



## Brian Slattery

### Contributor

Brian Slattery ([www.bfslattery.com](http://www.bfslattery.com)) is the arts editor for the New Haven Independent and a musician.

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Independent Review Crew is a new initiative of the nonprofit Online Journalism Project. It aims to seed a network of writers in cities across the country to review in-person local cultural events.

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# New Haven

## Artists Stare Into The Sun

by BRIAN SLATTERY | May 16, 2024 11:32 am

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LIONEL CRUET

An entire gallery of the Ely Center of Contemporary Art on Trumbull Street is bathed in a pinkish-orange glow that streams in through tinted windows, a constant chemical sunset. The light transforms the pieces that artist Lionel Cruet has in the space, from a painting of a mangrove swamp populated by iguanas to shopping bags emblazoned with ominous faces commanding you to enjoy your life.

# Artists Stare Into The Sun

by **BRIAN SLATTERY** | May 16, 2024 8:22 am

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LIONEL CRUET

Video installation in *Sunburnt*.

An entire gallery of the Ely Center of Contemporary Art on Trumbull Street is bathed in a pinkish-orange glow that streams in through tinted windows, a constant chemical sunset. The light transforms the pieces that artist Lionel Cruet has in the space, from a painting of a mangrove swamp populated by iguanas to shopping bags emblazoned with ominous faces commanding you to enjoy your life.

A NSFW video installation features a model with a sunshield that is far too small for his body. He moves it up and down over the course of the video, exposing himself not only to the viewer, but to the elements, as if maybe the viewer's gaze is as harmful as radiation.

Taken together, Cruet's installation is called "Sunburnt" and it's one of several installations running concurrently at ECOCA under the heading "Spring Heat," described as "a series of exhibitions that touch upon the many aspects of our environment and climate change,"

running now through June 2.

The video, Cruet writes, "alludes to the history of human civilizations and the use of the sun as a symbol of god, energy, power, and clarity. Ultimately, the performance challenges viewers to reflect on our role in the climate crisis and the delicate natural world on planet Earth." Cruet's use of orange "is indicative of caution and/or danger"; his use of multiple media is intended to "confront issues concerning ecology, geopolitics, and technology."



HANLYN DAVIES

*This Bad Apple, detail.*

“Spring Heat” features the work of [Cruet](#), [Sariah Park](#), [Yvonne Short & Rebecca West](#), [Hanlyn Davies](#), [Nua Collective](#), [Thinking about Water](#) (another collective), Water Women (yet another collective), and [Kevin Hernandez Rosa](#). Its theme of addressing climate change creates a narrative thread that winds through the space-transforming show, running the gamut of emotions that today swirl around the issue, attending to the damage done, and — most important — modeling a mind-set for acceptance and adaptation.

In some ways, the fear of climate change is really the fear of the end of life as we know it for humans; as comedian George Carlin pointed out years ago, “[the planet is fine; the people are fucked](#).... the planet isn’t going anywhere, we are.” For artist Hanlyn Davies, it boils down to a study of decay. “This Bad Apple ... stems” — surely, pun intended — “from his interest in growing apples in his New Haven backyard. It was observing the natural decay of these apples, while musing about the representation of ‘the apple’ in art, mythology, and folklore, that led to the work in this exhibition,” an accompanying note states. The series of images tracking the transformation of fruit through decomposition, in all its fascination and revulsion, “is a cautionary, allegorical tale for our current times” about, in the end, the inability to escape entropy.





YVONNE SHORTT AND REBECCA WEST

*Shedding My Toxic Core Part III.*

Elsewhere, mother-daughter team Yvonne Shortt and Rebecca West have turned a gallery into a fragile sanctuary with “Shedding My Toxic Core Part III.” “The concepts of scarcity and abundance have become more and more prevalent in how Shortt addresses her artistic practice,” an accompanying note states. “Examples of what Shortt defines as scarcity are: competition, gate-keeping, hierarchies, and exclusivities. The concepts of abundance, Shortt finds, are found in ‘intentionality and freedom as well as sustainability from a financial, emotional, and environmental perspective.’”

It also applies to the things Shortt and West make their art from. “The act of making art is almost always tied to a material. One must take a material from its natural state to create, often with environmentally harmful means of manipulation,” the note continues. The artists’ search for more sustainable approaches leads to more creativity. “They collaborate with beavers, using their discarded sticks to create pieces for play, conversation, and energy shifts. Shortt and West will continue to investigate these concepts as they invite others to work with them in the gallery space for the duration of their exhibition, using abundance to source their art making techniques, such as creating paint from soil.”

Where Cruett creates an aggressive landscape, Shortt and West create a place of contemplation. In many ways the gallery is comforting and welcoming, but it hasn’t lost its edge. As one hand-stitched banner reads, “I used to wonder how people got caught up in cults until I realized I was in the cult of America. We must forget what they’ve taught us and how they’ve brainwashed us.”





WATER WOMEN

### *Flood 2.0.*

Meanwhile, artists Krisanne Baker, Susan Hoffman Fishman, and Leslie Sobel — who make up the Water Women — have stayed true to their name by creating an absorbing, immersive installation using a variety of media including poetry, sound, and projections. “Flood 2.0 links future apocalyptic flood predictions to the ancient flood narrative of Noah and the world’s first apocalyptic flood. In the original Noah story, the Earth was flooded as a result of human greed, selfishness and immorality. Similarly, the predicted future apocalyptic flooding will occur as a result of the same human behaviors, which, this time, have caused significant environmental damage to the Earth itself,” an accompanying note states.

In addition to the projections, the work has “45+ scrolls painted to imitate the motions of flood waters, a makeshift boat, sails and mast, and the performance of a Greek Chorus, which tells the story of Noa, the lone female survivor whose name in Hebrew means ‘action.’ Flood 2.0’s goal is to use art, flood mythology and history to inspire community dialogue on local water issues.” The Water Women geared their installation toward New Haven because it’s tied so closely to rivers and the ocean, and several of the projections contain footage of flooding that has happened in New Haven itself.

The overall effect of the piece is transporting. The gallery is a place to confront the reality of the changes happening right now and the changes that are coming. It’s a place to feel a sense of what’s been lost already, and being lost as we speak. But it also makes room to think about what can be saved, and what can be adapted, to let go of the old ways we used to live and move toward something new.