

# Kim Morgan: Blood Portraits

CURATED BY SUSAN GIBSON GARVEY | DALHOUSIE ART GALLERY



In appreciation  
of generous support from the  
**University's Students  
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for the Marion McCain  
Arts and Social Sciences Building

  
**Kim Morgan, Blood Portraits**  
QR code linking to the video content of the installation.

**3** Rooms 3000 - 3200  
Washrooms  
**2** Rooms 2000 - 2200  
Washrooms  
**1** Rooms 1000 - 1200  
**L** Lobby  
Auditoriums  
**P** Parking  
Security Services  
**B** Washroom

In appreciation of  
**John C. Risley**  
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Blood Portraits installation view, nine circular images, each 79.8 cm diameter, ink on vinyl bonded to aluminum, video accessed via QR code on text panel, 2021. Photo: Steve Farmer

## KIM MORGAN: BLOOD PORTRAITS

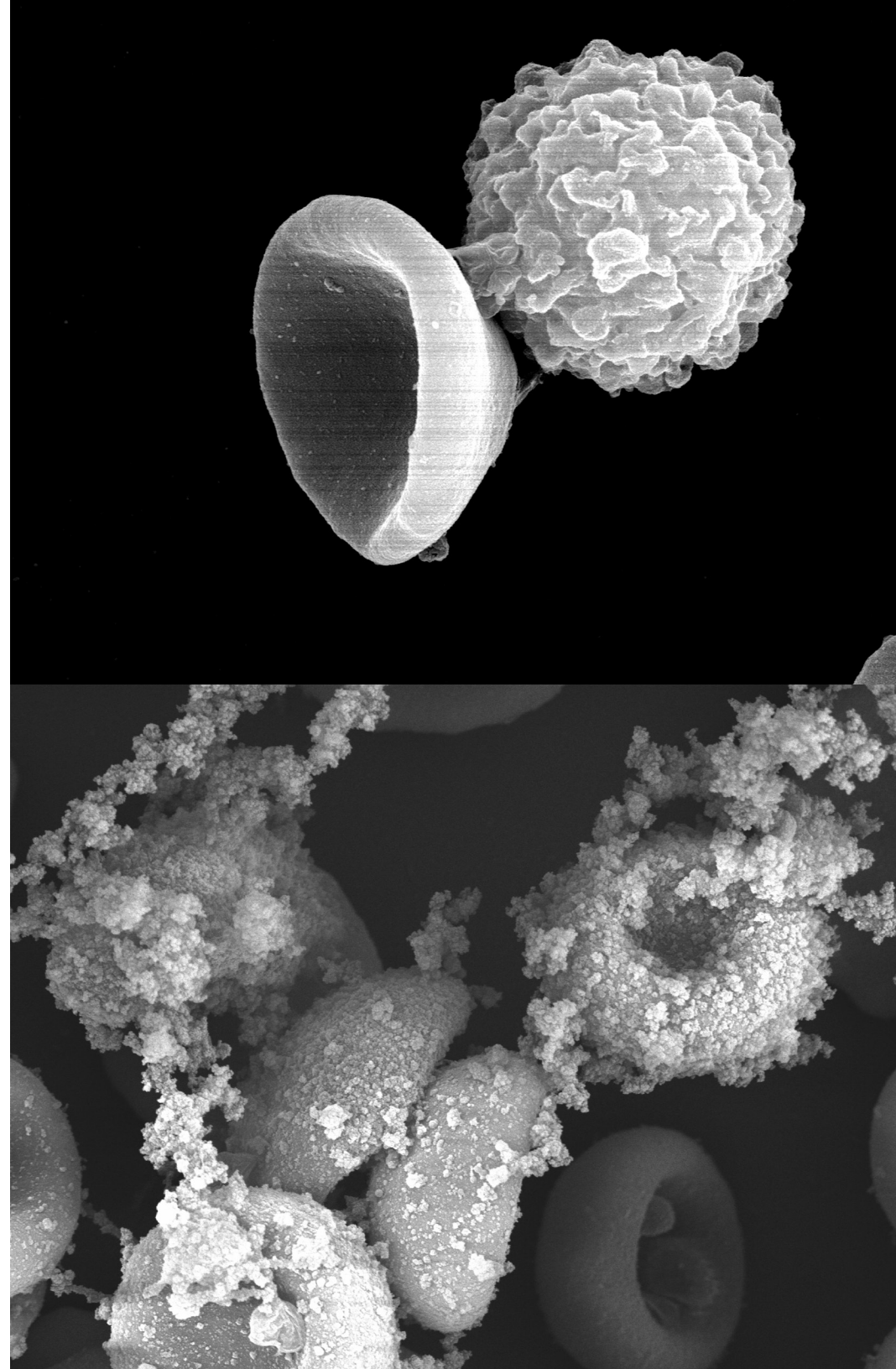
Susan Gibson Garvey  
curator/conceptual collaborator

Installed above the elevators on the first floor of the Marion McCain Building (housing Dalhousie University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences), nine large discs present images of an essential bodily material: human blood. Magnified up to 12,000 times through the use of scanning electron microscopy (SEM) they capture a frozen instant in the life of nine individuals' blood. We observe in detail the forms and structures of red and white blood cells, platelets, and antibodies involved in the processes of delivering oxygen and fending off disease.

The high-resolution images reveal a depth and richness of surface, complex cellular structures, and compositions that are morphologically reminiscent of other natural phenomena at different scales: a cascade of antigens like a surge of marine biota; white blood cells resembling coral or spiny sea urchins; red corpuscles like asteroids adrift in the depths of space...

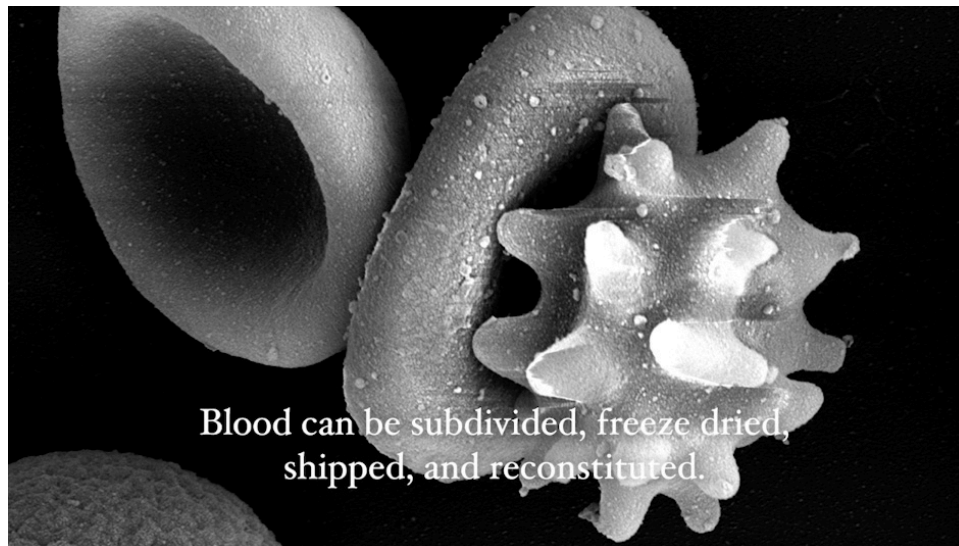
But these are not imaginary images. Each named image represents an individual blood "portrait" derived from a sample donated by a human volunteer, with appropriate permissions for its use. They are diverse in age, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, yet each volunteer's (self-identified) particulars are not detectable here. All SEM images are black and white. All human blood is red.

opposite top: *Kirsten*, 2020, detail; bottom: *Anonymous*, 2020, detail



The printed portraits represent one half of this two-part project by interdisciplinary artist Kim Morgan. Part Two is a video, accessible through a QR code on the text panel by the work. The video is structured around the same nine images, which circulate nine times, accompanied by the persistent sound of a beating heart, as if in a musical roundelay or nine-stanza poem, while a voice track offers an increasingly layered gloss of facts and fictions about blood and identity. Why nine? As the video informs us, the average adult human body contains about nine pints of blood.\*

The video's section titles are single words that act as *double-entendres*, exemplified in the fourth round, "circulation," which begins by describing the circulation of blood within the body, but fluidly transitions to reference the circulation of blood as a commodity, and the global trade in blood products. Likewise, the section titled "pathology" concerns itself not so much with blood-borne disease as with myth, misinformation, and prejudice about blood (a kind of *sociopathology*) that leads to the "stains" of deadly discriminatory practices.



video still from *Blood Portraits*, 2020, 7 minutes and 30 seconds

This installation was commissioned by Dalhousie Art Gallery as an offsite project well before the advent of Covid19 in Canada. However, the same kind of scanning technology (SEM) used in this artwork has also provided those striking images of the coronavirus in everyday media (images often artificially enhanced with colour, although electron microscopy only "sees" in monochrome). The pandemic has underscored the fragility of the body and made us acutely aware of the role of medical science in understanding threats to human health, as well as of the social disparities that the virus spread reveals.

In Morgan's installation, the strange beauty and ambiguity of the fixed images combine with the video's visceral layering to offer an experience intended to intrigue, provoke wonder, and prompt questions about the meaning, use, and value of a person's blood.

REFERENCES (PRINT)

\*Rose George: *Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood*, NY:NY, Henry Holt & Company, 2018

Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell: *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, 2006

SELECTED ONLINE RESOURCES

Blood Business – donate or sell? 2018  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmftBb4MIHQ&t=287s>

Desegregating blood 2015  
<https://theconversation.com/desegregating-blood-a-civil-rights-struggle-to-remember-37480>

Hospital ignores easing of fda restrictions on gay donors, 2020  
<https://www.washingtonblade.com/2020/05/06/local-gay-student-blocked-from-making-blood-donation-despite-fda-easing-policy/>

Killing Without Murder: Aboriginal Assimilation Policy as Genocide [Australia], 2005  
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228635378.pdf>

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kim Morgan works in sculpture, multimedia installation, and public art. Her current work explores materiality and the body through interdisciplinary and sometimes collaborative methods of artmaking. She first started working with scanning electron microscopy (SEM) in 2014 during a HEALS Artist-in-Residence Program at Dalhousie Medical School. This led to the commissioning of *Blood Group* (2016), an installation of plexiglass sculptural forms derived from diverse blood samples donated by medical students, artists, family, and friends. It may be viewed in the “Link” building between Sir Charles Tupper Medical Building and the Collaborative Health Education Building, or online at <http://kimmorgan.ca/blood-group>.

Kim Morgan has participated in solo and group exhibitions internationally at Mass MoCA, North Adams, USA, John Michael Kohler Arts Centre, Sheboygan, USA, Cynthia Broan Gallery, NYC, USA, and St. Paul’s Gallery, Auckland, NZ; in Canada at the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, MSVU Art Gallery and Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax. Public Spaces commissions include: Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Photopolis festival of photography, Halifax, the Vancouver Olympics, and Regina Transit System. Artist Residencies include: Artpace San Antonio, Texas, Dalhousie Medical School, Halifax, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Florida, Optic Nerve Residency, Banff Centre for the Arts, and TR Labs, University of Regina. Morgan has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Arts Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan Arts, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. She received the Arts Nova Scotia Established Artist Recognition Award in 2017 and the Nova Scotia Masterworks Award in 2012.

Kim Morgan, B.Lit. (McGill), BFA (School of Visual Arts, NYC), MFA (University of Regina) is also a Professor at NSCAD University, Halifax, teaching sculpture, installation, and public art.



installation view of *Blood Group*, 2016,  
Collaborative Health Education Building link, Dalhousie University, 5850 College Street

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover image: *Grace*, 2020. From the series *Blood Portraits*.

