

Bartow + Metzgar + Werberig,
Terrakwa: An investigation of the Erie Canal Across Time and Geography

January 24–March 8, 2025



Installation image courtesy of Buffalo Arts Studio

A Measured Approach

Curatorial Essay by Shirley Verrico

parameter: an arbitrary constant whose value characterizes a member of a system

Terrakwa: An Investigation of the Erie Canal Across Time and Geography is an innovative exhibition by the collaborative artist team Bartow+Metzgar+Werberig. This exhibition is the culmination of a multi-year experimental drawing project investigating the expression of time through a human-nonhuman collaboration with trees. Inspired by a profound question—*What is a nonhuman expression of time as it relates to the Erie Canal?*—the artists used a simple drawing apparatus to record atmospheric forces acting on trees over time. This project aims to shift the narrative surrounding the Erie Canal from its historical associations with human activity—such as

packet boats and mules—to a focus on the silent, yet significant, presence of the trees that line its banks. The trees, as silent stewards of the canal, embody stories and histories that are often overlooked. The artists focus on these living participants to illuminate the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman experiences within this shared space.

The installation serves as a small, yet significant step toward understanding the nonhuman entities that inhabit our environment. B+M+W situates their work within the public sphere, emphasizing the importance of accessible spaces for experimentation, free from the constraints often imposed by private ownership. This approach not only enriches the dialogue around the Erie Canal but also invites viewers to reconsider

their relationship with the natural world and the myriad stories it holds.

The exhibition includes 40 small tree drawings representing the entirety of the Erie Canal project. The artists assigned parametric parameters to the process including drawing time durations based on geographic distances from Albany and Buffalo. For example, a site 220 miles from Albany translated into 220 minutes of drawing time. Two tree drawings were created for each location—one reflecting the distance from Albany and the other from Buffalo.

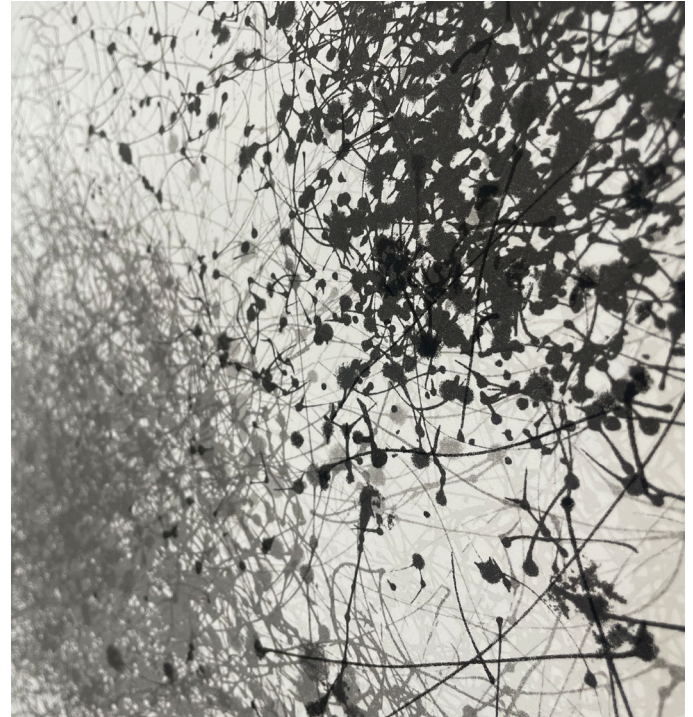
The video is a looping animation of the 40 tree drawings beginning with the earliest, made in 2016, to the most recent, made in 2024. The scanned images were filtered so that elevation dictated duration. Although the first and last image is fixed, the video program randomly moves through the remaining 38 drawings. The audio track accompanying the animation incorporates two distinct audio tracks of environmental sound recordings. The first was made on the shore at the Niagara River and the other at the Hudson River. The two tracks were stitched together, thereby bracketing all of the tree drawing locations from Albany to Buffalo. Like the video, the audio was also assigned filters; in this case, the density, frame placement, and duration (velocity) of the moving image manipulated the sound to correspond with specific qualities of the animation.

The artists also curated ten prints from the collection, representing ten sites along the Erie Canal, including the Niagara River and Hudson River, where the canal intersects each. The prints were made during a week-long residency at Mirabo Press. These prints serve as direct records of time-event phenomena, akin to a seismograph or heart monitor, capturing specific moments involving a tree, its geography, and atmospheric conditions.

The exhibition also features two composite prints, each layering ten tree drawings sequentially: The first begins with the Hudson River location and ends with the Niagara River, stacking other sites in between. The second starts with the Niagara River and ends with the Hudson River. These composites utilize a unique conversion method for tonal values. Distances from

Albany or Buffalo were translated into opacity levels: shorter distances yield lighter tones, while longer distances produce darker tones.

Terrakwa: An Investigation of the Erie Canal Across Time and Geography invites viewers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world, engaging trees as active members in and primal representatives of our larger ecosystem. While limiting human intervention, the artist allows these nonhuman entities to express their own narratives.



Composit detail courtesy of Rachel Shelton

About the Artists

Paul Bartow (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology) is a practicing artist, teacher, and fabricator based in Watkins Glen, NY.

Richard Metzgar (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology) is a practicing artist and professor in the Department of Art and Design at SUNY Oswego, based in Fulton, NY.

David Werberig (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology) is the creator of Digital Fold-Ups and their Director of Marketing and Sales, based in Victor, NY.

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