

# MEETING THE GROUND

COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY JANUARY 22 – MARCH 4, 2016

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we put things together and take things apart
we look at what is done and what is undone
we linger at the openings and at the closings
and here in this shared space
is the making
of an exhibition

I met with Renée Poisson for a studio visit in the spring of 2014. Over the course of a two year dialogue that followed, an exhibition has emerged in which the gallery plays a complex role as a malleable site and container for an evolving creative residency and public presentation of an interdisciplinary time-based / visual art installation; as a site for collaborative live art experimentations; and as a platform for thematically responsive art-making.

Meeting the Ground first had its genesis in the research and creative processes embedded in a single artistic vision, cultivated over many years. While preparing for the exhibition, Renée decided to make her work more permeable to invite interactions and concurrences. During a month-long artistic residency preceding the exhibition, and throughout the run of the six-week show, Renée inhabited the gallery as a means of extending and deepening her engagement – working between visual art, media art and movement practices. Using the gallery as a laboratory, she cultivated diverse opportunities for making independent, collaborative and interactive work in and across the arts. She tested new ideas, interacted with variable audiences and invited responses as part of her ongoing research.

# opening / widening

Meeting the Ground brings us to the threshold of possibilities. The artist attends to the exhibition as a living organism, unearthing and folding in deeper layers of production and content. We tell people about how she shows up each day prepared to work. We witness how she arrives into the body, meets the body, stirs the body, becomes present, again and again, each day. We notice as she sets about working on the elements of her project – reshaping videos, soundscapes and object-based installation elements, incorporating participatory footage, and accumulating content and documentation for a publication.

Renée carves wood. She tells us how it is vital to her that she offers this tangible reality to be acknowledged and experienced by others. She inspires a deep sense of curiosity about our relationships with objects that are all around us. During the run of the exhibition, we watch as she encourages viewers and performers to engage with and rearrange the life size, cherry wood sculptural elements *Detritus 1-5*, throughout the gallery space. These body/tool forms invite an expansion of our body knowledge.

The single channel video projection, entitled *falling research* and the excerpted stills in this publication, represent the artist's pursuit of the fall. They have been arrived at through a personal synthesis, drawn from different approaches to falling, in a variety of places. As part of this ongoing research, we direct people to the small gallery in the back (the George Sawchuk Room), in which the artist had placed tumbling mats for people to fall on. Some fall down. Others don't. The actions/non actions are recorded in 10 second intervals each day. The accumulated footage is downloaded and played back on a screen in the same space. Viewers see the recordings of themselves if they return. And some do.

# flowing into and out of

Renée's immersive research places emphasis on dissolving identity and beliefs, through her ongoing experience of walking towards death, as an ordinary aging person. Motivated by desire to understand what it is to be human, what it is to meet the unexpected, Renée invites us into the grace and awkwardness of "finding life in the preparation for death." In Meeting the Ground, we are exposed to an unearthing. The artist gathers, the work gathers and the space gathers. Artmaking serves as a way of knowing that everything is changing and there is a powerful energy within this culture of transformation.

# holding course: an innate language of knowing

Meeting the Ground is an ongoing project that began 10 years ago. The exhibition at the Comox Valley Art Gallery provided viewers with an understanding of the artist's work on this project to date – a choreographed narrative existing within this window of time. Informed by the dialogue between artist, curator, performance participants, contributors and audiences, Meeting the Ground was honed during its period of residence in the gallery space. Renée's experience was that many of the viewer/participants experienced an immediate response to the installation, noting its relevance to their own lives.

Since the closing of the exhibition, Renée has continued to develop the project. At the gallery we have been working on this publication, which flows from the exhibition and the broader falling project. We have stayed in touch with each other and with the work, as the project continues, beyond the specificity of the gallery context. The conversations emerging from Meeting the Ground come from a knowledge shared amongst those who have been involved, those who have witnessed, and those who have heard about the project.

### begin and end and begin again:

Here at the kitchen table, we are in a conversation once again. She tells me how it is: though the installation was complete, it was never meant to be the last word. The work involves doing, gathering and imagining. It is an evolving practice, with death in mind.

Now she is researching how it is to get up, to take the next step, to prepare to fall again, in order to live, or to die. Once again, the camera is the witness. The body movements are about meeting the challenge of getting up in awkward and difficult situations. This can take place in clearcut slash, on a sidewalk, amongst belongings piled in a storage locker, on a steep slope, or anywhere that is hard to get up from. Having experienced her body fallen on the ground, she has started to investigate getting up, because you have to get up, step up, meet it. You have to get up to die.

The going over video projection in Meeting the Ground, featured a collection of small, handmade, wooden boats. Black lettered words, that represented aspects of life that we let go of, were handwritten on the boats' white sails. Lately Renée has begun to record new footage of her boats. She shows me a recent video clip stored on her phone and tells me that she has been putting the boats in the snowmelt on the mountain – at the source of the river, at the place of origin, before words, before consciousness, before the beginning of everything.

Before Renée leaves she says, "in the summer I will take the boats to the open sea, beyond streams and rivers and free of obstructions. In that space I imagine the boats moving toward the edge of the world."

 Angela Somerset, curator for the Comox Valley Art Gallery in conversation with Renée Poisson

# I Keep Preparing

- Dorothy Livesay

I keep preparing
my death
re-arranging
the pillow
opening and closing
envelopes
re-filing
folders
I keep rehearsing
the last words to be inserted
on the typewriter ribbon

But it won't happen
as expected
It will be like this dream
I wake from:
shaggy cat hissing in the brown grass
and my dog, leaping over the stile
to attack she reels and falls back
stiff as a porcupine

No preparation was needed for the thunderbolt

Livesay, Dorothy, "I Keep Preparing," Archive for our Times: Previously Uncollected and Unpublished Poems of Dorothy Livesay, Arsenal Pulp Press 1998

Meeting the Ground is the second in an ongoing exhibition series entitled In this body: journeys in places of meeting. In this body invites conversation about the myriad of ways in which the artists encounter and deal with interpersonal dynamics, history, culture, behaviors, architecture, landscape and politics, and how these influences inform our changing sense of self. The artists and their collaborators, share affinities for creating and activating occurrences of 'being in this body,' as they confront and negotiate complex experiential terrain residing at the intersection of art and the everyday. The Comox Valley Art Gallery values the opportunity to support new site-responsive, collaborative and interactive projects, by contemporary artists engaged in taking risks, extending their research and practice into new territory.

falling research cover, pages 1+7
composite video interwoven with elements of prints and drawings, sourced from the artist's intentional falling research 2016
the cover is printed on Epson Enhanced Matte Photo Archival Paper
we rise we fall pages 2-6
performance documentation stills 2016



# My friend is leading me up a steep trail

After three hours of climbing, we pass a grassy meadow that slopes up to our left. "That looks good," she says. She reaches into her pack and produces a camera. I'm surprised.

"Try to keep me in the frame," she suggests.

She climbs the slope, throws herself to the ground and starts rolling toward me. I'm surprised.

She sees my expression.

"I'm falling," she explains, then climbs back up the slope and repeats. Several times. I try to keep her in the frame.

Hiking with Renee, is like talking with Renee. You will be challenged. You will feel a little uncertain of the ground you are on. Sometimes your legs will get wobbly from exertion.

You can work too hard trying to figure it out. Really, it's obvious. The mountain is beautiful. The hike is hard. The payoff is rewarding. Renee falls. She gets up. We all fall. We get up. Until we don't.

When Renee's show was up at the art gallery (to my surprise it included video footage where I more or less kept her in the frame) I saw people respond in many different ways. Some studied the video footage intently, repeatedly. Some went directly to the video recording zone and did their own falling on camera, eager to become part of the show. Some meditated. One guy came several times and played a hand-made wood instrument that produced haunting sounds.

Some came to the community space and drew pictures of falling. Some went through the gallery briskly. Some entered tentatively, not sure they were in the right place. Some asked what it meant.

She's falling, I might say (or wished I had said). Just try to keep her in the frame.

- Glen Sanford, friend of Renée Poisson/occassional CVAG staffer





# Death is important; it is important that we die

- Renée Poisson

The old growth forests here embody vividly and tangibly the completeness of life and death together. I belong in the midst of this, part of being death as well as life. The dead trees falling down pour their richness onto the ground and the live trees grow up through it. Death is great!

As I was getting close to 70 I had to see that most of my life was already done; I felt surprisingly uneasy. It was hard to admit to myself that I felt fearful of my own death, a fear so contrary to all my beliefs. I knew it was essential to die and at the same time I could feel a kind of shrinking in my body. Thoughts like "I'm just about dead now so what's the point of doing anything really?" invaded my mind. I didn't want to live like that! So I began an investigation through my work.

The action of falling, relearned as an adult in a dance process with Anthea Browne, had been a compelling part of my work in image and gesture for over 10 years. I liked the feeling of falling and the experience of landing on the chosen soft ground. I now began using this movement as a practice for death, an ending, a release.

As I venture moving into my body, inhabiting it instead of denying its reality as I tried to for years, I experience the wisdom of this body as profound. The information I need is all there. Its amazing! I filmed myself in the practice of these mini-death experiences so that I could take this record into my studio and study it in detail. Slowing the action, I could see the places of resistance in my body (reflecting resistance in my mind, emotion!). I was, am, fascinated, inspired. Drawing and printmaking became part of the process.

Bringing into the gallery my results, evidence of my ongoing work, making public my personal and private journey seemed both risky and essential. I don't want to be in this alone! I'm curious about peoples responses: do we have similar or different experiences? Does what I am saying make sense outside my studio? Are my images and metaphors useful to other people?



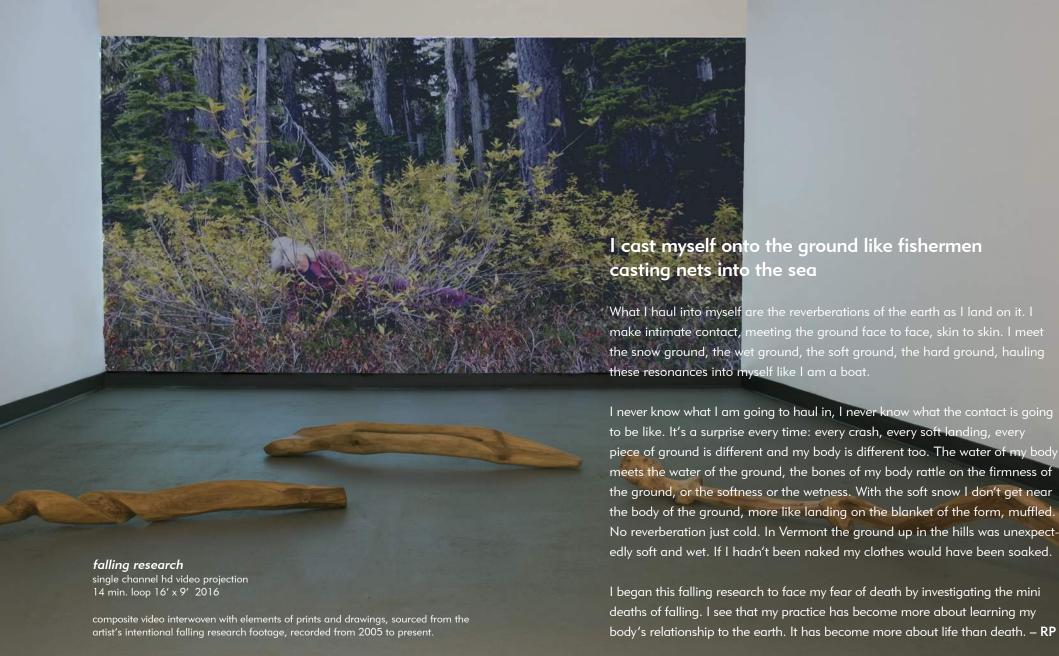
# In the midst of meeting the ground I am experiencing a quiet revolution

I don't know where I am, whether I am falling gradually to the ground or floating away in the great stream. I don't know if I am less afraid of death. I have a wider sense of where I am, beyond what I can see. And that was my wish, the impetus for this project. I didn't want my fear of death to stop me from being alive and flourishing right now. I knew running away and denial wouldn't work, but facing my fear and looking at death seemed risky. I might be overcome by the darkness. I might not be able to continue my life happily if I let death get huge.

This unplanned revolution is a result of my desire to move from an isolated and self sufficient creative practice in my studio to a public gallery context where I could interact, collaborate and take new risks. Throughout my years of art making I worked alone, defending my privacy with a life-or-death urgency. In this way I could risk anything without worrying about compromising others and this continues to give me great freedom to follow through on my vision.

The shift began when Angela saw my work as meaningful, gave my project a new context as we began to map the installation of the work. My own research led me to Liz Lerman, Marina Abramovich, Butoh, Rita Charon, stories people have told me about falling, about the dying of friends and family. All of this widened the field of my investigation, included accepting the warm outreach, help and support offered by the people who form the community in and around the Comox Valley Art Gallery. These connections undid the structure of aloneness I had made my reality.

In the past, working with people sometimes meant giving up my personal focus and direction; the process could be fun but the outcome didn't feel like my work in any significant way. In this presentation of *Meeting The Ground* at the Comox Valley Art Gallery, I have experienced collaboration as supportive and expansive. Engaging specifically and directly with community collaborators/performers, the staff team, volunteers, participants and audience has expanded my ability to sustain and deepen my creative vision, generating a new land-scape for continued exploration. – **RP** 



#### falling research

stills from single channel hd video projection, 14 min. loop 16' x 9' 2016







# Heading For a Fall

Dorothy Field

l am falling asleep

at the wheel

the switch

falling back

below beneath

between

two stools

by the wayside

falling away falling down

on the job

flat

on my face

falling for you

hook line and sinker

head over heels

in love

falling in line

in a heap

falling from grace

from power

falling ill falling into

place

a trap

decay

disgrace disuse

the wrong hands

their clutches

falling into ruin falling on

hard times

my knees

my face my sword

deaf ears

falling off

the radar the map

falling out

of bed

of love of favour

falling overboard

falling short

of the mark

falling through

the ice

the cracks the floor

falling under

a spell

a truck

falling to pieces

falling apart

at the seams

falling into ruin

into the gutter

into the drink

falling over backwards

off the face of the earth

falling all over

myself

like a ton of bricks

off the wagon

wide of the mark

falling down

like ninepins

easy as falling

off a log

13 —

(descend by force of out side) 019 Marray James fall in the start fall in

All falling is a form of surrender Margo McLoughlin, author/storyteller/consultant

Or is it?

The acrobat, the dancer, the artist who launches her body into space and consciously aims herself towards the ground - is she surrendering, or is she simply engaging with the natural laws of gravity?

To submit to the pull of the earth, either by conscious choice or by accident, is part of being human. The nursery rhyme reminds us:

"Ring around the rosey, a pocket full of posey. Husha, husha, we all fall down!"

Young children delight in singing this rhyme, swinging each other by the hand and letting go as they tumble to the ground. Falling on purpose! What fun! By the age of three or four, a child knows that falling happens a lot, and it often hurts. But to fall deliberately is exciting. It's against the rules. A baby crawls. A toddler toddles. A child soon begins to walk, run, skip and jump. Learning to propell oneself is about getting somewhere. Falling on purpose subverts that logic. And what is more pleasurable than defying convention?

The effort to resist the pull of the earth is also part of our human story. The rhythm of resistance and surrender, of rising and falling, becomes apparent when we step back and take a wide-angle view. The real question might be, How do I carry myself through life, knowing that death is my destination, as it is for everyone I know?

In my early 20's I lived in Montreal in a row house near McGill University. The house had a significant tilt. Any dropped object would roll down the slanting floor. I found this fascinating and charming, having come from a well-ordered home in Vancouver. This leaning house had character and history. Its instability reflected my own human frailty. Looking out my window one morning, I saw

an elderly man tumbling to the ground in the muddy lane. I hadn't seen what precipitated his fall; I only saw him falling. It appeared as if he had made a sudden decision to visit the ground.

A year later, the house was condemned and torn down, making way for something new, upright, and level.

In one of my theatre classes at university we were exploring the idea of levels in the performance space. My professor encouraged us to speak our lines from a variety of levels—crouching or kneeling; sitting or standing; or from a height of some kind. In the role of Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, I climbed up a ladder to address my son:

Do not for ever with thy vailed lids Seek for thy noble father in the dust: Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die, Passing through nature to eternity.

The existential question at the heart of Shakespeare's play had already made itself known in my own life. I felt the pull towards annihilation or meaning—how would I make sense of life? Raised as an Anglican, I didn't feel a connection to the Christian worldview. Earlier, while studying philosophy and theatre at the University of Laval in Quebec City, I read the work of the modern playwrights Harold Pinter, Eugene lonesco and Samuel Beckett. Was life as absurd and pointless as these authors depicted?

Occasionally, in between my coursework and my romantic dramas, I looked about for role models—those who seemed to have found a life worth living. I thought of my instructors at Outward Bound. Taking young people into the wilderness to find out who they were—that was a vocation I could imagine pursuing. I thought of my mother's cousin, who had gone to India in the 1960's to work with Tibetan refugees. That seemed a worthy and noble way to spend one's life. But what form of service was calling me?

Then, one day, in the spring of the year I was to graduate, I saw a poster: "Urgently needed: English teachers for CUSO Nigeria." By August, I was on my way. My assignment: teaching English at a Government Science College for boys in this predominantly Muslim part of the country.

About this time I had a vivid dream, the kind one remembers in detail. I was falling off a cliff, but there didn't seem to be any fear associated with my descent. I knew somehow that this fall belonged to me. It was up to me how I fell. I later wrote a poem about the dream:

I fall and know the fall is for me Aiming my back, I think, is this all?

Is this all? suggests a certain careless bravado. I had two motorcycle accidents while I was in Nigeria, and ultimately I fell ill with malaria and was repatriated as a result of my reaction to the drugs that were given me. Coming home like that was a severe blow to my self-image and I fell into a depression.

But I climbed out.

Falling and getting up again. Breathing in and breathing out. Birth and death. As Albert Camus wrote in his famous essay on the myth of Sisyphus, the seemingly repetitive and often absurd and pointless nature of life demands of us that we find meaning and happiness within the shape and circumstances in which we find ourselves. Making art, friendship, service, community work, family—whatever it is we do with the days of our lives, we have the potential to generate meaning.

If we can see falling as an art and a skill then an essential component of that art is the way we get up again. Childhood accidents, depression, love affairs, illness-does anyone escape these experiences? Learning how to fall is really learning how to "roll with the punches" wherever we find ourselves.

In one of the stories I tell from ancient India, two acrobats perform their tumbling tricks before a crowd at the city gates. Proud of their lineage of acrobats, they have been studying and perfecting the art of falling from an early age.

This skill serves them in good stead when the assembled crowd turns against them, beating and cursing them. Two Brahmin women, passing out of the city with their attendants, have had their eyesight polluted by the sight of the acrobats, who come from a village of outcastes. The young women decide to turn back without distributing their customary gifts of food and coins to the people, who turn on the two acrobats in their disappointment. The young men must leave their home and venture into the world. They decide to disguise themselves as Brahmin youth. Once again, however, they are discovered to be outcastes, and suffer beatings and cursing.

In the course of the story the acrobats die and are reborn four times, twice as animals and twice as human beings. The moment of rebirth is described as "falling from one state of existence to another." The implied teaching is that

who we are at birth is not the only factor that determines our lot in life. By our actions, we contribute to our own happiness in this and future life-times.

The story, one of the birth-stories of the Buddha, presents an oblique lesson on karma and the endless cycles of birth and rebirth. Even if we don't subscribe to the Buddhist view of rebirth, we can see in our own lives how the cycles of birth and death have played out. Projects, relationships, jobs, each have their own life cycles, offering us endless opportunities to learn and to let go.

Falling is part of being human. Oddly, once we've outgrown childhood, we try to cover it up, as if it were not acceptable to grow old, fall ill, or even die. Nature reminds us that each stage of life has its own mystery and its own beauty. Remembering the cyclical nature of life can be helpful when we're lost and bewildered, wandering in the metaphorical depths, or unable to get back on our feet. Likewise, when we're dancing on the tightrope of life, full of exuberant confidence, it's good to remember that a fall is waiting for us. And that's okay. It's also maybe a little bit exciting.











I am rooted when I touch, carve and polish my sculptural wood forms. I make these highly crafted, labour intensive objects out of wood, as this necessitates the space and time to reflect deeply. The cherry wood used for *Detritus 1 – 5* links with my years of involvement with fruit trees, propagating, grafting and pruning. The wood carries its ancestral roots. Working with this material grounds me in its vitality and structural integrity. It always feels alive.

These sculptural forms are expressions of detritus – what falls down and becomes the layers of the forest floor which, as it rots, becomes the forest. Like the forest, my artistic practice sustains me if I am willing to do the work and to be conscious in the release, knowing that it is part of a larger rhythm.

The five forms that comprise *Detritus* are deeply familiar. My hands shape variations of these forms again and again.

Arriving from the dark they echo plant archetypes and poetic archetypes of spiral, spear, lightning, of grooves and hollows: water chutes, armpits, clefts and openings in rocks, trees, bodies, implements for mending, sewing, shapes that reference spoons and paddles. All these are shorthand, symbols and icons of my inner fertile ground, built over years.

In the old forest the winter storms deposit branches, lichen, seeds, unidentified particles. The tunnelling goes on down and in, as the snow eventually melts, leaving the deep layered softness becoming soil and forest, the forest being both above and below. In the gallery, the floor becomes like the snow upon which the detritus is sharply articulated. As the dark shades of the detritus absorb the heat of the sun and melt the snowy landscape downward, we are drawn into these concave spaces filled with rich imaginary possibilities. — RP

# What Happens

Renée Poisson with Nicole Crouch

what happens when you fall?

fear frailty helplessness reaction shock resistance adrenalin because i have died and risen back up, fallen and brought myself back up, in those moments it's about falling into the body and the mind

its about thoughts and images
and
it's about the body
it's not about the body
it absolutely is about the body,
and the images of
the body
maybe there is something here that is useful

injury pain momentum
i've fallen so many times
damage despair courage anxiety
awakening rescue incapacity resilience
sorrow dread surprise discouragement
gravity density denial surrender help
hope hurt recovery resourcefulness strength support vitality

stillness grace

In the stream



single channel hd video, monitor with headphones 10 min. loop 16' x 9' 2016 Additional voice: Nicole Crouch Additional photography: Barbara Prowse, Grahame Edwards

A conversation between generations in images and words asks; what happens when you fall?









Using constructed jointed figures as part of my work gave me a different viewpoint from which to investigate falling. During the making of these forms I became newly appreciative of the intricacies of our human flexibility. I wanted these small figures to inhabit the gallery window frontage, continuously falling thoughout the day and night. Spotlit in the early dark of the winter they performed as if on a stage. Working with the puppets and the mechanism I invented for their random falls taught me to appreciate subtle movements. My collaboration with Nicole Crouch opened my mind to the importance of small falls. Our culture is all about large movement, high speed, spectacular gestures. With the puppet forms I am drawing attention to the small movements that we need to pay attention to. Positioned in the street level windows, the puppets announce the body theme of the installation. Referencing detritus on the forest floor, the non-literal puppet forms are the colour of ash set against a gradated background of red/orange/yellow. — RP

#### falling

six mixed media sculptural puppet forms controled by motors, fans and timers, audio various dimensions 2016
Technical consultant: Carrie Tannant









#### we rise we fall

two performances on January 22 and March 5, 2016 at the Comox Valley Art Gallery, 18 min. 9 participants, video projection and soundscape, with sculptural elements *detritus 1-5* Creative Collaborators/Performers:

Susan Cook, Ann Marie Lisch, Nicole Crouch, Trudy Beaton, Renée Poisson, Kaya Kehl, Denise Lawson, Shelly Hollingshead, Susan Youds, Quinn

Choreographic consultant: Holly Bright

several well known musician-composers have generously offered their work for this performance: Colin Stetson – *Groundswell*; Sarah Neufeld and Colin Stetson – *With the Dark Hug of Time*; Evan Parker – *Ak-Kor-Deer* 

Five of us began the construction of a movement piece to embody the physicality of the investigation. Wanting the movement to arise without the constriction of expectation, I chose to work with four women who have professional therapeutic knowledge of the body rather than trained dancers. Our starting point was the question – What does it take to stand upright, before we fall? We drew inspiration from our own awkward rising movements. At the end of 6 weeks we had a rough shape, and the music needed to support our direction; I created a soundscape to sustain our on-the-ground sequence. In January we opened our group, expanding our collaboration. Holly Bright, dancer, choreographer and artistic director of Crimson Coast Dance Society in Nanaimo viewed our rehearsals online and gave us valuable suggestions of imagery to underlay the choreography we were inventing.

From the very beginning of my falling research I had imagined some kind of movement piece, live art, real bodies. I had no idea what this would be. The experience of collaboration on such a profound level is new for me; in the beginning I was uneasy, unsure at the same time as I was deeply committed to this process. Ideas and approaches now went beyond my own. The setting and the interactions of we rise we fall have become bigger than what I imagined early on in the process. The resulting performance resonates deeply with my vision and connects to a broader community and context for further thought and discussion. — RP







For me, collaboration with Renée et alia was a gorgeous opportunity for exploring intersubjectivity. We hashed out meaning, called it fact and made it art. That part was very serious fun, playing with death. She let us all help. There is another part that is me in my late 30s, facing death on my feet. I felt the social fall and the death of pride. Icarus was soaring in the warmth and the heat, and when he fell it was Daedalus who caught me and helped me recover the warm pride of love and attachment. We asked "what makes us rise again?" My answer: erotic energy of course! And there it was: mighty women of all ages embodying death and resurrection and evolution with the force of snow-melting inner fire. Last weekend I went to Tofino and took my first surf lesson. I was fairly warned and gently guided toward the waves. It worked. It's possible. And then as I got thrashed in the spin cycle, waiting waiting waiting waiting to discover which way to air, I thought, "Playing dead. I know how to do this." — Nicole Crouch

Being invited to step into Renée's creative process has been an exercise in expansion and trust. Building a framework for organic movement from the ideas Renée expressed and stepping into each practice with the guiding principle of present moment embodied in movement, the performance piece took shape without ever becoming rigidified or codified into a routine to be performed. Indeed, the label "performance" was avoided as much as possible. Instead we attempted to explore and unfold Renée's ideas about what it takes to become upright, the journey before the falling. This experience of rising is a universal experience, and so the audience became participants through their own energetic attention to our movements. We stood in for those observing, saying "Remember? This is what it was like, finding the path from earthbound to upright," and their bodies knew the truth of it. This truth-telling and truth-knowing created a sustained experience of psychobiological circular attunement. People commented after the performance that they had had an

experience of an open energetic exchange between themselves as watchers and us as the movers. Both groups felt the attention and intensity of the other. This attunement is like the air in the room being breathed through each person, into and out of, in an organic loop, erasing artificial boundaries between the bodies and the artificial distinctions of 'performer' and 'observer.' – Ann Marie Lisch

Judgement and ego were left behind, as I moved to a place of acceptance and caring. I naturally trusted my body to shape its own response to rising and falling. As a whole, we organically played, and shaped a piece of moving art. It was a joy and privilege to imagine and create with others in this aspect of Renée's project. – Susan Youds

What impressed me about developing the performance piece was the intuitive, universal experience of Falling. Renée introduced the concept. The core group experimented with movements to express it. The additional members' energy and vision grew it larger. Until, finally, at the performance, the audience filled the space, anticipating and reflecting on their individual experiences of Falling.

It was powerful to see it grow and change, continuously. — **Trudy Beaton** 

We were reminded that in order to fall we first have to rise and be upright in the world. From there, the soundscape (layers of music, voices, sounds from nature) became the guide for our bodies to find their way from ground to UP, from interacting with the world to DOWN, and from DOWN to final stillness – death, from which new life arises. For me this experience was so different than thinking about these life stages. It was the embodied sensation of crawling on cold concrete; of interacting with other bodies in the joy and the effort of upright movement; the sinking and ebbing of energy in the slide back to the cold ground. There is a learning that I gained in the process of engaging with Renée that is outside of the realm of thought and word. This learning feels profound and real. – Susan Cook

As I walk into the gallery, I feel as though I am losing my centre, slipping less than gracefully into an unknown / there is nothing to do but allow my fear and curiosity and intuition find its own way / this is what I sense in each one of us who has come in response to Renée's call / our paths to here are all our own / but here we are with open faces and hearts / eager to join in the freedness of falling together into a discovery / each week we come and rise up and fall and rise up and fall / leaning into our own hearts and the hearts of our collaborators / leaning into our own bodies and the bodies of our collaborators / our tenderness caressing the bones of trees / each week, the artist, gentle as a midwife, leads us into a new birth / opening night... we are knit together now / as we rise and fall and rise and fall and lean and fall, those who watch become the Caulbearers, holding the mystery of our births and deaths in a translucent veil. — Denise Lawson

Participating in We Rise, We Fall allowed me to tap into the deep knowing that resides within and to connect with others on this beautiful shared journey. — **Quinn** 

Stepping into stillness. A welcome change from the pace of our everyday lives. Belly to cold floor. Hands. Feet. Knees. Heads. Lifting. Effort. No effort. Slowly. Breathing. Rising. Saplings toward filtered forest light. Slow and organic. Like time lapse photography. All at once, together and alone. Individuals seemingly alone, interconnected by roots that go deep beyond the eye. Community. Growing. Walking underwater. Walking on earth. Walking on ice. Walking on the moon. Evolution. Consciousness. Rising and falling. Falling like leaves lilting and lofting towards the forest floor. Falling unexpectedly, crashing, stumbling through life. Rising. Falling. Rising. Falling. Playing. Exploring. Lifting. Turning. Connecting. Trusting. Sustaining. More falling. Slowly, quietly to the earth. Soft. Fecund. Sinking. Melting. Merging. At rest.

At peace. In the deep beautiful quiet. A life cycle within a life cycle. Evolution. A lifetime. A year. An hour. A moment. On the spiral. Nothing else to do but to be present. And trust. Stepping into stillness. A welcome change from the pace of our everyday lives. Being in this space of creation with this group of incredible women was such an honour. At first, observing, watching, witnessing and coming to understand the vision. Then moving together. Breathing life into the piece. At first, I felt hesitant, and careful. Participating in We Rise, We Fall allowed me to tap into the deep knowing that resides within and to connect with others on this beautiful shared journey. Wishing just to be an instrument of the vision; a body to animate this dream. I didn't want any of my own ideas around movement or performance to influence my contribution. My intention was to stay open and to experience the purity of what was emerging. I loved the work from the beginning and yet, for some reason, it was all in my head; embodying it felt strained and foreign. I needed to find a way to sink the piece into my body. Less thinking. More being and doing. Finally, I had a very vivid dream. Full of wild imagery, rich with texture and meaning. With the emergence of this dream I knew I had found my way in. The work was merging with my subconscious. No more thinking. Just experiencing, witnessing, moving and breathing. Pure embodiment. Each time we move through this piece it's different; a moment in life that can never be repeated. Different circumstances. Different points of view. Different audience. We are guided through the movement with whatever and whoever shows up. Each time it's completely unique. It has its own breath and its own life cycle. It's been such a gift to be a mover in this work. Moving through stillness is just what I needed. - Kaya Kehl





#### looking for land

red cedar, cloth, pigments and oil, 32" x 24" x 11" 1995
Historically the boat has been an ongoing part of my artistic vocabulary. I made *Looking for Land* in 1995 during a prolific period of production. From as early as I can remember I have made small boats for imaginary journeys into distant unknowns. In *Looking for Land* a family longs to make landfall on a safe and happier shore, as they sail away from inner oppression.





RENÉE POISSON has been practicing art for more than five decades.

Turning away from institutional education, Renée has studied and learned directly from visual artists, writers, dancers, musicians and craftspeople. Her prolific practice is rooted in independent and collaborative projects involving sculpture, performance, drawing, video and soundscapes.

Renée grew up on Vancouver Island, earned an Honours B.A. in Philosophy at UBC in 1965, and has lived in Merville, BC, since 1973. Renée has studied and learned directly from visual artists, writers, dancers, musicians and craftspeople, including a period in San Francisco in the mid-1960s with renowned ceramic artist Marguerite Wildenhain.

She has had numerous solo and group exhibitions, including: Dwelling (1999), a site specific installation at Room Under the Stairs Gallery in Montreal; Trialogue (1988), a sculptural installation at the Helen Pitt Gallery in Vancouver; and Earth, Air, Water (1973), painting, prints and sculptural relief at Vila Public Gallery in Vanuatu.

She has directed and produced numerous videos including: Ancestral Intersections (2006), a stop frame animation that screened at the One Minute Film Festival in Toronto; Owning the Slave (2006), which screened in festivals across Canada, and Endangered Species (2003), which screened at the International Festival of Film on Art in Montreal. She has also composed soundscape for dance, including two pieces for choreographer Helen Walkley: Migration (2005); and Constantly Changing Rules (2004, in collaboration with Helen Walkley).

Renée's current multi-faceted exhibition *Meeting the Ground* at the Comox Valley Art Gallery is comprised of sculptural elements, printed matter, video projection and collaborative performances.



FROM? TO? video still Overwhelmed by unfamiliar art terms, I made my first move out of rural isolation in 2000. I used these same boats to carry the words I did not yet understand on their sails. I was literally at sea in their midst.



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GALLERY TUESDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5
SHOP MONDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5

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**MEETING THE GROUND Renée Poisson** 

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#### **CVAG PUBLICATIONS**

CVAG publications focus on the production, dissemination and dialogue emerging out of artist and gallery-initiated publications in all media. The publications are conceived of as small open printed editions, and are democratically available in a digital format, with an emphasis on circulation and sharing. The editions are produced as stand alone projects and as xtensions of exhibitions and events. Printed books can be purchased through the gallery and digital versions can be downloaded on our website.

#### **PUBLICATION CONTRIBUTORS**

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going over stills from single channel hd video projection, 27 min. loop 16' x 9'

#### **COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY**

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is dedicated to presenting and fostering contemporary art by professional artists from the region, the country and beyond. Through our exhibitions, publications, creative residencies and education programs, we link the Comox Valley to the broader world of contemporary art practice. We actively engage the public, draw visitors, and enliven the community through public events, performances, community collaborations, all-ages make art projects, youth training and mentorship programs, and a gift shop that sells the work of hundreds of local artists. CVAG is an independent public gallery run by a non-profit society.

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