

# <Immune Nations>



An evidence-based exhibition about the constructive role that art can play in public discourse around life-saving vaccines.

[www.immunenations.com](http://www.immunenations.com)

**Fall 2021**

**McMaster Museum of Art**

McMaster University

1280 Main St W

Hamilton, ON L8S 4L6

Canada

# <Immune Nations>

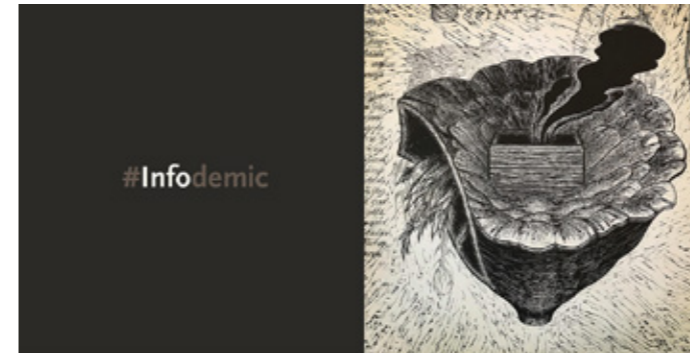
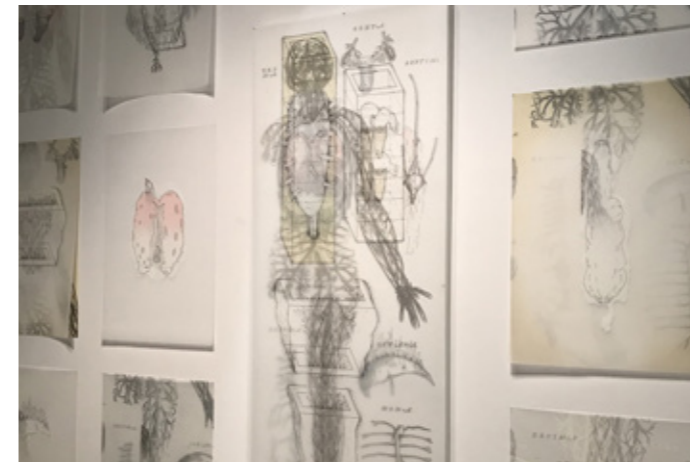
<Immune Nations> presents artistic research from a three-year interdisciplinary and collaborative project co-led by Natalie Loveless and Sean Caulfield (University of Alberta) and Steven J. Hoffman (York University).

Please see [www.immunenations.com](http://www.immunenations.com) for a full list of participants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised urgent questions related to the effective use of vaccines and has led to polarized global debates on vaccine equity. In turn, this has stimulated discourse around a number of broader ethical issues such as access to health care and balancing personal freedom with public health. The forces behind polarized vaccine debates are complex, involving many players including the media, funding agencies, corporations, and the scientific/academic community itself (and made more complex by the influx of fraudulent misinformation that undermines public confidence in vaccines). All of this complexity generates anxiety that too often hinders society's ability to engage in respectful discussion around the life-saving potential of vaccines. Art/creative research plays an important role in helping to foster a more nuanced discourse around vaccines by articulating elusive or emotionally charged issues in ways that other forms of communication often cannot.

The outcome of a multi-year project that was developed prior to the pandemic (2014-2017), <Immune Nations> was designed to explore complex issues related to the use and distribution of vaccines in the world today, and the capacity of artistic research to solicit complex forms of affective engagement when dealing with difficult and divisive social and political topics such as global vaccination. The project began with interdisciplinary workshops held over the course of three years, in which scientists, artists, and policymakers shared their perspectives and expertise, and devised collaborative artistic research projects. These workshops were followed by a first exhibition at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art's Galleri KiT in March 2017, where it was featured as the opening event of the 2017 Norwegian Global Health & Vaccination Research Conference, and a second exhibition at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in Geneva from May-July 2017, with an opening event as part of the World Health Organization's 2017 World Health Assembly.

For the McMaster Museum of Art, the exhibition presents original work alongside new work produced in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



## The Anatomy Table

**Project lead: Sean Caulfield**  
**Advisors: Tim Caulfield and Johan Holst**

Silkscreen and digital printing on drafting film, plexi and Photo Tex, 2017.

Responding to historic anatomical references, *The Anatomy Table* points to the gap that exists between empirical/scientific representations, and more emotional and culturally charged expressions of the body. One of the primary areas of focus in creating *The Anatomy Table* was to explore the loss of public trust in science, as well as misinformation surrounding science-informed interventions in health care, such as vaccination.

## #Infodemic

**Artistic Collaborators: Sean Caulfield and Sue Colberg | Advisor: Tim Caulfield**

Silkscreen and digital printing on drafting film, plexi and Photo Tex, 2021.

*#Infodemic* is an artist's book project made up of text and image pairings. The images in *#Infodemic* were first shared on social media in the hope they would make people stop and think before hitting 'retweet' or 'share,' potentially spreading misinformation about COVID-19. More broadly the *#Infodemic* project is also an attempt to explore creatively the sense of uncertainty and anxiety that has arisen out of the COVID-19 crisis.

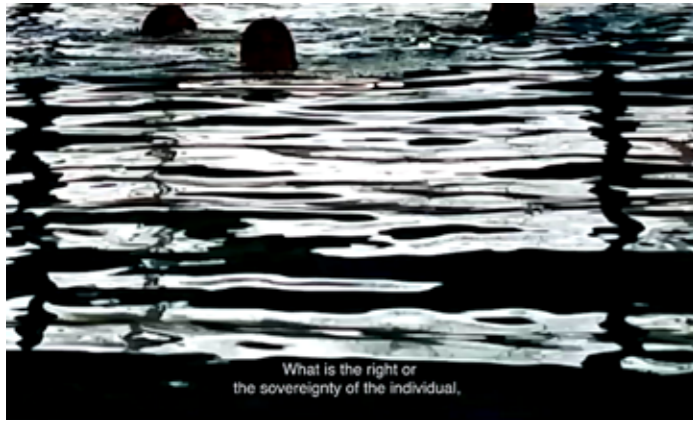


## Antisocial Distancing

**A documentary film by Arman Yeritsyan and Mkrtych Tonoyan**

Arman Yeritsyan — Director  
Mkrtych Tonoyan — Creative Producer  
Mikayel Nshanyan — Composer, sound  
Narek Nazaryan — Cinematography, sound, editing  
Mkhitar Serobyab — Cinematography, camera

*Antisocial Distancing* explores the clash of Covid-19 and the war that started in Armenia on the 27th of September 2020. Addressing the concept of 'social distance', the film reflects the conflict between pandemic restrictions policy; Armenia's traditional, cultural and social habits; and the disaster of war. For locations in the world gripped in the crisis of conflict, the risk of Covid-19 infection paled in the face of a greater threat. Using original footage and archival materials, *Antisocial Distancing* addresses the experience of the pandemic within a culture where social closeness is valued above the notion of personal space, in the context of daily life and the trauma of war.



## Conversations with Vaccine-Critical Parents

and *Theory of Illness #1–4* (2017),  
*Syringe Sequence #1–2* (2015–2016)

**Project lead: Kaisu Koski,**  
in collaboration with **Johan Holst**

Single channel HD video, duration (16:40), 2017.

*Conversations with Vaccine-Critical Parents* is a poetic documentary about vaccine-hesitancy, based on interviews with vaccine-critical parents and their home videos in the Netherlands and Finland. It explores the parents' health beliefs, including their understanding of the human immune system and their definitions of "natural" and "safe." After these interviews, the parents' predominant health beliefs were translated into speculative diagrams (by Koski) and discussed with a vaccine researcher (Holst). These diagrams also form the series titled *Theory of Illness #1–4*. The photo series *Syringe Sequence #1–2*, in turn, depicts life cycles of plant-based "pharmaceuticals," speculating what kinds of vaccines the parents possibly would accept. The two photos portray plants with medicinal properties such as Echinacea and Allium, which have been grown in syringes.

## HUG

**Kaisu Koski**

Installation and Digital C-print, 2021.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further accentuated the urgency for venues and language to maintain a dialogue with vaccine-hesitant communities and to consider framing vaccines as a stimulus for natural processes in the body. In my "pandemic work," I have also considered social distancing as part of disease prevention in the absence of vaccines in 2020. The wearable garment prototype *HUG* creates the tactile sensation of a hug without the presence of another person. While one of the primary gestures in expressing love and care, a hug has now become a potential health hazard, leaving many of us deprived of the human touch.

## Design for a Dissemunization Station

**Artistic collaborators:**  
**Patrick Mahon and Annemarie Hou**

Two printed tent structures accompanied by an ambient sound program; a sound montage of vaccine and pandemic news reports; and three photo montages mounted on display tripods

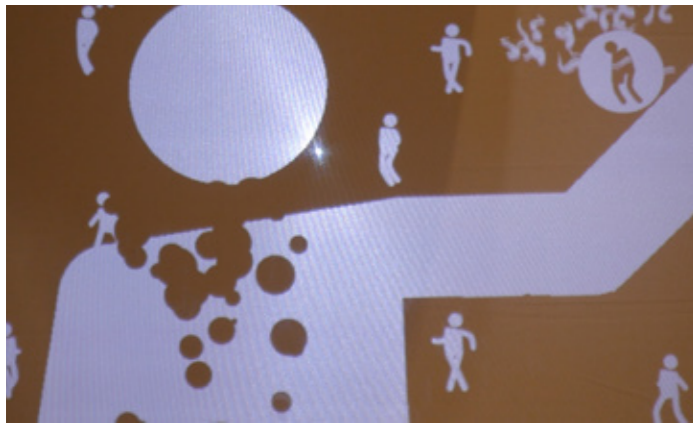
*Design for a Dissemunization Station (D4DS)* is a prototype for a portable sculptural structure that suggests multiple uses regarding vaccines. Developed as a setting for experiential engagement with the subject of vaccines and its complexities in a twenty-first-century global context, the work is comprised of a pair of custom-printed tent structures housing two listening stations and is surrounded by an ambient soundtrack invoking an "inner bodyscape" — with a vaccine ostensibly moving through it. The installation offers participants an opportunity to encounter a history of media coverage regarding vaccines and pandemic occurrences, mainly in the twentieth century, and to imagine mechanisms and environments for spreading information about vaccines as well as for administering vaccines themselves.

## Travelling Memories: The Vaccine Archive (2021)

**Project lead: Vicki Sung-yeon Kwon**  
**In collaboration with Hwirin, Sergio Serrano,**  
**Morgan Wedderspoon, and Lathika Sritharan**

24 postcards (5" x 7") on a postcard rack

*Memories and Records: The Vaccine Archive* (2017) is a research-creation project that provokes thoughts on the efficacy of visual communication and record-keeping systems relating to immunization in an era of mass migration and cross-border activity. *Travelling Memories: The Vaccine Archive* (2021) draws on selected archive materials and interview texts to produce 24 postcards, displayed on a postcard rack as if they were found in a souvenir shop. Reflecting on the travel ban during the pandemic, these postcards convey the collective memories of vaccines and the idea of memories travelling along with viruses and vaccines.



## Shadowpox: The Antibody Politic

**Artistic collaborators:** Alison Humphrey, Caitlin Fisher, Steven J. Hoffman and Lalaine Ulit-Destajo

Please see <[www.immunenations.com](http://www.immunenations.com)> for the full list of participating students and artists.

Motion-tracked interactive projections, aluminum frame, fabric, photographic prints, 2017.

*Shadowpox* imagines the emergence of a vaccine-preventable disease composed of viral shadows. Part fact, part science fantasy, the mixed-reality installation combines real-world statistical data with motion-tracking digital effects. The game makes visible what is usually invisible to us: how our immunization decisions affect not just our personal health, but the health of other people in our community... and vice versa. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, we created an online *Shadowpox: #StayHome Edition*. In today's COVID-19 global body politic, while wealthy nations like Canada focus on convincing a shrinking minority of our citizens to Get the Vaccine from the lion's share of doses we've bought up, the majority of people in the majority of nations still have to Risk the Virus whether they choose to or not.

## Upstream the Cold Chain

**Project lead:** Jesper Alvaer | **Advisor:** Johan Holst

Single Channel Video, 2017

Following a group of young scientists/healthcare professionals from their practical health work in the Global South to a conference on Global Vaccination in Norway, this single-channel video gathers local narratives on vaccine access — specifically the experience of navigating the temperate supply chains that are needed for vaccines to remain effective — and juxtaposes footage from the Global South with so-called “first world” footage in order to consider the cold chain both practically and allegorically.

## VacZineNations!

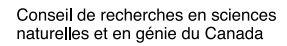
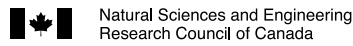
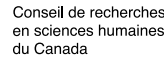
**Project leads:** Rachelle Viader Knowles and Mkrtych Tonoyan

Please see <[www.immunenations.com](http://www.immunenations.com)> for the full list of participating students and artists.

Small zines, large zine installation and window elements, 2017.

The goal of *VacZineNations!* was to develop an interdisciplinary platform to address how the social crux of the vaccination issue — public good versus individual choice — differs widely across countries and communities. Drawing submission from Canada, the UK, China, and Armenia, the project asks how artists, designers, journalists, and policymakers might work together to challenge vaccine hesitancy. Pre-pandemic, the topic of vaccines seemed vital but distant for many of the student participants; now, it is a lived experience that has reshaped all our lives.





**<Immune Nations>** was funded with support from the Research Council of Norway, the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Killam Research Fund.

We acknowledge the support of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC).

Cover image (front): Kaisu Koski, *Injection Simulator*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

Cover image (back): Installation view of *Immune Nations*, McMaster Museum of Art, 2021. Photo by Bob McNair.

Images from Trondheim exhibition at Galleri KiT by Yanir Shani.

Images from Geneva exhibition at UNAIDS by Annik Wetter.