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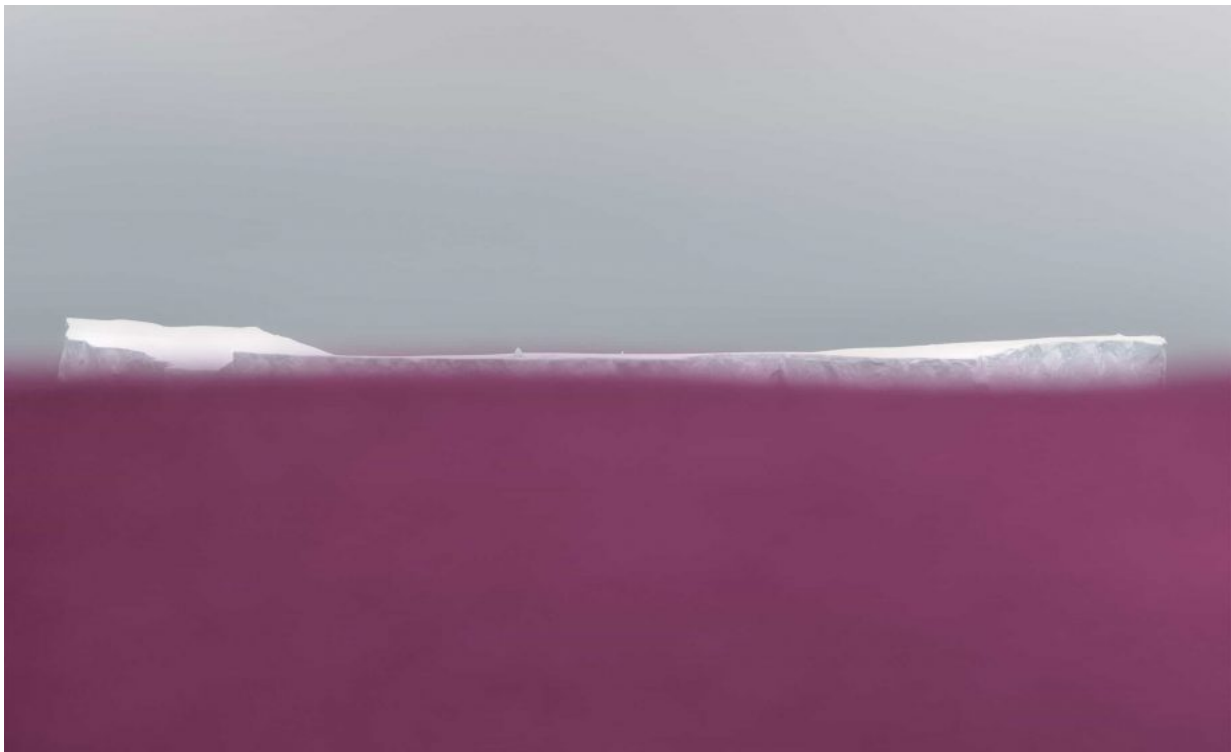
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‘Ecologies’ at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts explores humanity and nature



Jessica Houston (born in 1970), Ideas in Things (Antarctic Peninsula), from the series “Horizon Felt South,” 2018, ink-jet print, 4/5, 120.3 x 180.5 cm (sight). MMFA, Purchase, Hamelys Fund

MUST SEE - Exhibitions

By **Brandon Lorimer** (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/author/brandon-lorimer/>)

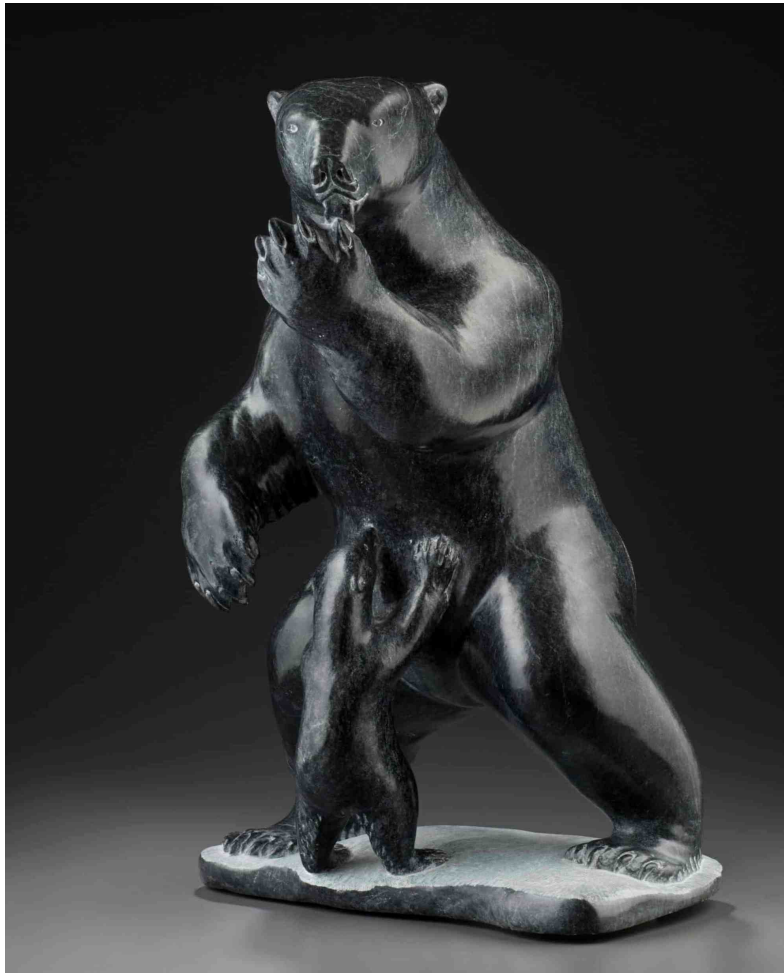
Published on 28 March 2021 at 17 h 12 min (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2021/03/>)

After a softening of restrictions on spaces throughout Montreal, (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2021/02/montreal-galleries-reopen-after-months-of-restrictions/>) the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has been able to open its doors to the

MUST SEE -

public once again. After a long autumn and winter without the presence of many physical arts spaces, the acclaimed museum's reopening has been met with a warm welcome. And as one of their first exhibitions of 2021, *Ecologies: A Song for Our Planet* serves as a strong return to the community and a reminder of our role in our own natural communities.

Curated by Iris Amizlev, the MMFA's Curator of Intercultural Arts, *Ecologies* highlights artists and works from the museum's collection which have dug into the topics of our natural environment. Many of the works will be on rotation throughout the exhibition's run, which will be on display until February 27th, 2022—giving more than enough reason to experience the thought-provoking collection multiple times throughout the coming year.



Peter Qumaluk Itukalla (born in 1954), *Untitled (Bear and Cub)*, 2003, stone, 42.7 x 32 x 24.5 cm. MMFA, gift of the Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto

There is a wonderful balance immediately noticeable as one walks through the cycle of *Ecologies*, something that Amizlev states she wanted to foster with the layout of the exhibition. Despite the physical makeup of the room being an open concept with one central unit, there are distinct conceptual divisions that really shape the quadrants of the space. Displays that contain animal figures carved by Inuit artists—including Osuitok Ipeelee and Peter Qumaluk Itukalla—give a sense of environmental bookends to the sections. It feels almost seasonal as the tour moves from harmonious nature, to industrial destruction, to hopeful up-cycling, to the dread of global warming.

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Must see!



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Pieces such as Giuseppe Penone's *Path* immediately draw the viewer into the soul of *Ecologies*, a rough and regal twisting of oxidized bronze, its wood-like limbs and detailed leaves giving way to the near-missable face amongst the limbs; serene yet strangely sorrowful, the intermingling of human and environment is striking.



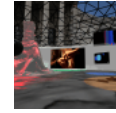
Giuseppe Penone (born in 1947), *Path*, 1983, bronze, single cast, 180 x 400 x 45 cm. MMFA, purchase, Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequest. © Giuseppe Penone / SOCAN (2021). Photo MMFA, Christine Guest

The darkest sides of humanity's intertwining with the world it resides in are just as hard to look away from. Robert Longo's *Joe Test* reproduces in charcoal an image of the U.S.S.R.'s first atomic bomb test. The sheer capacity for human's to irrevocably change our world for the worse is captured starkly, something feeling so ancient about the image despite it being less than a century ago. When viewed alongside the many depictions of our world for better and for worse, this representation of that which creates nothingness is all the more sobering,



Robert Longo (born in 1953), *Joe Test* / Russian, 2004, charcoal, 100.4 x 125.4 cm. MMFA, purchase, the Museum Campaign 1988-1993 Fund. © Robert Longo / SOCAN (2021)

formatted-outdoor-season/)



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Yet despite the weighty feelings and dark realities that are necessarily depicted across *Ecologies*, the exhibition is not at all without its lighter side. Laurie Walker's *Sisyphus, the Dung Beetle* is already engrossing from a distance—a large sphere of rolled dung with a perfect split of it painted gold—but upon closer inspection, the miniature beetle and the Superman logo that adorns its shell are a perfect pairing. Walker's brilliant mix of mythologies, pop culture and nature beams with humour and brightness and encapsulates much of the positivity that curator Iris Amizlev is expressing through this collection.



Laurie Walker (1962–2011), *Sisyphus, the Dung Beetle*, 2003, fibreglass, sheep manure, peat moss, straw, gold leaf, “Kheper” scarab beetle with coloured logo printed on paper. MMFA, gift of Evelyn and Lorne Walker. Photo MMFA, Denis Farley



A closeup of the titular *Sisyphus, the Dung Beetle*

After the tour of the exhibition space, one piece remains of *Ecologies* that is situated in another wing of the building—the video installation *Requiem for a Glacier*. While there was only time to see a fragment of the forty-minute loop (and will be covered in full at a later date), it goes without saying that creator Paul Walde has captured the sheer

immensity and ominous essence of a glacier threatened by global warming and industrial development, and serves as a gripping cap to the ideas behind the collection.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has done a tremendous job with the presentation of *Ecologies: A Song for Our Planet*. Highlighting our world, those who live within it, and those who capture that relationship, it displays the positives and negatives of human capability in a graceful balance. It is a breath of fresh air when wanted and a cold shock of truth when needed, but above all else, it is a stunning collection as we look towards what a new year on this planet holds for us.

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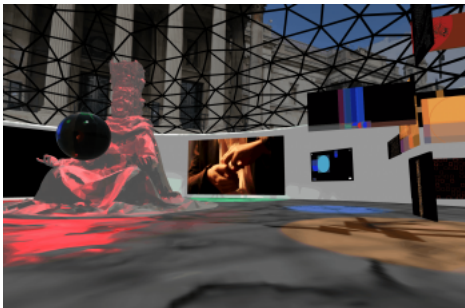
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