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I'll Never Let You Go: The Forest and Jen Clay

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I'll Never Let You Go: The Forest and Jen Clay

Tyler Emerson-Dorsch

Introduction

Two years ago in 2023, I curated an exhibition called *This World Doesn't Belong to You* by Jen Clay at our gallery, Emerson Dorsch, in Miami, FL. Her quilted monsters were a fabulous combination of charm and predation. I liked that she addressed mental illness and neurodivergence directly with her art practice. Her aesthetic and way of talking about the work spoke to widespread fears. She also had perspective gained from experience in semi-rural parts of America not often represented in urban art scenes. Jen is from North Carolina, and I am as well; we've both learned from mental health struggles. We have both seen the good and bad parts of the way sweetness, determination, stubbornness, and despair settle in small town and rural parts of the country. These were all reasons why, when my partner Brook Dorsch and I decided to start an artist residency, called the Residency at Metcalf Creek (RMC), in the mountains of North Carolina, Jen was the first artist we invited. We had a hunch she would respond to our remote location, and we had confidence that she would be a good first reader, so to speak, of our nascent project.

Jen came to RMC in the Summer of 2023 to work on her animated video game, *Eyes of the Skin*, which she would show at Miami's alternative art space Locust Projects later that year. The video game was, appropriately, about getting lost in a forest with monsters. In 2024 Brook recommended Jen for Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center's (BMCM+AC) inaugural annual residency program, Active Archive, on the Lake Eden campus of Black Mountain College (BMC). Awarded the residency, she attended in April of 2024. We were thrilled to visit her, this artist we believe in, while she was working in the storied Quiet House, crossing the field where now legendary artists worked and played. Our excitement was twofold. First, because by working on BMC's historic campus, Jen had reason to rediscover BMC artists with a new familiarity and comfort. Her presence there also called me to examine her work in a new way, in

relation to the legacy of Black Mountain College. Second, because I was drawn to the experimental spirit of BMC, having noted again and again the reverberations of its legacy in the contemporary artists we encounter, BMC was one of the reasons we chose North Carolina's mountains for our residency. What might we learn about Jen and about our residency by studying Black Mountain College's artists and how they benefited from the environment the college created for them?

A Roadmap

I will introduce you to Jen Clay's practice by way of her installation and video game *Eyes of the Skin* at Locust Projects in 2023 and her work in *This World Doesn't Belong to You* at Emerson Dorsch earlier that year. We'll follow Jen to the Residency at Metcalf Creek (RMC) in June 2023 to see how she spent her time there and how the place—the land—affected her work.

Themes of hospitality and placemaking arise, topics for which I look to Black Mountain College (BMC) as a model. I give an overview of BMC from my perspective as a contemporary art curator, recovering gallerist and co-founder of the RMC. This perspective gives rise to the question of how healing has a long history in Black Mountain College's location and how it played a part in the success of the college's art program and pedagogy. We learn that the college's farm was as therapeutic as it was functional and pedagogical. Education and art also nourish and galvanize souls. The chain reaction here is not linear; it's rhizomatic.

At this point, it will be time to visit Jen again, during her Active Archive residency at the site of Black Mountain College's Lake Eden campus, with an eye to the ways the residency and the land are impacting her and her work. Since Clay's brand of monster incorporates plant and insect-like elements, I turn to a discussion of surrealism, which was among the artistic movements reverberating at the time of Black Mountain College. With Clay in mind, I also discuss Antonin Artaud, a writer and director of avant-garde theater, whose work literary scholar and faculty member M.C. Richards helped to bring to Black Mountain College and the United States. I consider Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, Jen Clay's "radical kindness," and Richards's "moral eye."

In a coda, I visit Jen Clay at her residency at the McColl Center in Charlotte, NC, where I note a continuum from her work at the gallery, the RMC and Active Archive, but stronger, more muscular. During this studio visit, she states that her work affords viewers the chance to turn into uncertainty, the source of many fears and anxieties. Her statement harmonizes with a quote by Richards about how nurturing a “moral eye” leads to an appreciation of and a responsibility to nature and humanity.

Thesis

In this essay, an account of contemporary artist Jen Clay’s two-year trajectory provides common ground on which to consider interrelated themes of healing, education, and experimentation that flow between Clay’s work, the new Residency at Metcalf Creek, and the Active Archive residency at the site of Black Mountain College’s Lake Eden campus. A generative series of feedback loops take shape. Her participation in Active Archive introduced her to BMC’s history and to the atmosphere of the Lake Eden campus, nourishing her practice. It also invites us to consider Clay’s work within BMC’s lineage. Reviewing Black Mountain College’s legacy enriches the discussion of Clay’s work and approach, connecting her “radical kindness” to BMC’s educational philosophy, and M.C. Richards’s “moral eye.” The role of the land at BMC was foundational to the healing nature of all of these themes and so it is also a worthy inspiration for the nearby but new Residency at Metcalf Creek. Through the Active Archive, and programs like the Re-Happening and this Journal, Black Mountain College Museum + Art Center makes this generation of hosted artists like Jen Clay steward and situate themselves in relation to the original and now renowned group, augmenting its continued resonance in art and discourse of contemporary artists, art projects, and chronicles.



Figure 1. Jen Clay, exhibition installation view, *Jen Clay: Eyes of the Skin*, Locust Projects, Miami, FL, 2023. Photo Credit: J. Clay.

About Jen Clay

Jen Clay makes soft textile sculptures of biomorphic monsters. They derive from wearable sculptures she used during performances, which drew from the horror genre and children's edutainment in pop culture. She began exhibiting her monster sculptures as early as 2010, when she was still an undergraduate at UNC-Charlotte.¹ Her drawing style is fluid and fast, and she uses it to stitch intricate lines into her quilts. The style is also in her animations, works on paper and print work. In her video game, *Eyes of the Skin* (2023), she photographed her quilted creatures and layered them as stage sets and characters.

The video game creates a scenario in which the player negotiates with friendly monsters, who are so friendly that they might tempt you to stay forever. In the game structured like a choose-your-own-adventure story, a player “wins” by navigating a series of question and answer exchanges with the monster characters to ultimately make his way out of the forest.²

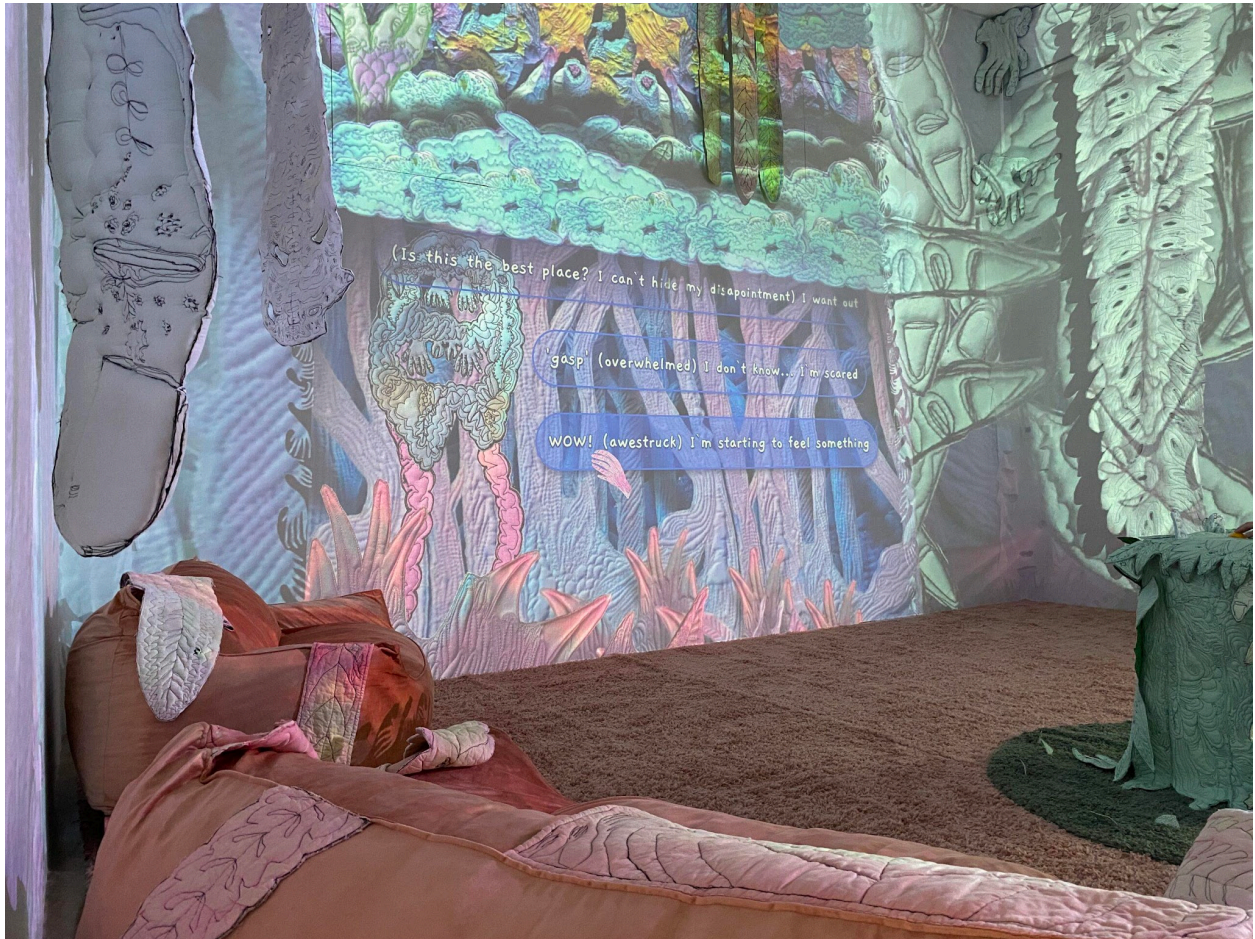


Figure 2. Jen Clay, exhibition installation view, Jen Clay: Eyes of the Skin, Locust Projects, Miami, FL, 2023. Photo Credit: J. Clay.

When discussing her work, Jen shares how her origin story supports her mission. She explains that she saw hallucinations as a child. She was often alone. Because she did not speak in school until she was 12, she was placed in Special Education until that time.³ She emphasizes that she was not unhappy with this arrangement—being left

alone to make art and crafts—but she is also firm in stating that these were real hallucinations, not daydreams, and not knowing what is real or not is a symptom and source of suffering and anguish. Hers has been and continues to be a life of working with and through neurological differences and handicaps. Her work up until this point is intertwined with giving space, dignity, and grace to this perspective. She calls her approach “radical kindness.”⁴

What began as a way to manifest her childhood monsters became a mode to connect with ideas and viewers. Her colorful and tactile fabric monsters are less threatening than charming. Their bulky top-heavy shapes recall children’s edutainment shows like *Sesame Street* and *Yo Gabba Gabba*. With a similar palette and proclivity for fuzz and softness, Clay’s textures beg to be touched. Her quilting technique adds another level of enchantment. Other funny, addictive, and sharp animated series are also influential—*SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Rick and Morty*. She describes her style as “friendly aesthetics,” an approach that can draw viewers in despite reluctance to engage with unsettling ideas and experiences.⁵



Figure 3. Jen Clay, Lose Yourself in Me, 2021, quilted, hand-dyed cotton, 87 x 43 x 9 inches, Private Collection, Miami, FL. Photo courtesy the artist and Emerson Dorsch. Photo Credit: Francesco Casale.

A curious viewer might lean in to examine details. Clay's quilted tapestries are well crafted, with countless opportunities to marvel. This is when the slight impression of monstrosity becomes more acute. Tight and intricate line work renders grasping hands, which grow like appendages from a plant. Organic shapes morph to become

scales, leaves, bark, veins, waves, wrinkles, tentacles, hands, and claws. Appendages curve outward, revealing stitched phrases that are both alluring and creepy. With language embedded in the artwork's substance, the monster can address the viewer directly. Even here, reading comments like "give up all hope," the threat is tolerable, because the line work mesmerizes, the palette is fun, and the softness comforts.



Figure 4. Jen Clay, Lose Yourself in Me, 2021, quilted, hand-dyed cotton, 87 x 43 x 9 inches, Private Collection, Miami, FL. Photo courtesy the artist and Emerson Dorsch. Photo Credit: Francesco Casale.

Clay's "friendly aesthetics" imitate adaptations in the natural world to attract pollinators and catch prey. Commerce, politics, education, art, and entertainment use similar strategies to lure, soothe, and capture. (Later in this essay, the phases in Clay's approach will be salient to the discussion of M.C. Richards's encounter with Antonin Artaud's theory of alternative theater at Black Mountain College.) Once captured, Clay's viewers encounter discomfort. But realizing the world as you knew it was over and you're in the thrall of a creature that could end your life is, at least, not terrifying. De-centering human anxieties by placing them in context with the miniscule role we humans play in the universe is a hallmark of both cosmic horror, a genre in popular culture, and cosmic pessimism, a school of thought with philosophical underpinnings. And yet, the appalling notion exists along with the fun. Clay's art explores themes of fear, mental illness, and the ambiguity between human and non-human. She challenges societal categories and offers a space to encounter discomfort. Her influences in these realms include author H.P. Lovecraft, theorists Eugene Thacker and Mark Fisher, and manga artist Junji Ito.⁶

First, a detour to the Residency Metcalf Creek, where Jen Clay finds a remote mountain house nestled in a hollow.



Figures 5 and 6. In June 2023, Jen Clay projects an animation onto the trees at Residency at Metcalf Creek in Mars Hills, NC.

The Residency at Metcalf Creek

In June 2023, Jen was the first artist to take residence at our place in the mountains of North Carolina. She was spending two weeks at the Residency at Metcalf Creek, about an hour north of Black Mountain College’s Lake Eden campus. Jen told me that this was the first time she’d had a chance to work alone—really alone—in a very long time.⁷ She leads a highly social life, between working in large studio complexes, daily parenting, and partnering. The space the Residency at Metcalf Creek offered her seemed to be both a balm and an excellent environment to foster

concentration. Given the chance, Clay said, she'd enter a flow state and work without pause for hours on end. She loved the lack of interruptions. She recalled,

It's really great. I would be in a video game about being lost in the woods while being surrounded by the woods. And I felt so comfortable. And I could sleep when I wanted to sleep. It felt like a little time capsule. ... And I didn't really need to leave for anything. I remember I was taking a nap, and I heard a noise. There was a deer on the deck. And it was so surreal because – did I imagine that, was that really real?⁸



*Figure 7. Jen blocks out her characters, text and sequencing for her Eyes of the Skin videogame.
Photo credit: T. Emerson-Dorsch.*

At the RMC, Jen blocked out the storyboarding, coding, sound, and text for her video *Eyes of the Skin*. When her friend and collaborator Elise Anderson arrived, she entered a different work state, one more buoyant and outward facing. When Elise arrived late at night, she went out to meet her and thought she saw a strange man emerge from the shadows. She pointed her flashlight toward him to discover bright reflections the size of eyes. It was a buck, she saw, whose antlers emerged from the rest of the night's shadows. This, she reflected, is how stories are born.⁹

Elise came from Nashville, Tennessee to help with the videogame's soundscape. One of their experiments at the RMC, where reverberations echo, was adding sound to Jen's projection on the forest. Field recordings of baby goat cries and guttural noises later became part of the videogame's soundscape.¹⁰



Figure 8. Goats Nutella and Yeti in front of our teen D at the RMC. Photo: T. Emerson-Dorsch.

From our experience with other residencies and our familiarity with Black Mountain College's model, we felt that hosting is an important part of creating a good environment for our creative residents, and it also cultivates joy, fueling us and our guests to continue our work. With this in mind, I led Jen and her collaborator Tayina Deraville one afternoon on a hike to the ridge behind the main house. We played in the undergrowth, treating the trees as co-conspirators.



Figure 9 & 10. Jen Clay and Tayina Deraville hike through Mayapples up to the ridge behind the house. The forest is so dense in summer that it's hard to find a view. Photos: T. Emerson-Dorsch.

Later that evening, our family shared a meal with the residents. Jen recalls the fresh wineberries, picked from thorny bushes all over the property. They're smaller than raspberries and more delicate, so you need to eat them within a day or two.



Figures 11,12 & 13. 11. The author, Jen Clay and Anna “Oma” Dorsch Aiello stand facing the house at the RMC. 12. Wine berries grow on thorny bushes. 13. Fresh wineberries and blackberries. The wineberries are small and red.

Creating Atmosphere

The Residency at Metcalf Creek can make a difference by cultivating good conditions for people, land, and community. When we have a chance to mediate between those elements, we have the chance to communicate wisdom we’ve picked up along the way. We’re listening for wisdom too. As we search for models for the RMC, Black Mountain College is one of our lodestars. What can we learn from BMC? There was the romance of the college’s rebel start and its egalitarian philosophy, its own version of an art-centered progressive education. Faculty and students ate, studied and lived together. They worked with advice and assistance from locals to build a farm that would help to feed the school. They were all drawn by the promise of freedom, of learning by doing. The camp-like atmosphere of the summer sessions was especially intoxicating, leading to now-mythic summers that influenced art, theater, poetry, and

music, if not other disciplines, for the rest of the 20th century to now. The campus was in a remote beautiful valley, surrounded by farms. BMC's resonance showed the power of hands-on learning and a hard-earned relationship to the land. They also launched their own legend.

Initially, we were drawn to BMC because of its impact on the story of contemporary art in the United States. It turns out that Black Mountain College's blend of legacy and legend was cultivated, and profoundly so. Bulletins, magazine articles, exhibitions, and poetry journals broadcast its culture from its beginning in 1933.¹¹ Faculty spread the word amongst their peers, as did students.¹² The effort was needed to lure new students, patrons, and faculty. Part of the draw in the college's later years was the bucolic beauty of its Lake Eden campus, which the college purchased from E.W. Grove in 1937.¹³ It was situated in a valley east of Asheville, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Charismatic and brilliant faculty mixed with curious and adventurous young people who were eager to learn, create and explore in a place set away from the troubles of the Depression, World War II, and, later, McCarthyism. Though, in that era, it was impossible to keep troubles at bay. They came with the people.

A Healing Place

The man behind the land at Lake Eden, E. W. Grove was a pharmacist in the late 1800s, who made his fortune with an elixir he called the Tasteless Chill Tonic. The advertisement for this had a baby's head on a pig's body with a tattooed slogan: "Makes Children and Adults Fat!"¹⁵ Grove parlayed his profits toward building, among other things, Asheville's Grove Park Inn—a retreat marketed to his exhausted patients, whose strange maladies were oddly persistent.¹⁶

Grove and his son-in-law Seeley built a robust economy on the idea that Western North Carolina's mountains were an ideal place to improve one's health and well-being.¹⁷ His tonic's clients were often already sick and stayed sick. The tonic he sold promised vitality but offered little more than hope. What he built with the Grove Park Inn was more stage set than clinic. The rustic architecture framed rocking chairs on a shaded terrace, where patients could rest and take in the

magnificent view. The Inn performed healing with this architecture, mountain air, the promise of repose, and the availability of rigorous outdoor activities. It also helped to shape the regional identity. Western North Carolina's reputation for healing and self-improvement helped develop a burgeoning tourist economy and eventually had a role at Black Mountain College.

Grove used his preferred rustic sensibility – rough stone-walled buildings – to build a summer resort at Lake Eden in 1920. By the time Black Mountain College bought the land in 1937, it had already cycled through several uses, but its character as a place for R & R remained and can be felt to this day.¹⁸ The site's location – a lovely lake in a valley surrounded by woods, pasture and arable land – was and is idyllic.

The period when Grove built his hotel was the turn of the century, and Americans worried that city life was making them soft. President Theodore Roosevelt epitomized the outdoorsman brand, and it was under his leadership that the United States government began to set aside vast swaths of land for national parks. They would be a collection of beautiful places with sweeping views. They would be aestheticized – that is, those in control of the effort would control who and what could be there, or not.



GROVES

MAKES CHILDREN AS FAT AS PIGS

TASTELESS CHILL TONIC

IS JUST AS GOOD FOR ADULTS.
WARRANTED. PRICE 50 cts.

GALATIA, ILLS., NOV. 18, 1898.
Paris Medicine Co., St. Louis, Mo.

Gentlemen:—We sold last year 800 bottles of GROVE'S TASTELESS CHILL TONIC and have bought three gross already this year. In all our experience of 14 years, in the drug business, have never sold an article that gave such universal satisfaction as your Tonic. Yours truly,
ABNEY, CARE & C

For sale at the Guenard drug sto? .

Figure 14. Grove Tasteless [sic] Chill Tonic. Makes Children as Fat as Pigs. Advertisement from "The Banner-Democrat", Lake Providence, Louisiana, December 3, 1898. Public Domain.¹⁴

Efforts by Grove overlapped with Edith Vanderbilt's work to promote a spirit of personal industry in the local economy. Very much in the vein of the tenets and goals of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Vanderbilt believed that handcrafts could support cottage industries (small businesses), foster individual dignity, and develop an appealing and unique culture.¹⁹ The Arts and Crafts state of mind resisted the Industrial Revolution, which stripped workers of their connection to their work and land.

Nothing is ever simple, though. The very culture Grove and Vanderbilt helped to build was based on extractive practices. The workers and craftsmen of the Village originally served the Estate itself. Grove's retreats were a product he sold to clients who still suffered from maladies his own tonics would not cure. A unique and quaint culture was good for the environment around the Inn and Biltmore Estate. Edith's husband George Vanderbilt had consolidated his immense estate by displacing hundreds of small farmers. Before any students could even set foot there, the land had to be settled, mostly by European immigrants, who wrested the land from the Cherokee, who had been here for thousands of years.²⁰ For them land and nature are all-encompassing. Land's and nature's forces can be healing but they can also be vengeful.

While a myth of Black Mountain College focuses on joys of freedom, communal living, and vigor, the reality was that the college's successes were dampened by and eventually lost to bad behavior, abuse of power, frequent debate, bickering, cliquishness, and poverty. This was especially evident in the life cycle of the Farm Program, which scholar David Silver frames as a turning point in the college's story.²¹ In the early years, the farm emerged from idealism and took hold because its impact was profound.

Healing and Black Mountain College

Black Mountain College was, in many ways, a school for reimagining the self. One enduring concern was mental and emotional health. In the 1930s, still a relatively new field, psychology pulled together theoretical and scientific methods to diagnose and develop treatments for inner anguish. The teachings of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Jung (1875-1961) were in the air and psychology was part of the curriculum.²² Spiritual practices like Zen Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, and Quaker precepts were also present on campus. Many faculty and students fled war, displacement, or repression.²³ Some suffered physical ailments. Many were in therapy; others found the college's communal and creative environment healing.²⁴ What Black Mountain College offered was not a cure in the medical sense, but an educational approach to navigate fear, imagination, and vulnerability.

This context helps to consider Clay's work, which does not diagnose mental illness but does construct tactile environments that bring together fear and comfort. Clay's quilted monsters and installations give form to emotional states. They build on the observation that fear is embodied and can limit perception. With her works, viewers can find themselves immersed in uncertainty, strangeness, and temptation with a surprising lack of tension usually associated with such states. Like the artists and educators at BMC who sought new ways of being through collaborative experimentation, Clay's work shows how kindness and calm can alter the embodied experience of fear and allow greater awareness in those moments.

Healing and The Farm

At the Residency at Metcalf Creek, we are only beginning to learn how to be with the land. Just as one book made a difference for the students at BMC, another was a particular catalyst for us at RMC: David Silver's *The Farm at Black Mountain College*. In this section, I emphasize Silver's point—that when BMC's relationship to its land was most productive, fun and fruitful, it made possible good soil and a strong plant from which the fruits of courageous experimentation could bloom.

Although farm and building work would later become essential to the college's survival, it wasn't necessity that first inspired students to break ground—it was an idea. Specifically, it was a book called *Flight from the City: An Experiment in Creative Living on the Land* by Ralph Borsodi that galvanized faculty and students. Borsodi's book did more than offer practical advice on self-sufficiency; it proposed that life on the land could be an act of creative liberation.²⁵ For students, some from privileged backgrounds, and faculty, with their pedagogical goals in mind, the farm became viable not just because it was needed, but because it carried creative and intellectual purpose.²⁶ Borsodi's vision informed the ethos of Black Mountain College, that living well by farming could be a form of art. The Farm and then the Build Program followed. What began as an inspired experiment soon became integral to the college's identity.²⁷

In his book, David Silver continues that, once embraced, farm and building work became a powerful form of therapy. The food that the students and faculty grew

sustained the college physically and financially. Working in the sun and fresh air relieved insomnia, sparked vitality, and offered structure and purpose. Many recalled feeling a sense of home, even joy, they hadn't felt in years. It wasn't just the labor that helped; it was also working together. This contributed to an *esprit de corps* that empowered amateurs; they were learning by doing.

Some students had a hard time in the academic part of college but flourished by working in the Farm and Build Program. One student, Norm Weston, might have been called dyslexic but was fantastic with physical labor and management.²⁸ Another student, Nat French, had a knack for leadership roles, or what we now call emotional intelligence, but was lackluster with academic subjects. He'd failed at Harvard and then been struck down by polio, disappointing his elite father.²⁹ His skills found their value in rallying people to do the work. Both found ways past these challenges to their confidence and potential; bad academics were no longer the point.

Education itself was a healing endeavor. Two of the college's founders, John Rice and Ted Dreier saw "manual labor as a gateway to participation in democratic society with cooperation and community as vital byproducts."³⁰ Dreier believed that there was spiritual virtue in hard, physical work.³¹ Another of the college's leaders, M.C. Richards wanted each student to find herself and believed that being close to the land and each other was part of that.³² A lifelong educator, Richards later developed the idea of the "moral eye," her term for a cultivated conscience rooted in experience, creativity, and reflection.³³ At the college, personal and moral development were intertwined with intellectual and spiritual growth.

Art, music, poetry, and discovery flourished at Black Mountain College, but they were all rooted in the deeper project of cultivating the whole person. The farm was more than a support infrastructure; it was foundational. Healing and flourishing—through land, labor, learning, and joy—were at the heart of the college's mission and made developing the moral eye, writing, making art, discussing theories, studying hard, and experimenting possible. Without the farm, none of it could have taken root.



Figure 15. Active Archive residents Arden Cone, Jen Clay and Julian Jamaal Jones laugh in front of the Studies Building at the Lake Eden Campus of Black Mountain College. April 2024. Photo: Jen Clay.

Jen Clay Goes to Lake Eden

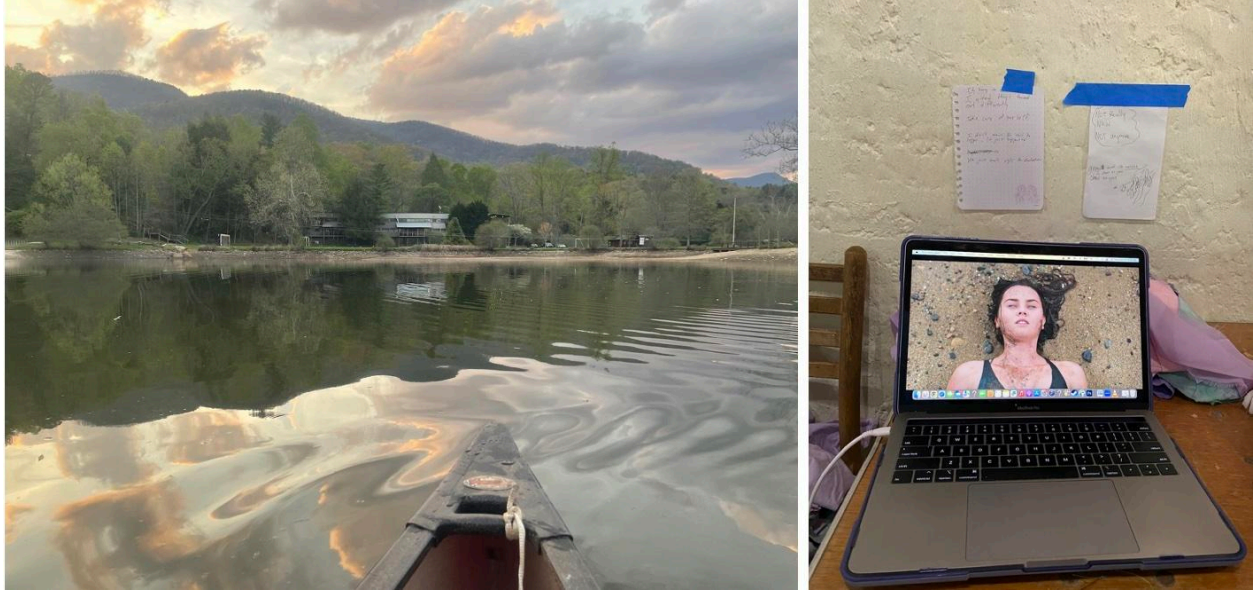
In April 2024, Jen joined artists Arden Cone and Julian Jamaal Jones for the inaugural session of Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center's BMC Active Archive, a two-week residency on the college's historic Lake Eden campus. She remembers driving past the tall trees lining the road and her excitement knowing she was almost there. Jeff Arnal, Executive Director of Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, welcomed her and gave her a tour.



Figure 16. Jen Clay in front of the Quiet House at Lake Eden. April 2024. Photo: Jen Clay.

Her studio space was in the Quiet House, a historic building with some modern additions to Alex Reed's original structure. An architecture student at BMC, Alex designed and personally built the house in 1942 as a memorial to faculty member Theodore Dreier's son Mark. The nine-year-old had died on campus earlier that year.³⁴ Many artists have paid tribute to this contemplative space.

Jen slept in the Studies Building, where Cone and Jones also stayed and had their studios. Suffering an ankle injury, she limped across the field and past the lake to the Quiet House each day. As at the Residency at Metcalf Creek, she relished the time, quiet and space to be alone and work. She ate simply, interrupting her flow state as little as possible. Clay set up an ambiance while she stitched and worked. When we visited, she was playing the movie *Beach House* and listening to the audiobook *Alien*, inputs for her "mind blender."³⁵ Some other pop culture feeds in the past have been Junji Ito's manga, *Rick and Morty*, James Vandermeer's Area X series and *Annihilation*, the 2018 movie based on it. There's a scene where the scientists are on an expedition into a mysteriously altered section of a wilderness. They come across a recently dead corpse which has already been thoroughly colonized by lichen. Within this augmented ambience, Jen started noticing strange things. While working late into the night, she made her way to the bathhouse a short way down the path. The campus is pitch black at night when there's no moon, so the red glow coming from the bathhouse's windows struck Jen as especially eerie.³⁶



Figures 17 and 18. 17. Jen Clay takes a canoe ride on Lake Eden. Photo: J. Clay. 18. The 2019 movie *Beach House* plays on Jen's computer in her studio at the Quiet House. Photo: T. Emerson-Dorsch.

There were occasions for play. Jen's manner often heightens the sense of fun. She snorts when she laughs, and surprising non-sequiturs befuddle, charm, and delight. The property manager Chuck Flournoy led the artists on a hike in the mountains nearby. Arden and Jen watched the eclipse together while sitting in the field in front of the Studies Building, where students once grew collard greens. They also liked to lounge by the lake, where Arden and Jen went swimming while Julian watched, amused. Jen made it known that she did not like the oo-ey gunky muck.³⁷ They all posed in iconic spots, layering their presence over the people who came there before them.



Figure 19 & 20. 19. BMC Active Archive residents Cone, Clay and Jones with Chuck Flournoy, Lake Eden Property Manager. 20. Clay and Cone watch the Eclipse. Photos: Jen Clay.



Figure 21. Active Archive residents at Black Mountain Museum + Arts Center library with staff members. From left to right: Arden Cone, a museum visitor, BMCM+AC Director of Preservation Alice Sebrell, Julian Jamaal Jones, BMCM+AC Executive Director Jeff Arnal, Jen Clay, BMCM+AC Collections Specialist Holly Filsinger. Photo: Jen Clay.

In the Quiet House, new works hung from the rafters, channeling the backgrounds of the video game *Eyes of the Skin* (2023). Her freehand stitching merges quilting—to attach two or more layers of fabric together—and drawing. It also mimics veins in humans, animals, and plants.



Figure 22. Jen Clay sews in the Quiet House. Photo: Jen Clay.

Clay uses the sewing machine so fluidly that she draws with it. Her doodle-like marks of natural plant growths sprout human limbs and other anthropo- and biomorphic stream of consciousness designs. She credits Junji Ito's *Uzumaki* as a stylistic influence. The book is a compilation of manga stories in which spirals infect a town,

compelling humans to do terrible things to serve the spiral's own interests. One of Ito's iconic images shows when a boy and his mom found his dad contorted impossibly into a barrel. The father had been so obsessed with the shape that he had turned himself into a spiral.³⁸

The dense compression of bodies and body parts into non-human shapes is a hallmark of Ito's style. Lithe figures, too, or limbs that undulate like a vine. Clay adopts these characteristics, assimilating them such that she stitches new designs, as she processes all the stories she's been reading, seeing, imagining, and listening to.



Figure 23 & 24. 23. Jen Clay explains the shrinky dinks on her piece. Installation View at the Quiet House, April 2024. Not Really, Not Anymore (2024). Quilted textile, found fabric, hand-dyed cotton, polystyrene. 28.5 x 25.5 x 3.5 inches. 24. Clay, Not Really, Not Anymore (detail) (2024). Photos: T. Emerson-Dorsch.

In Clay's *Not Really, Not Anymore* (2024) a pink snake winds through voids in a porous rounded rectangle made from found fabric printed with little pink, orange, yellow, and blue flowers. Here, the porous shape vaguely resembles a forest. Little black

“shrinky dinks” dangle from the snake-like scales. Underneath a curved flap, beneath the trees’ finger-like roots, reads the phrase from the artwork’s title. She stitched the script in cursive over a pale pink inset, mimicking fleshy soft parts.

Before Jen left the residency at Lake Eden, she installed two pieces at the Boat House for the *Re-Happening*, an annual art festival sponsored by Black Mountain College + Arts Center on the Lake Eden campus for a single day every spring. Clay wrote two quotes on the black board next to *Longing Limbs* which she’d pinned to the rafters underneath the porch’s roof. The piece’s arms swayed in the breeze.

The quotes read:

“The trees budded prematurely, and at night swayed ominously...even when there was no wind... Strangeness had come into everything growing now. Yet – Familiarity had dulled the people there.”

–*The Color Out of Space* by H. P. Lovecraft, 1927

“But of course, it wasn’t an arm! Whoever heard of an arm as tall as a tree? I don’t know what made me compare it to an arm, maybe I imagined it.”

–*The Space Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long, 1928



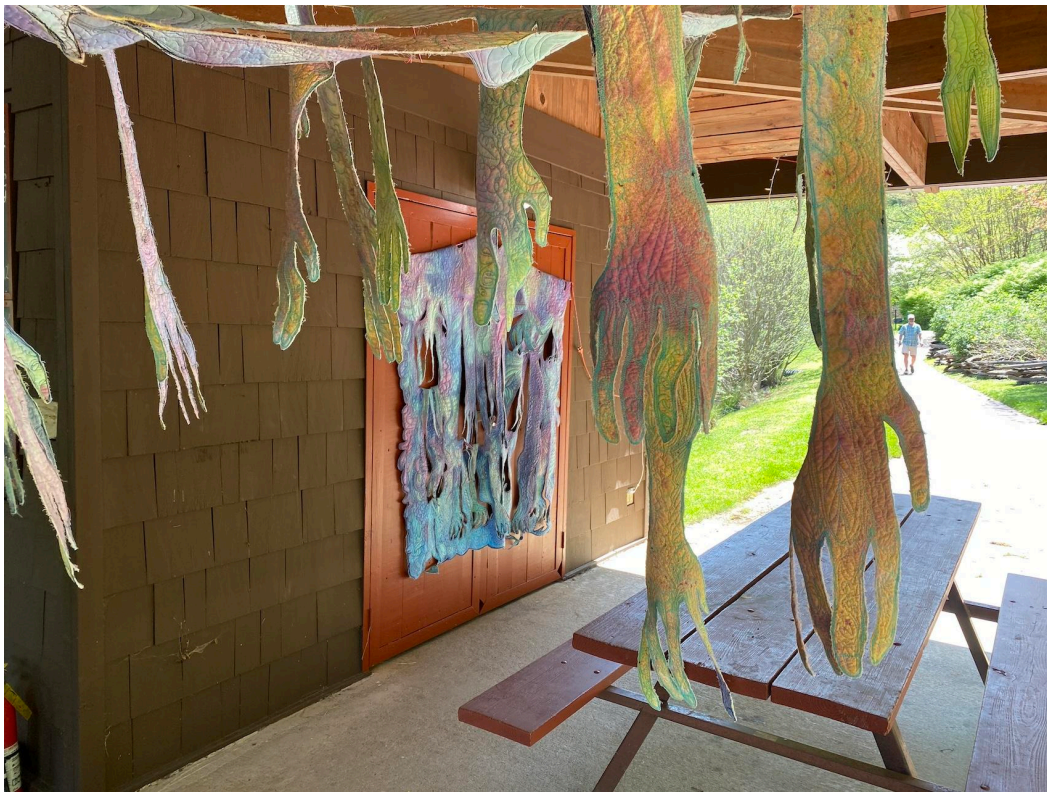
Figure 25. Jen installs Longing Limbs (2022), Quilted hand dyed cotton. 123 x 63 x 90 inches. At the Boat House at Black Mountain College's Lake Eden campus, April 2024. Photo: J. Clay.



Figure 26. Installation view, Jen Clay, Strange Trees (2022). Quilted hand dyed Cotton. 68 x 58 x 3 inches & 79 x 58 x 3 inches, on occasion of Black Mountain College's Re-Happening, 20 April 2024. Photo: T. Emerson-Dorsch.



Fig. 27-29. Installation views of Clay, Longing Limbs (2022) on the day of the 2024 Re-Happening. Brook Dorsch stands in Fig 26, for scale. Photos: T. Emerson-Dorsch.



Surrealism

Many of pop culture's monsters and horror scenarios spring from the legacy of Dada and Surrealists, whose influence cast a net over the world in the mid-20th century. Their way of evoking dream-like forms arrived in New York and Black Mountain College at nearly the same time, generating a fallout of style so ubiquitous that it seemed like everybody's brains were connected.

The progressive education at BMC, based on philosopher John Dewey's observation that art should serve a central and foundational role in a curriculum, encouraged interdisciplinary experimentation.³⁹ The milieu, especially the summer camp atmosphere that swelled during summer sessions, further fomented new art. Another component in the mix at the college was Surrealism, an art movement that interpreted the inner terrain of the individual psyche by using automatism as a way into abstraction. Many of BMC's faculty and visiting artists brought Surrealism to the college as a style and a way of interpreting the world. Richards, John Cage, Leo Amino, Emerson Woelffer, Josef Albers, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Cy Twombly, Esteban Vicente, and more were all BMC faculty members processing the influence of surrealism and Dada with their psychological themes and biomorphic dreamlike motifs.

The visual vocabulary of surrealism swept the campus. Certain works by faculty artists have elements Clay's monsters would echo generations later. The first is by Leo Amino, a Taiwanese sculptor who moved to the United States via Japan and taught at BMC 1946 to 1950. The piercing points jutting from one sculpture, called *Carnivorous Plant #22* (1952), made soon after, seems to have applied a menacing aspect to biomorphic forms.⁴⁰ The second is by Emerson Woelffer, a painter who taught during the summer session of 1949. His painting, *Last Internment* (1948), depicts a row of black sticks with thorn-like protrusions (similar to Amino's sculpture) on a vivid red background.⁴¹

Beyond sculpture and painting, surrealism in theater made an impact on campus. One important example of this happened, combined with a collaborative and improvisational spirit, during BMC's summer session in 1951. Literary theorist, poet and

ceramicist M.C. Richards, pianist David Tudor, and composer John Cage worked together on a close reading of Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and its Double* in French.⁴² Their reading of Artaud's book, which would become an important text for theater in the United States, led to what was arguably the first Happening, John Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1*.⁴³ Its performance at BMC in 1952 involved a cast of friends and fellows: Cage, Richards, Tudor, Merce Cunningham, Charles Olson, Nicholas Cernovich, Franz Kline and Robert Rauschenberg all took part.⁴⁴ After leaving the college, Richards continued working on the translation of Artaud's work, and in 1958 her translation was published by Grove Books, making possible Artaud's immense influence on alternative theater and performance art in the United States.

Artaud versus Clay

It's worth focusing on Artaud's ideas for a moment, because they relate to Jen's. Artaud's concept of a *Theater of Cruelty* was that theater must turn away from average realism to symbol, myth, ritual, and violence in order to break spectators' complacency. A self-proclaimed broken soul who had suffered mental illness since youth, Artaud was especially sensitive to the mental prison middle class people seemed to both inhabit and reinforce. Artaud's writings, plays, and art tended to be strategically grotesque; he was willing to go to great lengths to stun and break through to audiences. He extolled theater people to employ all tools *except* narrative, realistic dialogue, and direct expository language. To this end, his plays were highly visual and coded.⁴⁵ In one three-page play, "The Spurt of Blood," (1925) Artaud deployed taboos, signified in utmost brevity, in rapid succession. There was incest. A worm was born on stage from the vagina of a breast-less wet nurse. Beetles, scorpions, and colliding stars appeared like apparitions on stage.⁴⁶ This work constituted his symbolic rendition of Creation.⁴⁷

Another important aspect of Artaud was his concept of theater's double, a parallel universe if you will, only accessed when the breakthrough is accomplished. In this realm is fleeting relief from anguish, at least for truth-seekers like Artaud, for here there is joyful release and clarity. It's a chance to perceive a dangerous reality, but one

where “dolphins, once they had shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep.”⁴⁸

As a part of her research process since the 2010s at least, Clay has been on the receiving end of surrealism as repeatedly digested and reborn through popular culture and theory. The absurd and tragic aspects of existence are themes that simply seem to exist at all times and everywhere. When I first started working with her, she guided me on a tour of her worldview through the triad of James Vandermeer, Max Weber, and Eugene Thacker, all friends and proponents of a theoretical framework they call “cosmic pessimism.”⁴⁹ She also frequently refers to H.P. Lovecraft’s horror fiction as foundational to her thinking and imagery.⁵⁰

Jen makes visible truly grotesque fears. Playing out the possibility, in detail, that a human being could split apart and become a plant tends to break one’s spirit. Carnivorous plants could tempt you to lean in, and, once you’re close, release a pollen that infects you and impels you to spread its spores. Likewise, the idea that, in the larger scheme of things, neither planet nor universe cares one bit if a human being loses its free will, consciousness or life. Contemplating the fringes of consciousness and existence have driven philosophers, poets, artists, sensitive types – and Artaud – to early deaths.

But Jen also makes her monsters soft, bright, and inviting. Children particularly love playing in her installations – the environments she makes for her monsters. The stalker-y text hidden beneath tongues, leaves, and hands have double meanings that swing between sweet and threatening. She lifts these hallucinations up for us to see, wrap ourselves, and take solace in her recognition that it’s possible that we’re all going crazy, but sometimes crazy is a glitch in real truths we need to absorb. This is “soft sanity.”⁵¹

Her “radical kindness” enacts the vision of an intense empath, a woman who wants to validate the experience and knowledge of people who feel and know the world differently. Understanding the wide variety of individual experiences more thoughtfully will help us to understand where we’re going and bring us closer to wisdom.

Let's imagine, one more time, encountering one of Jen's monsters. It's the moment you realize that you're fascinated, you're locked in, and the meaning is doubled. "I can't let you go" is no longer a benign phrase, it's a menacing promise. No, the challenging thing to understand is that the menace has passed. Something terrible has already happened – you are caught and you are now in the possession of this non-human being. You may become something not-human. But you are no longer who you were. Encountering this work leads to the horrific apperception that you might accept your fate once you are caught. The past is the past, and it's no use fighting. Furthermore, your acceptance or rebellion will not matter.

What strikes me as revelatory is the fact that Jen landed at Black Mountain College, a site where forest ghost stories still haunt us and avant-garde art forms flourished – birthed there then to find myth-like status now. Her philosophy and embrace of multiple modalities make her the beneficiary of many of the disciplines taught and studied at BMC. Clay's lures (appealing textures, hidden messages, palette, solicitous language, soothing tactics, and immersive environments) align with Artaud's imperative to break through, but her approach to delivering difficult truths is nearly the opposite.

Soon after Richards's tenure at BMC and the publication of her translation of *The Theater and its Double*, she described her interpretation of Artaud's theory of theater. She wrote, "Our 'esprit' [mind and spirit] may be awakened by a theatre that rouses centers of perception, and once awake we will not be so likely to drowse in inanity... [and, quoting Artaud] Only one thing in the world is exalting: contact with powers of the spirit."⁵²

Decades later, in Richards's book *Opening Our Moral Eye*, she would reflect on the strength of connection needed to convey frightening or simply unfamiliar ideas. Unlike Artaud, Clay and Richards use gentleness and kindness in their approaches.

The Forest Grows

Now we see how works like those made at BMC have informed Jen's ambitious project in a way that relates to nature, therapeutic, and theatrical principles explored in this essay. In February 2025, I visited Jen at the McColl Center in Charlotte, NC. While

in residence, she was making works for her exhibition *Blasted Belonging* at Girls' Club Collection in Fort Lauderdale, FL. She planned to install individual curtain-like artworks as set-pieces on a stage. The new pieces took to next level the tree and forest-like motifs developed at the Residency at Metcalf Creek, Locust Projects and at Active Archive. I was there to see the new works and to spend time with Jen. Our children, both young adults, were struggling, and we were emotionally spent, coming off a weekend of tough parenting. Never was the urgency of Jen's work and presence more tangible.



*Figure 30. Jen Clay behind a work in progress in her studio at the McColl Center in Charlotte, NC.
Photo: McColl Center.*



*Figure 31. Installation view of Jen Clay: **Blasted Belonging** (2024) at Girls' Club Collection in Fort Lauderdale, FL. Photo: Girls' Club Collection. Photo by Francesco Casale.*

Jen told me that with this show she's especially concerned with creating permission for touch, agency, and interaction. She explained, "It's a role play. And it's not just any experience. I want my art to be such an experience. Rather than just looking." She continued, "My thought is, if our behavior is dictated by our past, then what if I can give you a good experience with uncertainty with literally almost a formless thing that isn't quite formless, that you cannot put into a category, that then in the future when you associate the same feelings with uncertainty, that you don't deny it, that you

turn into it. And that can be like uncertainty with yourself, with your identity, with your mental health. Our environment and other people.”⁵³

As M.C. Richards described “the moral imagination”:

My hunch is that morality is a strong sense of connection, that it is built in, as are connections themselves, and that the moral imagination may be awakened as the sense of wholeness is awakened. Our moral eye is the organ which understands connections between things, understands consequences, and attempts to maintain its commitment to the life of nature and humanity.⁵⁴

It strikes me that M.C. Richards’s “moral eye” would recognize Jen.

Since writing this article we changed the name of the residency from the Residency at Metcalf Creek to Emerson Dorsch Artist Residency.

¹ Jim Frakes, “Generations: 60 Years-21 Conversations” (Unpublished, Charlotte, NC, June 19, 2024).

² Tyler Emerson-Dorsch, “Just Look at Yourself,” in *Jen Clay: Eyes of the Skin [Gallery Note]* (Miami, FL: Locust Projects, 2023), 4, <https://www.locustprojects.org/uploads/file/gallery-notes/jen-clay-gallery-notes.pdf>.

³ *Jen Clay: The Texture of Anxiety*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Kc6-fQSG9Y>.

⁴ Jen Clay, Studio Visit at the McColl, [interview by the author] Digital audio recording, February 7, 2025.

⁵ Tyler Emerson-Dorsch, “Terrific Visions, an Essay about Jen Clay – Emerson Dorsch,” Contemporary Art Gallery, Emerson Dorsch, March 9, 2023,

<https://emersondorsch.com/terrific-visions-an-essay-about-jen-clay/>.

⁶ Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2010); Max Res, Mark Fisher, and Eugene Thacker. *That Which Lies Beyond: How Horror Disturbs Our World*. [Zine] Published by Viscera, ND; Junji Ito, *Uzumaki*, 15th printing, (San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2021). For a good introduction to Junji Ito’s career, see Sam Thielman and Gabriel Gianordoli, “How Manga Megastar Makes Such Terrifying Work,” *The New York Times*, 21 May 2025.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/05/21/books/junji-ito-manga-monsters.html> Last accessed 26 May 2025. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, vol. 1, 3 vols., *Horror of Philosophy 1* (Alresford, Hants, UK: Zer0 Books, 2011). Max Res, Mark Fisher, and Eugene Thacker, “That Which Lies Beyond: How Horror Disturbs Our World” (Viscera, ND). Junji Ito, *Uzumaki* (San Francisco, CA: VIZ Media, 2021). For an overview of Junji Ito see Sam Thielman and Gabriel Gianordoli, “How a Manga Megastar Makes Such Terrifying Work,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2025, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/05/21/books/junji-ito-manga-monsters.html>.

⁷ Jen Clay, Interview with Jen Clay by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch.

⁸ Jen Clay.

⁹ Jen Clay.

¹⁰ Frances Archer Dunbar, “Eyes of the Skin by Jen Clay at Locust Projects,” *Burnaway Magazine*, October 25, 2023, <https://burnaway.org/magazine/eyes-of-the-skin-by-jen-clay-at-locust-projects-miami/>.

¹¹ Louis Adamic, "Education on a Mountain: The Story of Black Mountain College," April 1936, *Harper's Magazine* cited in Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscape," in *Leap Before You Look* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 27.

¹² Faculty member Theodore Dreier was very well-connected and fundraised for the school. John Rice's brother was the president of Swarthmore College. Ted Dreier's aunt, art collector and MOMA patron Katherine Dreier led to the introduction of Josef Albers, who needed to leave Germany. Bauhaus, the industrial design school where he was teaching, was closing, a Hitler's rise to power was forcing many to flee. Through Albers and MoMA, many more artists and intellectuals who were connected to the European avant-garde were drawn to BMC. A core group of students from Rollins, acolytes of Rice, helped to recruit other students. Theodore Dreier, "Early Close Calls," in *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

¹³ Anne E. Chesky Smith and Heather South, *Black Mountain College*, Images of America (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 8.

¹⁴ Infrogmation of New Orleans, *English: Grove Tasteless [sic] Chill Tonic. Makes Children as Fat as Pigs. Advertisement from "The Banner-Democrat", Lake Providence, Louisiana, December 3, 1898*, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/infrogmation/8387165964/>, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Groves_Tasteless_Chill_Tonic_ad_1898.jpg.

¹⁵ Orleans.

¹⁶ "1898 Ad for Edwin Wiley Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic," in *Wikipedia*, October 5, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Edwin_Wiley_Grove&oldid=1249464424.

¹⁷ E.W. Grove earned his fortune as a pharmacist and subsequently had a number of business ventures, among them developing Asheville's Grove Park Inn. Denise Kiernan, *The Last Castle: The Epic Story of Love, Loss, and American Royalty in the Nation's Largest Home* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 227-29.

¹⁸ BMC purchased the Lake Eden campus from Grove in 1937. David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College* (Los Angeles, CA: At elier, 2024), 77.

¹⁹ Kiernan, *The Last Castle*, 139-43.

²⁰ "How the World Was Made: A Cherokee Creation Story" collected by James Mooney in *Myths of the Cherokee : Extract from the Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (1902). This story was reprinted in ed. Hannah Lack, *The Land: Stories of the Soil*, 5 vols., Faith in Arts (Los Angeles, CA: At elier, 2023), 11-16.

²¹ David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College*.

²² One important professor in a field related to psychology was Erwin Straus. After the Active Archive residency, Clay began to explore his work. For more about Straus see David Peifer, "The Sciences at Black Mountain College," *Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center* (blog), May 25, 2021, <https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/peifer-sciences/>.

²³ David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College*, 96-97.

²⁴ Therapists affected Jackson Pollock and other artists during this period both in constructive and destructive ways. Mary Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women: Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five Painters and the Movement That Changed Modern Art*, First Back Bay paperback edition (New York Boston London: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2019).

²⁵ David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College*. (Los Angeles: At elier, 2024), 39.

²⁶ David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College*.

²⁷ Silver, 39.

²⁸ Silver, 33.

²⁹ Silver, 61-62.

³⁰ Silver, 58.

³¹ Silver, 40.

³² Silver, 176. After Richards left BMC, she and others from the college would find new ways to live in community on the land: Gate Hill Cooperative in Stony Point, NY. See Jenni Sorkin, "M.C. Richards," in *Leap Before You Look* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 276. See also Julia Connor, "O Wild and Nameless!" in *M.C. Richards: Pots, Poems & Pedagogy*, Ed. Hannah Lack, Faith in Arts (Los Angeles: At elier, 2022), 8.

- ³³ M.C. Richards, "Author's Foreword" in *Opening Our Moral Eye: Essays, Talks and Poems*. Edited by Deborah J. Haynes. (Hudson, NY: Lendisfame Press, 1996), 7.
- ³⁴ Michael Beggs, "A Quiet Place for Quiet Thinking" in *The Quiet House: Stillness in Lake Eden*, Faith in Arts, Ed. Hannah Lack. Los Angeles: Atelier Editions, 2022. See in particular the historical citation *Black Mountain College Bulletin- Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Jan 1943).
- ³⁵ Jen Clay, Studio Visit at Lake Eden, interview by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch. Also present in recording is Brook Dorsch., Digital audio recording, April 15, 2024. Jeffrey A. Brown [writer and director], *Beach House* (Cleveland, OH: Low Spark Films, 2019). Alan Dean Foster, *Alien: The Official Movie Novelization*, audio book (Houston: Audible Studios, 2015).
- ³⁶ Jen Clay, Interview with Jen Clay by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch.
- ³⁷ Jen Clay.
- ³⁸ Ito, *Uzumaki*, 40-41.
- [39] David Silver, *The Farm at Black Mountain College*.
- ⁴⁰ Artwork: Leo Amino, *Carnivorous Plant #22*, 1952, polyester resin, wire, netting and thread on wood base, 23 1/8 x 9 1/4 x 6 7/8 inches, 1952, Collection Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University. Pictured in Bryan Barcena, "Leo Amino: Carnivorous Plant #22" in *LBYL*, 216-217.
- ⁴¹ Artwork: Emerson Woelffer, *Last Internment*, 1948, oil and enamel on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy Manny Silverman Gallery, Los Angeles in Jennifer Gross, "Emerson Woelffer" in *LBYL*, 230-231.
- ⁴² Jenni Sorkin, "M.C. Richards."
- ⁴³ Happening is a specific term for a particular participatory and improvisational kind of performance in the 1960s.
- ⁴⁴ Ruth Erikson, "Chance Encounters: Theater Piece no 1. And its Pre-History" in *LBYL*, 298-99.
- ⁴⁵ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, [1st ed., 25th printing] (New York: Grove Press, 1981).
- ⁴⁶ Artaud.
- ⁴⁷ Antonin Artaud, "The Spurt of Blood," in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, edited by Susan Sontag (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 72-75.
- ⁴⁸ Antonin Artaud in James C. Alexander, "M.C. Richards: Speaking of Theatre," in *M.C. Richards: Centering: Life + Art – 100 Years* (Asheville, NC: Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, 2016), 34, <https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/mcrichards/>.
- ⁴⁹ "Jen Clay: This World Doesn't Belong to You – Emerson Dorsch," exhibition announcement, web page, Emerson Dorsch, April 18, 2023, <https://emersondorsch.com/exhibition/jen-clay-this-world-doesnt-belong-to-you/>.
- ⁵⁰ When asked Clay about Artaud on March 7, 2025, Clay referred to this youtube video: "*The Colour Out of Space*" by H. P. Lovecraft, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JH7nEjwbEY>. Note also that Clay made a highly visible quote part of Lovecraft part of her installation at the 2024 Re-Happening at Lake Eden.
- ⁵¹ Artwork: Jen Clay, *Soft Sanity, a Performance*, December 28, 2019, Video textile installation with performative pieces in collaboration with soundscape by Richard Vergez, commissioned by Norton Museum of Art, December 28, 2019.
- ⁵² James C. Alexander, "M.C. Richards: Speaking of Theatre," 35.
- ⁵³ Jen Clay, Interview with Jen Clay by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch.
- ⁵⁴ M.C. Richards, "Author's Foreword," in *Opening Our Moral Eye: Essays, Talks and Poems*, Ed. Deborah J. Haynes (Hudson, NY: Lendisfame Press, 1996), 7.