I am a transdisciplinary artist researching the deep connection between the health of my body and the earth's. Whether working with fungi, plants, trees, or slime molds, I am drawn to the inherent unpredictability of these partnerships. My research highlights the idea that when working with other beings, control and predictability are surrendered, and the result is born of mutual influence and discovery. The process of co-creating with other species is more important to me than the end result or artwork. I embrace the natural cycles of growth and decay in my pieces, reflecting on my relationship with the natural world as one that is always in flux. I work across media experimenting with the way that concepts and ideas develop as my means of making shifts across: printmaking, choreographing, video, foraging, inkmaking, sculpture, virtual reality, fiber and biomaterials. As I document natural processes in the more-than-human world (fungi, plants, trees, slime molds), I use that documentation to imagine my internal world and its cycles of decay and regrowth – always fluctuating. My guiding question is: how do I visualize healing as a wholeness that is continuously ruptured and rebuilt?

Sara Dotterer received her B.A. in Studio Art and Anthropology at Washington and Lee University. She is now living in Dallas, Texas as a candidate for Southern Methodist University's MFA in Studio Art.
Yellow Oyster Mushroom

Pleurotus citrinopileatus

Chesnut Mushroom

Agaricus bisporus

TITLE
"Fungi and Fiber" Series
Installation
(Mud Cloth Textile, Fiber, Shelf & Petri Dishes Inoculated with various mushroom species)

2.2' x 3.4'
5' x 6" x 1.5"
2022

TITLE
We Are Walking Projectors
Installation (Video, Aluminum Sheeting, Scrim, Cinefoil, Foam)

22' x 11' x 9' Room
2021

TITLE
What Are You Attending To?
Plaster Sculpture, Sticks, Rock & Other Detritus, Video

9" x 3" x 2"
2022

TITLE
Moss and Mycelium
Linoleum Oil Print, Handmade Paper, Thread

8" x 8"
2022

TITLE
Branching Fractals
Linoleum Print w/ Oil on Paper

20" x 30"
2022

TITLE
Urban-Nature Ecotone:
80-year-old Oak in 2.5 Minutes
Sand, Dirt, Plastic, Video Projection
(Developed w/ The Grove Software)

3.2' x 2'
2022
“We come from the earth and we return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh. While we live our bodies are moving particles of the earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures.”
—Wendell Berry, “The Body and The Earth”

Sara and I shared studio space during our senior year of college. On the morning of our first critique, I found Sara’s section totally enclosed in an assemblage of string, reflective cellophane, and large sheets of crumpled paper. I stuck my head inside this pseudo fort; a mirror sat on the ground, swags of paper hung from the ceiling, and numerous aerial photos showing people moving through space adorned the walls. Sara arrived, and we laughed about building pillow forts in our childhood homes. That’s what I made, she said, a space to disconnect, then connect. To look up from your phone, to look inside, to look at your neighbor. To feel your body take up space.

Critique and vulnerability are not comfortable at twenty-two—what significance do your materials and process hold? Why is there paper hanging from the ceiling, and why is the tape visible? You need to be more intentional with your decisions. Afterward, Sara left the room. I followed; we walked to a nearby playground and sat on the swings. I can’t think straight. I can’t get outside my head. I feel nauseous. It must be side effects from my new medicine. It must be stress. The wind blew wood chips over our shoes, and a leaf fell from the bare branches overhead, descending slowly through the chill Virginia air.

Sara’s eco-art practice is highly research-driven, and her particular interest in mushroom ecology developed after beginning a Ketamine treatment regimen for depression. Throughout the process, she gained a deep understanding of neurological healing, where connections form and reform in the brain. She turns to the natural world, which consistently and visibly cycles through death and rebirth, to harness this process. Mushrooms are a literal manifestation of growth from decay as their mycelium form and reform connections to the earth and to the “self” of the organism. There is a larger metaphor here as well: mycelium, tree roots, mind-body connections, and neurological healing fuse in *Eco-Interoception* to illustrate both the precariousness and decay of our planet and the opportunity we have to participate in its healing.

*Eco-Interoception* is an advanced iteration of the pseudo fort—a space to disconnect from distraction and connect to the self. The installation, which includes works on paper, VR and video components, and sculptures made from a combination of found and fine art materials, manifests a growing mind-body connection, utilizing ecology as both a metaphor for and a mode of neurological healing. Foraged branches hang from the ceiling and reach toward one another, studio-grown mushrooms sit in dishes and on pedestals, and commercially-printed textiles are interspersed throughout. Each element visualizes the cycle of decay and growth that exists in both nature and the psyche. The fractal patterns present in the branches and fungi growth mimic neural pathways in the brain during neurogenesis; as organic life generates from decomposition, so the brain heals from trauma or disease. *Eco-Interoception* mandates that its viewers participate by confronting these parallels as they wander between tangled branches and observe the mycelium (or mushrooms’ root system) and thus, their own cycles of decay and regeneration. In this way, the work encourages connection to the self, one another, and the earth. It creates a space where this is possible—a space that merges the organic and manmade, the visible and ephemeral, the internal and external.
Textiles are another crucial aspect of *Eco-Interoception*. The branches placed and hung throughout the installation mimic root systems, which in turn mimics psychic healing. But the branches themselves are fractured—full of holes, cracks, and points of weakness and decay. Sara hand-places, inserts, or attaches fabrics and kozo paper in these areas, creating a patchwork that merges manmade and natural materials. Actions of mending, stitching, and sewing are visible, and the presence of these textiles suggests yet another method of connection and reconnection, this time with an emphasis on the interpersonal. These cycles of growth and decay—neurogenesis, mushroom ecology, root systems—are often supported by something external. Our healing accelerates when we join forces and strengthen our connections. So too, does the healing of the planet. This is the utopia that *Eco-Interoception* suggests: our bodies, minds, and earth are one, and we must strive to increase our degree of interconnectedness on every register.

That day in Virginia, we went outside. We sat with ourselves, together. We looked at each other, and we looked up. Branches silhouetted against the gray sky, fractured and split into countless pathways, becoming new at each juncture—each knobby joint and fragile length evidence and assurance of growth. We took deep breaths with the wind. We felt our bodies in space.

**McKenna Quatro Johnson**

MA Candidate in Art History, The Institute of Fine Arts NYU
This 2023 M.F.A. thesis exhibition is the culmination of two years of intensive work by M.F.A. candidates in the Division of Art and features works in a wide-ranging variety of styles and mediums.
Sara Dotterer

(De) Compose
MFA 23
Qualifying Exhibition

25 MARCH - 15 APRIL

OPENING:
25 March 2023
4:00 - 6:00 PM

Virtual Reality Experience for "Eco-Interception" Installation
Virtual World on Quest 2 Headset, Developed w/ Unity