

# Rituals of Loss: Finding Kinship with the Land and the Other Than Human

Ochre • Oil • Sap • Water • Blood • Cloth • Ice  
Ökra • Olía • Safi • Vatn • Blóð • Dúkur • Ís

By

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## Abstract

Caitlin ffrench's research/praxis thesis maps the parallels between the anthropogenic world and the ongoing impacts of multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and endometriosis on her body. Her ritual practice explores natural materials and processes, including natural plant dyes and ochre pigments, along with textiles, ceramics and documentary photography of important sites affected by climate change. Conceptually centered around the term *solastalgia*—grief felt for the dying world—ffrench invites her audience to reflect on their own experience of grief and its relationship to the devastation of climate change. Employing methodologies of phenomenology, observation and walking the land, along with technologies of magic, dreamwork, intuition, bibliomancy (the use of books in divination) and geomancy (earth divination) to lead her investigative processes, she creates installations on the land and in the gallery that provoke and encourage a heightened awareness of the destruction of the natural world.





Figure 1: *McDougall Creek Fire (August 17, 2023). 2023.*

## **Acknowledgements**

This research has taken place on the unceded and ancestral territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples where I live, the tm̓x̓wúlaʔx̓w Syilx (Okanagan) peoples while on field research trips, and in Iceland. As an uninvited guest to these lands, I will continually commit to reconciliation, to aid in land repatriation, and work towards decolonization. I acknowledge my privilege in both living on and working with the land, and I must work to undo the harms that colonialism and white supremacy have done and still do to Indigenous peoples and the land. Care must be taken when working with land-based materials as they are our kin.

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*McDougall Creek Fire* (Figure 1), August 17, 2023. Shot by Caitlin French from the base of Knox Mountain. The wind was blowing between 50km/h and 60km/h, and moments before this photo was shot the fire jumped the lake. The lake is 2km wide at the place the fire jumped.

*Coming Home* (Figure 2), Driving into the Okanagan Valley in the summer—fire season—when the sun is deep red, you can't see across the valley, and the air smells of burnt pine and hot sagebrush.

*Meeting Svínafellsjökull* (Figure 3), This photo was taken the first time I met Svínafellsjökull Glacier during my first trip to Iceland. This trip was taken as a pause in my regular life before returning home to have a hysterectomy caused by endometriosis.

*Smoke Pillar* (Figure 4), The pillar of smoke rising over the mountain in West Kelowna. It was surreal to witness people carrying on with a summer afternoon when it was apparent that the fire was starting to burn out of control.

*Burning Red Alder and Other Magic* (Figure 5), I had gathered red alder trees from the Squamish Valley to work collaborate with in an installation, and this image is from when I brought them back and burned them in ritual.

*Gathering water from Xá7elcha (Lynn Canyon)* (Figure 6), I gathered water to use in painting and ritual work. I often gather water from sites that have significant meaning or connection. I consider this a collaboration with the water and land.

*Ochre in Xá7elcha (Lynn Canyon)* (Figure 7), Rubbing small stones onto a larger and harder granite stone to see if the small stones would be good for working into finer pigment. Although all these small stones would have been able to be worked into usable pigment, I left them all at the river. I asked their permission to work with them, and I felt they wanted to stay with the river.

*Ochre Sanctuary* (Figure 8), Heidi Gustafson's Ochre Sanctuary. This space is filled with ochres from around the world that were gathered by or gifted to Heidi. There is great magic in this work.

*Reunited with Svínafellsjökull* (Figure 9), Taken on my most recent trip to Iceland in 2022. Having not visited the site in over three years, the loss of ice was startlingly apparent. When I walked over the hill and laid eyes on my dear glacial friend, I sat down and cried uncontrollably for over twenty minutes. I could feel the loss of this beautiful being.

*Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones)* (Figure 10), This weaving was the first time I melted ochre encased in ice onto my textile work, and it is a significant point in my thesis research.

*Library of Water, (2007)* (Figure 11), Roni Horn. Taken on a day of almost unending daylight in June 2022. My partner Arlin and I were the only people in the space and got to spend time communing with the spirits of the glaciers and glacial tongues.

*Extended Death Rituals (1)* (Figure 12), An exploration into hanging and display methods for my thesis exhibition. This piece includes seventy-three important objects/beings that I have made connections with. These include a stone from the 2021 eruption at Fagradalsfjall in Iceland, a glass vial of tears that I collected after I heard of the death of my friend's mother, and plants that I have used in ritual.

*They Are Lost as Soon as They Are Made* (Figure 13), an image shot by Karen Zalamea. Karen froze water that she gathered from the site the photo was shot, froze it in a mold to make a camera lens, shot the photo, and let the lens melt.

*Weaving on TC2 Jacquard Loom* (Figure 14), Caitlin ffrench working on the jacquard loom at Emily Carr University.

*Rituals of Loss* (Figure 15), The installation *Rituals of Loss*. There are sixty-eight other than human entities in this work. There is wool, walk, silk, and bones among these beings. Some will be kept, some will be returned to where they were gathered, and others burnt in ritual.

*Finding Kinship* (Figure 16), The installation *Finding Kinship*. The sticks used to build this structure were gathered from places I have left my heart- the tree I climbed as a child, the site of a forest fire that had burned in 2015, and the fallen arbutus branches from a grove of trees on the Sea-to-Sky highway.

*Scent Memory* (Figure 17), Spending time smelling the poplar buds soaked in olive oil in *Rituals of Loss*. The smell of this oil brings me to both Iceland and the Squamish Valley. Both are places where I've left parts of my heart.

*Returning* (Figure 18), In January 2024 I returned to the site where I shot the McDougall Creek Fire. I drove up into the hills where the fire burnt, and I was stunned at the destruction the fire caused.

## **I didn't understand you when I lost my sight**

Bodily decay pushed my work into parallels with the seen and unseen  
Kinship with the environment as the environment moves into a new epoch  
The mournful observation of the land and self

Brain on fire/Forest on fire  
Numbness of Limbs/Melting ice  
Swelling joints/Rising ocean

I am an artist that works with gathered ochres and plants. As a settler, I work with local natural materials with a set of ethics I have established for myself. When gathering ochres, I ask permission out loud to the land, I gather very small amounts, and I gather from human-disturbed sites. When gathering plants, I take care to gather only what I will use, I ask permission of the plants, and I take care to leave enough for the pollinators and other than human beings that live nearby. I work in collaboration with the land and with an attunement to the magic that exists in the world.

I grew up in the Okanagan valley on the traditional and unceded territories of the Syilx people (Oyama, Canada). My earliest memories are of building nests and forts out of sticks and fresh cut grass. My parents were orchardists, the thinned branches from the apple trees and grass from between the rows of trees were the first materials I used to make artwork. I have always remembered having a deep understanding and connection to the land. While in high school I learned about artist Andy Goldsworthy and his sculptural practice, and I felt an instant kinship with his ways of working. In his book *Time* Goldsworthy writes “My commitment to what are described as ‘natural materials’ is often misunderstood as a stance against the ‘man-made’”. I



need the nourishment and clarity that working the land with my hands gives me...”

(Goldsworthy) Reading this text when it was first published helped me understand that my work as a land-based artist could exist within the canon of fine art.



Figure 2: *Coming Home*. 2023.

The central narrative of this thesis work revolves around the relationship I have with the environment, and the rituals that I enact in collaboration with the land and its plants and waterways. Specifically, my work investigates the entanglements between the anthropogenic changes brought about by the climate crisis that we are collectively grappling with, and the parts of my body I have been losing to disease. In *Gathering Colour* I write to the challenging nature of describing intuition and ritual. ‘How I connect to the land, how I make art, and the rituals that

I've adopted are intuitive; articulating them is difficult. I have held these beliefs and ways of working for as long as I can remember.' (French) Trusting my intuition to lead me towards new methodologies and rituals in my practice allows me to connect with my unconscious mind as well as outside energetic forces. This includes spirits of the land, spirits of the other than human, and spirits of those who have come before me. My intuition comes in quickly with new ideas, popping into my mind as though they are being spoken to me by someone outside of my body. These intuitive thoughts are more abundant when I perform rituals more often in my daily life.

The rituals I work include daily invocations, offerings to the land and my body, and ceremonies to mark important dates. I live with endometriosis, multiple sclerosis, and rheumatoid arthritis, and I think of them as entities that I share my body with. These entities need to be cared for and nurtured in the same manner as I care for myself. In this nurturing, I have found I can make peace with these diseases, and to include them in my rituals. At the time of this writing, I inject myself with a medication for my rheumatoid arthritis on Fridays and have a ritual I perform with each injection. Turning this medical intervention into a ritual has helped form a bond between myself and my disease. When I use the term ritual, it describes the careful actions and ceremonies performed as parts of my spiritual practice and art making. Ritual is a way of living with magic. "[A]rtists have long been interested in rituals and routines; they will no doubt continue to invent and embellish them in the future, opening up new possibilities for understanding and making our lives more meaningful." (Harvard)

I am a pagan witch, and I carry my beliefs through all aspects of my life. I perform rituals each day, and throughout the eight pagan sabbats to mark time, and to celebrate each season as it passes. I work earth-based magic both outside of and within my art practice. I believe that stones, plants, water, and all other natural beings have agency and spirit, and must be treated with

reverence. I use dreamwork to lead investigations, and I turn to what I am seeing in nightly dreams to inspire what I make in waking life. When I wake up from dreams, I document experiences or lessons that came to me while I was asleep. I believe that there are both intuitive thoughts and magic that come to me while I am sleeping.



Figure 3: *Meeting Svínafellsjökull*. 2014.

For the past ten years, I have been studying the shrinking of Svínafellsjökull Glacier in the south of Iceland, not realizing that I would be seeing a notable recession of ice upon each visit to the foot of the ever-shrinking glacier. Svínafellsjökull is a glacial tongue of Vatnajökull in Southeast Iceland, and the recession of this glacier has notably sped up since 1995. (Lifandi)

Reading about the ways climate change affects glaciers does not convey the magnitude of loss that is happening over such a short time and bearing witness to the retreat of Svínafellsjökull has driven my artistic explorations.

More recently in locations closer to my home (Vancouver, Canada) I have been researching sites that have experienced catastrophic flooding, fires, and droughts due to climate change. In the summer of 2023, while on a field research trip documenting anthropogenic sites in Southern Alberta and British Columbia, I happened to be in Kelowna, BC the night the McDougall Creek Fire peaked. I watched the smoke cloud rise above the mountain in West Kelowna as the fire crest the top ridge, and the entire mountain become engulfed in flames as the night fell. Homes ignited in flames while I stood with hundreds of people on the opposite side of the lake. We all were bearing witness to the loss of homes for both human and more-than-human beings and this has caused many of us to experience solastalgia.



Figure 4: *Smoke Pillar*. 2023.

Solistalgia was first coined by environmental philosopher, Glenn Albrecht, who states, “solastalgia is the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one’s home and territory.” (Albrecht) Albrecht’s description of the pain or sickness of missing a connection with the land is deeply familiar to me. Upon learning the term solastalgia I was overcome with the realization that I am not alone in the grief that I feel for the land. The grief that I experience as I become increasingly disabled by multiple sclerosis reflects the grief that I feel for the environmental disasters that are resulting from the changing climate. Multiple sclerosis is a disease that degrades the myelin sheaths in one’s brain or spine and leads to long term disability. Living with this condition is forcing me to confront the degeneration of my body. The basic fear of living with multiple sclerosis is not knowing what

abilities of mine will be taken away by the disease. This dilemma parallels the way climate change is altering the land in ways that we cannot predict. My research took a reflective turn as I drew connections between my body and the environment. My kinship with Albrecht's concept of solastalgia has only strengthened as I have read how other artists and theorists have grappled with its meaning. The connections of environmental grief I share with so many others are building. Many theorists and scientists writing about the climate emergency are not hopeful for our future, but American writer Rebecca Solnit writes in her book *Not Too Late*, 'It is late. We are deep in an emergency. But it is not too late, because the emergency is not over. The outcome is not decided. We are deciding it now. The longer we wait to act, the more limited options, but scientists tell us there are good options and great urgency to embrace them while we can.' (Solnit) Reading Solnit's text has alleviated much of the stress that comes with acknowledging the climate crisis, but it has enforced the idea that we must act quickly to save the planet.

In addressing these notions over the course of my MFA, I selected the materials, methodologies and processes that best express the exponentially increasing changes that are profoundly altering my body and the world. This thesis project and explorations are multifaceted and include painting, sculptural installation, performance, sound, print making, photography, and writing as modes of creation. My praxis lives the values I carry and reflects an ethos of care and sustainability. Rather than driving to places to wildcraft ochres or plants, I walk or cycle when possible, and source fibres for dyeing from as ethical and as local a source as I can. I deeply consider the land-based materials that I work with believing that these materials have their own spirit and agency and should be treated with reverence. I have gathered or grown many of these materials, demonstrating the intent I hold to not create more "waste". While I understand that there are ways in which my practice is still harmful to the land, I work to lessen these impacts. I

don't want the artwork I make as a part of the research I am conducting to take up unnecessary space, and this ethos leads me to compost, burn, or otherwise return the artwork to the earth in some way once it has lived its life in the world.

In Potawatomi professor Robin Wall Kimmerer's seminal text, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she writes about kinship and connection with the land. Kimmerer outlines how climate change, industrialization, and loss of connection with the natural world are leading to lasting consequences that could lead to the end of humankind. In her writing and lectures, Kimmerer explains how Indigenous ecological knowledge can be linked with Western scientific methodologies to establish ways and protocols to slow the climate crisis and reconnect humans with the natural world. (Kimmerer) I continue to re-visit this book to investigate my connection with the land, and to be reminded that I must continue to nurture my relationship with the natural world.





Figure 5: *Burning Red Alder and Other Magic*. 2023.



“What we contemplate here is more than ecological restoration; it is the restoration of relationship between plants and people. Scientists have made a dent in understanding how to put ecosystems back together, but our experiments focus on soil pH and hydrology—matter, to the exclusion of spirit. We might look to the Thanksgiving Address for guidance on weaving the two. We are dreaming of a time when the land might give thanks for the people.” (Kimmerer)

As an artist working with the land, I have been influenced by the land artists of the 1960’s and 1970’s—including Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson— but I choose not to align my work with theirs. Whereas these artists would make large earth works that carve, dig into, and alter the land, I am working to make as little impact on the land as I can. When I gather from or work with the land, I exercise an ethos of care. I want to leave as little trace as possible. I hope that the spirits of the land understand that I am doing my best to care for them.



Figure 6: *Gathering water in Xá7elcha (Lynn Canyon). 2023.*



## **Melted ochre as pain sigil/Woven pain sigils**

Sigils laid over top of images

Constellations representing the major pain or problem areas in the body

Areas of rot and decay

Areas of disease

Areas of organs lost

My creative practice is largely installation-based, and I consider these installations as offerings to the land, to the materials that I work with, and to my ailing body. Using geomancy when gathering mineral pigments, I imbue magic into every aspect of the making process. When using water, plants, or other natural materials I take care to know these materials are living beings with their own spirits to be tended to. I have been collecting an ochre-archive as records of where I have been, and how I have witnessed the changing planet. I keep detailed records of where the pigments were found, the dates that they were gathered or gifted to me, and any other details about them. For example, when I collect carbonized wood from forests that have been changed from wildfires, I document when the fire burned through the area as well as the date and exact location of gathering. In taking care with how I work with these materials I am collaborating with them, rather than exploiting them as an extracted resource. I work with these mineral and carbonized pigments to make into paints, inks, and ceramic underglazes that are used in my research.

Gathering and collaborating with minerals gathered from specific sites is a form of geomancy — divination using earth (Cummins) — and this geomancy connects rituals, magic,

and my art practice. Ochre connects one directly to the land, and by using them I am intentionally engaging a form of geomancy. I believe that minerals hold energy and magic, and I believe that working with this energy and magic should be done with care.



Figure 7: *Ochre in Xá7elcha (Lynn Canyon). 2023.*

I see the land as my collaborator, and I believe ochre is a sibling. Mineral pigments are non-renewable, and I take care not to gather much if any at all. I make altars or reliquaries to honor pigments in my studio and as artworks. These pieces are offerings to the spirits of the places where the ochres are from. I do not take working with ochres lightly, and when I teach others how to gather and process mineral pigments, I make sure that ethical harvest is at the



forefront of my teaching alongside the health and safety needed to work with fine particulates.

This methodology is also inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's writing in *Braiding Sweetgrass* where she teaches about the honourable harvest. Kimmerer writes about asking permission of the land and taking care to treat the land and other than human beings as kin. (Kimmerer)

I have made connections with ochre-workers around the world, and I am inspired by Heidi Gustafson's practice. Gustafson's work explores the ways that land holds spirit, how humans and other beings engage with ochres— mineral pigments containing iron—in their lives, and the pedagogy of ethically collaborating with land-based materials. Gustafson works with mineral pigments, specifically ochres to create art and as a part of her archive *Ochre Sanctuary*.



Figure 8: Gustafson, Heidi. *Ochre Sanctuary*.

Gustafson's book published in 2023, *Book of Earth* describes the history, uses, processing, and magic that come from working with ochre. Gustafson's ochre research is broad but includes communications with ochre through spiritual and magical means, methods of decolonization, land repatriation of mineral pigments and ochre, and forms of ritualistic geomancy among other things. Gustafson's work is often centered on the land and minerals collected in her local environment in the North Cascade mountains in Washington, but she also gathers while travelling to other lands. My work is akin to Gustafson's in both our proximity to one another where we gather as we live close to one another, as well as our ethics around working with the land. Gustafson and I have aligned ethics around gathering and processing ochres, and we both live on unceded territories and are settlers on the land where we are working. To work in a good way with mineral pigments we must take care to not gather from areas sacred to Indigenous peoples and to take no more than a small handful of pigments when gathering. We both make ritualistic objects, employ geomancy when working with ochres, and hold high ethics of gathering within our pedagogical practices.

## Ritual to reach the Otherworld

### Ceremony as repeated connection to the Old Ones

Gestures to remember the past/Beings laid out to trace memory

Concentration of actions/Energy bound in more-than-human beings

Wool, wax, silk, and bones



Figure 9: *Reunited with Svínafellsjökull. 2022.*

In 2020, I received my diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, and in 2022, I attended the SIM residency in Reykjavik, Iceland where I explored how to create while living in a disabled body. I felt drawn to research the changes my body was experiencing, and how I could collaborate with the Svínafellsjökull glacier. I spent a day photographing the glacier and gathering ochre from the site, and I realized the slow degradation that I am experiencing in my body is comparative to the



melting of Svínafellsjökull. In 2023, I began a series of jacquard weavings using the photographs I took while on residency as a ritual for grief.



Figure 10: *Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones)*. 2023.

During the time I was first weaving on the jacquard loom for my thesis research, I dreamt of seeing a constellation of ten ochre marks on the front of the weaving and realized in the dream that they mapped a constellation of sites on my body that had been altered or lost to disease. The



red ochre used for the dots was collected at the base of the glacial lake of Svínafellsjökull on the same day that I captured the photo for the weaving. When *Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones<sup>1</sup>)*, was created, my brain, spine, shoulders, hands, uterus, an ovary, and my knees were represented by the ochre marks of the constellation. As disease has taken over more places in my body, I have added new dots to this constellation pattern. In October 2023, I had a relapse of my multiple sclerosis, and there are now thirteen dots in the constellation.

*Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones)* is a woven cotton photo-based weaving with red ochre marks layered on the front and is flanked on both sides by bundles of cottonwood. I used these branches because Cottonwood trees grow in both Iceland and Vancouver, and it allowed me to express a connection between the time that I spent in both places. The buds of the branches contain strong smelling sap, and when I smell cottonwood buds it activates scent-memory.

The labor needed to weave on the jacquard loom tracks the parallels between the receding glacier and the receding abilities of my body. When working with the Jacquard loom the weaving takes time and physical energy to produce. Each warp thread requires five body movements to set it into place. First the foot pad needs to be stepped on to open the weaving shed (lifting and lowering the warp threads), next the shuttle that contains a bobbin of weft threads is thrown through the open shed of strings, the shuttle is set down on the side of the loom, the reed is pulled towards the artist (beating the thread into place), the shuttle is picked back up, and these five steps are repeated again. While weaving this cloth I experienced many symptoms of my disease (multiple sclerosis) and I believe that I have woven the experience of pain, loss, and resilience into this cloth. The actions taken to weave the cloth changes my state of

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<sup>1</sup> *Glacial Bones* is a term I first heard from ochre-worker and researcher Heidi Gustafson in her pigment offering for the Wild Pigment Project in May 2021. Wild Pigment Project is a monthly pigment offering from participating artists and Tilke Elkins to raise awareness and funds for land-based artists and research.

being, each step grows the work as my body and the ice disappear. By the end of a weaving session, and for the rest of that day I experience tremors in my body, loss of motor function in my left leg, and my voice stutters. I deliberately pushed myself to this point as an offering of my body to the weaving. I did not experience lasting harm in this process, and by the next day my body returned to its normal state.



Figure 11: Horn, Roni. *Library of Water (Vatnasafn)*. 2007.

*Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones)* was inspired by Roni Horn's installation *Library of Water (Vatnasafn)* (2007). I visited this work in June 2022, while on residency in Iceland. This work is made up of 24 plexiglass columns, each filled with the ice of a glacier or glacial tongue from the Icelandic landbase. The building for Horn's installation overlooks the ocean, looking north to the West Fjords and the first thing that struck me about the installation was the awe of the daylight passing through ancient, melted ice. Horn managed to capture a sense of reverence in the work that is haunting. One of the glaciers that Horn gathered water from for her installation has since fully melted. The glacier has died. The disappearance of this glacier makes the water in the glass columns of Horn's work so much more precious and shows the viewer the reality that we are facing in a world being altered by climate change. Witnessing this artwork in person is not easily described. Communing with glacial spirits strengthened my kinship with the Icelandic landbase. The day after visiting *The Library of Water (Vatnasafn)* I went to the Svínafellsjökull glacier, and the link between my work and Horn's was established. I consider *Svínafellsjökull Retreat (Glacial Bones)* as a love letter to a disappearing friend.



*Extended Death Rituals (I)* is an installation of seventy-three objects hung in a circle on the gallery wall. This work was inspired by a dream where I hung my father's bones on a wall in a circle to bring him back to life. When I woke up and wrote down the dream, I knew I would want to use various natural entities instead of bones, but the shape would be the same as in my dream. Each being in the installation was chosen for its emotional significance or to signify where it was gathered. Each object is hung with silk thread, as I contend that silk acts as a protective fibre from negative energy. I have been told by other pagans and witches that silk is a protective fibre. In my years of experience working with silk I have learned to understand its protective qualities. The works are pinned to the wall using entomological pins as a signifier of death or loss on display. The objects include stones gathered from sites affected by climate change, burnt wood, plants, photographs, and woven cloth. The objects were hung in ritual where I was guided by my intuition on where to place each object on the wall. The wall was washed with water from Kalamalka Lake at the start of the ritual to open a portal to the otherworld. Kalamalka Lake is where I scattered my father's ashes nineteen years ago, and I use water from this lake during grief rituals. The center of the circle is positioned in the middle of my chest where my heart is. The circle is five feet (1.5m) wide so that I can extend my arms and hold all the objects within the space of my body as an act of care. The work is accompanied by a leaflet that has the title and a numbered photograph of the work on one side, and the list of the seventy-three objects and their descriptions on the other side. The viewer is invited to investigate each object, and to learn why they were chosen for this installation.

This work is the first in a series that explores memory, personhood of natural materials, and intuitive sharing. Future reincarnations of this series will explore other shapes and hanging methods while using similar objects and rituals to make the work.

## My haunted body is an altar

Fingers in ochre to connect with the land. Smelling smoke and feeling kinship with the disappearing spirits. Homesick for a memory of light

Smoke/Ritual

Ice/Loss

Land/Self

My work for the thesis exhibition—*Rituals of Loss (Finding Kinship with the Land and the Other Than Human)*— is comprised of two installations. One is an indoor interdisciplinary installation (*Rituals of Loss*) that includes ritual, jacquard weaving, ceramics, photography, plant magic, ochres, and other natural materials. The second installation (*Finding Kinship*) is a sculpture built from gathered sticks and trees installed outside of the building.

For the indoor installation the walls were first dressed<sup>2</sup> with water in a ritual and then rubbed with ochre gathered from both the Okanagan Valley and from the base of the Svínafellsjökull glacier in the corner of the installation. This large ochre mark signifies for me a portal to the otherworld. This portal is a space where spirits and entities can come and visit and commune with the living. At the edge of either wall, I have hung two jacquard weavings. The woven photograph on the left is of the Svínafellsjökull glacier that was taken in 2022, and the woven photograph on the right was taken of the site of the McDougall Creek Fire taken in January 2024. Carefully placed, on the front of each weaving is a constellation of 13 ochre marks. The ochre constellations were adhered to the front of the weavings by mixing ochre with cherry tree sap into a paste, putting the paste into a silicone mold with water, freezing the mixture, and melting

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<sup>2</sup> The term *dressed* is used to describe washing or coating an object with magical intentions.



the ochre ice onto the front of the work. I use cherry tree sap gathered from trees around my home in place of the traditional watercolour paint medium gum arabic. These two mediums both have the same qualities as paint mediums.

The act of melting ochre and ice onto artworks is a ritual I perform as offerings to the places I have photographed for my research. I use this ochre in place of blood to represent the body of a dying glacier, the site of a catastrophic wildfire, and as a representation of my degenerating body. My work with melting ice as a means of speaking to the melting of glaciers in Iceland was inspired by Vancouver artist Karen Zalamea's book and work *They are Lost as Soon as they Are Made*. During an artist residency in Iceland, Zalamea gathered water from multiple sites across the country, froze the water in a concave mold to form an ice camera lens, and shot photographs through these ice lenses. The lenses would melt as soon as the photo was taken.

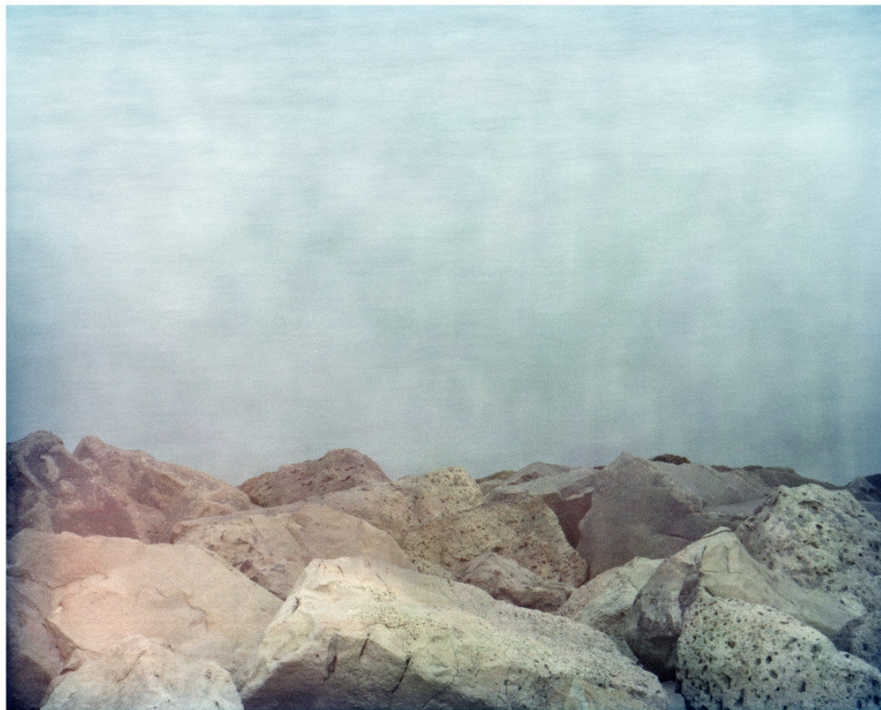


Figure 13: Zalamea, Karen. From *They Are Lost as Soon as They Are Made*. 2020.

I have visited Svínafellsjökull glacier over ten years during five trips I made to Iceland, and with each visit there is significantly more ice melted from the glacier. When I processed the ochre that was released by the glacier, I was able to find solace in speaking to the minerals.



Figure 14: *Weaving on TC2 Jacquard Loom. 2024.*

When I gathered these minerals, I asked permission to collaborate with them, forming a kinship as permission was granted. I spoke aloud to the stones, and I waited to have an answer given. If I had felt the stones or minerals did not wish to be worked with, I would not have gathered them. This practice requires me to be in tune with the land, and to trust my intuition. I gathered a few small red stones that I ground with a mortar and pestle, washed, and then sieved



before drying to store until use. The ochre bones of a dying glacier become the pigment for a series of work about loss.



Figure 15: Photo of *Rituals of Loss*. 2024.

Situated underneath each weaving is a cherrywood shelf and on each shelf is a ceramic bowl. The shelves are hung at the height on my body where my uterus would have been had I not lost it to endometriosis in 2014. Getting a hysterectomy at age thirty was a significant loss, but the suffering I was experiencing from endometriosis was too great to hold onto this organ. The ceramic bowl underneath the Svínafellsjökull weaving is filled with olive oil and black cottonwood buds that I gathered and put in olive oil on Imbolc. Imbolc is one of the eight pagan holidays, it falls on February 1<sup>st</sup> each year, and it is the midpoint between the winter solstice and spring equinox in the northern hemisphere. Underneath the weaving of the McDougall Creek Fire is a bowl of honey. The honey is from hives that are in the north-east area of British Columbia which absorbed smoke for four months during the devastating forest fires in the summer of 2023. I chose the honey and oil for this installation for their olfactory properties. Scent can be a powerful trigger of memories and emotions and be used to lead the viewer into a specific atmosphere. Sharing scent memories with the viewer situates them within the installation and gives them a sensorial experience. As scholar and professor Viveka Kjellmer wrote, “If we close our eyes and no longer rely on vision, a different set of rules applies. To experience the artwork, we would have to inhale and incorporate it in our bodies. A physical interplay occurs when the artwork becomes a part of us.” (Kjellmer) Inhaling the scent of the honey and oil connect the viewer physically to the installation space as the scent molecules enter their body through their nose.

Along the floor of the installation and piled up in the corner of the walls is soil and ash gathered from the site of the Elaho Valley fire. I am using this soil and ash because it is from land that was significantly changed by fire. The fire burned so hot that the land it burned has not been able to regenerate easily, and nine years later is still struggling to support new plant life. I

will return the soil and ash back to where I've gathered them, and I will perform a ritual of thanks for its collaboration in my installation.

Hanging in the center of *Rituals of Loss* are sixty-eight objects hung in a constellation. These objects include photographs, stones, plants, and other precious objects. Around the corner from the installation is another cherrywood shelf holding papers with a numbered photograph map on one side, and on the other side is each number describing the items in the installation. Some of these descriptions are concise, while others are poetic.



Figure 16: *Finding Kinship* installation. 2024.



*Finding Kinship* is an eight-foot-tall structure built from sticks and fallen trees with a doorway that faces north. The door of this sculpture faces north with the intention of facing the old gods and the dead. In my beliefs the northern direction is where these entities reside. The sticks and trees used for this installation have been gathered over the past two years from various sites that I consider important to my research. Among these are birch branches cut from a tree in front of the home I grew up in, windfallen arbutus branches, and English walnut tree branches from the tree I climbed as a child. This structure is built in a circular architectural feature and installed in the circle at the east end of the Emily Carr University campus plaza. This circle is normally filled with soil and planted with grass that is often patchy and dry throughout the summer and autumn. Once this installation is deinstalled I will be reseeding the ground with grass as an act of thanks and remediation to the land.

*Finding Kinship* is a performance-based installation, and I will be visiting the site each morning for the duration of the installation to spend time with the wooden sculpture to bring offerings of ochre and ice to the site, and to sit with the work to hear what the sticks and trees wish to say about this part of their life journey. This will be a daily ritual for the duration of the exhibition.





Figure 17: *Scent Memory*. Taken in the installation *Rituals of Loss*. 2024.

**There is hope in watching the light disappear  
The light will always return**

Moments of Solistalgic hopelessness are met with the joy  
Working with the land as kin

Hand caress stones/We are washed by rain  
Grief/Joy  
Bearing witness

Bearing witness to climate disasters and making artwork in response to it cannot solve climate change, but this research brings awareness to the reality we are all facing. In conveying the challenges I face with my diseased body into the conversation I give space to the viewer to find their own kinship with the world in crisis. I offer solace and space to connect with the other than human beings that coexist in our world.

These woven jacquard works have become a series about loss and the affects grief holds for both the artist and the viewer. Experiencing a natural disaster of the magnitude that the McDougall Creek Fire holds has had a lasting impact on my art practice and writing. Witnessing the retreat of the Svínafellsjökull glacier has been seemingly slow, taking years to witness the retreat, and the McDougall Creek Fire happened in what felt like an instant. This series explores pivotal moments of witnessing Anthropogenic disasters.

I will continue to work with the land as collaborator as my body exists with disease.

Our collective grief can be a catalyst to help slow our ascent into the anthropocene.



Figure 18: *Returning*. 2024.



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Upon presenting *Rituals of Loss: Finding Kinship with the Land and the Other Than Human* in both the gallery installation, the thesis support document, and in defense I was struck by the reactions of the readers/viewers. My research is deeply personal, but I had hoped that I could convey a space in which the viewer could see themselves (and their personal struggles) in relation to the land experiencing climate change. The feedback I received was overwhelmingly positive, and the research I have embarked on during my time at Emily Carr University has opened new areas of research that I will be continuing for the coming years.

This summer I will be attending the Ós Textile Residency in Blonduos, Iceland to continue my weaving research and collaboration with the Svínafellsjökull glacier. This residency will allow me the time and space to explore avenues of working with plant and mineral pigments in woven works.

In the autumn/winter of 2023/24 I explored methods of working with photographic methods of weaving that can be done without a digital loom, but I had to pause this work while finishing my thesis support document and thesis installation. I will be picking up this research in the autumn of 2024 as a visiting researcher/lecturer at the Alberta University of the Arts for the 2024/25 school year.

The connections I have made between the land and my body will continue to drive my work, and I look forward to explore the many avenues of research that have come up in my time at Emily Carr University.