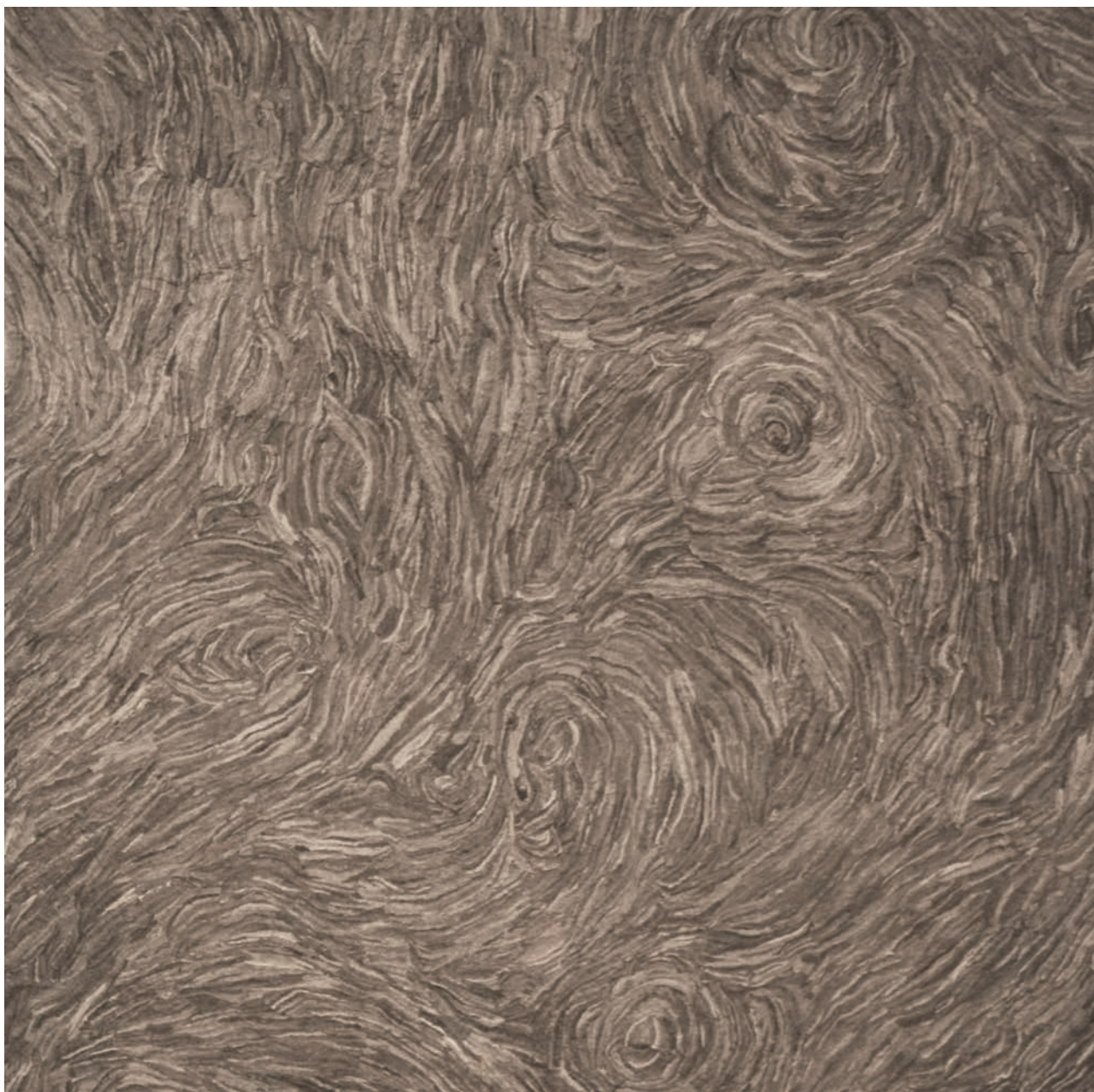






The catalogue of prairie plant species reads like a poem: wolf willow, black-eyed susan, sage, saskatoon berry. The names speak to the physical environment, but also an imaginative terrain—a place where ideologies and histories mingle and collide.

Our understanding of nature is a tangle of historical perspectives, personal experience, public and private interests. *The names of things* aims to tease out some of these issues through the poignant, humorous, and imaginative artworks of three Saskatoon artists.



Terry Billings' work sits in the charged space between knowledge and intuition. Her diverse practice, including video, mixed media and installation works, explores the contradictions between the established scientific understanding of biological life forms and her personal experience of the nonhuman world.

Her collaborative wasp drawings hinge on a delightful proposition—insects are creative, intelligent beings. Billings collects abandoned wasp nests, carefully removes sections from their paper construction, and transfers the delicate material onto canvas. She interprets the patterns and applies the material in a way that is “consistent with the wasps’ intent.” The resulting rhythmic, swirling compositions suggest an insect aesthetic consciousness that seems not entirely preposterous.

Reassembled Moults is comprised of sandhill crane feathers. Billings collected the feathers by the South Saskatchewan River, where the birds stop to rest, feed, and socialize on their annual migration route to Northern breeding areas. The birds preen in mud, and the iron content stains their typically grey plumage with brown washes of colour. Feathers are shed and replaced through the process of moulting. Billings reassembled her collection, conforming the feathers to the rectangular geometry of a picture frame. The work has an elegiac tone—so many muted feathers, beautiful, tinged with absence.



Zachari Logan's drawings investigate masculine representation. Through depictions of his body, Logan's provocative large-scale works explore notions of desire, sexuality, domesticity, and love.

The title of Logan's large, two-panel pastel drawing, *Eunuch Tapestry One*, is derived from a series of remarkable 15th-century European tapestries featuring the unicorn. *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, a series of seven works, depicts the pursuit and capture of the mythical one-horned creature. These works contain complex symbolism— Christian allegories of the Incarnation, references to pagan rituals, traditional knowledge, and the allegory of love.

In a contemporary context, the unicorn has been adopted as a symbol of queer culture, what Logan describes as a "campy gay icon." Logan extrapolates on the historical unicorn narrative to explore queer experience. The Christian allegory of persecution and redemption seems apropos; as political debate continues to swirl around the issue of same-sex marriage, the allegory of love is particularly resonant.

Logan's reference to the millefleur, a popular floral motif found in 15th-century European tapestries, testifies to the enduring appeal of natural subject matter. Literally translated to "one thousand flowers," Logan's millefleur composition depicts plants and flowers found in prairie ditches and others he observed during residencies in the Southern United States and in Europe. Logan's garden is a fictional space layered with symbolic and personal meaning; the ambiguous figure lends itself to wonderings and speculation, much like the tapestries themselves.

(Page 6) Zachari Logan, *Eunuch Tapestry One* (detail), 2012, pastel on black paper



Stacia Verigin's sculptures are inspired by her enchantment with the beauty and diversity of nature and are driven by a desire to give new purpose to waste materials. Through a process of experimentation and play, she eloquently transforms materials such as plastic, sawdust and glue into natural looking forms. Her work invites curious inspection; the viewer is challenged to resolve the tension between natural and unnatural, fiction and reality.

Citing an early interest in science, Verigin adapts biological nomenclature for the titles of her work. Her *taxon* series shares its name with the term used to describe a group of related organisms. Through her collections of sculpted bones, teeth, sticks and other organic forms, Verigin invites the viewer to imagine the entity in its entirety.

The skeletal structure, *Polydactyl*, is an assemblage of cast hands and fingers. Polydactylism is a congenital physical condition in which a person is born with more than 5 fingers or toes. Referencing a medical anomaly, the work calls to mind Victorian-era sideshow curiosities and museum displays of dinosaur bones, artifacts and other remains. This work speaks to the paradoxical drive to collect and dissect marvellous specimens discovered in the new world, and makes connections between human and nonhuman beings.

Human activities can have unintended and far-reaching consequences. Verigin's practice has made her mindful of her own patterns of consumption and waste. By transforming materials that are considered worthless or destined for the landfill, Verigin questions how a culture ascribes value.

(Page 8) Stacia Verigin, *Polydactyl*, 2012, plastic



Naming is a way of conceiving and articulating the human experience. The system of identifying, naming and classifying things is both necessary and inherently problematic. Names define things and fix meaning; just as plant and animal species, territories and bodies may be similarly named and claimed.

In their mixed-media works, drawings and sculpture, Terry Billings, Zachari Logan, and Stacia Verigin explore the complex relationships between human experience and the natural world. Their art engages with natural forms and imagery to challenge assumptions about nature, and consider the beauty and mystery of the world around us.

Curated by Troy Grons Dahl, Associate Curator.



Published to record the exhibition, *The names of things: Terry Billings, Zachari Logan, and Stacia Verigin*, presented from September 28, 2012 to January 6, 2013 at the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Canada. Curated by Troy Gronsdahl, Associate Curator.

Essay: Troy Gronsdahl, Mendel Art Gallery
Design: Lindsey Rewuski, Mendel Art Gallery

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The Mendel Art Gallery is a non-profit organization supported by donations and grants from the City of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Lotteries, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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