

ISSUE TWENTY : WINTER 2022
OPEN RIVERS :
RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

RIVERS AND MEANING

<http://openrivers.umn.edu>

An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking water, place & community
from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

ISSN 2471-190X

The cover image is of low clouds in Glen Forsa on the Isle of Mull, Scotland, UK. Image by Jill Diamond on Unsplash.

Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). This means each author holds the copyright to her or his work, and grants all users the rights to: share (copy and/or redistribute the material in any medium or format) or adapt (remix, transform, and/or build upon the material) the article, as long as the original author and source is cited, and the use is for noncommercial purposes.

Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community is produced by the [University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Services](https://www.librariespublishing.com/) and the [University of Minnesota Institute for Advanced Study](https://www.umn.edu/institute-for-advanced-study/).

Editorial Staff

Editor
Laurie Moberg, Institute for Advanced Study,
University of Minnesota

Administrative Editor
Phyllis Mauch Messenger

Editorial Assistant
Natalie Warren
PhD Candidate, Communication Studies,
University of Minnesota; Institute for Advanced
Study, University of Minnesota

Media and Production Manager
Joanne Richardson, Institute for Advanced Study,
University of Minnesota

Contact Us

Open Rivers
Institute for Advanced Study
University of Minnesota
Northrop
84 Church Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Telephone: (612) 626-5054
Fax: (612) 625-8583
E-mail: openrvrs@umn.edu
Web Site: <http://openrivers.umn.edu>

ISSN 2471-190X

CONTENTS

Introductions

Introduction to Issue Twenty By Laurie Moberg, Editor	4
Guest Editor's Introduction to Issue Twenty: Rivers and Meaning By Mary Modeen	6

Features

<i>RIVER FUGUES</i> By Margaret Cogswell	15
(Re)connecting Community to the Awataha Stream By Laura Donkers and Charmaine Bailie	47
TWEED By Tania Kovats and Mary Modeen	60
Professor Jiao Xingtao and <i>The Yangdeng Art Cooperative Project</i> By Jiao Xingtao and Mary Modeen	100

In Review

<i>Light and Language</i> at Lismore Castle Arts By Ciara Healy Musson	113
---	-----

Geographies

In the Crook of My Elbow By Katie Hart Potapoff	120
--	-----

Perspectives

River / Museum By Miriam Mallalieu	128
---	-----

Primary Sources

Photo Essay of Ilhabela Rivers By Francisco Pereira Da Silva, Laelcio Pereira Da Silva, and Helena Beutel	136
Reflecting On Brackish Waters By Louise Ritchie	164
Between Two Rivers: Two Ballads from a Scots Traveller Family By Arthur Watson	173

Teaching and Practice

The River and The Bridge By Robert Snikkar	179
---	-----

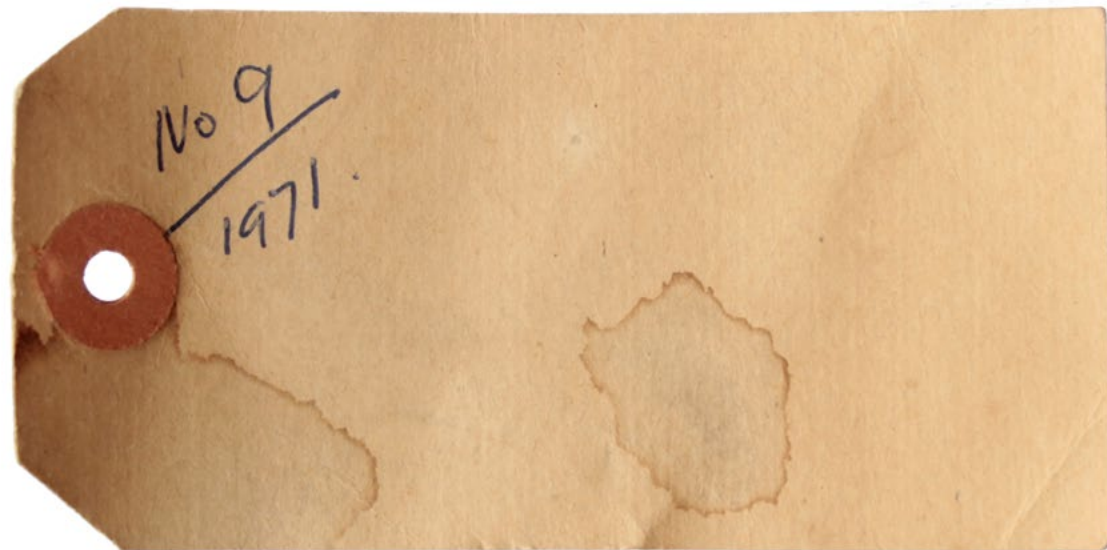
PERSPECTIVES

RIVER / MUSEUM

By Miriam Mallalieu

The River Tay and Perth Museum sit fifteen meters apart (or nineteen paces, with a pause at the traffic lights to cross the road). Sometimes the river sits low in its bed, with the banks adding another six paces; at other times the river is swollen and turbulent, risen to the edge of the edge of the wall. Sometimes you can walk along the promenade and let your fingertips skim the water's top.

There was a point at which they mixed, the museum and the river.^[1] The river swelled into the basement and rinsed the objects clean from their interpretation: labels were lost, organization was disassembled, and centuries of cleaning, conservation, and acid-free packing were soaked and muddied. The fire brigade was called, tasked with pulling objects from the brown water and laying them in the galleries above the water line.



Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

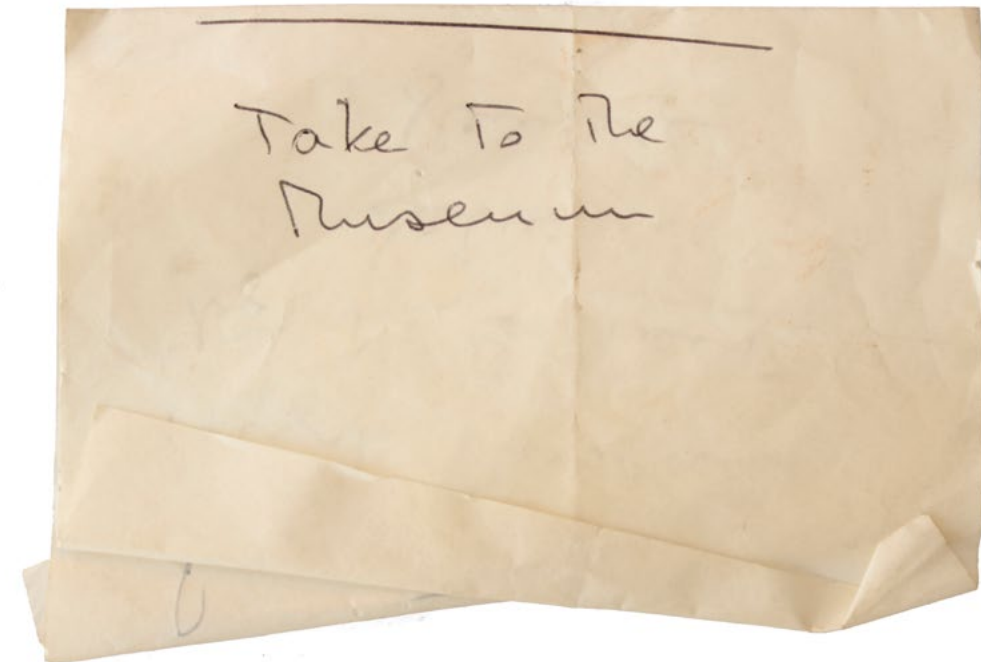
From the water, they pulled the Gavial Head, later nicknamed “the Monster of the Flood.”

It is joked that it emerged cleaner and better looking than before the flood, but this is probably not true.

Over time, this meeting of water and artifact was erased from visible history: cleaning, repair, and other conservation efforts removed the event

from the surface of the objects and the walls of the basement.

I like to think, however, that there was a change nonetheless in both the river and the museum, that it would be possible to detect traces of river water and silt between the delicate layers of oil on canvas that form Millais’ *Waking*, that this painting holds a record, still, of its dip in the



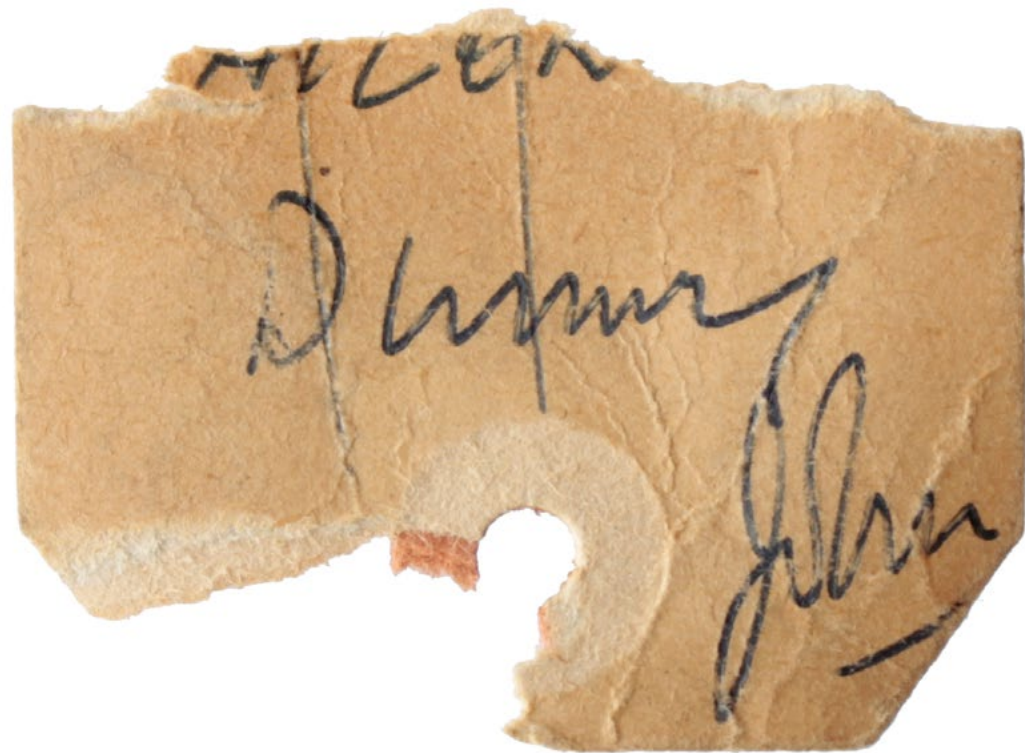
Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

river. Perhaps in the churning mêlée of artifact and river water, there was a Flann O’Brien-esque exchange of molecules, and the river receded with new qualities drawn from the sacred, historical, mundane, and accidental that make up the collection.[2] The collection, in turn, gained some quality of the distant hills, the farms, and the woodlands through which the water filters, and the nature of the river itself as it churns and pools and drifts towards the sea. Perhaps, if measured, we would find that those objects plucked from the flood have a tendency to lean eastwards towards the sea, rolling slowly on their shelves. The water

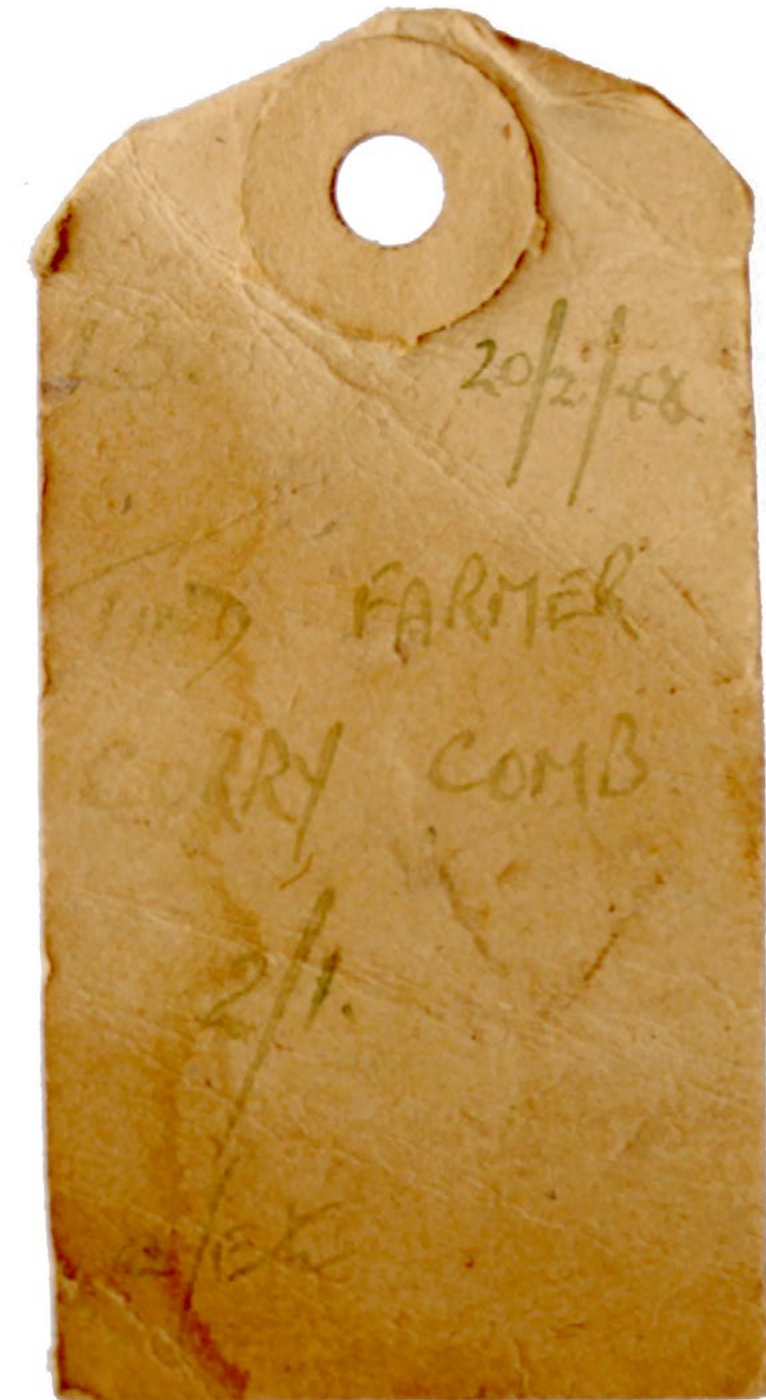
holding the nature of the collection would by now be dispersed across the North Sea and wider, possibly cycled through cloud and rain.

It is raining the water that washed away the names from the gods.[3]

Perhaps there were moments of recognition: archaeology pulled from the riverbed would at once recognize the cold submersion; Miss Ballantyne’s prize-winning salmon knew water once again, 75 years after it was hooked and pulled from the river depths.[4] Immersed, too, were pearls from



Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.



Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

the freshwater oysters, spades and tools that shaped the earth around the river, and objects that knew not this river, but rivers elsewhere. All were reminded for an instant of their purpose or use or existence beyond that of artifact.

The museum, in an attempt to chart (and contain) the history of the area, holds relics of the river: items of revolt over taxation and bridges; Celtic carvings from what may have been sacred pits at the river's edge. Perhaps the river wanted to reach these items, ensure its continued connection with the records and the gods and the events.

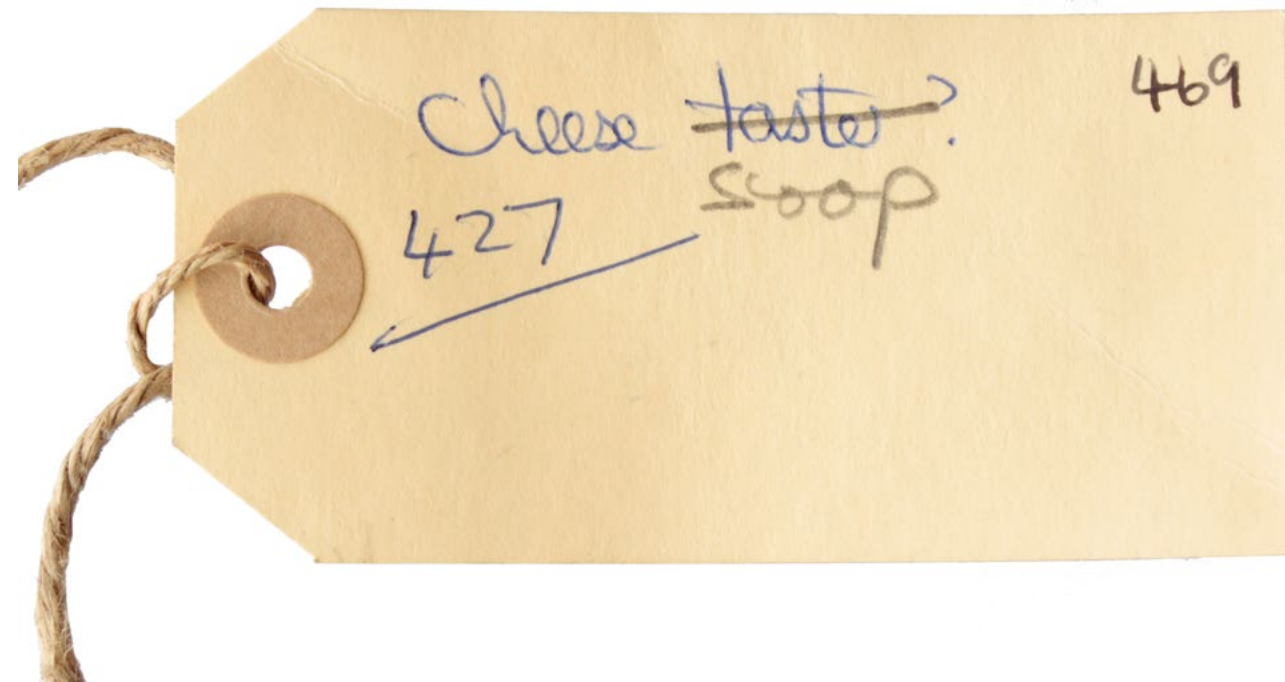
This meeting of forces (the river and the museum) was destructive, too. It momentarily broke down the rigid organizations of the museum collection, mixing Fine Art with Decorative Art with World Cultures. Distinctions were lost, and with them, determinations of value, cultural interpretations, and contexts. This was a moment of liberation as well as chaos. Some things have remained lost: there is a bag of loose labels in a cabinet in the basement—which, 25 years on,

are yet to be reunited with artifact—kept as a record of objects that may also have been lost (or more likely, re-labelled). They are a record of uncertain existence—objects that were, before this meeting of water and collection, tethered to their interpretation (they existed with certainty) but now remain as record only (suggesting only the possibility of existence elsewhere).

Twelve of these labels refer to different types of cheese scoops. Perhaps the river favored this selection of objects to wash onwards to the sea.

More troubling for the museum are the objects left without label, too obscure to reconnect with history. There is a wooden beam in the collection for which all history and context dissolved in the river water. Now recorded only as “wooden beam,” its significance is diminished to that it was once considered important enough to accession.

Perhaps it wasn't even accessioned. Perhaps the water brought it.



Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

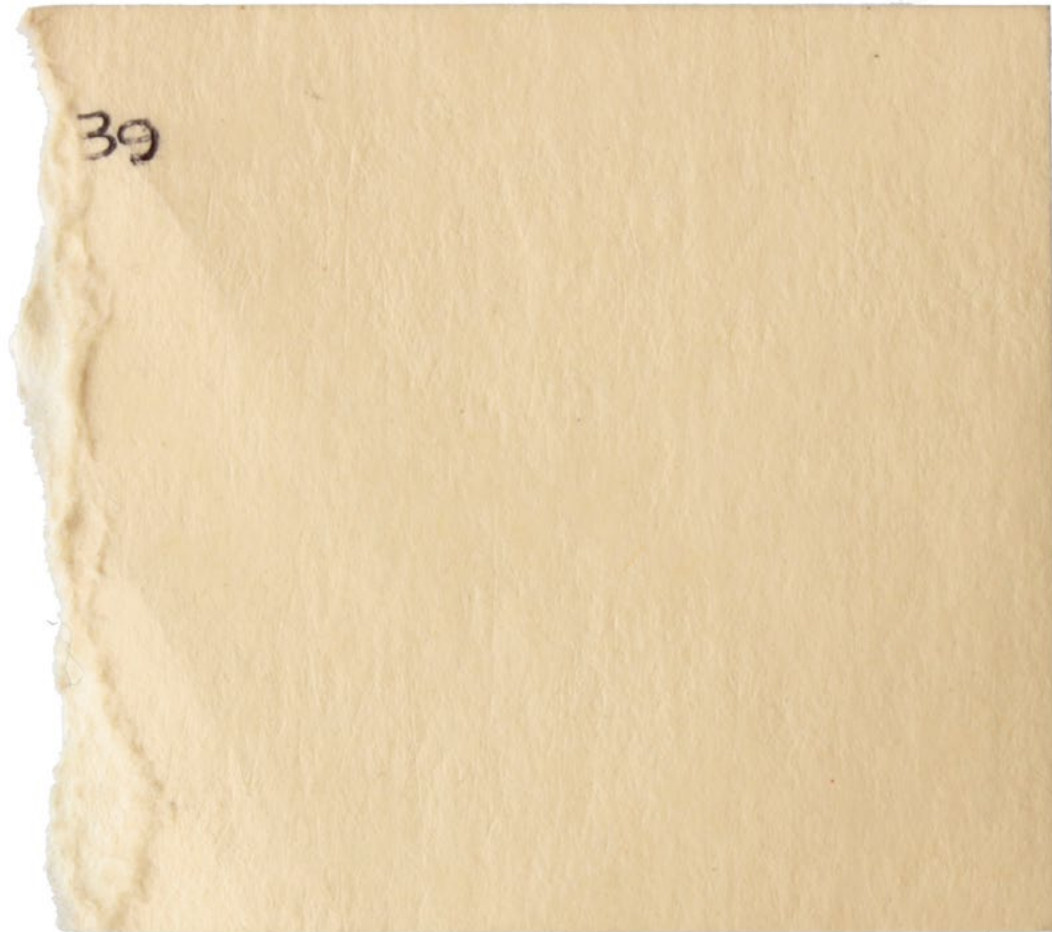


Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

In the period following this disruptive mixing of movement and history, precautions were taken to ensure that it cannot happen again. Seals were placed over the doors of the museums; plans drawn up for a new store (uphill). Water levels are watched closely and there is a Grab List compiled for emergencies. Before evacuating for

your own safety, objects of highest significance are snatched first from the basement, including a cloak of woven Kakapo feathers (nearly extinct) and an eight-foot Pictish stone carving.

I feel like I have written this before (but one cannot step into the same river twice).



Loose labels from Perth Museum. Image courtesy of Miriam Mallalieu.

Footnotes

[1] A contemporary account of the Tay 1993 flood was published by A. R. Black and J. L. Anderson, “The Great Tay Flood of 1993,” in *Hydrological Data UK: 1993 Yearbook* (Wallingford, UK: Institute of Hydrology, 1994), 25–34. http://nrfa.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The_Great_Tay_Flood_of_January_1993.pdf.

[2] Flann O’Brien, the pen name for Brian O’Nolan (1911-1966), was—in addition to being a civil servant—an Irish novelist, playwright, and satirist regarded as a major figure in twentieth-century modernism. He combines humor with wildly overlaid plots, deploying characters that stray far from the author’s commands.

[3] This refers (at least in part) to the gods listed on spiritual artifacts with the museum labels blurred by the water.

[4] Indeed, it was Miss Ballantyne who held the record for the largest salmon ever to be caught in the Tay, the fish weighing a hefty 64 lbs.

Recommended Citation

Mallalieu, Miriam. 2021. “River / Museum.” *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, no. 20. <https://editions.lib.umn.edu/openrivers/article/river-museum/>.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24926/2471190X.8767>

About the Author

Miriam Mallalieu’s research explores the idea of “making sense.” Interested in what knowledge is and how things are understood, she looks specifically at methods of catalogue, organization, archiving and curation, and significantly, the structures of power that this knowledge creates and upholds. Miriam is a current Ph.D. candidate at the University of Dundee, Scotland, in the final stages of completing her doctoral degree. She is a recipient of the Queens College Scholarship. Her thesis is titled *What Does A Museum Think It Is? Research and practice at the intersection of knowledge, interpretation and organization*. With a practice that extends across curation, writing, printmaking, and sculpture, Miriam has exhibited both across Scotland and internationally. She has won several prizes for her work, notably the Royal Scottish Academy prize and Watters Maclane Medal (2013), and the John Kinross Scholarship (2017) from the Royal Scottish Academy. www.cargocollective.com/miriammallalieu.