



Would You Like To Take A Seat?

Amanda Tkaczyk

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Cambridge Art Galleries

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seat.whatsoever.ca



Acknowledgements

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I sincerely appreciate the conversations, insights, and enthusiasm from the Cambridge Art Galleries team, including Žana Kozomora, Sarah Kernohan, Meg Ross, and Ashlynn Gregory.

The initial conceptual work for this exhibition was developed during my professional development training with the School of Expressive Art Therapy under Susanne Donder in Winter 2025.

None of this work would be possible without the support of Addison Tkaczyk who patiently helped me through a two Fringe Festival summer with a broken ankle while preparing for this exhibition, thank you brother.

Exhibition List of Works

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3. Sitting in the Light
4. The Floor is Candy
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7. Glamping Trip
8. Public Notice
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About Amanda Tkaczyk

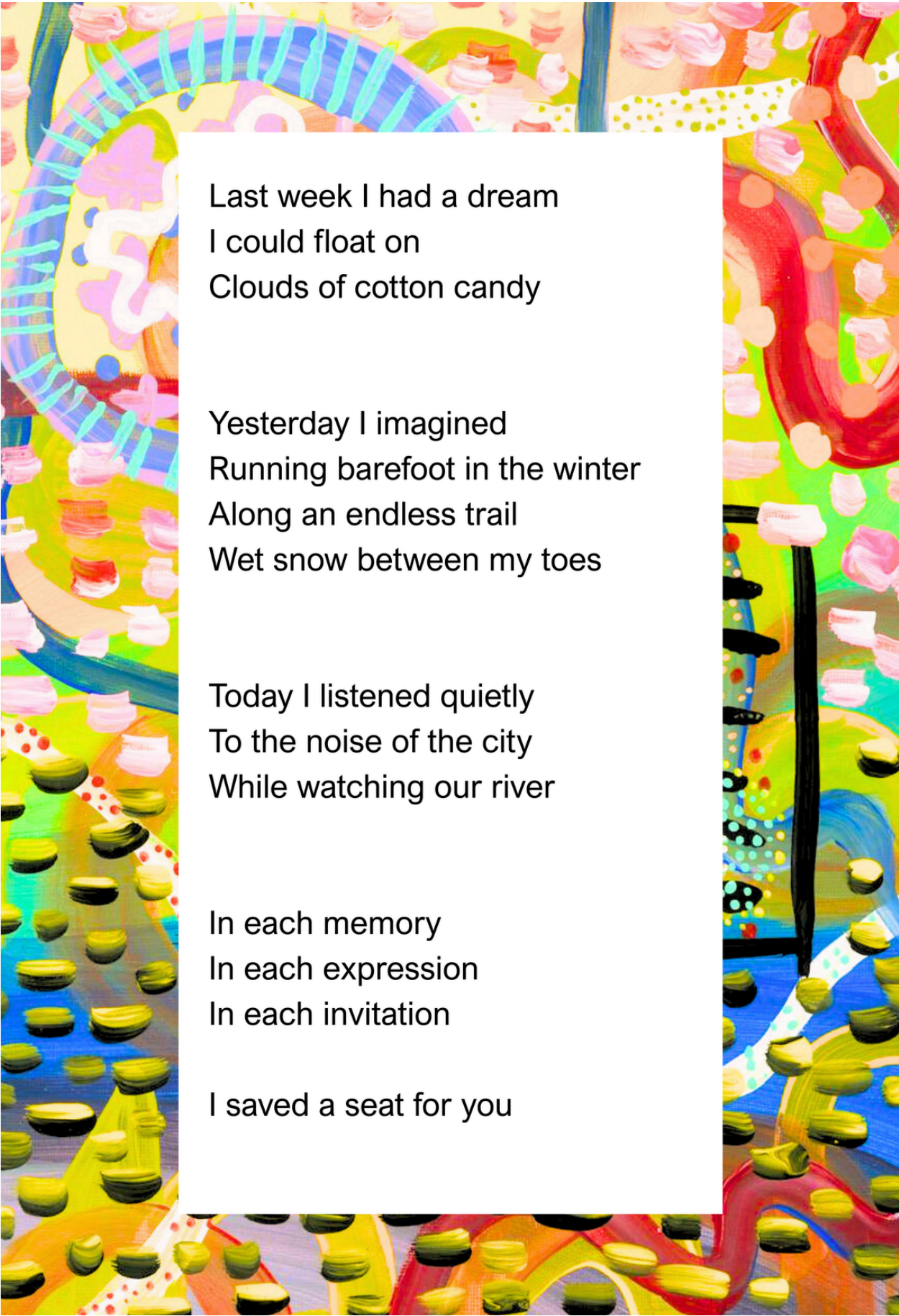
Amanda is a Black interdisciplinary artist based in Ontario, Canada. Her practice explores how technology shapes human relationships and how art can cultivate deeper forms of belonging. Working across performance, poetry, film, and visual art, she creates experimental participatory works that unsettle audiences.

Since establishing her practice in 2024, Amanda's work has been presented at venues and festivals including Third Shift Contemporary Art Festival (Saint John, NB), Wheat City Nuit Blanche (Brandon, MB), Hillside Festival (Guelph, ON), Grimsby Public Art Gallery, Helson Gallery (Georgetown, ON), Art Gallery of Burlington, Ottawa Fringe Festival, and Hamilton Fringe Festival. In 2026, she was selected as a Performance and Extended Reality Fellow with Single Thread Theatre.

Her work has been supported by the Ontario Arts Council, the Government of Ontario, the Region of Waterloo Arts Fund, as well as a fellowship exploring the future of care with ArtsPond, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Government of Ontario.

Read more at www.whatsoever.ca

As part of my practice rooted in access, care, and co-creation, I regularly invite artists and collaborators via open lottery-calls with no application or experience required. If you would like to be a part of future art projects, please follow [@whatsoever_creates](https://www.instagram.com/whatsoever_creates) on Instagram or send an email to hello@whatsoever.ca



Last week I had a dream
I could float on
Clouds of cotton candy

Yesterday I imagined
Running barefoot in the winter
Along an endless trail
Wet snow between my toes

Today I listened quietly
To the noise of the city
While watching our river

In each memory
In each expression
In each invitation

I saved a seat for you

Artist Statement

I miss my Mum.

I long for true love.

I want to be a better neighbour.

What about you?

This exhibition is a series of invitations specifically for you.

You are invited to read poetry out loud. You can play with an interactive tool to choose which seat belongs to you. You can create an invitation to save a seat for someone you care about. You are invited to sit and stay as long as you wish with participatory video art that times your engagement. You are offered a phone number to say Hello and have a conversation about whatsoever you'd like to discuss.

Each surreal collage features a single chair as a space held for you or someone you know or someone you will never know. I created the visuals. You can use your imagination to co-create the sounds, smells, and story of our scene.

The collages include photography of the City of Cambridge, including the Grand River, Christopher Park, and the Cambridge to Paris Trail.

Throughout this publication, there are questions specifically for you. You can choose to paint, sing, sculpt, film or whatsoever your responses. You can choose to ignore them. You can choose to share. If you would like to share or discuss with Amanda, please reach out to hello@whatsoever.ca

WHICH SEAT BELONGS TO YOU?



<https://seat.whatsoever.ca/which>

Response from Dasha Berezhnova

I generally associate art exhibitions with glass cases, hushed galleries, and expensive admissions, none of which particularly evoke a sense of belonging. From the first moment I enter this exhibition, I can feel that it's not a typical art gallery experience.

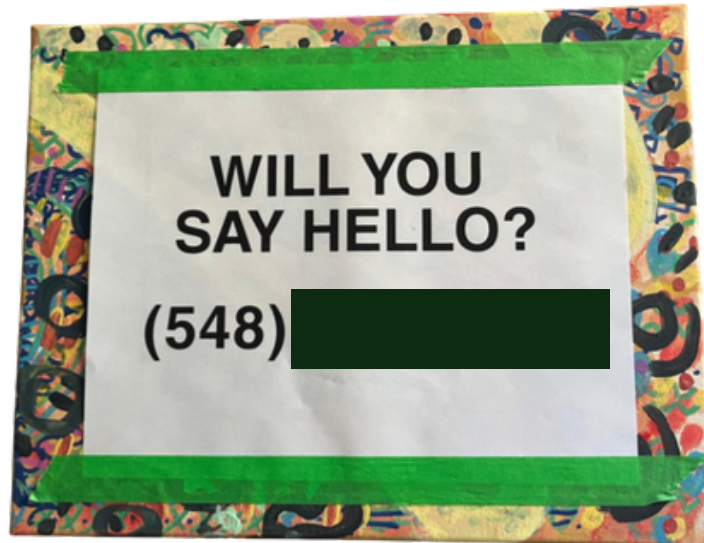
The viewer is invited to take a seat in one of ten dreamlike atmospheres – will you choose a beanbag in a jungle, a wicker chair on a snowy boardwalk, a red leather loveseat in the forest? The images seem almost randomly generated, combining everyday mundanity with the utterly surreal. I linger for a moment in a seat: a plastic chair hovering at an intersection in front of a beautiful Ontario sunset. It's been a while since I've lived here but it pulls on a memory – of wiping off dirty deck chairs on the first nice spring day, of taking photos of the most magnificent sunsets over parking lots. It's funny how an image by an artist I've never met, and only saw through a fluke of a lottery draw, leads me back to this vivid memory of my old home.

The experience continues with a series of invitations. “Which seat belongs to you?” leads to a personality quiz. After thoughtfully answering the questions, I’m pleased to see I’m the cute jungle beanbag, then laugh when I learn that the results are all randomly generated anyway. “Will you sit?” lets you share a seated moment with the artist, and “Will you say hello?” gives you the chance to call her. “Will you stay?” times how long you stay on the page, and “Who are you saving a seat for?” asks you to invite someone else to sit on one of the seats.

The entire exhibition invites me to participate until I feel a part of it: I linger over the images, go back to re-read the poems, watch the seconds tick up on “Will you stay?” It feels like sharing a joke with the artist, and more importantly, like I can meaningfully participate in the exhibition. In a world saturated with online content, it’s rare that something digital can feel so human. Yes, I would like to take a seat, and stay a while.

Dasha is a multimedia artist and arts educator based in Vancouver. Born in Russia, she immigrated to Canada in 2006 and lived in Ontario for over 10 years before moving to the West Coast. She works in ceramics, painting, and textile arts, and has recently been exploring woodworking for functional and sculptural artworks. Dasha's ethos for both art and education is to create a welcoming, playful space for making and appreciating art and craft in all its forms.





<https://seat.whatsoever.ca/sit>

<https://seat.whatsoever.ca/stay>



Response from Robert DiPardo

Would You Like to Take a Seat? is an opportunity to revisit some of the region's familiar places with a fresh perspective. At the same time, visitors will tour the imaginative landscapes of the artist's dreams. These double aims are achieved by taking care to domesticate each setting, in the sense of the word's Latin root, *domus* ("home"). The dreamscapes look as comfortable and welcoming as the streets, parks and trails that most visitors are likely to know well, so that one is never disoriented by the juxtaposition of interior and exterior, of the everyday and the dreamlike. Whether the subject is familiar or surreal, each digital collage is made inviting by an inspired arrangement of colour, surface texture and symbolism.

In *Jungle Beanbag*, the chair's brown leather looks warmed and softened by the sunlight pouring in from beyond the frame. At a distance, the beanbag could be mistaken for the shell of a tortoise, or the scales of a coiled snake — a reminder that guests of this space will be sharing it with the native jungle fauna. In *Plastic Paradise*, a pedestrian crossing on Water Street flashes green beneath an overcast sky. The setting sun warms the clouds to a rosy peach colour that calls to mind the clouds "of cotton candy" in the poem "Opening". A patio chair urges the viewer to ignore the traffic signal's invitation to continue walking. By contrast, the red traffic light that tells the viewer of *Sitting in the Light* to stop and linger is intended to be obeyed.

This landscape contains no recognizable landmarks. Instead, the combination of snowy foreground and reflective background captures the experience of sitting outdoors in the most Canadian of seasons. Glittering disco balls fill the sky, a visual metaphor evoking the sparkle of falling snowflakes.

Each collage extends a visual invitation to enter a place of comfort, or nostalgia, or grieving. What the visitor ultimately finds there will depend on the life journey that has led them to the gallery space, the personal story which the poem “Re-Opening” invites us to reflect upon. The interactive works provide even more direct prompts to reflection, appealing in turn to our curiosity (“Which seat belongs to you?”), our memories of hardship and loss (“Do you see [...] the crying spot?”), our concern for loved ones (“Who needs to be invited?”), among other emotions. But perhaps the most affecting invitations are those printed on white paper and attached to canvas with painter’s tape, an adhesive designed to remove easily, without leaving a trace — a subtle hint that the questions they pose expect sincere answers, from the gut, without hesitation. These invitations convey their urgency by acknowledging that they are temporary, ephemeral, and the healing self-awareness they offer to help us find is an opportunity to be seized.

Robert DiPardo was born in St. Catharines, Ontario. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto (Hon. B.A.) and Brock University (M.A.). His interests include music, English and Italian, literature, biology and computer science.



Yes, I would love to take a seat.

Fragments of Exhibition Notes

The Empty Chair

December 2019 before COVID-19 shut down the world, I was on vacation with my younger sister. One evening I ate dinner alone and I took a photo of the empty chair across the table.



I was imagining a future where I would be sitting with a partner. I was capturing the solitude while mentally saving the seat for someone I would someday love.

It's 2026 and I am single. The seat remains open. I create an exhibition of invitations and chairs. I think of this moment and I am hopeful.

Where do you noticed empty seats?



Past & Present: Buddy Benches, Name Tags, Telephone Numbers

I think about the past. In 2014, my manager told me that his young son advocated for a “Buddy Bench” at school. A place where students who needed a friend could sit and then a Buddy could come and invite them to play. An intervention for belonging. A place where people who wanted to find social support could find social support. I know the possible risks of the dedicated and widely visible bench, but I also believe in the benefits.

It reminds me of 2005 or 2006, I write an article for the St. Mary’s Catholic High School (Kitchener, ON) newspaper. “Wouldn’t it be nice if we all had name tags?” a speculative inquiry into the social benefit of knowing one another’s names and being able to greet, connect, and recognize one another. Again, I know the possible risks of the openly displayed name tags, but I also believe in the benefits.

Here I am in 2026, I am offering a phone number that will ring my cell phone directly 24/7 during the exhibition. Again, I know the possible risks of the publicly available telephone number, but I also believe in the benefits.

What possible risks and benefits of invitations influence you?

**DO YOU
NEED
A SEAT AT
THE RIVER?
THE PARK?
THE CRYING
SPOT?
THE DANCING
PLACE?**



Digital collages and poetry are inclusive and liberating.

They do not require specialized materials.

Their outputs can be shaped and re-mixed.

I can create 100s of digital collages without thinking too much about the environmental impacts.

I can write 1000 poems on my phone and not have to worry about filling my home with too many canvases.

I can play with these mediums and imagine the ways I want to share them with the world in different formats, sizes, and modes of presentation.

I do not have to overthink how my poetry will look on display.

I can imagine my digital collages being scaled to extra-tiny and extra-large formats and becoming seeds for virtual worlds or participatory films.

I can quickly assemble, create, pivot, discard, and share these works.

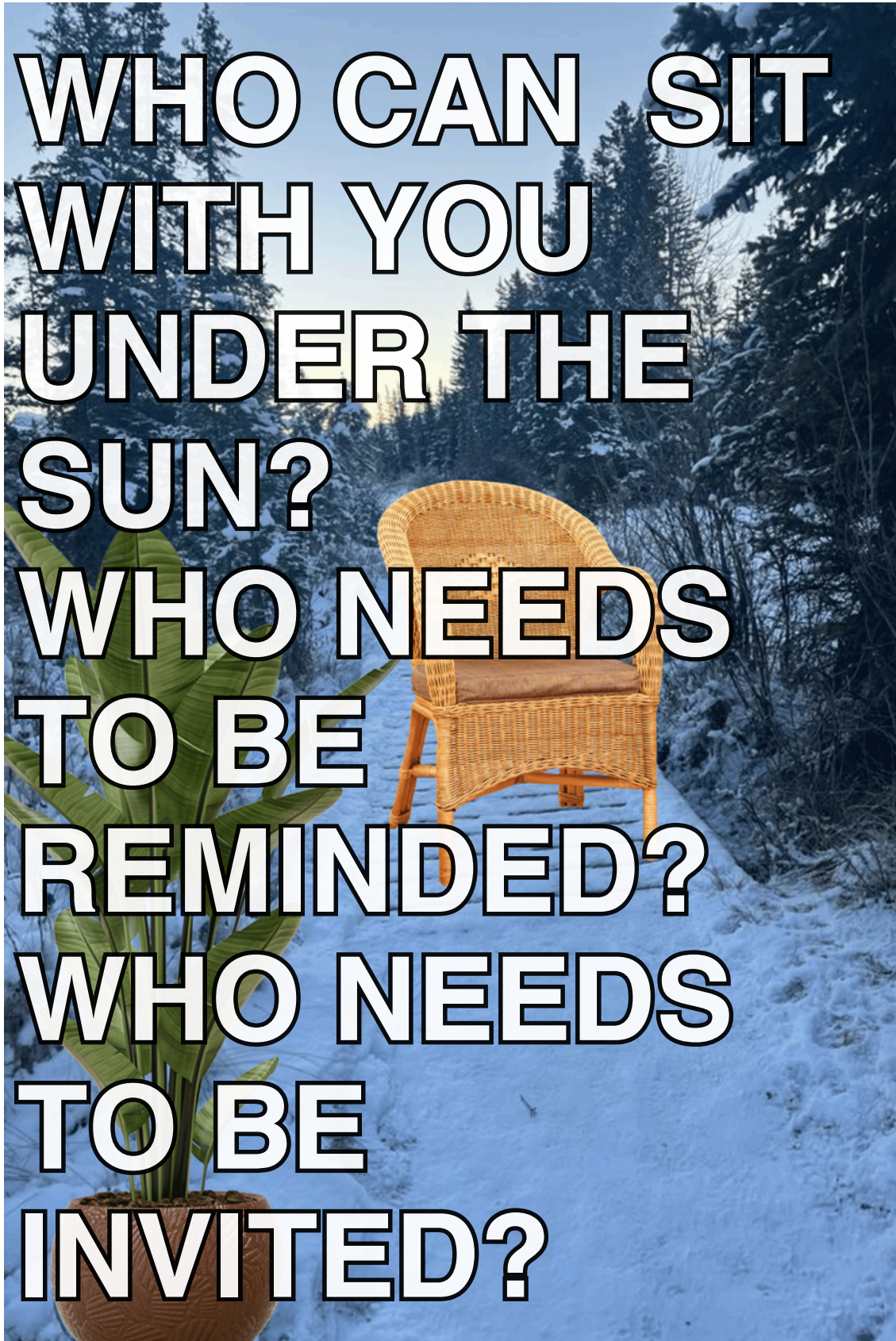
The speed and mess and openness make me feel safe to focus on what I ought to express.

What do you need to feel safe to create and express yourself?

**WHO CAN SIT
WITH YOU
UNDER THE
SUN?**

**WHO NEEDS
TO BE
REMINDING?**

**WHO NEEDS
TO BE
INVITED?**



Invitational Power

Time & Space at the Table

“You are the table. Tell everyone else to sit their butts down.”
paraphrased from a talk by technology leader Debra Christmas at the Black Professionals in Technology Network (BPTN) conference in November 2024.

“Even if you are satisfied and think you have negotiated what you need, you have to think of all the women who aren’t at the table and ask on their behalf. You have to negotiate on behalf of all women and ask for more” is loosely what I remember learning from Dr. Christine Logel while I was a psychology undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo (2007-2011).

As a Black biracial woman in STEM, I have often been the one and only woman and/or person of colour in many rooms. Classrooms, research teams, workplaces, and volunteer organizations - each of these experiences are places where I have observed the ways power is concentrated, hoarded, or shared.

Invitations are power mechanisms. While an invite is one step towards meaningful participation and engagement, the step matters. When “who is in the room” is a critical question that leaders and organizers can find difficult to answer truthfully, invitation practices need to be examined. Not just review of who gets invited, but how, when, in what ways.

I carry Debra's words of wisdom for how to navigate difficult conversations, uncomfortable opportunities, and moments of importance. When you are at the table, remember you earned your spot just as much as anyone else.

I think of Dr. Logel's specific and practical advice to remember all women when I am at the table and crafting my asks whether it is for compensation, improved processes, proposing new art projects, or resolving issues. When you are at the table, you are never alone.

I consider the power of an invite for social good, belonging, and wellness.

Why are we not inviting 10x more people?

Why are we not being proactive to those who are not yet in our space?

Who are we to be extending invitations?

Who can be a steward of invitations in the future?

How are our invitations being received and elevated?

How could an invitation transform your life?

**WHO ARE
YOU
SAVING A
SEAT FOR?**



<https://seat.whatsoever.ca/who>

Belonging & Fatigue

I have spent a lot of time thinking about belonging and interventions for loneliness.

During my Master's in AI at Queen's University, my individual capstone project focused on social support seeking. I explored the ways that pregnant women sought support online and ways we might use artificial intelligence to help them feel a bit less lonely or ways we could help the helpers offer more help.

When I was a professor at Conestoga College, I designed classroom experiences that were rooted in co-creation where individual contributors' work became the root for others to build upon. Attendance was nearly 100% and students shared highly positive feedback about how they truly felt meaningfully included. Co-creation is core to my creative practice and at Conestoga I got to experiment.

Now I am thinking a lot about how we reach people and engage them in ways that are not overwhelming.

In my performance art practice when I work with other artists, my intent is low-stress and flexible engagements rooted in care. For this exhibition, I sought two contributors for a commissioned response. I selected them via lottery to reduce the stress and labour of traditional applications and I gave them open-ended instructions.

Outside of the arts, I am thinking about civic interventions as the AI literacy gap widens. I think about access to information that is clear and actionable. I think about ways that institutions can facilitate distributed co-creation, engagement, and feedback. This exhibition is an exploration of how invitations can be designed, stacked, presented, and shaped for meaningful engagement. If I can do this for an art exhibition, what can you do? How do we tailor invitations to meet people where they are at? How do we shape opportunities and ways of belonging so that invisible barriers are reduced?

I think of the responsibility to examine power and how it can be distributed while also ways that decision making, influence, and authority can be imparted in ways that fit. Responsibilities without overwhelm. Impact without excess time commitment. Contribution without compromise. Engagement made easy. These feel like marketing because I am trying to persuade you to think of care-based approaches for your invitations.

What ways can you make it easier for others to say yes to your invitations?



Grief Spillage: *Weird is Wonderful Because Weird is What I Am*

*The wicker chair is an emblem from my childhood home.
The pink chair is a marker of my chic adulthood in Toronto.
The plastic white chair (which I eventually learned is called a Monoblonc) is everything in between.*

I start with that opening about chairs because this final section is about grief. I am thinking of the chairs because I want to ground myself. Chairs help me settle into the moment - here in my writing and there in the exhibition works.

Holding onto grief: Grief of losing my Mum unexpectedly.
Anticipatory grief of the people I love who will one day no longer be a part of my life. Ambiguous grief of the people who I love who could be a part of my life, but they are not and it is complicated and hurts.

“Make two new friends today and tell me their names later” - an instruction my Mum regularly gave us when starting school, joining new activities, and starting new jobs.

Everywhere she went she made new friends.

I sit with this grief.

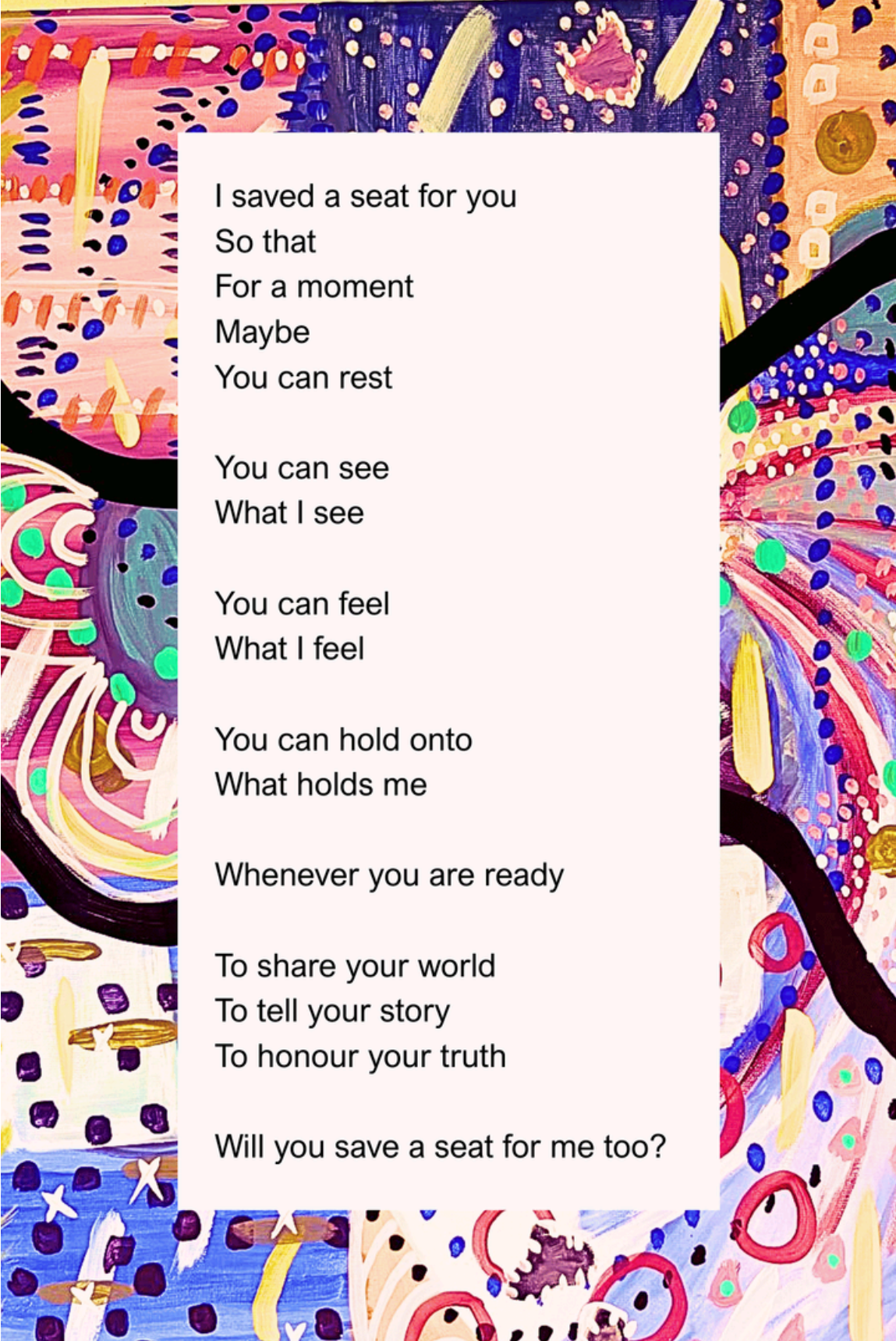
I can extol upon social good and inclusion and romantic pursuits but nothing compares to the ache to sit with my Mum again. I imagine her extreme pride if she knew that I would become a practicing artist and have a solo exhibition, especially at the Cambridge Art Galleries (we are a family of library lovers).

I imagine new landscapes and combinations of shapes and materials and spaces through digital art. I can be silly and speculative and socially engaged. Beneath it is holding onto remembering, honouring, and living the legacy of Jennifer Tkaczyk.

“Weird is wonderful because weird is what I am” - my Mum says that I said this when I was a child. She repeated it to me many times throughout the years to affirm my identity. Of course, I will create messy abstract and green-taped art for exhibition. Of course, I will create provocative interactives that might be unsettling.

I hope you embrace your weirdness and identity and places you belong. I hope you cherish the people you have as much as you can.

I sit with all of this.



I saved a seat for you
So that
For a moment
Maybe
You can rest

You can see
What I see

You can feel
What I feel

You can hold onto
What holds me

Whenever you are ready

To share your world
To tell your story
To honour your truth

Will you save a seat for me too?