

# STRATA



**March 29–May 3, 2025**

**OFF 70 STUDIO  
39 West Main St.  
Hancock, MD**

## CULTIVATE

**CULTIVATE** is an evolving collection of interdisciplinary artists, writers, and researchers driven by investigations of land, place, and the commons. Projects include experimental and practical art explorations that wrestle with the qualities, perceptions, and layers of experience that inform and expand notions of landscape. Ideas from a full spectrum of voices across generations are supported using sustainable tactics. From the hyper-local to the global, Cultivate reflects individual and collective curiosity, intention, imagining, and engagement with the phenomena of landscape.

### ARTISTS

**MAGGIE GOURLAY**

**KATIE KEHOE**

**SUSAN MAIN**

**CLAIRE McCONAUGHY**

**MURAT CEM MENGÜÇ**

**MJ NEUBERGER**

**ELZBIETA SIKORSKA**

**SUE WRBICAN**

## STRATA

**STRATA** is an exhibition of artists responding to the theme Strata as broadly as befits their practice and in relation to the town of Hancock, Maryland. Strata are the geological layers that time imprints on the landscape, they are the history lessons that leave treasures like pottery shards and fossils for historians, anthropologists, archeologists and paleontologists to find and use them to weave stories that reinterpret and reimagine our past. More broadly, strata can refer to family lineages, traces of dna that connect the past to the present in our bodies and minds, or can be connected to a particular site or landscape, as in historical environmental patterns no longer present but still creating evolutionary or socio-economic repercussions.

When considering a map of the town of Hancock and its surrounding area, it can also be seen as having layers. Part of an historic “strata” the town’s Main Street is parallel to I-70, the C&O bike path (formerly the C&O rail line), the C&O Canal and its towpath, and the Potomac River.

### POETS

**DAVID ABRUZZI**

**CHRISSY ALHART**

## DAVID ABRUZZI

clapboards

vinyl siding<sup>1</sup>  
vinyl windows  
sold online to the masses  
leaving facades - these faces expressionless and muted  
details covered or dismembered  
facades now homogenized in a sad tired grey  
hiding history that made a house a home

insulbrick<sup>TM2</sup>  
sold by traveling salesman to homeowners by the foot  
masquerading wooden houses pretending to be what they are  
not  
slapped up over clapboards and splitting in the heat  
reveal a glimpse of ancient color

wooden clapboards<sup>3</sup>  
wooden windows  
in faded hues of paint  
flaking and cracking  
yet still alive and breathing  
nearly forgotten the history that made the house a home

not one house  
not one home  
street by street  
block by block  
history covered up and suffocated  
wrapped in a monochrome of vinyl  
hiding history that made this place a home

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<sup>1</sup> vinyl siding. a plastic exterior cladding made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC). introduced in the 1950's.

<sup>2</sup> insulbrick<sup>TM</sup>. an exterior siding product that mimics brick. made from an inflammable mixture of asphalt, asbestos, and pebbles. neither insulating nor brick. popular from the 1930's into the 1950's.

<sup>3</sup> clapboards. long, thin, flat pieces of wood with edges horizontally overlapping in series. used to cover the exterior of buildings.

## CHRISSY ALHART

A Geology of Self

Part I - Igneous  
We were all born once  
emerging - fluid and unformed -  
from the great furnace of creation  
with only the potential - once cooled -  
of becoming anything solid

Like the day a baby bird opens its eyes

Part II - Syncline  
The experts said  
a core sample was unnecessary  
because - thanks to the road cut -  
the layers were already exposed  
and the deforming effects of all that pressure  
are visible to anyone who cared to look

There was a time you said the same thing about me

Part III - Erosion  
We will all die once  
having lived a life built of sediment  
and borrowed atoms  
so that when  
at the time of our dissolving  
we do not resist the weathering

But flow elemental back into the Earth



## MAGGIE GOURLAY

My current work includes a series of quilts or wall hangings, entitled Mapping Stories. It involves exploring and documenting local ecosystems by means of gathering samples of their plantlife to use as material to dye, ecoprint, and screen print. The resulting textile piece alludes to a specific place and time through both its material and formal expression, and includes a human “footprint” of some kind on the landscape. I explore these ecosystems in the context of the human relationship to nature in an era of global warming and accelerating species extinction. The foraging is undertaken mostly in ruderal areas (subject to human disturbance) and often reveals the presence of invasive plant species proliferating among the native ones.



Mapping Stories (Strata-Hancock), 2024, 43" x 26.5"  
Hanging quilt, ecoprinting, sewing and screenprint with natural dyes collected on site (multiflora rose, weld, logwood), iron and alum mordants, soy milk, on organic cotton, cotton batting.

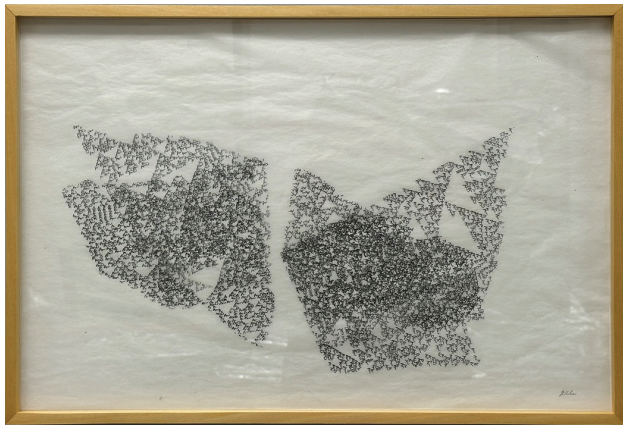


Mapping Stories (Byways-Hancock), 2024-2025, 39.5" x 24.5"  
Hanging quilt: ecoprinting, dyeing and screenprinting with natural dyes collected on site (multiflora rose, weld, logwood), iron and alum mordants, indigo dye, soy milk, on organic cotton, cotton batting.



## KATIE KEHOE

My drawings involve writing the word 'AND' repeatedly in overlapping patterns. For me - this syllable - this word - represents connectedness and by drawing it through processes of repetition, rotation, and overlap, it serves as mode of expressions as well as a structural tool. These pieces are at once reductive, formal, and conceptual.

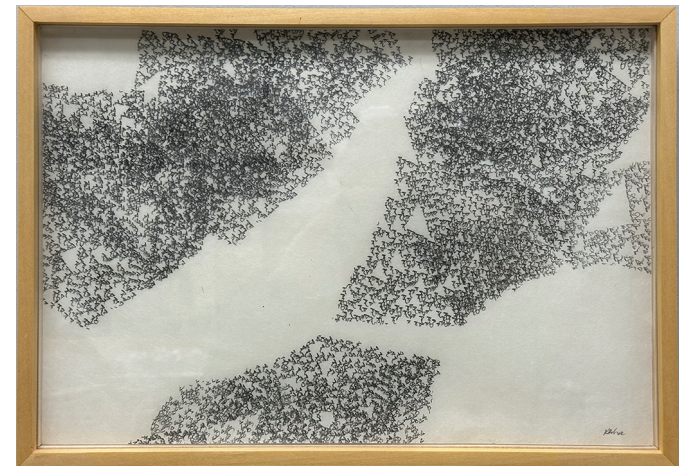


Top: Formation 6 (AND), 2022, Drawing, graphite on sekishu mare paper, 10.25" x 14.5"

Bottom : Formation 7 (AND), 2022, Drawing, graphite on sekishu mare paper, 10.25" x 14.5"



Top: Formation 11 (AND), 2022, Drawing, graphite on sekishu mare paper, 10.25" x 14.5"



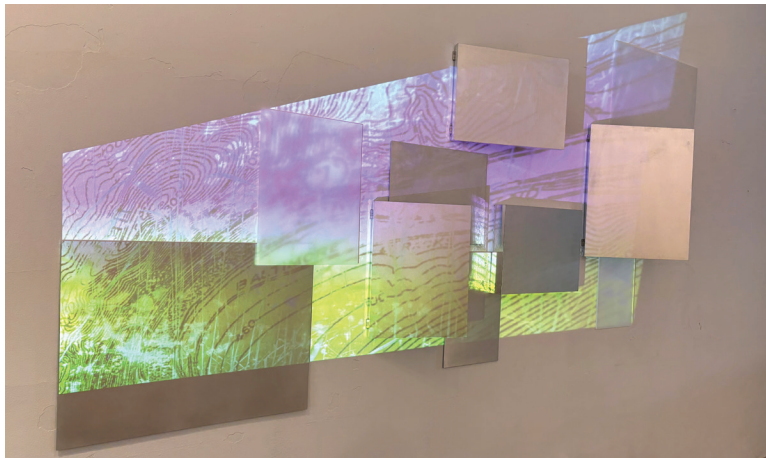
Bottom: Formation 14 (AND), 2022, Drawing, graphite on sekishu mare paper, 10.25" x 14.5"



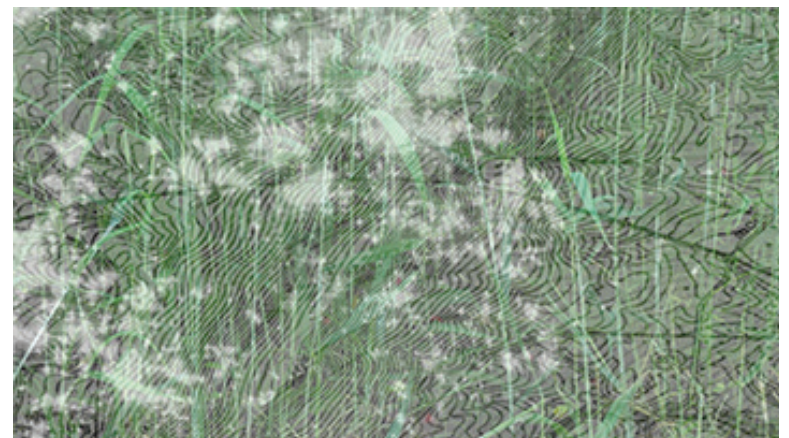
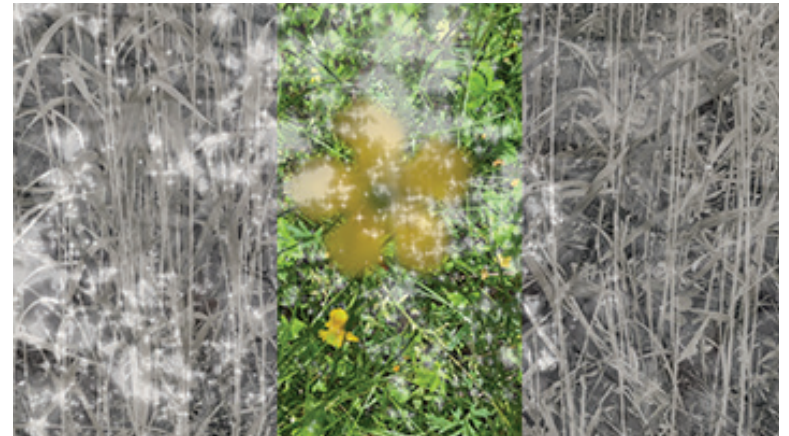
## SUSAN MAIN

Considering the concept of “strata,” I chose to focus on light and water – two elements that influence all spaces and places across time - whose elemental activity is common to all strata. Water: flowing around the dramatic curve of the Potomac River, seeping from Sideling Hill, springing from the ground, flooding, carrying, feeding. Light: embedded in and reflected from land and water, warming, brightening, shifting. Light and water continue to shape human and non-human relationships in and around present-day Hancock. They are building strata right now. How can one attend to the complexity of a strata from the compression of deep time to the fluctuating, shimmer of the present moment?

Composed of clips of light recorded from around Hancock layered with references to rock, moving water, and local history, the video is projected on a variety of surfaces causing imagery to advance and fall away. The evolving strata is specific to Hancock yet in common with all others.



Susan Main, *The shimmer in every layer*, panels, paint, mylar tape, projected video, dimensions variable, 2025



*The shimmer in every layer*, stills from video, 3:05 min, 2025



## CLAIRE McCONAUGHY

The paintings I chose for “Strata” show natural cycles that take place in the woods. The constant rotation of life is played out on the floor of the woods where species grow, live, die, and grow again as they interact with weather, time, the earth, and all the forces that impact life and are existence. I arrive at the images through my personal experience of the woods, imagination, and process of painting.



Goat's Beard Under the Appalachian Coal,  
2023, Oil on Canvas, 10" x 8"



Where the Tree Fell, 2023, Oil on Canvas, 72x36 in



Bottom row left to right:

Wren in the Lillies, 2023, Oil on Canvas, 16" x 12"

Stumble Upon Me Under the Pink Weeds, 2023, Oil on Canvas, 16" x 12"

Moths in The Goat's Beard, 2023, Oil on Canvas, 16" x 12"



## MURAT CEM MENGÜÇ

My work tries to bridge the gap between arts, social sciences, and history. I work under a studio practice I have been calling teleocene. This is a word that I made up in reaction to the term anthropocene which the geologists use to describe our current epoch. Teleocene combines teleology (the intrinsic belief that life develops toward a predetermined end), and -cene, (a geological epochs). I think we live in such times. I think we are the inhabitants of an ecological period that causes intense disbelief and almost religious awe. So, I assume the role of artist/historian, someone who is trying to explain our changing aesthetics of nature and landscape due to the climate change. Like everyone else, transforming nature and landscape of the world, as well as Hancock's, baffles me. pathways (and parameters) is my reaction to this bafflement. It is a collection of visuals that invite the viewers to interact with what is slipping through our hands.



pathways (and parameters), interactive site specific installation, 2025



pathways (and parameters), interactive site specific installation, 2025

## MJ NEUBERGER

Public green spaces that are accessible and that research demonstrates can aid in integrating trauma, are increasingly at risk in systems that commodify land. *What Trees Know* (2025) engages metal casting and installation to suggest the powerful role of the woods as witness. Beech trees, prevalent in Washington County, serve to memorialize what may have been the passing sentiments of besotted, pocket knife-toting lovers, eager to carve their summertime emotions into the trees' smooth silver surface. The urgency of their feelings, expressed over hours spent carving into the bark, persist over decades.

Amidst a sea of couples, like Harold Love Marion and MM + AM, many joined indelibly in arrow-pierced hearts on adjacent bark, the inscription of a lonely soul who carved *Please Love Me*, moved me to elevate these engravings in cast iron as well as bronze. On the ground are eye-like forms, cast in bronze from molds made of the scar tissue created by feet treading over the tree's roots on a well-travelled wooded path. By drawing the viewer's attention to the marks made by humans on the beech, which faces increasing challenges from disease, I suggest shared vulnerability and hint at what limited open spaces hold for local populations who use them as refuge and confessional.



Root Wounds, 2024-2025, Bronze and river sand, Individual bronze casts, 3" x 2" x 6", Installation dimensions variable. From the series *What Trees Know*.



Clockwise from top left:  
MM + AM, 2024-2025, Cast iron, 12" x 10" x 4" From the series *What Trees Know*.



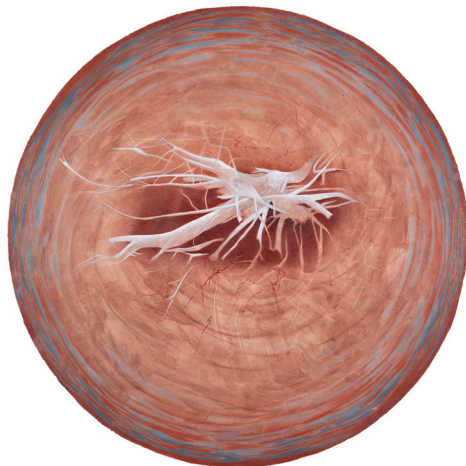
*Please Love Me*, 2024-2025, Cast iron, 15" x 13" x 4" From the series *What Trees Know*.

Harold Love Marion, 2024-2025, Bronze, 11" x 11" x 4" From the series *What Trees Know*.



## ELZBIETA SIKORSKA

There are invisible layers of memory in nature; a tree is a witness to life and events passing by, and soil covers earlier times with their many remains. Time and continuity are essential in understanding layers that accumulate to build and affect the present. For a few years I've been working on multimedia drawings inspired by such ideas: being connected to the world outside, drawing inspiration from the landscape and natural surroundings, and at the same time contemplating hidden layers. In my work I've been trying to find metaphors and ways to express and combine the visible and not visible in nature.



This page above: Tree; 2024; graphite and colored pencils, silver ink on died Arches watercolor and artist-made abaca paper; 64" x 31"

Opposite page top: Spring – Tondos series; 2024; graphite, colored pencil on artist-made abaca paper; 34" x 34"

Opposite page bottom: Swirl - Tondos series; 2024; ink, graphite, colored pencil on Arches watercolor paper; 33" x 33"



## SUE WRBICAN

Sideling Hill runs from Pennsylvania, through Maryland and into West Virginia. The decisive “Cut” through this ancient Appalachian mountain on Interstate 68 is 7 miles west of Hancock, MD. During the long winter of 2025 I wanted to see what this phenomena might look like with snow and fog and drove out from Berkeley Springs, a 20-minute trip. Because of the lowered temperatures after the snowfall the “Cut” was obliterated from view making it impossible to see the various geologic layers of coal, sandstone and shale, accumulations of over 300 million years ago. It brought to my mind ideas of concealment in relationship to the actualities and possibilities of contemporary life passing through its primordial existence. Making note of the slush of tire tracks, the blur of an Amazon truck, and barely balancing on ice I wandered underneath the closed bridge. It seemed appropriate to create a layered, fractured kaleidoscopic ghost as an underbelly looming over the nearly empty rest stop. Off in the distance a young couple lobbed snowballs at one another. I let them be.

In this passage written by David K. Brezinski, a Karst/Field Geologist, it is astonishing to consider the enormity of the earth’s history and that we witness a present which extends from a collision of continents. “The Sideling Hill road cut exposes a section through the axis of a tightly folded syncline. A syncline is a fold in which the strata on either side dip inward toward the axis. Such folding resulted from the enormous compressional stresses developed in the Earth’s crust by the collision of the North American and African continents.”

More at <http://discovery.mgs.md.gov/reports/sideling.pdf>



Amazon Rush, 2025, photograph, 10-1/4” x 13”



Top: Slush Trees, 2025, photograph, 10-1/4” x 13”

Bottom: Cut Bridge’s Kaleidoscope, 2025, photograph, 52” x 42”



STRATA, Installation view, Off 70 Studio, March 29 – May 3, 2025

## ARTIST AND POET BIOGRAPHIES

**DAVID ABRUZZI** About the “poet”. David Abruzzi is not a poet, but rather a registered architect and local historian working to protect and preserve WV’s historical places for the benefit of current and future generations. He was honored by the state of WV in 2025 as a WV History Hero for his work in Paw Paw, WV.

**CHRISSY ALHART** is living her dream life in her adopted home state of West Virginia with her Soul-Horse, Lexie; her two dogs, Sooner and Hazel; and her one husband, David. Born with a Writer’s Soul, Chrissy is excited to be pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in Fiction Writing from West Virginia Wesleyan College, which she will finish in January 2027. In addition to writing poetry, she writes short stories and is in the process of revising a draft of her young adult novel, *Guarded Hearts*.

**MAGGIE GOURLAY** Born in Belgium and raised in the US, Europe, and North Africa, Maggie Gourlay has carried the varied socio-cultural-environmental experiences of her upbringing into her art practice to investigate the crossroads of time and place. In her work, she depicts the ways the human species relates to (and dominates) the natural world—as symbolized by pattern and mapping—overlaying the chaos, unpredictability and fragility of nature. A multimedia artist, Maggie has exhibited widely and her work is held in private and public collections. She has been awarded DC Arts and Humanities Council art purchase grants; residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Pyramid Atlantic Art Center, and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts; as well as the Montgomery College-Smithsonian Institution Faculty Fellowship, and the Towson University Graduate Fellowship. She has taught screen printing, drawing, and 2D design at the college level, after getting her MFA at Towson University. Maggie is represented in Maryland by Adah Rose Gallery. As part of her ongoing commitment to a greener art practice, she grows dye plants such as Indigo, Coreopsis, and Black-eyed Susans in pots on her front stoop and also forages locally for weeds and invasive species to make natural dyes and pigments to use in her work.

**KATIE KEHOE** is an interdisciplinary artist raised in NS, CAN and currently based in Tallahassee, FL. She completed her MFA from the Mount Royal School of Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, MD and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at Florida State University. Katie's work has been presented across Canada and the US, highlights include: The Hirshhorn Museum (Washington, DC), The Contemporary Museum (Baltimore, MD), Center for Maine Contemporary Art (Rockland, ME), RedLine Contemporary (Denver, CO), and solo exhibitions at VisArts (Rockville, MD), Verso Gallery and Type Books Gallery (Toronto, CAN).

**SUSAN MAIN** is a multi-disciplinary artist who uses systematic and chance approaches to explore relationships between attention and landscape. Her work draws simple boundaries in time and space to attend to the elusive shifting conditions of everyday natural phenomena, concentration, and perception. Main is the founder of Cultivate, a platform that brings together an evolving collection of artists driven by investigations of land, place, and the commons. She also works with artist MJ Neuberger through Meeting Ground, a co-instigated, collaborative project that invites artists and non-artists to look down and attend to the ground through simple prompts that encourage co-creation and re-imagination of shared space. She lives and works in the Washington, D.C. metro area, Montana, and Italy.

**CLAIRE McCONAUGHY** lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She has exhibited in galleries including Nick Ryan Gallery, The Drawing Center, 490 Atlantic, The Painting Center, Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Zürcher Gallery, Red Fox Contemporary Art, Garvey-Simon West, and others. She is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship, Millay Arts Residency, Ucross Foundation Residency and Santa Fe Art Institute Artist's Residency. Her work has been reviewed in Art Spiel, artcritical, White Hot Magazine, Hamptons Art Hub and other publications. She served on the editorial board and staff of the art journal, New Observations, for over a decade, has taught at several NYC art colleges and currently is a full professor at Bergen Community College. Originally from Southwestern Pennsylvania, McConaughy has lived and worked in New York for over thirty years. She earned her MFA in painting from Columbia University and her BFA from Carnegie Mellon University.

**MURAT CEM MENGÜÇ** is an artist, writer and historian whose work appeared in solo shows, group exhibitions and numerous publications. He is the founder of Studio Teleocene which is dedicated to the study of environmental art and changing aesthetics of nature. In 2024, Menguc was an inaugural environmental justice fellow at Social Art and Culture and the Aspen Institute, Washington DC. Currently he teaches Religion and Social Justice at Hunter College, City University of New York. Menguc lives and grows food in North Potomac, Maryland, at the intersection of the Potomac River and the Seneca Trail, the ancestral home of the Piscataway Indian confederacy.

**MJ NEUBERGER** is a Filipino American artist, educator, and cultural worker whose sculpture, image-based, and installation works explore the ground as witness and human connection to the natural world. Her work has been exhibited internationally and nationally; at Art Resources Transfer and A Gathering of the Tribes in New York City, and in multiple solo exhibitions. As artist in residence at Creative Alliance, she mounted a large-scale, 2023 solo exhibition which garnered in-depth consideration from independent media.

**ELZBIETA SIKORSKA** was born in Warsaw, Poland, moved to the US about 30 years ago, and settled in the DC area a couple of years later. Over her lifetime, she has worked in various media, exhibited nationally and internationally, and her artworks are in several private and public collections. Her preferred medium for over 20 years has been large-scale multimedia works on paper focusing on nature. More recently she draws on collaged watercolor Arches and translucent abaca paper she made herself.

**SUE WRBICAN** is an interdisciplinary artist who works in photography, installation, sculpture and video. Her large sculptural work Buoyant Force can be seen at the Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art in Reston, Virginia. Previous towers inspired by the paintings of surrealist painter Kay Sage have been temporarily installed at the Seligmann Center in Sugarloaf, New York and the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati. Her work is in various collection such as the Museum of Modern Art Library, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA. Wrbicana has held residencies at the Robert Rauschenberg Residency in Captiva, Florida, Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, California, The Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida and La Baldi in Montegiovì, Italy.



**Off 70** is the working studio for artist Sue Wrban. Since 2024, Off 70 has occasionally featured the work of George Mason University's School of Art graduate students, Stephen Luu, Traci Reynolds, Mackenzie Hoffman, and Liz Kartchner, artists Ceci Cole McInturff, Mary Carothers, and Victoria Crayhon. The name "Off 70" is inspired by the studio's proximity to Interstate 70 in Hancock, Maryland.

Off 70 Studio  
39 West Main St.  
Hancock, MD 21750  
Instagram: @off\_70\_studio

Cultivate  
Website: [cultivateprojects.net](http://cultivateprojects.net)  
Instagram: @cultivateprojects

Cover Image: Sue Wrban, Cut Bridge's Kaleidoscope, 2025, photograph, 52" x 42"

Catalog Design: Claire McConaughy

