

FOREWORD

Hope Ginsburg's installation *Sponge Exchange* was developed from deep research into the effects of climate change on ocean ecology and a commitment to produce a body of work that has the potential to provide transformative knowledge and awareness. Ginsburg's projects often have multiple outcomes and offer a range of opportunities for direct engagement in their research and documentation, making them available beyond a specific installation and performance. *Sponge Exchange* was researched and developed while Ginsburg was the Kennedy Family Artist and Scholar in residence at the USF School of Art and Art History during the fall semester of 2019.

The installation/project was initiated by Sarah Howard, the Institute for Research in Art's Curator of Public Art and Social Practice. Howard has pursued her own research into artists that develop projects which engage visitors and serve as a catalyst for a new understanding of the catastrophic implications of the climate crisis. With two decades of experience as an artist, collaborator, activist

and producer, Sarah Howard is recognized locally, regionally and nationally for her commitment to advance community-based projects and public installations that connect art, politics and social justice.

The success of exhibitions and projects has everything to do with the energy, talent and will of the participants to commit to excellence and to the best presentation of the work, making it accessible to a broad and diverse public. Congratulations to the staff of the USF Contemporary Art Museum under the able leadership of Deputy Director Noel Smith and to the multidisciplinary team of collaborators. Most of all I acknowledge and thank Hope Ginsburg for bringing her talents to Tampa and the University of South Florida.

Margaret Miller
Professor and Director
USF Institute for Research in Art

Hope Ginsburg, *Breath Portrait I*, 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much like the multicellular composition, adaptability, and filtering functions of a sponge, the *Sponge Exchange* project connects to the university and museum as a forum for knowledge exchange and a catalyst for community-building and social transformation. Through the creative and conceptual guidance of artist and educator Hope Ginsburg, and the generous collaboration and contributions of a talented and dedicated network, *Sponge Exchange* included an artist residency and class at the USF School of Art and Art History, which fostered the production of new collective work for the museum exhibition, as well as a community-based "Land Dive" performance. I am honored to have the opportunity to share in this work with Ginsburg, and the community built around this endeavor. Ginsburg's boundless vision and spirit breathes thoughtful contemplation and vibrant energy into the space around her work, and I continue to be inspired by the enthusiasm and dynamic vigor emanating from this multi-faceted project.

During the fall of 2019, with support from the USF School of Art and Art History Kennedy Family Artist and Scholar Residency, Ginsburg co-taught a course with USF Associate Professor John Byrd, assisted by MFA graduate student Maxwell Parker, to engage students in the research, ideation, and fabrication of the *Coastorama* dioramas. Guided by Ginsburg's pedagogical approach and Byrd and Parker's material knowledge and technical expertise, the visual art students dove into research informed by marine science, coastal ecology, historic sponge diving, as well as spatial theory and sculptural production techniques, to realize a series of dioramas exploring the impacts of the climate crisis on marine species. I am especially appreciative to John Byrd and Maxwell Parker for their dedication in leading the students through this process, and to the USF students who engaged in the *Sponge Exchange* class by creating dynamic dioramas for the exhibition. Additional experts who shared their expertise to inform the class's diorama research include: Amber Whittle, Ph.D., Keri O'Neil, Austyn Bushman, Rachel Serafin, and Emily Williams at The Florida Aquarium Center for Conservation; Kari Goetz, The Florida Aquarium; and Matt McCarthy, Ph.D., USF College of Marine Science. Bob Ballard and USF graduate students Matt Campbell and Dom Humphrey also provided technical support for construction of the dioramas. I would like to express deep gratitude to Director Wallace Wilson and the students, faculty and staff of the USF School of Art and Art History for welcoming Ginsburg into the program and sharing in this cooperative venture.

It has been a pleasure to work with Ginsburg and her ever expanding team of creative collaborators, including *Swirling* videographer Matt Flowers and composer Joshua Quarles who provided essential artistic and technical input for the premiere of the video installation, and Ginsburg's studio assistant and artist Michael Royce. Wexner Center for the Arts Film/Video Studio Program Curator Jennifer Lange and Editor Alexis McCrimmon provided abundant support in the production and presentation of *Swirling*. Special gratitude to VCU School of the Arts and its Art Foundation Program for their contributions to the exhibition. The VCUarts Arts Research Institute also provided generous support for *Swirling*. Thanks to J. Morgan Puett and Mildred's Lane for the loan of work for the show, and to Mason Mills for providing the *Land Dive Team: Amphibious James* documentary.

A number of individuals from the Tarpon Springs community invested their time and energy in facilitating deeper research and connections

to the local sponge diving community including, sponge expert Tina Bucuvalas; Debi Dillenberg at Spongeorama Sponge Factory; sponge diver Taso Karistinos; Louis Pappas of The Sponge Exchange; Yannis Panagiotis of Tarpon Strings Music; Diane Wood at the Tarpon Springs Heritage Museum; and Patti Buster and Director Dr. Theresa Wilkins of the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art at St. Petersburg College. Special thanks to the *Land Dive Team: Tarpon Springs* participants and partners at The Sponge Exchange and Tarpon Strings Music for generously sharing their space in support of the performance.

I would also like to extend gratitude to scholars and experts Ulrike Heine, Ph.D., Independent Curator and Visual Studies Scholar; CJ Reynolds, Director of Resiliency and Engagement, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council; and Stephanie Wakefield, Ph.D., Urban Studies Foundation International Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Florida International University, for sharing their extensive knowledge about the issues related to climate crisis and the Florida environment as part of our panel discussion *Rising Above: Art and Climate Resiliency*.

USFCAM is fortunate to have generous support and funding for the exhibition, educational programs and community-based programming from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the USFCAM Art for Community Engagement (ACE) funders. The artist's gallery talk is made possible through the philanthropic support of Dr. Allen Root in honor of his late wife Janet G. Root.

I would like to express deep gratitude to the entire IRA team, as I truly appreciate the enthusiastic support and guidance of the USF Institute for Research in Art Director Margaret Miller, Deputy Directors Noel Smith and Randall West, and the incredible dedication and professional talent of the entire IRA team as we addressed the many tasks associated with mounting an exhibition including grant and patron funding, contracts, artwork loans, exhibition design and installation, documentation, travel and event planning, marketing and promotion, publication design, educational and community-based engagement and so much more. Special thanks to IRA team members Amy Allison, Shannon Annis, Jessica Barber, Marty De la Cruz, Leslie Elsasser, Mark Fredricks, Don Fuller, Ashley Jablonski, Eric Jonas, Vincent Kral, Will Lytch, Anthony Wong Palms, Gary Schmitt, Christian Viveros-Fauné, and David Waterman, as well as student interns and volunteers Andrew Ryan, Daniel Sulbaran, and Nicole Otaivaro. Much gratitude to the members of CAM Club for hosting the Film on the Lawn series and assisting with special events. It is a pleasure to work with each of you and I am forever grateful for your willingness to expand the limits and boundaries of the institution in new and exciting directions.

This project has truly been a unique collaborative experience, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to present Ginsburg's creative and pedagogical practice to the Tampa Bay community, and connect her passion and inspiration for marine invertebrates to the Tarpon Springs sponge diving community, while addressing the imperative and critical issues surrounding the climate crisis and Florida's delicate natural and socio-economic ecologies.

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Dr. Allen Root
in honor of his late wife
Janet G. Root



Sponge Exchange // Hope Ginsburg

January 17 - March 07, 2020
USF Contemporary Art Museum

Hope Ginsburg, Matt Flowers, Joshua Quarles; Video still from *Swirling*, 2019

SPONGE EXCHANGE // HOPE GINSBURG

Sponge Exchange is the first solo museum exhibition to focus on Hope Ginsburg's participatory, collaborative and pedagogical practice of investigating marine ecologies as a catalyst for knowledge exchange and social transformation. Grounded in her previous long-term educational and performative platforms, the exhibition includes new collaboratively produced video and sculpture installations inspired by coral restoration and sponge diving. Addressing the impacts of the climate crisis on coastal ecosystems and potential solutions for the future, *Sponge Exchange* aims to catalyze new thinking towards the health of the planet and our own environmental and economic resilience.

Sponge Exchange premieres *Swirling* (2019), a four-channel video installation that immerses viewers in the high stakes of coral restoration. Capturing the often unseen collective labor of underwater coral farming and reef restoration, *Swirling* reveals the optimistic and adaptive step-by-step efforts of the conservationists working to turn the tide against massive extinction. Stressed by warming waters and additional results of humanity's impact on the planet, coral reefs serve as essential habitats and a significant food source for the entire marine ecology, contributing to the health and well-being of humans and our future socio-economic viability. *Swirling* was produced in collaboration with videographer Matthew Flowers and composer Joshua Quarles through a residency at the Wexner Center for the Arts Film/Video Studio Program.

Surrounded within a triangular installation of three large scale projections, viewers are submerged in the underwater coral nurseries and outplant sites of the Swirling Reef of Death off the Caribbean coast of Saint Croix. Within the projection, viewers physically swirl around to absorb the surreal narrative unfolding as *Swirling* documents the growth and replanting of staghorn coral fragments. Referred to by The Nature Conservancy as "fragments of opportunity," the coral fragments are harvested underwater by scuba divers from man-made, floating PVC frameworks and then carried in plastic laundry baskets to reef planting sites where they are adhered to the existing reef! *Swirling's* score, composed with gurgling bubbles and breath, plunges viewers into a soundscape of eerie apprehension and anxiety about whether these efforts will be enough to sustain the health of the reefs, its species and that of the planet. Meanwhile, a separate fourth video channel presents one possible positive outcome—a scene of healthy out-planted coral, with finger sponges swaying in the current, teeming with a diversity of fish who have returned to the vital habitat. Reflecting the fragility of the planet, the oceans and the species that inhabit it, *Swirling* invites meditation on our own relationship and interdependence with the natural world and contemplation of our ingenuity and ability to protect, restore, and adapt to the changing climate.

Informed by Ginsburg's previous pedagogical exploration of the sponge as a vehicle for the exchange of knowledge, *Sponge Exchange* is influenced by the resilient cultural and economic heritage of the Greek

1. The Nature Conservancy <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/caribbean/stories-in-caribbean/caribbean-a-revolution-in-coral-conservation/>

sponge-diving village of Tarpon Springs, Florida. Established in the late 1880s, Tarpon Springs became known as the "Sponge Capital of the World," but following a series of mid-twentieth century blights thought to be caused by toxic red tide, the Gulf Coast sponge beds were almost completely wiped out. With the rise of automobiles and a post-war middle class seeking leisure in Florida's warmth, Tarpon Springs turned to a tourist-based economy. Although the sponge industry was thriving again by the late century, it never reached the height of the market established in the early part of the century.² The historic and contemporary sites of The Sponge Exchange, a former sponge market now turned retail plaza, and The Sponge Factory's Spongeorama Museum serve as catalysts for exploring past ecological and economic challenges to generate awareness and solutions for the future. Built in the late sixties and currently closed to the public following Hurricane Irma in 2017, the Spongeorama attraction showcases the history and culture of sponge-diving and its environmental and economic concerns through an extensive series of idiosyncratic three-dimensional dioramas, which serve as the source of inspiration for Ginsburg's new pedagogical project.

Ginsburg worked with USF Professor John Byrd, Graduate Teaching Assistant Maxwell Parker and the students of the Sponge Exchange class, named the Coastorama Cooperative, to collaboratively create a series of dioramas inspired by the quirky and extraordinary spectacle of Spongeorama. Charged with the investigation, ideation and depiction of the environmental issues facing coastal and marine species, the Sponge Exchange class and formation of the Coastorama Cooperative embody the foundation of Ginsburg's practice: learning by doing and building community through collaboration. Informed through research, lectures and field trips, the *Coastorama* dioramas explore the harmful effects of climate crisis—warming and acidification of oceans, toxic algal blooms, tropical cyclones, sea level rise, and endangered and invasive species—to a number of vital coastal species. Corals, lionfish, manatees, mangroves, sea snails, sea turtles, smalltooth sawfish, and the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale are all represented through the visual, illustrative format of the dioramas. Compressing space and time, fact and speculative fictions of a potential future, the dioramas use illusionary painted backgrounds and sculpted and crafted props to construct spatial and theoretical artifice. An interdisciplinary blending of art and science, these dioramas transcend illusionism and allow viewers a critical and transformative approach to the alarming ecological issues facing marine species and coastal communities. Collectively, the *Coastorama* dioramas prompt contemplation of our own relationship to these ecologies through a series of creative vignettes highlighting the climate crisis-induced threats to aquatic species while imagining future opportunities for adaptation and resilience.

Building community and collective memories through participation, the *Sponge Exchange Diving Helmet* replicates the tourist photo-opportunity still on view at Spongeorama. A portal to the exhibition, the helmet

2. Ellen J. Ugoccioni, "Development and Architecture," in *CELEBRATING COMMUNITY: Tarpon Springs, Reflections on 125 Years* (Tarpon Springs: City of Tarpon Springs, 2013), 35.



invites audiences to pose for a photographic souvenir emulating and celebrating the sponge culture of Tarpon Springs.

Expanding the exhibition beyond the museum walls and into the sponge-diving community of Tarpon Springs, Ginsburg presents her fourteenth work in the *Land Dive* series, *Land Dive Team: Tarpon Springs*. Held on the historical site of the Tarpon Springs' Sponge Exchange, where sponges were once commercially traded, *Land Dive Team: Tarpon Springs* taps into the former function of the space as a site of exchange to stimulate thought, emotion and dialogue around the climate crisis, our relationship to it, and its impact on our lives and future. The public performance engages a group of trained participants outfitted in full scuba gear sitting on land, breathing in unison, to perform present moment awareness. Accompanied by a live musical score, composed and performed by Joshua Quarles, that incorporates the breath of the composer and the land divers, *Land Dive Team: Tarpon Springs* invites audiences to participate in the meditative and collective breathing practice as a tool for coping with the overwhelming fear associated with living in a radically changing environment.

Mounted on the exterior of the museum and animated by the elements, the artist-designed flag *Bryde's Whale and a Breathing Moon* honors one of the most endangered whale species in the world. A member of the baleen whale family and a distinct subspecies of the Bryde's whale, fewer than 100 Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales are remaining in the world.³ Inspired by the symbolism of dive flags, the *Bryde's Whale and a Breathing Moon* flag incorporates a stripe, representing the landscape and horizon, to signify the symbiotic relationship between marine and coastal ecologies. The flag also depicts the phases of the lunar cycle: a waxing, waning and breathing moon illuminates the passage of time, the ebb and flow of tidal and life cycle patterns, conveying the potential for an optimistic future.

Connected through breath, knowledge transfer and an exploration of the ocean's liminal spaces in the face of a changing climate, Ginsburg's performative, participatory and pedagogical practice stimulates viewers to dive deeper into the impacts of climate crisis. Promoting collaborative strategies over individualistic approaches, Ginsburg's practice communicates the importance of diverse and cooperative solutions. Looking back on the past challenges of the local sponge industry and forward to coral restoration efforts, the collaboratively produced works and ephemera presented in *Sponge Exchange* collectively contemplate the health and vitality of marine species and bring to the surface an optimistic awareness of our relationship and responsibility to the ecologies of the planet.

Sarah Howard
Curator of Public Art and Social Practice
USF Institute for Research in Art

3. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/gulf-mexico-brydes-whale>

Left: Hope Ginsburg, Matt Flowers, Joshua Quarles; Video stills from *Swirling*, 2019
Right: Mackenzie Erickson and Samantha Redman, *Sea Turtle: Sea Level Rise*, from *Coastorama*, 2019-2020. Photo: Will Lytch
Far right: Dioramas from the Tarpon Springs Spongeorama. Photos by Sarah Howard

THE SPONGE EXCHANGE CLASS: COASTORAMA COOPERATIVE

The Sponge Exchange class was born of Hope Ginsburg's pedagogical project *Sponge* (2006–2016), which produces hands-on, collaborative projects that transfer knowledge experientially. A community of engaged students, artists, museum professionals, and scientists had the opportunity to make a new iteration of *Sponge* at USF in fortuitous proximity to Tarpon Springs, the "Sponge Capital of the World." The goal was a series of cooperatively-produced coastal ecology dioramas for exhibition at USFCAM, inspired by the 1960s-era Spongeorama sponge-diving dioramas of Tarpon Springs.

Ginsburg, along with co-teacher USF Professor John Byrd, Teaching Assistant Maxwell Parker, and the students initiated the project with a series of questions. Which coastal climate issues would the group research? Which species would symbolize these crises? Which material processes would be used? Most importantly, what would the dioramas look like and would they incite curiosity, empathy, even action in viewers? The class began by honing a list of research topics via readings, discussion, and visits with experts. Small groups presented findings to the class and cohorts were formed for the next step: pairing each coastal phenomenon with an impacted species.



Students participated in material process demos such as sculpting with papier-mâché; they were also asked to consider and record the environmental impact of their material choices. The group made additional field trips, including to the Florida Aquarium's Coral Arks at Apollo Beach, where Atlantic hard corals spawned in a lab for the first time. The students, by then appropriately named Coastorama Cooperative after their nascent *Coastorama* dioramas, revisited the idiosyncratic presentation strategies of Spongeorama for inspiration. Concept development came next and students presented drawings and 3D animal prototypes.

Curator Sarah Howard and visiting critics from USFCAM joined class critiques as students refined their ideas, beginning to move sculpted elements into their custom diorama boxes. From midterm through the final critique, students experienced real-world conditions, working with others within budgetary and timeline constraints to prepare artworks for exhibition. Cooperation, learning-by-doing, experimentation, knowledge-exchange, and engagement with site are the DNA of *Sponge*, which has vigorously evolved through the Sponge Exchange class and its collaborative environmental project.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All artworks and archival materials are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

CAM EXTERIOR

Hope Ginsburg and Sarah Howard
Bryde's Whale and a Breathing Moon, 2020
nylon
48 x 72 in.

GENEVIEVE LYKES DIMMITT LOBBY GALLERY

Hope Ginsburg, Maxwell Parker, Natalia Kraviec and Luke Myers
Sponge Exchange Diving Helmet, 2020
mixed media
96 x 82 x 14-1/4 in.

LEE AND VICTOR LEAVENGOOD GALLERY

Hope Ginsburg, Matt Flowers and Joshua Quarles
Swirling, 2019
four-channel video installation with sound
12 min 58 sec

Coastorama Cooperative
Coastorama, 2019-2020
mixed media site-specific installation
variable dimensions

The Coastorama Cooperative is Hope Ginsburg, John Byrd, Maxwell Parker and the students of the Fall 2019 USF Class Sponge Exchange. Coastorama diorama credits:

Ashley Rivers and Margherita Tibaldo
Corals: Ocean Warming

Hope Ginsburg, Maxwell Parker, Joshua Quarles* and Michael Royce*
Gulf of Mexico Bryde's Whale: Endangered Species

Alex Lopez, James Ritman and James Wyslomiński
Lionfish: Invasive Species

Veronica Brewster and Vivian Fisk
Manatee: Harmful Algal Blooms

Jhen Lee and Andrew Ryan
Mangroves: Tropical Cyclones

Leonardo Claudio, Jessie Saldivar and Marissa Snow
Sea Snails: Ocean Acidification

Mackenzie Erickson and Samantha Redman
Sea Turtle: Sea Level Rise

Dalton Howard, Daniel Sulbaran and Alejandro Wolf
Smalltooth Sawfish: Endangered Species

* artist collaborators not part of the Sponge Exchange class.

BACK HALLWAY

Hope Ginsburg
Breath Portrait I, III, IV, VI, VII, 2016
archival inkjet print
Edition of 3
10 x 14 in.

Hope Ginsburg
Breathing on Land, 2014
archival inkjet print
Edition of 50
17 x 22 in.

Hope Ginsburg
Breathing on Land Title Slate, 2014
dive slate
8 x 5 in.

Hope Ginsburg
Land Diver Certification Cards, 2014 – laminated archival inkjet prints
variable dimensions

Land Dive Team: Amphibious James, 2018
Video Presentation: A Production of VPM
Producer/Director: Mason Mills
Producer/Field Director: Allison Benedict

Hope Ginsburg
Sponge HQ Fins, 2013
wool, dive fins
20 x 16 x 4 in.

Hope Ginsburg
Sponge HQ Mask and Snorkel, 2013
wool, dive mask, snorkel
18 x 12 x 3 in.

Hope Ginsburg with Jasmine Calvert and Jessica Carey
Sponge HQ Wetsuit, 2014
wool
54 x 27 x 4 in.

Sponge HQ archive materials
2006 - 2016

Hope Ginsburg with Julia Hundley and S. Riley Duncan
Bronze Sponge from Prototype for Preserving the Phylum Porifera, 2012
bronze
7 x 7 x 4 in.
Courtesy of Mildred's Lane, Pennsylvania

