ROSALIE D. GAGNÉ
A Contemporary Alchemist

> "For as long as I can remember, observing nature and experimenting with matter have always been valuable tools of knowledge for me. Sometimes, I imagine that if I had not worked in the field of visual arts, I would have been active in the sciences, and that if I had been born in the Middle Ages, I like to think that I would have been an alchemist."
>
> Rosalie D. Gagné

Rosalie D. Gagné has made over the last twenty-five years a series of works that witness her ability to combine manual sculpting practices with new technologies. She has explored the traditional arts of glassblowing and clay, but also composes with artificial materials, including polyethylene, ventilators, movement detectors, LED light systems, and electronics. Since 2018, in collaboration with Sofian Audry, she has been working on an ambitious project called *Morphosis* involving robots and machine learning algorithms. With ventures into biology and meditation, Gagné's work combines opposing worlds – organic and artificial, solid and ethereal, microcosm and macrocosm – and investigates the ensuing tensions. The artist also revealed an early fascination with alchemy, manifested through works featuring eccentric glass vases and liquids of all sorts-resembling at times those of a chemistry laboratory. Inspired by Foucault's device, she made hanging sculptures such as *Pendulum* (2006), which expressed her interest in cosmology and the place of humankind and Earth in the Universe.

Since 2009, she has created a number of installations generating sound, movement, and color, while exploring biomimicry through sculptures that replicate shapes and behaviors found in nature. Gagné's latest works have become major installations, such as *Artificial Kingdom IV*: forty-five inflatable polyethylene cells hanging from a thirty-foot ceiling and reacting to the visitor's presence. First installed in the Grand Theatre de Québec in 2020 and at the Neuberger Museum of Art in 2024, the installation has now been reproduced and adapted for the hall of the Musée d'art de Joliette.

Born in Québec City, Rosalie D. Gagné is a true Pan-American artist, whose artist career can be traced between Québec, Mexico City, and Montréal, where she currently resides and practices. In addition to her career as a practicing artist, Gagné is a professor in the Department of Visual Art and Art History at Cégep régional de Lanaudière in Joliette, where she has taught since 2010.

Rosalie D. Gagné: A Contemporary Alchemist is her first retrospective exhibition and showcases her artistic production since 1997. The exhibition also documents the artist's most important site-specific projects and features a selection of freehand preparatory drawings on paper.

Patrice Giasson, Alex Gordon Curator of Art of the Americas
Neuberger Museum of Art

ROSALIE D. GAGNÉ
Québec, Québec, 1974

1. *Règne artificiel IV*, 2019
[Artificial Kingdom IV]
30 inflatable objects : polyethylene, ventilator, microcontrollers,
infrared movement detectors, RGB LED lighting, variable dimensions
Property of the artist

This is an interactive piece that responds to your presence.
Please refrain from touching it.

---

2. *SusPendue*, 2000
[Hanged]
Metal, found objects (hook and rope), blown glass, water
85 x 40 x 45 cm
Property of the artist

---

3. *Lavamanos*, 2001
[Hand-Wash]
Found object (vanity unit), blown glass, metal, tinted water,
latex tube, wax, 180 x 80 x 60 cm
Property of the artist

---

4. *Système fermé*, 2001
[Closed System]
Found object (metal), blown glass, metal, tinted water,
latex tube, 120 x 18 x 40 cm
Property of the artist

---

5. *Axis Mundi*, 2000
[Axis of the World]
Metal, blown glass, tinted water, 210.8 x 15.2 x 15 cm
Property of the artist

---

6. *Effet papillon*, 2007
[Butterfly Effect]
Blown glass, found objects, sand, water, butterfly,
aquatic plants and other lifeforms, 25.4 x 88.9 x 17.8 cm
Property of the artist

---

7. *Corazón Molido*, 1997
[Ground Heart]
Found object (meat grinder), metal, blown glass, tinted water
85 x 40 x 45 cm
Property of the artist

---

8. *Microcosme*, 2000
[Microcosm]
Found object (metal), blown glass, water, aquatic plants
and other lifeforms, 120 x 60 x 60 cm
Property of the artist

---

9. *Espécimen #12*, 2001
[Specimen #12]
Metal, paint, glass, felt, tinted water, wax, 120 x 18 x 18 cm
Property of the artist

---

10. *Système circulatoire*, 2000
[Circulatory System]
Found object (metal), latex tubes, blown glass, tinted water,
metal wire, 180 x 180 x 40 cm
Property of the artist

---

11. Études préparatoires *ExCroissance #2*, 2017
[Preparatory studies OutGrowth #2]
Photograph and felt pen drawing on mylar paper, 17.8 x 22.9 cm each
Property of the artist

---

12. *Alvéole*, 2007
[Alveolus]
Polyethylene, ventilator, mirror, metal wire, microcontroller
300 x 300 x 300 cm
Property of the artist

Please do not enter inside the work.

---

13. *Cellulhotel*, 2004
[Cellhotel]
Metal, blown glass, fabric, tinted water
Contact microphone and speakers since 2015
210 x 180 x 180 cm
Property of the artist

Please do not enter inside the work.

---

14. Dessins préparatoires *Quinte Essence*, 2000
[Preparatory drawings Quint Essence]
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 27.9 x 20.3 cm each
Property of the artist

---

15. Documentation de *Red Encantada* [Réseau enchanté], œuvre installée à La Clínica Regina, Mexico, 2011
[Documentation of *Red encantada* [Enchanted Network], installed at La Clínica Regina, Mexico]
Video, 1 min 14 s
Property of the artist

Red encantada [Enchanted Network] is Gagné's first installation where luminescent nerve-like cells took up a whole room. It is significant that it was displayed in Mexico City's La Clínica, a space that had inspired many of her previous works. In this piece, the artist bonded glass and plastic, as if reconciling her move from one medium to another, and one country to another. Enchanted Network gives the sensation of being inside a technological version of a drawing of the nervous system by neuroscientists Camillo Golgi (1843-1926) and Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934), both winners of the Medicine Nobel Prize in 1906. As in their drawings, Gagné's work cells are tangled and interwoven, occupying the whole space. Each tube-based cell contains light-emitted diodes and a fan, all linked to a network of sensors and programmable electronics. The sculpture, which connects artificial and biological life, responds to a visitor's presence by adjusting the speed of the flashing lights. The luminosity reminds us that electrical energy flows continuously in our brains.

Excerpt from Claudia Arozqueta's text « Life in a Breath: Rosalie D. Gagné's Works », in the the exhibition catalogue: *Rosalie D. Gagné: A Contemporary Alchemist*, Patrice Giasson ed., Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2024: 47-48.

---

16. Documentation d'*ExCroissance #2*, œuvre d'art public créée à Sainte-Hélène-de-Bagot (Québec) pour l'évènement *Truck Stop*, 2017
[Documentation of OutGrowth #2, public art created at Sainte-Hélène-de-Bagot, Québec, for the Truck Stop event]
Digital print
Property of the artist

OutGrowth #2 is first and foremost a body, an overflowing volume that returns, formally speaking, to the sources of blown glass pieces. Presented as part of the Truck Stop event in the summer of 2017, the work appeared as a strange prominence parasitizing the Relais Routier Petit building in Sainte-Hélène-de-Bagot. Visible from the freeway, the inflatable structure seemed to be sitting on top of two buildings at once, giving the impression of a heavy substance that could possibly move, progress in a certain way— or, more worryingly, absorb the matter of the world on which it has landed

Excerpt from Nathalie Bachand's text « Between Technological and Organic; Between Science and Fiction-Junctions and Extensions », in the the exhibition catalogue: *Rosalie D. Gagné: A Contemporary Alchemist*, Patrice Giasson ed., Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2024: 35.

---

17. *Murmures internes*, 2006
[Inner Whispers]
7 sculptures, clay, beeswax, sound devices, variable dimensions
Property of the artist

These sculptures have audio components. Please listen closely to the sounds within the pieces, but do not touch the vessels.

---

18. *Pendulum*, 2006
Metal, blown glass, sand, tinted water
Motor since 2024
400 x 90 x 180 cm
Property of the artist

Please do not step on the sand.

The exhibition continues on the 2nd floor in the Salle Harnois Énergies.

19. Dessins préparatoires *Morphoses*, 2018-2023
[Preparatory drawings Morphosis]
Inkjet print on archival matte paper, 45.4 x 53 cm each
Property of the artist

20. Prototypes *Morphoses*, 2017-2018
[Prototypes Morphosis]
Oil-based modeling clay, variable dimensions
Property of the artist

ROSALIE D. GAGNÉ & SOFIAN AUDRY
Québec, Québec, 1974 | Montréal, Québec, 1978

21. *Morphoses*, 2018 – Ongoing
[Morphosis]
3 robots, silicone rubber, LED light, machine learning algorithm,
live-data wall projection, approx. 30.5 cm diameter each.
Property of the artists

Activation every day at 3 p.m.

Morphoses [Morphosis] is the result of a collaboration between
Rosalie D. Gagné and Sofian Audry, an artist trained in programming
and machine learning. This open-ended project explores the boundaries
between artificial and biological life through the study of machine behavior.

The morphosis are not preprogrammed to execute specific tasks, but rather
are given simple goals, receiving positive rewards when their actions bring
them closer to the goal (the creatures emit a green light), and negative
rewards when they are further from the goal (a red light). Through trial
and error, they try to discover which actions yield the best results,
balancing their need to exploit their knowledge of the world with
the necessity to explore new possibilities.

During each performance, the viewer gets to see them going through

a sequence of short goal-seeking acts. At the start of each of these acts, the creatures' memory is reset as if they were born anew each time, with no prior knowledge of their world or their body. While the goals given to the creatures appear simple, the morphosis have to learn from scratch using their limited senses, clunky bodies, and primitive cognition. What is at stake is less their ability to reach their goal efficiently, but rather to reveal a process of becoming, as the creatures try to learn these acts. The projection indicates which of the six acts is happening, and the monitor offers a graphic representation of their perceptions (white lines) and rewards (colored line).

Sequence of Behaviors

Rocking without rolling. The creatures should attempt to generate internal motion, but avoid moving horizontally across the floor.

Being curious. The creatures are motivated by novelty. As they explore their world and body, and get a better understanding of how their actions are connected to their perceptions, they become bored by predictable situations. To avoid boredom, they attempt different behaviors.

Tilting in synchrony. The creatures should try to follow a specific rhythm, following an internal cycling signal. This "internal clock" can be seen on the visualization monitor as a repetitive wave that slowly moves up and, when it reaches its apex, quickly falls down.

Moving to the wall. The creatures explore getting as close to the walls as possible.

Meeting in the middle. The creatures try to find the center of the room and stay there.

Being still. The creatures try to slow down and be completely still.

Keys of Interpretation

The morphosis make decisions at a slow pace, such as one action every second or more, depending on the behavior. You should see this pace when viewing the visualization monitor, which will refresh at the same rhythm.

Their memory is erased at the beginning of each behavior, so they have to learn everything from scratch each time.

They have a very limited view over the world that is reduced to only very little data, such as their location on the floor, their rotation, or their velocity.

They are rewarded only *after* they do an action and observe its results. The reward is shown both as a color feedback on the creature and on the visualization monitor: green for high rewards, red for low rewards, yellow or orange for neutral rewards.

The reward that is shown is based on their own experience of the world from the beginning of each behavior, readjusting their expectations as they discover the world. Hence, the color they show does not represent the objective absolute value of the reward, but rather a subjective value based on their experience thus far. For example, a morphosis might discover early on that a certain action yields good results, thus turning green, only to discover later on that there are even better rewards to gain by making other decisions.
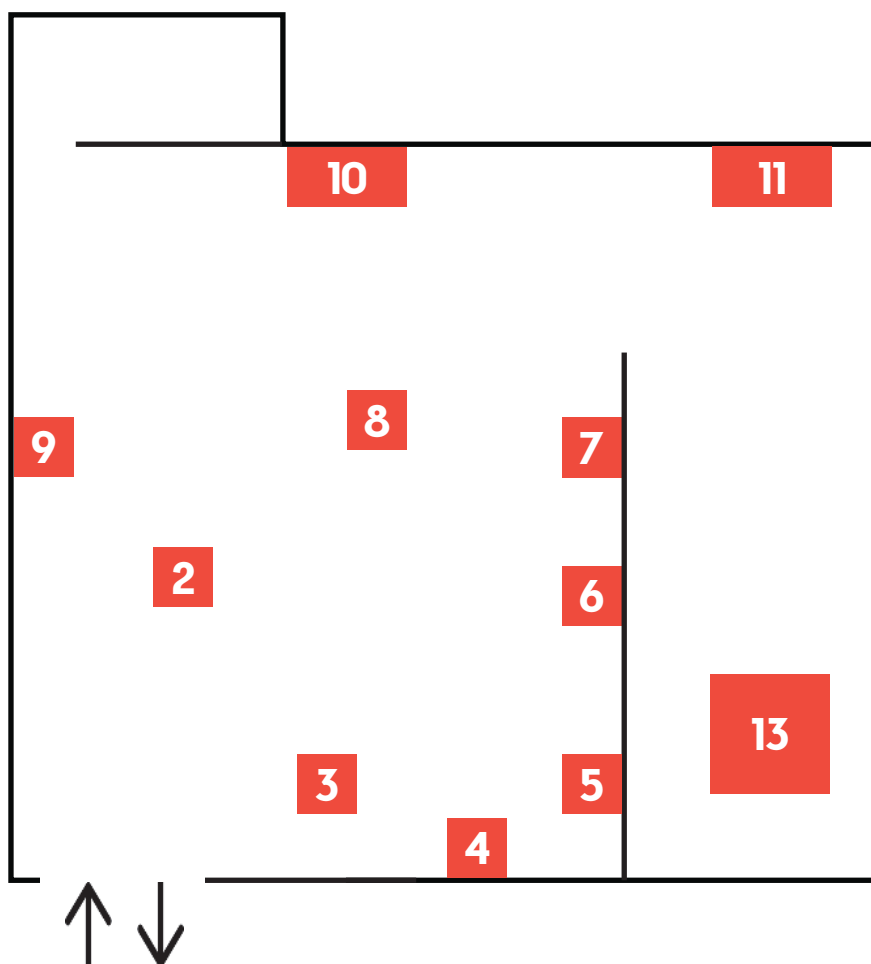
FLOOR PLANS

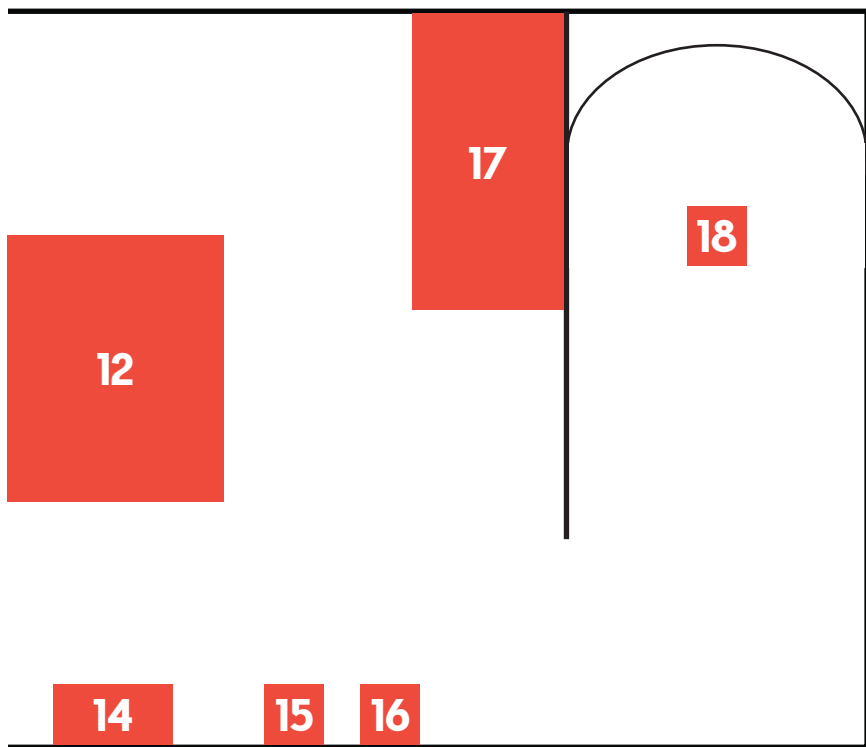## 1st floor

Hall Famille Jacques Martin

1
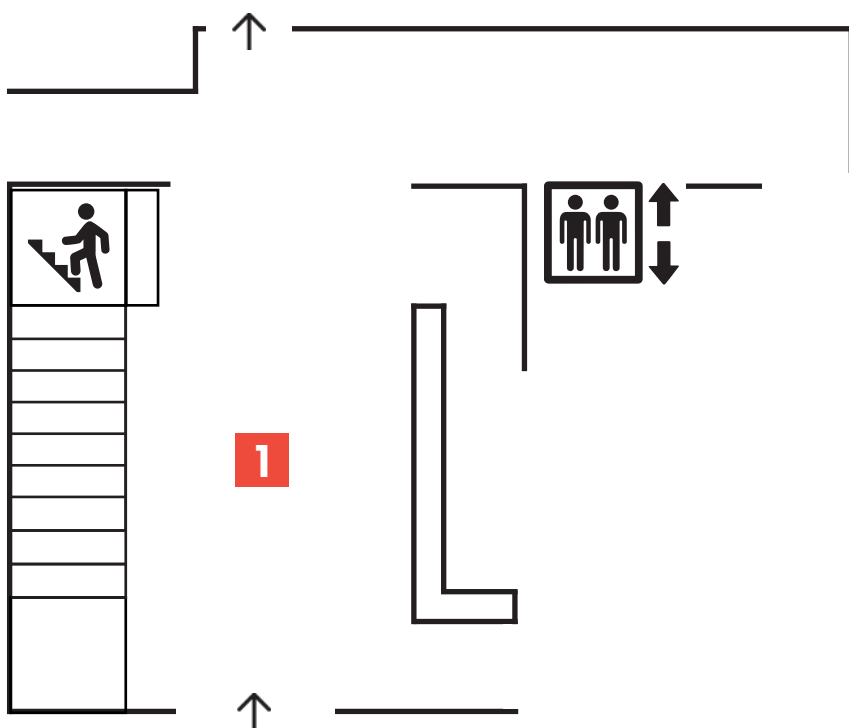
FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle Nicole et René Després et Jeannette et Luc Liard

12

17

18

14

15

16

FLOOR PLAN

2nd floor

Salle Harnois Énergies

20

19

21

21

21