

Margaret LeJeune

## *Agency*

### Curator's Statement

Environmental artist Agnes Denes' pioneering and multi-dimensional work, *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982), encouraged engagement and empowered viewers to make change. This land-art piece, in which she planted a field of wheat in the shadow of Wall Street, revitalized an infertile landfill site. The work protested urbanization, climate change, and economic inequality. By growing food in the heart of the financial district, Denes called upon us to care for one another and the earth. As Manhattan office workers gathered in the field to pray with her for rain to nurture the seeds, they became active and engrossed participants in the project.

As I reviewed the submissions for the Broto exhibition, *Agency*, I was looking for works that, like Denes', exert power or explore participation. For example, Environmental Performance Agency Collective (EPA) work *Multispecies Care Survey*, is an interactive website that encourages users to engage and consider their relationship with multi-species communities. By being pro-active, rather than re-active, participants become empowered to understand the intricate web of life.

By examining our relationship to non-human species, we engage with other ways of knowing. Susan Hoenig's painting of migratory birds asks viewers to consider the earth's magnetic field as a navigational tool and the ways in which this "unseen knowledge" can expand our understanding of the planet's complex systems. In Paloma Marquez' interdisciplinary work, *Osseous Collaboration*, we are invited to be active participants in a conversation with rocks – earth's geologic archivists. By dynamically engaging with knowledge systems outside of our own, we empower other species and redefine the hierarchy currently leading us to ecological disaster.

Art objects are the indicators of the artist's agency and are automatically infused with a certain purpose. As viewers, we are tasked with reading and interpreting the work within the current cultural framework. Like *Wheatfield*, the works in this exhibition have left me pondering several questions: What exists at the intersection of empowerment, the climate crisis, and radical empathy? What does agency look like in a post-human world? And, can it be ascribed to non-human species, rivers and/or ecosystems?