RIVER DRAWINGS, RIVER NOTES

By

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I outline a multimodal research project that investigates my relationship to the lower Fraser River from Yale BC to the mouth and takes up methods of physical exploration, conversation and drawing. My research questions include: As a fifth generation settler, woman, artist and forestry laborer, how might I form a respectful relationship to land and water in a moment of indigenous resurgence during the Anthropocene? And through representation, how might I contribute to the construction of landscape as a cultural medium?

First, I briefly contextualize both my positionality and the Fraser River delta area, and then introduce a methodological framework that incorporates long-term place-based and embodied investigations including walking and swimming, and conversations with indigenous and non-indigenous people who share interests and hold knowledge about the river. These practices have been influenced by an understanding of land and water as having implicit agency and power far beyond their role as consumptive resources; and have been guided by an ethos of respect and reciprocity that draws on ideas imbedded in many indigenous research methodologies.

I then introduce a co-emergent drawing practice that is linked to site-based investigations by the idea of wayfinding, and utilizes site-derived plant and mineral-based pigments. Included is a description of artistic process and formal elements of the work, a discussion about materiality as imbedded in ecological relationships, and a conversation about my choice to use halq'eméylem place-names to both indicate where the pigments were found and to honour the depth of cultural knowledge imbedded in the landscape of the lower Fraser River.

This thesis defines a practice that takes up formal image making while engaging in the politics of place from a critical settler perspective. It describes a deep artistic investment, guided by a cyclical and iterative engagement with land, form, material, language, theory and intuition.

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To the *Stó:lõ* or Fraser River, for letting me in and helping me listen

To Verity Rolfe, Jay White, Lucie Chan and Randy Lee Cutler
For their guidance, excitement and conversation

To Sonny McHalsie for sharing stories with me,
To Laura Wee Lay Laq for sharing the Halq'eméylem language,
To my dad Nick for making me eat dinner
And to my grandparents for their belief and support

"The better I know the New West the more my attention is claimed by the peripheral vision – by the side-of-the-road-shows, by life on the land. I argue now for the nearby, a micro view of land and art, grassroots connections rather than macro pronouncements."

- Lucy Lippard

"Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here': the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice."

- Michel De Certeau

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(1): an important route in a system of roads, rivers, or railroad lines
(2): any of the muscular-walled tubes forming part of the circulation system by which blood is conveyed from the heart to all parts of the body

SOURCE:

A : a generative force **:** cause
B (1) **:** a point of origin or procurement **:** beginning (2) **:** one that initiates **:** author
C : the point of origin of a stream of water

The word *source* signifies both the origin of flowing water and the places where my work begins. Over the last year and a half, I have been walking and swimming along the shores of the Fraser River[1] from Yale B.C. to the mouth and making drawings in response. This has meant learning about elusiveness, witnessing, water, loss, Stó:lõ culture, local land and resource politics and my own subjectivity in relation to these elements. This writing runs alongside an emergent personal ecology[2], and outlines the scope and potentiality of my practice.

This paper is divided into three sections: *Source* is an introduction to my positionality, practice, and research methodology and includes a brief contextualization of the Fraser River delta area; *Current* frames the body of work I have produced and its theoretical, art historical and material dimensions; and *Mouth / Chuchuwálets* is a conclusion that considers the 'sediment' I am taking forward beyond the program. The footnotes contain undercurrents of research that substantively inform the project.

[1] The Source of the Fraser River is nestled in the western Rocky Mountains near Mount Robson and curves in an s-shaped arc towards Vancouver's lower mainland and the Pacific Ocean, 1375 km away.
[2] By this I mean my relationship to both physical surroundings and other living beings.

Introduction: Positionality and Practice

The sense of home I feel in this local region is partially rooted in early memories of living in remote forestry camps in southwestern British Columbia. There, my parents founded a forestry co-operative, organizing and toiling in watersheds that feed into the Fraser River. This intergenerational and geographical history has become my lived experience, as I spent twelve years working in the forest industry in B.C. and Alberta. I witnessed the effects of the resource extraction industrial complex manifested in the landscapes I labored in, and in the cumulative effect of overwork and toxicity on my own body. I also fell in love with these intricate and broken landscapes. My identity is traced with embodied memories of living and working outside; the smell of dry pine needles in the fall, the sound of swollen creeks and rustling birch trees in the spring, the sound of work trucks idling in the morning (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. My mother Verity and I, Western Reforestation cook shack, Squamish Valley, 1989

My relationship to the unceded lands of B.C. is therefore multifaceted, involving personal, economic, health, territorial and ecological implications. It is this history that brings me to my work, propelling me to seek new ways of forming a respectful and inquisitive relationship with this region and the waters that run through it. Theory has become intertwined with practice as a way of navigating the world. And yet the ideas in this thesis

have not been reductively forced on the work, but rather assist in parsing out an ethical framework in relation to place. This framework spans beyond the last two years. In 2013 I attended York University's Environmental Studies Graduate program where I was exposed to radical research methodologies, environmental philosophy and embodiment studies. I chose to come to Emily Carr because I needed to pursue these ideas through a visual, tactile language rooted in studio engagement.

As a fifth generation settler,[3] woman, artist and forestry laborer, how might I form a respectful relationship to land and water in a moment of indigenous resurgence[4] during the Anthropocene[5]? And through representation, how might I contribute to the construction of landscape as a cultural medium? Throughout this hybrid thesis project, I have built an ethic and method for working which includes long-term site-based engagement, embodied practices of walking and swimming, co-emergent community-building and conversation, and a studio drawing practice that utilizes found organic materials. This is all couched within the scope of an expanded drawing practice. Whether I am swimming or using charcoal, I see my work rooted in drawing: drawing through the water with my body; drawing materials and histories out of the sites I experience; drawing to learn, honour, process and remember, and drawing as wayfinding.

Throughout this text sit three psychic spaces: water, site and studio. Being out on the shoreline is the root of research and I see the land and water as collaborators, teachers, and as emblematic of human power relations and conflicting values (Baum, 8). Starting with embodied fieldwork I bring place-based knowledge and collected findings into the studio, where my work is derived from an emergent, intuitive sensibility of materiality and simple form, and investigates the matter under my feet and around my body: water, oil, mud, flora, fauna and mineral (fig. 2). The space between politics and aesthetics is generative, and I aspire to make formally resolved images while grappling with unresolved issues of biodiversity loss, resource extraction and settler roles in decolonization.

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[3] Of European descent

[4] Although many indigenous people and allies are working towards decolonization through struggles that re-negotiate aboriginal rights and title and land sovereignty, it cannot yet be said that we are in a 'decolonial time' because of the dominance of settler-colonial power structures and dominion over land. My understanding of decolonization draws on the text *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang.

[5] Defined as a new geological epoch during which human activities have had an environmental impact on the Earth, which some scientists argue started after the industrial revolution.

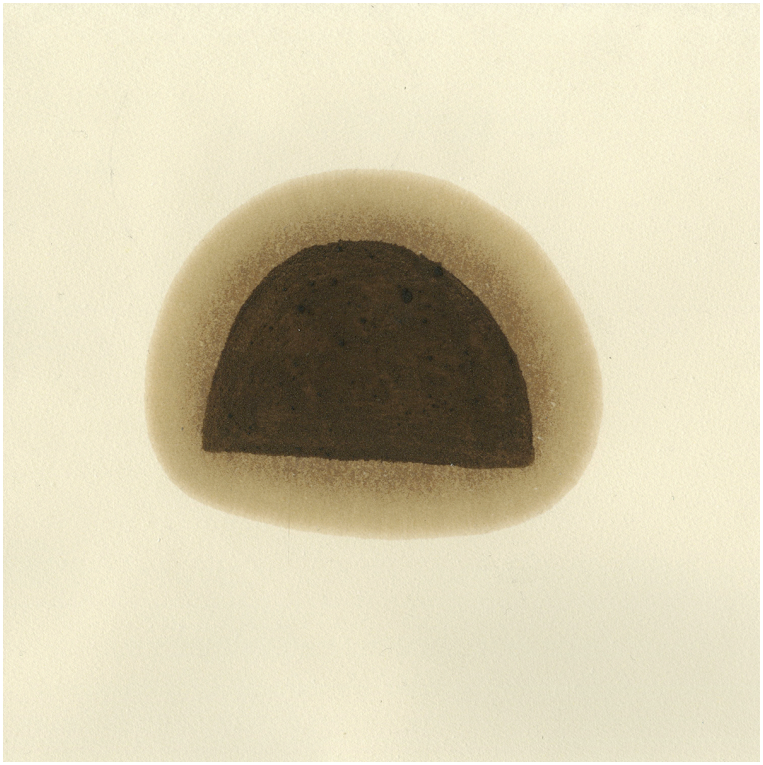

Fig. 2. *Pit* / Found oil sand on paper / 10”x10” / 2015

Site: Stó:lõ and Colonial Context of the Fraser River Delta

I want to acknowledge that although my artistic gestures are relatively discreet, the geographic scale and cultural context of the Fraser River delta area is vast and diverse; the river is at once perceived as an ecologically valuable natural resource, an industrial highway, and the heart of a spiritual cosmology. I am coming to understand the layered spatiotemporal relations that take place on the river, where intricate local narratives of both subordination and self-determination[6] interact with global patterns of commerce[7].

[6] For example, the Stó:lõ Xwexwilmexw Treaty Association are in the middle of a territorial treaty process that will re-grant aboriginal land rights and title and self-government. (McHalsie, oral interview)

[7] The river is used industrially for coal, gravel and lumber transport and processing, commercial and sports fishing, and is the site of various contested resource proposals, including the proposed expansion of the Kinder Morgan crude oil pipeline route, the Delta Port 2 and Fraser Docks coal terminal, the proposed Tilbury Island Wespac/Fortis BC LNG plant, and a jet fuel terminal and pipeline in South Richmond. According to Mathew Evenden in *Fish Versus Power, the* Fraser River is also the most productive salmon run in the world, although development threatens this food security (16).

The Fraser River delta area is unceded territory of the Stó:lō and Musqueam people, who since time immemorial, have been its hereditary caretakers. I walk and swim on the shores of the river with the understanding that my presence is a privilege, not a right. I acknowledge that in choosing to work in relation to this area, I am engaging with a series of histories and associations: with the river as a culturally significant, spiritual place to the Stó:lō and Musqueam people[8]; with local and global histories of conquest through the imposition of hydraulic order over rivers[9]; and with representation of land as an ideological tool in the process of colonization. Direct and representational elements of the project of imperialism have effected the Fraser River delta area and the Stó:lō and Musqueam people in countless ways: systemic stealing of aboriginal rights and title through reserve creation, practices of renaming land, exploitation of natural resources, destruction of sacred and culturally significant sites[10], and institutional systems of display that render indigenous cultures only visible through the narrative of obsolescence, to name a few. Although I do not claim to attempt an undoing of any of these histories, I aim to avoid reifying these power relations through representation, practice or otherwise.

Approach to Site: Orienting to a Respectful Site-Based Practice Through Methodology

I have been influenced by indigenous research methods and ways of knowing and articulating relationships to land and water. Rather than an act of appropriation, this approach responds to my desire to find an academic language that articulates a more multidimensional relationship to land than what I have found in the Western canon. Relational accountability, an important element in many indigenous research methodologies, privileges the importance of creating healthy and mutually beneficial research relationships with all human and non-human participants and collaborators[11], including the land[12].

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[8] The Stó:lō People (which, by some, is contested as a cultural or ethnographic construction) make up a diversity of collective identities and affiliations, with histories of both conflict and friendship, sharing a multitude of overlapping dialects (Carlson, 17).

[9] The imposition of hydrological order over rivers is taken up throughout Simon Schama's "Streams of Consciousness" section, in *Landscape and Memory.*

[10] Including but by no means limited to: the draining of *Semá:th*, or Sumas Lake in 1928, the destruction of the historic town site and burial site in Musqueam known as *ćəsnaʔəm*, and the destruction of the 9000 year old archeological sites at Glenrose Cannery and St. Mungo due to the construction of the South Fraser Perimeter Road in Surrey.

[11] I will address human relationship building later in this document.

Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony* discusses pedagogy of place, articulating that the land can be the epistemic base and the active agent in research axiologies. The environment *is* the knowledge, in other words, and we are accountable for upholding our relationship with it and being sensitive to it. In Wilson's account, "the distance or relationship between ourselves and the environment is sacred, and so you do ceremonies to bridge that space or distance" (87). My practices of swimming and walking seek to engage with that distance in a generative way that lays the foundation for a relationship with land, and leaves room for the experience of the sacred. This relationship engenders a sense of accountability to the river: to engage in thoughtful, nuanced art making, to leave no damaging trace, to sustain a long term investigation, and to witness and humble myself to its waters and to the stories I learn through research. The river has had an ineffable affect on my work and being; I have listened to it and it has talked back, influencing my movement, material choices, and approach to encounter with it.[13]

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[12] This sense of accountability is articulated throughout Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* and in Jay T. Johnson and Soren C. Larsen's *A Deeper Sense of Place.*

[13] The idea that the land talks back, or keeps track of you, is resonant and was initially introduced to me through Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache,* where an apache elder describes, "The land is always stalking people" (38).

(1): v. cause the water or other liquid in (something) to run out, leaving it empty, dry, or drier (2): v. deprive of strength or vitality (3): a thing that uses up a particular resource

CURRENT:

A: the swiftest part of a stream or river
B: flow marked by force or strength
C: a tendency or course of events that is usually the result of interplay of forces
D: happening or existing now: belonging to or existing in the present time
E: used as a medium of exchange

This section contextualizes the thesis exhibition, placing it in relationship to past work, theorists and artists. Through the use of the word *current,* I invoke water and movement but also suggest that respectful artistic engagement with land, while always important, is especially the case now.

River Catalogue: Drawing as Walking as Wayfinding

In January 2015, I began walking along the river and making images in response, creating a gridded series of drawings called *River Catalogue* (fig. 3). This was a time of searching, orienting and gathering. The images I made were simple and their creation enacted a form of *wayfinding,* defined here as a process that humans and animals use to orient themselves in real or psychic space and navigate from place to place. This wayfinding was taking place on the river and in the studio.

Fig. 3. *River Catalogue* / River water, found charcoal, gouache and found oil sand on paper / 84" x 60" / 2015

In *Line: A Brief History,* Social Anthropologist Tim Ingold links drawing and physical movement together through a conception of the line, as a mode of marking gesture, presence and engagement, whether an additive mark on paper or a subtractive trace made by movement through the world. In his text *Being Alive,* Ingold writes, "The practice of drawing has little or nothing to do with the projection of images and everything to do with wayfaring – with breaking a path through a terrain and leaving a trace, at once in the imagination and on the ground, in a matter very similar to what happens as one walks along in a world of earth and sky" (179). In this way, Ingold frees the representation of landscape from the scopic regime of disinterested observation, and reasserts the etymological root of the word

'scape', meaning 'to shape'[14] (126). This relationship between drawing and walking through the world assists in linking my embodied work as cultural practice with the idea of landscape as a cultural medium. Through *River Catalogue*, I explored representations of landscape that exposed a reflexive and ongoing engagement with place and went beyond familiar typologies like the sublime, picturesque, romantic, pastoral and exotic. The production of *River Catalogue* was a process of both orienting and recall. As I came to know the river through physical exploration, I created a taxonomy of symbolic and mimetic forms, while following an impulse to collect and organize. This work relied on a gridded display structure. I have since moved away from the grid because of its rigidity: its use in the social sciences as a taxonomic tool; its reference the post-industrial landscapes that emblemize Western progress; and it's capacity to neutralize or inoculate potentially powerful imagery.

Fig. 4. Studio documentation of process material / Banff Centre / 2015

[14] In *Landscape and Power,* theorist W.T.J. Mitchell further demonstrates the possibilities for conceiving of landscape as a verb: "What we have done and are doing to our environment, what the environment in turn does to us, how we naturalize what we do to each other, and how these 'doings' are enacted in the medium of representation" (2).

However, during this time the grid was helpful as I collected both human-produced and natural objects, organic materials, photographs, notes, sketches and words[15], which became the basis for work (fig. 4).

At the same time, I began using natural site derived substances in the drawings, evoking a direct connection between site and studio (fig. 5). These pigmentation and material processes have continued to influence my working methods.

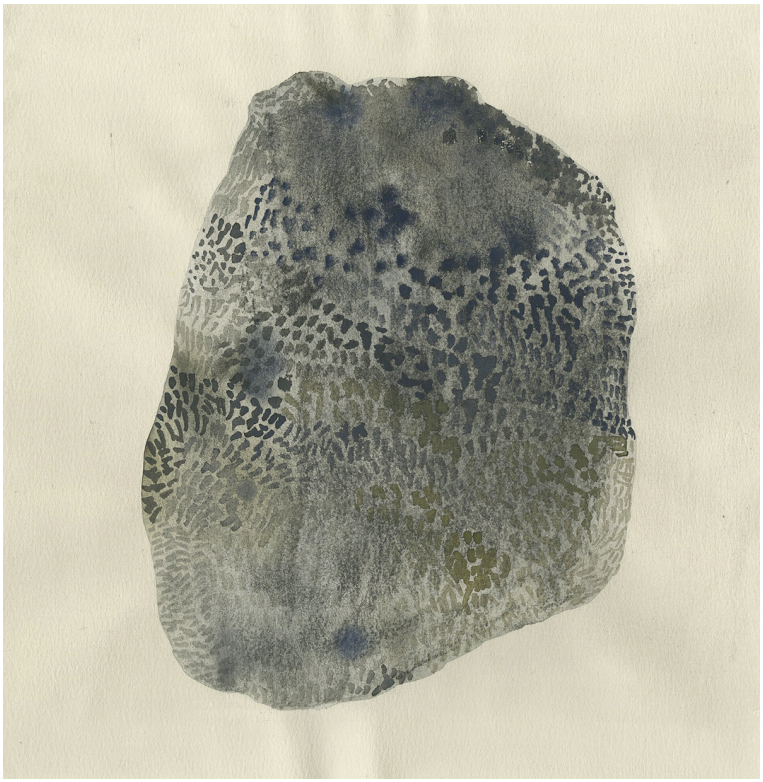

Fig. 5. *Pool* / From River Catalogue / 10"x10" / River water and gouache on paper / 2015

***River Drawings*: Understanding Water Through Embodied Experience**

River Drawings is a 20-minute video documentation of a durational practice of swimming in the Fraser River, in both urban-industrial and rural areas close to the mouth (fig. 6). This long-term embodied exploration is fundamentally a form of drawing and knowledge-production;

[15] Such as bramble, cloud, coal, dam, dust, gravel, oil, pit, plume, pond, metal, tap, water, wind, and wood

my body becomes a conductor for understanding the experience of entering a habitat that is not my own, the force of the water and its ever-shifting currents, and the effect of resource industries on the river's ecology. This work takes me to interstitial spaces where animals live precariously between the industrial activity of a resource economy and a toxic shoreline. The rope that I am using as an anchor has been collected and knotted together as I walk along the shoreline. It is at once a physical and psychological safety measure, a drawing implement, and an accumulation of knotted histories recording my repetitive gesture of swimming. Through this work, I learn to read the sounds that can be heard and felt under the surface of the water, the limits of my body as substrate, and the feeling of stepping barefoot into stinky shoreline. This muck is a coalescence of slick silt deposits, toxic particles, engine oil, and decomposing organics: a sedimentary of the Anthropocene in the making.

Fig. 6. *River Drawings* / Video Still / 20 minute looped video / 2015

This practice came as a response to many months of walking along the shoreline of the Fraser River delta and making drawings in response. I was finding the process to be belabored and inconclusive; I was often thwarted by one thing or another. Swimming allowed for a more direct encounter with the river itself. The practice of trying to 'know' a vast stretch of water through experience is at times absurd and at times powerful. In the act of swimming attached to a rope, there is both a silliness and a pointlessness that I interface with every time I walk and fumble through the mucky, murky water and out to the depth where the current begins to pull at my body. I feel silly again at the moment when I get to the end of the rope and start

pulling myself back, having accomplished nothing tangible except for reaching an arbitrary end.[16] The swimming practice also allows for an experience of awe. The river is frighteningly large and surges with fast kinetic energy; the water is cold, my rope is tenuous. It is my aim that the swimming work communicates both of these perspectives, as well as opening a conversation about vulnerability and power in relation to the body, water and industry.

An understanding of place builds on the generative legacies of thinkers like Henri Lefebvre who articulates a relationship between space and power, where space is not simply a container but is produced by human activity and shaped by the power relations therein, and Doreen Massey who brings forth an interpretation of place through identity politics and gender studies. However, my practice is most directly informed by what Michel De Certeau calls *narrative delinquencies* that, through direct inscription of the body on order (or land), work to disrupt or interrogate established systems of spatial and material power upheld by dominant narratives. Here swimming is an active form of spatial research, a strategy for locating myself within the landscape and water. I am immersed in the grittiness of the shoreline, in contrast to the scopic experience of an industrial environment translated through a panorama of infrastructure, technology and rapid movement, "whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (Certeau, 233). This can be related to the experiential difference between speeding over the Port Mann Bridge in a car, removed, verses bushwhacking through muddy and weed-choked Canadian Pacific Railway property in order to get to a swimming site. I am a female body in a male dominated industrial landscape[17], a vulnerable body surrounded by elemental and human-produced forces, an unusually placed body seeking out a narrative that moves in opposition to normalcy, and a curious body, moving through a foreign and complex habitat while witnessing the site and listening to its story (fig. 7).

[16] Another element of this work that I am engaged with is that of relentlessness and the practice of making art. It seems that I have come to a point where I need to regularly plunge myself into dirty, cold water in order to make drawings.

[17] While swimming and walking on Mitchell Island, an industrial area used for the processing of concrete and lumber in South Richmond, I did not see another woman all day. This is often the case during my excursions into industrialized areas of the river, both on and off shore.

Fig. 7. *River Drawings* / Video Still / 20 minute looped video / 2015

The production of *River Drawings* has necessitated a coming-to-know of water as both an elemental force and a cultural metaphor. Feminist, anti-colonial thinker Astrida Neimanis asks:

> How might paying attention to water – really paying attention to it, its movements and relations, its vulnerabilities and gifts, what it does and how it organizes itself and other bodies – open up a different sort of imaginative space, perhaps opening up some of the foundational concepts and beliefs in dominant Western systems of thought that I have inherited? (68).

My embodied experience in the Fraser River has led to a nuanced reconsideration of the dominant belief that water is simply a resource. This informs water's invisibility, unknowability, and 'feminine' position in western binary oppositions: mother, fluid conductor, gestator, communicator, and memory-keeper. Neimanis claims these conceptions lead, in part, to its cultural invisibility and undervaluing. The Fraser River snakes invisibly through the city, although it is the fundamental reason why human settlement exists here. In *What is Water?: A History of Modern Abstraction,* Jamie Linton posits that our modern perception of water is limited, and "overcoming the hegemony of modern water involves changes in how we think about water, as well as how we represent, manage, distribute, value and use it, for all of these are closely related" (13). By making the river (and myself) visible, I hope to articulate water as something more than solely a consumable resource.

Thinking about the artistic legacy that *River Drawings* is inspired by, I must acknowledge but move beyond the historical tradition of spatial practices burdened by modernism such as the work of Richard Long. Instead, I am interested in the role and resurgence of spatial practice in contemporary art, where the ubiquity of these practices emblemizes an appeal for geopolitical and territorial engagement, a desire to come to know localities and histories through embodied practice.[18] For the purposes of this paper I will focus the discussion through Anishinaabe-Canadian performance artist Rebecca Belmore's *Fountain.*

Fountain, a video piece that was projected onto a screen made of falling water at the Venice Biennale in 2005, took place on Iona Beach on sacred Musqueam land, at the mouth of the north channel of the Fraser River, which is the convergence of logging industry, a sewage treatment plant, and the international airport. Belmore is seen struggling in the cold water just off shore with a bucket. She then walks towards the camera and heaves the contents of the bucket directly at the lens. At this moment, the liquid in the bucket is revealed to be blood, and Belmore's face is seen through a curtain of red liquid as the video piece ends (fig. 8).

The Figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions.

Fig. 8. Rebecca Belmore / *Fountain* / video still / 2005

Foundationally, there is overlap between the geographical and material specificities of our work but the reading of their discrete components and implications are very different: an indigenous female body and a white female body; a struggling, aggressive act and a looping act without an obvious goal. At the heart of both projects is a desire to 'know' and interact

[18] This is elucidated through the work of artists like Klara Hobza (*Diving Through Europe 2010-2040)* and Gina Badger (*Mongrels 2011)*.

with water as an element with agency and force. Here, I want to acknowledge that lively materialism has had a place in indigenous thought long before Object Oriented Ontology became a fashionable academic theme, with its goals to undermine an anthropocentric post-Enlightenment intellectual tradition rooted in human primacy (Horton, 17). In *Beyond the Mirror: Indigenous Ecologies and 'New Materialisms' in Contemporary Art*, Jessica Horton and Catherine Berlo outline the myriad ways in which a restoration of material thought might assist in moving us towards environmental justice:

> The ecological promise of these 'new materialisms' is to invite a dialogue among a wider host of agents, imagining a profoundly relational world in which humans interact with, rather than act upon, others. Indeed, we maintain that grasping multiple forms of liveliness has implications for the questions of global environmental justice in raising the possibility of an ethics that binds not only the affluent and the poor, colonizer and colonized, but all the material entities upon which all our livelihoods depend (Horton, 18).

Horton and Berlo assert that Belmore's *Fountain* grants water the agency to push back, reminding people of their precarious position in a relational world, and indeed confronting them directly with colonial violence and the dire environmental realities we face. Although the repetitive gesture of *River Drawings* does not force water to be read so directly as a material agent, water becomes a main character as I repetitively enact an effort to meet it.

Belmore's work is often produced through a repetitive gesture that points, often explicitly, to loss: loss of land, ecological sustainability, self-determination, identity and language through processes of systemic dismantling. This loss is often articulated very directly in her work. Similarly, longing or loss echoes through my practice, though expressed in a gentler way and experienced on a very different scale: a failure in representation, a struggle to remember and articulate through process, the abjectness of industry, the remains or afterimage of exploitive action, and perhaps an ineffable loss that comes from a cultural disconnection and attempt to reconnect with land. It is my hope that both *River Drawings* and *River Notes* contribute to a discourse around water, loss and the politics of place.

River Notes: Reflections on Drawing as a Methodology

Drawing with the Land to Learn and Honour

River Notes, the drawing series that made up the final thesis exhibition, was produced with gouache, gold, and found coal, tar sand,[19] Fraser River water, silt, charcoal, and natural plant and berry pigments. Each drawing is centered and contained within the edges of the page in a traditional figure to ground relationship, which adds to the symbolic properties of the organic and elemental forms. The series is informed by my earlier drawing methodology where the logic of making was guided by a cyclical process of wayfinding, both on the land and in the studio. What emerged through this new series, however, was a methodology that included more implicit knowledge-production and honouring of specific places, stories and materials. By this I mean that the creation and research for a drawing took me through a multi dimensional learning process. The best way to describe this is to tell stories about specific drawings.

Salal / Heart on the Chest

Salal / Heart on the Chest (fig. 9) began when I noticed an abundance of salal along the river, and the simple beauty of its leaf shape. In June 2015 on a hot morning, right at the beginning of the coastal salal berry season, I walked along *Sts'a'i:les* River, a tributary that flows into the Fraser and is a very productive salmon spawning area. There I picked berries off dusty windblown bushes, and later made jam and boiled some berries down to make dye. The smell was dark, bitter and syrupy. If you smell the finished drawing now, you still get traces of this musk.

As the salal dye drawing unfolded through trial and error, a reflexive process developed that connected experiencing the plant along the edge of the *Sts'a'i:les* River, learning through drawing with its pigment, and honoring its material origin through naming. In drawing with a raw material, I learn about its sensual properties, its growing season, uses, and the sites

[19] I initially collected the naturally derived tar sand on the banks of the Athabasca River, on another walking project through the tar sands area in summer 2014. The use of tar sand fills a gap in our cultural imaginaries; often invisible or demonized, oil becomes abstracted by layers of opposing ideological rhetoric. Our slippery and un-codified relationship to it, as both substance and cultural operator is paralleled by the abstraction we are faced with when attempting to understand the contested geographies between extraction and shipment or departure and destination, of which there are several on the Fraser River.

where it grows.[20] I find it generative to think of natural materials as dynamic and relational, in constant flux between coagulation, dispersal and entropy. As a maker engaging with substances and their relationships to one another, I am caught in the currents of the life-world. In *Materials Against Materiality* Tim Ingold writes:

> The properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate (13).

In the case of *Salal / Heart on the Chest*, material and processual engagement went beyond paper and salal berry dye. In order for dye to take to cellulose or plant-based fibre, I learned that one must apply tannin, which "animalizes" the cellulose fibre, allowing it to act more like a protein or animal-based fibre, which bonds more easily to the plant compounds. Through a slow heating and layering process, I then added a mordant, which causes the dye to "bite" the paper, chemically binding the two materials. Working back into the completed dye-drawing with delicate pencil crayon marks, I experienced this process as one of paying attention and giving time to the drawing as a form of honouring its form, the place it came from, and it's material elements.

Around this time, I went out to visit Stó:lõ cultural advisor and archivist Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie, who was kind and generous enough to take me out on the land and share stories about Stó:lõ transformer mythology and the meaning behind some Halq'eméylem place-names. This experience was very meaningful. Several of my drawings reference specific places and times along the river. To honour the depth of history and identity formation that is embedded in these places, I engaged in dialogue about using Halq'eméylem place-names to inform the *River Notes* titles. *Salal / Heart on the Chest* refers to the place-name for the *Sts'a'i:les* River area where the berries originated, which means *heart on the chest, beating heart, or laying on the chest.* This name refers to a large rock in the river that creates rhythmic splashes at the tempo of a heartbeat. Although the drawing was almost complete when I

[20] This knowledge is gathered through direct experience and through reading Nancy Turner's *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America,* and *Plants of Coastal British Columbia*, by Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon.

learned this, there is a formal connection between *Salal / Heart on the Chest* and a heart.

Fig. 9 *Salal / Heart on the Chest* / Tannin, mordant, pencil crayon and salal berry dye
(Collected at *Sts'a'i:les*, *heart on the chest, beating heart, laying on the chest), on paper / 35" x 48" / 2016

Skwiyó / Big Eddy, Stay Away

Skwiyó / Big Eddy, Stay Away (fig. 11) was produced with river water, silt and gouache. I collected the water using a battered tin bucket I found on the shoreline. It was a cold morning in a tight canyon just south of Yale. The water level was high and churning with froth and wood debris from upstream. I was on a mission to find the place where the historic slide of 1914, created by accident during the building of the Canadian Northern Railway lin to the coast, had impeded the spawning and wiped out thousands of Sockeye salmon. I was misguided about the location, and it wasn't until I met Sonny McHalsie that I learned the slide was much further up the river, and that I had been across from *Skwiyó*, meaning *big eddy, stay away*. The powerful circular counter flow movement of eddies had previously fascinated me.

When I learned about this place-name, I decided to do an eddy drawing using the water from that day, and using silt collected at *Chuchuwálets,* meaning *the Fraser River (way out at the end), the mouth of the Stó:lõ*. The drawing was created by rolling water and silt continuously around the paper. This gesture mimicked the movement of an eddy, and slowly formed an edge or membrane. I am invested in how this image reads as both micro and macro: a cell and an eddy simultaneously.

Fig. 11 *Skwiyó / Big Eddy, Stay Away* / Gouache, charcoal and found silt (collected at *Chuchuwálets* * Fraser River, way out at the end, mouth of the Stó:lõ*)*, and river water (collected near *Skwiyó** Big eddy, stay away) on paper / 35" x 48" / 2016

Although these multi modal forms of drawing-as-knowledge-production are not wholly legible in the final exhibition of the work, it is my hope that the material engagement and the titling that references it offers a way of accessing the drawings that links them explicitly to site.

Salal berry dye, collected at Sts'a'i:les
Heart on the chest, beating heart, laying on the chest

Wild blueberry dye, collected on Mount Chiyo:m or Lhílheqey
Always wild strawberries

Charcoal, collected in Semá:th
Thick grass, level place lake, lost lake

Silt, collected at Chuchuwálets
Fraser River (way out at the end), mouth of the Stó:lõ

Oregon grape root dye, collected at Seq'á:m
Split, divide

Processed coal, collected at the Fraser Surrey Coal Docks

Water, qó, collected at Sq'oyi:m near Skwiyó,
Big eddy, stay away

Water, qó, collected near the Stawberry Island eddy Kwetl'twotl'thetows
Water jumping

Oil sand, collected on the Athabasca River

Goldenrod dye, collected near Qwequatchem
Echo, holler and hear your voice, answers you

On Slowness and Vulnerability

During the production of *River Notes*, I reached out to several people and a series of conversations and connections developed. These connections were often slow to form, could not be pushed faster than was natural, and required some vulnerability to engage in dialogue across disciplines and cultures. In addition to several sturgeon scientists, advocates and farmers, I have been in contact with Environment Canada's freshwater taxonomist Adam Martens, who offered microscopic images of micro-invertebrates living in the water of the Fraser. These, and accompanying conversations, have influenced my work and fed an interest in microscopic verses macroscopic representations of land and water (fig. 11).

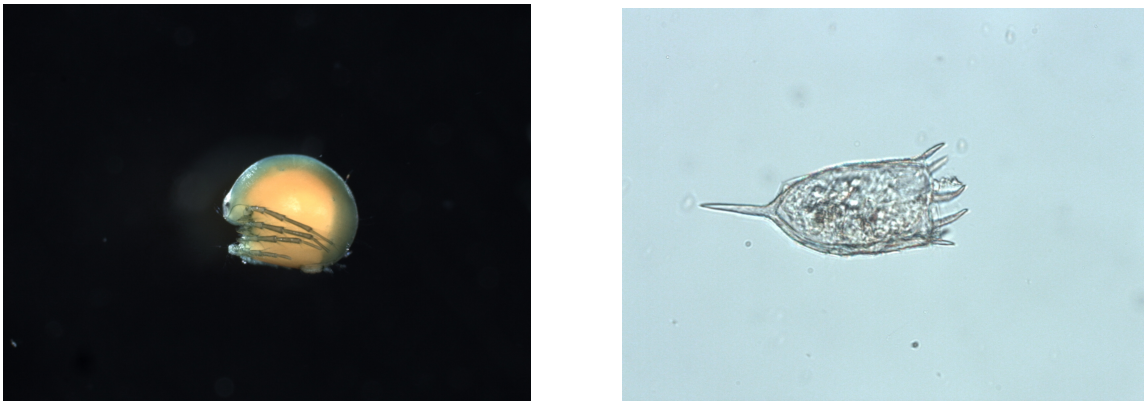

Fig. 11. Left: magnified image of the mite Frontipoda, Right: magnified image of a rotifer Keratella Coelastrium[21]

I have also received ongoing guidance from Brenda Crabtree, Stó:lõ and Nlaka'pamux artist and Emily Carr educator, about local natural dying techniques; and Laura Wee Lay Laq, Stó:lõ ceramicist and Halq'eméylem language instructor, about place-names and word pronunciations; as well as Stó:lõ cultural advisor Sonny McHalsie. These relationships have been very significant for me, emerging slowly as my work clarified. Sonny McHalsie and Laura Wee Lay Laq have assisted me in finding the appropriate and correct place-names for several sites. Sonny referred to this process as "oral footnoting": by citing who passed these names along, there is continuity in a lineage of knowledge. I also want to acknowledge the conflict I feel about using these names as a settler and in an institutional context[22]. Doubt arises about the appropriateness of using Halq'eméylem place names, and alternatively, the

[21] Adam Martens shared this information with me via email.

[22] There are other non-aboriginal artists who have negotiated this difficult territory, for example: Christos Dekeakos's 1990's Vancouver-based *Sites and Place Names* photography project, and David Campion and Sarah Shield's 2008 photography project titled *Memory In the Valley*, which also engages with traditional Stó:lõ territory, power relations and Halq'eméylem place-names.

reification of using Western place names if I don't. This is complex and unresolved, which is reflected in the titling of the works.

The social element of my work has taken up vulnerability: in terms of unsettling my own settler identity through learning and bringing this into an institutional context; being comfortable engaging with complex and unresolved issues; reaching out across disciplines; and never expecting any particular outcome or timeframe. Vulnerability is also present in the drawings themselves, which often simultaneously signify corporeality and biology. Whether they read as body parts or botanical shapes, in their scale and simplicity, these works are earnest and lay bare. I am invested in the potential for affect that this bareness might generate.

On Scale and Temporality

Accompanying four large drawings (two of which are pictured above) were a series of small-scale drawings, exhibited unframed in a salon-style installation. Within this series, several forms are inchoate and ambiguous in scale, oscillating between small material minutia and large segments of land, engaging in the creation of both microcosms and macrocosms simultaneously. A tension between taxonomy and topography then emerges; multiple readings draw on botany, geology, territory, and abstract form (fig. 13). My interest in scale and abstraction in relation to landscape is derived from embodied memories of moving quickly through land while working, where one's perspective is in constant flux between a vast and intimate view of the land, a negotiation between obscurity and the pictorial. Through disruption of a consistent scale, I seek to destabilize a fixed perspective, which has classically indicated claiming ownership over territory whether through landscape painting or mapping practices (Willems-Braun, 7). The salon-style installation of this series allowed the forms more agency than they would have had in a grid, granting them the opportunity to assert themselves as individual drawings rather than a collection, to be compared to one another.

Fig. 12 *River Notes /* Thesis Exhibition Installation Shot/ Emily Carr Concourse Gallery/2016

While disrupting a consistent physical scale, this series also suggests an inconsistent temporality. Some drawings relate to specific historical events in the post-contact era along the Fraser River, while others convey a sense of deep time (fig. 13). Perhaps more legible are the works that reference geologic time and weather pattern: precipitation, deposit, debris, sediment and strata (left drawing). The drawing on the right references the history of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, or "The New El Dorado" and is constructed using gold leaf to suggest fragments of a gold rush era map. The Halq'eméylem word for non-aboriginal people without land title is *Xwelítem*, translating as "hungry ones" or "starving ones". The root of this word can be traced back to the gold rush, when many settlers and miners relied heavily on the assistance of Stó:lõ people for their basic sustenance and survival. *Xwelítem* is still used in reference to settlers today (Carlson, 2). It is drawings like these that lose their contextual legibility when exhibited in a series. Letting go of their readability was part of the exhibition process.

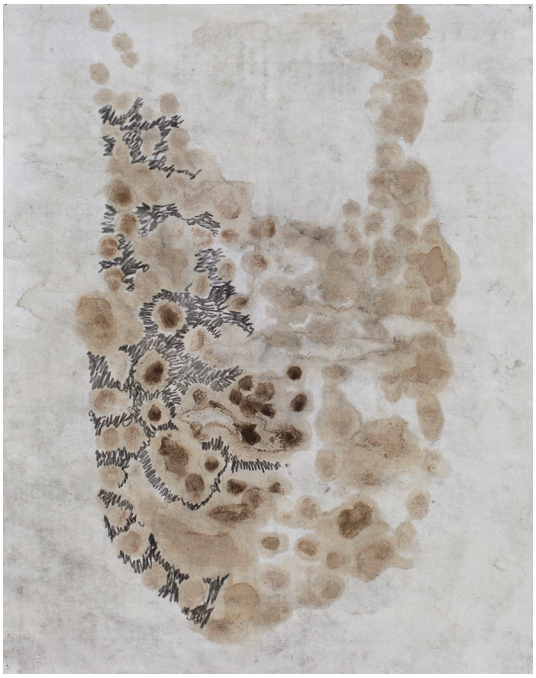


Fig. 13 Left: *Deposit* / Oil sand, marine engine oil and pencil on paper / 18" x 23" / 2016
Right: *Xwelítem / Hungry Ones* / Gold leaf on paper / 18" x 23" / 2016

Between Inner and Outer Worlds

Many of the forms used in these drawings are iterative and have been generated through a process of material engagement and intuitive knowledge-production in the studio. This can be related, once more, to *wayfinding*. A formal and material thread leads me forward, each drawing spilling into the next. A path is forged through the error of a failed drawing, the afterimage of an unresolved form, leftover goldenrod dye and spilled engine oil. In *Technologies of Intuition* Jennifer Fisher writes, "The term 'intuition', while commonly used by artists, has been marginalized within art theory and criticism. Whether sensed as a gut feeling or a flash of insight, intuition is a central process of 'coming to know' in aesthetic practice and experience"(11). Fisher explains that etymologically, intuition is rooted in the idea of guide or guardian, and of 'looking within'. She articulates that intuition presents a reflexive and innate form of knowing – an inner guidance that includes implicit insight. My making process is sometimes an exorcism of forms that linger in mind or body, gathered on the Fraser River or generated internally. Robert Smithson, in *A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects (1968),* deftly articulates integration between land and intuitive cognition:

> One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into

> stones of unknowing … This movement seems motionless, yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries … The entire body is pulled into the cerebral sediment, where particles and fragments make themselves known as solid consciousness (100).

This merging of inner and outer worlds is very useful, in framing a practice deeply and simultaneously invested in both.

For his engagement with both interiority and exteriority, I resonate with the art practice of painter, drawer and printmaker Terry Winters. Formally, Winters is known for his consistent use of simple figure-ground relationships, his use and collection of natural pigments, and the organic and implicitly biologic qualities of his work. This calls up a visceral connection with microscopic and cellular structures, as well as elemental, indefinable forces (fig. 14).

The figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions.

Fig. 14. Terry Winters / *Untitled* / Oil on Canvas / 78" x 98" / 1984

Curator Lisa Philips writes, "These were primal elements of the natural world – images of things on the threshold of being, on the border between material and immaterial, between articulated form and the inchoate" (17). I identify with how Winter's drawings communicate a tension between a field research aesthetic and visceral engagement, where scientific objectivity and emotionality or obscurity collide. It is this edge between objective record and the inchoate, or uncanny that I am interested in occupying with more intention in my future work.

(1): the clear liquid that has no colour, taste, or smell, that falls from the clouds as rain, that forms streams, lakes, seas and rivers and is the basis of the fluids of living organisms (2): (of the eyes) become full of moisture with tears

Mouth / Chuchuwálets:

A: The place where a stream enters a larger body of water
B: Fraser River (way out at the end), mouth of the Fraser River
C: Where the *Stó:lō* meets the *kw'ótl'kwa,* meaning salt water

This section offers a conclusion to this thesis project, and outlines the nature of the ideas I will be taking forward beyond the scope of the program. I conceive of the mouth of a river as a beginning of something new, an opportunity for interacting with a larger community, rather than an abrupt end.

Conclusion: Towards a Recuperative Ecology

This thesis project has led me to investigations and places I could not have predicted, and above all, has been a process of learning and regenerating. There have been times of struggle as I re-asserted a drawing practice and fumbled through seemingly muddy water. How to conceive and begin forming a respectful relationship with land? How to make representations out of a visceral engagement with the material of the river? How to negotiate the politics of place from a critical, settler perspective? This work has necessitated acceptance and patience: an acceptance of the elusive nature of the river and of the questions I am asking; an understanding of the temporal and physical scale that I am engaging with; and an acceptance of the unpredictability of raw materials and processes of trial and error in the studio.

Through this work, a recuperative ecology is developing. By this I mean: through forming a relationship with the river, through reaching out to people who share interests and hold knowledge, and through rebuilding a studio drawing practice, restoration has taken place. At the heart of this thesis work is the formation of an ethos, a commitment to a life guided by art and lead with respect for other beings. This is felt in the core of the body, and is the result of a deep inquiry into my relationship with land and with the living fabric of the planet.

Onward: Drawing the Shoreline, Occupying the Edge

Through this two-year engagement with the Fraser River, I have come to think about the edge, about the shoreline. The edge: as in marginality, as in hybrid, as in doomsday. The space between two interacting materials; land and water, oil and silt, gouache and paper. The shoreline: a charged line that traces the global interstice between land and water, a fecund gestator of biodiversity, a wasteland. Much produced leaves via the shoreline, much washes back up as unwanted waste. The shoreline is the substrate of global warming, the vibrating indicator of change that we are all watching closely.

As a metaphorical site to explore form, the shoreline is very rich. During the making of *River Notes,* something began to happen that I had not predicted. Certain drawings began to take on energy between playful and uncanny, innocuous and dangerous. In my future drawing

work, it is this edge that I would like to engage with. I will propose hybrid forms, between biology and geology, flora and fauna, toxic particulate and bacteria, waste and treasure. Through this work I will ask: What kind of speculative ecologies might occur on the shoreline as a result of tenacious forms of adaptability and survival? While using a visual language of botanical or marine biological taxonomy, how might I allow drawings more agency to push back, to express danger, to occupy the edge?

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