

Cal Waichler '21 and Helen Bennett '22 Conduct Research to Contribute to Maya Lin's *What Is Missing?* Project

To continue a fruitful relationship that began last fall, the Buck Lab for Climate and Environment has partnered with the Lunder Institute for American Art to sponsor an internship program. Designed to be collaborative at its foundation, the program brings together two students: one with a background in environmental studies, and another whose focus is in the visual arts. The program's inaugural interns are Cal Waichler '21 and Helen Bennett '22, who have both been assigned to conduct research for [Maya Lin](#), one of the Lunder Institute's senior fellows for the current academic year.

Together, Waichler and Bennett are researching Maine's ecological history to contribute to Lin's [What is Missing?](#), a multi-sited, multimedia project devoted to issues of biodiversity and habitat loss. At the halfway point of their appointment, the students spoke to Jessamine Batario, the Lunder Institute's Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, to reflect on their experiences.

Jessamine Batario: Could you describe the research you're doing for *What Is Missing?*

Helen Bennett: Cal and I work collaboratively doing research for *What is Missing?*, Maya Lin's fifth and final memorial. We are putting together an ecological history of Maine that will eventually become a component of the digital part of the project. We have also conducted research for what is called the Maine Overview. We identified extinct and endangered species, Maine's most pressing issues, and organizations here that attempt to combat these issues.

Cal Waichler: Compiling an ecological timeline of Maine has involved sifting through online digital archives, tracking down old books through Special Collections at our library (research librarians are very helpful!), and trying to synthesize historical and contemporary information and sources into a cohesive, engaging timeline. We have also been using resources from the Colby Museum and incorporating works from the collection that depict Maine into our timeline.

Batario: *What Is Missing?* is so much more than a sum of its already impressive parts (a website and art installations). With a holistic view in mind, can you talk about the larger significance of this project — for art, for the environment, for society? In big-picture terms, what does this project achieve or hope to achieve?

Bennett: One element of this project that initially stood out to me was the fact that it is Maya's "final memorial." After all of the world's memorials are made, the earth will be the only thing left. This project brings attention to the fact that slowly we are losing the earth as well.

Waichler: The hope for the project is to make people care, and then to encourage them to choose practices and organizations that will help places and species rebound. Some of the forward-looking pieces of the project, like [Greenprint](#), provide a template for people to make sustainable choices and think about their role in the environment in a different, active way.

Batario: How does this all compare to some of your other research projects?

Waichler: In fall of 2019 I spent a semester in Chile with Round River Conservation Studies. We carried out population censuses and surveys of wildlife populations such as guanaco and huemul. This work had a very specific focus, in contrast to what we are doing for the broad overview type work we are doing for *WIM*. Although scientific studies provide critical context for understanding our current environmental problems, *WIM* has required stepping back and finding the broad contours of history, unlike the fine-grained focus of studying an animal population. In comparison to wildlife research in Chile, I've gotten less muddy and been more appreciative about how art and history feed into our relationship with the environment during this internship.

Bennett: During January of 2020, I received funding from DavisConnects to travel to Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands and conduct research on the global influence of the Bauhaus 100 years after its founding — a project I titled “The Whole World is a Bauhaus,” after a quote by Bauhaus student and teacher, Fritz Kuhr. Through various exhibits, I learned about Bauhaus studio practices, the master teachers, life at the school, and ultimately the school’s closing in 1933. I conducted research on the design schools that sprouted in its wake, and the translation of the Bauhaus mission over space and time. I became mesmerized when elements of my architectural education began to find their way into my research and ultimately concluded that as a young architecture student I am so influenced by Bauhaus methods. This research project is similar to the research we are doing for *WIM* in that it depends on the past to inform the future. Architecture is so reliant on its surroundings – it must add, but it should never intrude.

Batario: Maya Lin is such a world-renowned artist, whose work gets taught in art history survey courses. What is it like to work with Maya and her team? Any highlights?

Bennett: My first encounter with her work was when I was 10 years old. It was at the Storm King Art Center and I got to see and experience her *Wave Field*. At RISD I studied her Vietnam Veterans Memorial proposal and learned about her artistic communication. Maya is a huge inspiration to me as an artist and an architect and has really opened my eyes to the powerful intersection between the arts and sciences. She really sees the value of art in expressing opinions, ideas, and inspiring people to take action which is something that I really love.

Waichler: I have been surprised by how many technical aspects are behind the scenes. There are website redesigns and updates. Organizing data in specific ways is vital to presenting the

information. Maya Lin's team is really adept at switching between the technical and the visual or conceptual - always returning to the theme that art can communicate larger or non-visual ideas. It's inspiring to see such rigorous inter-disciplinarity in these artists.

Batario: This internship program was designed to be collaborative from the start. Can you talk about how the two of you have worked together?

Bennett: So far working with Cal has been really fun. Having no environmental studies background (apart from AP ES in high school) I have really learned a lot from her and this project. In compiling a comprehensive ecological history of Maine, we are looking for quotes to pair with images of Maine. I am really enjoying the way that we haven't designated our roles to be totally ES (quote finder) and art (visual finder).

Waichler: We have sensitivities to different types of information, so together we can build more bridges. Together we think about what quote might hook someone with a scientific perspective, or what image could really speak to a visual learner, and what combinations of quotes and imagery paint the most compelling picture.

Bennett: Maya really wanted two interns from different backgrounds to work together and offer a diverse array of perspectives and I think we are definitely doing that. Cal is also a printmaker and a lover of the arts. And I am an architecture and arts student who recognizes the critical importance of conservation and sustainability. I have really enjoyed talking with her about other artists with an environmental focus (for example, Olafur Eliasson and Andy Goldsworthy) and seeing the ways that her love for the natural world inspires a lot of her own work as an artist.

Waichler: Our collaboration has also shown that there are a lot of parallels in our disciplinary training. Helen thinks about site and context for architecture and sculpture, which is similar to thinking about the environment as a setting for science. She has an awareness of surroundings and history and form - how a landscape's inhabitants change over time.

Batario: Any parting thoughts?

Waichler: Circles are very important in *WIM*. Many timelines we construct are linear, but there is a possibility for restoration and resurgence in these timelines - striving toward a circular narrative where species abundances, free flowing rivers, birdsong, etc., can return to what they once were.