





INSTALLATION VIEW OF *SALVAGE*

SALVAGE

ALISON STIGORA

**AUGUST 16 - NOVEMBER 23
2022**





PREVIOUS: DRIFTWOOD WALL
AND LIGHT WELL INTERIOR

ABOVE: DETAIL OF DRIFTWOOD AND
INDUSTRIAL DEBRIS IN *SALVAGE*

FORWARD

Seattle-based artist Alison Stigora utilizes architecture, scale, perspective, and material familiarity to create monumental works that connect viewers to their surrounding environments and to the natural world. Engaging with her sculptural installations prompts a response that extends beyond the conceptual underpinnings of her work, situating the viewer within the complete physical experience of the moment. Stigora accomplishes this in her MadArt Studio exhibition, *SALVAGE*, by incorporating multi-sensory elements, including an original musical composition and an immersive light sculpture. These aspects, experienced alongside Stigora's colossal driftwood sculpture, combine to create a contemplative and expansive space that transports guests from the urban landscape of Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood to a sanctuary of natural phenomena.

Upon entering the studio, visitors of *SALVAGE* are met by a 13-foot-tall curving wall constructed from pieces of discarded driftwood that were recently recovered from the waters surrounding Seattle. These logs are weighty—some nearly the size of whole trees—and carry the

salty smell of their time at sea. They form to create a mass that bisects the studio and appears to be carried along by a powerful current. As viewers circumvent this wood barrier and move deeper into the space, they encounter a large, soft, translucent sculpture that is built directly off of the studio's architectural skylight and extends its geometric shape to the floor. This inhabitable light well subtly transitions through the luminous, colorful sequence of a sunrise and was conceived of as a celestial counter to the weighty, earthbound, wood sculpture. The audio composition was made in collaboration with Rachael Fasano, an emerging Seattle-based composer. Stigora and Fasano worked together to define the score, collecting, compiling, and manipulating found sounds gathered in and around Seattle. Rumbling wind, moving water, ferryboat engines, clinking chains, clashing driftwood, and celestial vocals are a few of the elements that mix together to create the sonic component that emotively shapes the space and enhances the experience of the physical sculptures.

The driftwood used to construct *SALVAGE* was graciously donated by the Army Corps of Engineers' M/V

Puget, a recovery vessel for retrieving dangerous debris from our region's waterways. Many of the wood pieces reflect their past lives as implements of the logging industry or hosts for various crustaceans and other sea life. When taken individually, each log has characteristics that give it its own identity, and many of the larger or more unique pieces were endearingly monikered during the installation. Sections such as the whale, dolphin's fin, and keystone make it impossible to ignore the history of these logs, starting as seedlings and growing for hundreds of years as rooted trees before being dislodged and tossed into sea for an unknowable amount of time. In a way, Stigora's installation has become an unexpected part of their journey, providing a moment for these trees to be regarded in a new light, and as more than just a dangerous impediment blocking safe passage. In this, the M/V Puget's mission becomes central to Stigora's creative intentions. By offering space for contemplation and reflection, she hopes that *SALVAGE* will provide visitors with an opportunity for reflection, and to note what sorts of obstructions might exist on a personal or communal level. Akin to reshaping cast-off sources of detritus into something beautiful, Stigora poses the question: *how can we embrace areas of resistance and positively see them as spaces for transformation?*

EMILY KELLY
MADART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR + CURATOR



FRONT VIEW OF *SALVAGE*
DRIFTWOOD AND LIGHT WELL



In partnership, MadArt Studio and the Cornish Dance Department presented an evening of performance inspired by *SALVAGE*. Under the guidance of professor Alia Swersky, Cornish College of the Arts choreography students performed in response to the themes of *SALVAGE*. Additionally, Swersky and creative collaborator Hannah Rice generated a movement-based study derived from their time with the installation.

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

ONE OF YOUR INTENTIONS IN BUILDING *SALVAGE* WAS TO CREATE A SPACE FOR RESPITE. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS?

When I was invited to build an installation at MadArt, we were still coming out of COVID, with a lot of social and emotional upheaval. I wanted to create something restorative for people after the last two years we've collectively had. I thought about creating a space that would intentionally invite viewers to slow down by providing places to sit and reflect, as well as time-based elements of sound and light that invite staying longer for the full experience.

I'VE HEARD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SCULPTURAL WORK AS ARCHITECTURE. HOW DOES THIS TIE INTO MAKING WORK IN SITU AT MADART STUDIO?

My work is an intersection of sculpture and architecture. I constantly think about how people move through spaces, which is a very 'architect' way of thinking. I consider the impact my installations have not only on people's physical movement and experience, but also the emotional/psychological impact of the space. At MadArt, there are a lot of unique architectural features, such as varied ceiling heights, exposed raw materials, and the skylights. In conceiving this project, I was first drawn to the shape of the skylights and envisioned the light sculpture as an extension of this architectural form, bringing the angles of the skylight all the way to the ground

with fabric and illuminating the space inside. The curve of the wood was then placed in response to this, creating a curved wall that bisects the entire room. *SALVAGE* responded to the already existing architecture at MadArt by creating multiple new spaces for viewers to navigate.

THE DRIFTWOOD USED IN *SALVAGE* INCLUDED SOME OF THE LARGEST INDIVIDUAL PIECES YOU HAVE WORKED WITH. HOW HAS THE SPECIFICITY OF THIS MATERIAL INFLUENCED YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS?

Working with large scale materials is not easy, but I was drawn to these pieces for their visceral quality and the impact such scale provides. There is something about seeing driftwood this scale, and many pieces piled together, that makes a person feel small by comparison. It's humbling to be reminded that I am small in the grand scheme of things, and also oddly comforting. All the driftwood used in *SALVAGE* was pulled out of Puget Sound, most of it by the Army Corps of Engineers. It is incredible to think about how many massive logs are floating in the waters around Seattle; largely unseen. Large driftwood is viewed as blockage since it impedes passage in the shipping channel, so the Army Corps is constantly at work gathering and clearing it out. The underlying concept of what are the unseen blockages all around us, and how do we respond to them, became a driving motivation for *SALVAGE*. The sheer scale of these pieces meant I had to use heavy

machinery, drive a forklift, and work with a team. Yet the vision of taking something considered 'debris' and transforming it into a restorative space for people made the challenge worth it.

IN *SALVAGE*, YOU WORKED WITH TWO NEWER ELEMENTS; LIGHT AND SOUND. WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF INCORPORATING THESE MEDIA INTO YOUR WORK?

I have been wanting to work with light and sound on a large scale for a while. I'm interested in the way sound can create an environment, just as much as physical materials can. The components used to build the audio score all relate in some way to the physical materials, such as recordings from Puget Sound, ferry crossings, the hum of machinery used to move the logs, the clink of rusted logging chain, even using driftwood branches to play the installation like a giant percussion instrument. The ethereal vocals related to the softness of the fabric form and glowing light. Both the light and audio had a time-based sequence that would progress in different arrangements depending on when you arrived, so the

overall experience was never the same twice. The audio had some subtle parts and some that were quite loud which you could feel in your body, and I think that changed the impact of the physical structures. Similarly, the light slowly progressed from dark to bright and from warm to cool, which influenced the overall emotional experience.

WHAT IS YOUR HOPE THAT VISITORS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE OF *SALVAGE*?

I hope viewers allow themselves to slow down and pay attention to details in *SALVAGE* that might normally be overlooked, and that this could extend to a deeper awareness of subtleties in daily life. In reflecting on the story of this driftwood, it also raises questions such as what are sources of blockage in my own life, and what can be cleared in order to make for free passage? My hope is that in *SALVAGE*, viewers are offered spaces for contemplation and reflection, possibly even seeing how things once disregarded can become places for transformation.

BELOW: VIEW LOOKING UP AT *SALVAGE*





ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alison Stigora is a site-specific artist whose practice explores relationships between physical spaces, materials, and the body. Often using found and natural objects, her work evokes awareness of human scale within the expanse of the natural and constructed world. Emphasizing transformation of familiar materials, she creates environments simultaneously vast and intimate, inviting viewers to pause and notice themselves and their surroundings in new ways.

Stigora is a Seattle resident but is originally from the East Coast and holds her MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. She enjoys collaborating on large-scale projects and has worked with a range of interdisciplinary professionals, including architects, engineers, dancers, and lighting designers. Stigora has exhibited at the Philadelphia International Airport, Joshua Tree Highlands Artist Residency, and Nes Artist Residency (Iceland). Her permanent works can be found at Arte Sella Sculpture Park (Italy), Blackfoot Pathways Sculpture Park (Montana), and Domaine de Chaumont sur Loire (France).



INSTALLATION VIEW OF *SALVAGE* LIGHT WELL SCULPTURE

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MadArt is a contemporary arts organization located in Seattle, Washington. We serve as a catalyst for making new installation-based works by supporting artists and encouraging them to experiment with materials and ideas that expand their professional practices.

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