

Yédí Kwə Daiǰá Gots'é Náts'ətə

The Story of Indigenous
Spirit Printmaking and the
Living Rock Spirit:
Yédí Kwə

by

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A thesis presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in
Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

Tkaronto, Ontario, "Canada", April 2020

Abstract

This (re)search is aimed at finding out how Dene Yédí; a concept translated in English as “living beings” could be considered within my artistic practice of printmaking. Dene Yédí acknowledges objects as alive with spirits of their own. As an urban Sahtu Dene artist I shadow the stories and teachings of Sahtúgot’ıne spirituality that have been carried forward through the lived experiences of Denendah Elders and leaders such as George Blondin, Tatti Fibbie, and Johnny Neyelle, who tell these stories for new generations of Dene to take hold of. I explore my relationships to non-human Yédí that are interwoven within my spiritual/artistic practice of stone-printing (Lithography) and the ways of Indigenous Spirit Printmaking, and how they expand ideas of reciprocity, ceremony, and realities of urban Indigeneity. Through this process I use methods of creative narrative writing and storying to tell these ideas of relationality, rather than coercing to western and institutional research thesis frameworks that still need decolonizing. For my thesis, I tell the story of my deep connection and relationship to Kwə [rock], our journey towards the creation of prints that express my lived experiences through adoption, connections to Indigenous Dene spirit, connections to land, and honouring embodied realities for urban Sahtu Dene in the Edıri Néne [now world].

Mahsi Cho

Peter Morin, for your support, guidance, and friendship. For your unclouded trust and understanding. For pushing me. For being my first *Indian* mentor. Every time we talk, I am changed. There is no word to truly express my deep thanks. But I might find it one day.

Ashok Mathur for the small (small in the sense that they seemed quiet and short, but they were big for me), words of encouragement and kindness. For your support that has greatly helped me navigate and thrive in this institution.

Ryan Rice, for the way you guide and can explain things to me in ways that my scatter art brain can understand. I am grateful for the times I have had with you.

Alison Judd, for giving me the opportunity to teach screen printing. My love of teaching printmaking was finalized when I was able to teach your classes. And for the random talks about so many things in life and in printmaking.

George Blondin, for being my core “theorists”. You may not be in this world anymore, but your books and stories are always in my mind and heart. They will continue to live on in past, now, and future Dene.

Fibbie Tatti. I have not met you, but your masters thesis has influenced me in deep ways. I didn’t get to grow up with my Indigenous stories, but your thesis became a beacon for me to understanding just a little bit more about myself and my spirit.

To my family. I would not be here today without you. You are my biggest supporters. There is no one else like you and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Anal Citation: Emma, Adrienne, Erin, Cierra. You are the fucking best. Mahsi for the conversations, love, sexy pole dancing times, and support-wine-sessions.

Kwə, for being my rock lol.

To the ancestors who come to my dreams.

To the wild sage I picked from my aunt and uncle’s old ranch. You filled my room with feelings and familiar smells of home.

And to the snow, because it seems like when it snows that I really feel like writing. When it pours, so does my mind.

Né Né Land Acknowledgement

away from - gozech'á

here – Ejq

Né – land

K'e – on – place

Kó: house, fire, community, home

'(the place) beside the fire' extended to mean '(the place) where people are'

Máhsi niwẹ – Thankful

thinking – Náadits'ewe

now – Hıdú

Ekúu – then

tomorrow – Sachq

Nakəcho Kə – Ancestors

Dedication

for all the native kids who are trying to find their way back path, wherever that may be and in whatever form that may take.

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Godí [glossary]

Akweréwhá – long ago	Máhsi n̄jw̄e – thankful
Ale – first time	Náadits'ewe – thinking
?aḷnetthi – elder	Nakəcho Kə – ancestors
ánihi?á – loneliness	Nak̄ine – us
Asi ı́ dule dedá ékanele – can you show me?	Naoka – northern lights
Belaorewile gots'é gots'ədí – eternal life	Náts'ətə – dream
Bedie'hule – his heart is absent	Náyaəhti – meeting
Bedzie'eya, – her heart is hurt	Né – land
Bets'ine – spirit	Sachq̄ - tomorrow
Daetle – they are dancing	Sadae Anele Idiikóné – show me electricity
Daı́ ?á – wish	Sahtúgot'ine – people of Great Bear Lake
Daı̄chu sine – touch me	Segha – i'am
Dáni Bek'ə Eghálaı́dá – methodology	Segha gonezq̄ – good
Dene kədə – slavey language	Segha nezq̄ – i like it
Denets'iné – person spirit	Seht'ı́ı – friend
Dene k'ə t'údlá – skin oneself	Seyidani?a – my breath is blocked
Denekw'ené hehtq̄ – fractured bone	T'akwə kədə héonı́wı – introduction
Dél̄ne – where the waters flow	Yədı – living spirit
Edelé, Nı́ k'e tu, Natu – blood, sweat, tears	
Edırı Néné – now world	
Ej̄q̄ – here	
Ekúu – then	
Eriḷ'échu – picture paper	
Eriḷt'é Hets'énádaı́ – references	
?ets'q̄ ne – act of inviting a bad spirit	
Godı – story	
Godı Behə dāgo ht'e – results	
Gərech'á – away from	
Gogha zets'ereı – feeding the fire	
Gots'é – and	
Gowhane – alone	
Hannı – please	
Hıdə néne – upper world	
Hıdó-dene nakwə – future	
Hıdú – now	
Hıyuwə ne ne – lower world	
K'e – place	
K'enetlé – not enough	
K'et'adı tla – walk backward	
Kó – house, fire, community, home	
Kwə – rock	

chapter one: T'akwə kədə héoníwí

[introduction]

Segodí - Laura Séredi, Dene K'eę gohdele. Si Deline Go
ech'a Azhíi dúwé. Łíe dze nezų Dene K'éeę gohndeh Gha.

I am Laura, and I do not speak Slavey.

I am “from” Délıne, I am away from Délıne.

Anything is possible.

One day I will speak really good Dene.

This thesis cries out for its own language. Its own way to be understood. This thesis cries out in ways that may not be fully known yet. This thesis is knowledge.

This thesis is a living document that both honours and centers Dene knowledges, specifically Sahtu Dene knowledges.

This (re)search represents a lifelong pursuit for my own language.

The words of Délıne First Nation Laura Tutcho tend to ring in my head when she once said that,

You begin to wonder where language went and how you can get that back. It is great to speak your own language because it gives you that knowledge that is deep within you. You just have to remember how to get it out and share it with the rest of the world because that is your gift from your Elders and your people¹.

¹ Tutcho, Laura. (2016). *Ets'ulah: The Language is like est'ulah*, University of Victoria, Master Thesis, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia.

I am trying to remember. I am trying to search for a way to tell this story in a visual culture that is my own, and in my Dene kədə́ [North Slavey Language]. I had to find this language for myself. I searched for what I was drawn to: archives, stories, short conversations. I realized that there were many pieces of the language, very small pieces, scattered out in the world. Thankfully, they are there. Just enough for me to start this.

The use of Délı̄ne/ Dene kədə́ may be a “challenge”. So, I have chosen to use the words I have gathered of Dene kədə́ on page viii, and I have chosen to translate these words and phrases “in the spirit of reciprocity”² into English. Though I do not speak Dene kədə́, I attempt to use Dene kədə́ to create a link to myself, to my ancestors, and to future ancestors. These profound words of my Dene language are like tiny lights, that all have history and who are all pieces of something familiar.

I look towards path burners like Nisga’a nation Luugigyoo/Patrick Robert Reid Stewart, who uses Nisga’a in their final PhD dissertation *Indigenous Architecture through Indigenous Knowledge: Dim sagalts’apkw nisim’ [Together we will build a village]*. Or Laura Tutchos’ *Ets’ulah: The Language is like est’ulah* master thesis, and Sahtúgot’ı̄ne First Nation Fibbie Tatti’s master thesis, *The Wind Waits For No One Nı̄hts’ı̄ Dene Ası́ Henáoréhı̄ le Q̄t’e: Spirituality in a Sahtúgot’ı̄ne Perspective*, of which I have read a thousand times. Works such as

² Luugigyoo-Stewart, Patrick Robert Reid. (2015). *Indigenous Architecture through Indigenous Knowledge: Dim sagalts’apkw nisim’ [Together we will build a village]*, University of British Columbia Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation.

these are evidence, and a comfort, that there are many who are also finding a way back to their Indigenous languages in their own individual ways.

Language bridges gaps by acting as a mechanism to express divergent worldviews. Like inward knowing, languages is so powerful because it reminds us who we are; it is deeply entwined with personal and cultural identity³.

My key resources of Dene kədə́ are: the *Sahtúgot'ıne Dictionary Deline Kede: Dialect of the North Slavey Language*⁴, *Shutaot'ine Intro* language app⁵, and the literal translations from Sally Rice's "*Our Language is very Literal: Figurative Expression in Deline Suline [Athapaskan]*"⁶. Each word that I use in this thesis are uncovered from these cherished documents.

I am constantly aware of the deeper levels of understanding within Dene kədə́ that I may not come to fully know as it is rooted in direct experience and I am currently far away. Fibbie expressed that she feels that "research on indigenous spirituality must be undertaken by an aboriginal person fluent in his or her language." There is truth to this, yet, I am also sure that spirituality is an inherent personal knowledge that you collect and gain. My thesis folds personal and

³ Kovach, Margaret. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

⁴ Modeste, Jane, Tatti, Fibbie. (2012). *Sahtúgot'ıne Dictionary Deline Kede: Dialect of the North Slavey Language, Sahtu Goh't'ine Gokede*. Edited by Albertaine Ayha and Alina Takazo.

<http://www.sahutudc.ca/documents/general/Deline%20TLC%20Sahtuotine%20Kede.pdf> accessed Nov 2017.

⁵ GNWT Official Languages. (2016). *Shutaot'ine Intro* (Version 0.315) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.languagepal.androidjessee_north_slavey&hl=en_CA

⁶ Rice, Sally. (2015). *Our Language is very Literal: Figurative Expression in Deline Suline [Athapaskan]*. University of Alberta Sally Rice.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278028015_Our_language_is_very_literal_Figurative_expression_in_Dene_Suline_Athapaskan

collective explorations of how I bring my Dene Spirit into my everyday making life, and how it has followed me throughout this time on earth.

I did not arrive here alone. The amassed piles of books and articles, active attendance at events, making, listening to others, are ways I have come to this place. I have chosen to primarily reference Indigenous scholars and Dene storytellers in this research story and I am choosing to leave out examples of different Indigenous artworks. It may be that this thesis can only be useful by diving deep within *this* story. If I were to talk about all the other Indigenous artists who are having the same conversation about spirit, reciprocity, and relationship⁷, it would not have been done right and needs more respect and space. I *currently* refuse⁸ to speak for other artists' experiences.

On the subject of identity: it's complicated and I don't want to spend any time talking about *identity*. I am Dene. I am adopted. I am an artist. I am mostly sad and wear a lot of black. Like any other Indigenous person who has to battle fragmentation, racism, and their own damn brain, I have done a lot of work to survive and to be in art *academia*. Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that:

Fragmentation is not an indigenous project; it is something we are recovering from. While shifts are occurring in the ways in which we indigenous peoples put ourselves back together again, the greater project is about re-centering indigenous identities on a larger scale⁹.

⁷ Wilson, Shawn. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, N.S.

⁸ Simpson, Leanne. (2017). *Nishnaabeg Brilliance as Radical Resurgence Theory, As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.

⁹ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. London; New York; Dunedin: New York: Zed Books; University of Otago Press; distributed in the USA exclusively by St Martin's Press.

I want to move on from linear and binary *notions* of identity. This isn't about me being lost and trying to find my old traditional "cultural heritage¹⁰" or for you to eat up my NDN¹¹ story/telling. It is much more than that. There are many Indigenous artists who are moving on to bigger things, and stretching the boundaries of what research, art, knowledge, and theory can look like. This is what I want, and this is what I am doing right now.

Ultimately, it is the intent of this (re)search to follow Indigenous methods and storying. As Margaret Kovach explains,

Skilled orators, then and now, were able to imbue energy through word choice, and allow listeners to walk inside the story to find their own teachings. The interpretation of the teachings taken become the listener's task. With the listener's involvement, the insight gained from the story is a highly particular and relevant form of knowledge exchange¹².

Those reading this work may not be able to see everything, but it is also my intention to not give it all to you directly, just like the skilled storytellers. We are giving you a chance to listen and to learn. This is the purpose.

I hope you can also hear me too. Since speaking and mind speaking is idiosyncratic and can be a scattered way of communicating, you will find that this thesis is full of racing *interpretations/interruptions* and *personal narrative*. I want you to experience what it is like to be inside this body, what it's like inside this

¹⁰ "Cultural heritage" is a term that is periodically pushed on to me by professors/academics/white people in regards to my "artistic interests".

¹¹ [Not Dead Native]. Belcourt, Billy-Ray. (2019). *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field*. House of Anansi Press.

¹² Ibid. Kovach, 60.

research, and the possibilities continue to be endless. I think about the Indigenous people who are breaking into their stories and realities and using elements of resurgence and resistance. Like Driftpile Cree Nation Billy-Ray Belcourt, whose words “ring in my chest¹³” and inspire me to start writing my own poetry as a protection tactic. And Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who says we can learn from Indigenous artists who, “use coded disruptions and affirmative refusal through the use of Indigenous aesthetical practices¹⁴”. My work refuses to spend more time explaining how it is and focuses on the ideas and experiences you can see and cannot see.

This story and its poetry is either told by me or told by my partner Kwə, or by both of us. This story is full of references from George Blondin, Fibbie Tatti, and my own grandfather (of whom I have never met and never will meet in this life). *How you choose to take what we say is up to you.*

I could sit here and tell you in the most direct way of how all of this work came to be, and in a way that showcases my skills as an artist and researcher and give you a statement like:

As I come to terms with my own reality of fragmentation, loss, loss of land, loss of language, loss of body, and loss of Dene culture, I try to find new paths of an inherent Dene spirituality that can exist within my creative practice of printmaking.

¹³ Ibid. Belcourt, 16.

¹⁴ Simpson, Leanne. (2017). *Nishnaabeg Brilliance as Radical Resurgence Theory, As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.

Followed by questions that may be impossible to fully answer within one program of studies, let alone a lifetime, such as:

1. *What are the methodologies within Indigenous Bets'ıne/Spirit Printmaking?*
2. *As an urban Sahtu Dene artist, how does my inherent Dene spirit speak to me, speak to others, speak to Kwə, and speak to land and ancestors?*
3. *How can the power of Dene spirituality inform ways of making, specifically stone-printing?*

Or, I could tell you to get a cup of tea, sit in your cozy place, and I'll tell you a story that is inspired by the stories of many great storytellers. It is the story of Kwə, who is my protector and my very dear friend. It is a window into myself, and about the work I have made with Kwə and how deeply it goes. Perhaps to levels some of you have never realised were there.

So, here it is. This one thesis paper that supports my creative practice and research. But is also about this Fracture who is weird, and probably vain, and is now just going to talk about themselves, their partners in their medium, and their work. Lol

This (re)search is going to have Kwə tell a part of the story and we hope you understand just a little bit more of the many things we want to tell you.

Mahsi Cho.

chapter two: Kwə-godi

[thetoryofKwə]

a stone doesn't forget.

my image engrains

back to the earth.

like Fracture's dna, it is

everlasting.

Belaorewile gots'é gots'adi.

colossally shifting between

temporality

and longevity.

Akweréwhá [long ago], when the land was new and world was dark,

i birthed in a deep deep motionless lagoon. silent. still. eating sand that slowly snowed down in a salty brine where no one bothered me. my place was deemed *inhospitable*, but i think that's just because i liked my solitude. life forms are a clicky bunch anyway.

time. it did not have a name yet. my earliest memories are so far away. i remember seeing a flash of light shoot up towards the sky and in an instant i could see. the water i was in suddenly had a canopy, sparkling little rays of light. i used to think that i ate too much and was getting fat, but it was the water that was shrinking, and the canopy got closer.

over time i could talk to many other rocks¹⁶ who told me stories of fire rivers, and giant land animals¹⁷, and how some of their family cracked apart and took a trip across the sea. eventually, my spirit could leave. my spirit could leave my physical body and wander between worlds. by the time i could spirit fly¹⁸, the world was different once again. i saw my home freeze, and eventually drain down.

and i became

out in the open.

time now seemed to run. cousin rocks would tell me of these beings that could also spirit fly, and that they were starting to *use* us in the living world. i thought they were like giant monsters who could eat rocks whole and who could even take down an entire mountain family.

to my disappointment they were small, squishy, alien, and fleshy. unimpressive.

for years i would watch them, see them come and go and see them when they were no longer in their body shells.

i learned many things. languages, mind thinking, and how these beings started to shape everything around us, or how they shaped their own “people”. just as much as they created,

they also destroyed.

¹⁶ Rock/stone is a living being who jumps into various forms of rock beings, primarily being of limestone, the type of rock used in stone-printing.

¹⁷ Story of giants/monsters/dinosaurs who once lived on this land. Allana Fletcher, Morris Neyelle. (2019). *The Man Who Lived With a Giant: Stories from Johnny Neyelle, Dene Elder*. Edmonton, ALTA, University of Alberta Press.

¹⁸ Blondin, George. (1997). *Yamoria the Lawmaker: Stories of the Dene*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press. 11.

when the world became warmer, and great monuments of these beings
sprouted all over the land, a day arrived when these beings came to me. they
wielded metal things, pully things. things that could take apart my
large b o d y.

They never even asked.

they just started breaking into me, shattering,
harvesting.

they said i was special. i was so soft and smooth.

like that was supposed to make me feel better.

i fell into many pieces.

i was taken into these big stone monuments

to a man.

A funny looking man.

this man would take a piece of me, touch me with black sticks, or greasy black
things, and eventually

burn me.

what i would learn is that the marks they burned me with were
messages. messages for each other, sometimes in images, sometimes in word
language. when they were done with the message, they would take off another layer
of me and start all over again.

niɹɔs ɔnɹ niɹɔɹA

Again and again.

i have learned to forgive them.

i don't even feel the burning anymore.

in fact, i can choose to feel it now. learning to like it.

i would also listen to

these people. who all had names.

they would use my body to convey these messages for other people all
over the world. and i would take in every single mark. every single message i
have become soooo full eatingeverything.

holding it into my tiny cre va sse es.

one day i came to the realization that parts of me were slowly disappearing. did this
mean that i wasn't eternal? that there was an end? what would become of me?

it was a hard time.

i didn't know where to go. many parts of me start to make their way across
this ocean to a place now known as "canada".

one day i heard a sound. it came from further up north. since i was part of
land, i had access to a field where the people here could walk in when they weren't
in body form.

the spirit trails¹⁹.

when i got closer to the sound, i finally found that it was coming from a
person spirit. but not like any other person spirit i have met. some say that they
came from ancient rock. *But we haven't heard that story yet.*

and so, this is where *our* story began.

¹⁹ Blondin, George. (2006). *Trail of the Spirit: Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press. 20, the story of spirit trails that one with medicine power can travel in to see and help spirits.

Ale-náyaəhti

[firsttimemeeting]

And who am I? To the stone, who am I? What name will I be given? “girl” that was broken in two. a half. Fractured “girl”. They. but more than that. Fractured being.

That is my name. Fracture. Denekw’ené hehtó.

Denets’iné – Person Spirit

i remembered that they came to me in my dreams. ages ago now. in the days when i was alone in that dark lagoon. wandering vast fields and plains

is where i finally met them. Fracture.

i was drawn to how they sounded.

Fracture’s story was said to be short, only living twice before on earth²⁰. they often liked to visit the lights at night. Fracture would try and describe them to me, and i liked to imagine on my own, something that is probably different from whatever the reality of it is. lights that dance.

air that could cut you with their little tiny cold particles.

ice bullets.

no sound. no wind. no time. *Naoka.*

it was the first time i have ever heard of this language that Fracture spoke. the time i spent visiting Fracture would allow me to come to know this language.

²⁰ Blondin, George. (1990). *When the World Was New: Stories of the Sahtu Dene*. Yellowknife, NTW: Outcrop, the Northern Publishers. 19, George tells the story of the Dene spiritual belief of re-birth.

but then Fracture left once more to find a woman womb²¹, and now in this
ediri ne´ ne´, Fracture was born in cold night again. but this life was going to be
different. Fracture, from birth, was always fated to be broken into two. the first
cracks started to appear as soon as they entered this world. it wasn't long until they
completely f r a g m e n t e d.

from then on, they were made to have a different existence from their past
beings. no longer having a memory of their language, of the lights, of the quiet star
nights, or of me. the memories drifted away.

yet, one by one, some memories came back. then, the holding started.

so much holding. taking it in

Does it make me wiser,

or weaker?

Who was it that moved back and forth?

Was it god?

was it good?

Was it bad?

I promise to hold on to it all

just,

not alone.

little Fracture, like a pebble trying to get across a large lake but only to end up
sinking after two jumps, rang loudly to us. r i p p l e s. sometimes feeling engulfed

²¹ Ibid. Blondin, 68. 1990. Story of spirits finding a woman womb to be birthed again.

in dark grey waters, but still able to make out the tiniest of waves. Fracture used to think that everything was grey, but maybe that's the rock in them talking.

Fracture talks to many of us Yédí. sometimes they would talk to *Wind*. Wind would gale and i would hold laughter in my mouth when Fracture got mad at Wind for whirling around too much and messing their hair.



Fracture likes the sound of us rocks too.
there was one rock Fracture held on to often. they walked by it every day. it would eventually s e e p into their dreams.

Figure 1: Yédí Kwə Fracture would often dream about.

when rock dreams began, Fracture began remembering. and then seeing.

Sometimes the dreams were too loud.

those dreams are a link back to past. back to their kin. like this old spirit man who came to Fracture many times. only it would scare them. being so alone, not knowing, can be scary. and sometimes fear can make bad things inside someone.

i saw the inside of *it* a few times. one of the bad things that made them split. it is black and sometimes

it oozed out of them²².

²² Depression. Or/and an entity.

thankfully Fracture started taking medicine for their greyed-out brain. they looked upon the world and saw that things had color again. they noticed how pictures that always lived in their house seemed to radiate. these pictures became a key.

they had come from people of the north.

i could tell.

the colors are north color²³. north. people not so different from Fracture.

these images were created with Stone. by us. with us. i remember them.

the stories of animals²⁴ and life in the cold.

Fracture could feel it right away. and so they set out on the path they were meant to eventually find.

and it starts with a piece of me.

Nakıne

[us]

I hardened my feelings like a rock.

But then, that rock split.

I become (a) Fragment.

In each of those pieces I am

s c a t t e r e d.

Not whole. Not yet released.

How much of me is out there? How do I begin finding them all?

Before they are

s h a t t e r e d.

And all that is left of me

is dust.

surely, they felt orphaned. orphaned by it all.

²³ Aoudla Pudlat, *Tundra Bird in Flight* (1982), stone cut and stencil. Printer: Pee Mikkigak.

²⁴ Tim Pitsiulak, *Caribou Migration* (2004), stone lithograph. Lithograph Printer: Niviaksie Quvianaqtuliaq AP.

beings like Fracture, how do i describe them? so mushy. not
just sentiment(ally), but they feel gross. Oil. Fat. Water.

i like to watch Fracture shape shift. sometimes chubby, sometimes sad,
sometimes happy, and sometimes stoned. i change too. some of my forms get filed
down to nothing so quickly. but i find that time with humans is fleeting. it's not
certain what form they will take when their bodies are gone. Fracture was certainly
never the same.

Fracture was displaced just like me. many parts of me are sprinkled in many
lands. I begin to think about this word "home", and how *this* Fracture doesn't know
their language, their people, or their land anymore. i wonder what life would have
been like for them if they hadn't split. i have a feeling that they would be stuck up
there.

letting the dark consume them.

this family Fracture was brought to was crucial to them surviving. they were meant
to find them. and they were meant to bring pictures of stone prints to them,
ensuring Fracture's longevity.

i remember when Fracture first saw my flat self.

it started with seeing the black water pool.

like dirt and sediment.

it sits on me and i drink all of its moisture. to reveal traces that resonate in
Fracture. reminding them of the entrails of small rivers, where they can find many
rock friends.

the darkness of it speaks to Fracture. raw. nothing can hide in it, and yet, so much can be imagined in its various shades of inky blacks.

these times hit Fracture like an arrow. raw, *blunt*, and straight through the heart.

like first love.

*I shake the first time.
Not wanting to disrespect,
not wanting to fail.
I watch the black entrails pool,
black circles
dancing with water.
Fear.
Skin softened.
The air was salty
and I was drowned.
And the failures
became devastating.*

from that point on, we would work together when we could.

Fracture would handle me with care and respect. we are all fragile, despite our hard solid exterior.

*Reciprocity*²⁵.

that's the word.

thanks to the many that Fracture has taken in, we now understand what this reciprocity means. what it can mean.

we broke ground. we woke up. and in our dreams, these pictures poured out.

these dances

these marks

these pains

that could no longer be kept inside the body (*our bodies*)

²⁵Wilson, Shawn. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, N.S. 86.

What would these look like on the outside?

this collaborative relationship. is so much more. this union is about us exposing our spirits to one another. with hopes that others may see the spirits that live in all *things*. when you start to see us, it is hard to un-see us.

Seht'u

Friend

now the work to make our conversations alive can begin.

chapter three: Seht'íí

[thetowardsmeone]

edelé, ní k'e tu, natu [bloodsweattears]

“Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationship that we hold and are part of²⁶.” -Shawn Wilson

it begins as it always begins. in burning. in yearning. it lives in the middle back and front lower chest of Fracture.

in me, it lives right down to the granite. waiting for that catalyst.
a vibration really.

this burn sparks from very human places. only Fracture can say for sure.

all the letdowns that Fracture feels, turns into a flame. burning it all down or
burning into something. and i became a heart.

To create something significant doesn't come from nothing.

we work hard. this process is many things. this is the dance. we started to exchange information about processes in this print dance. they share their mind, and i share my memories. i have learned from watching all the others who have imprinted on me. Fracture though. Fracture uses their spirit to guide them. and sometimes luck. still, much tears, much sweat, and even a little bit of blood has been spilt.

“stone lithography” is what some call it. Fracture uses this as way to speak, as their own voice is not as strong. we find that this work/collaboration/process is important,

²⁶ Wilson, Shawn. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, N.S. 80.

as are the messages. what message were we going to show? what is our ways of making? after circling around, we found our way to story.

messages are like stories.

we had to find story.

Fracture(s) story(s) too.

ʔaḷnetthi teachings

[theonewhowentthelength/elder]

The great Dene stories of the past, when the world was new, go back to the beginning of human existence on this earth when the Dene were partly animal. This is why storytellers have no problem talking about humans being able to talk to animals, birds, and fish²⁷. – George Blondin

in the middle of all this imagining, Fracture began to hear calls from home in their dreams. and they would not be ignored any longer.

frantically Fracture started to scour. we had to go back!

and i, started to spirit fly with them. and talking with them, those we cannot see.

Fracture's dreams would take us to different worlds, different lifetimes again. ones of prophecies, of animal things, giants, and sometimes of the bad things. in one of these dreams they saw lands they have never seen in this lifetime. it was of their homeland. land full of story.

²⁷ Blondin, George. (1997). *Yamoria the Lawmaker: Stories of the Dene*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press. 44.

when we first started searching, we were gifted with many articles, books, and even videos of the older Dene. where Fracture's kin are from. it is located near a great lake. the Sahtu.

one of those Dene was named George Blondin, who had written books all about spirits. they were stories that linked how we saw and felt things. stories of north people spirits. George Blondin told us that “we are people of the land; we see ourselves as no different than the trees, the caribou, and the raven, except we are more complicated²⁸”. Fracture consumed all of the books and the stories of their people. Fracture remembered being small and talking to other animals and rocks. this was normal. this was inherent.

we also came across one called Fibbie Tatti who had written about Dene spirituality. finally, words were starting to form. Fibbie explained such words:

The word for another aspect of spirituality is *yə́ dǫ́*, ‘the world of living beings or living entities.’ *Yə́ dǫ́* refers to specific geographic sites or features which have special, historic and traditional significance for the Sahtúgot’ıne which have their own living spirit. *Yə́ dǫ́* also refers to the living spirit in organisms such as plants, trees and to more inanimate objects such as the thunder, the lightning, the water and the rocks, each having distinctive characteristics and possessing a living force²⁹.

and there it all was. the knowledge system. in one paragraph. everything. and we then began forming our own knowledge system based on spirit and stone-printing.

²⁸ Blondin, George. (1997). *Yamoria the Lawmaker: Stories of the Dene*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press.

²⁹ Tatti, Fibbie. (2015). *The Wind Waits For No One Nihts’ı Dene Asi Henáoréhzi’le Qt’e: Spirituality in a Sahtúgot’ıne Perspective*. Master Thesis, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia. 15.

Bets'iné Dání Bek'ə Eghálaídá

[spiritmethodology]

*I am consumed with how ways of Indigenous Spirit Printmaking may be received
within the path of Indigenous methodologies and “storying”³⁰.*

as i sit on the dusty shelves within buildings full of beings teaching and
learning stone-printing, i have learnt a thing or two about their word-language.
listening. having conversations with the messages burnt in me, trying to
understand it all. because it is on me. it is in me.

beings like Fracture have invited me in to be part of their inner fires.
to give back, we/i/i/we want to pass on what we have learned during the time spent
in these art houses that hold stone. so, we made a “methodology”. combining
printmaking processes with indigenous methodology. it is to create understanding.
it is our “system” to print with our spirits.
the way to Indigenous Spirit Printmaking is:

- 1. Practice – experiential knowledge**
- 2. Repetition/ labour –relationality and ceremony**
- 3. Process – knowledge and conceptual understanding**
- 4. Community – printshop ethos and connectivity**
- 5. Responsibility – power and truth**
- 6. Spirit or Bets'ine – intuition and inherent Indigeneity**

³⁰ Kovach, Margaret. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 94.

Practice is the first step

this “printmaking”. it is a practiced skill that needs much patience.

we have to be present. with intention. and a bit of luck/prayer/good Ik’ó³¹. otherwise the person must labour on, onandonandon. wiping away “mistakes”.

To sit and think about oneself, while they grain and grain.

this is experiential³²

practice experience, experience practice

we do not know what we have not experienced. we cannot speak to what we do not directly understand. this story, and other stories, have come from direct experiences by those who tell the story. we/they are storytellers who have lived such events and continue to pass on knowledge and stories.

the same can then be said for stone-printing. we did not know that we have to burn a mark a certain way without the experiences of past stone-printers³³ who have honed such knowledge with their own direct experience.

for us, ceremony and relationality happens most in the way of **Repetition** and **Labour**. Fracture has come to know that i can reflect. in negative and positive ways. when Fracture grains me, and i’m not feeling level, Fracture may have to stay with me for a few days. graining with water, grit, and metal.

overandoverandover.

it is here, when the metal sings, that we are the most calm.

³¹ Medicine Power. Blondin, George (2006). *Trail of the Spirit: Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press.

³² Ibid. Wilson, 98.

³³ Alois Senefelder, Louis Ducos du Hauron, Ira Rubel, Alphonse Louis Poitevin, to name a few white men who had the ‘privilege’ to invent different lithography processes. >>

everything is clear and we have one purpose, one action, and one relation.

my relation to Fracture is then translated to an embodiment of the land that i remember. all these connections of beings are what drive these actions.

i can't help but feel the power of healing when i am wiped new.

grained. my body trickling down. back to land.

and i can feel Fracture's own body aches as a result of labour.

the word **Process** is fundamental. process is at times the middle of making. the key components within process are *problem solving, consideration, action, and concept*. these are needed to create a "good" print or even experience. most importantly we must acknowledge that we do not own knowledge. we cannot control learning and concepts do not come from nothing. they have been gifted through the many past, present, and even future steps which guide the medium and guide the artist. such methods require patience and doing things in a good way³⁴.

Community and environment very much effect printmaking and studio places, as can be said for many aspects of the world. if our world is unorganized, chaotic, busy, and unkept, we can't expect to have an easy space to live in. let alone make. the beauty of this step is that it's what draws many people together.

we find community all over the world who long to form relationships and seek collaboration. there are many influential beings within these art houses who work together in projects and help one another in printing techniques. i see spirits flow

³⁴ "In a good way" is most used in the Renewable Resource Board as well as within the Dene Laws of Yamoria, and it is a living system and cycle.

from artistic space such as printmaking studios. flowing with laughter, sadness, ritual, ceremony, honor, respect, and knowledge.

Responsibility may not always be reflected in the world of printmaking; however, i see Fracture carry an intricate level of responsibility as does many similar indigenous artist beings. these teachings are rooted in responsibility and truth. Fibbie Tatti once again guides us by saying:

To honour our history and culture in this process of transmitting knowledge, the storyteller must be honest and truthful. Unless they are personal stories, these stories do not belong to the storyteller, they belong to the people³⁵.

to make art messages and distribute it to the world should carry responsibility as the art messages carry influence. what i have come to know, and create with Fracture, is rooted in a sense of responsibility to truth and knowledge. what Fracture has taught me is that we should use our making to critique current society and our own realities to create dialogue, or even change.

Bets'ine means “the spirit of a person or animal³⁶” in Fracture’s language. to us, this is what drives us because we are both never alone when we make. we are together. we are nothing without a spirit. the body dies when our spirit leaves us. “At the time of your death your spirit departs from your body and travels to the spirit world. There it can be born into the physical world again. It is a circle³⁷”. this circle interconnects us. i have lived a long life and i continue to learn,

³⁵ Ibid.Tatti, 7.

³⁶ Ibid.Tatti, 109.

³⁷ Ibid. Blondin, 19. 2006.

and i believe many of us Yə́ dǫ́ are everlasting. spirit is the carrier of passion, frustrations, and our intellect. it carries our ancestors and an inherent intuition to ideas and to making.

i have told you our experiences in this medium-making/process. yet, we believe that this is not set in “stone”. each individual has their own way of communicating with other spirits in their creative message art making. this is how we see it. and sometimes that changes too.
as it currently sits; this is how we make

- Fracture and i.

chapter four: Eriṭ'échu

[picturepaper]

Now is the part where Kwə and I can show you what we have made in this conversation of spirit, each other, and the stories. We have made many picture papers and messages together. In particular, this one piece of writing by Fibbie seemed to get us closer to what it was we were dreaming about:

Spirituality is a deeper level of knowledge and awareness and it too guides our behaviour. Living fully and successfully in ‘edırı néné,’ the now world, is dependent upon our understandings and our relationship to the living entities of ‘hıdə néné,’ the upper world. Our lives are regulated by these relationships and maintaining the balance in these relationships is of utmost importance. Our very existence depends on maintaining and respecting these relationships³⁸.

Based on this knowledge, our first journey to this shift in mark making and responses to Sahtu Dene spirituality began with *Néné prints*.

Néné prints

While reading Fibbie Tatti’s master thesis, we found many Dene words and what Dene say about spirit. These prints are a gift to her. I don’t know if she will ever read this, or if she will ever come to know us. But we wanted to try to give back in print³⁹. To give further thanks, we start with sage, tobacco and fat. Figure 2

³⁸ Tatti, Fibbie. (2015). *The Wind Waits For No One Niḥts’i Dene Ası́ Henáoréhzí le Q’t’e: Spirituality in a Sahtúgot’ıne Perspective*. Master Thesis, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia 19.

³⁹ I hope that one day I will have the courage to reach out to her and tell her how much I am grateful to have read her work. I hope I’m doing good with this work too.

is a pre-etched stone, where I melted Crisco, which is what I use to make food with since I don't have access to animal fat. To Kwə's disappointment "it tasted like nothing". I then rubbed Kwə with sage and tobacco and mouthed the word *Dene*

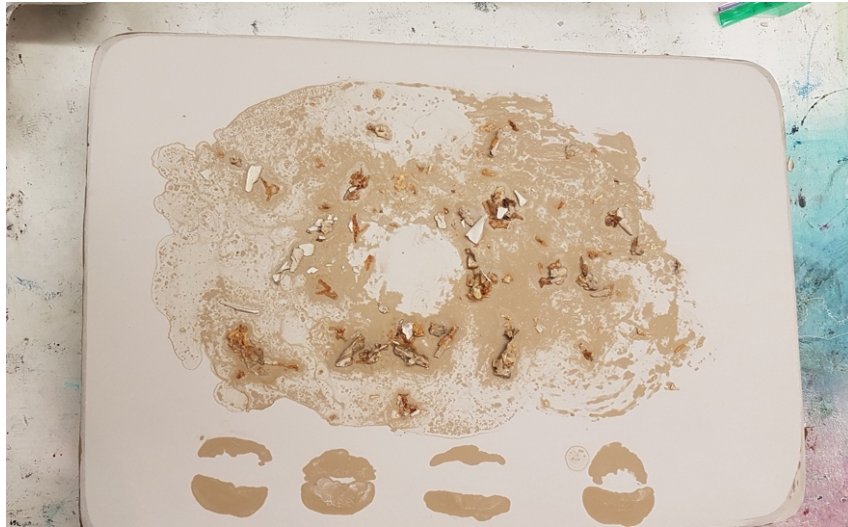


Figure 2: Lithography stone with boiled crisco, tobacco, and sage.

ʔik'o. I was thinking of the traditional Elders and how medicine is used, and how it has made its way back to me. This was my way of trying to introduce

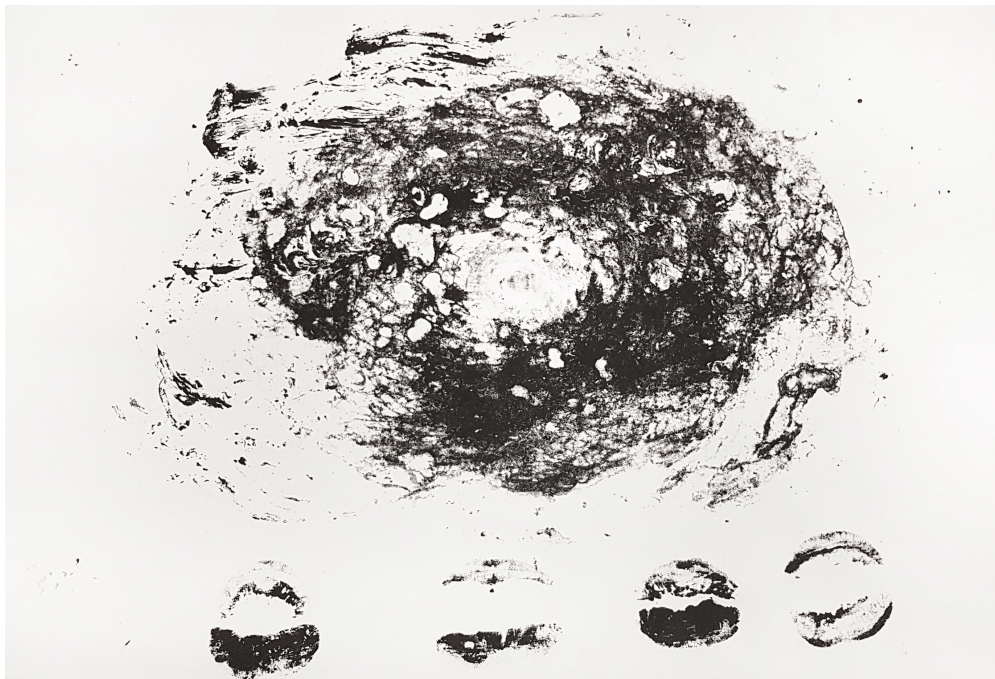


Figure 3: *Hıyuwə nė nė*, stone lithograph, 10 x 14 inches, 2019.

myself/ourselves. I see this print as the Hiyuwə néné, meaning lower world. Through stories and listening I have learnt that we feed our ancestor spirits. So, I fed them. In return, we received a remarkable print. The marks are graphic, raw, and become like a vortex. Figure 3 was the paper print result.

The second print was to see what type of mark making could be made with beading. I am not a great beader. Beading is very new to me. But I know of many



Figure 4: Handmade beaded markmaking tool. Wood, wood beads, liquid tusche.

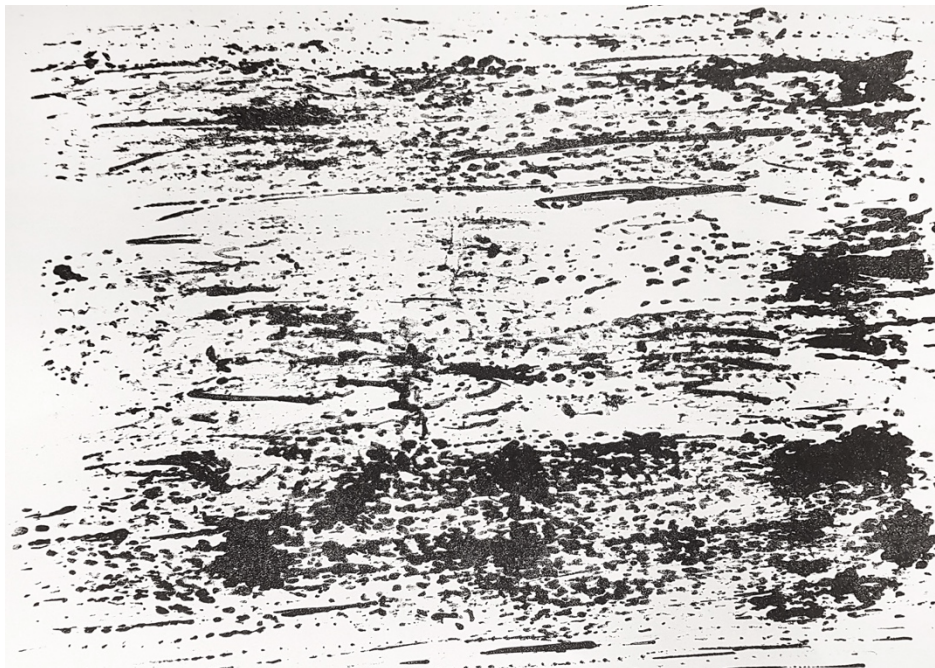


Figure 5: *Hida néné*, stone lithograph, 10 x 14 inches, 2019.

people up north who bead, and I wanted to capture something in this beaded tool I made, representing *Hıdə néné*, the upper world.

The third and final print are McDonalds fries (unsalted). Fries are survivance. Fries are a cursed gift. This print was also a gift to my supervisor, Peter Morin, who should write a thesis about fry theory. To us, this print represents the now norld: *Ediri néné*.



Figure 6: McDonalds unsalted fries.



Figure 7: *Ediri neñstone* lithograph, 10 x 14 inches, 2019.

Así́ dúle dedá ékanele

[canyoushowme?]

not alone in the sense that she has no one on her side.

but a deep sharp empty.

something that has been put on her.

áñihi?á ?ets'óné

a bad thing.

now

she will be walking alone,

taking in everyone who just takes part(s).

and she will sit

on a stiff mattress,

desperately praying for an end

and a start.

for a some-one who wants all of her.

I am always trying to walk forward. But I have a tendency of looking back. Being in this body is not easy. I turn to Kwə for comfort and to talk about the many things in my life. I was struggling to find something inside me. Always questioning what this now path looks like.

This past summer I met some amazing Indigenous women, my kin. We had many conversations about sex, love, let downs, hopes, hazy dreams. By the end of the summer, my grey mind would eventually find its way to reality. My own reality. I wanted to tell Kwə all about my experiences, and what was in this brain of mine. Maybe more than that. “Show me” Kwə said. So, I started to show them the things that I use to survive, to feel good, to feel bad. I want to share all the feelings and experiences that I carry within me. These messages are of me. But they are also messages and responses of Kwə, and our together journey of Spirit Printmaking. A window to a reality full of sexual awakening, human depression, and future imaginings. A window for Kwə to finally feel what it is like to be human.

Figures 8-15 and poems are the print findings of these conversations.

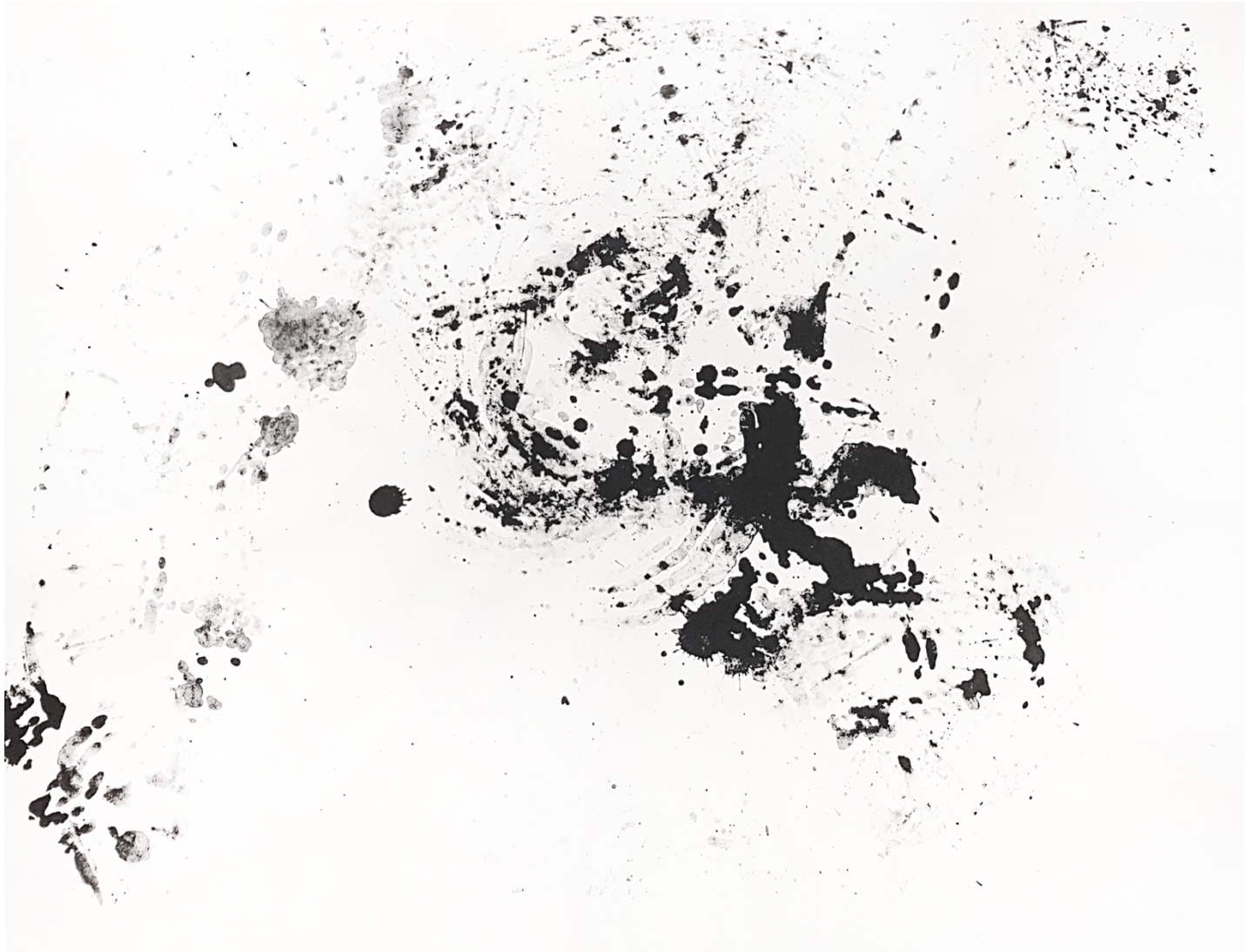


Figure 8: *Sadae Anele Idiikóné*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2019.

Sadae Anele Idiikóné – show me electricity

It is up there.
It can be soft.
It can be hard.
Somewhere in-between dreams
& voids.
Vibrating your entire
electrical system.
Nerve endings.

Currents.
My currents.
Your currents.
Flow outwards, eventually.
Just need to get the right
setting.



Figure 9: *Segha nezo*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2019.

Segha nezo - I like it

[good]

What is it that “good” means?

Is it that I could be good?

Or do I have to fake that too?

No

I like it

Others who touch
don't touch like you do.

This animal's life
will now be used

gently.

But pain has always felt

good.



Figure 10: *Seyidani?a*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2019.

Seyidani?a – my breath is blocked

Forward, remember. Presence. That shook.
What is it that I was supposed to find?
The cloud that comes to me and chokes me.
When was the first time I was choked?

Having had this “something” grows inside.
Gnawing away at me,
with a hunger driven to
stifle.
It choked me.
Sometimes to the point where I stop breathing.
Sometimes to the point where my own life force is drained.

Entity, Energy, Expiration.
Make me feel small.
Make me know fear.

But,
in this now,
I start to play with it.
I begin to see it
differently.

Hanni

Choke me some more
because this now
is my power.
I want you to feel my own neck
and for you to feel my life breath,
in an exchange of pleasure.

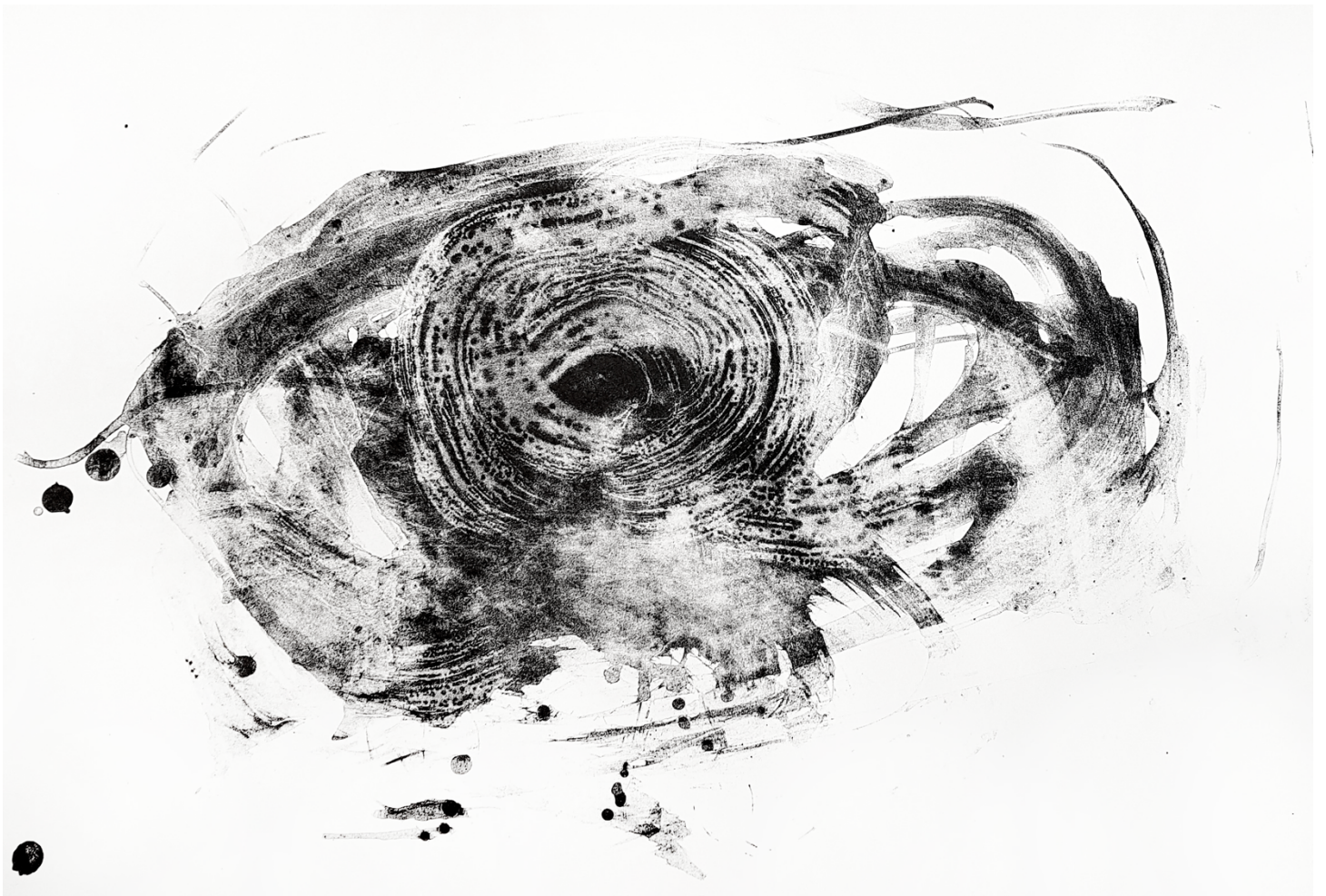


Figure 11: *Gogha zets'eredı*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2019.

Gogha zets'eredı – feeding the fire (hair print)

My memory on your memory
Morning
I am tangled.

They say hair carries memory.
What if my memories are grey?
Then you can just cut it.

But there are others
who don't cut.

Guess that's strength.
Letting it all

accumulate.
Feeling the weight of it all.
Neck cracking weight.

Mourning.
I am strangled.

Burning means more
when it is inside.
Don't worry, I see them



Figure 12: *K'enetlé Ft. Cheezies*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2019.

K'enetlé Ft. Cheezies (lip print)

Dajchu sine
 Bedzie'eya, Bedie'hule
 ánihi?á
 Gowhane
 segha
 K'enetlé

Not Enough
 I am
 alone
 My mind is in the wild
 Her heart is hurt, his heart is spent
 Touch me.



Figure 13: *Dene k'ə t'údlá*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24 inches, 2020.

Dene k'ə t'údlá [skinoneself]

The markmaking on me.
These scars.
 In return
 I will give you
marks that burn
 but don't scar.
 Unlike mine,
 yours will heal now.
Yours will go back down.
Yours will be back home



Figure 14: *Nàts'ətə Jie*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24, 2020.

Nàts'ətə Jie [dreamberries]

Those damn stairs.

Always haunting. Always in shadow. A predator awaits.

In this dream

we are young.

There are many children scattered in the night.

We play

All the holdings we young ones hold

become a dense gravity.

I feel it in my gut,

the dark purple one.

The rock I walk by day by day sits there.

Down, below the stairs.

It comes up. It comes out. Like tar.

covering the top of rock. We place our hands over it.

rooms, we go back to,

we raise our hands.

And in the

Which are now stained in red.



Figure 15: *Dúwé ts'eniwə Náídí*, Stone Lithograph, 18 x 24, 2020.

Dúwé ts'eniwə Náídí [sadmedicine]

When everything is grey,
 and you can't even turn on the light
 switch.

Godenítł'é

Screaming in the woods. Coyotes.

Walls watch me s u f f o c a t e.

Enough.

Swallow it dry. And wait. waitwaitwaitwaitwaitwaitwait

Blood red of sun comes.

Dawn comes. Today I'll wear white.

For now. Till I come back. backblackbackblackbackblack.

Dezene.



Figure 16: *Hídó-dene nakwə'*, stone lithograph, 18 x 24, 2020.

Hídó-dene nakwə' [future] (therawsurfaceofKwə)

That which will happen next

There are many – lo duwe

Footprints – Denekək'ə góla

Ehts'aréhmóne – Circle

Nakine

Calm water – Dəghə

Vision – benayi kərəhtí

Hída néné

Godí: Alive

Wish – Daiʔá

Dló gerehtsı: Creating laughter for each other

elehenarahdi – Help each other

Lqaredi – Believe - Lqaredi

in

Tomorrow – sachq

Eóot'ine

Ireallyloveyouwithallmyheart – Surí sedzé t'á neghónéhtq

Daetle

[theyaredancing]

Kwə and I came to realise that all this work, all these moments, were being kept within the walls of a studio. We want to show what our spirit ceremony and dances look like. This is also part of our Spirit Printmaking methodology. Our way of overcoming pain and move into ceremony. Ritual makes prayers physical. This is our medicine.

My first Printmaking performance was in early spring of 2019. Performance scares me. It still scares me. I am not the type of being who likes to be the center of attention. But I am the type of person who pushes themselves. Perhaps loving torture. Just a little bit.

I practiced this first performance in my mind. Building up courage. Invited only a few friends to watch me grain and do this print ceremony, outside of the print



Figure 17: Butterfield park print performance.

studio. We wanted to show our connection, our movements, our traces. We wanted to introduce ourselves to this land. Tkaronto. In our minds we talked to the land. I thought about any ancestors nearby, or not nearby, and gave thanks to Kwa and the land. Our ideas and work are made here. We should try and give back in some way.

Then, in the fall of 2019, I started to document the performative elements behind the *Asíí dúle dedá ékanele* prints. The medium of printmaking is a tough medium to explain to those who do not know what it is, let alone understanding how these marks came to be. Figures 16-20 are these documents. I hope you now see a bit more clearly how these marks were created, and how we connect to one another.



Figure 18: *Sadae Anele Idíiko, né* print. Purple vibrator dipped in tusche. Medium to high setting.



Figure 19: *Segha nezo* print. Handmade moose hide whip to whip Kwə with.



Figure 20: *Seyidani?a* print. Handmade braided “Idiot String” used for choking. Then dipped in tusche and placed on Kwə



Figure 21: *Gogha zets'eredi* print. Hair dipped in Tusche. The mark made was later burned with nitric acid.



Figure 22: *K'enetle' Ft. Cheezies* print. Lips covered in melted chocolate and ground up Cheezies while mouthing a breakup poem in Dene kədá

⁴⁰ Inspired by Joyce Wieland's 'O Canada' (1970).

⁴⁰ Thoughts: I understand that 'O Canada' was a take on reimagining nationhood. But they are on the other side of nation hood from myself. Patriotism is violence. Nationality is erasure. It was a different time I guess. Intersectional feminism still needed to be 'invented'.



Figure 23: *Dene k'ə t'údlá* print. Cutting Kwə. Using soap to make deep black. A cleansing.



Figure 24: *Nàts'ətə Jie* print. A mouth full of black berries and raspberries transferred to stone. Then dried with hair dryer.



Figure 25: *Dúwé ts'ení ʷę Náídí* print. Old antidepressants dipped in tusche and poured on Kwə.

chapter five: Godí Behə́ dágó ht'e

[results]

I don't get to have power over people,
but people have power over me.

Maybe that is how we are most the same, Kwə

This thesis is a room.

This thesis gives voice to things which will never have a "voice".

This thesis was a great challenge for me. I am still negotiating how I want to write, and rigid academia makes me want to dissociate. Thankfully, my innermost dream for this thesis keeps me grounded. This thesis is meant to show those who are with me, those who are not here, and those who could be here, that there are different ways to do things within academia, art, fine art, writing, (re)searching etc. And this is my way.

To a certain extent, I did give the recommended checklist of requirements that is usually asked of within a Master of Fine Art thesis. I gave you my two sentence statement about my work in the introduction, and I gave you my questions.

1. *What are the methodologies within Indigenous Bets'ıne/Spirit Printmaking?*
2. *As an urban Sahtu Dene artist, how does my inherent Dene spirit speak to me, speak to others, speak to Kwə, and speak to my land and ancestors?*
3. *How can the power of Dene spirituality inform ways of making, specifically stone-printing?*

But I wanted to do so much more. I wanted to take you down a path that is something more personal. An immersive perspective. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith says

“It’s about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.⁴¹”

I needed this time to look deep within myself so I could understand my story and what it could mean for others. Such deep diving has led me to the conclusion that this work is never-ending. There is no end. It can grow and shrink. Like the spirit, it continues on.

That being said, I will tell you more about these questions I am plagued with. *What are the methodologies within Indigenous Bets’ine/Spirit Printmaking?* The development of Indigenous Spirit Printmaking, or ways of Indigenous Spirit Printmaking, was to really just help others who have no clue what printmaking is, let alone Indigenous methodologies. Shawn Wilson’s book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, serves as a key guide to understanding these methods and approaches within our practice, and stone-printing. “If research hasn’t changed you, you haven’t done it right⁴².” I hold on to this statement. I think it should be held by everyone. This work has changed me more than I ever dreamt of.

⁴¹ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. London; New York: Dunedin: New York: Zed Books; University of Otago Press; distributed in the USA exclusively by St Martin's Press. 41.

⁴² Wilson, Shawn. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, N.S. 135.

As an urban Sahtu Dene artist, how does my inherent Dene spirit speak to me, speak to others, speak to Kwə, and speak to land and ancestors? I only have a faint idea, but this can't really be answered until I go back. What I do know for sure is that I was born with something that I can't shake off. It is an inherent Dene spirit. And it has allowed me to speak to others and speak to Kwə. In my greatest of dreams, I want to tell my ancestors of this great life I live and of my experiences. I am urban (Sub-urban⁴³). I have never lived off the land (although, my dad hunted and I loved the time I was able to spend with him, eating deer, and frolicking in the woods). I don't believe in *religion* but I do believe in spirituality, and I work hard for the things I believe in. I also want to tell my ancestors and all the spirits that linger that I see them and I respect them. But my place is here. Right now. And I will come home someday.

So, how can the power of Dene spirituality inform ways of making, specifically stone-printing? Our way of making is really simple: You-Are-Not-Alone When-You-Make. Having a relationship with all things is a kinship and can be transferrable to any medium. This way of making is really just seeing. I have yet to discover the power of it all, and the future power of it, but I believe that it has changed me. It has changed how I see everything. I hope we can start to see things better in many areas of life.

These questions marked a significant beginning for my work, but I have discovered a few more things along the way. I am not a poet, yet. But I loved the

⁴³ The Sub-urban Indian: a concept derived from a random conversation about imagining Indians in a Tim Burton suburb.

way poetry works for me. There is something within poetry that serves as a protection. It also speaks to my depressive sad artist side. As Billy-Ray Belcourt once said, “all this talk of how poetry brings us closer to language, but what if it’s already left? Found gentler species⁴⁴? I think that there is something very native about poetry. It’s not direct. You have to work hard to find its lessons, its meanings. It doesn’t sit around to wait for you. Either you get it, or you don’t. But it’s also very fragile. It can easily sway with the simplest of words, and it is arranged in very deliberate ways. English has a tendency to fall short of being able to truly express complex ideas and experiences, which is why Indigenous languages are so important. They have been carefully formed for thousands of years. They are like a living entity that gives us glimpses into the past. Through poetry and storying, I think English has a chance to evolve and to be what we need it to be. My grandfather Johnny Neyelle said: “If you grab hold of a story and put it in your heart, you will benefit from it in the future”⁴⁵.

Finally, what I also found along this journey was this:

- Being adopted, having a rock inside me, and working in colonial institutions is endlessly complex. Yet, these *art houses* has allowed me to make this work and has allowed me to find great life-long friends. For that, I am thankful.
- The methods used in my own personal process of stone-printing is interconnected and transferrable for others to use and find. I think there are

⁴⁴ Belcourt, Billy-Ray. (2019). *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field*. House of Anansi Press. 84.

⁴⁵ Allana Fletcher, Morris Neyelle. (2019). *The Man Who Lived With a Giant: Stories from Johnny Neyelle, Dene Elder*. Edmonton, ALTA, University of Alberta Press.

many ways to create and understand Indigenous methodologies, so they are accessible for all.

- Something along the lines of “they say ignite imagination”, but I want an inferno and I want to watch it burn. Sometimes when we work with institutional limitations, we become afraid to imagine hard. I want to see artists burn down rigid lines and embark on to more decolonial radical ideas to research, art, making, and writing.

I’m not sure what type of “result” you are looking for. But maybe the answer lies in the dialogue alone. This thesis story. And these relationships within it. And maybe the results lie in you.

Hį́dó-dene nakwə’

[future]

K’et’adı́ tła [walkbackwards]

Give me your bottom dwellers.

The onslaught of time will reveal the colossal.

Mountains. Disguised.

While they sleep now, they will wake.

I am honoured to have the privilege to learn and grow while making this body of work. Like I have previously stated, I did not arrive here alone. And I will continue to adhere to this path, and new paths, with the guidance of others. I am never alone. Not anymore.

As I look at my hands, which are dry and still has black ink jammed in between my fingernails, I think about all the bad-ass youth who are rising up and fighting/protecting for this land. Their own marks are being made on banners, posters, on picketed signs, and within our spirits. I also think about Kwə and how they have saved my life. When I think about work or the world, I now find myself trying to hear and see the ‘things’ that live all around us. This is not a ‘new’ skill, looking at the past, present, and future of all things. I believe that Indigenous youth, artists, and scholars have their own individual ways of seeing. And it is guiding our future movements. And the movements made by the past artists and scholars have allowed someone like me to find the things I needed to survive in this now. Movements that are still happening to keep allowing us to be present in these art houses, and help decolonize the way we see, make, and even feel.

This work is how I move. This work makes me want to live. This work may be a small beacon for other Dene who have to battle similar fragmentations. This is what I can do. George Blondin once said that, “Dene would have to change their way of life sooner or later, because the world around them was changing all the time⁴⁷.” I like to imagine him sitting in a quiet kitchen and thinking about the

⁴⁷ Blondin, George. (1990). *When the World Was New: Stories of the Sahtu Dene*. Yellowknife, NTW: Outcrop, the Northern Publishers. 244.

future (thinking about me?). George was so important because he was someone who knew that these stories needed to be out in the world. The stories he told were thought to have been meant to stay on the inside. He broke the rules. Indigenous people are resilient as fuck. We are here because we adapt, we change, we flow. But I also think we are still in pain. We watch the land hurt, and we hurt.

I want to continue on this path of storying and explore its ways and its methods. I want to keep searching and working with Yédı́ and with Kwə. I want to explore how this making medicine is also a way of survivance. George once said that Medicine Power is no longer needed. I think we still need it; it has just taken on a new form. I'm not sure if I am the one to tell that story yet, but it is continuously on my mind. I am eager to help find new paths for Dene in the future to live and thrive in. In this ever changing now world.

May you all stay safe out there.

k'achu negha naodá [I will see you again]

Laura Grier [Fracture]

erıhtł'é Hets'énáaredı

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