

by John Threlfall

Ever wanted to have an intimate, interactive moment with a baby orca? A new student-created sculpture allows viewers to have just that, while also learning something about the threats currently facing our local killer whale population.

"Resonant Disintegration" is an intermedia installation created by University of Victoria undergraduate student Colton Hash. Featuring a life-size representation of three-year-old J53, the youngest surviving female of the endangered southern resident orcas, the eight-foot-long hollow sheet-metal sculpture is suspended by wires to simulate an aquatic environment.

After cutting, shaping and welding it, Hash then submerged the piece in a quiet bay off Esquimalt's Saxe Point to achieve a rust-textured coating that allowed it to be "physically infused with a sense of local place and local water."

But creating the physical sculpture was only half the concept. When installed, a projected visualization of climate data plays across the surfaces of both the whale and the room, while underwater recordings of passing freighters fill the space with a disturbing rumble. "When people enter into the interactive space, their movements are recorded by a motion sensor and, as they approach the whale, the background noise and the speed of the climate data slows down, so they have somewhat of an intimate moment with the sculpture," Hash explains.

Add in a microphone and another set of speakers playing the same sounds from inside the whale, all connected by a real-time computer program, and the whole effect becomes

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