

# Gallery Guide

**SWOON**

**SEVEN CONTEMPLATIONS**



Albright-Knox  
**Northland**



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*By Caledonia Curry  
(Swoon)*

**This is a meditation and contemplation practice to accompany the exhibition.**

This exhibition aims to create empathetic spaces for contemplating both personal and community healing journeys, and the restorative and generative power of creativity.



*You may have a complete experience of the exhibition without this practice, but if you would like to go deeper here's how it works:*

Each of these artworks addresses a set of themes common to the experience of being human. There are places to sit and meditate within the exhibition. Accompanying each work is a suggested point of focus for your gaze during the meditation and a suggested contemplation to let float through your mind as you sit. I have based these instructions on some practices that have brought about profound contemplative experiences for me. This is, above all, an art installation, and so everything should be taken as a suggestion—try parts that sound interesting, leave behind things that feel too complicated or don't sit right with you, and know that there will be other sights and sounds going on in Northland as you sit, so, this is, above all things, a practice in imperfection.

## The meditation

Take a seat. Pause for a moment to sense your body, feel your feet on the floor, and get comfortable.

Read the contemplation that corresponds to the artwork in front of you, printed in the following pages of the guide, and let its themes percolate for a moment in your consciousness. Take as long as you like with this.

If you're feeling comfortable and you'd like to go deeper, follow these cues for a structured meditation experience.

Look at the picture accompanying the contemplation, and locate the approximate point of focus. Let your eyes naturally settle on a point in that area. That will be your gazing point, and you will steadily rest your eyes on it for the duration of your meditation. With your eyes softly focused and your body relaxed, turn your attention to your breath as it flows in and out of your nose. Begin counting your breaths to help center your mind. As you breathe in count "one" silently in your mind, as you breathe out count "two," and continue as you breathe in and out until you reach ten. Then, start over from one and keep going.

As you sit quietly, back relaxed but straight, feet comfortable on the ground, gaze softly resting on your point of focus, mentally counting the breaths coming in and out of your lungs, you will find that thoughts come in and out of your mind. Try to let the thoughts come and go, and return to counting your breaths. When you get distracted and lose count, know that this is totally normal, and just relaxedly return your focus to your breath.

Thoughts related to the contemplations may come up. These should be treated without judgement like any other thoughts, just allowed to pass through the mind as you return your focus to your breath.

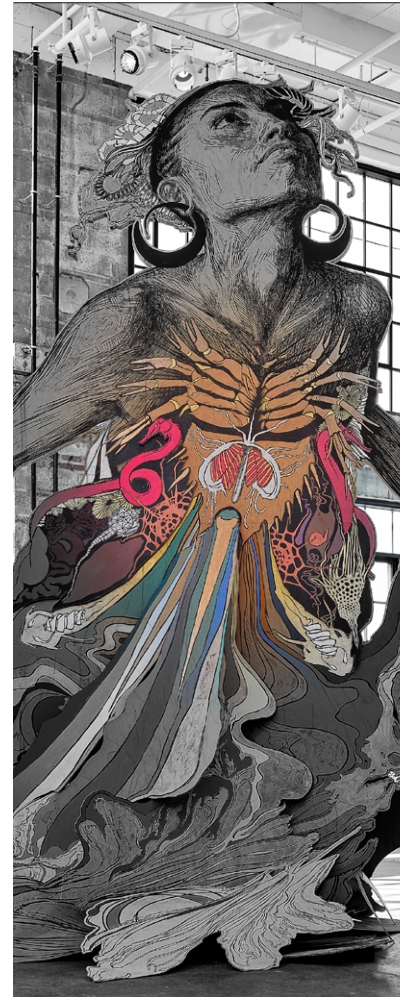
If you can, stay seated for at least ten cycles of ten breaths. Stay as long as you like. Stay past discomfort and awkwardness. Let your gaze and your breath continue to focus and soften as you observe yourself seated, breathing, looking. Remain open to and observant of all sensations as they come and go.

When you're ready to stand up, thank yourself for being brave enough to peer into your messy, lovely, sometimes difficult human self.



# THALASSA

*primordial self*



Who were you before you were born? Who were you before the earth was born? Sometimes our personal selves get stuck. The mind's tendency is to fasten onto things it perceives as problems or threats to self, and to ruminate there. Is it possible to step outside of our individual "I" for a moment and give our consciousness more room to breathe? Sometimes a seemingly nonsensical question can shift our focus and connect us to a more spacious awareness. If you were to arise right now from the primordial sea, what form might you take?

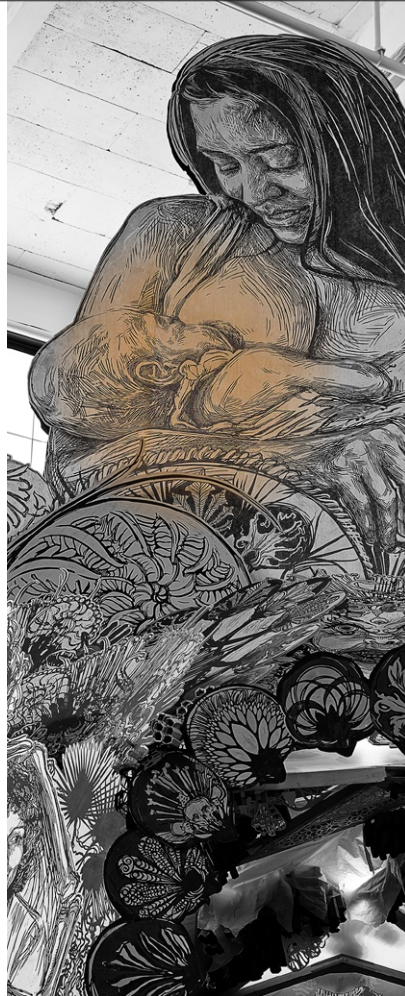




## DAWN AND GEMMA

birth

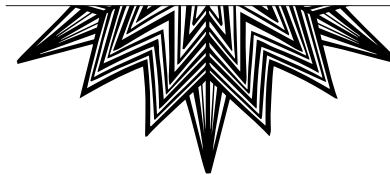
Contemplate a time when something new was born—the celebrated birth of a child, an endeavor with an uncertain start, or the tenderness of green shoots popping up through spring mud. Hold the spark of new beginnings in your awareness. Sense the softness and care, or even the complex feelings that vulnerable things which need our attention may call on inside us. Remember a time when you have nurtured someone, or when you have been nurtured. Let those feelings of softness and caring be present in your awareness.



## MEMENTO MORI

death

Our difficulties become bridges that connect us to one another, especially when we are able to feel these difficulties fully. Loss is a thing that all humans experience and so it links us together. Contemplate a time when someone you cared about passed away or was separated from you—this could be a family member, a friend, or even a beloved pet. Consider a time when something ended before you were ready. Recall a loss that you might otherwise avoid thinking about, and give yourself some kindness while you experience the sensations that thinking about this loss brings up. Perhaps a tightness in your chest or a heaviness in your head? Perhaps a fear that feels like it will engulf you and never pass? Allow these feelings to flow over you, and know that they are temporary. Consider that these same feelings will be experienced by every human being alive today, and have been felt by every human being who has ever existed. Sense the way that you are linked to all those other humans via this bridge of feeling.



## MEDEA

*fear and suffering*

Sometimes terrifying events can scare us out of our skin. We become dislocated from ourselves and may seem to float outside of our bodies or feel cut off from our lives. Suffering can make us reach for destructive behaviors or substances in an attempt to free ourselves from pain and anxiety. Can we use small instances of discomfort or anxiety to help ourselves learn to face strong emotions when they arise? For just a few moments, recall some small occurrence in your day-to-day life that makes you uncomfortable or a bit anxious. How do these feelings show up in your body? Do you feel them in your chest or hands? Or in the quality of focus you are able to give to things that need your attention? Practice staying with an uncomfortable emotion, observing it and allowing it to pass on its own. When we can sit with and experience the things that scare us or that we would like to escape, we gain a great deal of strength and power. We become more able to choose how we want to react to the world around us.



## CICADA

*flow, transformation, healing*

Imagine a cicada buried underground for more than a decade. It seems lost in the darkness, but incredible changes are happening. It is, in its own time, readying itself for a new life. Recall a time when you experienced a great change or transformation. A time when you healed from something you imagined you would never get over or surprised yourself by discovering a hidden talent. Were you confused while the changes were happening? Did you wonder where you were going and who you would be when you got there? Was there an aspect of yourself that seemed to have faith in the process all along?





## TREE OF LIFE

*the miracle, grace, forgiveness, that which is given without reason, that which arises spontaneously*

New life is freely given to you with each breath you take. Our cuts heal, our hearts pump blood without being ever asked, and every spring new flowers push up from under the snow. Are there ways that we can appreciate or even mirror how life gives spontaneously? Think of a time when you became able to understand someone with whom you had been angry and so found yourself able to forgive them or they you. Think of a bit of luck that changed your life or a gift you were given whose generosity still surprises you. Sit and feel the tinge of the miraculous that hangs around something as simple as a single breath or as wondrous as a second chance.



## COSMOS

*awe*

What is the largest thing you can imagine? Does thinking of something billions of times your size make you feel cozily tucked into the pattern of the cosmos? Or lost in the uncontrollable ferment of the universe? Or perhaps both? What does awe feel like in your chest? What does it feel like at the corners of your mouth or behind your eyes?







This exhibition features works by the artist Caledonia Curry, who makes her art under the name Swoon. Much of her work, from her early wheat-paste portraits to large-scale installations like those featured here, explores methods of healing. Such experiences have been central to the artist's own life; both of her parents suffered from addiction. While much of Swoon's work is inspired by her personal healing journey, she imagines her installations as spaces where we can reflect on our own experiences and begin the process of healing as a community from the impact of addiction, mental illness, and generational and economic trauma.

For each installation, the artist has developed a set of questions to contemplate while experiencing the work. She has also identified locations adjacent to each work in the exhibition to pause and consider these contemplations. Please use these marked locations as opportunities for reflection as well as ways to support safe social distancing.



*Thalassa* takes its name from an ancient Greek mythological spirit of the sea. She is pictured as a figure leaping from the water. As an installation, *Thalassa* offers a space to contemplate the “primordial self,” or the self that has its beginning before birth. You might begin this contemplation by asking:

*Who were you before you were born?*

*Who were you before the earth was born?*

*If you were to arise right now from the primordial sea, what form might you take?*



*Medea* refers to a character in the ancient Greek myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece. Numerous authors have retold this tale with different endings and details. In one version, Medea falls in love with Jason and agrees to help him in his quest, turning away from her family based on the promise that he will marry her and take her away with him. Later, he abandons Medea for the daughter of a king, and in despair and rage she takes revenge by murdering their children. Swoon created this installation in response to childhood fears that her mother might harm her. The contemplation for this work focuses on fear and suffering.

*What changes when you feel disconnected from a sense of safety?*

*Has someone or something helped you face emotions you thought you could not bear?*

*What does healing mean to you?*

The installation *Dawn and Gemma* features a portrait of a mother cradling a child. The nearby installation showing a woman and child embraced by a skeleton is based on Swoon’s memories of her mother at the end of her life and is entitled *Memento Mori*. This Latin phrase means “remember you must die,” and has been used throughout history to refer to artworks featuring symbolic visual reminders of the inevitability of death. Taken together, *Dawn and Gemma* and *Memento Mori* create a space for contemplating birth and death.



*How has love or tenderness shaped who you are?*

*When you hold the spark of a new beginning in your mind, what do you see and feel?*

*Why is loss a necessary part of the universe in which we live?*

*Can holding the reality of death in our awareness offer anything to our experience of life?*

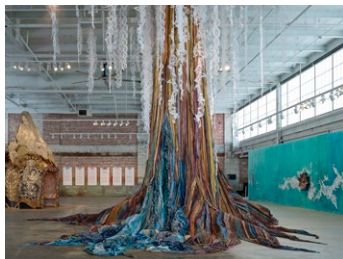


The stop-motion animation *Cicada* explores cycles of birth, rebirth, and reinvention. Its diverse imagery includes images of the cicada, an insect that buries itself underground only to reemerge a dozen or more years later. This work is a prompt to consider healing, transformation, and flow.

*Can you recall a time when you experienced a great change or transformation?*

*Has a myth or a story ever helped you in your own life?*

*Has being lost ever helped you find a sense of home?*



The nearby installation *Tree of Life* draws from the story of Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, who reached Enlightenment while meditating beneath the Bodhi tree. *Tree of Life* offers a grounded and sheltered space in which to focus on grace and forgiveness.

*Is love a force with its own instrumentality in the world?*

*Is there something for which you feel so grateful that you are filled with wonder and ask, "how did this happen to me?"*

*Have you ever crossed through pain and found forgiveness, or been forgiven?*

*Cosmos*, like its namesake, is an evolving and expanding constellation of three-dimensional collages. Taken together, these works explore forces, experiences, and realities that are beyond our ability to grasp easily. This work focuses on feelings of awe, of being filled with wonder and reverence.



*What is the largest thing you can imagine?*

*How does thinking of something billions of times your size make you feel?*

*What does awe feel like in your chest?*



## QR Codes for Audio and Further Reading



Medea Audio



Horizons talk about Medea



Reading List



## EVENTS



★ Community Spirit Programming for *Swoon: Seven Contemplations* is made possible by an anonymous donor in honor of those who have been touched by addiction and in memory of those who have died from the disease.

Thursday, September 24  
6-7 pm  
Virtual Members' Preview

Saturday, October 3  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Yoga

Saturday, October 10  
1-2:30 pm  
Ekphrastic Writing to *Swoon: Seven Contemplations* with Just Buffalo Literary Center

Sunday, October 11  
1-2:30 pm  
**VIRTUAL FAMILY FUNDAY**

★ Sunday, October 18  
2:30-3:30 pm  
Sunday Insights

Thursday, October 29  
5:30-6:30 pm  
Virtual Movement Workshop with Sky Cubacub of Rebirth Garments

Saturday, November 7  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Yoga

Sunday, November 8  
1-2:30 pm  
**VIRTUAL FAMILY FUNDAY**

Saturday, November 14  
1-2:30 pm  
Ekphrastic Writing to *Swoon: Seven Contemplations* with Just Buffalo Literary Center

★ Sunday, November 15  
2:30-3:30 pm  
Sunday Insights

Saturday, November 21  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Meditation with the Museum

Friday, December 4  
6:30-7:30 pm  
Swoon in conversation with Prentis Hemphill

Saturday, December 5  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Yoga

Saturday, December 12  
1-2:30 pm  
Ekphrastic Writing to *Swoon: Seven Contemplations* with Just Buffalo Literary Center

Sunday, December 13  
1-2:30 pm  
**VIRTUAL FAMILY FUNDAY**

Saturday, December 19  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Meditation with the Museum

★ Sunday, December 20  
2:30-3:30 pm  
Sunday Insights

Saturday, January 2  
3-4 pm  
Virtual Yoga

★ Thursday, January 7  
7 pm  
The Movement of Joy

Sunday, January 10  
1-2:30 pm  
**VIRTUAL FAMILY FUNDAY**

For more information and to register, please visit [albrightknox.org/swoon](http://albrightknox.org/swoon).



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## **Swoon: Seven Contemplations**

September 26, 2020–January 10, 2021

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Photography by Brenda Bieger and Amanda Smith.

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Community Spirit Programming is made possible by an anonymous donor in honor of those who have been touched by addiction and in memory of those who have died from the disease.

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