 10 April, 2019).
4. International Union for Conservation of Nature, "Coral Reefs and Climate Change," IUCN (2019), <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/coral-reefs-and-climate-change> (accessed 10 April, 2019).

## Artist's Biography

Tracey-Mae Chambers is a Métis sculptor and installation artist based in Simcoe, Ontario. Committed to art as a vehicle for social change, her work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the United States, Australia, South America and Europe. Her work is also included in numerous public and private art collections. Chambers has been awarded several artist residencies, including Artscape's Gibraltar Island Residency. In 2017, Chambers was commissioned by the United Nations to create six sculptures for the U.N. Environmental Awards celebrating 30 years since the Montreal Protocol was initiated. Her work has also been the subject of feature articles and interviews by several prominent news and print agencies.



*Vessels series*, 2018, encaustic wax, damar resin, pigment

Anticipation of the end of times continues to occupy the work of scientists, writers, and artists. The theory of the anthropocene is perhaps the most popular concept used to define the relationship between human beings and mass extinction. Broadly defined, the anthropocene describes an era in our most recent history whereby the activities of human beings have transformed the climate and natural environment. Rather obviously, the physical impacts of human beings mark the natural environment—take a quick glance out the window. Yet how much and at what cost is debated by scientists and politicians alike. For some, climate change is a farce driven by ideology, a system of ideas supporting a political agenda. For others, climate change points to a “decline in the richness of life [...] pulling apart species that have been together for millions of years.”<sup>1</sup>

In response, writers, filmmakers, and artists create powerful artworks that engage with the theory of the anthropocene. For instance, the documentary film *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (2018), co-directed by Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, a body of work titled “Plastiglomerate” by Montreal-based artist Kelly Jazvac representing how ocean-based plastic fuses with stone through beach campfires, and, in a roundabout way, Josh Fox’s documentary film *Gasland* (2010) on the harmful effects of hydraulic fracturing, better known as “fracking,” on Earth’s biosphere. What they share in common is a persuasive combination of empirical evidence of climate change rendered through artistic expression to produce meaningful discussions about how, or if, human beings are changing the world for better or for worse.

Simcoe-based artist Tracey-Mae Chambers is an important part of this discourse. For decades, she has been preoccupied with our collective impact on the climate and natural environment. “Leaving only footprints, is still an intrusion,” she writes. “This exhibition illustrates one possible outcome of our inaction. When our beehives are empty, save for fetid wax, when our forests are filled with diseased trees, and when our very seeds are contaminated, will we act?”<sup>2</sup> Using complex materials such as melted beeswax mixed with damar resin (tree sap) and various pigments, Chambers’ encaustic sculptures and installations appear uncannily fragile yet durably strong. To this end, they function as metaphors for the capacity of human beings to damage the Earth but also the resilience of Earth to gradually repair itself. Many of her sculptural works function as a type of vessel, which, for all cultures and peoples of the world, hold food and water in order to



*Pisum Sativum*, 2018, encaustic wax, damar resin, pigment



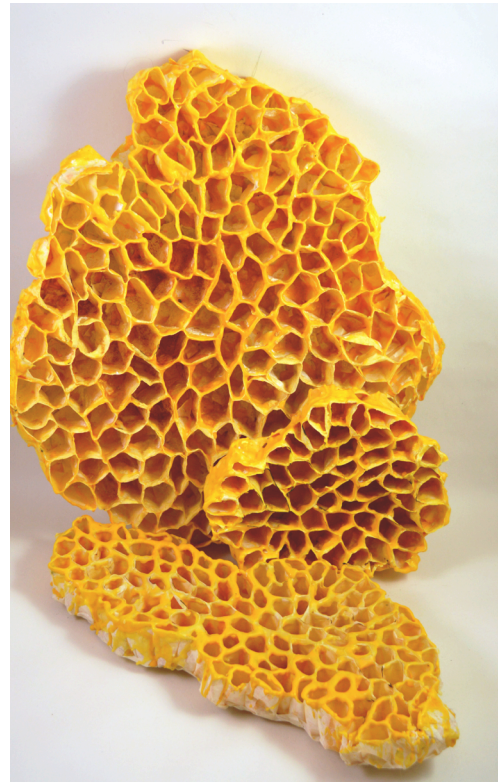
*Wire Coral*, 2018, encaustic wax, damar resin, pigment

sustain life. As such, they are also filled with memories and the passing of time, of scampering bees that formed its wax, of trees that secrete resin, and of engineers who craft pigment. Add to this the artist's own hands that tell a story of her history and experience of the world.

Chambers is particularly concerned with the everyday plight of honey bees and the health of water, be it a nearby stream or vast oceans. For example, in the large-scale installation *Beehive* (2019), she reproduces a remarkable network of honeycombs to emphasize how parasites, pesticides, and habitat destruction has led to massive colony collapses while threatening a \$15 billion dollar agricultural industry that we rely on for food.<sup>3</sup> In an ironic twist, beeswax is widely considered to be the first plastic, yet scientists believe modern plastic is one of the materials contributing to the anthropocene. For Chambers, honeybees are similar to vessels in that they are a conduit for life itself, and their losses en masse, often related to human activity, should not be underestimated.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, Chambers' investigation of the anthropocene takes her gaze below water. In her *Driftwood* (2019) series, she gathers several pieces of driftwood washed up on beaches of The Great Lakes to serve as the base for encaustic experiments. The result is a surrealistic vision of loss: gnarled driftwood affixed with sinister coral shapes coloured with iridescent black and blue to signify the entropy of the oceans. According to studies by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, "Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have caused an increase in global surface temperature of approximately 1°C since pre-industrial times. This has led to unprecedented mass coral bleaching events which [...] have made coral reefs one of the most threatened ecosystems on Earth."<sup>4</sup>

Chambers' examination of coral and other sea forms relate to her larger project of visualizing the aesthetics of the anthropocene, in the ways that we perceive and engage with how human beings impact the climate and the natural environment. In other words, she offers audiences a lens to view the world (and ourselves), then combines this with feelings of trepidation towards what the future may hold. Though it is not necessarily a new idea, what is unique about it is how she is using the very materials and forms of the threatened to speak for and through them to remind us of, sometimes painfully, the potential cost of our footprints.



*Beehive*, 2018, beeswax, damar resin, pigment



*Beehive* (installation photograph), 2018, beeswax, damar resin, pigment, found driftwood